

A spin on art

Woodturner transforms logs into works of beauty

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Photos by Jennifer Reynolds

Turning wood used to be a painstaking ordeal. Makeshift lathes operated by ropes and pedals were used to produce spinning wheels, chairs, bowls and just about anything needed for everyday use. But by the mid-19th century, woodturning became an art form, with turners making exquisite decorative objects. Today, motorized lathes are powerful machines that have transformed the utilitarian craft of woodturning into a popular art medium. Woodturner Marty Kaminsky has been intrigued by this process since he was a boy. His house is full of bowls, vessels, vases, boxes — just about anything you can turn on a lathe — each piece having its own stunning personality. His San Leon workshop is full of machinery — lathes, saws, grinders, planers, stacks of wood and a mind-boggling assortment of tools.

Growing up in Ohio, Kaminsky was fascinated with making things, especially out of wood. But he also had an eye for photography and making jewelry. The son of a photographer, Kaminsky picked up a camera at a young age. He learned how to cast gold while working part-time in a dental lab. After college, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering, he followed a career path in that field and landed in Texas.

After years of taking pictures, casting jewelry and turning wood, Kaminsky began to focus more on developing his woodturning craft, which is his main medium at the moment. Working mostly in hardwoods, he gets a kick out of turning with mesquite. “Those who are not from Texas find it exotic,” he said.

Wormholes add to the uniqueness of one of woodturner Marty Kaminsky's bowls.



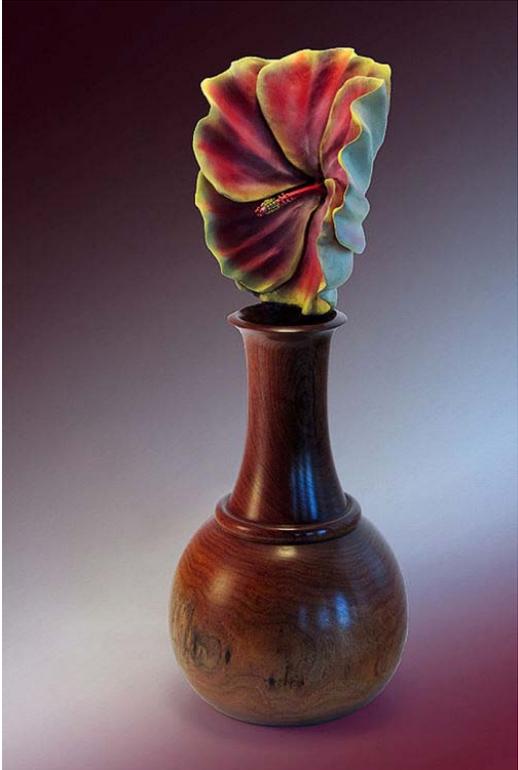
Woodturning has changed quite a bit in the past 10 to 12 years, Kaminsky said. “It used to be if you could make a really fine bowl or vase, that was as good as it got,” he said. “But we’ve moved on artistically by implementing more color, texture and carving.” His latest piece is a vase containing a sculpted airbrush colored flower atop a stem protruding out of the vase. It took more than 100 hours to complete and is his most time-consuming project to date. It’s hard to believe that a rough log can be turned into such a work of art, but that’s exactly what happens.

“Woodturners often don’t buy wood at lumberyards,” Kaminsky said. “We prefer chunks of raw logs or FOG (found on ground) wood. When I place a log on the lathe, I usually know where I’m going with it, but sometimes there are surprises — what we like to call ‘design opportunities’ — but I pretty much know what

I’m aiming for.” The finished products contain blemishes such as worm holes and rotted areas already within the wood. These imperfections stay in the design, which adds to their uniqueness.

“Working with wet wood, a basic bowl without color and texture may take a long afternoon to take shape,” said Kaminsky, who starts by slicing a log in half, putting it on the lathe, and does a rough shaping before putting it in a kiln to dry for several days. He then puts it back on the lathe for re-turning, sanding, finishing and buffing. Boxes are another story. Lids are involved, requiring completely dry wood with no shrinkage to allow for a precise fit. Most are topped with a decorative spindle called a finial.





"April Bloom," a mesquite flower and vase that is one piece



Decorative Fish

“I’m leaning more toward artistic coloring and carving,” said Kaminsky, who is applying much of his jewelry-making experience by adding brass and sterling silver parts he has cast. A member of several woodturning associations, Kaminsky participates in exhibitions and mentors other turners. Now retired, he is able to spend more time at his craft.

“Woodturning is a lot more fun than being an engineer,” he said. www.martykaminsky.com



Woodturner Marty Kaminsky turns a platter on a lathe in his workshop. Also a photographer and jewelry artist, Kaminsky mainly focuses on woodturning these days.