

## Anniversary Profiles Mark Sfirri, Member #231

### What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?

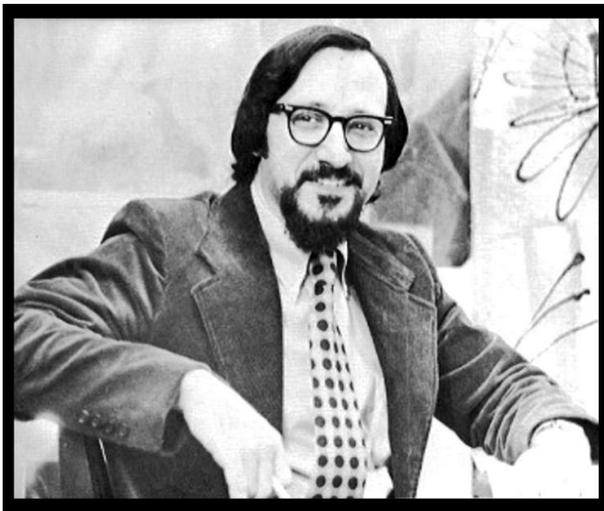
As a person with interests in wood turning and furniture, I wanted to be a part of this newly established group.

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

At that point, I was involved with using turned elements in furniture and was collaborating with Robert Dodge making painted furniture. I see work that was pretty unusual for the time.

### Who or what was your greatest teacher?

Claude Falcone, my high school art teacher, was amazing, opening my eyes to many aspects of art through looking at art and making art. He set an incredibly high bar in his high school art program where, amazingly, one could major! Five days a week and this was in a public high school.



*Claude Falcone*

### What was your funniest turning moment?

In France, while there for one of Jean Francois Escoulen's conferences, I was painting a piece and had some leftover white paint in my brush when I saw a stale baguette and decided to paint it white. It was interesting, because it looked just like a baguette (because it was one) but it was white.



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 Mark Sfirri

Mark Sfirri is well-known in the woodturning world for his brain-bending multi-axis work, and for the humor he brings to both presentations and sculptural pieces like those in his *Rejects From the Bat Factory* series. Trained as an artist, woodworker, furniture maker and industrial designer, Mark is also an academic, with a particular interest in the Studio Furniture Movement and the work of Wharton Esherick.



Rejects From the Bat Factory,

The next day I had some leftover off-white paint and decided to keep going with the baguette and try to paint it to look like a baguette. I even went with some medium brown to make it look like it was a little browned in the middle.

At the end of the conference, I was about to toss it out when I saw Australian turner Ernie Newman looking at it. I asked him if he wanted it, he did, and I signed it for him. He had a little difficulty at Customs when he went back home and had to convince them that it wasn't bread, but carved wood.

About a year later, it fell off the shelf where he was keeping it and it broke. It was then that he realized that he had been duped.

#### **What was your happiest turning moment?**

Lots of happy moments in turning. Being in the Center for Art in Wood's International Turned Object Show (ITOS) was a big one, and being a part of the exhibition *Woodturning in North America Since 1930*. Coming to AAW conferences is huge, it's like a reunion, a great opportunity to see turners that you haven't seen in a long time. Going to Emma Lake holds lots of great memories for me.

#### **What is your favorite tool/wood and why?**

I like so many species of wood, from pine to ebony. Holly is a new favorite, but also pear wood, ash, etc.

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

Having been involved in carved and painted turnings thirty years ago, there wasn't a lot of acceptance of it then. There sure is now.

#### **If you couldn't be a woodturner, what would you do instead?**

I've been a furniture and turning teacher all this time, I've also been involved in research of the fields of turning and furniture, I really enjoy that. I would still be making furniture.



*Mark Sfirri, right, in Mr. Francone's art class.*

#### **Do you still have *American Woodturner* back issues? Where do you keep them?**

All of my back issues are at Bucks County Community College, where I teach. They are great reference for me and for students.

#### **Has being a part of AAW affected your life and work? How?**

*Mark Sfirri, 2005. Ash, 25" x 34"*  
AAW Permanent Collection,  
anonymous donation

Mark holds a BFA and MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, where he studied with the prominent Danish Modern designer Tage Frid, who was a leader in the studio furniture movement. A well-respected artist, Mark's work is in over two dozen museum collections, including those of The Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Museum of Arts & Design, The Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and The Detroit Institute of Art. Mark has been recognized for his art and his teaching, and is the recipient of the Collectors of Wood Art Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Distinguished Educator Award from the Renwick, among others.

A dedicated educator, Mark has run the Fine Woodworking Program at Bucks County Community College in Newtown, Pennsylvania since 1981. He lectures and demonstrates woodturning and woodworking design and techniques throughout the US, Canada, France, Ireland, England, New Zealand, and Australia.

Mark lives with his wife, Lucy, in New Hope, Pennsylvania. Their son, Sam, lives in Charleston, South Carolina where he works as an archivist, plays soccer and performs as a musician.

Learn more about Mark Sfirri and his work:

*Heavy Lifting*, David Fry's *American Woodturner* [article](#)  
Senior Artist Initiative video [interview](#)

## **Want to learn more?**



The AAW has opened up opportunities and pushed me in different directions with themed shows. I've also had many opportunities to demonstrate to AAW chapters. It's great to see turners from all over.

**What's your favorite project/piece? (and send us a picture!)**

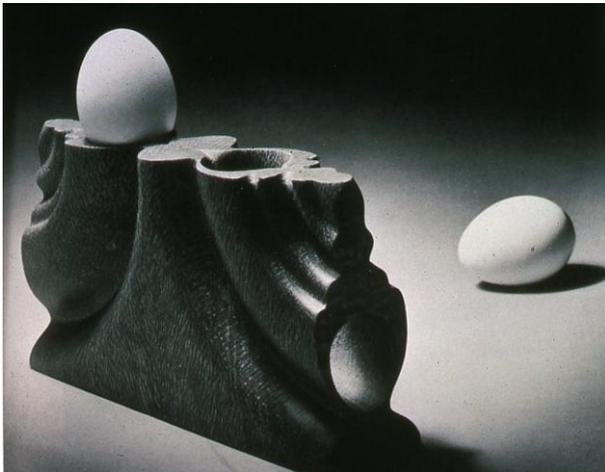
Like many have stated, it's the most recent piece that I find exciting. One of my turned animal heads is right up there.



From the Banks of the Wabash, from the series *Game Hunting in North America*, Mark Sfirri, 2008

**Favorite piece turned by another artist? (send a picture!)**

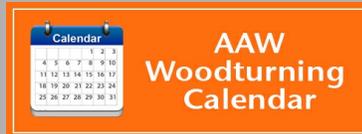
My favorite turned piece of all time is "Eggcup" by Stephen Hogbin.



*Stephen Hogbin, Egg Cup, 1975.  
Silky brown oak. 4.5" x 8" x 2" Collection:  
Crafts Board of the Australia Council*

**If you could give your 30-years-younger self some advice about being a turner what would you say?**

I'm pleased with the path my career has taken. I think that the main thing is to stay creative, always trying out new directions.



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Descending Staircase, 2009, by Mark Sfirri

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