

PROFILE OF A TURNER

JACK DeVOS

Jack was born in Holland in 1942 and was the oldest of nine children. After the traumatic war years, his parents decided to emigrate. It was true, Dad DeVos himself had a very good job, but he saw no future for his family, there was too much red tape in the post war years.

So, for the sake of his then, five children, they decided to set sail for Australia. In January 1952 they left Holland to make a new beginning in the land "Down under". Everything was so totally new and different that the first year did not hold pleasant memories for Jack's parents.

Jack himself managed reasonably well, but then he didn't have the responsibilities his parents had of looking after a large family, school was not enjoyed as it could have been, partly due to the language barrier that made schoolwork more difficult in the first year, but also because Jack was a "hands on" rather than an academic type. Manual Arts was his favourite subject.

In the school holidays Jack had a job in a local citrus orchard; he took to that like a duck to water. The genes from his mother's side probably had something to do with it, as her family were mainly farmers. When Jack was old enough to leave school, he was offered a full-time job in the same orchard. In the fifties you could leave school when 14 years old. His parents reluctantly agreed on the proviso that he would follow a variety of courses at night school, which he did for the next four years.

Upon arrival in Australia, Dad DeVos took up the trade he was trained for before the war, namely carpentry. Being a very good tradesman, he was never out of work. When he had a reasonable grasp of the language, he studied for his Builders Registration. When he received his registration in 1960, he convinced Jack to work for him with the words "You will have to earn some real money if you're to buy your own orchard".

Many years were spent building State Housing cottages in country areas until Jack married his sweetheart, Ina, in 1965. By that time, he had saved enough to put down a good deposit on some acreage in Challis Road Armadale. Land was cleared, trees were planted, irrigation laid on, and then the zoning was changed to rural deferred, meaning that in the future the area would be subdivided into building blocks, not good for fruit growing.

Around that time the Free Reformed Church of which he was a member appointed Jack to the Mission Board. Work was done among the Noongar people of Pinjarra. In 1968 Jack and Ina sold their Armadale property and purchased a 30-acre citrus orchard on the Murray River in Pinjarra. They lived there for 10 years. They were years not free from frustrations, however they still have fond memories of their time in Pinjarra and of their Noongar friends. In 1978 the property was sold, and land was purchased in the hills at Keysbrook just south of Serpentine. This was not an existing orchard but a grazing property, so back to clearing and planting, about 5 acres a year.

In the meantime, Jack went back to the building trade as sub-contract roof carpenter. However, in 1982 the building industry faced a lean time, and the only developments of note were in Kingsley and Mirrabooka. This meant leaving home at 5am and returning around 7pm, in time to see his children being put to bed. It was soon realised that something was

wrong here. You work to support your wife and seven children, but don't spend any time with them. That year was the start of tomato growing, from a modest 6,000 plants to 15-18,000 plants per year; this was kept up for 10 years while the trees grew and reached full production. The first year of tomato growing was a disappointment, low prices and due to inexperience, the quality was not there either.

At that time, Jack's eldest son, who had earned money in the tomato patch, wanted to buy a wood lathe as he learned woodturning at school and wanted his own. Jack came along and that was the start of it all. The lathe was purchased from Chaz "someone or other" who made them. He told Jack there was a living to be made in woodturning.

Willing to try anything rather than go back to building, Jack gave it a go and was surprised that his work sold. He soon had several outlets in the Metro area so that the income from turning helped them struggle through to the next tomato season, which thankfully was a successful one. Around this time, Jack joined WAWA. Mandurah was the closest group, but they met in daytime and because of work he rarely attended. In the following years woodturning was an important part of Jack's income, however as the trees matured and also required more time, he was forced to cut back on his woodturning so when they sold their property in 1993, he only supplied one outlet.

In 1993 Jack and Ina moved to their present address and woodturning became his fulltime occupation, (according to Ina, his "obsession").

Through the influence of Gerald Young, his neighbour across the road, he entered his work in competitions which is, as Jacks says, "The best thing I have ever done. It forces you to reach beyond your comfort zone."

He recommends it to anyone who is serious about improving his or her work.

Extract from WAWA Newsletter issue 78 dated October/November 1998

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE

On our recent visit to Canada, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Burlington 'Golden Horseshoe Woodturners Guild', where I did a demo and also had the opportunity to see how it was all done over there. Like all woodies they were a great bunch of guys, all 75 of them. We soon felt ourselves at home as is often the case when you have a common interest. Their timbers made me drool; however, they reacted the same when shown a piece of jarrah. Their timbers are lighter in colour generally speaking and not that many are as dense as our timbers. To impress the guy from Australia they had a 'show and tell' of some 25 pieces, all beautifully done. The timbers used were mainly maple, either in Birdseye, fiddleback or burl. There were also others like walnut and cherry which are spectacular. This particular guild meets twice per month, one official meeting with usually a guest turner, the second meeting is a hands on, where the less able are taught and encouraged. It was noticeable that they had no competition items. When inquiring. I was told they only do that once or twice per year which is a shame as competing is such a good stimulant to improve your work. We all need to push ourselves beyond our 'comfort zone' from time to time. I gladly took the given

opportunity to tell them about our Association. They were impressed that we had so many members. For example: Toronto has a population of 3 million; they have one woodturning group. Perth, with a population of 1.3 million, has 6 groups.

They were even more impressed when I told them we have monthly weekend meetings over and above our group meetings. They have something similar, but not monthly, more like yearly and to organise that is a major task, as they aren't all members of the one Association. That also means they don't have an 'umbrella body' which organises and co-ordinates such events as we do.

In Ontario there are no more than half a dozen clubs, yet they all operate independently of each other, without the interaction as we have with our weekends. One Guild is called the Canadian Woodturners Guild, but I was told it is that in name only and is an independent group like all the others. Such a system is cumbersome for visiting craft people. An event as our recent John Jordon demos and workshops would be a nightmare to organise. Our system may not always work without a hiccup but compared to the alternative we don't realise how fortunate we are to have had people with a bit of foresight when setting up our association. The grass greener on the other side of the fence? Not for this woody.

Jack DeVos

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The Association of South Coast Wood Artisans Inc. 2001 Woodcraft Awards, Bateman's Bay, N.S.W.

Jack DeVos has won First Prize for his entry in the Artistic Sculptural Woodturning category, "Tripod" three turned and carved She-oak seed pods. Also, the "Best of Show Award" for this piece. The spectrum of categories was: - Furniture, Faceplate/Spindle Turning, Artistic/Sculptural Woodturning, Carving Sculpture, Marquetry/Intarsia and Open. The judges were Richard Raffan and David MacLarren of the Bungendore Wood Works Gallery. Congratulations Jack, on your fine achievement

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Observations Wandii WEWS September 2008

Standing room only when **Jack DeVos** took the floor to deliver an entertaining and skilful demonstration that had something for everyone, tool skills and ideas for the beginner and a commanding display of showmanship that captivated his audience. Even experienced demonstrators would have learnt message delivery from Jack including how not to lose your cool if things go wrong.



Jack DeVos (left) shares his turning expertise with a Workshop for interested woman turners.