

What's New in Woodturning Instruction?

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Center for Furniture Craftsmanship, Rockport, Maine

Over the past twenty years, Center for Furniture Craftsmanship (CFC) in Rockport, Maine, has built a solid reputation in the education of fine furniture craftsmanship. Not one to sit on his laurels, Peter Korn, CFC's founder and executive director, is expanding the school's offering in woodturning instruction. The school is not new to teaching woodturning—it routinely employs an impressive list of faculty. But beginning in January 2014, students will be able to take a new 12-week intensive woodturning course geared toward professional turning. The course will cover a broad curriculum, including architectural work; production techniques for faceplate, spindle, and endgrain work; furniture components; milling with other woodworking machines for stock preparation, forming, and joinery; sharpening; tool making; and business practices. As such, the course represents a bold departure from typical woodturning instruction.

A course specifically geared toward a career in woodturning? This piqued my interest. Demographically, most

woodturners are older (retired) hobbyists, and not surprisingly most of the available instruction caters to that market. Many professional woodturners, after gaining enough experience, generate income by teaching and demonstrating for the hobbyist market, not by becoming dedicated practitioners. But Korn's vision goes beyond the demographics. He maintains that dedicated professional turners who possess the appropriate skills and who can build relationships with architects, designers, and custom builders have the opportunity to thrive creatively and economically.

I wanted to see CFC's woodturning shop in action, so I visited while the nine-month comprehensive furniture program students were doing their one week of woodturning. The facility is impressive, with twelve Oneway 1640 lathes for students, plus one for demonstration purposes. I witnessed Stephen Gleasner teaching the furniture students spindle turning skills, such as beads, coves, and pommels, which are likely to be useful in furniture projects (*Photos 1, 2*).

The Beth Ireland connection

The intensive woodturning course at CFC will cover many facets of becoming a professional turner. Beth Ireland, an accomplished professional, will be the instructor. To get a better understanding of the significance of this new course, I caught up with Beth at SUNY Purchase, where she was the artist in residence. It doesn't take long to understand that she is an inspired teacher who, as Korn puts it, makes you believe that you can achieve anything. I found her optimism contagious.

Beth got her start in carpentry more than thirty years ago and is no stranger to hard work and long production runs. Her abilities are obvious. Her goal as a teacher is to not just impart the specific skills needed for predefined projects; she intends to help students experience the satisfaction of creativity through problem solving, so they can create what they envision. One of her first class projects is tool-making, emphasizing that stock tools tend to create stock end products, and custom tools (and grinds) increase possibilities.

As a professional turner, Beth caters to a wide array of clients beyond those you might expect; she gets commissions from toy designers, scientists, manufacturers, lighting companies, plumbing contractors, and religious organizations. She believes that this expansiveness is what makes turning so great. “When architectural jobs are down, other jobs are up,” she explained. “Turning is really about the creative process of object making.”

Beth believes that establishing the fundamentals by repetition—until skills become second nature—is the place to start for learning how to be creative. From a high level of skill and familiarity with materials and tools comes the possibility for creativity and art. She is thrilled about the prospect of having the same woodturning students for twelve weeks. “They will spend forty hours a week for three months, so the course is truly intensive and mimics the schedule of a real woodworker. The students will be totally immersed in the experience, so I’ll be able to go further with them,” she said. In addition to regular class hours, students will have shop access twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

After learning the necessary skills, students begin to develop intuition



Stephen Gleasner is one of many talented woodturning instructors at Center for Furniture Craftsmanship.



CFC has a well-equipped woodturning studio.

about materials and form, and then they can create work that excites them. A suitable market will follow: “Build it and they will come.”

A look at Beth’s website, bethireland.net, shows that she is adept at both functional and artistic work. This diversity stands as a testimony to her dedication to both skill and creativity. It is obvious that the new course at the CFC is very much about the special qualities Beth has to offer as an instructor. For more information about the new 12-week intensive woodturning course, including enrollment, visit woodschoool.org.

Turning 20

This year is CFC’s 20th year of operation, and, to mark the occasion, Jacques

Vesery will curate a birthday-themed woodturning exhibit at CFC’s Messler Gallery. Featured wood artists include Mac Ray, Michael Cullen, Harvey Fien, Mark Gardner, Binh Pho, Dale Larson, Mark Sfirri, John Beaver, Stephen Gleasner, John Jordan, Christian Burchard, Chris Hoehle, Steve Kennard, Haley Smith, David Belser, Bill Luce, Michael Mocho, Michael Hosaluk, Jacques Vesery, and Beth Ireland. The exhibit, which is open to the public, will run through January 2014. ■

Joshua Friend, a woodturner and writer, is a member of the Nutmeg Woodturner’s League, an AAW chapter that meets at the Brookfield Craft Center in Brookfield, CT. See jfriendwoodworks.com for examples of his work and contact information.



(Left) Beth Ireland is well versed in large-scale production of all kinds of spindle turnings, including balusters, newels, and columns.

Photo: Jenn Moller



(Top) Beth sometimes juxtaposes spindle-turned architectural elements in surprising ways with these whimsical utility items.

From *The Artfactory*, 2009, Maple, 20" x 17"

(Bottom) **Beth Ireland**, *Architectural Reliquary*, 2011, Cherry, Holly, glass, 5" x 10" x 2"

Collection of The Center For Art In Wood

Photo: John Carlano