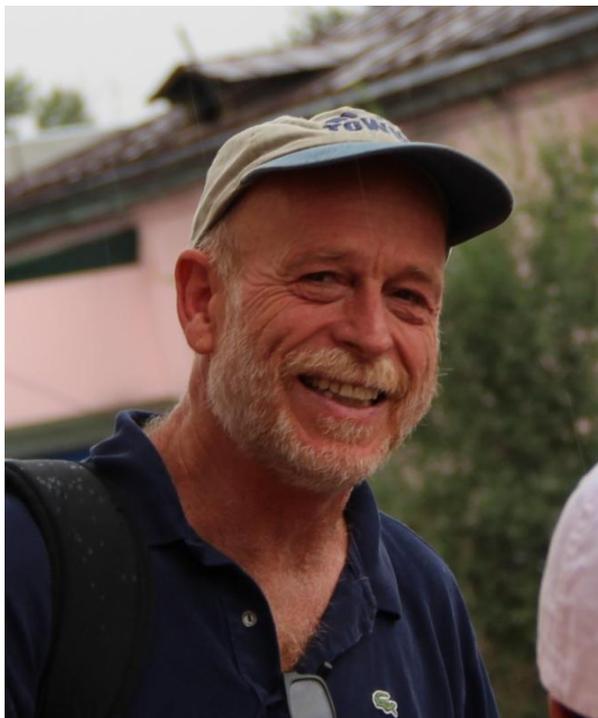


Anniversary Profiles Christian Burchard Member #195



What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?

I was trained as furniture maker in Germany but never given a chance to turn. At the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston I found an old lathe and bought Peter Child's book, *The Craftsman Woodturner*, and started slowly...so I am pretty much self-taught, learning from mistakes, mostly.

When I heard about this thing called the AAW, I was in. People with the same obsession. What could go wrong?

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

Lots of confusion, half-baked ideas and some cool stuff. And then some more half baked ideas....



In the thirty weeks leading up to AAW's 30th Anniversary Symposium in Atlanta (and for a few weeks after!) 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 Christian Burchard

Christian Burchard was formally trained as a furniture maker in Germany, a career path decidedly different than the future in finance envisioned by his family when he set off for a year of travel after high school. He returned determined to earn his living with his hands, and - in keeping with his desire to travel - to learn a craft which could be practiced anywhere.

After completing his furniture-making course, during which he never used a lathe, Christian continued his travels, began to practice *tai chi*, and came to the United States to continue his studies at a retreat center in Colorado. He later applied to the School of the Fine Arts Museum of Boston, and, by his own statement, was unexpectedly accepted, starting a period of intense



Chalice #7, 1992. Boxelder burl, mahogany, ebony. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, a gift from the collection of John and Robyn Horn

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

Relax, take your time, relax. At least 20x more....

Who or what was your greatest teacher?

I am pretty much self-taught on the lathe, but I took a week-long class from Richard Raffan in Provo, Utah. What an excellent teacher! And I learned a lot from David Ellsworth through images of his work that I saw published. That *Fine Woodworking* issue! Black and white, then.

But I think that my greatest teacher has always been the wood itself. When I care to listen....

What was your funniest turning moment?

At a conference outside of Atlanta, I was given a lathe that (as I found out later!) had been dropped on the loading dock. I tried turning a sphere. No way. I was getting warm...very warm...no round was to be had. I wanted to prove that it could really be done, no matter what.... Then it, this sphere-ish, and of course off-center thing, fell to the ground and took off running. It hit the stand that held my drawing board and knocked it over. I remounted the sphere and tried hollowing it, but my foot-long hand-held depth drill broke off when I tried to drill a pilot hole, and half of the drill bit stayed in the sphere.

It still fetched \$220 at the auction that night!

study in a broad range of art subjects which continued at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, British Columbia.

After moving to Oregon in the early 80s and establishing a studio, he supported his growing family through house-building and furniture-making while continuing to experiment with lathe-made forms. Over time, sculpture became his primary occupation, and he started to focus almost exclusively on only one wood: madrone. Christian is continually fascinated by what he describes as madrone's 'predictable unpredictability'. When turned or worked green madrone requires an openness to change and risk, but the creative rewards are great.

