

MORE

# WOODTURNING

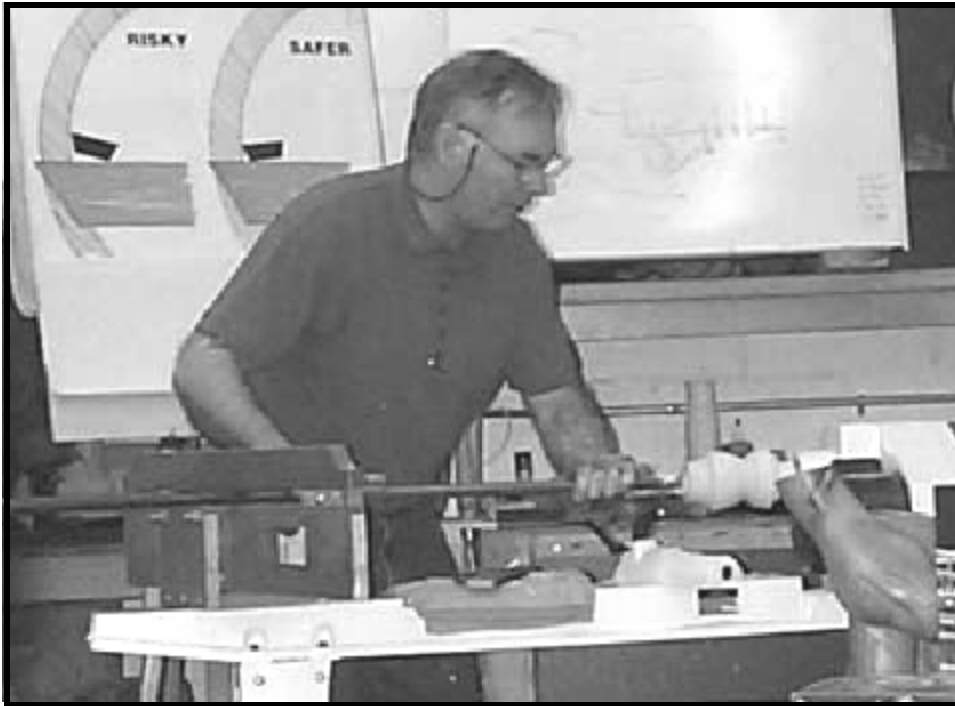
the newspaper for turners

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## An Interview with Lyle Jamieson



Lyle Jamieson demonstrating the use of his boring bar during the Saturday evening demonstration at Puget Sound Woodworking Center.



Here are two of Lyle's hollow female figures that were small enough for him to carry with him to the demonstration.

by Fred Holder

This is the third in our series on profiling some of the well known turners around the world. Fortunately, the Puget Sound Woodworking Center in Everett, Washington has a Masters Program going on this year, thus making readily available these outstanding turners for interview in my own back yard so to speak.

Originally, we had planned to have Lyle for a quiet dinner in our home and an interview in a relaxed environment. Unfortunately, things do not always go

as planned, so we interviewed him at a local restaurant after he had finished his day of demonstrating/teaching a class. We were still able to keep a fairly relaxed environment in a back room of the restaurant.

We want to thank Lyle for granting us the time for this interview and Puget Sound Woodworking Center in Everett, Washington for making Lyle available by bringing him there as a part of their Master's Program. Like our interview with Dick Sing, we have used a taped

and transcribed interview. I hope you enjoy this brief visit with one of the well known woodturners in the United States.

As with Richard Raffan and Dick Sing, Puget Sound Woodworking Center set up a Saturday evening demonstration that was open to anyone for a small fee, \$25.00 for the evening. The pictures of Lyle demonstrating were taken at that demonstration.

**Fred:** How long have you been turning?

**Lyle:** Oh, wow. The short answer or the long answer? I've been a woodworker all my life. My dad was a woodworker so we had a shop and tools. I did a chess set when I was 16 years old. But from there until about 10 years ago, I didn't do much turning. I did a lot of woodworking and furniture building and lots of things but not much turning. And then it was just about 10 or 11 years ago that I got connected with my local club and realized what was going on in the turning world and really got sucked into this, and it's been a passion ever since.

**Fred:** Are you a full-time turner?

**Lyle:** I just made the leap in October...gave up my day job so this is full-time now. Yes, October 2000.

**Fred:** To me, you're best known for your hollow female forms and the boring bar. Are there any other forms that you consider your specialty?

