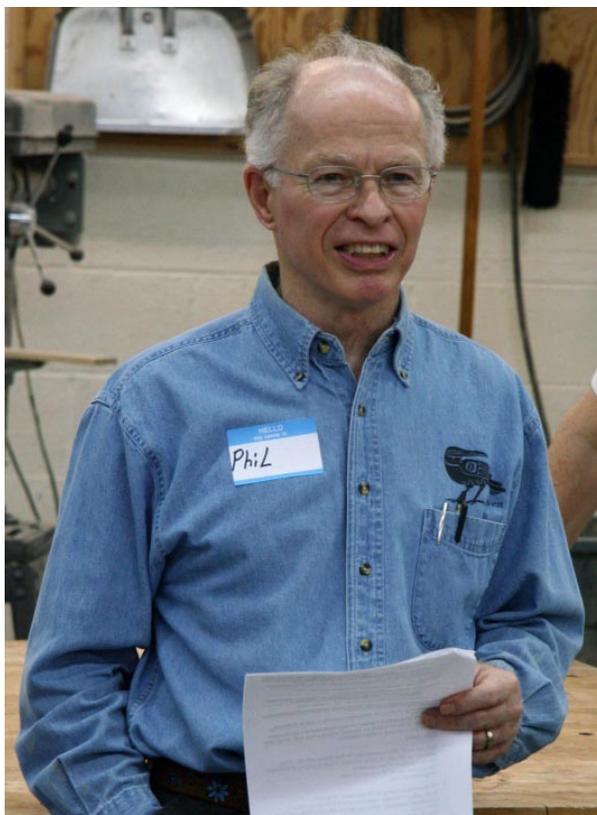


Anniversary Profiles Phil Brown, Member #105



What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?

I had ten years of turning experience by 1986 and knew some of the organizers for the Arrowmont planning meeting, so I wanted to attend it. Unfortunately, I didn't have money to travel and was very committed to and busy with my job. As soon as the information came, following the meeting, I joined. I have always enjoyed being associated with other wood turners.

When you look at your pieces from 1986, what do you see?

My pieces in 1986 were a major improvement over those of the first few years, since I started without any design or art training. Since then, my flare or vortex shape (described in the April 2016 *American Woodturner*) has evolved into what people think of as my signature form, although other turners have used it,



In the thirty weeks leading up to AAW's 30th Anniversary Symposium in Atlanta, we will be sharing the stories of members who joined in 1986 and are still members today. We hope you enjoy their memories and insights!

Click [here](#) to read this and other profiles online.

About Phil Brown

The indications that Phil Brown would become a serious woodworker showed early in life. Growing up in Denver, Colorado, he swept floors at school to earn the money to buy a table-saw, jointer, and drill press. He negotiated with his mother to obtain materials: she would buy him wood, provided he built furniture for her. His early interest in Scandinavian Modern design made for clean-lined, attractive pieces; a walnut credenza he made for his mother is still in use by the maker and his wife today.

Phil didn't really begin turning in earnest, though, until the mid-70s, when he came into a lot of apple wood. He milled lumber from it, and then, looking for something to do with the shorter pieces, decided to make some bowls. He bought a used lathe, a few tools, and a copy of *The Practical Woodturner* by Frank Pain, and set to work. Gradually his interest turned

and it can also be seen in other mediums, such as glass.

If you could give your 30-years younger self some advice about being a turner what would you say?

Turn as much as possible, exploring forms you like, and search for marketing and exhibiting opportunities to pay for tools and equipment. Get a good quality high air-volume dust collector right away. Associate with other woodturners by joining or forming a local club, and attend as many annual AAW symposiums as possible. Look at pottery and glass in craft shows, galleries, and museums.

I was quite enamored with Bob Stocksdale's teak salad bowl, which I saw displayed in the Craft Multiples exhibit at the Smithsonian Renwick Gallery in 1975. It was right after I started turning. After occasionally turning various versions of that bowl (and putting a wide rim on it at Jane Mason's suggestion) I have created a number of salad bowls in lightweight species and in spalted and burl wood, finished with a durable epoxy coating.



Bob Stocksdale's salad bowl from the Craft Multiples exhibition, now in the AAW Permanent Collection. Gift of Norman and Nora Stevens.

Who or what was your greatest teacher?

