

Planning Ahead

Not long ago my wife challenged me to think about the directions I've taken and choices I've made in my development as a woodturner and wood artist. This was in anticipation of the upcoming June meeting of the AAW in Portland, OR – a meeting I'm very much looking forward to having missed the last AAW meeting in Kansas City as well as the 2nd Mid-Atlantic Symposium this past Fall. Our discussion revolved around what I hoped to do at the meeting, what I hoped to learn, and what I hoped to take home and put to use. While not mutually exclusive, these are not at all the same goals.

In the past, I've often approached big meetings or conventions with a laissez-faire attitude. Unlike attendees who have studied the program and know in advance exactly where they'll go and when, I've tended to have my first look at the program on arrival. Then, after a quick glance, decide what to do based on what captures my attention. This was because I was so immersed in day-to-day work before the meeting, that I didn't have time to plan. Or so I would tell myself. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that I didn't TAKE time to plan my approach to the meeting until I arrived. This wasn't all bad. It sometimes opened my eyes to new and exciting information or gave focus to topics that I wouldn't have chosen in advance. But it was hardly the most efficient approach and, surely, lots was missed due to my lack of anticipation and planning.

These days, I can't claim being so immersed in day to day work that I can't plan ahead. And the scale of an AAW meeting hardly compares to the medical conventions of my past, which often had more than 10,000 in attendance and a program resembling a phone book (remember phone books?). So I'm trying to anticipate what will happen in Portland and to plan how I will take advantage of the smorgasbord of opportunities.

The AAW website now gives a lot of information about the program – short of the actual schedule. There will be 27 professional turners giving demonstrations, four from Europe and Australia. The demonstrations are organized into nine categories – Learning to Turn, Segmenting Techniques, Ornamental Turning, Pen Turning, Vessels and Hollowforms, Embellishing and Finishing, Boxes and Lids, Sculpture and Inspiration, and Turning for Furniture. The largest number of professional demonstrators will be making presentations of embellishing and finishing -- an interesting reflection of current fashion as well as how far the craft has progressed from an original emphasis on basic form and function.

In addition to the skill demonstrations, the POP (Professional Outreach Program) will have a bunch of alluring panel discussions on topics including The Evolution of an Artist, Creativity, Marketing, Collaboration, and more. A panel titled "The Ego and The Soul – Why Makers Make" is particularly intriguing. Then there's the ever-popular Instant Gallery (always worth a few hours of time), the juried member exhibition ("Dia-log" -- with a Pacific NW resources theme), the POP juried exhibition ("Out of the Woods – Traditional Form Revisited"), and the POP artists showcase (which will feature the work of two yet to be named artists)...not to mention the banquet, the auctions and the trade show – all crammed into 3 and a half days.

And there's Portland itself, my home for two years long ago... a beautiful city with spectacular views of Mt. Hood, a foodie paradise, and only two hours from a fantastic stretch of Pacific coastline – Cannon Beach, Haystack Rock and more.

Now that I have time, I can plan to take maximum advantage of all that will be going on. The possibilities are a little overwhelming and every choice comes at the expense of missing something. So probably I'll start with a craft beer at a trendy pub and see what captures my attention at the moment. It's a strategy that has worked in the past. It's not all bad.