

Rocky Mountain Woodturners

A Chapter of the American Association of Woodturners

August 2023 Newsletter

News & Announcements:

- Logo Gear- Smocks are in, patches are sewn, and pick-up can be made at the September General Meeting. Bring your card for payment, and pick yourself up a hat or patch while you're at it!
- The August demonstration was the club's first ever Interactive Remote Demo (IRD) and was attended by over 30 members. The UK's Tiny Turner, Emma Cook, put on a fantastic demonstration from across the pond (and several hours into the future.) The folks beyond the first row had a better view than an in-person demonstration. The carved bowl that Emma turned



during the IRD will be shipped here for an in-person raffle at a future general meeting. The Tiny Turner has most of the supplies she used, such as color-shift pigments, paints and finishes, and even some complete project kits available on her website:

- Website – www.thetinyturner.co.uk
- IRD - <https://youtu.be/p-ABF5WP0Ts>
- Handouts: [Bowl](#) & [Platter](#)
- [August Instant Gallery](#)

- Pat Carroll's Beaded Trinket Box, from the June Demo, was raffled off as a door prize at the August Meeting.
- The August Perpetual Turning was quite a prize, a Tom Wirsing Tulip Bowl. When the winning numbers were called, Bob Franklin held the winning ticket. That means that a Bob Franklin piece will be in the raffle for the September Meeting!
- Wood Bank - Contact [John](#) if you'd like to arrange a visit to the lot (no gear or experience required,) or [Brandon](#) if you'd like to arrange a log pickup. The woodbank is still in need of some consistent help with cutting and transporting the monthly EOG raffle blanks and collecting wood.
- The August Social Hour topic was embellishment. Show-and-tell included tri-cornered bowls, snowmen, whiskey barrels, hollow forms, chip bowls, weaved rim bowls & easter eggs. We discussed tool rack layout, beading tools, and dry brushing. Inspirations cited included: [Dixie Biggs](#), [Avelino Samuel](#), and Harvey Meyer's Basket Illusion videos Parts [1](#) & [2](#). The September topic will be "Something learned at the (or a) Symposium."
- Registration for the Rocky Mountain Symposium on September 15-17 is nearly full, with less than 20 spots remaining. Registrations will be accepted through August 31st or until capacity is reached. Register [here](#), and we hope to see you there!

Pen Turners Update:



The August pen turner's meeting included a dozen folks with Harry Farmer turning a patriotic Corian pen. There was some lively discussion about the Pen Turner's Christmas plans, wet vs dry sanding, and other projects the members were working on. Several incredible pens were passed around for inspection, including the leather pens from last month's demonstration.



If you're interested in turning pens for the Freedom Pens for Troops Program, get in touch with Harry, so that enough kits are ordered. The September meeting will be "Something WACKY" by Patrick Crumpton.

September Interactive Remote Demo:

For the September General Meeting, RMWT will host our next IRD demonstrator, **Ernie Conover!**

Ernie will be demonstrating hand-chased threading.

Ernie Conover is a veteran woodworking author with eleven books, many videos and hundreds of articles to his credit. His most recent book is the 3rd Edition the Lathe Book, published by Taunton Press. It came out in February of 2020. His work has received numerous awards and been the subject of several one-man shows. He lectures widely for clubs, trade show groups and woodworking stores and is frequently called upon as a consultant and expert witness in the woodworking field. Ernie is also a lathe designer having developed his own lathe



and worked on the designs of the Nova and the Powermatic 3520b. When not writing, lecturing or consulting he is actively teaching at Conover Workshops—a craft school founded by the Conover family.

For more on Ernie, check out:
www.conoverworkshops.com

Ernie will also join us in-person on October 12th to teach a hands-on class. He will be following up his IRD with a real life hand chased threading class at Woodcraft. The cost of the class is \$175, and the deadline to register is September 22nd. Please contact [Margaret Stiles](#) to register.



Twirling Sisters Update:



The main focus of the Twirling Sisters this summer was the Greeley Art in the Park event which happened July 29th and 30th. A long term goal of the club has been to test the waters in a regional craft fair setting. Many of our members have wanted to try selling their turnings, but without the risk and effort of going it alone. In addition to providing a retail opportunity to members, the club gained regional exposure and certainly interested some fair-goers to look at woodturning as a hobby or craft.

