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Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase: Ornamental Turning from the Walter Balliet Collection March 4 - July 23, 2011

Essay By Tina C. LeCoff, Philadelphia

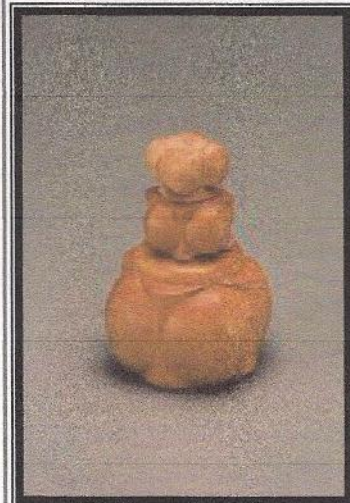
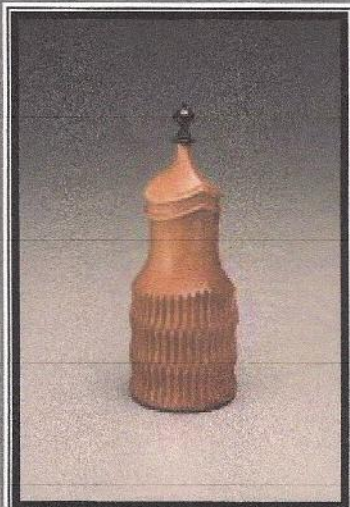
History -

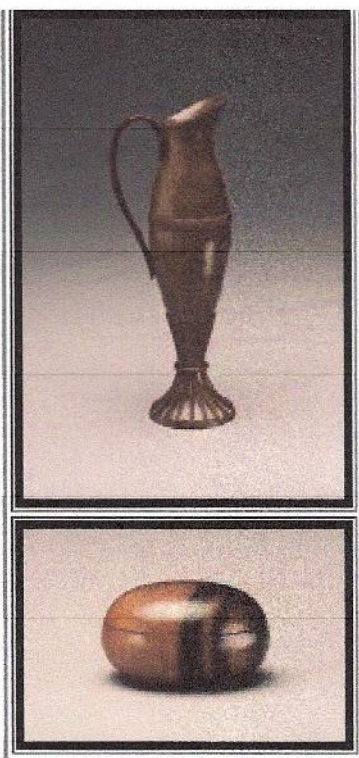
In the 17th and 18th century, ornamental turning was a popular pastime in the homes of European royalty. European kings did it, including Tsar Peter the Great of Russia; the Prussian Kings Frederick III and IV; Louis XV and XVI of France; and the kings of Denmark. Both men and women practiced the art. European museums are full of gorgeous, delicate works made on ornamental lathes from ivory, wood and other precious materials. These treasures were shaped on simple lathes, then attached to ornamental lathes where metal cutters slowly etched and pierced elaborate designs on the interiors and exteriors.

Ornamental turning (OT) is a historic and complex art form wherein artists must configure and master their precise machines, their elaborate cutters and rosettes, and the materials which they select for ornamentation. Today it thrives in the UK and the United States where organizations facilitate the art, respectively the Society of Ornamental Turners (S.O.T.) in the UK, and Ornamental Turners International in the US. Websites and bi-annual meetings provide networking, technology sharing, instant galleries and healthy competition.

The Exhibition -

The ornamental turning of Walter Balliet, of New Jersey, and his OT friends, exemplifies the proficient technical and artistic skills required of contemporary ornamental turners. Over a lifetime as a tool and die maker, Balliet has shared his imagination and skills with turners such as Dale Chase, Frank Knox, and Daniel Brush, all of whom became famous in their own right. Behind the scenes, Balliet built himself a Holtzapffel lathe with complex rose engine and oval attachments, numerous cams and cutters, and geometric chucks and cutting





frames, including one designed to follow elliptical shapes. All the while, he delighted in designing and making cutters and tools to facilitate the designs of his OT friends.

These professional collaborations and friendships resulted in Walter Balliet's large collection of ornamental turning. Recently donated to the Wood Turning Center's museum collection, the Balliet Collection reflects decades of meticulous experimentation and collaboration by retired tool and die maker, Balliet, and his friends. These masterpieces include over eighty precious hand-size boxes by the late Dale Chase of California, the largest comprehensive museum collection to date. Other historic pieces, by Balliet and the late Frank Knox, are complemented by contemporary ornamental turning (OT) by Fred Armbruster, Paul Cler, and Gorst duPlessis. The experimental materials include over 25 varieties of wood including African Blackwood, Pink Ivory, and Bubinga, and jade, acrylic and precious metals.

