

Anniversary Profiles Jon Sauer, Member #351



What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?

In the late 70s I was part of a loose group of wood turners in the San Francisco Bay Area. We would meet at each other's homes or workshops, share our knowledge and compare work. At the time, information was limited to what publications were printing, and it was not always current. In the early 80s I attended the first Western Woodturning Conference. There I met turners like Del Stubbs, David Ellsworth, Merryll Saylan, and even toolmaker Jerry Glaser, along with his friend Bob Stocksdale. Talk about a shot of turner's adrenaline! It seemed that we needed to be better informed and up-to-date on the world of woodturning. When the AAW was formed the whole group of us joined. Soon after Merryll Saylan and Gene Pozzesi formed the local chapter Bay Area Woodturners of the AAW.

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

As I look back at the work, I see items that were correct for the time. Some are good and some are not, but none the less they are part of my style of the date.

Who or what was your greatest teacher?

As I am self-taught, there is only the person in the



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 Jon Sauer

For a turner who started on a homemade lathe and found wood to be too challenging a material to turn, Jon Sauer has come an astonishingly long way.

An acknowledged master and a leader in the world of ornamental turning (and the proud owner of an exquisite 1868 Holtzapfel lathe) Jon started turning in the late 60s on a lathe made by his grandfather. Frustrated by wood as a medium, he turned wax for a while. By the late 70s he was again working with wood, and selling band-saw boxes, vases and lamps at street fairs. Before too long, he got serious, and worked his way up to a used commercial lathe in 1982.

Jon's work sold well, so he had had plenty of practice turning when an article on ornamental turning in *Fine Woodworking* caught his eye. It took him five years to find

mirror. As for influences, I would say in the area of ornamental turning it would be [Frank Knox](#).

What was your funniest turning moment?

Glue failure leads to something new. I had a piece come apart on the lathe. By accident I re-glued it back together the wrong way, and amazingly the piece was much better than what I was planning. Sometimes mistakes lead us in new direction.

What was your happiest turning moment?

In 1986 when an antique Holtzapffel Ornamental turning lathe arrived at my door!



What is your favorite tool and why?

The skew is the tool I learned with, and now the round skews are my favorite. They are much easier to use than the flat ones. Currently I have more than twenty, in different sizes and with slightly different grinds. Other than that, the ornamental lathe in the workshop.

Favorite wood?

I must say that [African blackwood](#) tops the list. It is a wood that turns very well, requires little or no sanding, and finishes fantastically. It is used in woodwind instruments, principally clarinets, oboes, piccolos, and bagpipes; it is sometimes called "the tree of music."



Jon uses many different materials in his work, including betel nut and bamboo. The box on the left has a shagreen (sharkskin)-covered lid. Below, a detail from *Homage to Sushi*, created for the 2014 Professional Outreach Program exhibition Ceremony,

the right ornamental lathe, which he bought sight-unseen in 1986 through Christie's auction house. One thing led to another, and in 1992 he also purchased a rose engine lathe.

Self-taught, Jon produces a wide variety of items, and is well-known for his boxes, spinning tops, and buttons. Since 1998 he has participated in almost a hundred exhibitions at galleries and museums, and his work is in a number of prestigious private and public collections (including the Los Angeles County Art Museum, the National Museum of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution, and the Royal Cultural Center, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.) It has also been included in several books, notably [Woodturning in North America Since 1930](#) (Wood Turning Center/Yale University Art Gallery, 2003), [The Cutting Edge- Contemporary Wood Art and the Lipton Collection](#) (Fine Arts Press, 2011) and [Conversations with Wood- The Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury](#) (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2011).

Jon's writing and work has appeared in *American Woodturner*, and also been featured in publications as diverse as *the San Francisco Chronicle* and *Woodshop News*.



Jon Sauer smuggler's button. from [knittersreview.com](#)

Jon creates engine-turned buttons in wood, bone and clay. His modern [smuggler's](#)

is created with African blackwood and polymer clay.



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

Over the years there has been a major shift from simple, plain turning into the works of art.

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

I sometimes think of being a glass artist.

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

Yes, I still have many of them in the house, and in the shop, and always within reach. Some have left the building to help others.

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

The AAW has shared the work, ideas, and how-to-do's of lathe artists from around the world. *American Woodturner* provides updates on the latest developments in this ever changing field. The symposiums offer a wealth of information. Thank You!

What is your favorite piece?

Since I have so many, that's a difficult one. One of my first ornamental pieces is *Dot Box*, made of pernambuco, African blackwood and partridge wood. Amazingly this piece is still with me.

buttons, a style historically used to hide gems, are sought after.

Jon has written articles on ornamental turning, and shared his knowledge of this intricate craft through classes and demonstrations, and through active participation and leadership in AAW virtual chapter [Ornamental Turners International](#). Jon a member of the [Bay Area Woodturners](#) and the [West Bay Woodturners](#).

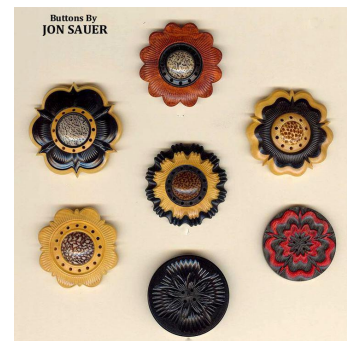
A California native, Jon was born in San Francisco. He is retired from the United States Postal Service, and lives in Pacifica with his wife, Sharon.

You can see more of Jon Sauer's work on the [Collectors of Wood Art](#) website.

Learn more about ornamental turning [here](#).



Bamboo Spinner, 2008. AAW Permanent Collection, POP Purchase Award. African blackwood, bamboo, vera wood, betel nut.



Buttons showing a range of different patterns.

-Tib Shaw



Favorite piece turned by another artist?
From a series Dale Chase did in 2005, there is a three layered box made of African blackwood & boxwood.



If you could give your 30 years-younger self some advice about being a turner what would you say?
Enjoy woodturning, let your body of work continue to evolve, stay with it, keep in touch, learn, plus keep your tools sharp.

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