

## Anniversary Profiles David Ellsworth Member #1



### **What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?**

That's an easy one...I was part of the group who formed the organization. I am also thankful and very proud that the 130+ attendees at the "Vision & Concept" conference at Arrowmont in 1985 voted me in to be the first President and, by default, the 1st member.

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

The decade of the 1980s was the decade of natural edge burl bowls. I think Mark Lindquist did the first push to that motif and pretty soon everyone was doing them. The largest I did was 26" in diameter and about 18" high in maple burl. It was a very exciting era, although I haven't done any since.



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 David Ellsworth**

During the 2010 Symposium in Hartford, David Ellsworth was speaking with a small group of people in the Maple Medley exhibition when a young girl started turning cartwheels, dangerously close to the artwork. He reached over and gently put his hand on her head. A kindly look from this experienced teacher and she understood: no words were spoken, no words needed to be. "I am, and always have been, a teacher," he once said in an interview, but, coming from an academic family, being a woodturner and teaching woodturning was not the original plan.

After three years as a self-described singer/songwriter in the military, David started formal studies in architecture, sculpture, and ceramics. Although he'd started turning in junior high woodshop in the late 50s, wood was not an accepted part of the academic arts world. After graduating



*Norway Maple Burl, 1989. 4 ½" x 6 ¼"*  
*"Composing the orientation of the natural edge was always a great challenge when making natural edge forms."*

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

Joseph Campbell said it best: "Follow your muse." Although in today's world, 'diversify'! We learned from the potters back in the early 1970s that if you didn't have a well designed and functional production item that people could use and afford, you weren't going to make it. Mine was my salt, pepper and sugar shaker sets that sold for \$18 retail in the mid-1970s. We've learned in today's stalled marketplace that having a broad range of items increases ones chances for success, while simultaneously developing a strong work ethic and the discipline needed to survive.



*Salt, pepper and sugar containers*

**Who or what was your greatest teacher?**

The ceramist, [Paul Soldner](#), plus making the shift from the fine arts to the crafted arts.

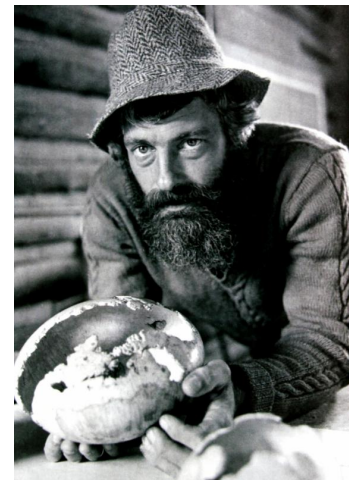
**What was your funniest turning moment?**

Sorry, but I'll have to save these for my memories.

**What was your happiest turning moment?**

Two moments, actually: the first time I remember turning a hollow form without consciously thinking about how I made it; and receiving the Merit and Lifetime Member awards from the AAW.

with an MFA in the 70s, he was on track to a life teaching sculpture, drawing and design at the university level. A conversation with Paul Saldano resulted in being hired to develop the woodworking program at [Anderson Ranch](#) in Snowmass, Colorado. Soon after, he opened his own studio in Boulder doing production work. As an artist, he was also exploring the boundaries of craft and art, wanting to create forms in wood similar to those he had created in clay. Frustrated by the limitations of the straight tools he was using, he invented the bent turning tools he needed to create thin-walled hollow forms. The tools, techniques and approach to form had a tremendous influence on the world of woodturning.



*At Anderson Ranch, 1974*

David's works have been included in the permanent collections of thirty-six museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He has taught workshops throughout the world and has received fellowship grants from the National Endowment of Arts, the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts, and the PEW Foundation. In 2009 he was elected the "Master of the Medium" by the James A. Renwick Alliance of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. He is a



## David Ellsworth

Professional Outreach Program 2011 Merit Award Recipient

Click [here](#) to read turner and writer [Terry Martin's](#) article on David Ellsworth

### What is your favorite tool/wood and why?

Gouge? My 'Signature' gouge. Wood? Probably ash, as it's the most versatile wood I know: you can sand it, polish it, blast it with sand, burn it, bleach it and beat the crap out of it and it still looks good...to somebody.



*Black Pot - Dawn, 2011, Ash, 6" h x 8 1/2" d*  
*"Burning creates cracks. Cracks are not mistakes, but rather opportunities for embellishment. My inlay work is intended to draw attention to these cracks by standing proud on the surface such that a blind person would never miss them."*

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

The breadth and diversity of types and styles in the work being produced today, plus the breadth and diversity of the types and styles of the people making them.

**If you couldn't be a woodturner, what would**

Honorary Lifetime Member of the American Association of Woodturners and the Collectors of Wood Art, and a Fellow and a former Trustee of the American Craft Council.

A snooker table in the gallery above his studio is testament to David's love of ball and cue. He and his wife Wendy, an accomplished bead artist, split their time between Colorado and their home and studios in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, where they both teach and work. Married since 1980, they have four adult children and five grandchildren.

### Learn more about David



*Episode from the Michener Museum's series, "Creative Hand, Discerning Heart: Form, Rhythm, Song" featuring David Ellsworth. [Click to watch](#)*



*"The key to being a good teacher is being a good student," Ellsworth said in this 011 ACC [article](#) by Jessica Shaykett.*

Profile by Tina LeCoff from the Craft Now Philadelphia website. [Click to read](#)

**The Ellsworth's [website](#)**



### you do instead?

Become a better pool player, hit the road and pretend it was sometime in the mid-1960s.

### Do you still have *American Woodturner* back issues?

Where do you keep them? All of them...scattered all over the place.

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

Obviously, yes. I've become a much more knowledgeable writer about our field; I've grown to become a much better teacher; and my work has matured as a result of my associations with the people within our field whose lives and artwork have also grown.

Considering the nature of the world we currently live in, the only stable elements in the art and craft world are the organizations that have been formed by the makers of art and craft. Without the AAW, the field of woodturning as we know it would not exist.

### What's your favorite project/piece?

Sorry, but it's the one that is yet to be made, for it may lead to an entirely new body of work yet to be conceived.



*Line Ascending, 2011. Pecan, 18" high.  
Photo by John Kelsey*

### Favorite piece turned by another artist?

A lovely, humble little bowl by the late Herbie Balderson. It isn't that well turned, isn't that well sanded, doesn't have that good a finish on it, but it fits well in the hand.

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