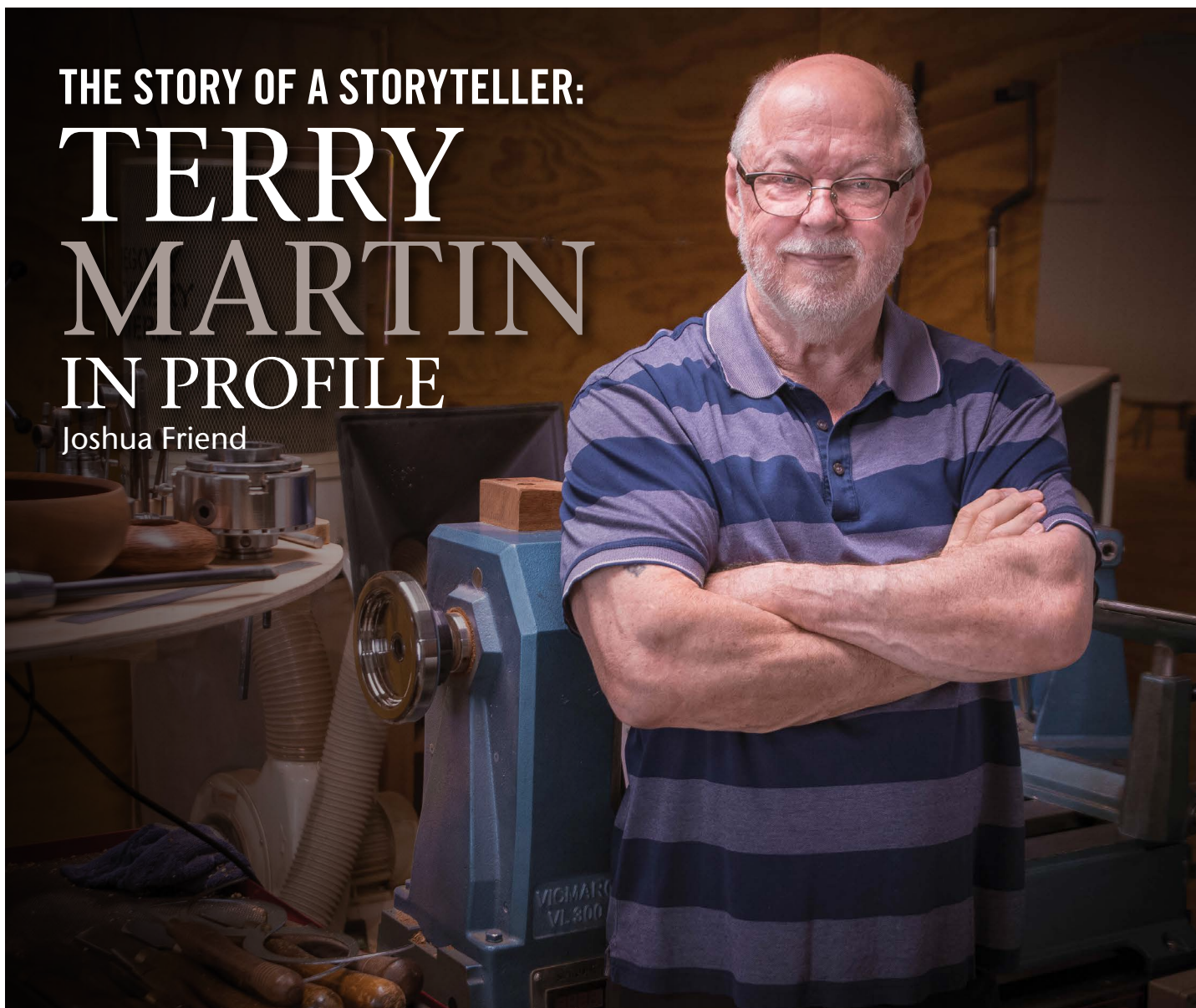


THE STORY OF A STORYTELLER:

TERRY MARTIN IN PROFILE

Joshua Friend



Photos by Terry Martin, unless otherwise noted.

During the earliest years of my woodturning obsession, I joined the AAW and began reading *American Woodturner*. I was inspired by many of the authors, but none of them stood out quite like Terry Martin. Here was a woodturner from Australia who traveled the world to write about our craft. He journeyed to remote areas of China and Japan and reported on aspects of woodturning's ancient history. He visited accomplished woodturners everywhere and

recorded their stories in words and photos. I was at once impressed, jealous, and appreciative and—living vicariously—eagerly awaited his next installment.