Walter Balliet and Friends -

Walter Balliet graduated in 1935 from the Patton Masonic Trade School in Elizabethtown, PA. He commuted to Philadelphia to work at Westinghouse Electric, then at Bridge Tool and Die Works for 33 years. At Bridge, he led the task to develop the M-16 machine gun over ten years. Intended for the Korean War, it was used prolifically in the Vietnam War.

Half of the pieces in the Balliet collection were made by him; working with others stimulated his innovations in tools, cutters and design. Walter Balliet discovered ornamental turning in the Fall of 1976, in the 4th issue of Fine Woodworking Magazine. John Kelsey's article on ornamental turning included work by Frank Knox. Based on his tool and die making skills, Balliet told himself, "I can do this...". With drawings from the original Holtzapffel books, he built an ornamental lathe in his basement. When he met Frank Knox and saw his Holtz machine, Balliet discovered he had built his lathe at 2 times the scale (since the Holtz book provided no measurements or scale).

Balliet next observed OT directly at the Wood Turning Center's 1987 International Turned Objects Show (ITOS) in Philadelphia, PA. He was particularly intrigued by the work of Dale Chase. They met at the exhibition and this led to a collaboration and friendship that spanned two decades. From 1988 through 2006, Balliet and Chase talked almost daily and used the mail to expedite their exchange of ideas, designs, tools, cutters and products. Every time Balliet made

Chase a new cutter or tool, Chase sent Balliet a box showing the magnificent results of their collaboration. Only Chase's untimely death in 2007 halted their collaboration. Now in his mid-nineties, Balliet lives independently at home.

Dale Chase -

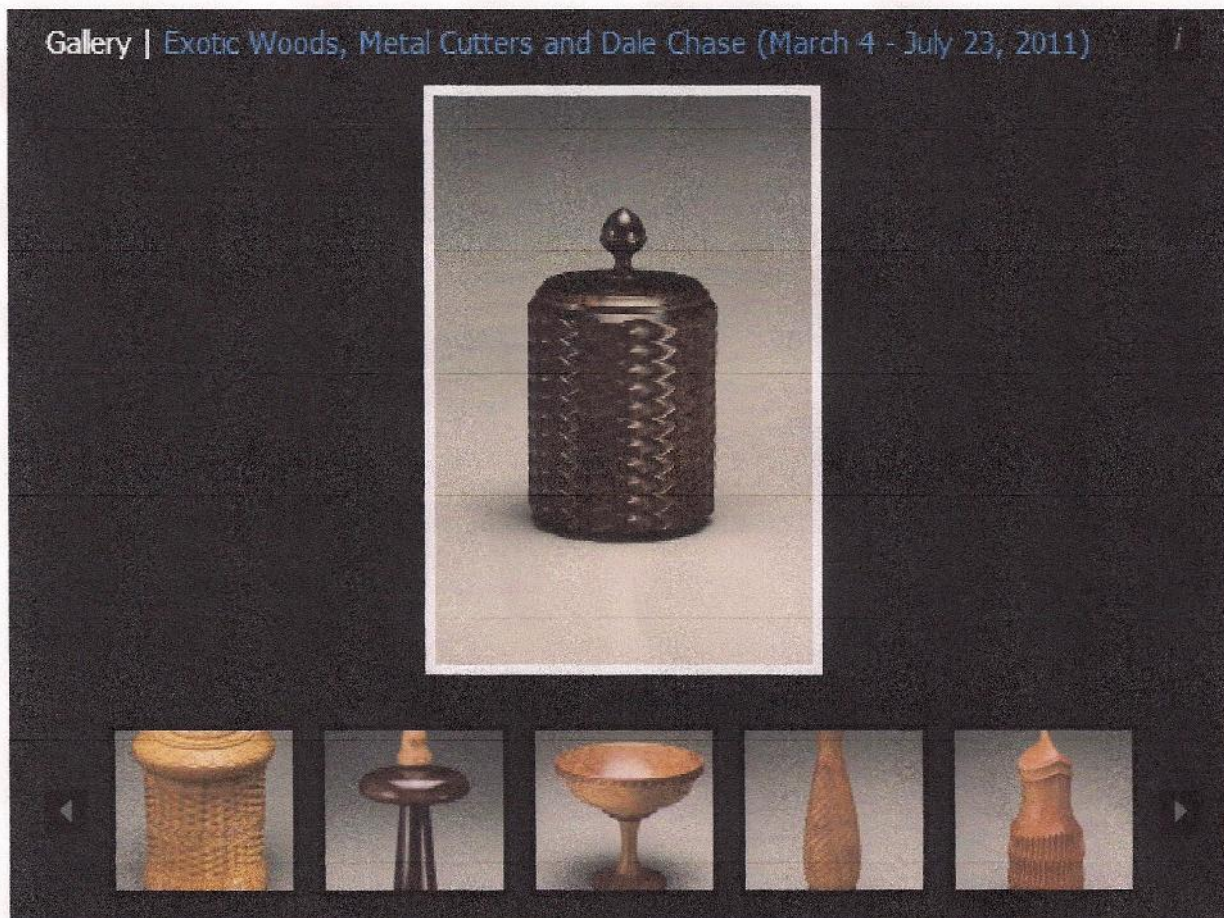
Key to the Balliet collection and this exhibition are the OT boxes made by the late Dale Chase of California, utilizing Balliet cutters and tools. Each box reflects how proficiently Chase transferred his technical skills as a vascular surgeon to OT. At first, he ornamented only the exteriors of objects utilizing three ornamental lathes, including a 150 year-old Holtzapffel. Eventually he secreted the designs on the inside, creating surprises and wonder at the colorful nested layers of woods, elaborate rosette designs, and endless tactile surfaces. Chase named his hand-sized boxes by shape, including - pocket; clam; cricket; cream puff; prune; rims and nugget boxes. These treasures delight and amaze onlookers, and reflect Chase's design and technical skills as facilitated by years of collaboration with his machinist friend, Walter Balliet. Chase said, "Walter Balliet translated my ideas into sculpturally beautiful tools and fixtures for my lathes." 2