My most stimulating and skill-enhancing experiences were three weekend symposiums organized by Albert LeCoff at the George School in Newtown, PA from 1978-81. Demonstrators included Bob Stocksdale, Rude Osolnik, David Ellsworth, Palmer Sharpless among others. I most admired Stocksdale's forms from solid wood. I later learned about James Prestini's work. I was always looking for learning opportunities in our local Washington Woodworkers Guild, Capital Area Woodturners and Chesapeake Woodturners when they formed, and by attending programs of The Wood Turning Center (now the [Center for Art in Wood](#)) in Philadelphia and AAW symposiums.

into a bit of an addiction.

After retiring from work as an agricultural economist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Phil gained momentum; he has since made his mark not only by developing distinctive turned forms, but through his dedication to teaching, his leadership role in forming and growing local chapters, and in his active outreach and promotion of woodturning.

Phil has work in a number of well-known public and private collections, and his work has been featured in many of publications, including *Turning to Art in Wood* (Center for Art in Wood, 2009); *Revolutions in Wood: The Bresler Collection* (Nicholas Bell, 2010); *Conversations with Wood: The Collection of Ruth and David Waterbury* (Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2011), and *500 Bowls* (Lark Books, 2004). At last count he has been in over fifty exhibitions.

Behind the scenes, Phil has been an organizer of many outreach events and demonstrations, given tours, and, with seemingly endless energy, networked with turners, the public, collectors, and institutions. He has served on the board of the Renwick Alliance, and facilitated the organization of a number of exhibitions and demonstrations at libraries, museums and art shows.

Phil has given presentations and classes on topics as diverse as preparing felled wood for green-turning to epoxy and lacquer techniques and designing using mathematical ratios. He is a member of three local chapters, [Montgomery County Woodturners](#) (former president, treasurer), [Capital Area Woodturners](#) (founding member), and [Chesapeake Woodturners](#). For many years, he prepared the maps of local chapters and statewide member counts for the AAW Resource Directory.

What was your happiest turning moment?

Creating a 20" diameter flare vessel with a nice continuous curve into the base out of paulownia, and discovering the stability and lightness of this wood; the finished piece weighed only about one pound.



What is your favorite tool/wood and why?

For bowls, my favorite tools are the long and strong 3/8" gouge for roughing out and some thinning, and for finish cuts the Stockdale gouge that Jerry Glaser made. Since wearing that down, the replacement has been a similar Henry Taylor gouge that is midway between a spindle and bowl gouge.

While I like many of our local species, each for different reasons, over a third of my work has been with soft maples. The color variation from spalting, and the pattern from curl, burl, and crotch compressed growth provides such great variety that each maple piece is unique.

What do you see as the biggest change in the field?

The development of equipment and tools. We now have larger and higher powered lathes, scroll chucks with specialized jaws for holding wood, very hard steel gouges and hollowing tools, sanding supplies, as well as jigs and techniques for achieving an amazing array of results. In the last 30 to 40 years, woodturning has benefitted from an explosion of invention, enhancement, and sharing.

I also admire the advancement of our output from bland functional ware toward art, and the recognition and acceptance of turning as an art form.

If you couldn't be a woodturner, what would you do instead?

Probably a cabinet/furniture maker, or possibly free-form wood sculptor.



The credenza Phil made in his teens for his mother. It sits in his living room today.

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issues? Where do you keep them?

Yes I have all the back issues on my office shelves. I also have some early *Fine Woodworking* magazines, from the years when John Kelsey included a turning article in each issue.

Has being a part of AAW affected your life and work? How?

AAW symposiums, the journal, and local chapters have been a continuing focus in my life and work. The technical and skill-building information, and seeing the work others have achieved has been a continuing benefit. It stimulates me to keep turning and to create new pieces. I have also made gallery contacts and met or seen many collectors at symposiums.

Locally, the interaction with other turners has been stimulating and the source of many friends. I was present during the formation to two local chapters, and started a third chapter. My role in chapters has included multi-year positions as president, program chairman, and treasurer; a continuing contributor to newsletters, and exhibit organizer.

What's your favorite project/piece?

While it is a difficult choice, a favorite is the combination of a straight sided bowl with the flare form. It has an approximately a 1:2.6 ratio of height to diameter, giving a more sculptural and heavy piece than either vessel alone.



Favorite piece turned by another artist?

A two part turned and carved mesquite sculpture by [Stoney Lamar](#) that is in my collection.



Circa 1998 sculpture by Stoney Lamar. Mesquite, 14.75" high, 13" wide, and 6" deep

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