It wasn't until years later that I would begin to learn the full extent of Terry's activity in woodturning. If, like me as a new turner, you know of Terry only through his contributions to *AW* or through the books he has authored or edited, you might not know the broader extent of his influence. Described by

Mark Lindquist as a polymath, Terry has played many overlapping roles: an astute historian of and prolific journalist for our craft, a widely traveled demonstrator/panelist, and an accomplished maker/artist in his own right. Being multilingual, he has enthusiastically played the role of event organizer and curator around the globe and is eager to share with anyone stories about the origins of lathe work and its evolution.

Former AAW Board member Jean LeGwin attests, "Terry has delved into

the history of the craft, the unique character of woodturning in various countries, and personally knows a huge number of those who have been instrumental in creating the craft we know today.”

The sum of Terry’s woodturning career shows that despite being able to produce work on par with any maker he has written about, he didn’t pursue the limelight for himself. Having a good reputation was always more important than achieving fame, so he very often positioned himself in the role of participant-observer, curator, and journalist, rather than top dog at the lathe. Over the years, he attended probably hundreds of turning events, where he always managed to be at once *on* the scene—making, learning, and collaborating with the best of them—and also *behind* it, all the while watching, photographing, and keeping notes with the keen sense that history was just then being made. Terry’s is a unique kind of success, stemming from a thirsty fascination with both the craft itself *and* its individual practitioners.

A love of trees

The story of Terry’s work as a woodturner begins with his love of trees. His 1996 book, *Wood Dreaming* (Harper Collins), offers not only an account of woodturning in Australia, but reflects



Tree, 2014, Red mallee burl, 18" × 24" × 6" (46cm × 61cm × 15cm)

an appreciation by turners, craftspeople, and aborigines alike of the splendid raw material of trees. Perhaps because Australia is resplendent with unique and interesting timbers, often with stunning grain, Terry has enjoyed a life-long love affair with them. He writes, “The trees of Australia have evolved in perfect response to the unique conditions of their land. Some have survived for inconceivably long periods—living memorials of ancient continents and primeval eras.”

In his 2014 book, *The Creative Woodturner* (Linden Publishing), Terry writes, “My love of trees has always influenced what I have made. Every time I cut a piece of wood, I think about the tree.” And, indeed, he has paid homage to trees in numerous turned and carved works. *Tree*, made in 2012 from red mallee burl, is a direct representation that uses the burl’s stippled outer spikes to depict foliage.

Another work, *Aspects of Treeness*, made by Terry and his daughter Yumi ▶

Terry’s is a unique kind of success, stemming from a thirsty fascination with both the craft itself and its individual practitioners.



Aspects of Treeness, 2012, Jacaranda, 10" × 17½" × 4" (25cm × 44cm × 10cm)

in 2012, reveals a touching empathy for trees. On a turned and carved section of jacaranda, Terry and Yumi lovingly annotated characteristics of the wood, and the effect is at once educational and testimonial. For example, next to some curved grain are the words, "I used to live and breathe and sway in the breeze." Following an edge where weathered bark meets solid wood: "my bark protected me so it took a lot of damage." Near some chatoyance: "this shiny

ripple shows where I felt stressed." And next to some insect damage: "after I died grubs came to live in my wood." The act of personifying this section of tree goes well beyond dendrological fact: the collaboration itself—between Yumi at age 24, Terry at age 65, and the tree, having passed—is a soulful communication about life on earth.

Yet another piece from 2012 is *Heart of the Tree*, which Terry pierced and burned to represent the cell

