

Behind the Scenes with Kurt Hertzog



Packard Woodworks

There are very few woodturners who haven't heard of Packard Woodworks. This catalog and website woodturning retailer has become a household name among US customers. Though Packard does do some Canadian and overseas sales, their major market is the American woodturner. Celebrating their twentieth anniversary this year, Brad and Debbie Packard have made this family-owned and family-operated business a well known player in the woodturning sales arena.

Back in 1991, family issues took Brad Packard and his wife, Debbie, from their employment in a woodworking business to Tryon, North Carolina. You might ask where Tryon is. Tryon is a small town near Route 26; it's a pleasant little town that you typically never notice unless you really need to go there. Depending on who you ask and how you define the boundaries, the population is a few thousand to five or six thousand. Brad needed to be in Tryon and was not content with working in an outside sales job. Brad and Debbie decided that a mail-order business, which they could run from their home, would allow them to live in Tryon while attending to family matters. Having many years of experience in the woodworking field and with Brad being an avid woodturner, woodturning was selected as the business. It was something he knew and it wasn't too expansive.

Even though they got started in 1991, it wasn't until the fall of 1992 that the first catalog for Packard Woodworks was produced and mailed out. With all the things that needed to be done to create the business and generate the catalog, it took the Packards that length of time to get the business in order and release catalog number one. From that original sixteen-pager, the business has grown to a 112-page catalog that is published several times a year. The business, originally located in their house, expanded to fill every available space. By 2000, there was no more space available. Every nook and cranny had been commandeered. The Packards moved the business to a building not far from their home. They began their web presence in 2002, their growth continued, and they outgrew that location within five years.

In 2005, Packard Woodworks relocated to their current location. A building that had started its life as a Dodge Automobile Dealership and Showroom, morphed into a heating supply company, and in 2005, became available. Originally designed to support cars parked in the showroom on the second floor, the building has impressive and stunningly beautiful woodwork. With high ceilings and

incredibly strong construction, the remodeling to convert it into Packard Woodworks retained the beautiful flooring and impressive construction.

Packard Woodworks is solely a woodturning retailer. They carry almost anything a turner would desire, with a special emphasis on tools. They carry the industry standard tools, along with their own line and specially designed tools they sell exclusively. With six employees, including Brad and Debbie, everything is done in-house. The product photography, catalog creation, product selection and testing, and the order fulfillment and shipping are done by Brad, Debbie, or one of the other employees.

In the early years, Packard Woodworks was represented at the various symposiums and trade shows. Those symposiums and shows helped build the mailing list database, but weren't always a profitable event when you consider the cost and time away. Now, they only take a booth at the local North Carolina Symposium and the American Association of Woodturners annual symposium. Having started with the AAW Symposium in Purchase, New York, back in 1993, Packard Woodworks has been represented in the trade show at every AAW symposium since. Usually, Brad can be easily identified by his trademark suspenders. If your travels ever take you down Route 26, south of Asheville, you may want to take a scenic drive into Tryon. Though the company doesn't have a showroom or have a great deal of walk-in trade, you are always welcome to stop in and say hello to the folks at Packard Woodworks.



Fig. 1. Tryon, North Carolina, isn't the biggest place on the map, and you will need to keep a keen eye out or you'll miss the Packard Woodworks building.



Fig. 2. Packard Woodworks doesn't have a showroom or get much walk-in traffic, yet the folks will certainly welcome and wait on you if you stop in.



Fig. 5. In the fall of 1992, the first catalog, which was sixteen pages, was produced.



Fig. 3. With almost all sales through the website and phone, the salespeople have a quiet workspace in the heart of the building.



Fig. 6. Self-contained, the design, photography, and creation of the catalog and website are all done inside the company.



Fig. 4. Since woodturnings adorn every part of the building, there is little doubt about what Packard Woodworks' business is.

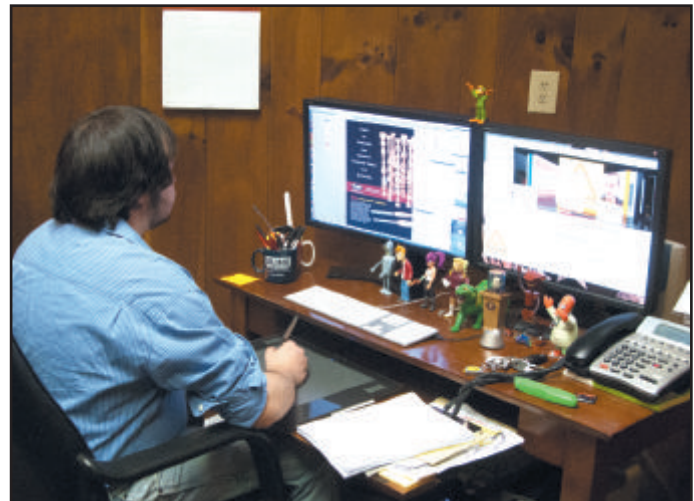


Fig. 7. Kaylon, who does much of the photography and catalog creation, has his favorite characters looking on.



Fig. 8. Most of the inventory, except the extremely large items, is housed on the main floor in typical order pick-and-pack organization.



Fig. 11. Around the back of the building, there is a door to nowhere with its original purpose lost over the years.



Fig. 9. The building was originally built as a car dealership and showroom with the appropriate construction to support the weight.



Fig. 12. The bulk and heavier items are stored in the basement, and so is the "heavy iron."



Fig. 10. Much of the building still has the wonderful wooden flooring, adding a lot of character to the workspace.



Fig. 13. Of course, everything is available for Brad and the other turners to test, as well as do a bit of turning.