



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BELSER, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

20 minutes with David Belser



David Belser has always been fascinated with machines and how things work. Woodturning allows him to express his creativity and create geometric and intricate pieces

Your work is abstract and very intricate; what causes you to explore these avenues?

I've always been interested in patterns – geometric, manmade, organic and fractal. There is usually a physical or mathematical underpinning to the pattern but it isn't the specific mathematics or physics but rather that these patterns are manifestations of higher level abstractions that really excites me. Simple rules that lead to beautiful and sometimes amazingly complex results.

What piece are you currently working on?

A structure of veneer and sticks that mimics the actual structure of a tree. I've been working on a supported turning technique that uses wax or ice as a temporary support for turning delicate structures. It just so happens that the hard part is building the structures.

Can you explain how your 'Cryptex Tantalus' is made?

Basically, it is made from

tubes using traditional staved construction. The letter rings are 16-sided with the flats left on. The rest of the outside is a six-sided box turned to a tube. Unlike all the other cryptex constructions I've seen, I use a single inside tube with six parts. The long staves slide together like a dovetail joint; three stay attached to the bottom and support the letter rings and the alternate three staves are attached to the top and slide out like fingers. I came to this design because I wanted to limit the thickness of the

ABOVE: 'Spherical Aspirations,' 180mm (7in) cube, ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), 588 ash sticks assembled into a 3D grid cube with a spherical hollow turned inside

box. At the size I'm working – bottle sized – the more common three-tube approach would have been quite bulky in comparison.

Which turners do you most admire, and why?

There are a number of turners that I admire for their generosity of time and encouragement: Jon Siegel and Jacques Vesery have both been great mentors. The list of turners whose work I find inspiring is long and includes Alain Mailland, Virginia Dotson, Bill Smith, Al Stirt, and Bill Luce – just to name a few.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Gosh, I'm just starting out; five years from now would be half my career away. I'd like to travel around the world to demonstrate and meet other turners. Maybe within five years I could do a solo gallery show, but I think that's a bit optimistic!

What are your current likes and dislikes within the sphere of turning?

The up and coming turners are taking the field in many fantastically imaginative directions; I can't wait to see what comes next. I understand that glass as a medium went through a similar period of expansion of what was accepted as glass art. At the same time, there are those who believe that woodturning is getting too 'artsy.' The idea that embellishments somehow violate the purity of the wood or that if it's not round it's not a turning. The realm of woodturning is huge and from my experience the community is very accepting. Pursue your passion and let others chase their own.

What direction to you see your work taking?

My work is tending to a more sculptural/artistic direction at the moment. I'm having a blast exploring what I can do with supported turnings. I love boxes and mechanical interactions and hope to keep making different mechanical locking boxes. I also enjoy optical art and illusions.

If you could only offer one bit of advice to someone starting out turning, what would it be, and why?

Besides learning what sharp is and how to do it quickly – woodturning is so

much, much more enjoyable with sharp tools – take the time to develop your ideas; keep trying until you get what you want then make more, but try to make them better.

What music and which book are you currently into?

Right now, when I want to ignore the rest of the world, I'm really into Underworld, particularly the album *A Hundred Days Off*. I haven't heard a track of theirs that I don't like but my iPod has 15,000 tracks on it and I'll put James Brown or Ray Charles on when it's time to clean up. I've been working my way through *Don Quixote* by Cervantes – the translation by Edith Grossman.

What three items in your workshop could you not do without?

My lathe – though it would be hard to choose between the wood lathe and the metal lathe – my bandsaw, and my drum sander.

What is your biggest regret?

That I can only work on one idea at a time.

What are your other interests besides turning?

Hiking, astronomy, good food and drink, beach combing and road trips in my '93 Mazda Miata.

Describe the view from your workshop

My boiler! Actually, if I look out the door I can see my wife's massage office. As part of the new house negotiations she got the view looking up river. The upside is that she will eventually retire from massage therapy, at which point we may re-negotiate.

You describe yourself as having a mechanical mind, how does this help with your turning?

I am a very visual person; I imagine my ideas vividly in my mind as real 3D objects. I wouldn't necessarily say that I have a mechanical mind, maybe more abstract reasoning or algorithmic? A lot of the work I do is the development or application of a process, possibly an attempt to mimic a natural process. ●

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LEFT: 'Gear Box,' mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*), ebony (*Diospyros spp*), pink ivory (*Rhamnus zeyheri*), cherry (*Prunus serotina*) with copper leaf, 90mm (3 1/2 in) dia. x 115mm (4 1/2 in) high, collection of Harvey Fein

ABOVE: 'Stage of Enchantment,' bamboo, ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), glass, 140mm (5 1/2 in) high x 140mm (5 1/2 in) wide and 100mm (4 in) deep, private collection