



George Sherwood

A Sculptor for All Seasons

—By Meg Brazill • Photos courtesy of George Sherwood



Herons 2004
Stainless steel
6" x 6" x 48", 32" legs
Lyme, NH.



Standing Wave 2005
Stainless steel
180" x 180" x 240"
Freeport, Maine.

Above: *Herons*
Right: *Standing Wave*, at Sculpturefest.

Sherwood is a kinetic sculptor.

His sculptures move, depending on wind and air currents.

His material of choice is stainless steel, which has the reflective characteristics of water and replicates the way light moves across it.



At fifteen feet high, George Sherwood's sculpture *Standing Wave* is deceptively delicate. Made of stainless steel, it gleams in the morning sky, reflecting light across a new-mown field. A breeze engages its long "tendrils" of vertical steel. Once in motion, they appear to intertwine with one another. "Leaves" emerge from the tips of the sculpture's four-foot-long metal arms, like newly hatched seedlings. The sculpture's beauty, in part, derives from its stainless steel material, and from the engineering that supports its intimate dance with the environment.



Arc Angel 2004, 40"x24"x18", stainless steel, Lyme, NH.

George Sherwood is a kinetic sculptor. His sculptures move, depending on wind and air currents. In just a word or two, the titles of his work describe the works themselves: *Tendrils*, towering at thirty feet, *Wind Orchid*, *Square Wave*, *Arc Angel*. Some of his sculptures, such as *Heron(s)* or *Tea of Turns*, are figurative, depicting not just birds but their natural movements. Visitors to Woodstock's 2005 Sculpture Fest remember Sherwood's *Standing Wave* sculpture, sited prominently at the crest of a field. Its wind-driven choreography intrigued audiences and, during Sculpture Fest's opening weekend, it also served as a partner to Flock Dance Troupe, whose dancers performed in front of it.

Sherwood's outdoor kinetic art is not just *in* the environment;

his sculptures are collaborations with it. "It sounds like a cliché, but I can't help being inspired by the nature around me," Sherwood says. He points to the mature maple, oak, and pine trees surrounding his home in Ipswich, Mass., and beyond them to the marsh and the Atlantic Ocean. "It's all there – all the textures an artist needs."

His material of choice is stainless steel, which has the reflective characteristics of water and replicates the way light moves across it, according to Sherwood. He should know; he swims a mile in the ocean every other day. "I have a personal relationship with salt water. It gives me the experience of being suspended in a medium that works the way that wind works on my sculpture."

He's spent time *on* the water too, learning sailing from his father. "We spent a lot of time together out on the water, understanding the wind." These days, Sherwood doesn't sail much, but he employs the wind's power to animate his sculptures, whether they're rippling in a mild breeze or sustaining blustering headwinds. Variations in wind speed and direction produce differing dynamics, affecting how a kinetic sculpture will move. Harsh conditions can turn the ballet-like rhythms of his sculptures into rapid spinning ones, like a metallic Sufi.

For the past twenty years, George Sherwood and his wife, Rue, have lived in their Ipswich, Mass., home; the cedar shingle, cottage-style house has been in Rue's family for nearly one hundred years. It's surrounded by gardens, which Rue, a landscape designer, has created over the years. From early spring through fall, the garden blooms with a profusion of flowers from iris and poppies to echinacea and aster. A kitchen garden provides easy pickings of herbs, garlic, and greens; a second, larger garden produces blueberries and raspberries, potatoes, squash, and tomatoes.

Just steps away from their house is George's studio, which once garaged a Model T Ford decades ago. Inside, horizontal pine planks line the walls. Whorls and whirls of fabricated metal hang from the ceiling, along with spikes, spokes, and arcs of steel. Everywhere, stainless steel reflects the light. Completed sculptures line the studio walls in shapes reminiscent of sunflowers, ginkgo leaves, fish, water, and waves. Bracketed shelving holds miniatures, which may become models for large-scale sculptures. With a dizzying array of completed sculptures and works-in-progress, it is combination laboratory, workshop, and play space.