This event came together after significant effort by Jenni and Margaret. The planning efforts began with several Zoom calls between a dozen or so volunteers addressing details such as:

- Business plan development to justify club funding support
- ID'ing volunteers to help determine fees
- setting a pricing structure and handling taxes and payment methods
- booth layout and staffing
- equipment needs and responsibilities



When the event finally arrived, the thorough planning ensured a smooth event. The turnings available for purchase were widely varied and included everything from huge segmented bowls to pens, and everything in between. Those staffing the booth took several passes through the fair and all agreed that the RMWT booth had the best cross section of goods.



Several passers-by stepped under the tent to try their hands at turning tops and pens. Many kids walked away with a top in their hand and a smile on their face. Shoppers were encouraged to handle items and ask questions, and numerous folks left their contact information.

For more photos, click [here](#).

All those involved considered the undertaking to be a success and lots of great knowledge was gained to apply to future events. Our presence was very well received, with the Greeley Art Coordinator complimenting our booth and suggesting future invitations to Greeley events are likely. The Greeley group is currently considering a 1-day Saturday event in Berthoud in December.



In other Twirling Sister's news, Jim Bessette will be coming to Jenni's shop on Aug. 29th to do a Learn to Burn demo. At the June meeting, the Sisters decided not to meet in September because the club symposium is Sept. 15-17th and there will be some fantastic demonstrators coming to town.

Meet Your Mentors Founders:

The subject of the following article, David Nittman, is our Educational Opportunity Grant Namesake. The article appeared in the Summer 2001 issue of American Woodturner Magazine and is reprinted here with permission from the AAW.

DAVID NITTMANN

Wood guy and artist

KEN KEOUGHAN

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT I can say about David Nittmann is that he is an authentic artist. His commitment to art is without reservation. His results as reflected in his "Basket Evolution" series are subtle, complex, fascinating.

As I studied one of his pieces I found myself shaking my head. It was a perfectly symmetrical pattern. I could see that. But my eye drifted inward toward the center ... involuntarily ... or outward toward the rim, again involuntarily. I counted the spaces. It was not perfectly symmetrical. And yet my eye told me that it was. His colors live together in peace and harmony; whether bright or muted, they always work together with synergy. There are patterns on top of patterns on top of patterns.

The names he gives his pieces mean something. They are part of what he as an artist is expressing, part of what each piece is intended to convey. "Crossed Wires," "Never Strikes Twice," "Square Dance." These have meaning beyond "untitled bowl II." This is not a guy cutting a few beads, indexing a few radials and coloring them in with magic markers.

Nittmann, on first meeting, can seem to be made of bluff and bluster. He's not. That's just the shield he throws up to protect the vulnerability he shares with most artists. He is as sensitive and caring and human as the life he has lived allows.

As a turner of wood, he can do almost anything. His versatility and willingness to try everything is amazing. Want a Bonny Klein style top? No problem. Multi-axis? Done lots of those. Deep hollowing? Can do! How about a spin-top the size of the one on display at the Greensboro, NC, Symposium? He came home and made one. Want some carved feathers? Piece of cake. How about some cherry



David Nittmann, a high-energy artist, at his 12-ft. Ullery/Nichols lathe. The large drum-like fixtures on the headstock and tailstock are for architectural work, a major component of his business. Photo by Ken Keoughan.

architectural columns 10-ft.-high by 10-in. in diameter? They're part of a project he was doing when I visited his shop in Boulder, CO, last February. I saw them in progress. How does he turn them? Slowly, on a 12-ft. Denver Ullery/John Nichols lathe.

I point all of this out because the "Basket Illusion" series, which has put him in our spotlight, is but one body of work. He has ideas that haven't even caught up with him yet.

