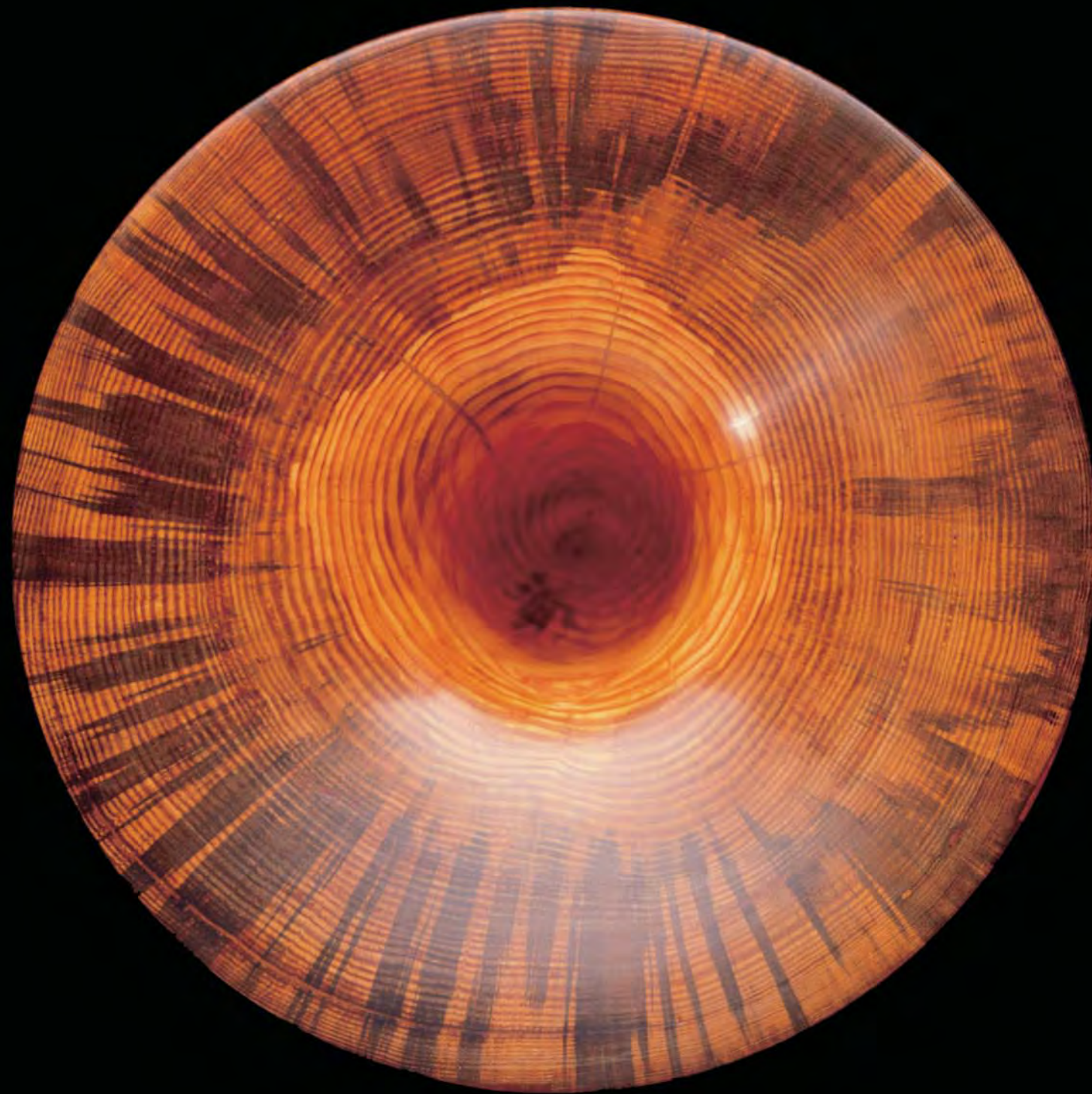


# MATERIAL + FORM + PROCESS = ART

## THE MOULTHROPS' LEGACY IN WOOD



Philip and Matt Moulthrop have always lived and worked in Georgia, a fact attested to by their unpretentious manner and comfortable southern drawl. They remain unassuming and down-to-earth in both their demeanor and their approach to art, despite a history that includes being invited to the White House to meet with presidents, as well as having their work exhibited in leading museums and collected by foreign dignitaries, prominent individuals, and celebrities. A Moulthrop vessel is instantly recognizable by the distinctive use of form, wood, and finish. Collectors will often say, "I have a Moulthrop," considering the question of which family member created it to be secondary. The aesthetic is inherited, following the modernist approach Ed Moulthrop introduced a half-century ago. The works, free of ornamentation or elaborate sculptural notions, share a fascination with the balance of material, form, and process.

While the early pioneers of artistic wood turning, with their embrace of pure form, can be understood within the context of modernist theory and practice, the Moulthrops are among the few artists working in the field today who have continued on this path. While many wood turners have become concerned with manipulation of the wood and displays of technical virtuosity, Moulthrop vessels are simple, sleek, and seductive. As artists, the Moulthrops see their role as selecting forms that serve the material, trusting the voice of nature to speak clearly and eloquently.



Ed Moulthrop  
Figured Tulipwood Saturn Bowl  
*Liriodendron tulipifera*  
15" h x 13" d  
1990

**Opposite:**  
Ed Moulthrop  
Loblolly Pine Morning Glory Bowl  
*Pinus taeda*  
27" d  
1989



Ed Moulthrop  
Spotted Silver Maple Ellipsoid Bowl - *Acer sacharinum*  
13" h x 20" d - 1990

Viewed largely as a celebration of the machine, the geometric and the artificial, modernism also embraced the natural and the organic. This is clearly demonstrated in the works of two giants of modernism: Alvar Aalto (who was a guest lecturer during Ed Moulthrop's studies at Princeton University), and Ed's hero, the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. In 1925, the modernist Hugo Haring wrote, "There is no other way forward but consciously to act as nature acts, consciously ordering things in a way that allows their individuality to unfold, while this unfolding also serves the life of the whole. This whole is the form of our life."<sup>1</sup>