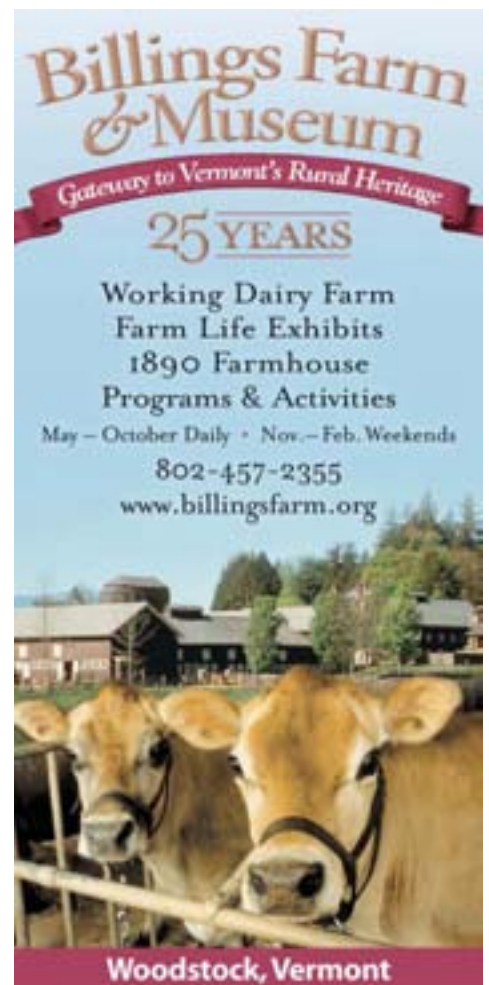
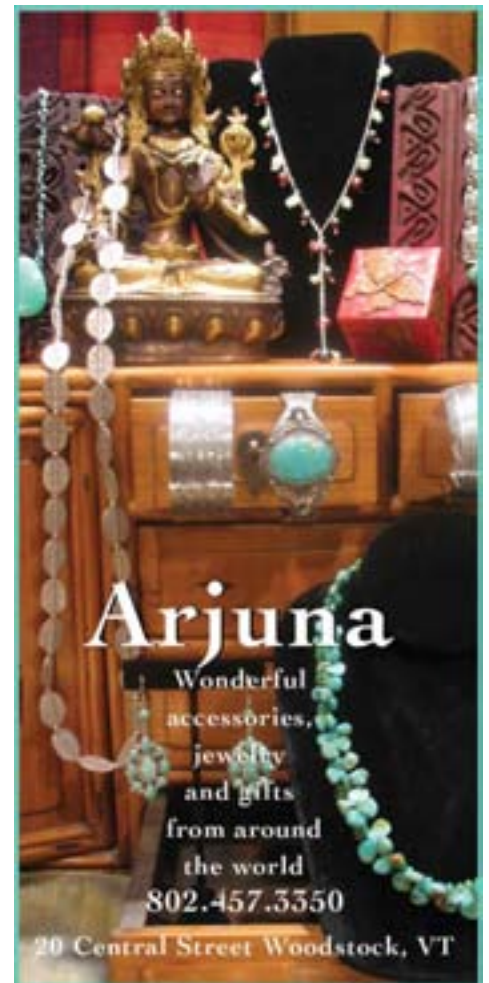
Sherwood's workspace extends outside, beyond the studio. Because his artwork is exhibited outdoors, how it interacts with the elements is critical to its success. "Sometimes I take things down to the marsh," explains Sherwood. "I can test them in more extreme weather." He can evaluate the sculpture's endurance *and* see how it behaves aesthetically under a variety of wind and light situations.

For the past fifteen years, Sherwood has been making kinetic sculpture; for the past ten, he's made it his full-time profession. At fifty-four, he is something of a latecomer to his field, yet looking back, everything he's studied, and worked at, and loved, has prepared him for being a sculptor.

Throughout high school, Sherwood didn't give much thought to making art; he preferred being outdoors, hiking in the mountains. But he still believes that "high school sets the stage for a lot of things. Your brain is making quality connections then." He thinks these connections bear fruit eventually, if you pay enough attention. "When I think about it, I haven't really changed that much." And, he still prefers being outdoors.



Wind Orchid 2007, 52"x16"x16", stainless steel, Ipswich, MA.



Sculpture Fest 2008

"Outside In – Inside Out – What Makes You Sing – What Makes You Shout?"

There's no doubt about it: Sculpture Fest is a labor of love. For nearly twenty years, Charlet and Peter Davenport have invited artists to dream, invent, and construct sculpture on their land in Woodstock. It's a spectacular piece of land, but even more so when it's enlivened by ceramic, mesh, paper, stone, steel, wood, wire, and – yes, even wacky noodle – sculptures dotting their fields and garden.

This year's theme, "Outside In – Inside Out – What Makes You Sing – What Makes You Shout?" is intentionally open-ended so artists and audiences can interpret it broadly. The festival is free and, in a word, unassuming. It's known for its friendly atmosphere – you don't have to be an art expert to enjoy it – area students discover this when they trek to Sculpture Fest on their first field trip of the school year. Some elementary school students have even had the chance to meet and talk to sculptors like George Sherwood and Seth Callander.

