

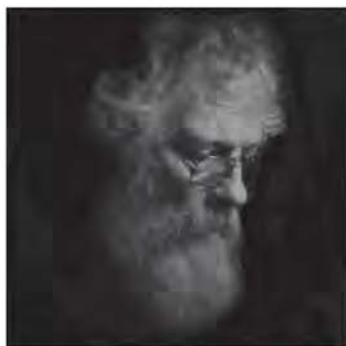
American Association of Woodturners



David Ellsworth

Professional Outreach Program 2011 Merit Award Recipient

David Ellsworth



David Ellsworth is never far from the center of woodturning action and he is hard to miss: a tall presence with a prophet-like beard and a large, charismatic voice. He has been well known and respected for so long in the international woodturning world that he is, paradoxically, sometimes taken for granted. If you ask most turners what David's biggest contribution has been, they will tell you that it was his creation of the thin-walled hollow wooden vessel. True, it continues to be the most imitated form of turning and has been a benchmark for turning skill for decades, but I don't think this was his greatest achievement. He has most distinguished himself by building an unsassailably preeminent position in the turning world and then, most importantly, using that reputation and experience to promote his chosen field. Even more, David has been instrumental in guaranteeing that hobbyists and professionals alike have shared in the flood of creativity that has swept us all along for the last forty years.

David first turned in 1958 as a 14-year-old in school

woodshop. After studying sculpture at college he eventually worked as a production turner making small objects such as salt and peppershakers, but his reputation started to grow in 1976 when he began making very thin-walled hollow forms that broke all precedents. We need to remember that nobody else had ever thought such work could be done, let alone done so breathtakingly well. In the following years, against all odds, he single-handedly created a whole new genre of turning and inspired generations of turners.

David's turning career alone would justify the current award, but right from the start David was helping others to share in his dream. In 1974 he started the woodworking program at Anderson Ranch in Colorado and its woodturning program in 2002; he was a participant in Albert LeCoff's ground-breaking Philadelphia symposia in 1977 and 1979;

attended world-wide conferences from 1979; has taught at Arrowmont every year since 1983; and he created his own school in 1990. To support his teaching David has produced five tutorial video tapes and nearly fifty articles on woodturning and related topics, most recently his book *Ellsworth on Woodturning*. His tools for hollow turning and his Ellsworth Signature gouge and sharpening jig have been bought by thousands.

David was co-founder of the AAW in 1986, was its first President, and the first to be awarded Honorary Lifetime Member. His devotion to the AAW has been extraordinary and he has always felt a particular responsibility towards it. David has been a significant representative for the turning movement on the American Craft Council and has helped build a two-way bridge to the wider community.

— Terry Martin

Adapted from the article *A Timely Honor for David Ellsworth*, published in *American Woodturner*, vol 26, no 3.

Cover: *Maple Burl*, 1988. Norway Maple Burl. 10" h x 14" d

Inside flap: *Vase*, 1985. Spalted Norway Maple Burl. 17" h x 5.5" d
Portrait (above) by Ian Kuhn



Spirit Forms (l to r) Tulipwood, 1979. 2" h x 5" d; Cocobolo Rosewood Burl – Triad, 2009. Tallest: 1.75" h x .75" d; and Spalted Hickory Burl, 2006. 3 ½" h x 5" d *This grouping of pieces represents thirty-six years of evolution in design, surface treatment and use of materials. My use of the term 'spirit form' comes from the tiny Acoma ceramic forms I first saw as a child, and where the energy within the forms directly reflects the energy experienced during the making process.*



Idea... Concept... History... Instinct...

Influence... Material... Process

*Define the form: height, width and depth. Sense the inner volume begin to grow, begin to speak... listen
This veil of wood - this skin - to see, to touch, to hear;
the inside of 'self' revealed, outside from within*

Now... add pulse.

— David Ellsworth



Sphere – 2010
Spalted Maple, 11" h x 11" d

In 1990, I came to the sphere as the baseline of my designs because it is universal and beyond cultural identity. It is also extremely difficult to design from because it is too perfect and, therefore, presents a never-ending challenge.



Maple Pot, 2009
Spalted Maple, 10" h x 10.5" d

Beauty in wood can mean many things. The rawness of the spalted surface, so fresh and natural to its condition, expresses a beauty that I find both revealing and very personal.



Beech Pot, 1988
Spalted beech, 10" d x 14" d

My first use of multiple surface treatments within the same piece, where the solid wood is oiled and polished while the spalted areas are untreated and off the tool. The wonderful distortion of this form was a gift.



Black Pot – Dawn, 2011
Ash, 6" h x 8.5" d
Burning creates cracks. Cracks are not mistakes, but rather opportunities for embellishment. My inlay work is intended to draw attention to these cracks by standing proud on the surface such that a blind person would never miss them.



Norway Maple Burl, 1989
4.5" h x 6.5" d
Composing the orientation of the natural edge was always a great challenge when making natural edge forms.

(above) Roopi, 1991. Ash, burned & painted. 11.5" h x 7.5" d

Designed as sculpture rather than vessels, this 'monosphere' from my Solstice Series (1989-1991), incorporated fire and color; all the things I was not supposed to be doing at the time. Some people loved these pieces, many hated them. What a joy!



Redwood Burl - Pau Ferro, June 1976
2" h x 6.75" d

My first successful hollow form done with a bent tool. There is no longer a physical record of the many unsuccessful ones.

(below) Low Orb, 1995
Figured Maple. 6.5" h x 12.5" d

By the mid-90's, I had tried to take the process of turning hollow forms through a tiny opening to its limits. What gives this form its power is the subtle marriage between material and form.



Oak Pot, 2008.
Red oak burl, 7" h x 8" d

Complete with chain saw cut and decorative inlay, this piece exemplifies my feelings that wood is the most perfectly imperfect material to work with.



“We all did production work in the beginning of our careers. These three pieces originally sold for \$18 for the set. I made nearly 5,000 of them between 1975 and 1977. It’s how I learned to turn.”

— David Ellsworth

Museum Collections

Metropolitan Museum of Art – New York, NY

Smithsonian American Art Museum –
Washington, D.C

Minneapolis Institute of Arts – Minneapolis, MN

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston – Boston, MA

Arkansas Art Center – Little Rock, AR

Carnegie Museum of Art – Pittsburgh, PA

Yale University Art Gallery – New Haven, CT

Mint Museum – Charlotte, NC

Museum of Arts & Design – New York, NY

Philadelphia Museum of Art–Philadelphia, PA

Denver Art Museum – Denver, CO

High Museum of Art – Atlanta, GA

Detroit Institute of Arts – Detroit, MI

Racine Art Museum – Racine, WI

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco – CA

The White House – Washington, DC

Los Angeles County Museum of Art –
Los Angeles, CA

The American Association of Woodturners is dedicated to the advancement of woodturning at all levels. The AAW has more than 350 local chapters in the United States and over 13,500 members worldwide, and publishes the journal *American Woodturner*. The AAW offices and the AAW Gallery of Wood Art are located in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The Professional Outreach Program Merit Award is given biennially to an artist whose body of work has contributed significantly to the growth of woodturning as an art form. Previous honorees are Stephen Hogbin, Giles Gilson, Mark Lindquist and Merryll Saylan.

To learn more, visit www.woodturner.org
and www.galleryofwoodart.org or call 651-484-9094.



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