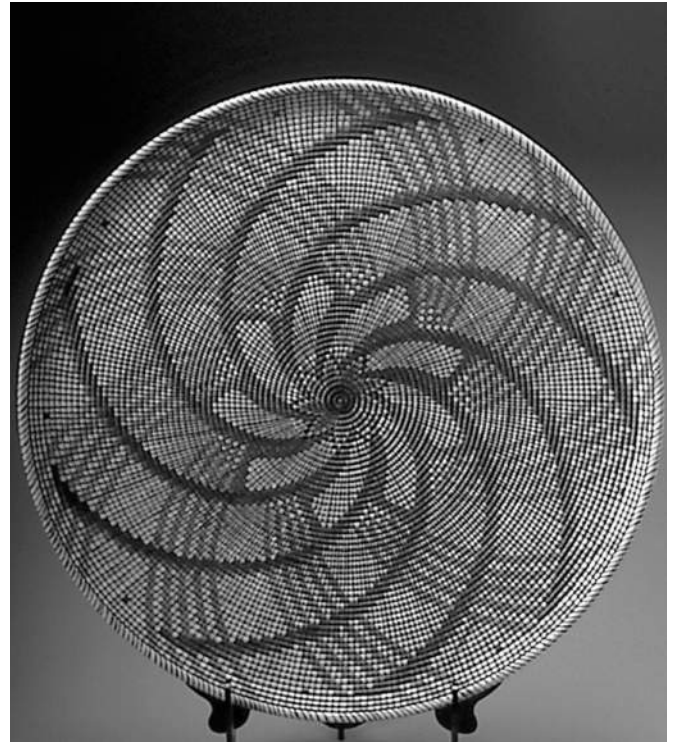
How did the versatility come about? He was raised with wood and woodworking. As a small boy Nittmann was made an official "sweeper" in his grandfather's shop, Peter's Wooden Toy Factory. He learned carpentry early, as a young man. "Cabinetmaking is simply carpentry with precision," he says. He has been a cabinetmaker, a successful one.

David is very bright and very energetic. After three years in the Army as

a meteorologist in the Vietnam conflict, he went to Colorado State University. He put himself through school with carpentry and other woodworking jobs and was graduated with honors. He went on to take an MS in Watershed Science.

Jobs in his field in the private sector were neither plentiful nor forthcoming. But a wife and children were. He did carpentry, cabinetry and a little furniture repair. In the furniture repair arena he needed to replace damaged pieces that had been turned. So he got a small Rockwell lathe, some scrapers and just ... did it.

If you are in Fort Collins, CO, and you turn wood, you know Lee Carter. It's as simple as that. And if you know Lee Carter and have a little sense, you will learn more than you already know about turning wood. It doesn't make any difference how much you know already, you'll learn more if you are around Lee Carter.



Two of Nittmann's signature pieces in his "Basket Evolution" series, which are turned, then embellished with burned-in lines and colored. Above left, "Square Dance", a 22-in. maple platter and, above right, "Crossed Wires," a 22-in. maple platter. Photos courtesy of the artist.

David met and got to know Del Stubbs through Lee Carter. Stubbs blew his socks off. Spindle turning was nice but nothing like the excitement of green turned hollow vessels, natural edges and all the rest. Bowl

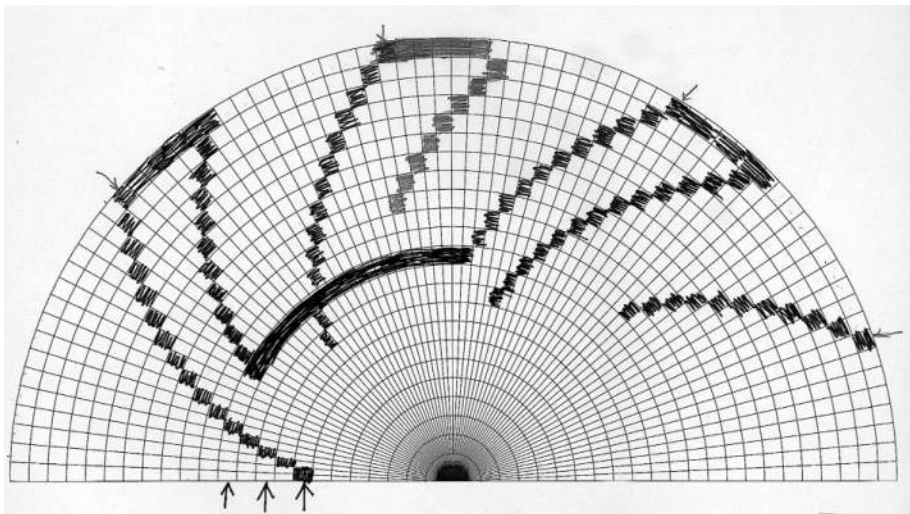
gouges and the Stewart System became turning tools of choice for David Nittmann.

