

## Turning in the Age of Corona, Episode 24

January 29, 2021

Santa Cruz Woodturners

Oldies but “Sorta” Goodies...What do you do with those?

What do our club’s professionals and old hands say?

*Pretty good, not bad, I can't complain...  
But actually, all them bowls are  
just about the same*  
—John Prine...with a minor lyric tweak

*We can't change the past...  
But we can leave it behind*  
—Bonnie Raitt

All of us who have been turning more than 5 or 10 years have some articles which we made before education, inspiration, and practice refined our work and elevated our standards. Some have powerful nostalgic value—something we made from a grandfather’s tree, perhaps an early success pushing a limit, a gift to a dear friend who’s no longer with us, or maybe the talisman of recovery from one of life’s body blows. Others, well, maybe those projects were just a “stop along the way.”

Sandie and I still use some furniture I made almost 50 years ago, some physical structures from 40+ years ago, and a small number of decent bowls from 15-20 years ago. For all of those, it’s not hard to find features I could do better now. Some of those well-used pieces could use refinishing. It’s also tempting to want to fix bowls with clumsy bottoms when the form and figure are otherwise pleasant.

Other times, if the article would be ordinary even if it were upgraded, I’m inclined to leave it as a milepost of the past and spend the energy on something fresh.

*But those are an amateur's prerogatives. I asked: What do our professionals do?*



*Crotch figure from the live oak tree on the hill above our house where three daughters learned the joy of flying on the swing...before the wind took it down in the 1980's.*

## What do our Professionals and Long Time Turners do with an Oldie?

I surveyed some of our members who are pro woodworkers as well as some of our experienced amateur turners. How they have approached older works which have charm but don't quite come up their current standards? I figured their responses would help the rest of us when we hold a bowl from the early days with a squatty bottom, patched faceplate screw holes, or a crack.

In particular:

1. Do you ever re-work an article that's more than 20 years old?
2. Does it make a difference if it's a personal or family possession versus a work you sold?

**Mattie Guthrie**, Professional Woodworker (Mountain Fog Creations), New Turner

*I haven't done very much restoration work honestly. I have re-pinned a few chairs and fixed some wobbly benches and tables, etc. I do enjoy doing refurbishment but don't get much chance to do it. I believe that is mostly due to cost. It usually seems more cost effective just to build new.*

*My journey into turning is just beginning so not much chance to do anything with those types of items yet. I am looking forward to challenging myself in the future though.*



*Wells' add: Mattie's too humble to say so, but if you build something properly, the only thing that will need fixing is the surface finish.*

**John Wells**, Professional Woodturner and Woodworker, constant teacher, and one of SCW's Founders

*Haven't really run into this situation with any furniture I've made or architectural parts. A couple times I delivered and the client wasn't completely satisfied over some minor detail so I just remade them no questions asked.*

*There is one exception, I suppose, and that is the arm of the couch in our living room which one of my dogs gnawed on. I reshaped and refinished that. Oh, and there's the 1800s sideboard with high rise back with applied carvings which I managed to knock off and break diagonally. Glued it back together, filled a bit, and re-stained. Proud to say I couldn't find the break last I tried. Absolutely worth it.*

*Salad bowls: I have refinished several that belonged to friends and family who just plain neglected them. I do believe my earlier ones are a bit clunkier, but not bad.*

*I have, however, repaired and/or refinished many old pieces of furniture that weren't mine or family's or friends'. It's something I've greatly enjoyed: matching finishes, distressing, getting dimensions right so people can't find the repair. Once made 3 dining chairs for a friend to expand her inherited set of 5 to 8 and delivered for Thanksgiving. She reported than they all played "find the new chairs" at dinner. Only her daughter could do it as she noticed that the 3 new ones had more luster as I had just waxed them.*



*Those three chairs*

**Raf Strudley**, your club treasurer, another SCW founder, and turning pro with remarkable form and finish.

*Actually, I have only done one restoration piece which was a family heirloom/bowl for a friend, and that was more of a patch a crack, sand, and finish. So far, none of my bowls that I have either sold or given away have been returned for further work.*

*I can say however, that when I have attempted to complete a bowl that somehow has not met my expectations, I don't dwell on it. I generally just run it through the band saw so that I don't think about further and spend pointless time on it. If I don't do this, I find that the bowl keeps "nagging at me," and then I spend far too much time on it and that generally is just a waste of time!* (WS: See Tom Eovaldi's echoing comment page 9!)