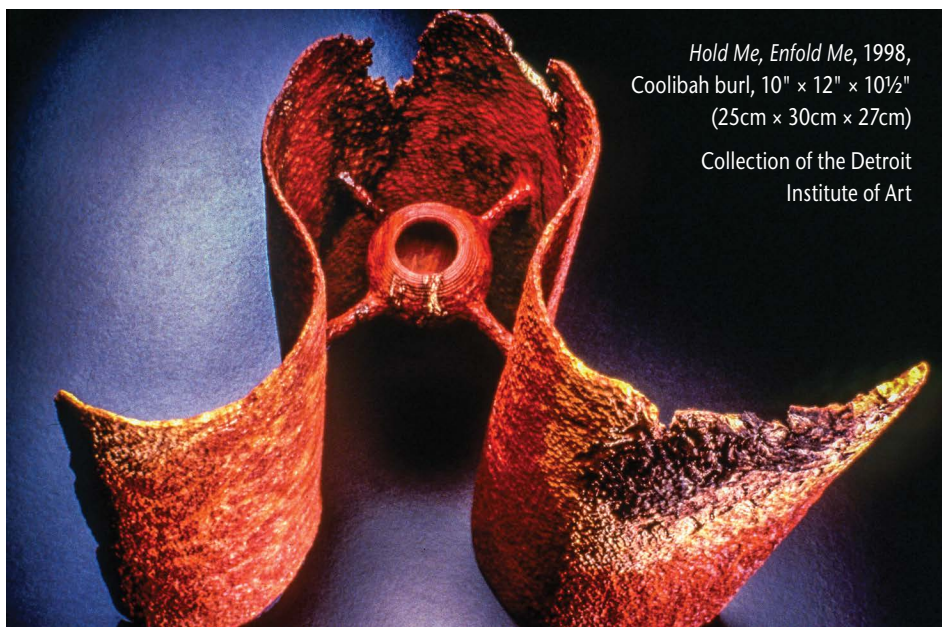
structure of jacaranda, a species native to South America. In fact, his carving on the piece was directly based on an image of actual jacaranda cells. *Heart of the Tree* delivers on the promise of its title, and the viewer has the sensation of peering through the bark, right to the tree's internal veins. The image of capillary action comes to mind, and in this viewer's moment, Terry accomplishes an important act of stewardship for trees everywhere.

Hold Me, Enfold Me features a turned vessel enveloped in a dynamic wave of wood, complete with bark inclusions. With this piece, Terry reminds viewers that everything we make in wood was at one time "enfolded" in a tree and that our process as makers is to reveal what lies within. He explains, "I often like to keep a part of the outside of the tree in my work to remind people that it was part of a tree."

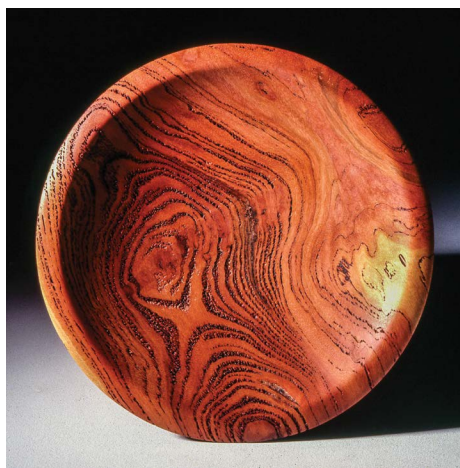
In a less symbolic representation, Terry is also happy simply showcasing the amazing woodgrain in simple forms such as bowls and platters. The bloodwood bowl shown *at left* is an example of an intriguing Australian timber, requiring not sculpture but only the simplest of shapes. Bloodwood is one of the more than 1,500 varieties of eucalypts in Australia. Terry explains, "It is called bloodwood because it bleeds sticky red sap when you cut it. Many eucalypts bleed sap, which is why the common name for them here is gum trees."

Exploring creative ideas

Terry was an adept and prolific maker in his own right during the early days of artistic woodturning. His works have been acquired by private collectors and major museums alike. According to David Ellsworth, Terry is "one of the most highly skilled woodturners



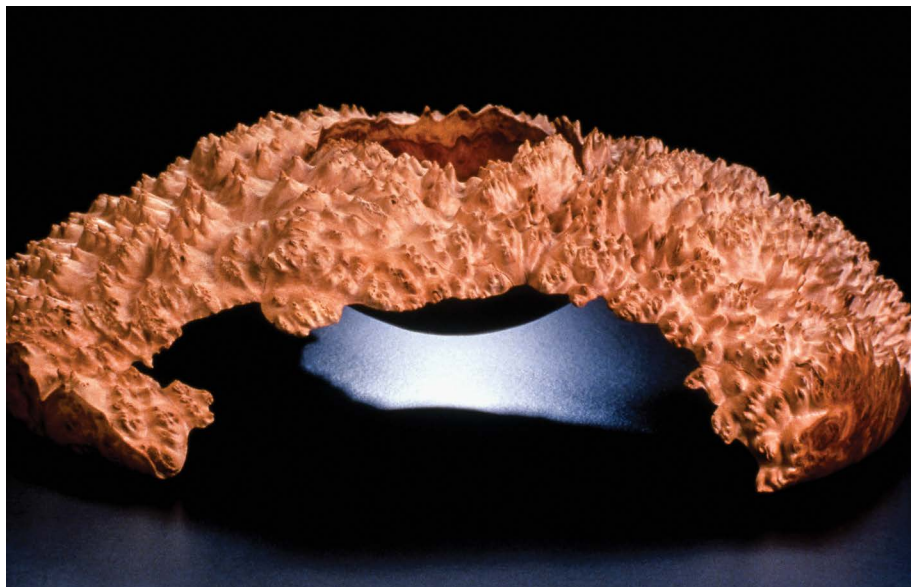
Hold Me, Enfold Me, 1998,
Coolibah burl, 10" x 12" x 10½"
(25cm x 30cm x 27cm)
Collection of the Detroit
Institute of Art



