

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practices #005: Critiquing Members' Work Heading: Meetings



The Northwestern Michigan Woodturners, a chapter of AAW, has a longstanding meeting activity involving the sharing and evaluation of our turnings. This activity has become a part of our regular meeting agenda and is enjoyed by all. Other chapters may find it worthwhile in adding more learning and fun to their meetings.

This activity evolved from our tradition of a 'show & tell' table at each month's meeting, where members' work could be displayed and discussed during the gathering and coffee time before the regular meeting. At some point, questions of style, form, finish, etc. arose, so we tried having one member lead an evaluative discussion of each item on the table. An effort was made to avoid harsh criticism or excessive praise, so that members would feel comfortable about bringing pieces for the table. This should be an important part of any such activity. Our group has always shared new ideas, techniques, tool use, etc. on a freewheeling basis. No one has a 'secret' to success in turning, so it was natural to move on to sharing opinions of each other's work.

Here is how it works. One member is designated as the 'evaluator' of turned pieces for the meeting, with a different person chosen for each meeting. That person leads the discussion, which may last 1/4 to 1 hour, depending on the number of pieces on the table. The leader may, or may not, involve the turners of the pieces in the discussion.

Other members often chime in to ask questions of the turner about technique, tools, wood type, etc. The opinions of the leader about style and design are valuable, regardless of their experience, and sharing them helps everyone grow - the evaluated and the evaluator. The format of the discussion is totally up to the leader, and since some of us are better at this than others, some were reluctant at first to be the leader. After a few months, all members are now willing to tackle this assignment.

We feel that this activity is a very valuable part of our efforts to help one another improve our skills, knowledge and the enjoyment of woodturning. Why not try it in your chapter?

Submitted by:

Art Schubert, Northwest Michigan Woodturners

ar811@tcnet.org

Lyle Jamieson, Northwest Michigan Woodturners

ar785@tcnet.org

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