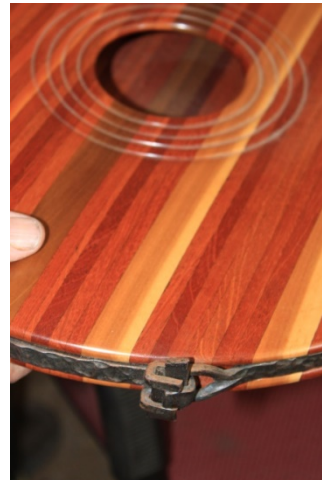
Needless to say, these beauties never meet Brudda Bandsaw...

**Roy Holmberg**, Blacksmith, turner, and multimedia craftsman, former director of Open Studios, contemplating retirement from the “pro” domain

*I have never reworked an older piece because it was not up to current standards. I have repaired a couple of pieces which were damaged by the buyer. I think these early pieces demonstrate our progress and should be left as they were turned.*

*Hope this helps,*

*Roy*



Wells: *Yes, it does!*

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**Sue Broadston** isn't a pro turner, but she's a pro teacher and yet another SCW founder. This walnut bowl pictured was one of her very early ones, and it was a present to treasured friends. The bowl became part of the family and obviously saw extensive use. Over many years, possibly related to storage quirks, maybe with some developmental technique issues...who knows...it developed these radial cracks. Sue's friends wondered this week if it could be glued up, and a conversation ensued.



The question started out “how” to fix it.

Honestly, probably there's no good answer to that...and it works fine as a functional bowl. (Humpty isn't broken.)

The bigger thought became “why,” since this was an emotional as well as a technical milestone...now well in the past.

Instead, Sue decided to make a new and better one now and give the old bowl a little sister with bright eyes, searing intelligence, and a mischievous sense of humor.

**Jim Beckett** has recently retired after 45 years of dermatology practice in Santa Cruz, but he's been turning occasionally for the duration. *Lots more time for that now!* He finished the 19" platter below, maybe 25 years ago, with a red oxide rim highlight. The pigment faded steadily over a decade while it occupied an intermittently sunny spot on Sandie's kitchen wall. Structurally, the platter was true...with a beautiful feel in the hand. Jim approached the faded rim with a new medium: acrylic paint, with some visual and textural embellishment, and this is the happy result. For the last 10 years, it has looked like this...radiant...perfect.



*Maple and acrylic, January 2021*

**Wells Shoemaker** I used to argue a bit with my mother-in-law, Martyl, who was a successful artist in Chicago. Before the turn of the century, I turned a 15" diameter, 6" deep redwood bowl outboard (no tailstock) on a 12" Delta lathe. That was scary, but I did learn that lathes can dance better than I ever could. While the salad capacity was impressive, that bowl was ponderously bottom heavy. It mostly gathered dust on the unused fireplace hearth, underneath one of Martyl's very large paintings.

The ancient picture wire broke and down came the frame, breaking out a sizeable piece of the rim with a loud bang. With the tension relieved, the wood quickly moved so that the pieces would no longer fit in place. I dutifully re-glued it, remounted it with a waste block, intending to pare down the ragged edges and refinish it. However, Martyl was apparently not finished with me on this effort, as the bowl promptly peeled off the waste block and crashed squarely onto my foot, breaking a bone (not with a bang but a whimper).