(Above left) *Bloodwood Bowl*, 1993, Bloodwood,
5" x 15" (13cm x 38cm)

(Right) *Heart of the Tree*, Jacaranda, 2012,
10¼" x 7½" (26cm x 19cm)





Mallee Dream, 1994, Mallee root, 7" × 14" (18cm × 36cm)



Jarrah Vessel, 2001, Jarrah burl, 14" × 6½" (36cm × 17cm)

around. In effect, there is no tool or process that he isn't aware of or tried, leaving no restrictions when developing ideas or challenging the notion of something new."

Wood art collector Randy Pi reports, "I first knew Terry as an accomplished writer, having purchased *New Masters of Woodturning* [a book Terry co-wrote with Kevin Wallace, 2008, Fox Chapel Publishing]. Then in the instant gallery of AAW Phoenix in 2014, I came across a stunning sculptural piece oddly marrying a cyclopean element with a waterfall flowing element. I looked at the tag and gasped at the price for I was a newbie collector then. The tag read, 'Terry Martin and John Morris—*Eye of the Beholder*.' In my mind, I noted this man to be not just a fine documentarian of the field, but also a creative type in his own right."

"During the 1990s, I was having a new idea almost every day. It was exhilarating, and my energy was incredible," says Terry. "Some days I worked over twelve hours and only stopped to be with my daughter. I used to go back to the workshop after I put her to

bed." This was the abundant energy of someone interested in many different things and titillated by what could be, and Terry focused that energy on exploration in the workshop.

One theme Terry explored was the design possibilities of the foot of a vessel. He was intrigued by the problem of visual "lift," which seemed at odds with preconceptions of stability. *Mallee Dream*, 1994, plays with a surprising visual contrast, simultaneously conveying a sense of weight and levity. Here, the rim reaches down organically and becomes the support mechanism, revealing a levitating bowl in the middle. The form challenges our assumptions about traditional feet.

Jarrah Vessel, 1999, challenges our sense of lift in a different way. Its legs follow the line of the vessel down to the point where they form a tiny footprint, with a glimpse of light and air between them.

Other creative ideas stemmed from Terry's experiences at The Center for Art in Wood's (then The Wood Turning Center's) International Turning Exchange (ITE). Terry

explains, "When I did my first ITE residency [in 1996, the other being 2005], I was lucky to be sharing it with three giants in the field, Jean-François Escoulen, Michael Brolly, and Hugh McKay. Watching them for two months was the biggest boost I ever had in my creative thinking." One day during the ITE, Terry was making a small vessel that was surrounded by a square, wavy rim. Unsure of what the piece's design should be, Terry consulted with Michael Brolly, who picked it up and turned it on edge so that it stood, not facing upwards, but horizontally outward. Michael asked, *Why not stand it like this?* "It was one of the most powerful moments in my early years, and *Why not?* became a standard tool in my thought kit," Terry reflects.

When Terry returned home to Australia, he began playing with the idea of standing bowls on their sides. And the obvious realization soon struck: when a bowl is stood on its side, it loses its purpose as a bowl. Preconceived notions fell away, and suddenly Terry was free to turn right through a form, which he did to create the first in what would become his ►

Cyclops series, *A Vessel for Light and Air*. He explains, "What was most important was the thought that a hole is just a hole, but how you frame and support it is everything. From then, I was engaged in such fun exploring ways to frame the hole. The best thing is that the holding method is hidden in plain sight—expansion into each end of the hole."



