



# Arizona Gourds

November updates from the desert southwest...

Welcome to the November issue of the Arizona Gourds newsletter!

**Gourd Trivia** Have you ever seen a flute made from a gourd? The Mandarin Chinese name for a gourd is **HULU**, and this flute is called a **Hulusi** (pronounced Hoo-Lo-SE), and is one of the few gourd items I saw on my travels to Asia. (I'm sure there were plenty in some places but we must not have been in the right gourd areas!)

The flute is played by blowing into the small hollow wooden plug at the end of the gourd. There are finger holes on the bamboo tubes and a small soft plug is inserted into one or both of the outer tubes to modify the sound. I'm not a musician so I'm not able to make it sound too impressive - but the fellow I bought it from played it beautifully. You can see a photo of me holding it while standing at the Great Wall and read more about my trip to China below.

## What's featured on the Arizona Gourds website?

In keeping with the Asian theme this month, be sure to check out the **NEW Chinese Coins, chopsticks and chopstick rests** on the [Special Embellishments](#) page, and take a look at the **Asian Suspended Urn pattern and the Gourd Teapots pattern** on the [Project Packets page](#).



### Update: Gourd Classes

I will be teaching two sessions of the **River Bed Gourd Class** at the "Gourd Retreat - Southern Style" near Savannah, Georgia next January 18-20. Please visit [www.webgourds.com/southern/classes.htm](http://www.webgourds.com/southern/classes.htm) for more information about the Retreat.

My classes at the Wuertz festival in February are already full. I'm hoping to offer more classes in the spring. Watch future newsletters for more details...



## Selling your gourds - Part Two

In the September issue, we talked a bit about pricing your gourds when you've made the decision to sell your art. Next, you'll need to decide how and where to sell. The easiest way to start is with casual sales to friends and acquaintances. If you've moved beyond casual selling, the top places to sell are at shows (fine art shows, craft shows, gourd shows, etc.), at stores and galleries, or online. Each place has pros and cons. What is best for one person may be the wrong choice for another. Consider all the positives and negatives of each venue and factor in your own geographical area, your interest in selling, and the time you have to spend.

Craft fairs and gourd shows are the only way some gourd crafters sell their work. Some people swear by it, others swear they'll never do it again! Speak to people who've participated in shows to get their opinions and thoughts on selling this way. Find out what they liked or didn't like about doing a show. Attend a show or two and strike up a conversation with friendly vendors and ask for their feedback. There are many things to consider when doing a show. Find out what is provided and what you'll need to rent or purchase, including tables, chairs, table covers, tents, etc. Do you need lighting and electricity? Is it provided or even available? Determine if the event has a flat rate booth fee or asks for a percentage of your sales. Consider hours, advertising, who handles the cash, who handles the sales tax, etc. Find out all you can before committing to do a show.

The same considerations must be taken into account when deciding to sell on consignment at a store or gallery. A consignment shop owner traditionally takes a percentage of the selling price to offset their costs in paying sales staff, rent, utilities, etc., and for providing you with a steady customer traffic. Galleries are similar to consignment shops, except they may handle higher end merchandise and may offer better traffic. There are also craft malls, where you rent a small cubicle of space from the merchant to sell your items. You pay rent and/or work whether you sell anything or not, often for a minimum period of a year. They do handle the cash and sales tax for you, and can take credit cards and debit cards - a great convenience. Again, consider it carefully before signing up. Check the reputation of any store or gallery before leaving your work. Many artists have lost money or their inventory when a shaky business has closed their doors suddenly due to insolvency. (\* Sadly, I know this one through personal experience....)

Selling your work on the internet is another possibility. One way is to build your own website. There are services that will allow you to build a site at little or no cost. Unfortunately, very few people will ever see your site unless you aggressively market and advertise. There are so many internet gourd art sites on the internet that it will only be through luck or hard work that anyone will discover yours. Free sites usually have annoying pop ups and advertising that will be a deterrent to many visitors. You may be better off spending some money to build a more professional looking site - but be forewarned: your costs may far outweigh any income until your presence is well established. You may also consider selling on venues such as [eBay](#) or [Etsy](#). Ebay is well established, and gets a lot of visitors every day. Unfortunately, most gourd art sells at very low prices. Only exceptional, unusual or pieces by very well known artist sell at anywhere close to fair market value. Etsy is a fast growing service where people can sell all kinds of handmade arts and crafts at a low cost. (Even if you don't ever sell on Etsy, you may enjoy just browsing to see plenty of beautiful art!)

