



PROFILES

by Terry Scott

Pat and Karen Miller



What better than to be forced to get a into gear because my Internet is down. The cows broke into the brown Telecom box this morning and chewed all those pretty spaghetti look alike cables into a ball of what now resembles a regurgitated tennis ball.

Many people ask me where I find all the turners that I write about that inspire me. Like many readers of Creative Wood I am a member of WoW, the World of Woodturners. For quite some time now I have been stalking Pat and Karen both on this website and on Facebook.

Their pieces are masterly made and show me that the makers are always experimenting and willing to take risks that more often than not lead onto a series of works that are captivating and have that how-did-they-do-that factor. One thing I am particularly envious of is a couple that combine their talents not only adding value to each other's input, but also enjoying the journey of creativity. Karen and Pat live in Yakima, Washington and attended the same college though they never met there.

Pat has a degree in Geology and Karen in Fine Arts however both have worked in fields not related to their degrees, this coming August they plan to retire and become full time artists. With Karen's BFA degree in small sculpture and jewellery, Pat says he has found a soul mate as he turns and she embellishes - the perfect combination.

Karen comes from a family of makers and also has a predisposition for using tools. Pat met Karen when she was remodelling a house by herself, this impressed Pat enough that he offered to give her a hand to deliver some materials in return for dinner. They have been together ever since. Pat, I've heard a lot of pick up lines but that takes the cake.

Pat has always been surrounded by a hobbyist's plethora of metal and woodworking tools and has had an innate ability to use them. Like many he had his first taste of turning at school. His first lathe was a Shop Smith - a space saving piece of metal that includes a table saw, lathe and drill press.

He says his initial attempts at turning were at best futile. "I had no idea of tool presentation, wood mounting, speed - none of the technical aspects of the craft. As most folks know a lathe is a completely opposite



methodology from the cutting, drilling and planing associated with flat work. That spinning work and stationary cutter requires a completely different skillset. I was rather hopelessly lost. I wanted to learn but didn't know where to turn so I came in one afternoon and told Karen - I'm selling the whole lot! Luckily after a couple of frustrated rants on a Shop Smith Internet forum it was suggested I contact the AAW (American Association of Woodturners). They in turn suggested a chapter, the Mid-Columbia Woodturners located ninety miles away in Kennewick, Washington. It happened that this group had an active member in Yakima, John Barany. I gave him a call and he suggested I come over and we'd talk, the

beginning of a beautiful friend and mentorship. For a year or better I spent three hours in John's shop every Thursday after work. Under his guidance my skills quickly improved and we still collaborate today. John is the single biggest influence in my turning career.

Any attempt to select others who have provided influence will always leave important folks out. However the three that seem to always come up are Michael Foster from Vermont, Neil Turner from Perth in Australia who I was fortunate to meet at the Utah Turning Symposium this May and my wife Karen. Their work continues to amaze and inspire me."

Their progression as artists

Pat and Karen have found themselves working on smaller sculptural pieces based on containers. A friend and artist dubbed some of their decorated, handled vase and urn pieces as "Vaseurns", a new word they took a shine to. They continue to work and refine these pieces

and have also been exploring wooden teapots. The process of turning, carving, decorating and assembly seems to keep them creating happily. Pat will bring a partially done turning in for Karen to look at, it may be a "beautiful shape", a wince or "she's a bit dumpy on the bottom". Karen will then show Pat a burn pattern for a piece and for the most part he finds her ideas less in need of refinement than his own. They do on occasion run into a bit of "creative tension", however ultimately they are very supportive of each other's contributions. Even during those times when only one of them actually takes a piece from beginning to end, the piece is still the result of both of their inputs. One plus one often adds to more than two.



Pats comment when I asked about his work area were

“Karen won’t let me call our maker space a shop. She is attempting to gentrify me by using the term studio, all in good fun of course.” The fifteen by eighteen foot (five by six metre) space at the end of the garage is home to a Oneway 1640 lathe, a Turncrafter Pro lathe, Powermatic bandsaw, a tool grinder, several bench mounted sanders, a second smaller bandsaw, a small tablesaw and a drill press. A tiny metal lathe, wire feed welder and oxy-acetylene torch have crept into the car space. “I make many of my own tools and accessories”, says Pat. Karen has a small bench with a MicroPro carver, an NSK Presto, two pyrography units and a bevy of tips. The air compressor is housed in a small closet on the outside. The paint booth is a sixteen cubic inches (forty cubic centimetre) cardboard box with a length of flexible dryer duct and separate fan. It hangs from the ceiling out of the way when not in use and is surprisingly more effective than the description would imply. A dust collection system vents to the outside, a benefit of country living and the cost of removing heated or cooled air when it is running is a price we are willing to pay for the additional space. If you do the math on space and tools, you can see why it’s important to get along.

Not technically part of the shop but a back bedroom is home to our photo studio. “A simple foam board booth, gradient background and lighting have made dramatic improvements in our images” says Pat. “You never get a second chance to make a first impression, good photos are as important as a good finish.”

Pat and Karen create what they like rather than what others perceive they should make. So far they have avoided production work



simply because they are always trying something new, even within a familiar (to them) context. They have the luxury of not having to make house payments or set aside a college fund with any income from turning, so this also gives them flexibility as the pressure isn’t on to provide a living from turning.

Pat and Karen both think there are pluses

and minuses to a “signature style”. Being recognised or recognisable brings a certain satisfaction and maybe even reward, however there is always that invisible trap. For example they have a friend who makes the most beautiful and iconic, lidded bowls. Most turners would recognise the style and many the name of the maker. That being said, he will quietly admit envy





of the freedom that Pat and Karen have, there is a fine line to tread. Pat fancies himself a bit of a wordsmith and will on occasion pen a few words for a piece that might have a bit of a message. Art can convey opinion.

Do you sell your work?

We love to sell our work. We enjoy marketing, promotion and art shows. There is something satisfying and validating about a phone call from a potential customer or opening the mailbox and finding a check from a gallery.

We have a website, www.patandkarenmiller.com and promote via social media. We have work in the Northwest Woodworkers Gallery

in downtown Seattle, the Oak Hollow Gallery in Yakima and the Short Term Gallery in Baker City Oregon. We are always looking for new galleries with whom to form a relationship, the gallery/artist path is a two way street. We are also excited when we get a chance to trade work with fellow artists helping to build our own collection.

Pat says, "For as long as we've been together Karen and I have shared a bit of a twist in how we see things. It's part of what drew us to each other I suspect. We seem to feed off each other's perspectives in a way where one and one adds up to more than two. We have years of pictures in files with names like 'shadows', 'clouds', 'things that look like other things', 'weird stuff' and 'jump'. We seldom say anything that goes over the head of the other but often goes over those around us. Both of us have an innate need to make things that lead us to dabble a bit in wood art since 2010 and the dabbling quickly engulfed us as a passion. We've earned our living, raised our kid, formed some opinions, paid our taxes and added candles to our cakes but haven't really grown old. We are rather easily inspired and try not to look past the obvious. Our work may include the labour of one of us or both but the heart, soul and result of all our work is a true collaborative effort.

Our intention is to enjoy the journey. We hope you will also."



What's Happening to Woodturning Around the World

A segment of Creative Wood that profiles a turner/artist who has come to my attention in my travels and on the internet, and who I think will be of interest to other turners.

My own woodturning journey is one of learning and extending myself, so I never miss the opportunity to watch and learn from others.

Terry Scott