



AS THE WOOD TURNS

BY MORGAN BARNES // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA DEEKS

When a challenging career in Ottawa's IT field came to an end in October 2011, John Ward decided to pursue his passion for a craft that dates back to 1300 BC in Egypt.

It may seem an unlikely interest for someone who made a career in today's modern technology sector, but the ancient art form of wood turning proved a natural calling for John, who has enjoyed woodworking since he was a teenager. Throughout his adult life, John has spent his spare time woodworking in his garage, creating beautiful, functional wood pieces for his home.

In 2012, only a few months after his layoff, John decided to launch his business, **Treeware Woodworks**, into a full-time endeavour.

Once he decided to make the transition from hobbyist to full-time artisan, he never worried that his love of wood turning would become a burden and feel like work. "I knew my fate was sealed when Pam gave me my first lathe," says John, reflecting on the day he received his steel mini lathe from his wife, an interior decorator. "I love the physical work and immediate reward of a finished product that comes with this new career.

Working with wood forces you to live in the moment and be present 100 per cent of the time. There's also an element of danger when you're creating something from nature."

John's creations can be found throughout the rooms of his family home. Stunning, one-of-a-kind pedestal tables that integrate actual tree branches into the design, gorgeously shaped bowls with live edging, sleek and vibrantly coloured pens made from exotic woods and austere candlesticks are just some of his signature specialties.

His new career as a wood turner soon posed a zoning issue for his home-based workshop. Weather and the amount of inventory John wanted to build for his repertoire were also factors prompting a search for a new space.

Today, John works in a well-equipped, 1,000 sq. ft. industrial condo workshop in the city's west end that he shares with other artisans. The space is ideal for John, who works on a large, Canadian-made, Oneway lathe that enables him to create larger pieces.

A regular at farmers' markets and craft shows across the city and the



surrounding area, John has built a reputation in a short period of time as an exceptional wood-turning artist. In the fall of 2012, he won an Honourable Mention at Toronto's famed Cabbagetown Arts and Crafts Festival. His work appears at Cornerstone Gallery in Kingston. Another gallery from Prince Edward County has also approached John about showcasing his creations. The accolades and attention haven't gone to his head. When asked what his favourite piece is, John refers to his continued search for perfection and modestly replies, "always the next one."

John works with primarily domestic wood like maple, cherry, oak and walnut. He uses exotics like African and Central American woods for small, decorative pieces that require vibrant colours and fine grains like the popular wooden pens, sketching pencils and bottle stoppers he creates. For the most part, he likes to use reclaimed urban wood or he sources materials from a variety of local suppliers like KJP Select Hardwoods and The Wood Source. "I particularly enjoy making beautiful functional objects out of wood that would have been otherwise used for firewood or simply discarded for their imperfections."

John approaches his work using the Shaker aesthetic philosophy that "form follows function." He finds inspiration for his work from around the world, including the serenity found in Japanese architecture and gardens, mid-century Danish sculptural shapes and simple, but misleading ceramics in all their beautiful forms. He also notes some prolific 20th century woodturners, including Bob Stocksdale and Rude Osolnik. A few years ago, he studied with Richard Raffan, one of the world's best known wood turners.

Asked to describe his work in three words, John pauses and thoughtfully responds: "There's a calmness and longevity to Japanese pieces that I greatly admire and strive to achieve in my own work, so I would probably say 'serene, timeless and functional.'"

Based on the exquisite work he has produced and the attention he has justly received, those words are as solid as oak to us.

You can learn more about John, his upcoming shows and where you can find his work on his blog at www.treewarewoodworks.blogspot.ca. **OH**

