

# The Artful Wood Turning of Robert Holmes

The art of the late Robert Leroy Holmes of Mequon (1934 – 2018) reveals his wide-ranging skills with wood turning on a large lathe as well as wood working using a variety of machines and tools. Holmes explored numerous woods, from commonly found local woods to exotic tropical hardwoods, to reveal their natural characteristics and defects. In his 40 years of working with wood, Holmes became more aware of wood art in global cultures, and he moved back and forth between turning and wood working. Love for vein inlay materials and wood dyeing also add unique dimension to numerous objects he created. Most all of Holmes' pieces in the Cedarburg Art Museum's *Beauty in Wood* exhibition are turned wood pieces to show Holmes' expertise and great variety in this specific area.



Lamination was an area that Holmes explored with distinctive results. To create a finished piece with lamination meant preparing the wood in advance of the turning. In the example of the colorful, cone-shaped vases in this exhibition shown at left, 14 layers of thin airplane plywood are laminated to make one ¼-inch layer. Multiple laminations are built up and grouped and adhered in creative ways to make the patterns that are eventually revealed after wood turning. The artist also learned and employed a special technique of dyeing and staining wood to create these colorful vases in the multi-step process.

Holmes also utilized burls and defects in wood and put them to artistic use. Several of the pieces in this exhibition show the natural beauty of a great variety of woods, even those that have deformed growths in the wood as a response to injury or infection in a tree. In Holmes' deft hands, burls became an object of beauty when the unusual growth was incorporated into a turned vase or vessel. An example of a dark burl that beautifies a turned vase in a lighter wood is pictured below.

Inlay patterns also beautify the wood objects that Holmes created. Creating inlay patterns with pieced woods of different colors adds another level of complexity. In Holmes' turned bowls and vessels, sometimes the inlay would be painted, or the natural wood pieced in, or it could be crushed minerals such as azurite creating a colorful contrast. Sometimes crushed turquoise or ebony would be used to fill natural crevices or veins in the wood, creating a colorful, linear surprise in a bowl or vessel, as in the example pictured at right.



With functional vessels, bowls, peppermills, kaleidoscopes, pens, bracelets, or objects of sheer beauty, mastery of technique is paramount in Robert Holmes' wood art while touches of embellishment imbue artistic distinction. To see more examples or to learn more about Holmes' many artfully turned wood pieces or his wood working, contact Jan Effinger in Mequon at [jan.effinger@gmail.com](mailto:jan.effinger@gmail.com).