

Hello *Thornleigh Westleigh & Pennant Hills* Neighbours

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Let's Meet Simon Begg

OUR LOCAL WOOD TURNER
FOLLOWING HIS CREATIVE DREAM

Letting the beauty of wood speak for itself



Let's meet **Simon Begg** *by Stefanie Pearce*

This May we meet Simon Begg. Simon's story really revolves around his passion for wood working, so let's find out how this Westleigh boy has become our very own acclaimed wood turner.

Simon is a true local. He was born at the Hornsby Ku-Ring-Gai Hospital and has lived in Westleigh for his entire life, so it's safe to say that Simon feels right at home in the community. "I love living in the bush, going for walks and exploring the area. It's a beautiful place to grow up," he remarks. "I am not a big city person so being in a place that feels a bit removed but is fully accessible is perfect for me. It's also a great little community where you feel like you know most people." Simon grew up enjoying the Fishponds walk and exploring around the creeks. "There are some awesome animals down there," he adds. "This summer I have seen snakes, lyrebirds, goannas, eels, frogs, water dragons and yabbies." Sounds like we should all take the kids down there this weekend!

Simon went to Pennant Hills High and graduated in 2012. School is where his passion for wood work was piqued. Simon made his first wooden bowl in Year 9 and was hooked. "It was a silky oak bowl with a giant foot and an awful finish but the consistency and the thickness were pretty good," he laughs. "For a first attempt it was actually really good and I loved the process so much that I bought my own equipment." With the help of his teachers Simon spent his savings on purchasing a lathe and tools on eBay. He then spent all of his free time creating and experimenting with his new-found passion. "I love being able to work with a natural resource. I think it's great that I can save a log from being turned into mulch or firewood and instead turn it into a piece of art or a functional bowl," shares Simon.

His teachers clearly played a big role in fostering Simon's skills. "My teachers, Matt Dwight and Mark Tyler, were great at giving me advice and timbers to learn with. On one occasion Matt gave me a range of rarer off-cuts, from his own collection, to turn into pens. But another teacher accidentally picked them up and gave them to the Principal for firewood and so I never saw them again!" he laughs.

Simon knew he'd found his calling and considered leaving school early to start his trade. "Fortunately, I stayed in school and I had really good success there, placing 2nd in the state for Industrial Technology in Year 12," Simon

explains. Around this time he also joined the Hornsby Woodturners Guild – as its youngest member. "I was only 16 years old and the next youngest member of the Guild was 59! Occasionally my dad came along and he was the second youngest member, which I thought was funny. I learnt a lot of the basics from this club too, which really helped my development," Simon adds.

Simon started his cabinet making apprenticeship in the middle of his HSC exams and started working at Stephen Pemberton Fine Furniture then Covemore Designs, which focused on parker style furniture. "I was the lucky one at TAFE to get a job working with solid timber for a lot of my work. The industry is now more focused on board work," he explains. Simon eventually completed his Certificate 3 in Cabinetmaking through Lidcombe TAFE before striking out





on his own as a full time artistic wood turner and carver in his Annangrove workshop.

“**Every piece of timber is unique with either grain, colour or shape varying. I have worked with 133 species of timber from around the world and every timber cuts differently and has its own beauty and interest,**”

explains Simon. “One of the main things that I specialise in is carved embellishment. On plain pieces of timber I find that carving is where I get the best out of the wood, but if I have a beautiful piece of timber it’s my responsibility to do minimal work and let the beauty of the wood speak for itself.”

Some of his embellishments are inspired by nature and things that he finds on his walks. “One of my more recent designs is carving a cracked clay effect into the rim of cedar bowls. I think the natural timber really compliments a texture from nature and creates a great harmony. There are so many shapes and patterns in nature which make for perfect inspiration,” he says.

Wood turning has taken Simon on some big adventures too. In 2017 he spent almost 5 months travelling around America, Canada and Mexico, attending wood turning conferences as well as enjoying hikes in Yosemite and



kayaking to spy on brown bears catching salmon.

“**While I was over there I managed to stay with one of the best turners in the world. Networking and learning from the best in the industry was one of the highlights,**”

Simon recalls. “I also got to see my first NHL game, which was brilliant as I am a huge ice hockey fan.”

Simon has also entered the Australian Wood Turning Exhibition for the last 2 years with great results. Out of his 11 entries Simon won 7 first places and will now be heading to Melbourne to be a judge at this year’s Exhibition. Last year he had one of his pieces featured in the Cabinet of Excellence at the Sydney Royal Easter Show! “That is where the best of all the first places go, so that was quite an honour,” he adds.

In March Simon was one of the principal demonstrators at Turnfest, Australia’s top wood turning conference held at Sea World on the Gold Coast. “This event has hosted most of the

best wood turners in the world and I was really excited to be part of it,” he says. “Turnfest has been a huge part of my life. At my first event in 2016 I met my favourite wood turner from WA. After chatting to him, and other wood turners, I was inspired to leave my job as a cabinetmaker. That’s where my journey as a full-time artist started.”

Simon’s favourite timber to work with is camphor laurel. “I know it’s technically a weed but its timber is so easy to work, it has amazing variation in the grain and it has a beautiful smell,” he explains. “Last year I did get lucky with an awesome macadamia tree from a local guy in Westleigh. It is a temperamental timber but looks incredible.” Although Simon loves all of his pieces, there are a few that stick out as particularly memorable. He was commissioned by Mjolner, a Scandinavian restaurant in the city, to convert an old dingy into a Viking ship with a 1.5-meter-tall dragon head! “That was a lot of fun and it’s awesome to see it

staring you down as you enter the bar,” he adds.

Simon’s parents, Geoff and Fiona, have been a big support for Simon to follow his dreams. “If it wasn’t for their support and tolerance of my mess I would not be where I am now. It’s not the cleanest of hobbies and I have taken up a lot of space at the house in the past,” he laughs.

Simon’s works now feature in the top woodworking galleries in the state, including Bungendore Wood Works Gallery – which is arguably the best in the country. He also teaches wood turning skills at wood working clubs around Sydney and can tutor individuals and school groups too.

When he’s not busy in his workshop Simon enjoys being out on the water, particularly kayaking. “I got a pair of kayaks for Christmas and I have been on the water at least once a week and loving it. Bobbin Head is my favourite spot, but we have so many brilliant options in our area,” Simon explains. He also loves ice hockey (and follows the Ice Dogs in the Australian league) as well as following all of the local football teams. Playing squash at Thornleigh is also a favourite. “I love the fast pace and fitness of it. It’s also the best sporting club I have been a part of,” Simon adds. He enjoys attending Thornleigh Baptist Church, which is a big part of his life.

It’s certainly not your average 24-year old’s dream to become a wood turner, but Simon Beggs has turned his hobby into a fulfilling and creative career. Make sure you check out his online gallery at www.simonbeggswoodturning.com.



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