**Next issue: Advertising, Marketing and Promoting your Art**

## *General observations on crafts, peoples and travels in China*

It would be impossible to describe all the wonderful things I saw on my recent trip to Asia.

My husband and I did a 10 day whirlwind land/riverboat tour in mainland China, then we joined a cruise that had ports of call in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand. (I'll have pictures from some of the other countries in a later issue.) There was never enough time to see everything we wanted to see, but we got a great taste of many places. This was definitely an educational tour as well as a pleasure trip.

I'm always interested in the local crafts and culture of each place I visit. In China, we saw many handmade items as well as plenty of machine made inexpensive items. Labor is very cheap in China - which means you could enjoy an hour massage for well under \$10, or a typical meal for under \$2. Americans feel that the Chinese have very hard lives, but the people generally seemed happy. There is plenty of excitement about the upcoming Olympics and the huge boost this will bring to their economy. There are construction cranes everywhere you look - in cities and even more rural areas as well. Although China is still a communist country, capitalism is alive and well in the big cities. While you could buy almost anything you could imagine, the average rural person still lives in relatively primitive conditions. Some Westerners have a hard time getting used to "squatter toilets" and the smoggy conditions caused by coal burning power generation, but the friendliness of the people makes up for minor inconveniences. Population control is a sensitive subject; but after seeing the incredible masses of people it becomes a bit more understandable.



### **Typical crafts of China**

The large fan is made from bamboo and painted silk.

The crystal snuff bottle has been painted from the inside. I watched a snuff bottle painter do some of this type of interior painting using a tiny right angled brush. He even let me try it; it's much harder than it looks!



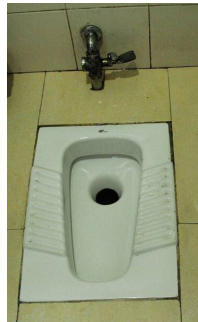
We ate plenty of interesting foods during our travels, some of which was unidentifiable. The meals were usually served family style from a large lazy susan. Meals consisted of several courses including soups, meats, vegetables and dessert. In Beijing, you could purchase anything ranging from standard fare consisting of steamed buns or large bowls of noodles with broth and either meat or vegetables, to exotic fare of skewers of fried scorpions, seahorses and cicadas. (Ugh, I didn't try any of those!) *\*No, I never got sick from the food. I just ate safely, omitting uncooked and/or unpeeled fruits and vegetables, and we drank only bottled water, as the water in China is unpotable.*



Skewers of fried scorpions and seahorses, yum!



Chestnuts roasting in a wok filled with hot rocks



Bring your own paper!



Fairly typical method of transporting merchandise. We saw others loaded with ducks or pigs.



**Street food - noodles and wontons.**

*We had a great meal one night at a small restaurant in Beijing where the locals ate. We had skewers of fried chicken, rice, a big bowl of noodles with beef and broth and sodas - all for about \$4! (They also had McDonald's in Beijing if you weren't brave.)*



Lots of colorful crafts - silks, pottery, fans, and more.

**Left: At the Summer Palace in Beijing.**

This was the only day that we saw anything close to a blue sky - and even then there was a grey haze in the air. Smog is bad all over the country since coal is their primary fuel for heating and cooking. Beijing is spending millions of dollars to move polluting factories and clean the air before the upcoming Olympics.





**Right: A part of the Forbidden City**  
Early in the day before the crowds arrived.



**At the old city wall of Xi'an**  
This is not atypical - the sky conditions often look like this in the larger cities.



**A highlight of the trip - the Terra Cotta Warriors of Xi'an**  
(Pronounced She-an)

The upper photos shows the largest of 4 covered sites, holding the main army. Other buildings contain archers, chariots and bronzes.

The bottom photo is a close up of just a few of these life sized warriors. Each face is individually sculpted so all of them are different.



