

# AS THE LATHE TURNS

*Woodchuck Turners of  
Northern Vermont*

## A Note from the Board

We are getting closer to Spring and restarting Sawdust Sessions! In the mean time we want to let you know that we are looking for an additional Member at Large for the Board. This is a great position that allows you to help “turn” the board in to an even more amazing group by collaborating on workshops, demos and more. If you are interested, please let a board member know. Voting will occur at an upcoming meeting.

## A Cut Above—Member Spotlight

In the world of woodturning, where skill meets patience and creativity takes shape one shaving at a time, few makers embody curiosity and craftsmanship quite like Brad Vietje.

Based in the quiet town of Newbury and now Jericho, Brad’s path into woodturning is anything but ordinary. With a background that spans neuroscience, physics education, and renewable energy, he brings a unique perspective to the lathe—one that blends analytical thinking with artistic exploration.

Brad’s work often begins with locally sourced Vermont wood, each piece carrying its own story. Whether he’s shaping a delicate ornament or a natural-edge bowl, there’s a clear respect for the material. Grain patterns, bark inclusions, and natural imperfections aren’t hidden—they’re highlighted.

His hollow forms and finely turned pieces showcase not only technical skill but a willingness to push boundaries, exploring how thin, light, or intricate a piece can become.

Beyond the lathe, Brad is widely known for his role as an educator. A member of the American Association of Woodturners, he has spent years sharing his knowledge through demonstrations, workshops, and club presentations.

If you’ve ever attended one of his demos, you know his style—clear, thoughtful, and encouraging. He has a knack for breaking down complex techniques into approachable steps, making even advanced concepts feel within reach.

From turning ornaments to experimenting with ultra-thin forms like lampshades, Brad's demonstrations are as inspiring as they are informative.

What sets Brad apart is how seamlessly he blends science into his craft. His background in physics and research shows up in his approach—careful observation, experimentation, and a deep understanding of how materials behave.

Wood movement, tool dynamics, balance—these aren't just concepts; they're part of a bigger system he intuitively navigates. It's this mindset that allows him to innovate while staying grounded in solid technique. Brad has also contributed to educational materials and publications within the woodturning community, helping to grow the craft beyond his local area. His involvement in instructional content ensures that his knowledge continues to reach turners of all skill levels.

At the end of the day, what makes Brad Vietje stand out isn't just his skill—it's his generosity. His willingness to share, teach, and explore keeps the spirit of woodturning alive and thriving. For those lucky enough to learn from him, the takeaway isn't just a new technique—it's a renewed sense of curiosity.

And maybe that's the real lesson: Sometimes the most meaningful pieces aren't just the ones we turn—but the knowledge we pass along.





## ***What in the Wood?!*** ***Featured Wood: White Birch***

***White birch (*Betula papyrifera*) is known for its fine, uniform texture & creamy white color. It is relatively easy to cut, shape, and finish. Its high-density, close-grain structure holds intricate details well, though it is prone to checking, requiring careful drying or sealing of the ends***



# ***Safety First, Shavings Second***

In a woodturning studio, one of the most important safety practices is also one of the simplest: keep your tools sharp. While it may seem counterintuitive, sharp tools are significantly safer than dull ones. A properly sharpened edge cuts cleanly and predictably, allowing the turner to stay in control. Dull tools, on the other hand, require more force, increase the likelihood of catches, and can quickly turn a routine cut into a dangerous situation.

When a tool becomes dull, the turner naturally compensates by pushing harder into the wood. This added pressure reduces control and increases fatigue, both of which raise the risk of mistakes. Dull edges also tend to scrape rather than cut, leading to tear-out and rough surfaces. These poor cutting conditions often result in sudden catches—one of the most common causes of accidents at the lathe. In contrast, a sharp tool slices through the wood fibers with minimal resistance, creating smoother cuts and allowing the turner to work with a lighter, more controlled touch. Maintaining a sharp edge does not require a complicated process, but it does require consistency. A bench grinder equipped with an appropriate wheel and a stable tool rest or sharpening jig is the most common setup. Using light pressure and maintaining consistent bevel angles are key to effective sharpening. Overheating the tool edge should be avoided, as excessive heat can damage the temper of the steel.

Frequent, light touch-ups are far more efficient and safer than waiting until a tool becomes completely dull and requires heavy grinding. Sharpening itself comes with its own set of safety considerations. Eye protection or a face shield should always be worn when using a grinder. The tool rest should be positioned close to the wheel to prevent the tool from slipping, and the operator should stand slightly off to the side when starting the grinder. Hands and fingers must be kept clear of the wheel at all times, and only the appropriate grinding surface should be used.



## ***Safety First, Shavings Second continued***

Even with a sharp tool, proper technique at the lathe is essential. The tool should always be anchored firmly on the tool rest before being brought into contact with the wood. The cut should begin gently, allowing the bevel to guide the tool. Forcing a cut, even with a sharp edge, can still result in a catch. Maintaining a stable stance and a controlled grip ensures that the turner remains in command of the tool throughout the process.

Developing the habit of frequent sharpening is one of the hallmarks of experienced woodturners. Rather than viewing sharpening as an interruption, it should be seen as a natural and necessary part of the workflow. Many turners sharpen their tools multiple times during a single project, ensuring that they are always working with an optimal edge.

Ultimately, sharp tools contribute not only to better craftsmanship but also to a safer working environment. They reduce effort, improve control, and minimize the risks associated with woodturning. By making tool maintenance a priority, turners can focus more on their technique and less on managing problems caused by dull equipment. In a woodturning studio, a sharp edge is more than a matter of quality—it is a fundamental part of staying safe at the lathe.

If you have questions about sharpening, Sawdust Sessions are a perfect time to ask fellow guild members!



**Gouge Out Time  
to Connect**

**Member/board directory  
Coming soon**

**Mentor opportunities  
Coming soon**

# **Chucking Great Deals**

**Buy, Sell & Trade  
None at this time**



Vermont  
Woodturners Guild

**Pay Your Dues [HERE](#)**

## **Spinning Your Way**

**Monthly Demo**

**April 15, 2026-Finishes**

**Meeting will be held @ Zachary's Pizza**

**1250 Williston Road**

**South Burlington**

**Sawdust Session**

**See you May 13th**

**Check out new Workshops [here](#)**

**<https://www.vtwoodturnersguild.org/>**