1 James Harris; <http://www.ornamentalturmer.com/history.htm>
Based on interviews with Walter Balliet 2008-2011, and Mrs. Charlene Chase, 2011.

2 Dale Chase, Artist's Statement; del Mano Gallery, CA

For additional information call: 215.923.8000 or email: injo@woodturningcenter.org. Wood Turning Center 501 Vine Street Philadelphia PA 19106

Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase: Ornamental Turning from the Walter Balliet Collection
(March 4 – July 23, 2011)



History -

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Dale Chase -

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Ornamental Turning

(<http://ornamentalturning.net/>)

The online resource for "OT" enthusiasts

Turners of the Information Age

Dale Chase (1934-2007)

Morton "Dale" Chase grew up in Michigan until his family moved to the San Francisco area at age 11. He graduated from UC Medical School and became a vascular surgeon for 32 years before retiring. After acquiring a Holtzapffel lathe in 1972, he began creating wood boxes with engraved ornamental designs. As his skills continued to develop, he grew from traditional index ornamenting to the less common (at that time) rose engine work.

In order to realize his artistic goals, Chase worked closely with master machinist Walter Balliet, having many parts and apparatus made, sometimes highly customizing older lathes into modern precision machines. In fact, Chase owned many ornamental turning machines. He acquired three Holtzapffel lathes over 35 years: No. 2362 (built 1881), No. 1993 (built 1853), and No. 753 (built 1811). He claimed his Neuweiler & Engelberger rose engine was his favorite, although he also had three Lienhard rose engines (one of which was the "wet machine" for jade and quartz work). For straight line work, he used two Neuweilers and a long motion Plant.

Chase became intrigued with making the finest boxes possible, pushing the very definition of sensuous, colorful and striking. The turned box became his passion during the last fifteen years of his more than thirty years as a woodturner. During a "sabbatical" from wood box making during the 1990s, he explored making gold, silver, jade and quartz crystal boxes.

In 2003, after encouragement from collectors, curators and gallery owners, he successfully developed multi-colored three layer boxes. These boxes became the highlight of his turning career, as seen during the solo exhibition at del Mano Gallery in December 2005.

