

Jane and Arthur Mason Advocates of the Art

By Jacques Vesery



Our woodturning world draws people from all walks of life. Some practice the art as a vocation, others use woodturning to relieve stress. For most, it's an addiction, a passion of pure enjoyment.

Whatever the reason for being drawn to wood and the art, the common ground is passion. It is no different for woodturning collectors.

This year, the AAW recognizes Jane and Arthur Mason for their woodturning passion. As the organization's newest lifetime honorary members, they join a group of past honorees who have tirelessly supported the AAW's growth.

Collectors help sustain woodturning in many ways. Their appreciation for the artists' work is evident. Indeed, Jane and Arthur have gone beyond the realm of mere collectors—they have become advocates of the art of woodturning.

In the beginning

As luck would have it, the Masons started collecting wood art the same year the AAW was chartered. In 1986, Jane and Arthur saw the Jacobson Collection exhibited at a Renwick Gallery near their home in Washington, D.C. Pieces by David Ellsworth and Ed and Philip Moulthrop captivated the Masons.

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The Mason living room includes turned pieces by Po Shun Leong, Mark Lindquist, David Ellsworth, Harvey Littleton, Stoney Lamar (2), Ed Moulthrop (2), Philip Moulthrop, and Mark Lindquist. On the original Isamu Noguchi table (1952) is a glass bowl by Joel Philip Meyer and turned pieces by Bob Stocksdale and William Hunter.

Photo: Bruce Miller



Shortly after, they visited David. As Arthur puts it, "Having more nerve than manners, we found his phone number, called him up, and invited ourselves to spend the weekend with him and his wife, Wendy, to learn more about woodturning."

David graciously explained key aspects to look for in collecting turned wood. But most importantly, the trip kindled a friendship.

Just one year later the Mason collection was 100 pieces strong. Jane and Arthur had visited, met, and befriended many more artists represented in their collection.

Why wood

Their newfound interest in wood art was more of a rebirth of relation. When asked, "Why wood?" Jane and Arthur delve deep, far surpassing the collection itself.

Collecting art had already been an important part of life for the Masons. With pieces by George Segal and Louise Nevelson, their collection was a blend of two- and three-dimensional art.

Arthur's interest and reverence for wood goes beyond the material and includes a sense of stewardship taught to him in his youth. His father was in Yale University's first graduating class of the forestry school. While spending summers at their camp in the Berkshires, his father taught him the importance of nurturing a healthy forest.

When Arthur saw the Jacobson Collection, it rekindled his interest in wood. As Jane recalls, "In the beginning, if Arthur had his way, he would have purchased almost every piece he saw. If it was a pretty piece of wood, he wanted it."

The quest for understanding has drawn Arthur in as a student. He

has taken lessons from David Ellsworth and Bonnie Klein and with bounding curiosity—like a kid in a candy store.

What Arthur gains is a view of the methods and means, and a window of deeper understanding. Arthur has made it his goal to pass on this turning knowledge of the art to all who will listen, including other collectors new and old.

Jane approached collecting turned wood from a different perspective. With a degree in English and art, Jane has always dreamt of sleeping in the Art Institute of Chicago, one of the leading art museums in the world.

With her fondness and respect for art, she saw turning as an opportunity. Although it was Arthur who wanted to start collecting wood, Jane liked the fact that the scope of wood as art was a narrower field. "Choosing and documenting the collection has been an intellectual exercise," Jane says.

There are many criterion which Jane seeks out that help continue the relationship of the entire collection. Form is at the top of her list, which also includes presence, artistic merit, and an artist's respect for the material.

Jane's aesthetic sense and Arthur's love of the material has melded into a great partnership that makes the collection what it is today. Both also appreciate criticisms addressed by curators, listen to what they recommend, and look at each piece as an individual work of art.

Involvement

Jane and Arthur have both served on the boards of many art associations. Being involved with such far-reaching organizations as the Renwick Alliance, the Mint

Museum Founder's Circle, and the American Craft Council has given them a voice in promoting their passion. Jane has served as president of the Collectors of Wood Art, and both have played steady roles in its conception and growth. They also support the International Turning Exchange at the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia.

Many turners express joy in seeing Jane and Arthur's elated faces in demonstration audiences at the AAW symposiums. Jane and Arthur remain enthusiastic supporters of the Educational Opportunity Grant (EOG) program and benefit auction.

A sense for giving

As a whole, the collection has had from 800 to 900 pieces in it, with approximately 200 of those gifted to museums. The Mint Museum of Craft + Design in Charlotte, North Carolina, is the largest beneficiary. When seeing the collection at the Mint, Arthur said, "I can't believe we had all this in our house."

Favorites

When asked the predictable question, "Which are your favorites?" Jane and Arthur's quick response avows that they don't have favorites. "We admire all the pieces, and even though some stand out among many at any given time, it changes with the days," Jane says. "It's like the way you look at your children."

The Masons have fostered a true sense of ownership through educating others with the same passion for collecting and boundless friendship throughout the woodturning community.

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A grouping of turned pieces by David Ellsworth, Stoney Lamar, Michael Peterson, Todd Hoyer, and Mark Lindquist greets visitors to the Mason home. The painting is by Joan Miro.

Photo: Bruce Miller