**Lyle:** I started out doing all kinds of things...different shapes and hollow forms. They're all non-functional but the last four years have been just totally immersed in multi-axis torsos. I just have so many ideas I just don't know where to begin. Every time I go into the shop there's not enough time to even get started on the ideas that I want to produce and there's no end in sight. That's just what I've been having fun with.

**Fred:** Most turners have a bread and butter product that they turn a lot of. Do you have such a product?

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**Lyle:** Well I'm building my full-time turning career on a three-legged stool really. I've got the teaching. I'm teaching all over the country often. For instance, this is the second workshop in a series. In the next three months I've got nine workshops that I'll be doing all over the country and a couple in my own shop. So that's part of it. The second leg is the tool system. I'm selling boring bars and that system and that's just spreading all over the country as the way to do the boring. It's so much easier than the hand-held system so it's just really spreading all over and so I make a little money on that. I produce those myself and have had them produced for me locally in my town and wholesale them out to the catalogs...Cutting Edge and Craft Supplies. So I make a little bit on those...not a big profit but it's part of the picture.

[Continued on Page 2.]

## Lyle Jamieson Interview Continued

And then the third thing would be the sales of my pieces. That's new. I've sold a few of mine but most of them in the last three or four years I've been just trying to get them out and be seen...getting into exhibitions and shows and invitational exhibitions and things...just trying to get them out there and most of the time it's been not for sale on them all along the way. Now I've got some time to produce more and I'm trying to get some sales. I've got some galleries around the country that I'm working with to get some sales going. Some of the old ones I've sold to people who have seen them out in the exhibitions and they call me and say I gotta have it and I say whoops, not for sale...well, when it is...so I've given some of those away. But now I need to sell some pieces in galleries and make some money on that too, so there will be three elements in my livelihood.

**Fred:** What did you do before you decided to go full-time? Were you a teacher?

**Lyle:** I've never been a teacher. I've been a number of things. For the last 14 years I helped manage the distribution of a newspaper...circulation. What I did throughout this last ten years is learn from people. I worked with some of the masters and many others. I've tried to use their ideas and the main thing that I needed to know when I was learning is the "whys" and I think that's what I do is I try to translate why things are happening and the dynamics so that the students can take it in any direction they want...not



**Lyle Jamieson with his boring bar and laser wall thickness measuring device shows how easy it is to hollow a form and get the desired wall thickness.**

so much into turning something specific like a Christmas ornament or a square-edge bowl. I'd rather work on the "whys" and the "hows" and not the "whats." And I think that translates into a fun, entertaining learning experience.

**Fred:** I don't remember seeing a book or video with your name on it. Is this an oversight on my part? Have you made any videos or written any books?

**Lyle:** One that I produced myself...no. I've done a number of articles but not a whole book and I don't see that in the future but I would imagine some videos will probably happen. I don't know that I'll produce them myself but somebody will want to go in and do it and I'll be willing. I think what I'm doing is valuable and so the best way that we can get it around...I'd love to try it but I haven't so far.

It's tough. My processes drag it out into a three-month period so I've tried to take some pictures of it even to have them in the galleries and I keep skipping stuff and forgetting and pictures don't come out and I just can't get a flow of it. I've tried it twice and it just hasn't worked.

**Fred:** How about a video camera?

**Lyle:** I'll do it if you'll edit three months' worth. It's possible. I just haven't thought about it. My process is pretty technically challenging but any one element of it is pretty routine and boring. Everybody can bore a hole in a block of wood. While you're doing that you can't see what's going on. It's no big deal. Anybody can face off a place to seat a face-plate on. It's no big deal but it takes me two or three hours with that hunk of wood. So I don't know...how do you make that interesting? The only time that anybody has done a video snap of my thing was the AAW Symposium in San Antonio. I was one of the six or eight people in their video that year and they edited it down to about a ten-minute thing of the setup of that tool system and they captured it real well.