A Vessel for Light and Air, 1996, Macassar ebony, 4½" × 2½" × 2" (11cm × 6cm × 5cm)

Examples of *Cyclops* forms followed, including *Sweet Androgyne*, *Bigclops*, *Bladerunner Cyclops*, and *Emerging Cyclops*. *Hokusaiclops* takes its name from its inspiration, a woodblock print by Japanese master Hokusai called *Views of Mount Fuji*. Positioning a turned form on edge was the perfect way to emulate the emotion of the



Sweet Androgyne, Ebony, 1997, 9" × 3" × 3" (23cm × 8cm × 8cm)



Emerging Cyclops, 1998, Jarrah burl, 28" × 22" × 13" (71cm × 56cm × 33cm)

print, in which an immense wave is threateningly poised over a fishing boat, ironically framing a calm view of Mount Fuji. Similarly, the hole through *Hokusaiclops* offers the viewer a glimpse of whatever happens to calmly reside nearby, unaffected by the drama of the foreground. Significant for Terry was that by removing three sections of the "rim," he could transform a concentrically turned object into something that conveys a sense of movement, while retaining a stable base. The remaining section of rim, a natural edge of stippled burl, evokes the dynamic top edge of a wave about to crash. And remarkably, this refinement came from what started as a rough lump of wood.

As we explore a creative idea repeatedly, we naturally create works that could amount to a series. As Terry engaged in such exploration, he remained cautious about the opposite side of that coin—repetition and cliché. He noted that even the very notion of an artist's series became clichéd during the 1990s. As evidence, he cites a funny line artist Mike Lee said during a presentation. As Mike showed a slide of his family, he quipped, "This is the latest in my *Child* series." So Terry was careful to keep his ideas evolving, and if others appeared to be doing similar work (whether copied from him or not), he would move on to something else.

In the early 1990s, Terry made several pieces in what might be called his *Splash* series, inspired by a freeze-frame image of a splash in action. He explains, "When I was a boy, I read popular science books all the time. I remember an image of an object being dropped into a container of milk, and the splash of milk was captured in the air. When I looked 'into' dome-shaped burls to see what I could bring out of them, this image came to mind." Terry's *Splash* pieces incorporate several elements that he values: lift, light and air, reference to the tree (through natural edges and sapwood), originality, and a good technical challenge. This early

Inspiration: Views of Mount Fuji



Left: *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, after Hokusai / Public Domain, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5576388

Right: *Hokusaiclops*, 1999, Coolibah burl, 20" x 15" x 8½" (51cm x 38cm x 22cm)

Collection of the Fuller Craft Museum



Terry poses next to a Mark Lindquist piece and *Hokusaiclops* during an exhibition of work by him and Zina Burloiu at the Fuller Craft Museum, Brockton, Massachusetts, 2017.

Photo: Zina Burloiu

series would influence other creative turners of the time.

Woodworking journalist

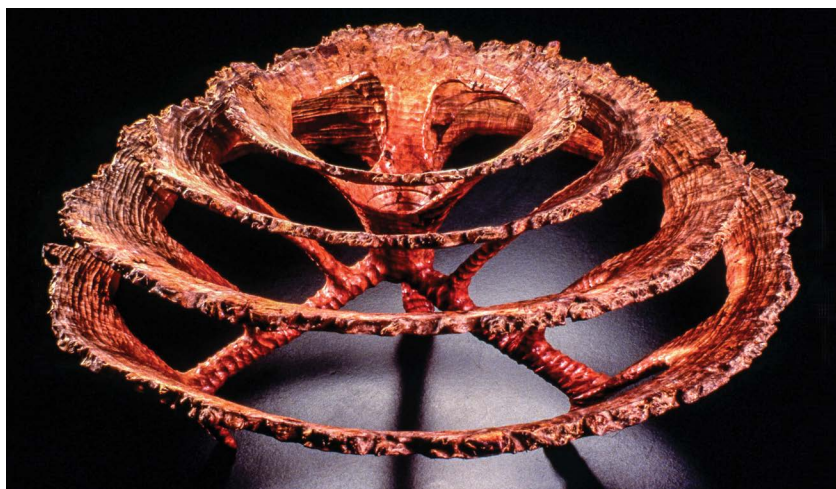
The inquisitive mind of a polymath doesn't rest for long. Not surprisingly, Terry has taken many and varied career paths in his lifetime, before coming to work with wood and document its field as a woodworking journalist. Linda Nathan, Editor of the *Australian Wood Review*, explains: "When I first read Terry Martin's bio, some twenty-nine years ago, I was intrigued. I mean—who could once have been a stage manager at Britain's

Royal Ballet, taken part in mining expeditions, been a member of the police force, and was now wanting to write for *Australian Wood Review* magazine?"