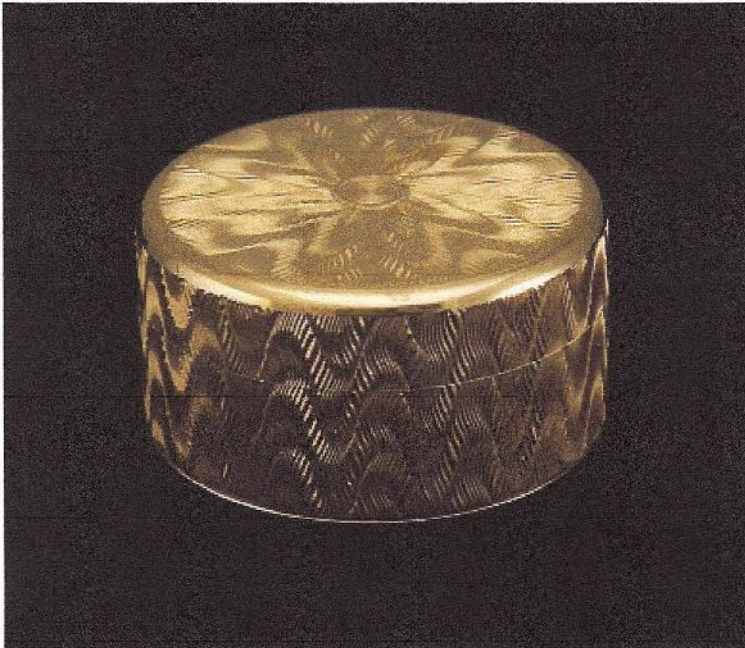
His work survives in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Honolulu Museum of Art, Yale University Museum of Art, and several others, as well as in personal collections on all continents.

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First Gold Box

ca. 1996

[M. Dale Chase](#)

Born: Grand Rapids, Michigan 1934

Died: Penn Valley, California 2007

14k gold

3/4 x 1 1/2 in. diam. (2.0 x 3.7 cm)

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Gift of Fleur and Charles Bresler in honor
of Kenneth R. Trapp, curator-in-charge
of the Renwick Gallery (1995--2003)

2003.60.6A-B

Not currently on view

[View Larger](#) ZOOM

Keywords

decorative arts

Crafts - Metal

metal - gold

About [M. Dale Chase](#)

Born: Grand Rapids, Michigan 1934

Died: Penn Valley, California 2007

Blogs, Podcasts, and More

[Eye Level](#)

[Eye Level](#)

[Eye Level: Ghosts of a Chance](#)

[Eye Level](#)

Wood Turning Center
Museum of Contemporary Wood Art
501 Vine St., Philadelphia, PA 19106
Phone: 215-923-8000
www.woodturningcenter.org
Ron Humbertson, Director of Exhibitions
ron@woodturningcenter.org
Additional images available upon request

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 2011

***Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase:
Ornamental Turning from the Walter Balliet Collection***
March 4 – July 23, 2011

(Wood Turning Center, Philadelphia, PA) The Wood Turning Center is pleased to announce the March 4, 2011, opening of its exhibition: ***Exotic Woods, Metal Cutters and Dale Chase: Ornamental Turnings from the Walter Balliet Collection***, which will run at the Center through July 23, 2011.

This exquisite selection from the Center's museum collection includes wood objects finely decorated via metal cutters fastened to historic ornamental lathes. The objects, recently donated to the Center by retired tool and die maker and ornamental turner Walter Balliet, of New Jersey, reflect decades of meticulous experimentation and collaboration by Balliet and friends. These masterpieces include over eighty precious hand-size boxes by the late Dale Chase of California, the largest comprehensive museum collection to date. Other historic pieces, by Balliet and the late Frank Knox, are complemented by contemporary ornamental turning (OT) by Fred Armbruster, Paul Cler, and Gorst duPlessis. The exotic woods include over 25 varieties, including African Blackwood, Pink Ivory, and Bubinga. Experimental materials include precious metals, jade, and acrylic.

