

# Behind the Scenes

## with Kurt Hertzog



## American Association of Woodturners

Founded in 1986 by a handful of visionary woodturners during a gathering at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, the American Association of Woodturners (AAW) is now the parent organization to over 350 chapters of woodturners worldwide. Since its founding with about twenty members, the AAW has grown to over 15,000 members. The initial headquarters was located in San Marcos, Texas; and then moved to Shoreview, Minnesota; and finally, in 2003, to the current location in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Minneapolis/Saint Paul, nicknamed the Twin Cities, is the sixteenth largest metropolitan center in the United States with a population of 3.4 million.

The AAW offices are located in the Landmark Center in downtown Saint Paul. The building has a rich history dating back to its completion in 1902 and has had a varied and colorful record of uses, including a Federal Courthouse, US Post Office, Customs House, and more. The colorful history of the courthouse includes the trials of John Dillinger's girlfriend Evelyn Freschette, "Doc" Barker, Baby Face Nelson, Machine Gun Kelly, and others of the Barker-Karpis gang. In the 1970s, the aging building was destined for the wrecking ball, but a group formed to save the building and restore it to its original stately grandeur. Restored and reopened in 1978, it is owned by Ramsey County and is home to many Twin Cities arts organizations, including the American Association of Woodturners. The offices and gallery of the AAW reside on the second floor of the building. The building is also a site for many special events—the facility has been rented for everything from fundraisers to weddings in order to take advantage of the location and wonderful architecture, appointments, and ambiance.

When you visit the AAW offices, you'll certainly see Jane Charbonneau and Linda Ferber. They are located in the front office immediately inside the office door. If you've had any contact with the AAW, you most likely were in contact with either Jane or Linda. They deal with nearly all the programs that touch the entire membership, whether it is registration for the symposium, a missing magazine, or other matters, phone or e-mail inquiries are taken care of by Linda or Jane. Phil McDonald, the Executive Director of the association is

nearby in the compact, yet very functional, office area. Two other rooms are part of the AAW working space and are used for gallery materials preparation, photography of gallery and exhibit materials, AAW-branded merchandise, and storage of critical symposium items. The offices are usually only visited by members, but the gallery that is located a short distance down the hall is visited by members and the public at large.

The AAW's Gallery of Wood Art is situated in four adjacent rooms just across the foyer from the AAW offices on the second floor. Not only is there walk-in traffic by visitors to the building, but there also is usually a huge increase of visitors whenever there is a special event. The hours of the gallery are adapted to be available for these special events. Tib Shaw is responsible for the gallery and, the same as the other staff members, has many other responsibilities. The gallery houses an entry area with a reception desk along with an assortment of member-turned items for sale. Two antique lathes are also located in that area for the visitors to view. The next room is usually populated with the latest exhibition, and is likely to be either a special invitation exhibit that members' work is juried into or pieces from the AAW's permanent collection. Set and lit similar to any other art gallery, the bulk of the work is situated on pedestals for up-close-and-personal examination by the visitors. The third and last room in the gallery area has displays of antique and modern woodturnings along with several educational exhibits. These are special explanation displays that range from how a baseball bat is created to the different looks a bowl takes on depending on the location of the wood harvest from the tree.

In addition to the woodturning art that is on display in the Saint Paul gallery, often there are pieces that are shown at other venues. Special woodturning displays are held at the governor's mansion, capitol buildings, or other museums. The AAW's mission statement is "to foster a wider understanding and appreciation of lathe-turning as a traditional and contemporary craft and a form of art among the general public, amateur turners, part-time turners, and professional turners. This will be accomplished by providing education, information, organization, technical assistance, and publications

relating to the woodturning goal of educating the public on the art of woodturning; opportunities to display work and interest new members are pursued to fulfill our corporate mission statement.” As such, opportunities to share, display, and educate are pursued to promote the understanding and growth of woodturning and the organization.

If you are a member of the AAW, hopefully this Behind the Scenes column will give you additional insight into the organization. The operations and staff in Saint Paul keep the AAW running and service the 15,000-plus members located around the globe. If you aren't a current member of the American Association of Woodturners, visiting the AAW website at [www.woodturner.org](http://www.woodturner.org) will provide more information on the organization and the benefits of becoming a member.



Fig. 1. The home of the American Association of Woodturners has been located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, since 2003. Because of its nonprofit status and dedication to education and wood art, it is permitted to be located in the Landmark Center in the heart of downtown.



Fig. 2. This grand old building was saved from demolition and is now used to promote the arts. It is often rented for weddings, fund-raisers, and other special events. Here, it is being decorated for a wedding.



Fig. 3. Originally built and operated as a federal courthouse building, it has also included the post office and other county seat functions. The wood and plaster trim adorning the building is spectacular. With twenty-foot ceilings, the rooms are from a bygone era.



Fig. 4. The offices of the American Association of Woodturners are on the second floor of the building. When you visit, you'll probably see Jane (left) and Linda (right) who are the usual interface to the more than 15,000 members of the AAW.



Fig. 5. Executive Director Phil McDonald is located in the next office. Though the foot traffic into the AAW offices by members is fairly sparse, any member is more than welcome to visit and see the facility and, in particular, the gallery.

Fig. 6. From a past era, there is a large walk-in safe that is now decommissioned, but is certainly an interesting relic. More puzzling is the safe located directly above it that is nearly ten feet off the floor. Likewise, this safe is left for its nostalgia value, but its position and use are not understood.



Fig. 9. One of the reasons that the AAW enjoys the modest rent and ability to occupy this special building is the gallery. As an educational facility to promote the knowledge of woodturning and wood art, it is a draw for members and visitors alike.

