

'Pods' and 'Bowls' with Joe Hogan

In April 2014 I had the absolute pleasure of going on a course in glorious Connemara with Joe Hogan. The simple title above is misleading, the pods and the bowl are amongst the most interesting baskets I have ever made and are some of Joe's most recognisable creations.

I received a Study bursary from the BA, which covered most of the cost of the course. I not only had a wonderful time in Ireland, but also found Joe to be one of the most experienced and inspiring basketry teachers I have ever met.

I came to Joe with the desire to learn 'sculptural' basketry techniques. In particular, I wished to learn how to make a 'pod', a special sort of frame basket, using driftwood as the rim.

As a starting point, the pod involved using an interesting piece of wood, for example a naturally occurring hole where a branch has fallen off a tree. Once this is seasoned well, you can start to look at how you want to fix in your 'uprights'. Basically the hole is the base of the basket, if that makes any sense!

Armed with a drill, you carefully make holes in the wood you are using as a rim and fit in your stakes. Using small weavers, you begin with a three rod wale. This goes straight into a basic pairing weave, beginning the 'sides' or your pod. Adding by-stakes, this pairing continues for quite some time. Carefully bending the uprights, you gradually coax them into shape (like an swan's neck says Joe). Here you start French randing on the side of the structure. Re-tie your swan's neck more tightly. Next more waling for strength as you start to bend over the uprights on the long sides of the structure. Carefully cutting them to length and, avoiding kinking at all costs, you push them into an opposite gap to form the base of the basket. To level up the sides, you can do some packing if needed. With some more discretionary pairing and packing, you weave the end stakes and fill in the gaps to cunningly finish the base.

Next I made a frame basket using four pieces of wood from Joe's large supply of bogwood and driftwood. Selecting pieces that fitted together aesthetically, I used the drill and made holes for the basic frame of this basket. After this it really is more of a free form sculpture, as you need to ensure it looks right, more than following a set pattern. Each one of these frame baskets is different, as the driftwood frames are unique. It was simple to make yet very satisfying.

Sitting outside his workshop on the final day of the course, with a view of the loch and the mountains, I pondered what to make next. When one of my fellow students started making a 'bowl', I immediately knew that that was the next basket for me! This bowl is not just any bowl, but one with downy birch sides, and a beautiful yet simple border. This took another day to make. Joe sometimes uses bog myrtle for this basket. At home I am going to seek out suitable, native

materials. I think birch will be a good idea, maybe with some heather? I am looking forward to collecting my materials this winter and making another bowl this spring.

The combination of Irish hospitality, incomparable scenery, comfortable accommodation and the wealth of nearly 40 years working with willow, made Joe's course the best I have ever been on. Needless to say, I am hoping to visit Joe again in the next few years.

Following on from this course, I will be displaying and demonstrating the baskets I made on Joe's course at the West Wales Basketry Gathering – a sort of show & tell & shared food event.

We will be holding it on
1-4pm May 16th 2015, at the Tir-y-Gafel Eco-village, Pembrokeshire
(www.lammas.org.uk).

Please bring an interesting basket you have made.

At this gathering we will also consider booking a few workshops for West Wales Basketmakers, I have already asked Helen Campbell to teach a 'Welsh Tea-things' basket.

If you are interested in coming, you can look us up on Facebook, 'West Wales Basketmakers', where I can add you as a member, or you can contact me cassandra@cassandralishman.co.uk. I will also post updates on my website www.cassandralishman.net.

I hope to see some of you there!

Cassandra Lishman