

# Metamorphosis

Working in a two-car garage shop in Pittsburgh, Ron Layport transforms wood into wildlife, turning and carving his delicate vessels direct from the log. A 14-in.-high piece like this one in maple, which began as a 55-lb. chunk of tree, weighs less than 2 lb. at the end. After turning the basic thin-walled vessel from green wood, he sets it aside and begins carving only when it is bone dry. Layport, 73, was an accomplished furniture maker in the early 1990s when he took a turning workshop so he could make round legs for his tables. Once he turned his first vessel, furniture was forgotten. After eight years turning pure vessel forms, he began carving his turnings: “I chopped away at that first piece,” he says, “having no idea what I was doing. My process was trial and error, struggle and success. It’s still a risk every day—and total involvement.” Layport often draws inspiration for his designs from memory. This one celebrates a summer afternoon in childhood when a favorite aunt taught him how to catch a butterfly gently between his fingers, examine it, and let it go. Making his vessels, he says, “is a very meditative, solitary, spiritual process.” Days and weeks disappear before the piece comes fluttering into final focus.

—Jonathan Binzen



Photo: Mark May