I attached it the next time with a face plate, did the repairs and refinished it, but it was still thick and heavy, and still relegated to dust collection. As you look at the images below, it's clear that this one is *not* going back to the lathe. *Know when to say when....*



*Well, not so invisible*



*"Four eyes"*

**Jim Baker**, possibly our most loyal attendee, everlasting student and philosopher

*Wells, did you send this question to us because we are "older"... or because we have likely screwed up some good wood and wish to do a makeover? I am guilty of being older and wanting to do makeovers...and not all in woodturning. But as a matter of fact I have a couple of bowls just waiting attention.*

*I have found that doing a makeover is easier now for two reasons. I have learned a great deal about new modern turning techniques from attending SC Woodturners meetings and the Zoom meetings. Also, You-Tube has many great videos. The second reason is more modern equipment. When I returned to turning in the 1980's we didn't have the great chucks, vacuum systems, and the fine cutting and sharpening tools. My new modern lathe enables me to use new techniques by controlling speeds easily and securing the old bowl more safely.*

*It's shop time now to do the rest of a candle holder from scraps of madrone. I just couldn't burn them.*



*Don't fiddle with this one, Jim!*

*It looks great. WS*

**Tom Eovaldi**, an active contributor to two woodturning clubs, a wintertime Santa Cruz enthusiast, lifelong teacher, and a demonstrator for us in the past

*I think we all know why we were invited to comment on refurbishing older works—we are so old that we have many pieces to think about! I do have quite a few oldies, and some of them are good candidates for refurbishing. Here are some of my thoughts.*

*Some pieces have sentimental value, and I rarely try to rework any of them. Included in this category are the first natural edge bowl I turned, in the year of the new millennium, 2000, and the first box I turned, under the guidance of Bihn Pho. That box actually needs no refurbishing; I've never made a better fitting lid since.*

*Otherwise, yes, I am tempted to “refurbish” from time to time, even when refurbish means rework in the sense of re-turning the piece. Pieces that have warped sometimes are good candidates for reworking, but some are not. It is easy to rule out those that have warped so much that there would be serious risk of flying objects if a gouge were applied, even with the most EXTREME CARE. But if your piece [bowl] has a fairly thick wall, it might be possible to make it into a thin [or thinner] wall bowl with careful bowl-gouge cuts. Doing the outside first, from base to rim, seems to work best. I have a couple of black acacia bowls I turned last spring that I plan to “refurbish” this way, this spring or next.*

*If there is just too much warping for safe re-turning, it may be better to just sit back and admire the interesting shape that warping has created; you can always claim that it was intentional. On the other hand, if what drives you nuts is the fact that the piece wobbles, it is very likely that the base can be re-turned so that it has a flat bottom. I have found this process to be quite satisfying; there likely will be opportunities to add some decorative touches to the bottom that you have learned to create since you first turned the piece.*

*Some advice: Jam chucks aren't helpful, so you have to use the tailstock to press the piece into a padded piece of wood held by your chuck [shape that piece to conform to the inside of the bottom of the bowl]. There will be a lot of delicate truing-up needed to find the exact original center! Once you have tightened the tailstock and have the piece stabilized, level off the bottom. At the end, you will be left with a nub, which can be removed by ever so gently using fine cuts with a small spindle gouge, with the lathe running at the slowest speed available. Finally, sand off any remaining nub and apply another coat of the same finish you applied the first time around.*

*Other candidates for “refurbishing” are those that have a finish which has been damaged by, e.g., water. I very likely will refinish those pieces. Here is where a lacquer finish shines [so to speak]. The original lacquer finish can be removed with lacquer thinner, and this likely is a prerequisite; applying more lacquer without removal usually leaves things even more unsatisfactory than the piece looked without any retouching. After removal of the finish and drying, pick up the can of spray lacquer and have a go at making your piece look like new. I have been very pleased with the four or five pieces I have redone this way. Non-lacquered finishes are best left alone, unless*



*you feel like sanding the whole piece to remove the original finish. That is usually too much work.*

*Beyond these exceptions, it might be best to dispose of those really bad pieces. Or take them to the bandsaw and see if your wall thickness is really uniform.*

WS: And *that* comment, Tom, ties the ribbon on this discussion!

Drop the mic!



*Honey Locust, cross cut, crack free! Tom*

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We have time to push our boundaries toward the future. Meanwhile, we can rejoice in the past...years of pleasure of creation, satisfaction of problem solving, and sometimes involuntary humility that the lathe brings to us all. Fix 'em or not, they're part of our trip.

Remember we have our next club meeting Saturday, February 20, by Zoom. Learn to better photograph your works so we can keep sharing like this! Be there!

Wells Shoemaker  
President, Santa Cruz Woodturners 2020-21



*Don't let life get you all twisted up....*

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