This statement could easily be used to introduce a Moulthrop vessel.

"Ed liked simple forms," his son Philip says. "He didn't like complex or intricate forms. What he loved was the wood. And this has carried on; we're working with the same ideas. Our work concerns the beauty of the wood as revealed through form."

"Early on, Ed saw his vessels as an art form," adds his grand-

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Opposite, front:  
Philip Moulthrop  
White Pine Node Bowl  
*Pinus strobus*  
6 3/4" h x 7 3/4" d  
2002

Opposite, back:  
Philip Moulthrop  
Ashleaf Maple Vase  
*Acer negundo*  
14" h x 8" d  
2002

1. Hugo Haring, "Wege zur Form," *Die Form*, vol. 1 (October 1925): 4





Matt Moulthrop standing at the lathe, holding a lance tool.

son Matt. “From what I’ve learned, he called them sculptures at first and then he switched to referring to them as bowls.”

Philip learned the art of wood turning from his father in the 1970s and embraced Ed’s basic aesthetic. Today, even when creating a bold new body of work, such as the Mosaic series, Philip does not stray from the established form or intention but uses new technical approaches in order to share the natural beauty of the wood.

When they were children, Philip’s sons, Chris and Matt, worked with their grandfather in his studio, learning about wood and how to use the tools.

While Chris went on to work in the computer industry, Matt became immersed in the demands of turning.

Today, Matt has a greater knowledge of wood than his grandfather had accumulated, thanks to an ever-expanding array of trees to choose from and greater access to research on timbers and their properties.

Moulthrop vessels came along at a point in history when

modern art and traditional craft merged, creating a fertile breeding ground for bold new works. Working in three-dimensional space produces a considerable advantage to what painting offers—the addition of depth and multiple perspectives as a viewer moves around the work. While paintings are obviously impressions (thus the term “picture”), the three-dimensional craft object is very real in time and space, and expands the language of artistic expression. Using wood and other materials that have been essential to humans since the beginning of time, modern craftspeople discovered new channels of artistic expression.

