

**DWIGHT BENNETT**  
**SCULPTOR / CRAFTSMAN**

Based on the lyrical beauty of the female form, Dwight Bennett's turned wood vessels and sculptures capture the essence of the feminine shape. Inlaid with delicate strands of silver that wander and weave their way through the wood, these abstract forms incorporate the characteristic elegance and strength of wood with the fluidity and permanence of precious metal. Enhanced by these silver surprises, his beautiful sculptures offer a rare visual understanding of graceful contours.

Collectors are usually drawn from a distance to his beautiful lines. Upon closer examination, they are impressed by the uniqueness of the inlaid silver. One characteristic is as important as the other. People often exclaim, "I have never seen silver inlays before." There is a reason for that. The artist was inspired to create the process himself.

The event that triggered the exploration for this innovation took place in 1981. "I was turning a piece of ironwood on a lathe when something flashed at me," Bennett recalls. "It was a lead bullet that was lodged in and flowed beautifully through the piece of wood. I loved the effect. It was an epiphany. I spent the next five years figuring out how to be able to make silver do what the lead bullet had done." With the help of three professors at Arizona State University, Bennett's alma mater, he discovered an alloy that can be cast and embedded into the wood by hand. "Wood is the foundation. The silver should look as if it grew in the wood."

An artist is made not just by inspiration, but also by turns in the road of life that compel him to follow the path of creating beauty. Dwight Bennett's long and winding road has included many roles: athlete, teacher, artist, and innovator. His life, much like his work, has been an amalgamation of the unexpected.  
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*Dwight Bennett, continued*

A gifted athlete and talented artist, it appeared his creative expression would be saved for later in life as he explored the world of professional athletics shortly after college. In 1972 he was an alternate javelin thrower for the United States Olympic Team and garnered a position as a tight end for the Los Angeles Rams. His life of athletics halted when he was injured in a serious automobile accident. Wanting more time with his family, Dwight returned to his native state of Arizona and became a high school art teacher and track and field coach. Along with his new career came more time to pursue his art.

Decades of perfecting his craft brought him to accomplishment and recognition among his peers and collectors. Only the finest pieces of a variety of knotted woods such as mesquite, olive, holly, exotic hardwoods, or Bennett's personal favorite, Arizona ironwood, are chosen for his exquisite sculptures. There are tiny natural fissures in the wood. Bennett's job is to choose which ones to enhance and how to infuse them with silver. "I'm creating from Mother Nature," he explains. "All the time I'm working I'm thinking of how to make the silver flow in harmony with the wood." This harmony is evident in the undulating and flowing lines of his wood sculptures.

Bennett's surfaces also inspire a sense of wonder and amazement from his collectors. Lacquers are out. Natural shines and finishes perfectly complement the pieces. It takes Bennett three weeks to put the final oil finish on a sculpture. "I use multiple coats and hand rub the oil into the surface," he explains. "It's quite an extensive process."

For over two decades, Dwight Bennett has elevated the field of turned wood vessels and sculpture from craft to fine art. From his early work such as the heart-shaped sculpture he titled "Life" which toured the United States and Europe as part of a Phoenix Art Museum show to his more recent pieces, Bennett's magnificent work continues to evolve. Infusing his art with grace and vitality, he thrills and inspires both his peers and collectors alike.

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