Timeless Turnings
TMBaker. Woodturner

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Welcome to my Timeless Turnings Newsletter!

I'm hoping to provide some entertainment, education, and — most of all — a glimpse into the whys and wherefores of my creative woodturning journey. Join me…

Inside…

Turning Back in Time

The mid-70s recession had forced our move from our beloved Grand Marais to a more populous center of the Upper Peninsula, experiences of which were coverd in the last issue. Our next big turning point — returning to GM — was a conscious decision to opt for excellence in educational opportunity for our two girls. As entry into 1st Grade was upon us, we decided to return home, even though we had no employment in sight. We remained throughout the girls' school years, and advanced our lives in the process.

I first hired out for handyman services, which quickly extended to repairs and remodeling. I secured several significant remodeling jobs working on historic homes, not realizing how much of an impact it would have on my life. I loved working on historic homes, and developed a sensitivity to preservation ethics. Even though there were many historic homes in town, the real steady work was in new construction. Hence, I studied furiously, became licensed, and hung out my shingle as Northern Climes Contracting.

I designed and built custom homes throughout much of the 80s, until my knees finally gave out completely, and my orthopedist insisted I find another line of work. Yikes! While it was devastating to hear such news, I quickly switched to cabinetmaking to keep generating income. We also pursued a few small-scale entrepenurial opportunities, which further strengthened our resolve to carve out a living, albeit with various levels of success. It was during this period that I got the wild idea to try my hand at lathe work. I ordered a cheap lathe to see if I had any affinity for it, threw a piece from our firewood pile on it, and instantly fell in love with it — I had definitely found my newest passion!

To this day, we love the solitude of Lake Superior beaches and the diversity of the Upper Peninsula's wild forests — it instilled a broader appreciation for wild places everywhere.

Foraging Adventures

Staying with the Grand Marais, MI theme of things, our most recent road trip back 'home' was in 2022, when we took our truck cross-country for the specific purpose of hauling a load of wood (& Lake Superior rocks for the garden!) back to the west coast. And we had a blast! The truck was sitting pretty high in the front and very low in the back. I was a tad concerned about that much weight in it for the trip back, but it handled it like it was meant to.

The wild black cherry forests of the central U.P. just west of Grand Marais were of primary interest for me. There are typically plenty of windfalls available, and the trip did not disappoint. I brought back a respectable pickup load of black cherry burls, in particular, which are particularly numerous in that area. In addition, I was able to pick up some excellent white birch and the now-rare beech from a dear, old friend who has a great camp in the deep woods. We had a wonderfully memorable day in the forest together, walking about, identifying wildflowers and other plants, and generally enjoying being in each other's company again. Naturally, we had to top it off with some foraging activity. All-in-all, I will forever be grateful for having spent the day with one of the finest people I will ever have the pleasure to have known, Brody Block. Rest in peace and the spirit of the woods, my friend,

Wood Words

There is an entire, crazy world below ground in the woods, which is inhabited by a host of organisms, structures, bugs, etc., etc. Being a bit of a wild & crazy woodturner, I am totally intrigued by Root Balls. Consider taking the roots of a tree with all their tendrils, xylem for transporting water, and root hairs: one wild mess, right? Now consider taking that part of the tree and putting it on a lathe in order to produce a functional piece of art. I love the challenge and all that it brings. Problem-solving is half the fun in creating!

Turning a root ball on the lathe takes a considerable amount of planning and careful execution. Even then, the intended result is never guaranteed. Simply deciding how to start on each root ball is a challenge in itself. Then you need to judiciously decide which parts to remove and which to keep for character, also considering the safety factor in doing so. Root ball turning isn't for everyone, but I love the challenge and potential results!

Thanks for joining me — see you next month!

In the meantime, please visit my website at https://www.tmbaker-woodturner.me — my new shop is up and running, so look for new products from Timeless Turnings!