

DALLAS LIFE

An artistic branch of tree-hugging

Arborist collaborates with nature in his work

By CLARE MIERS
Special Contributor

Thirty-five years of Kevin Bassett's 56-year life have been spent working with trees. "I'm a big-time tree-hugger," he says with a laugh.

By day, Bassett is a Plano-based certified arborist refining trees in the landscape. By night (and every other possible free moment), he's still refining trees, shaping them into works of art as a wood turner.

"My wife, Sandy, says my work comes in three types: That's nice. Your Mom will love that. And *wow*," Bassett says with a smirk as he dusts off a few stunning wine goblets that he made from tree limbs that show a visitor. "Sometimes I can feel the *wow* coming on when I'm working on a piece."

Bassett's late mother had a creative spirit and encouraged her son's wood turning. She enjoyed even his more abstract creations, as well as the more traditional pieces.

Bassett, who belongs to a number of wood-turning clubs, including the Dallas Area Woodturners, says his creativity may have evolved from solitude. He was always the new kid on the block — pardon the pun — while growing up.

"We moved around a lot, as my dad was in the oil business. From New Orleans to Denver and really anywhere the oil business was, we were," he says.

"And when you are always the new kid, you grow up kind

of tough," says Bassett, surrounded by sketches of wood projects. "Artwork is a solitary endeavor."

It can also be messy. There's a steady flow of dust in his studio, as if it were somewhere in West Texas. The particles and shavings are the spinoff from the large lathe he uses to carve his sculptures from raw wood.

In the back of the studio is a woodshed of sorts; tree trunks, roots and limbs wait to be morphed into something else at the moment of inspiration.

"It's like they have a little bit of soul to them," Bassett says as he holds a gnarled, knotty wooden vase that should be on display in a museum somewhere. He then picks up a lidded bowl that he made from his Aunt Edna's cherry tree from Natchez, Miss., a tree he was particularly fond of. To see more, go to www.kbwoodturnings.com.

I am fortunate to watch the complete metamorphosis of another piece of wood, transformed by Bassett during my visit into a bowl with delicate, natural-bark edges. Surprising is the water emitted from the wood as it spins on the

lathe. I tell Bassett it feels as if I've just gotten an exotic tree-facial.

"Trees are living things, and water is the basis for life," he says over the sounds of the lathe turning.

As the bowl dries, Bassett says, it will change and become what it is meant to be, naturally. After all, his creations are a joint effort with Mother Nature.

"I've done my thing. Now it'll do its thing, and that's the collaboration."

Clare Miers is a Dallas freelance writer.



Photos by Clare Miers/Special Contributor

The natural bark provides a decorative edge to this bowl created by Kevin Bassett.



The lathe kicks off plenty of wood particles as Bassett creates his pieces.



Bassett considers his creations a collaboration with Mother Nature.

