

## YOU CAN BE THE JUDGE - CRITIQUES - TOWARDS PERFECTION

Presented by Gordon Cookson

Here is my list on the subject of critique that I believe shows that most of the considerations apply to all types of turning including ornamental turned pieces . It has drawn on the ideas / thoughts / comments from various sources including the Critiques at the 2015 and 2018 AWGB Seminars, Jim Christiansen and David Buskell from their article in Woodturning Magazine 297 October 2016, Cheam Woodturners Association members, Society of Ornamental Turners members John Edwards and Ian Lane and others.

I do appreciate that more experienced turners will consider many of the questions on a kind of auto pilot but hopefully it will act as a reminder to everyone .

### CRITIQUE

- I believe they work better when you have examined the piece rather than a quick glance, and, if possible, discussed it with the turner and found out whether they want a general critique or help with particular aspects.
- Express your likes first and then make your 2 or 3 positive constructive comments in a friendly way and do remember how you would like to hear comments on your own work.
- Remember that many things are a matter of taste.
- Recognise your own preferences, experience and disclose as appropriate.
- Say what the problem is and how it might be helped. (e.g. There is a small flat there rather than the shape is not very good)

### BACKGROUND TO MAKING

- How experienced is the turner?
- What were you trying to achieve? How successful is the piece?
- How were you influenced by another turner or other source?
- What is any story behind the piece or incorporated successfully in it? (e.g. collaboration between turners or other craftspeople, competition interest, material source)
- Why you chose the wood/material, style, decoration and colour?
- How does the piece reflect who you are?
- What did you learn from making it and do differently in future?
- How proud are you of the piece?

- How much did you enjoy making it?
- What difference would there be if it was for someone you really loved?

## SHAPE AND MATERIALS

- Is your eye immediately attracted to the piece and do you go back to it?
- Does the rim frame the piece and draw you into looking more? Is a rim needed, how wide, thick or shape should it be?
- Does any stand, foot or finial add or detract? Is it of the same standard or style as the turning?
- Is there crisp definition and appropriate amount of details?
- Is the inside and outside shape pleasing throughout? Consider using the Golden Ratio?
- Has the type of wood/material and the piece's orientation in the tree/grain direction been used to its best advantage? (e.g. growth rings concentric or interesting figure in the middle of a decorative piece)
- How innovative is the piece?
- How imaginative is the use of available equipment ?
- How difficult was the piece to make?
- Do any additional materials/mechanisms help or hinder?

## DECORATION AND FINISH

- How good is the finish off the tool or cutter?
- Are there any sanding marks or rough end grain?
- How difficult is the decoration and did the maker succeed? Any mistakes?
- Does the piece show any banned dangerous practices? (e.g. fractal burning)
- Does the decoration suit the piece? Is there enough or too much? Is it consistent around the piece? Should it continue underneath?
- Is finish appropriate for the use it will be put and buyers' tastes? (e.g. Food safe - no nut oils, child safe, liquid impervious, regular handling , where it will be kept)
- Is depth of finish consistent throughout?
- Has finish dried or cured properly before being wrapped for travel? (e.g. oil finishes can come to the surface if wrapped too soon in plastic/bubble wrap)
- Is matt black or other colour appropriate for the inside of highly decorated pieces?
- Should wood be visible somewhere on decorated pieces to show that it is not some other material?
- Beware of marks left from previous displays (e.g. museum gel to stop piece moving).
- Has glue discoloured the material used?
- Is it signed appropriately?

## USE AND DISPLAY

- How appropriate for the purpose it will be put - Use , Display or both?

- Is the wood appropriate for the purpose it will be put ? ( e.g. not yew , laburnum or ivy for food or children )
- Are box lids fitting appropriately for the use it will be put?
- Does the weight feel right?
- Are pairs/sets the same?
- How appropriate are chocking or decoration marks on the base? ( e.g. ease of re-polishing damaged bowls )
- What height will it be displayed, how might it be changed to look good at any height, option to hang on a wall ? (e.g. dovetail included in foot/back design)
- Would a group of similar items be more effective than one on its own?

## SELLING

- Can it be legally sold? (e.g. allowed by Cites or electrical regulations, non-inflammable candle/T light holders)
- Is Advice Notice needed and clearly understandable? (e.g. cleaning, revival of finish, restrictions - not in dishwasher , bright sunlight , near heat source , damp conditions, woods that change colour quickly with time , any after sales service )
- Does selling description include relevant information ? ( e.g. type & source of wood & other materials , finish , intended use , influences )
- How appropriate for selling place?
- How appropriate is the selling price?

## COMPETITION ENTRIES

- Does the piece comply with the rules?
- Is it in the correct section or appropriate experience division?
- How well does the piece reflect the theme?
- How well does the piece reflect any emphasis of the competition? (e.g.turning type, innovation, emotion, colouring )
- Is any required or given description clearly understandable?
- Consider all the above critique questions.
- What are the likely preferences of who is judging ? (e.g. professional turners, club members, gallery owners, public )
- Judging or critique in bigger settings is ideally done by people who have :
  - (1) Experience of doing a lot of turning that has won prizes and/or sold well.
  - (2) Knowledge of materials and understand how they can/should be used and the difficulty of making the piece.
  - (3) An artistic eye for form, beauty, proportion, colour, finish, utility, etc.
  - (4) Considered whether, or not, the winning piece would look good in their own home.

Gordon Cookson 6 July 2019 ( To be updated as necessary )

