

Artist's work is indicative of his life's goals

by RHONDA REESE
STAFF WRITER

Grant Ward will tell you that his artwork is about far more than the unique objects of beauty and intrigue that he creates. Ward's art displays his values and gives clues to what he holds dear.

"My work is about how I want to live my life and spend my days," Ward, a graduate of the Ohio Institute of Technology, explained.

An electrical engineer by education, Ward spent several years working in management with MCI before he got tired of what he saw as a rat race and realized that the constant scramble up the corporate ladder was not how he wanted to invest his life. Now Ward spends his days

sharing a home with his wife of seven years, surrounded by items that keep him grounded.

"Once I quit the business world I took a 10 month sabbatical to decide what direction I wanted to go in and what I was going to do with the rest of my life," Ward said. "I'd always loved to work with wood as a hobby, so I sent some slides of my work in for a show, and I was invited to participate."

Ward has now been participating in shows and designing work for private clients for the past 17 years.

"This will be a vase for a contractor," Ward said, pointing to a section of a pecan tree weighing several hundred pounds.

"And this," he continued while touching a large root section

of aromatic cedar, "will also be used for another piece I've been contracted to do."

Ward's backyard, a wonderland piece of property backing up to a softly flowing creek on one side and wetlands on the other, is dotted with mounds of tarp-covered tree sections.

"Some of this came from a huge oak which was four or five stories high," Ward said lifting the corner of a gray piece of heavy plastic. "The tree was hollow inside so it had to come down. The guy who did the work let me know, and we made arrangements for me to get the wood that was usable."

Usable parts often include a burl in a tree. Ward believes a burl can hold some of the most beautiful designs in a section of wood. This talented artist also works with a variety of metals, such as copper, as well as padauk wood, maple, manzanita, cedar and camphor, to name just a few. Ward even welds his own stands in which to display his unique sculpture.

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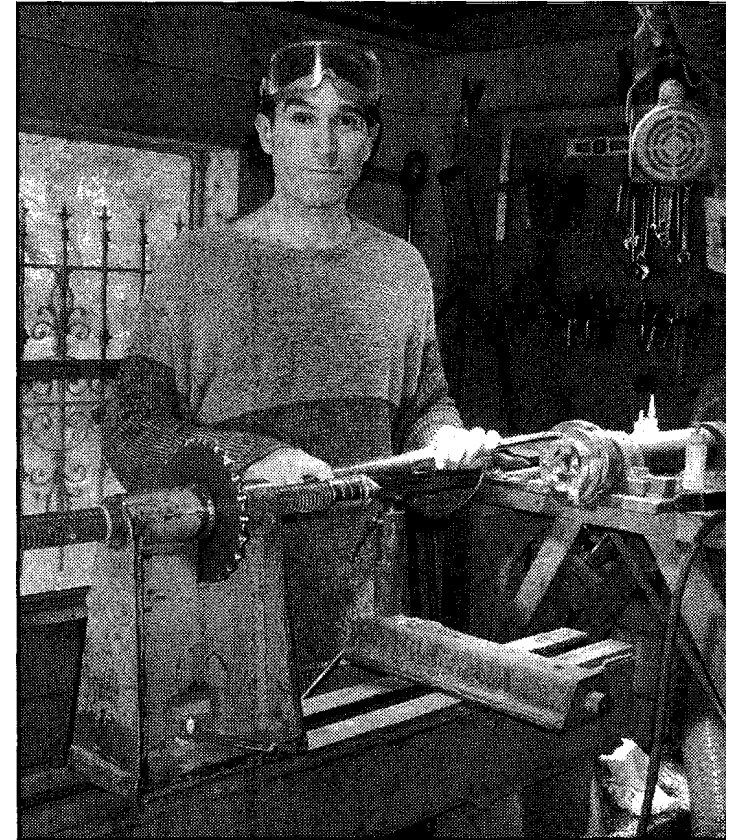


photo by RHONDA REESE

Grant Ward poses in his home studio, the place where he spends his time working with wood and metals.

Sculptor: Traded corporate life for life of an artist

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"I like to make everything myself," he said pointing towards an unusual piece of welded metal. "I think of the display stands as being part of the work. They are integrated in."

Using a lathe he researched and designed, Ward specializes in turning wood and spinning metal vessels. While turning wood (held by Ward's lathe) the artist carves the wood freehand, forming the piece into anything from a bowl to a table leg. When spinning metal, Ward mounts a wooden formed mandrel onto his lathe and clamps a metal blank against it. Then Ward forces a series of spinning tools against the metal to form what he wants.

"It's kind of like the way a potter interacts with the clay on a potter's wheel," Ward noted. "Many of the processes I use have been around for over 3,000 years."

Some of Ward's "modern" tools include a variety of equipment such as a lighted sanding box, an acetylene welder, a tig welder and even a plasma cutter that can, as he describes, slice through a piece of metal like a hot knife through butter.

"Whenever I get frustrated with my work," Ward noted, "I can just walk out-side in the yard for a few minutes and everything is fine."

Ward said he enjoys being able to share his art.

"I feel fortunate to be able to sell my work," he explained. "It's a great way to get instant feedback about what works and what doesn't. I also enjoy being able to talk to people."

Ward has been a popular artist at the Mandarin Arts Festival for many years. His work ranges in price from \$95 to \$10,000.

"And I have items everywhere - in between," he added with a smile.



Photo by RHONDA REESE

One of Ward's many pieces evidences why he has been a popular artist at the Mandarin Art Festival in years past.