

As the wood turns: Burlington man creates art from fallen trees

WOODTURNING From D1

that have beauty buried in them. The most beautiful wood on the inside is the ugliest on the outside."

DiPietro uses a chainsaw to cut his found logs into "a manageable piece I can lift — 1 to 2 feet long." Then he lugs the pieces into his basement workshop, where the wood gets a second life. He uses templates to determine the size of the piece he can create — a 16-inch-long log, for example, will be trimmed to 12 inches and end up as a 5-inch-by-10-inch bowl — from the log, trims the ends with a band saw and checks for cracks in the wood, then seals the ends with an



DiPietro displays an unfinished bowl as he talks about his woodturning hobby.

emulsion.

DiPietro then marks the centers of the log and mounts it on his lathe between the centers.

"The fresher it is, the less cracked it is, and the bigger the piece I can yield out of the log."

In addition, he said, "The entire tree is filled with water at all times. When cut, the water evaporates from the ends."

DiPietro has found that his engineering

background also is helpful — to a degree.

"One thing I really like about this hobby — I'm a mechanical engineer, and in my profession, I have to be precise down to .001 — and in here, I don't have to."

Pointing to a newly turned 15-inch-high, 8-inch-diameter, hollow-form spalted maple vessel, DiPietro said the effort took 12 hours.

He shaped the outside of the vessel with a 5/8-inch-diameter bowl gouge, then used a hollowing tool with a 3/16-inch square cutter and laser attachment to guide the tool so he could monitor the thickness of the vessel wall. Then the hollow form was sanded, the outside coated with a tung oil-based product and allowed to dry for several weeks. After several more applications of the coating, the vessel was buffed to a glossy finish. It will spend the next month drying in the workshop.

DiPietro said walls of the hollow forms must be 1/8- to 1/4-inch thick to enable the vessels to dry evenly without cracking.

"For me, a hollow form is the best way to display beautiful wood," he said.

Safety is an important aspect of woodworking, said DiPietro, who protects his face with a full shield that is equipped with a fan and double filter. The fans and dust collection system he installed in the workshop help keep the area clean. White walls and ceiling, plus overhead and lower-level lighting ensure that DiPietro has ample illumination while working.

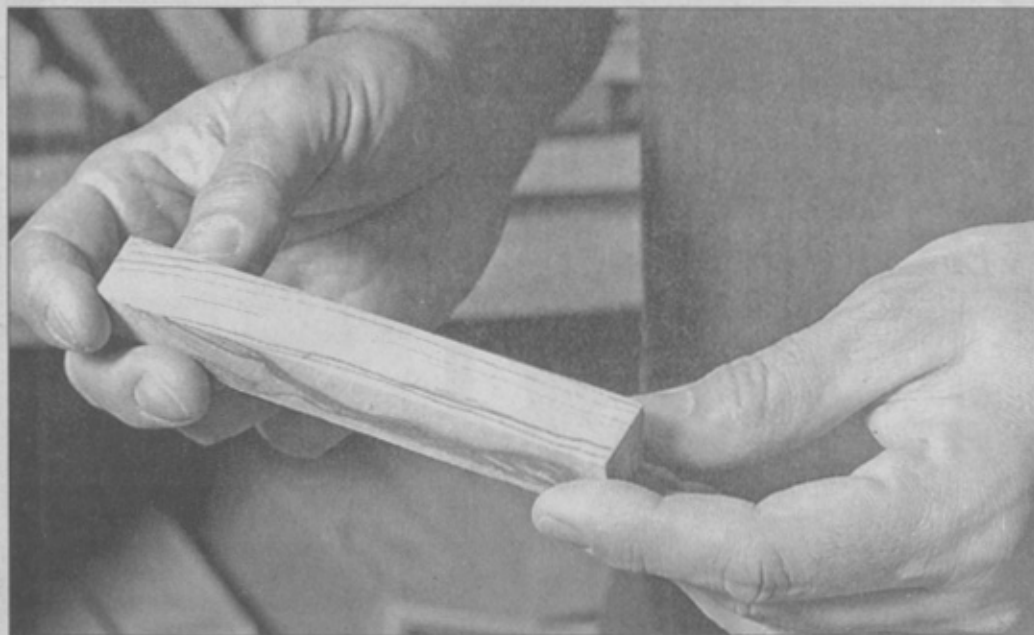
He noted that key tools for woodturners include: "a good lathe, a good chainsaw, a good band saw — also a dust collector of some sort."

DiPietro, who has lived in Burlington Township since 1992, traces his passion for wood crafting to the woodworking and metalworking classes he took while attending Milton Hershey School in Hershey, Pa.

"I really enjoyed the hands-on work back then," he said.

Inspiration also came from an uncle who turned out spindle works and small bowls and from DiPietro's stepfather, who dabbled in woodworking and basic cabinetry. DiPietro said his uncle "used to encourage me about woodworking. Back then, there were no formalized clubs," he said.

Despite his early interest in woodworking, DiPietro did not pursue the hobby until



BCT staff photos/MICHELLE BOTTALICO

The Burlington Township resident displays a piece of exotic wood he will use in his work in the basement workshop of his home.

a bout with cancer in 1999 convinced him that it was time to revisit the craft. He started building his shop that year as he began designing and constructing cabinets. His work also included applying finishing touches to the purchased table, chairs and hutch in the dining room. After completing the entertainment center in the living room in 2004, DiPietro decided to try his hand at woodturning.

"I started out on my own, then I struggled and took some classes at Bucks Woodturners," he said.

This year, he served as instructor at four Saturday classes through the Del-Val Woodturners of Haddonfield. DiPietro is vice president of the 40-member club, a chapter of the American Association of Woodturners. He also is a member of the Bucks Woodturners of Newtown, Pa.

"A lot of hobbyists have converted to woodturning — it takes less time," he said.

"A lot of people find that woodturning is very addictive. Once you start woodturning, and you find you can make bowls, you start challenging yourself and you want to try different types of wood."

Alongside the basement stairs in DiPietro's shop, a shelving unit holds exotic woods that he aims to try. Among them are Tulipwood from Brazil, Bethlehem Olive Wood and rosewood.

"Rosewoods are the most beautiful and the most expensive woods in the world — they're considered exotic woods," he said. "I realized over time I'm a wood collector."

DiPietro, who shares his home with his wife, Patricia, a collie named Sammy and golden retrievers Dylan and Chenin, said woodworking is a fulfilling craft.

"This hobby has paid me back in so many ways," he said, "the joy of working with beautiful wood and wonderful people. It is also a great feeling when I give a woodturning as a gift to friends and family. It is something they never forget and they enjoy sharing with others. I think the best gifts are handmade because they come from the heart."

Andy DiPietro's work will be on display at the "Works in Wood" exhibition at the New Hope Arts Center, New Hope, Pa., beginning Nov. 17. For more information, contact www.newhopeartsinc.org; or (215) 862-9606.