

Anniversary Profiles

J. Paul Fennell, Member #297



Artist portrait circa 1985, by Judy Fennell

What motivated you to join the fledging AAW?

I began woodturning around 1970, and at that time there was virtually no means to communicate with other woodturners, no sense of community whereby one could learn from others, or experience that there was even a "movement" of woodturning.

In 1975, the magazine *Fine Woodworking* was created, within which information about the field of woodturning began to be published. This was 10 years before a national woodturning organization was even contemplated. However, during the late '70s and early '80s, Albert and Allen LeCoff organized semi-annual symposiums in Pennsylvania. I attended two of these, in 1980 and 1981, and learned that there was indeed a woodturning community that included turners from many countries. Being relatively new, I was awed at the experience of being a member of such a community. When the AAW was formed 5 years later, I had no hesitation about joining immediately.

When you look at your pieces from 1986, what do you see?

At that time I was experimenting with many phases of turning, from bowls to miniatures, to objects of utility. I lacked a sense of direction, but the passion was there, which still exists today.

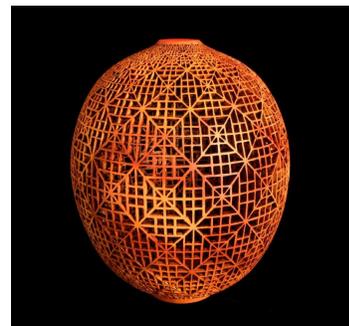
What was your funniest turning moment?



In the thirty weeks leading up to AAW's 30th Anniversary Symposium in Atlanta, we will be sharing the stories of members who joined in 1986 and are still members today. We hope you enjoy their memories and insights!

Click [here](#) to read this and other profiles online.

About J. Paul Fennell



*Szechuan Serenity
African sumac, 11" x 9"*

J. Paul's first exposure to woodturning was in 1970 through an adult education woodworking class at a local high school. Although his intention was to improve his furniture-making skills, when he discovered the school's lathes he switched gears and never looked back.

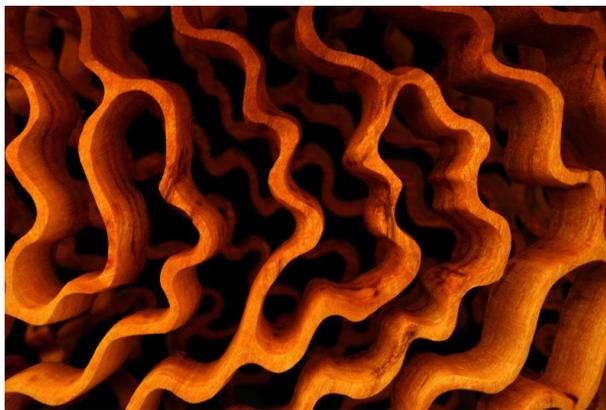
Buying a Stockdale bowl at the first LeCoff symposium I attended in 1980. Along with Bob's wife Kay Sekimachi in their hotel room, I had to wait while she opened her suitcase, removing bowls, each wrapped in her lingerie (bubble wrap had yet to be invented), and carefully unwrapping every bowl for me to see and contemplate. Needless to say, the situation was not humorous at the time, but I did end up buying a beautiful walnut bowl. Further, my embarrassment was not diminished as I –red-faced– watched her gently re-wrap the remaining ones and carefully place them back in the suitcase. When I returned home my wife and I laughed about this for a long time.

What was your happiest turning moment?

I have several, but being accepted for the first time into a major woodturning exhibit, the *International Turned Objects Show* (ITOS) in 1988 was special.

What is your favorite wood and why?

I am an advocate of salvaging wood that is destined for the landfill or firewood pile. In Arizona, the so-called "urban forest" of the Phoenix metropolitan area has many species that are exotic, in that they have been introduced from other parts of the world. Wood salvaged from this source is usually not available commercially, or if so, at a high cost. Out of this, I have discovered and favor African sumac, carob, acacia and mesquite from Chile and Argentina.



Detail from a piece created in African sumac:
O'er the Bounding Main, 2013

What do you see as the biggest change in the field?

There are many significant changes to the field that can be attributed to the AAW: one of them is the thorough documentation of the contemporary movement of woodturning through the *American Woodturner* Journal, achieved by superb editorship. Another is the strive to eliminate any perceived biases of gender, nationality, and age. I think the most significant change, however, is the attitude towards boundaries or limits. We certainly can accommodate the traditional aspects of the field and their associated techniques, but not feel restricted by them in going beyond perceived boundaries.

Do you still have *American Woodturner* back issues?

Yes, I believe I have every issue from the first publication on.

Has being a part of AAW affected your life and



Fennell's first lathe project

He is primarily self-taught, and has remained passionate about woodturning for more than four decades. His work is made from wood salvaged from the "urban forest" the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. An accomplished artist, J. Paul is also well-recognized nationally and internationally as an instructor and demonstrator. For almost thirty years, he has focused primarily on turning and piercing hollow forms.



O'er the Bounding Main, 2013,
African sumac, 10.5" x 8"

Featured in many woodworking and woodturning books and magazines, J. Paul's distinctive work is held in major private and museum collections, including the Smithsonian, Detroit Institute of Arts, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Cincinnati Art Museum, Museum of Art & Design, New York, Carnegie Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A retired mission, rocket performance and orbital mechanics analyst in the Apollo space program, J. Paul lives in the Sonoran desert with his wife, Judy.

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work?

Being able to meet and socialize with people that share a common interest but come from all walks of life and areas of the world has had a profound effect on me. This aspect, in my opinion, is an educational experience in and of itself, and is one of the greatest benefits of the organization. Another great benefit is the openness of sharing information, ideas and techniques.

What is your favorite piece?

This is not an easy question to answer, especially when you have spent decades making work based on different ideas and along different paths of inspiration. In that respect, some of my favorite pieces have been failures. There could also be favorite pieces, each from a specific body of work, so the answer to the question is relative. In that vein, a favorite piece could be one was successfully created from a set of huge challenges that existed at the time of making, such as using a technique never tried before.



The image above was one such piece, a thin-walled translucent tulip-shaped hollow form with a very flat top, and with convex and concave surfaces.

See more of J. Paul Fennell's work:

www.jpaulfennell.com

Click [here](#) for

The International Wood Culture Society's
2013 video interview with J. Paul Fennell

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