

Woodturning in the Sun, by David Bright

Back in 2013 I was thumbing through a Woodturning magazine and spotted an advert for woodturning courses by Nikos Siragas, Artistic Woodturner, Rethymno, Crete. I know Rethymno as it is the main



town closest to our favourite Cretan holiday destination of Panormos. That seeded an idea to combine a holiday with some woodturning activity. 2013 did not work out for us so we formed plans for a Cretan holiday in 2014 incorporating a course with Nikos. We managed this at the end of June spending 1 week near Agios Nikolaos on the West of Crete and 1 week at Panormos. I roped in some friends to join us so I would not feel guilty leaving my wife for 2 days while I did the woodturning.

Nikos runs 2 or 3 days woodturning courses on several weeks in the year – see his website www.siragas.gr for details. Nikos has a small shop in Rethymno (see picture) where he sells his works and does on site woodturning at the back of the

shop to show that the work really is all his. We arranged to meet Nikos a few days before the course at his shop to meet him and discuss what I would make on the course. At the shop we also met his English wife Frances with whom most of the earlier email communication had been.

The woodturning course itself is held at Nikos' house in the hills above Rethymno. His workshop is in the basement of his house (see pictures) where it is relatively cool. The terrace of his house where we had lunch (prepared in advance by Frances) is surrounded by olive trees and has fantastic views towards Rethymno.

At the shop I chose to make a deep hollowed vase – I felt it had to be olive wood due to the location but Nikos also turns lots of other woods including carob which was very tempting. Nikos' courses usually are for 2 to 3 people but on the dates I had chosen I was the only one so I got individual tuition.

The courses start at 10 am so no need for an early start whilst on holiday and are scheduled to finish at 3:30 but both days went on to about 4 pm. This seems ideal to me for a "holiday" activity, leaving time to return to Panormos for a well-earned swim in the sea to cool off.

Nikos' workshop is very well equipped, he has at least 3 lathes, and the one I used was a Wivamac, identical to the club lathe.

The first piece I chose to make was a clean lines vase 180 mm tall x 120 mm diameter. The day started by searching his vast basement for a suitable piece of tree. The olive wood itself came from one of the trees Nikos had cut down himself on his land so no "air miles" – at least

not until I brought it home. Nikos told me that 90% of the olive wood items you see on sale in Crete come from Tunisia!

The chosen piece was quite green, but making the vase walls fairly thin, carefully using a hot air gun at stages during the turning and wrapping the piece in newspaper, then plastic at night and for the journey home all is well. For the hollowing we used Nikos' homemade hollowing tool (a scraper with a steadying arm). Finishing down to 600 grit and lots of polishing. For finishing the inside of this quite deep vase Nikos used a soft bamboo stick which has enough flex to add some pressure to the sandpaper. I'd not seen bamboo like this before and came home with a piece courtesy of Nikos. This first piece took the whole of the first day and some of the next morning.

For the second piece I wanted to do something with a natural bark edge. We found a suitable piece of dry olive wood and made quite an artistic vase approx 120 mm diameter x 100 mm tall. This piece had some issues with cracks but copious amounts of superglue especially at the bark/wood interface solved any issues. Nikos had a shaped beading tool to add a bit of interest to the diameter. If anything this is my favourite piece of the two.

I found Nikos very knowledgeable and something of a perfectionist, especially when it comes to finishing. The 2 days were very enjoyable and I came away with additional woodturning knowledge and two rather nice olive wood items.