Later, again through Lee Carter, Nittmann was exposed to multi-axis turning's most successful living advo-

cate, Stoney Lamar. Again he was captivated, fascinated and quick to learn. He loved it and still does. He's skilled at multi-axis turning and uses it in his own fashion to carve interest into the commonplace.

His shop is a woodworking "shop." No studio here. Cluttered, well lit, well-swept, busy. He shares it with Cindy Drozda, a production turner producing moderately priced, extremely well-done gift items. The welder next door pops in like a "Jack-in-Box." Nittmann's machine shop is in the little room in the back. It is kept dust free. Two cats live there. The computer and all its components are in the little room off to the right. So are the phone and the answering machine.

On the computer, Nittmann uses a CAD program from his lumber business to help design the "Basket Illusion" series. With it he creates a circle with concentric inner circles and ra-



A section of Nittmann's "Grid in the Round" hints at the complexity and detail involved in his basket illusions.

dial lines from the center out ... i.e. a "grid-in-the-round." However, it is more than just graph paper in a circular format. Each little rectangle or group of them created by the crossing of the concentrics and the radials is in the exact proportion of his design. This facilitates the sometimes arduous task of "counting out" the pattern, then the under/overlying patterns. It also facilitates the coloration process.

I asked him about the coloration — the sophistication is exquisite. He smiled and said, "I have a deep debt there. A friend, Pat Baker who works in glass, has spent hours with me. She taught me the uses of colors; the relationship of one color to the next; the idea of 'families' of color ... the subtleties. She showed me how to make the illusion of one pattern seem to be beneath or under another."

There are three physical phases in the "Basket Illusion" process. The lathe is used for the first physical phase to create a form from a single piece of wood. Concentric beads are then cut to follow the chosen form. The valley between each of the beads is friction burned, using sandpaper as the piece spins, to accentuate the line. The indexing wheel on the lathe is then used to locate a "spoke" (pencil marked) approximately every 10 degrees around the form. Both sides of platters and bowls and the entire surface of hollow forms and "Body Drums" are marked for the next phase.

The second phase uses Nittmann's specially designed burning pens to define the marked spokes and addi-



Nittmann at Work. Ken Keoughan photo.

tional radial lines. Platters have 40,000 to 50,000 separate burned marks to create the appearance of a woven basket.

The third phase is coloring the design. Fine-point, alcohol-dye, felt-tipped pens of various colors are carefully applied to the individual rectangles to further define the illusion.

He demonstrated how he did all these phases for me. And he, as most really skilled people, simply extends himself gracefully, harmoniously as he works with his tools.

I was impressed with David Nittmann's commitment. He has

boxes of reference sources; boxes of burnt out burning tools; and boxes of coloring tools. He has sketchbooks that go back years, scrap books of "things I like the look of," stacks of CAD sheets, and batches of color compatibility tests. He has devoted thousands of hours of his "life" to the pieces we see today.

This man is an independent, resourceful giving person. He started and presided over the Front Range chapter of AAW for three years; was one of the coterie of hard workers who engineered the success of the AAW Symposium in Fort Collins in 1994. He is proud of the \$25,000 scholarship that this event yielded to his Alma Mater, Colorado State University.

He and Cindy run 20-25 miles a week in the short-day winter months; 40-50 miles per week in the summer. Health is important to them. Physical condition is important to

them. But let me tell you, they focus on their work. These guys both put in a lot of hours. (They are both demonstrating at the 2001 annual AAW Symposium in St. Paul)

I asked David — I couldn't resist — "If you were going to make these 'Basket Illusions,' why didn't you just make a basket?" He gave me a look like my old coach used to give me and said, "Because, I'm a wood guy". And so he is... a wood guy and an artist.

Ken Keoughan is a woodturner and writer in Friendship, ME, and contributing editor at American Woodturner.