Ornamental turning is a historic and complex art form. Artists must configure and master their precise machines, their elaborate cutters and rosettes, and the materials which they select for ornamentation. Beautiful, elaborate historic machines such as Holtzapffel and Rose Engine lathes, belonged to European kings in the 17th century for use by craftsmen to create treasures for their personal collections. Metal parts from these lathes were salvaged during World War II, and modern makers often had to rebuild their machines before use. Walter Balliet and other OT artists



have built or refined their own OT machines over years of experimentation. A few contemporary ornamental turners also have created computer-assisted ornamental lathes. This exhibit demonstrates that when all materials, machines and cutters are perfectly aligned to slowly cut away delicate, designed patterns over hours of time, the most exquisite detailed items result.

Walter Balliet first discovered ornamental turning in the Fall of 1976, in John Kelsey's article on ornamental turning in the 4th issue of *Fine Woodworking Magazine*, which included work by Frank Knox. Subsequently, Balliet utilized his tool and die making skills, along with drawings from the original Holtzapffel books, to build an ornamental lathe and later Rose Engine attachment in his basement. When he eventually met Frank Knox and saw his Holz machine, Balliet discovered he had built his lathe at 2 times the scale (since the Holz book provided no measurements or scales). Balliet next observed OT directly at the Wood Turning Center's 1987 *International Turned Objects Show* (ITOS) in Philadelphia, PA. He was particularly intrigued by the work of Dale Chase of California. Balliet met Chase at the exhibition and this led to collaboration and friendship which spanned two decades. This interaction resulted in the eighty Dale Chase pieces donated to the collection, all of which typify Chase's work over his lifetime. Balliet's professional friendships with Chase and others inspired him to design and make over eighty pieces, many of which are included in the exhibition. Now in his mid-90's, Balliet lives independently in New Jersey.

This exhibition reflects the long-distance collaboration between Walter Balliet (NJ) and Dale Chase (CA), regarding OT tools, metal cutters and techniques. From 1988 through 2006, Balliet and Chase utilized telephones and postage to share their ideas, designs, tools, cutters and products. Every time Balliet made Chase a new cutter or tool, Chase sent Balliet a box showing the magnificent results of their collaboration. Only Chase's untimely death in 2007 halted this profound collaboration.

The exhibit reflects how proficiently artist Dale Chase transferred his technical skills as a vascular surgeon to OT. At first, Chase ornamented only the exteriors of objects utilizing three ornamental lathes, including a 150 year-old Holtzapffel. Eventually he secreted the designs only on the inside, creating surprises and wonder with rosette designs, colorful nested layers of wood, and elaborate tactile surfaces. Chase's hand-sized, lidded, wood boxes include shapes he called – pocket; clam; cricket; cream puff; Prune; rims and nuggets. His finger-sized metal boxes vary from round to oval and hexagonal, utilizing silver and gunmetal, accented with bluing. The lids have Guilloche designs on them, executed with a 100 year-old Leonhard Engine, and highlighted with applied gold. Chase's treasure boxes delight and amaze collectors and onlookers, and reflect his design and technical skills as well as his years of collaboration with and assistance from his machinist friend, Walter Balliet.

The Wood Turning Center's museum collection was first established in 1986. It now contains over 900 historic and contemporary objects. Each reflects the evolution of wood and lathe turning for function and art, into wood as the medium for contemporary sculpture. Function meets sculpture in this international collection. Materials include wood, metal, jade, alabaster, acrylic and other materials that artists select and manipulate. The collection can be viewed at the Center by appointment and in the gallery section on our website.

Opening Reception and Gallery Talk with Walter Balliet, Friday March 4 from 5 – 6:30pm.

Gallery Talk with Walter Balliet and Albert LeCoff on Saturday April 9th, 2 – 4pm and Saturday May 7th from 1 – 3pm.

THE WOOD TURNING CENTER:

At its Old City, Philadelphia location, the Center features international contemporary art made from wood in changing exhibits, a museum collection showing the breadth of the wood field, a research library, and an eclectic mix of handmade merchandise in the Museum Store. The Center is open Tuesday – Friday, 10am – 5pm, and Saturday 12pm – 5pm. Admission is free. Donations support the Center's educational programs. For more information, visit www.woodturningcenter.org, email info@woodturningcenter.org or call 215.923.8000.

