



David and Ruth Waterbury
Photo: Judy Chernoff

RUTH AND DAVID WATERBURY

AAW 2015 HONORARY LIFETIME MEMBERS

Judy Chernoff and Jeff Bernstein

Every year, the AAW awards the distinction of Honorary Lifetime Member to someone who has contributed significantly to the field of woodturning. This year, that award goes to Ruth and David Waterbury of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Long time supporters of the AAW and other wood-centered organizations as well as the wood art movement in general, they have passionately collected, generously donated, and tirelessly advocated

for wood within the context of craft and the greater art world. Over the years, their extensive involvement in promoting wood has resulted in their recognition as ambassadors and champions of the field.

Accidental discovery

Ruth and David's involvement with wood began in 1984, during a trip to Hawaii, when they unexpectedly happened upon a display of



Ron Kent, *Vessel*, 1984, Norfolk Island pine, 4¾" x 16⅞" (12cm x 41cm)

Photo: Robert Fogt

Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury

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This bowl was absolutely magic as we held it up to the light and could see the shadow of our hands through it. It was the first piece we bought—the outcome of a resort cocktail party we attended for the free mai tais. That party and meeting Ron and Myra certainly changed our lives.

—David Waterbury

woodturned vessels. They had gone to a cocktail party and ended up seeing Ron Kent's translucent Norfolk Island pine vessels, and the rest, as they say, is history. Ron's work captivated and mesmerized their sensibilities. Not only did they end up buying a piece, but this was the beginning of what would grow into a significant and long-lasting friendship with Ron and his wife, Myra. That first purchase was the birth of an "all-consuming passion," which has fascinated the Waterburys to this day.

Over the past thirty-one years, Ruth and David have amassed an extensive, world-class, museum-quality collection of wood art objects and sculptures. Their collecting journey culminated in an exhibition and accompanying book, *Conversations with Wood: The Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury*. Debuting at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) in July 2011, the exhibition has since traveled to several other venues. The catalog features superb photography of 552 outstanding works by 132 artists, as well as engaging essays by Glenn Adamson, Patricia Kane, Albert LeCoff, Christopher Monkhouse, Jennifer Komar Olivarez, and Ruth and David Waterbury. These essays add important scholarship to a field in need of more historical perspective, commentary, and critique. In addition, artists in the Waterbury collection were invited to give their personal perspectives and memories about their pieces. Together, the scholarly essays and artists' writings add important contributions to the expanding lexicon of the wood art movement.

Contributions to the field

Perhaps even more important than the works acquired over the ►

JOURNAL ARCHIVE CONNECTION

See David M. Fry's insightful review of *Conversations with Wood: The Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury* in the October 2011 issue of the journal (vol 26, no 5, page 56). AAW members can access this and all past journal articles online at woodturner.org.



David Ellsworth, *Atlantic Pot*, 1996, Spalted elm with spalted sugar maple inlays, 9½" x 8¼" (24cm x 21cm)

Photo: Robert Fogt

Gifted to Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
Provenance: The Waterbury Collection



This is a great example of David's magic, inserting a piece to fill a void so skillfully that it seems just a part of the spalting.

—David Waterbury



There was magic in the way Michelle was able to make the two parts of this object sing to each other, a real duet.

—David Waterbury



Michelle Holzapfel, *Duet Vase*, 2001, Cherry burl, 13" x 13" x 7" (33cm x 13cm x 18cm)

Photo: MIA Visual Resources

Gifted to Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Provenance: The Waterbury Collection

years, however, have been the remarkable friendships developed along the way. Ruth and David have created wonderful ties with artists, collectors, gallery owners, and museum curators. Christopher Monkhouse commented in his catalog essay, “I often feel that they care as much about the makers of turned wood as they do about the wood objects they have so enthusiastically collected.” Ruth and David have also thoroughly enjoyed having artists visit their home, traveling to see artists’ studios, taking in gallery shows and wood exhibitions, participating in AAW symposiums and viewing works in the Instant Gallery, and being involved in events sponsored by the AAW, The Center for Art in Wood, and Collectors of Wood Art.

Ruth and David also have focused on sharing their love of wood with others. They have worked tirelessly with curators and museum directors to help get the word out about contemporary wood art. Through ongoing discussions concerning the importance of carrying or increasing the presence of contemporary wood objects in art galleries and museums, the Waterburys are building the future for wood. Many institutions have benefitted from their generosity, including the MIA, Yale University Art Gallery, The Art Museum of South Texas - Corpus Christi, and The Honolulu Museum of Art.

Moreover, they have actively participated in the Collectors of Wood Art and were among the original members of the organization in 1997. David and Ruth served as CWA’s first co-treasurers, and both held a variety of board positions over the years. The Waterburys

organized a CWA forum in 2001 in conjunction with the exhibit, “Woodturning in North America Since 1930,” at the MIA. They also helped organize a CWA gathering in conjunction with the 2011 opening of their “Conversations with Wood” exhibit at the MIA. That year, they were also awarded CWA’s Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Waterburys have been AAW cheerleaders, having attended most of the symposiums since 1993. They have frequently opened their home to traveling turners—both to visit their collection and to stay at their home. An investment advisor by profession, David has also done some woodturning and was a founding member of the Minnesota Woodturners Association. Ruth, a retired primary school teacher, has been very involved in the arts, including being a docent at the MIA. In addition to their involvement in the wood world, they have devoted a great deal of time and funding to other charitable and advocacy interests both locally and nationally.

Ruth and David Waterbury have made extraordinary contributions to the AAW and to the advancement of the world of wood. Their palpable passion for collecting; their generous support of artists and contributions to museums; their work as founding members and working officers for the Collectors of Wood Art; their outstanding contribution to the wood field with the publication of *Conversations with Wood*; and their central role in raising the visibility of wood art make them well deserving of this year’s AAW Honorary Lifetime Member Award. ■



Malcolm Martin and Gaynor Dowling, *Vessel*, 2000, Limewood, 24½" x 9¼" x 2¾" (62cm x 23cm x 7cm)

Photo: Robert Fogt

Gifted to Honolulu Museum of Art

Provenance: The Waterbury Collection



We found this in a gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland, and were very taken by the sculptural qualities and presence of the object.

—David Waterbury