Featured artists at this year's event are Li Shen and Ethan Ames. Visitors who've attended previous Sculpture Fests may remember Li Shen's wire couch, tucked up in the woods, looking strangely inviting despite its wire construction. Her work tackles big subjects like conservation and exploitation of the earth's resources, but her art engages us with its whimsical beauty. Ames creates sculpture that doubles as furniture – or is it the other way around? Come visit Sculpture Fest on opening day, Saturday, August 30, and find out.

Sherwood will also participate in this year's Sculpture Fest with two pieces, *Twining* and *Vortex*.

2008 SCULPTURE FEST

304 Prosper Road, West Woodstock (about .5 mile from Route 4)

Free. Open to the public from August 30 – mid-October. Directions and details: sculpturefest.org



Conn.). After graduation he lived in Burlington, Vt., and performed his solo show there, including street performances on the Church Street pedestrian mall. Essentially "wearing" art, and using his body to manipulate it, Sherwood describes this as his first interest in kinetic sculpture. In 1979, the Vermont Council on the Arts awarded him a grant to make a kinetic sculpture for his performances.

His interest in design and the way things work led him to return to school at the University of Vermont to earn a second Bachelor's degree – this time in Engineering. He began to envision a job that would combine his interest in movement with his interest in making things. After graduating in 1984, he went to work for Parker Bros., the first of several toy companies where he'd be able to marry these two desires.

Sherwood continued making sculpture off and on, but an article in *Scientific American*, about kinetic sculptor George Rickey, crystallized his interest. Along with Alexander Calder, Rickey is considered to be one of the two major artists in the twentieth century to make movement central to their sculptures. Rickey is also widely credited with being the first to take his kinetic sculptures outdoors.

"If I were to connect with someone in the kinetic world, it would be George Rickey," Sherwood says. "He really created a different language with his sculpture. His work affected me more [than Calder's]." Sherwood eventually met Rickey and spent some time at the artist's studio. In 1994, Rickey critiqued several of Sherwood's pieces. It was "as good as a semester spent learning." Rickey died in 2002, leaving behind a rich legacy of experimentation and sculpture.

In the early seventies, he attended college at Hartford Art School where he took an interest in the performing arts. Using animated props, puppetry, and the movements of his own body, he developed a one man show. In 1976, he obtained a B.A. in Fine Art from Hartford Art School (University of Hartford,



Square Wave 2005, 74"x38"x38", stainless steel, Hinesburg, VT.

In 1998, Sherwood quit his day job, determined to make sculpture his full-time occupation. He put behind him a successful career in concept development for a variety of toy companies – including Parker Bros., Hasbro, and most recently, Lego. It was a bold move; he traded a one-and-a-half hour commute into Boston for a three-and-a-half second walk from his home to his studio. But the distance didn't figure in to his decision – Sherwood followed his passion.

At 5' 9", George Sherwood is of medium build, with brown hair and gray/blue eyes that seem to reflect the ocean light. His work continues to grow in size and complexity, and Sherwood now works with an assistant, Rob Winthrop. He's expanded his studio to house necessary equipment, including a metal lathe; a Bridgeport milling machine; welding tools; and a bending brake, used to bend metal

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Square Wave 2005, 74"x38"x38", stainless steel, Woodstock, VT.

plates. A pulley is there to lift large-scale sculptures into the studio's two-story cathedral ceiling, which is critical for working on larger pieces. Upstairs in his studio, Sherwood has a small office with a computer and camera equipment. There's a "clean" space for designing, modeling, and documenting; and a "dirty space" for executing the sculptures.

Recently, Sherwood exhibited at Atlanta Botanical Garden, Chesterwood Museum, Shelburne Farms, Southern Vermont Art Center, and St. Gaudens National Historic Site, among others. He was the featured artist at Sculpture Fest in 2005. Permanent installations of his sculptures are at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, and locally, at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science in Quechee. Currently, his work is on exhibit at the Southern Vermont Arts Center through October 26. His sculpture is also represented in collections throughout the United States and Europe.

Those most familiar with Sherwood's work recommend seeing his sculptures in every kind of wind and weather, under brilliant sunlight as well as on an overcast day, at dawn and dusk, and throughout the changes of the seasons. With the unpredictability of nature controlling them, Sherwood's sculptures not only dance, they sing.

Meg Brazill has been working in, and writing about, the arts for thirty years. A recovering punk rocker and performance artist, she lives with her daughter in South Woodstock. She is currently working on a book of short fiction.

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