

# NICK COOK, WOODTURNER

*Our 2002 Honorary Lifetime Award Recipient*

KEN KEOUGHAN

THE FIRST TIME I MET NICK COOK, he was standing in his booth turning a small wooden box. He had a little crowd gathered around him and was chatting amiably with some of the assembled gawkers and squawkers. Nick was confident, pleasant and respectful of their knowledge of woodturning, as well as their thirst for knowledge of woodturning. But most of all, Nick was happy...actively participating in, contributing to, and appreciative of the world in which he and his life were engaged. He still is. And if as I believe, "happiness" is the product of a life well-lived, Nick Cook has earned his happiness.

Nick Cook is the unanimous choice of the AAW's Board of Directors for the Honorary Lifetime Membership Award for the year 2002. With the acceptance of this award he becomes the 12th person to receive it. His predecessors include: James Prestini, Bob Stocksdale, Rude Osolnik, Dale Nish, Palmer Sharpless, Al Stirt, David Ellsworth, Gary Roberts, Alan Lacer, Robyn Horn, and Ray Key.

Nick is still quite happily engaged in his life. He shares it with his wife, Cathy Wike-Cook, a host of activities in which they both have an interest and a multitude of friends and acquaintances in and out of the AAW. His accomplishments and resume are more than worthy of note.

## Woodturning in the early days

Nick was actively involved in woodturning before the AAW was formed in 1986. He was there at the gathering at Arrowmont when a group of turners, including Nick Cook, decided to found an organization to foster and promote woodturning...the AAW.

And although active within the organization, he didn't serve on the



Nick Cook in his shop in Atlanta, ready to turn out high-quality pieces, day in and day out in any scale and from any species of wood. And, he still finds time to to teach and to throw the occasional gourmet barbeque. Photo Marisa Pruss

Board of Directors until 1990. During his 6-year tenure on the board, the AAW flourished. Membership began to mushroom; the Board's recognition of the value of communication with the membership resulted in the development of the AAW Membership Directory. And within the context of the Membership Directory, Nick's little black book of "Resources" became the initial basis of the AAW Directory of Resources.

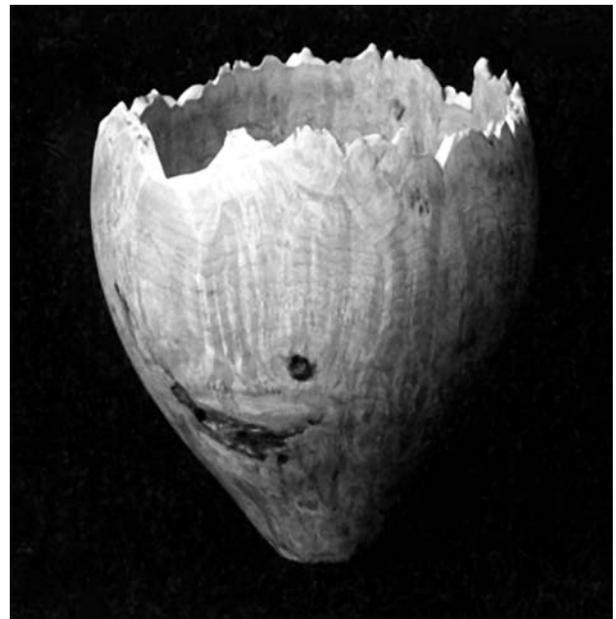
During his final year on the Board, Nick was in charge of the annual symposium, the 1996 Symposium held at Greensboro. In several ways this symposium became a landmark event. It was the first held under one roof, and the first held in a "Conference Center" setting. Prior to that they had all been held in an academic setting. It generated an enormous audience, attendance totaled 1042. The

auction, benefiting AAW's Education Fund, generated a record total to date.

Stemming from Nick's chronicling of the time involved in organizing and orchestrating the whole thing, the Board began to act on the need for professional management of this annual event. The result, of course, was Butch and Pat Titus, paid professionals, who have been doing the coordination for the past several years and seem to be getting better at it all the time.

## The value of mentors

In talking about his formative years in turning, Nick looks back with fondness. His first and best mentor was his father, Clarence Cook. Clarence enjoyed a career in the U.S. Navy as a photographer. Despite the fact that the Navy moved him around a lot, Clarence worked with wood



Wine stoppers and other elegant, reasonably priced gifts are an important part of Nick's business, but he also does one-off objects, like the Bubinga piece at left, and the Big Leaf Maple Burl natural-edge vase, above. Photos: Courtesy of Nick Cook. Color photos are on Page 32.

and had some sort of woodworking shop wherever he was based. When Nick was a little kid people would comment on his skill with tools. "Nick started working with wood as soon as he could see over the table saw" Clarence would say with pride. After he retired and Nick was making a good living in production turning Clarence helped out with the non-turning activities required in the shop...packing, sawing, routing.