"I do take a lot of chances and I fail a lot. Many ideas just don't turn out after all. I burn a lot of my work. It can feel at times as if I was holding a whole lot of strings and am weaving them together. I push and pull till it sings. And I am learning to ask more of the right questions, to set things in motion, set possibilities in motion. At times I am even patient! I allow my relationships and my need for connection to flow into and inform the work. It is different now than it was ten years ago. There used to be lot of fear in my work, a rush to succeed and a fear of failing. Life has changed and I have slowed down, and my work has gotten simpler and quieter. The difference is that I am not looking for something new all the time. I have gained a deeper understanding of the wood that I am using, there is more breadth in our relationship. I have learned to trust the process, to give it the time and confidence it needs and deserves. That in turn is stretching my creative abilities, strongly affecting me and the work."

Traveling (and receptivity to change and risk) continues to be a life practice: in 2014 he



*A much later sphere by Christian Burchard.
Dance #14, 2007, madrone burl, paint. 10" diameter*

What was your happiest turning moment?

Hollowing something really big and taking it off the lathe, and it survived! But I think at those times I was always too exhausted to be "happy".

I do remember a craft show in Baltimore many years back when I did really well selling my turned work, which was a real happy turning moment...

What is your favorite wood and why?

Madrone, root or burl. This is as wild and unpredictable as it gets.

Your favorite tool?

As for tools, the good old bowl gouge, and for hollowing, a Dennis Stewart tool arm brace.

And of course my pencil!!

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

I am some what baffled by what I see as the infatuation with technology in the field today. I love wood as an organic material, I love its very nature and the very power within. That's just me.



*'Baskets', 2006. Madrone burl, 17" to 1"
Photo: Rob Jaffe*

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

Make more cheese. Lots of it. Get more goats, ramp

went to Tuva, in southern Siberia, lured by a long-time fascination with the rich arts and culture of the Scythians, an ancient nomadic people. While there, he immersed himself in the Tuvan culture and became a student of [throat-singing](#), a challenge for a man who described himself as a non-musician.



Black Deer #2, created for the AAW Professional Outreach Program exhibition Roots, was influenced by Scythian animal motifs

Christian has taught and exhibited internationally, and his work is in many major public and private collections, including the Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Mint Museum of Craft and Design; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Royal Cultural Center, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Yale University Art Gallery; Stanford University Art Gallery; The Center for Art in Wood, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. A set of his madrone baskets is in the AAW Permanent Collection. He is represented by [Sarah Myerscough](#) Gallery.

Christian lives in Ashland, Oregon with his wife, where he has his studio, raises goats, and pursues the fine craft of cheese-making.

Learn more:

www.burchardstudio.com

The Society for Contemporary Craft's Raphael Prize [video](#) of Christian Burchard discussing his work.

[Free Form](#), an article by Joyce Lovelace published in

up production.

Do you still have *American Woodturner* back issues? Where do you keep them?

I was just now cleaning up my shop, and when I saw those boxes of old issues it seemed a good time to get rid of them. I tried finding someone who might be interested. And then I started leafing through them, and they felt like old friends, there were so many memories there. So I kept them after all...

So yes, you could say that I have *American Woodturner* issues.....

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

Becoming a member and meeting other turners had a big impact. Some of them are still my good friends! I still remember my first rotation at the Davis symposium (I just hope no one else does.) I learned so much from teaching, and taught workshops for many years after that. I found a community of friends within the AAW. Some of them are nuts like me.



*Demonstrating at the 2015 AAW Symposium.
Photo: Andi Wolfe*

What's your favorite piece?

It would be this piece. Turned from green madrone root, then bleached.

American Craft, 2016

An informal visit and a video slideshow by Susan Viebrock from [Telluride Inside](#), 2012

[Material and Process](#) by Kevin Wallace, Craft Arts International, 2005



*Tall White Vessel by Christian Burchard, 2014
17" x 7" x 7", bleached madrone*

Favorite piece turned by another artist?

After all these years it is still this piece by Stephen Hogbin. The simplicity of form. And instead of trying to hide those voids, he made them the focus, red epoxy! What an absolutely beautiful piece of work.



Ceremonial Bowl by Stephen Hogbin, 1976. Grass tree (Xanthorrhoea) 19.5" x 10.5". Vic Wood collection.

American Association of Woodturners
222 Landmark Center, 75 5th St W, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102
651 484-9094 | www.woodturner.org
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