Terry has written more than seventy articles for *Australian Wood Review* since 1993. His subjects include tool reviews, technique and project articles, historical and regional pieces, as well as profiles of influential turners. Overlapping many of those years, he has also amassed a similarly impressive catalog of articles published in *American Woodturner*, having met Rick Mastelli (editor of *AW* from 1993 to

1998) during his ITE residency in 1996.

At the 1996 allTURNatives conference, put on by The Wood Turning Center at Ursinus College in Philadelphia, Terry offered a slide presentation on woodturning in Japan. Mastelli would write in review of that conference, "Terry Martin, the ITE resident turner from Australia who also functioned as the group's scribe and photojournalist, offered an eye-opening view of woodturning in Japan, contrasted with that in Australia. ... Martin's camera and stories have captured some wonderful characters" (*AW* ▶



Splash, 1995, Jarrah burl, 11" x 16" (28cm x 41cm)

vol 11, no 4, page 33). Soon Terry began writing articles for Mastelli to publish in *American Woodturner* and continued later for Betty Scarpino when she became editor.

During this time, Terry also served as editor of The Wood Turning Center's *Turning Points* newsletter, a post he held with enthusiasm for seven years.

When I first met Terry—in 2014 at the AAW Symposium in Phoenix, Arizona—he told me it was important that we get to know each other. At the time, as the new editor of *American Woodturner*, I didn't fully appreciate the magnitude of this request. I knew about some of Terry's publishing experience and understood that this was an important part of his career, but I hadn't yet learned to what extent publishing was part of his personal mission. Terry once wrote, in correspondence with J. Paul Fennell, "I'm on a mission to get as much of the history as I can recorded while we are still alive and kicking." And J. Paul notes of Terry's inclination to write, "I think his writing says a lot about him—it's something he *has* to do."

It is notable that when Terry pitches an idea for publication, he submits a "story" and not simply an article or manuscript. It is a fine distinction, but one that reveals the care and focus he brings to



Jean-François Escoulen with his granddaughter, 2013.

his writing. This is true even for how-to pieces, where he'd rather tell you the *story* of how he made something—complete with thought processes, spontaneous decisions, and the resulting steps—than recount mere instructions.

Storytelling is most prominent in the collection of profile articles he has written for *AW*. As a woodworking journalist, he is, in his own words, "fascinated by what makes people do amazing things." And it is with this fascination, curiosity, and appreciation that he has told the stories of Neil Scobie, Glenn Lucas, Hans Weissflog, Curt Theobald, Dewey Garrett, Gary Stevens, Giles Gilson, David Ellsworth, Richard Raffan, John Kelsey, Mark Lindquist, J. Paul Fennell, Albert LeCoff, Jean LeGwin, Jean-François Escoulen, and others. Terry also has brought the ancient woodturning traditions of China and Japan to modern-day American readers, and has documented the ongoing evolution of our craft in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as in Europe and the U.S. Terry notes, "There are strong links between us all, and we are all heirs of the same tradition of European turning."

His works published in *AW* amount to an important historical record, helping readers understand who brought woodturning to new levels and how the current scene came to be. But at the same time, if you read his accounts of key woodturners, it is not difficult to see that Terry is, as he says, "more interested in the people than in what they make." When writing *Wood Dreaming*, he intentionally avoided covering how to turn wood and even omitted photos of people at their lathes. "What I wanted to write about was *why* people turned."

When he visits a profile subject to gather information, he is there to tell a human story, not just a woodturning story, and this is evident in his photography as well as his writing. A touching photo of Jean-François Escoulen with his granddaughter serves as an example, revealing that the question,



Bowl, 2016,
Flame sheoak,
3½" x 4" (9cm x 10cm)

Who is this person when he is away from the lathe? helps to answer the question, *What has prompted this person's utter dedication to lathe work?*

How does an author gain the required level of trust from his subjects? Terry often befriends them and becomes immersed in the flow of their lives. David Ellsworth notes, "It was probably an hour into our first conversation at my home in Pennsylvania when I realized I was being interviewed. And I use the word *conversation* because I never felt the usual probe of standardized questions, but rather a simple interaction of ideas between two individuals with a common interest."