**Fred:** Do you have a favorite lathe?

**Lyle:** Oh, you don't want to publish that.

**Fred:** What do you have in your shop?

**Lyle:** I use a Nichols. John Nichols made it for me. The reason I have it is when I'm turning these big hunks of wood on the bias they're just flopping around there. I need the spring. At the time, Oneway or the other ones weren't big enough. Nichols is long on strength and stability. I worked extra stuff and manipulated it a little bit. It's not stock, but I don't want to get into grading lathes. I turn on them all. I don't think there's any that I haven't worked on, every club has a different lathe or each shop I teach in has a different lathe. Oneway is a Cadillac. There's the machining and engineering of the Oneways and it is quite a bit better than the others. Coming up a close second, I like the Stubby. Stubby does a nice job, but there's nothing wrong with the Generals and the Woodfast and the middle range lathes that have some beef to them. Where it's tough is getting into the entry level lathes...down under \$1,000 range, for that price, they can't build in enough stability and dependability. The bearings and the spindle systems just can't carry the weight that I want to play with and when I hog something off, I'm putting the metal to it and those things just don't carry the load.

**Fred:** I've seen you use a bowl gouge with the Ellsworth grind. Is that your favorite tool or do you have a different tool that you reach for the most?

**Lyle:** It's almost my only tool. I use it about 95% of the time. All the other tools on my shelf are just little snippets of ten seconds here that I might need for a certain specific thing...finishing off the bottom or setting a flat spot for my face-plate to mount or something like that. You know, I've got a lot of little specialty tools for but when I'm turning a bowl inside or out...when I'm turning the outside of the hollow vessel, that's the tool. It is much more user friendly, it works easier, more efficiently than the other grinds.

**Fred:** Who is the manufacturer?

**Lyle:** It really doesn't matter. There are differences in the flute. It's important to have the flute configuration like the Henry Taylor super flute, Crafts Supplies has a good one. The ones that don't work as well are Packard, Glaser...they're flute configuration is angled just a little bit differently so the tip doesn't grind as easily or as well but they'll still work. You can still use any of them with that same similar grind but the flute on the Henry Taylor is wider at the opening and it comes down into a right nice shallow "u" in the bottom. Some of the other ones are straighter on the sides, some of the other ones have more of a "u" shape or a "v" and real pointed in the flute. Those don't grind as easily but they can still work and do the same grind. I always use a Henry Taylor super flute.

**Fred:** Have you tried any of the Crown PRO PM or the Hamlet ASP 2060 tools? Do you have an opinion on them?

**Lyle:** No.

**Fred:** How about Chucks? What's your favorite?

**Lyle:** You got a half hour? Chucks don't work. Chucks don't work period. I only have a Chuck because somebody almost gave me one just a few months less than a year ago. I never had one before that. I used this one once when I couldn't get one of my tools in my new box to go on the airplane so I chucked the handle in the Chuck so I could shorten the tool. That's the only time I've used that Chuck. Why? Not because Chucks aren't good. Chucks are wonderful machines and they have a great purpose for remounting and re-centering, taking stuff on and off production work...smaller things...they work great. For any kind of work other than small things what the Chuck's designed for is convenience and re-centering is what the Chuck's designed for but holding wood and working with wood they're not designed to do that not because the Chuck fails but because the wood fails. We're squeezing on wood fibers and you squeeze on a bowl blank you're squeezing on the end fibers up and down and sideways...you squeeze on the soft side fibers and it sets up a place to vibrate. When I'm putting the fire to the coal there, I can make a 10-inch bowl vibrate in a Chuck in a heartbeat. It just won't hold the wood. Not that there's anything wrong with the Chuck but most people over use the abilities of a Chuck. Everybody wants to go bigger, longer, stronger and you do that with a Chuck and then you start to get vibration and you can't do that so it's great for little things. There's nothing better than a face-plate screwed right on the wood. You can't get a better holding device. It transfers the power into the wood...the Chuck won't do that, can't do that. The best Chucking device is a face-plate, second best and real close is a glue block because we're talking about a brittle, glue line to hold the glue on because you can't use a glue block on end grain so you've got to put screws directly in it. I use a big face-plate that's got 40 or 50



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holes in it. That's how many screws I use for 150-200 pounds of wood to hold it up and make sure that it's stable. I use a steady rest on the other end. So when I'm putting four-inch screws in my face plate...so I strip five of them, no problem. But if you've got eight screws in it, and you strip three of them what do you have left?

**Fred:** If you had to advise a person considering going full-time into woodturning, what would you consider the most important attribute they should have?