In embracing a minimalist aesthetic, the Moulthrop vessel draws our attention to content, which is simply the material itself: wood, with all of its broader associations and particular grains and colors. With a restrained approach to form, the vessels allow the hand of nature to provide figure and gesture on the curved surfaces that rival the most accomplished Abstract Expressionist.

Ed Moulthrop had two advantages in creating this aesthetic. With knowledge of watercolor painting, in the form of both professional architectural renderings and landscape paintings, he had an in-depth understanding of line and color. As an architect, he understood scale and the relationship between the object and its surroundings. It was the marriage of these two disciplines, accompanied by a childhood love of working with wood, which allowed him to combine natural abstraction and form in a new aesthetic language.

The Princeton-educated Moulthrop also was able to comprehend enough engineering, botany, and science to develop the tools and processes to create his unique wood vessel forms.

“One of his favorite artists was Leonardo da Vinci,” Matt recalls. “He had a lot of admiration for da Vinci, and talked to me about his being both a scientist and an intellectual as well as an artist. There was influence from that.”

Ed’s career as a wood-turning artist began in the 1960s, when he started exhibiting with Blanche Reeves at her Signature Shop and Gallery. This was the first craft gallery in Atlanta and the longest continuously operating craft gallery in the United States.

“She had a reputation in Atlanta for being very blunt and straightforward,” Philip says. “But she had knowledge of art and



Philip Moulthrop  
White Pine Node Platter  
*Pinus strobus*  
2 ¼” h x 14 ½” d  
2003

“He had a lot of admiration for da Vinci, and talked to me about his being both a scientist and an intellectual as well as an artist. There was influence from that.”  
~ Matt Moulthrop



Philip Moulthrop  
Spalted Silver Maple Vase form  
*Acer saccharinum*  
17¾" h x 12" d  
2005

crafts. Most of the architects and designers trusted her when they were working on buildings and big homes. They would call on her to help because she was very knowledgeable."

Ed Moulthrop and Blanche Reeves were seemingly destined to cross paths. He became aware of her gallery through the circle of architects and designers he worked with, but the role she came to play in his life involved his career as an artist.

"She was the one who got Ed, as well as a lot of other craft artists, started in Atlanta," Philip says. "She operated the gallery until she died in the early 1990s."

This led to the Moulthrop's having relationships with gallery

owners in major cities across the country.

The work of Ed Moulthrop opened the market for turned-wood vessels in Atlanta, San Francisco, Scottsdale, New York, and other cities. Today Philip and Matt maintain these relationships that preceded them, and their work has come to be represented in every major art market in the United States.

"Ed was among the first to create really large vessels off the lathe," says Albert LeCoff, founder and director of the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia. "Everyone loves the early photos of Matt inside one of Ed's large pieces. Who knew that he would follow in his grandfather's large footsteps someday?"



Ed Moulthrop  
Morning Glory Bowls - 1990

<b>Small:</b>	<b>Medium:</b>	<b>Large:</b>
Streaked Loblolly Pine	Spalted Silver Maple	Red Elm
<i>Pinus taeda</i>	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>
10" d	15" d	21" d



Matt Moulthrop  
Black Walnut Sphere  
*Juglans nigra*  
9½" h x 12" d  
2006

The emphasis of a Moulthrop vessel is on its rounded exterior. Though there is obviously an interior, it is for the most part consigned to mystery—along with the process involved in creating the work.

"What you see in the end doesn't tell you what went into the works, because it's cured, dried, and sealed off, and that's permanent," Matt says "You just see what is there. You don't realize that it could have been the most unappealing and undesirable-looking piece of wood. You see only what resulted, not what you started with or what went into it."

Beneath the layers and within each Moulthrop vessel is the history of the tree, the process of creation, and the legacy of the Moulthrop family.



Opposite:  
Philip Moulthrop  
Mimosa Vase  
*Albizia julibrissin*  
21" h x 10½" d  
2005