



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN VAN DOMELEN

MAIN:
'Genus Fungia,'
inspired by a Fungia
species skeleton.
Wormy ash
(*Fraxinus excelsior*),
turned, carved and
bleached. Designed
to hang on a wall,
French cleat mount.
380mm (15in)
diameter

20 minutes with John Van Domelen



Tegan Foley spends 20 minutes finding out more about the stunning work of third generation woodturner John Van Domelen

Can you explain why you chose the medium of wood to work with?

I came by it honestly. My grandfather, after a career at the US government Patent Office, took a job with a mill near Washington DC. He later went into business for himself and did well making mostly production work, stair components and such – he did some artistic faceplate work as well. I got reinterested in turning in my

early forties and now can't imagine not spending time each week in the studio.

You use some rare tropical woods to make your pieces, what benefits do these types of timber offer?

I have used small amounts of these materials. I have found that as I have come to consider wood to be more of a canvas to be manipulated that I am

drawn to plainer grained local woods. My most successful body of work to date is made entirely from local wood that was downed during hurricane Ike. Additionally, I try to source the small amount of exotics that I do use from cabinet makers and buy cut-offs that otherwise would be discarded or sent to the landfill. That and much of the larger pieces came from my grandfather's sizable stash of wood that I inherited.

What are your current likes and dislikes within the sphere of turning?

I like wood to look like wood and personally do not care for overly shiny plastic looking finishes. In the world of woodturning as a whole, I like the encompassing big tent approach taken by the AAW (American Association of Woodturners). I also like attending their annual symposia. The past 25th Anniversary event was just outstanding.

Can you explain the inspiration behind your 'Torroid' series?

Mostly a lifelong fascination with geometry and mathematics. Three dimensional objects with fewer surfaces than is maybe first apparent intrigue me. This series was an exploration of one of those shapes – the torus.

If you could only offer one bit of advice to someone starting out turning, what would it be and why?

Become an active member of your local turning group. Additionally, seek out and apply for Artist in Residency programs. The time I spent as an AIR at the Houston Center for Contemporary Craft and the influence of my local turning club were both invaluable to me.

What music and which book are you currently into?

The last things played on my mp3 player included *The Very Best of the*

Doobie Brothers and Lady Gaga's latest. I am currently re-reading the *Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin.

Tell us about the piece you are currently working on.

I am currently working on a series of differing pieces in my 'Coral' series inspired by the Genus Fungia, or mushroom corals.

Which turners do you most admire and why?

I most admire, first my grandfather, for instilling in me the desire to turn when I was a child. Second, and perhaps a much greater influence on my work and the direction it has taken, would be Jerry Bennett, an outstanding turner and someone whom I consider a mentor.

What do you think the best single development in turning has been?

For me personally, it would have to be the torque arresting systems that allow those with carpal tunnel, such as myself, to turn hollow forms. I currently do all my hollowing with John Jordan's hollowing tools used with collets in a jointed articulating arm system that clamps to the tailstock. I couldn't hollow without such a system.

What do you see yourself doing in five years' time?

Working on a new series; doing more teaching; and finding more studio time!

What do you see as the biggest thing that has hindered the development of woodturning in general?

Wow – deep question! As an art form, I would say the lack of scholarly critical analysis and critiques from outside

the movement are what is holding us back as a 'fine art' movement. That and our 'marriage' to the lathe. Studio glass, ceramics, the textile arts – none of these movements are married to a particular tool. The recent change of the Woodturning Center to The Center for Art in Wood is a step in the right direction and a more accurate description as to what most makers are doing. The lathe is just one of many tools used in the process of making wood art.

What would you say is your biggest regret?

Not having taken up woodturning earlier in my life. ●

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RIGHT: 'The Path Home,' tassel box, homebrew wipe on poly finish with ebonised lid. 100mm (4in) wide x 180mm (7in) tall (including tassel)



BELOW: Coral series work, from left to right: Brain Coral, Coral Twist, and an Urchin Bowl. Turned and carved, all in black tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*)