Nick also has wonderful memories of Rude Osolnik. He assisted Rude at Arrowmont in the early 80s. "We became close friends and I came to see Rude as a mentor. One of the things that helped build our relationship was that during one of Rude's slide presentations I groaned about the poor quality of his slides. They were really embarrassing. Rude being Rude, challenged me to do a better job. So I went up to his home on Poverty Ridge in Berea, Kentucky and started shooting slides of his work. He had work tucked away everywhere...drawers, shelves, cabinets,

inside boxes and in other work. Well, before I was through we had a snow-storm and I was stuck on Poverty Ridge. By the time I was able to make my way down off Poverty Ridge we had become, and would remain, fast friends. I can still hear Rude holler 'Hell's fire son! Where you been? I've done a whole day's work already.' That would be at 5:30 am and he probably had done a day's work already." It was Rude who urged Nick to make "small things that don't need to be high-priced, that you can make quickly, efficiently. You'll want to make a lot of 'em."

### Memories of Mel Lindquist

Another of Nick's mentors was Mel Lindquist. "It was Mel more than anyone else that got me focused on finishing. He really helped me to understand the importance of appropriate finishes and the ins and outs of doing them."

Dale Nish mentored Nick too. Dale's not sure how much actual mentoring he did. Of course, if you

know Dale you know that "It takes a modest man to sing a modest song." Here's what he said, "If you want a friend, you've got to be a friend." (Think about that.) "I like Nick and I've tried to be a friend. To do that I tried to be supportive. I bought some of his work; helped him find opportunities to show his skills and share them. I was able to do that when I ran the Symposium at Brigham Young University." And finally, Dale said, "I did with Nick what I try to do with all my friends...just let them know that I like them and respect them."

Nick more than returned that friendship. "When I was put in charge of developing the Osolnik fellowship in 1994 at Arrowmont, Nick Cook and Willard Baxter were both very much instrumental in getting the word out and promoting the event. Between them and the Georgia woodturning groups they generated \$10-15,000 for the Fellowship Fund. My job was easy because what they didn't do Dave Hout did. Nick very much deserves the Lifetime Membership

Award that he will receive this year.”

Willard Baxter who did the auction at this event, told me that the overall funding that accrued to the Osolnik Fellowship was in excess of \$100,000. (More about Baxter on Page 25 in this issue.)

I’ve dwelled at length on the mentors in this profile of Nick Cook for a reason. Nick’s life is devoted to the art and craft of turning wood. He gives back a lot. Not just in time, in teaching, in sharing...but in a genuine love of the process and the people involved in turning wood.

When I asked him, “Why? Why so much attention to what I call ‘service’?” He replied without a moment’s hesitation, “Oh...my mentors, they all gave me so much...so very much. I’ll never be able to pay them back but they sure helped to create an attitude of spontaneity, of generosity, of decency. They were all fine men.” The men of whom he spoke were Rude Osolnik, Mel Lindquist, Dale Nish, and, his dad, Clarence Cook.

Nick Cook today makes a very good living in his world. He does a lot of architectural turning. His production work continues to sell well. They each account for about 40% of his revenue. The remainder comes from teaching. He gives private lessons in his shop. I would highly recommend them. He also teaches both at Arrowmont in Gatlinburg, TN and the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC. He consults for several manufacturers of woodworking products and with Willard Baxter and Rude Osolnik was instrumental in the design and development of the current line of Powermatic lathes.

An interesting aside is that the man who married Nick and Cathy and has been an ordained Baptist Minister for over fifty years is none other than AAW’s very own Treasurer and Auctioneer... you guessed it...Willard Baxter.

In summing up Nick Cook’s con-



When Nick bills his shop as the only full-service turning shop in the Atlanta, GA, metro area, he’s not kidding, as the photos above and at right show. He is equipped and versatile enough to turn out an oversize column or a pen or Christmas ornament. Good business? Certainly. But Nick brings a little special zest to the job, an artist’s eye and sensibility that makes everything produced by his shop distinctive.



tributions to the world of woodturning, Bobby Clemons, current President of AAW said, “I’ll tell you a typical Nick Cook story. The Brasstown Woodturners call him to come up and do a demonstration at the local high school with very little notice. Without a second thought, Nick said, ‘Sure’ and went up to Brasstown and did the demo. You know why? Because that’s the way Nick is.”

And so we come full circle. Nick Cook continues actively participating

in, contributing to and appreciating the world in which which he and his life are engaged...the wonderful world of woodturning. We are all of us fortunate to be able to call Nick Cook “a friend.”

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