In 1998, Terry attended the Emma Lake collaborative event organized by Michael Hosaluk in Canada. There, he met Romanian wood artist Zina Burloiu, who would become a longstanding partner in creativity. Zina recalls of that first meeting, "Terry came to me and asked if I would like to create something together. He said, 'Why don't you use your skills to do something new?' We made *Breaking Barriers* together, and that piece changed my destiny. One year later, I received a magazine where I discovered a beautiful article about me written by Terry. It showed me carving a spoon, and he had captured so many accurate details just by watching." She continues, "If I were asked to describe Terry in one sentence, I would say he never stops thinking, learning, creating, and helping others. I am deeply grateful for his kindness in making me shine in our collaborations, even though he has

always been an equal creative force in our work.”

In 2009, Terry was invited to Blakely, Georgia, by Mark Lindquist to write the story of the removal, processing, and worldwide distribution of wood from a 150-year-old heavily burlled pecan tree (see blakelyburltree.com). The Blakely Burl Tree Project (BBTP) was well funded and filmed by Emmy Award-winner Ken Browne. Terry notes of that experience, “As a woodworker myself, I’m occasionally caught up in the thrill of the flying sawdust and the scent of freshly cut lumber, but the very best thing about my role as writer for the BBTP is the chance to watch people closely, especially when they are too busy to notice I am watching. Of course, in this case watching other people work is only an honorable occupation if I end up with something worthwhile to say about them.”

Still at it

Terry’s life now, at 74, is a more domestic affair. He lives peacefully with his wife Yuriko just outside of Brisbane. I asked Terry what he has been making lately, knowing he recently moved and built a new shop. He said he has been enjoying the pleasures of making simple bowls. After learning what was behind his *Cyclops* pieces and other artistic explorations, I wondered if Terry was now *returning* to simple forms. But he quickly set me straight: “I made my first bowl in the early 80s and I only started to do the unusual stuff because I am inherently adventurous. My first-ever exhibition in 1990 was mainly bowls. I had an exhibition called simply *Bowls* at a Japanese gallery here in Brisbane as recently as 2016. So this is an enduring love and I think I’d rather turn a simple bowl than anything else.”

Terry also told me he recently turned more than 100 small pocket mirrors, many of them using wood from different trees. They were stocked at a local art gallery last fall, in anticipation of Christmas sales. He said that as he looked at the grain of the timbers, he wondered

what the individual trees might have looked like. Terry explains, “When I do production turning, I go into a kind of meditative state and thoughts roil in my mind. I can feel the tree standing behind me, looking over my shoulder.”

Along with his love of trees and appreciation for simplicity comes a complex kind of humility. The *humility* part of it includes an aversion to accolades for accolades’ sake. It is not his goal to be recognized or celebrated, but to explore with a sense of adventure, seek to understand what motivates successful people, and connect contemporary woodturning to its ancestry. This helps to explain his more comfortable role as participant-observer. The *complex* part of it is that he is irked by the hubris in others and can’t help but confront it. Terry takes pleasure in poking holes in popular misconceptions and revels in the opportunity to deflate oversized egos.

Jeffrey Bernstein, a prominent collector of wood art, notes, “Some perceive him as a provocateur who stirs the pot.... However, what many do not know is the thoughtful, thorough, and careful approach he utilizes when any project or challenge is set before him.” And Randy Pi acknowledges, “Terry’s brand of constructive criticism can be harsh. It has tested friendships and organizational leadership. But his assessments carry value.”

Regardless of this duality and varying perceptions about Terry, one thing is certainly true: his contributions to the woodturning field, accrued over decades, are indelible. David Ellsworth wrote what could well be Terry’s epitaph: “Terry Martin: quietly recognized, forever heard.” ■

For more, visit terrymartinwoodartist.com.

Joshua Friend is editor of *American Woodturner*.

UPCOMING EXHIBITION

Terry Martin’s next exhibition will be hosted at the Ipswich Art Gallery, outside of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia, February 5 to April 18, 2022. For more, visit ipswichartgallery.qld.gov.au.



Impossibowl, 2012, Huon pine, 3½" × 8½" (9cm × 22cm)



A production run of “pocket mirrors,” each made from a different tree. Species include Tasmanian blackwood, ebonized jacaranda, flame sheoak, camphor laurel, Huon pine, red cedar, mango, ebonized red gum, crow’s ash, Queensland maple, and black heart sassafras. Average diameter 3½" (9cm)