

# Wrought Wood

## Mike Scott

I was born in Oxford in 1943, leaving school in 1960 to take up a career in accounting. In 1965 I emigrated to Australia, where I worked in a number of accounting and administrative posts, returning to England in 1976.

In 1980 I felt the need to change direction and spent some time studying Eastern philosophy and holistic medicine, whilst seeking a suitable outlet for my creativity.

Consequently in October 1982 I enrolled at Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education, where I completed one year of the three year BA (Creative Arts) Degree course. It was during this time that I first started working on a woodturning lathe.

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme gave me the opportunity to set up in business in November 1984, working in wood. In May of the following year I had bought a lathe and was soon realising the possibilities that it offered. Over the next few months, I started producing 'one-off' bowls and platters, and, encouraged by the public's response at Craft Fairs, began selling my work through galleries.

This eventually led to my first one-man exhibition at the Leeds Craft and Design Gallery in August 1986. Since then I have exhibited in most of the major Crafts Council recommended galleries in the UK as well as in Germany, France, Japan and the USA.

In the process of seeking inspiration for my work, I have discovered a wealth of ideas in vessel and other forms from many cultures, traditions and disciplines. Each idea becomes a seed that either grows, expands, changes shape and flowers or remains dormant until called forth some time in the future.

Sometimes I follow through specific themes, other times I become excited by a new idea and go off at a tangent to try something quite different. I enjoy the infinite challenges and risks that are part of the process; wood is alive - it moves, shrinks, puckers and splits - constantly presenting me with new possibilities.

Until recently the starting point for each piece would have been a rough-hewn chunk of wood from my wood store, which consists mainly of elm and oak burrs that I harvest locally. As I start to remove wood in the turning process, various possibilities emerge - and the characteristics of each piece of wood (colour, hardness, age, grain, texture, moisture and content) are a major influence in the development.

I may exploit the texture by wirebrushing, leaving the tool marks and ridges or by cutting grooves and segments with my lathe mounted chainsaw. Colour may be affected by scorching, ebonising, staining, painting or fuming in ammonia. Some areas may be sanded smooth to highlight an area of outstanding grain pattern, whilst other parts may be sandblasted to fully exploit the 'aged' look of a piece. Sometimes I use rope to encircle the exterior or make handles: iron plates, wire and nails for securing cracked or broken edges: lacing with leather or cord over a split or fissure in the wood. I often leave areas from the outside of the tree surface to create sculptural effects - these may appear as cave-like openings in the sides of vessels, coral-like fringes on the base or undulating mountain peaks around the rim of a vessel. Recurring themes in my work have references to archaeology - amphitheatres, ancient ruins and castellated turrets.

Recent developments, however, have seen a move towards a more contemporary approach. I had often felt a need to be more rigorous in the initiation, control and limitation of design in my work. A two month residency in Grizedale Forest Workshops in Cumbria in 1995 gave me the opportunity to develop new series of pieces in this way.

Substituting a router for the chainsaw to segment and flute my vessels has allowed the cleaner, crisper edges to enhance the mechanistic feel. Scorching emphasises the form and etches the grain to give a satisfying tactile texture. Some areas may be limed to create strong contrasts to the black.

Current work now revolves around four basic themes:

1. Rough-hewn, chainsaw carved, sandblasted, rock-like forms, amphitheatres and huge vessels that appear to have been excavated from an ancient 'dig'.
2. Strong forms, geometric - usually hemispherical or discus, broken up by hard lines, fluted, segmented, scorched and limed. Some pieces are hollowed, with the fluting 'breaking through' the walls allowing light to pass through, creating shadows.
3. Sculptural objects – cube forms, tusk-like objects, columnar forms, some made on the lathe, others carved.
3. Simple, elegant, scorched thin walled bowl forms in ash.

Since moving to Whidbey Island in May 2010, I have been enjoying a new phase of life with my new wife, Kim Kelzer, doing construction and building maintenance, nest-building at our home, building and renovating wooden boats, messing with motorcycles, and generally having fun.(it's called retirement, but don't let anyone kid you it's about sittin' around!)