

## Turning Green by Neil Kagan

**T**urning Green, the theme of AAW's next juried and invitational exhibit, will premier at the 21st Annual AAW Symposium in Portland, Oregon (June 29 - July 1, 2007). This theme seemed like the perfect challenge for me – create a turned object that minimizes the use of precious resources. It also was the perfect excuse to plan a trip to my first AAW Symposium, and see my daughter who lives in Portland.

In September I started to conceptualize and sketch the three pieces that appear here – one to be created from a recycled piece of furniture, the others from wood headed for the dump or someone's fireplace. Each design was inspired by one of Portland's world famous gardens – the Japanese Garden, Rose Garden, and Chinese garden. Each piece involved turning and then carving the wood until it "moved", reflecting patterns of growth in nature.

Thanks to some strategic help along the way from CAW members C.A. Savoy, Don Riggs, George Salinas, and Phil Brown, I was able to achieve my goal – turn wood destined for destruction into lasting symbols of life. Here is the story behind my entries.

*Rebirth* is turned and carved from a 50 year old coffee table pedestal (donated by Woodcraft's Bill Ford). Inspired by the Portland based School and Community Action Project (SCRAP) - an organization that collects reusable materials and provides them at low cost to educators, artists, and the Portland community -- I envisioned giving the discarded pedestal new life. Locked inside the pedestal (which was covered with some kind of Formica-like material), I found a series of glued-up woods, including a beautiful old growth Poplar that has a rare golden-green glow.



The design was also inspired by Portland's Japanese Garden. A series of intertwining leaves unfurl and move towards the sun emulating the essence of growth on our green planet.

To create this piece the pedestal was mounted on the Stubby lathe during a Skill Enhancement Workshop, reshaped and hollowed under C.A.'s guidance using a deep hollowing tool custom designed by C.A. Once hollowed, I spent countless hours carving the leaves using Foredom flexible shaft carving tools with carbide bits pushing my skills and the delicate old wood to the limit. As one of my friends at the Woodcraft shop (where I do all my carving) said "I was teetering somewhere between a masterpiece and a disaster piece!"

Once the piece was completed I coated it with 12 coats of Watco Danish Oil natural and tested two leaves with a finish coat of wax –another disaster. All of the wax accumulated in the end grain of the wood virtually ruining the piece. Phil Brown came to the rescue, and after 3 hours of brainstorming and testing a series of different materials, we removed the wax and coated the piece with old fashioned Mineral oil. The Mineral oil restored the luster bringing the old woods back to life. The second entry, *The Secret Rose*, is turned and carved from a cherry tree which was cut down by my

neighbors because it was threatening to fall on their home. I discovered the cherry logs left by the curb waiting to be carted off and ground into mulch.

This design was inspired by Portland's Rose Garden. The rose reflects the emotional connection between people and nature. It is the ultimate symbol of love, the flower that connects the essence of the natural world with the human heart.

The Secret Rose is a turned box with a lid carved into a stylized rose. Upon opening the box a second rose is revealed on the underside of the lid. If you turn the box over the secret of the rose's growth is revealed – unfurling petals in a spiral pattern.



Like the Rose piece, the third entry, *Wedding Flower* was turned and carved from a log I found at curbside while walking in my neighborhood. I noticed the telltale streaks of the ambrosia beetle in the wood and rescued several choice pieces that would have ended up in the



dump or in someone's fireplace. I split the logs with George Salinas, who did all the chain saw work. Without George's help I could have never lifted these huge logs off the curb!



*Wedding Flower* was inspired by Portland's 3rd world class garden – the spectacular Chinese Garden -- and my daughter, a Portland artist and art educator, who was married near Oregon's Columbia River Gorge in July of 2006.

In Chinese culture, flowers are not only objects of beauty, but symbols of life, happiness, and fertility.

The turned and carved flower is similar to the one I made for my daughter and husband for a wedding gift – created from the other half of the same maple log. It is another example of turning wood destined for destruction into a symbol of life – a kind of eternal bloom. Please note, the photograph shows *Wedding Flower* as a work in progress. I still need to refine the carving and finish the piece.

Like the other two entries this piece was turned at one of the Bryant School Skill Enhancement Workshops. Since I don't have my own shop I do all my turning at these Skill Sessions. With the help and guidance provided by C.A. Savoy, Don Riggs, Don Johnson, and Aaron Grebeldinger, these sessions are as good if not better than any master class offered in woodturning centers around the country.

In the end, I have no idea if I will get juried into the Turning Green exhibit but I can say that I gave it my best shot. I am also very lucky to be part of CAW, surrounded by people with unparalleled skills and passion for creating fine turned works. Overall Turning Green was quite a learning experience!