

Post-Millennial **Standout:**

MICHAEL ANDERSEN

David M. Fry

Far from any college woodworking program or even local high school shop, 17-year-old Mike Andersen has emerged as something of a prodigy in the world of artistic woodturning. He claimed POP Instant Gallery awards for youth at the last two AAW symposia, as well as first place at the 2015 Turning to the Future competition of the Association of Woodworking & Furnishings Suppliers. At the Pittsburgh symposium, he also completed a full slate of rotations as room assistant to various demonstrators at the suggestion of mentor and current AAW board member John Ellis. And renowned turner Trent Bosch has already scheduled him to demonstrate at the Rocky Mountain Woodturning Symposium in 2016. All together, it's a remarkable track record for a teenager with only 2½ years' experience at the lathe.

Scouting wood

In the remote high country of Northern New Mexico, Mike had few local resources besides pine and cottonwood to build a replacement bobsled for his scout troop several years ago. His quest for suitable wood took him three hours south to Albuquerque, where he found stores offering not only a great variety of species, but also tools and instruction. Soon after being introduced to pen turning there, he bought a lathe and eventually took a class with Jimmy Clewes. It was Jimmy, Mike



Surreal Stream, 2015, Bolivian rosewood, Gabon ebony, 5½" × 10" × 3¾" (14cm × 25cm × 9cm)
2015 POP Instant Gallery Youth Award



Michael Andersen in his 112-square-foot workshop at the campground managed by his parents. He created the space by building walls around a flatbed utility trailer.

recalls, "who opened my eyes to the rest of woodturning and sparked my interest in the AAW." Florida turner Rudolph Lopez and wood dealer Jake Jacobson also have provided pivotal guidance.

Design and experimentation

Quickly advancing beyond traditional turned forms, Mike has gravitated toward "funky shapes like turned boards and triangles—what you see in the hull and sails of my *Fire Ship*." As in *Surreal Stream*, the Clewes influence is apparent in the elongated geometry. "I like to watch how other people turn, to figure out how they do it, and to scoop up ideas from everywhere. I'm especially interested in the approach of Jacques Vesery—someone I've talked to quite a bit who has redefined my sense of design. I'd like to get more involved in fine surface embellishment, although I'm limited now by having just an angle grinder with a big burr."

To explore a concept,



Fire Ship, 2015, Scrub oak (hull), big leaf maple burl (sails), and myrtle (mast), 11½" × 8" × 3¼" (29cm × 20cm × 8cm)

The inspiration arose from Mike's fondness for the vivid imagery of sea shanties.

Mike may doodle, but he doesn't make detailed drawings. Designs are usually refined at the lathe without elaborate jigs. For complex works, he may first turn and assemble prototypes out of scrap woods. While turning gives him pleasure and satisfies his attraction to curved, thin forms, he doesn't want to be limited to objects made exclusively on the lathe.

Career aspirations

Mike has been home-schooled in a tiny community—Chama, New Mexico—and his occupational goals diverge from the conventional college-to-job trajectory plotted by many of his contemporaries. "Owning a business is probably in my future, and doing art will remain my passion. Because I don't want to put all my eggs in one basket, I'll probably get electrician training. But I do hope to become a professional woodturning demonstrator and teacher and to sell my work through galleries." Mike's impressive showing so far suggests he's well on his way. ■

David M. Fry turns wood and writes near Washington, D.C.