Programming at the Center is supported in part by generous donations by all Members and Friends of the Wood Turning Center. Included is the **Cambium Circle**: Walter Balliet; Lee Bender & Carol Schilling; Fleur Bresler; Theodore Bunin & Miriam Karash; Harvey & Fiona Fein; Richard & Rita Goldberg; Bruce & Eleanor Heister; Robyn & John Horn; Bruce A. Kaiser; Elizabeth Kalogris; Jerome & Deena Kaplan; Stephen Keeble & Karen Depew; Alan Keiser; Leonard & Norma Klorfine; Tim & Sheryl Kochman; Herbert & Mae Kurtz; Dale Larson; Alan LeCoff; Albert & Tina LeCoff; H.F.(Gerry) & Marquerite Lenfest; Mark & Kathy Lindquist; Judson Randall; Greg & Regina Rhoa; Robin Rice; Norton Rockler; Doyle Scott; Joseph Seltzer; William A. Sticker; Robert & Mary Lou Sutter; Bradford Whitman; and Ronald & Anita Wornick. **Public and Private Foundations**: Samuel Fels Fund; Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance; Pennsylvania Council for the Arts; Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; Philadelphia Cultural Fund, William Penn Foundation and anonymous foundations. **Corporate Sponsors**: Penn State Industries; Rockler Woodworking & Hardware.

The Wood Turning Center participates in First Friday Openings in conjunction with the Old City Arts Association. The Wood Turning Center is a nonprofit art and educational organization whose mission is to further the growth of artists, exhibit contemporary art in wood, and promote public appreciation of the art.

Contact: Ron Humbertson, Director of Exhibitions Email: ron@woodturningcenter.org, Images available upon request

Images (top to bottom)

Frank Knox, *Greek Um*, 1977, Lignum Vitae, 12 ¼" x 4 ½"

Dale Chase, *Lidded Container, w Two Bowl Forms*, African Blackwood, boxwood, 2" x 3 ¼"

Dale Chase, *Lidded Container, w Two Bowl Forms, (Open)* African blackwood, boxwood, 2" x 3 ¼"

Walter Balliet, *Potpourri Bowl*, 1988, Ivory, Brazilian tulip, Australian silky oak, American black walnut, 4 ½" x 4"

Dale Chase, *Blued Gunmetal Box*, Blued gunmetal, gold layers, 1" x 1 ¾"

Walter Balliet, *Bisselon Bowl*, 1995, Bisselon, spalted maple, 2 ¼" x 6"



Gold Machinery <dgold@goldmachinery.com>

OTI mailing RE: W. Balliet Exhibit

socaljimh@aol.com <socaljimh@aol.com>

Wed, Apr 20, 2011 at 11:44
PM

To: socaljimh@aol.com

(Note: Records indicate you are on the "Dues are past due" list. If you have renewed your membership within the last 4 days please disregard this notation.)

Dear OTI Member,

Below is a message from Albert LeCoff, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Wood Turning Center (and also an OTI Member)

Subj: **Walter Balliet OT Exhibit**

Dear Fellow OTI Member,

The Wood Turning Center is honored to have this significant ornamental collection donated to our permanent collection.

These masterpieces include over eighty precious hand-size boxes by the late Dale Chase, the largest comprehensive museum collection to date.

Other historic pieces, by Balliet and the late Frank Knox, are complemented by contemporary ornamental turning by Fred Armbruster, Paul Cler, and Gorst Duplessis. (Editor Note: Fred, Paul, and Gorst are all long time OTI members)

It may be the largest OT collection in a public institution.

The attached press release gives more information on the Center's Walter Balliet Ornamental Exhibit. The link at the bottom of this page will take you to more information and photos of the exhibit.

The show looks great and we have received a lot of visitors. We hope you will be one of them!

<http://mail.google.com/a/goldmachinery.com/?ui=2&ik=425462c...> 4/21/2011



Albert LeCoff
Co-Founder and Executive Director

Wood Turning Center

501 Vine Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

215.923.8000 begin_of_the_skype_highlighting 215.923.8000 end_of_the_skype_highlighting

fax: 215.923.4403

www.woodturningcenter.org

Link to the W. Balliet Exhibit: <http://www.woodturningcenter.org/2011/exhibit1/index.html>,



WTC_Press_February_2011.pdf

64K
