

THE ARTS

Visual arts, literature,
theater, music & more

CARVING OUT A INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, **ONE PIECE AT A TIME**

Rick Crawford — Astoria's wood-turning sculptor and jewelry designer

By **MARILYN GILBAUGH**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

ASTORIA — Hundreds of different woods, all descriptions, sizes and shapes, are part of wood sculptor and jewelry designer Rick Crawford's prized stash — where he settles, they settle.

Crawford, his partner, Gail, and their four cats reside comfortably and creatively in a home nestled high in the hills of Astoria. For Crawford, it's his home and his studio; a studio that would make any like-minded artist or, for that matter, any artist wannabe wish to hang out and get creative right along beside him.

"We were excited when we first saw this place. Gail, (a writer and ad designer at The Daily Astorian) went almost immediately upstairs in search of a writing nook as I headed down to the basement. It provided all that I was looking for. My criteria were met," said Crawford.

Much like the found treasures he collects and at some point repurposes into award-winning art, both he his large collection of "what is" and "what will be" are transplants from many places; most recently from south Florida.

An international award-winning sculptor and jewelry maker, he has a fine eye and a lifetime passion for collecting and repurposing three-dimensional pieces inspired by nature.

Collected and cherished, he gathers his stash from backyards, schoolyards, riverbeds, pathways and ocean beaches; his vast assortment shows up from near and far. Both Crawford and his many friends and new acquaintances are ever on the lookout, alerting and/or adding to his finds. And with his outgoing and inviting nature, for Crawford, a new acquaintance quickly shifts to the friend list.

A tireless and inveterate salvager and scrounger, precious woods, driftwood,



DANNY MILLER/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Rick Crawford, local wood sculptor and jewelry designer, poses for a portrait in his studio in Astoria.

metal tubing, sea glass, copper wire, entire seashells, bits of seashell, stones and seed-pods, show off his innate artist's knack for what most of us would pass by.

With a passion for what he does, each of the tools of his trade, along with each piece of reclaimed whatever (from the very large to the most minuscule), there is a story attached.

Wood pieces usually begin a new life on his main carving tool, a wood-turning lathe made in Australia; It's a Stubby S750 and comes with, no surprise, a Crawford story.

"It's the best on the market," he says demonstrating the massive lathes many moving parts and pieces. Then there are a couple of kilns, one for glass and the other for pottery, and shelves neatly holding more tools of his trade. The man's artistic passion overflows with a genuine excitement for his work.

The stories continue. "I have one piece

of reclaimed wood that I kept seeing in my sleep. I will wait until a piece speaks to me; until an image slowly comes together" said Crawford, who adds that his finished pieces tend to name themselves.

"When a friend of mine learned that I was a woodturner, he asked me if I had any need for mahogany. He owned a piece of property in the (Florida) Keys that he rented out to a guy who built a boat out of true Cuban mahogany, which is extremely hard to get hold of. I've owned a piece of it since 1992," Crawford continued.

If you or someone you know is into woodworking, you know that a woodworker's mantra (often delivered to fellow wood lovers in a hushed tone) is: "This is something you can't even get anymore." Rick has many "can't get anymore" treasures.

Most of his sculpture and jewelry is inspired by what he sees in nature, re-positioning and highlighting grains and

textures. "What looks roughly textured is finished to a hard to believe smooth as a baby's bottom — in fact Crawford often invites viewers to handle his work to appreciate the silky finish.

"No splinters here," he says as each piece of driftwood, mahogany, rosewood, purple heartwood, western red cedar, and the rest of his "jewels" wait to be repurposed and repositioned.

Several pieces of Rick Crawford's art can be viewed at Astoria's River Sea Gallery. More information about him, his international awards, and his work are available at numerous online sites.

Chances are, once you take a long look at Rick Crawford's wondrous creations you'll never stroll on our beaches the same way. Or for that matter, there's a good chance anywhere you walk, things you once saw as just old bits and pieces of debris will never look the same.