**At the 3 Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River**

A controversial project that will raise the river 175 feet and will be completed in 2008. This is the largest dam in the world - well over a mile long. This project has displaced around 1.8 million people. Erosion, pollution, and damage to wildlife are among the negatives - generation of power and flood control are the positives.

**Right: Bang Bang men** (named for the sticks they carry on their shoulders) were hired to transport luggage and goods to and from the riverboat we were on for 3 days down the Yangtze. They carry loads of up to several hundred pounds for about \$3 - 5 per day



**Crowded Shopping Street - Shanghai**  
The crowds were a bit frightening at times!



**Children are the same all over the world.....**



**Tip of the Month: Pointers to help you enjoy a gourd show!**

1) Make a list of what raw gourds and supplies you REALLY need. Make a list, and write down everything you can think of. Then, prioritize which items you must purchase and the ones that you can live without. If you need any raw gourds or tools, add them to the list too. Write down specific questions you want to ask vendors about tool use, glues, materials, etc. Set a budget and plan to stick to it.

2) Be prepared to walk a lot, wear comfortable clothes and shoes, and take a fold up shopping bag and drinking water with you. You may also want to pack a light healthy snack to avoid the temptation to buy expensive, fattening goodies. Walk around the show area first, just checking it out and asking prices, and

making mental notes of where you saw things of interest. Then do a second round and buy the things on the top of your list first.

3) When you ask prices on finished gourd art, make sure you take into account factors such as quality of the work, originality, and your own gut feeling. Remember that many new artists often make the mistake of pricing their work too low. Their first show may be your only opportunity to purchase a particular artists' piece at a low price.

4) Allow yourself some splurge money, but determine how much before arriving at the show. After you have done all your priority shopping, then you can just buy what you like, but only up to your preset max.

5) If you can, take a break halfway through the show and evaluate your current purchases. Have you ever realized halfway through the show that you bought certain items twice, at different vendors?

6) Shows are the best place to actually try out tools to see which woodburner, saw or other tool really works well for you. Don't just take the word of the vendor that their tool is "the best". Try it yourself. Does the tool fit your hand comfortably, does it meet your needs, is it within your budget?

7) When purchasing, ask the name of the vendor for their card. Remember, most of the vendors are people who love gourds just like you do, and they can become good friends. Later on, if you find yourself buying always from the same suppliers, you can buy directly from them.

8) Immediately after purchasing, write the cost of the item and the name of the supplier on the package, business card or receipt. This helps you to remember the cost of certain items, where buy more of a specific or hard to find item from a supplier in the future; and to write accurate descriptions of the materials used in your gourd creations.

9) Finally, wash your hands after leaving the show. Handling raw gourds and even supplies all day can leave you feeling grubby. When leaving, ask for a "return pass" at the exit if you intend to return, most shows allow re-entry later that day.

10) When choosing what to wear to the show, Add a gourd name tag or other gourd jewelry. These items are eye-catchers, which will lead to compliments and comments, and is a great way to make new friends.

**Most of all, remember to have fun... !!!**

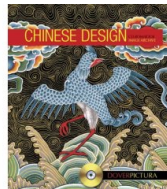
*\*Do you have a tip, tutorial or other idea we can feature here? Please [contact me](#).*

### Featured Gourd of the Month: **Asian Dragonflies**

Made as a wedding gift for Leah and Waylon  
Wuertz



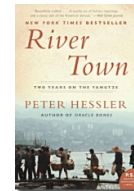
### Featured Books of the Month:



[Chinese Design](#)



[Chinese Folk  
Designs Book  
and CD Rom](#)



[River Town:  
Two years along the  
Yangtze by Peter  
Hessler](#)

Want to read more about Chinese arts, crafts and designs? Please visit the [Asian Cultures, Patterns and Designs page](#) for more titles from Amazon.

For more on the history and life in central China, try **River Town**. Written by a Peace Corps teacher about his 2 years living along the Yangtze. Excellent read!

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<http://www.arizonagourds.com/Nov07.html>

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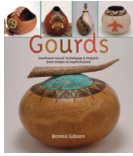
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