**Lyle:** You have to be a lot more than just a turner to think about doing it full time. Michael and I were talking last night, you have to spend a lot of time on marketing. You've got to be able to network with people and market. One of the things that's surprised me since I've gone full time is how much time I've had to spend out of the shop. The e-mails and the phone calls and connecting with people...you have to put so much of that time in or I don't think you could make it. So you have to wear a lot of hats and artists aren't known for having a lot of patience and many of them are kind of out there in their organizational skills, and some of them are hermits and just want to work by themselves and stuff and I think that would be a very difficult way to try to make it full time. You have to wear a lot of hats.

**Fred:** Any recommendations on selling?

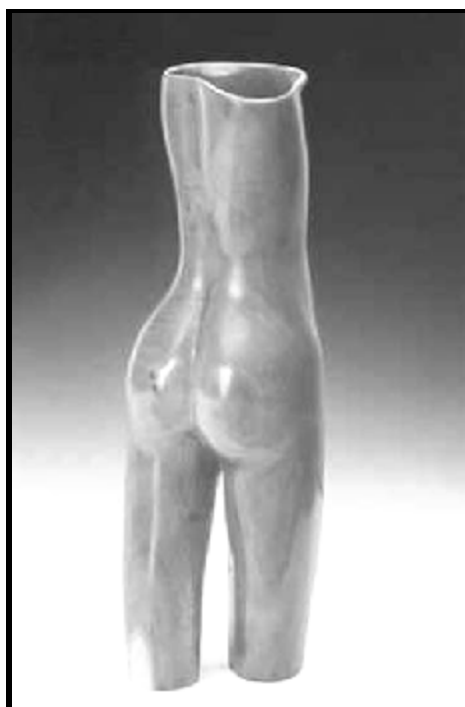
**Lyle:** I've sold a lot of things prior to my torso days and still have a little gallery in the local town. Michigan isn't an art state very much but I've sold quite a bit in bowls and hollow forms and things that I used to do and still have a little gallery that I keep going. I think working with the galleries is a win-win situation. I don't have a problem with splitting the profit with them if they're working for you. If they're excited about your work and promoting it for you that's worth a lot. I'd just as soon have them take on that responsibility. I don't know what else I can say about sales. There's a lot of different ways of reaching the sales. A lot of people do it with craft show things or wholesale markets, collectors directly and that's another hat that you have to wear is being able to network in a lot of those different areas to make some sales.

**Fred:** I know that you turn mostly green wood. Is this because of the dust or simply a preference for the easier cutting of green wood?

**Lyle:** I'm into easy. I don't like to work hard and dry wood is harder. It's harder on the tools; it's harder on your body. It does have dust so I choose not to do things that I need to do in dry wood. In my series of torsos it's just impossible to grind a 300-hundred pound block of wood or grind any shape of a block of wood that size so it's going to be wet. It doesn't matter if it's 20 years old, it'll be wet probably but I'm using as green a wood as I can find because it's easier.

**Fred:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**Lyle:** Thank you for the opportunity I guess.



Little Princess.



Princess.

**Editor's Note:** Lyle has a web site with most of his hollow female forms on show. You can also contact him from his web site, especially if you wish to purchase one of his pieces or to arrange for him to demonstrate or teach a class in your area. Here is his web site UR: <http://www.lylejamieson.com>



Lyle Helping a Student during one of his classes.



Reaching.

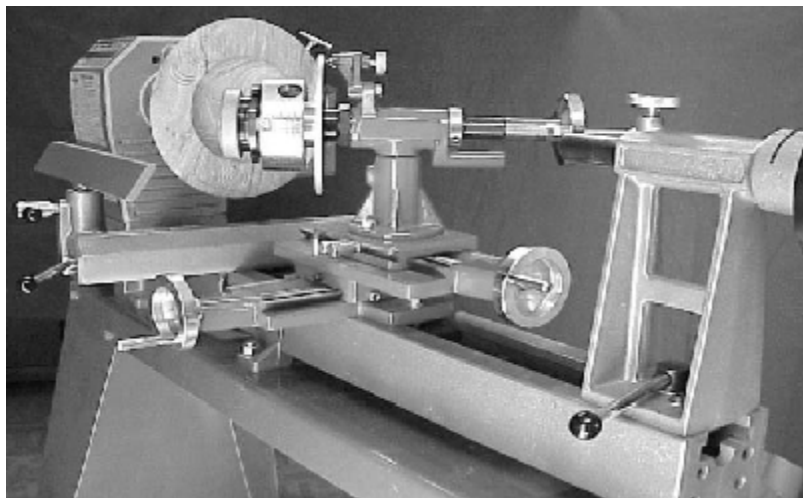


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