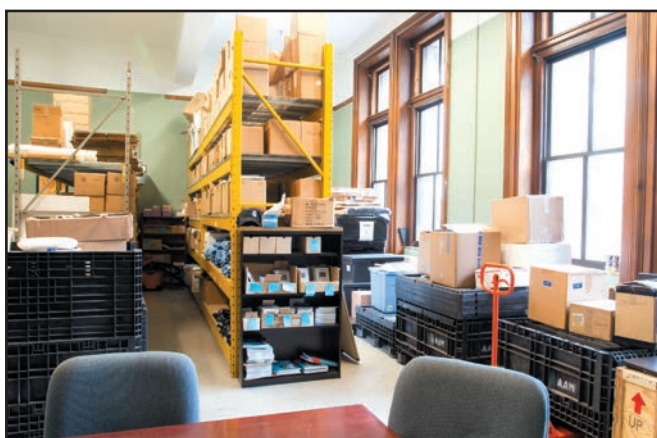


Fig. 7. There is a nearby storage room that houses the AAW-branded items, publications, and other items, such as symposium materials. Orders for items are filled from here directly to the membership, while the symposium materials are secured here for the next event.



Fig. 10. The goal of the AAW gallery is to provide a look at past tools, equipment, and turnings along with the current. As such, there are not only exhibits, but also displays of woodturnings that are for sale. These include from the very modest to the high-end.



Fig. 8. In a workroom on the same floor, but away from the AAW offices, turnings are photographed for brochures, displays, and gallery publications. The displays that are part of the symposium and other exhibitions are staged here.



Fig. 11. The gallery proudly shows many lathes from the past. Some are authentic historical pieces and some are modern replicas. They illustrate the art of woodturning from centuries ago through the modern day.



Fig. 12. As part of the educational program, turning demonstrations are held for the public. These can include demonstrations by the staff, as well as by local AAW chapter members. With all the turnings on display, it is great to see something being made in front of you.



Fig. 13. The gallery is composed of three rooms. The entry room houses the items for sale and some of the lathes (historical and modern). The center room is the one with the current exhibit on display. Often this is the precursor to an exhibit that will be at the symposium.

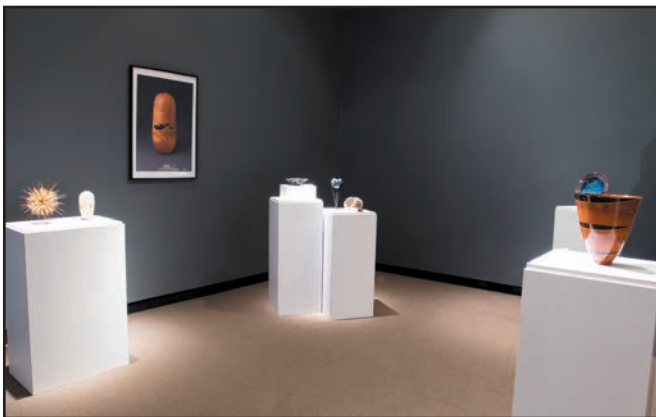


Fig. 14. As for all gallery exhibits, care is given to placement and lighting. The goal of the gallery is to show the public the depth and breadth of woodturning from functional pieces to art. The presentation is key to showing the work in its best possible light.



Fig. 15. It is an honor to have your work selected to be on display in the gallery. These varying exhibits, along with the showing of pieces from the permanent collection, make it likely that for each visit, there will be a different display.

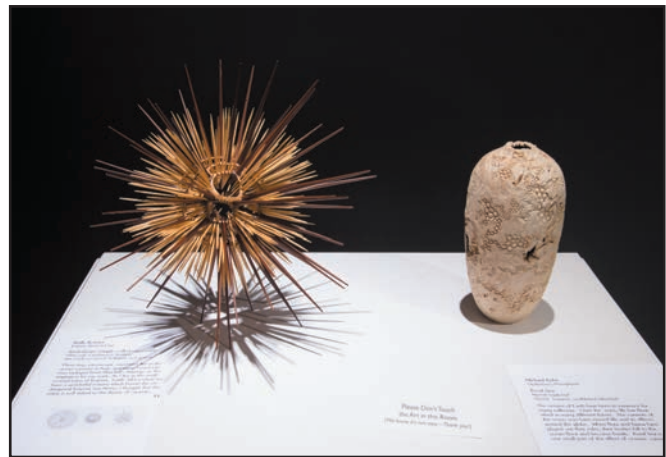


Fig. 16. The variety can range from one end of the spectrum to the other. Along with the art, there is an artist's explanation of the piece. The public at large might never see such varied pieces in any other forum. Only the very fragile are under clear cover—most are wide open.



Fig. 17. Tib Shaw is responsible for the various aspects of the gallery. She handles the gallery, permanent collection, and special exhibits along with other responsibilities. Part of the educational aspect of the gallery is that artworks are loaned to sites at different locations.



Fig. 18. The third room of the gallery is the most focused on the educational understanding of wood and the various items that can be created. One of the exhibits that is of a more explanatory nature shows the difference in the look of turnings when coming from various orientations in the tree.



Fig. 19. Room three of the gallery houses some additional antique lathes and a variety of modern turnings from baseball bats to stairwell parts. Many people live among a host of turnings never understanding where they came from or how they were made.



Fig. 20. There is a display of turnings from ancient times through the modern day. These range from water can-

teens from hundreds of years ago to modern toys from different parts of the world.



Fig. 21. Additional pieces from the AAW collection are on display for public viewing. Many of these fragile pieces need to be kept in an enclosure. The pieces are more secure from damage, and they can also be lit for better viewing.



Fig. 22. The Landmark Center is such a treasure with rich history and superb decorative value. Not part of the AAW display, but certainly of interest should you get the opportunity, is the Elvis display in the subbasement. It gives new meaning to "Elvis is in the house."