



Arizona Gourds

April updates from the desert southwest...

Welcome to the April issue of the Arizona Gourds newsletter!



Gourd Related Trivia:

I think most of us are intrigued when we see gourds on our travels or examples of gourds from other cultures.

I enjoyed seeing photos of these "gourd-like" boulders that are located in **New Zealand**. According to Maori tradition, the boulders are gourds and calabashes, washed from the great voyaging canoe Arai-te-uru when it was wrecked upon landfall in New Zealand some 1000 years ago.

Thanks go out to my daughter for referring me to these interesting photos, and also to Yair from Israel for sharing one of his pictures. If you have other interesting gourd trivia or gourd sightings from your travels, please send them to me and I'll be glad to share them with others.

What's new on the [Arizona Gourds website?](#)

Back in Stock....

I recently received another shipment of the feathered cabochons. These are imported from China, and I'm never quite sure when they'll arrive or what I will get in each shipment. It's always an interesting adventure to order them, the language barrier sometimes leads to surprises! These usually sell out pretty quickly so I tried to get a few more this time around. You can find them on the [Special Embellishments page](#).

I've also added some new dichroic glass cabochons to the [Inlay Supplies page](#). These are great for inlaying into your gourds or for creating one of a kind jewelry. Use the shopping cart, or email me with your special requests.

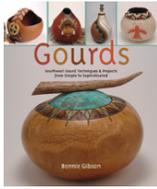


Update: Gourd Classes

I will be teaching classes at the **Welburn Gourd Festival** again this June. These classes are now full, (they filled up in less than a week!!) but I will be offering more classes in Tucson for those brave enough to stand a bit of heat. I should have a full schedule of classes in the fall, but sometime this summer I will also offer an inlaid inlay class and a closed coiling class. Be sure to join the class updates list if you want to receive information about upcoming classes. *I'd also be very interested in hearing from you if you have an idea of a new class you'd like to see me offer.



[Join The Class updates List](#)



Gourds Southwest Gourd Techniques & Projects from Simple to Sophisticated

All books I ship are autographed.

(Please click on the book cover for ordering information.)

April Feature: Composition and Creativity - Part Three Composition Skills

There are many art textbooks that will explain composition rules and formulas for painters; gourd artists have the additional concern of working with a three dimensional item. No matter which medium is used, an artist will strive to create works that draw the eye to focal points of interest. A successful piece will unconsciously direct the eye from one interesting area to another, so that the entire piece is seen as a cohesive and pleasing whole.

There are decisions that need to be made at the beginning of any project. How will the finished piece be displayed, and will it be designed with one or more points of interest? A gourd vessel or sculpture that will be placed in a niche or corner can be designed with only one main focal area of interest, and the decoration of less exposed areas can be kept to a minimum. Conversely, other gourds are more effective when decorated with a series of patterns and focal points that allow the gourd to be turned or viewed from all sides.

Tools such as changes in rhythm, contrast, color, or depth can capture the viewer's attention and lead the eye from one area of the gourd to another. A composition that is created in the round can be unified by balancing focal points with areas of repetition. The **rhythm** of a piece provides continuity, and can be established by the use of intervals of recurring or related elements. The repeated use of patterns, color, shapes or textures, when combined with a judicious use of dissimilar elements or embellishments, can be used to accent some areas and shift the eye from place to place.

Contrast is used to attract the eye and emphasize focal points. Contrast is achieved by adding areas of differences, such as light against dark, dissimilar textures, lines that change directions or cross, or varying sizes. Areas where contrast is minimized will be de-emphasized, helping the design to flow and allowing the eye to move towards the next focal area.

Color can be used to emphasize or minimize attention. Bold colors will attract the eye, while muted or pale colors will recede into the distance. Complex compositions will often look better with a limited palette of colors; use similar hues throughout to sooth the eye and allow for compatibility between the areas of emphasis.

Depth changes provide additional areas of contrast that can emphasize design elements. Negative space can be utilized by cutting out portions of the gourd surface or by adding irregularly shaped openings. Dimensional additives such as embellishments, built up areas or added gourd pieces can draw attention and provide eye-catching focal areas.

Generally, art will look more pleasing to the eye when the focal points are not placed at the exact center of the piece. Often, moving the design slightly above or below center will be more attractive. Off centered areas can be balanced with other areas of dominance. Symmetry is a useful tool in design, but asymmetrical patterns or unexpected line directions can add a fresh element to the overall composition.

There are no hard and fast rules that govern the way an artist should interpret a subject. With some experimentation and some practice, a person's own style will emerge. Placing elements of design together into pleasing compositions is only one step along the road to creativity. The true creative process should combine composition with a meaningful statement and the use of innovation and experimentation.

Some Examples



Left: This moose gourd has one prominent design centered on the front. There is good **contrast** between the dark moose and the lighter background. The eye is drawn directly to the center of the gourd and then follows around the circular pattern to take in the entire picture.

Below: The addition of carved ripples, cut out holes and the butterfly adds a lot of **depth** to this piece. The eye takes in the whole picture, but at the same time, it subconsciously notices all the different levels.





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Above: This gourd shows a definite **rhythm** with the use of repeating ridges and the carved band. The eye tends to follow the repeating pattern and then pull away to look at the lid.

**Did you find this information to interesting or useful? These are only some of the basic elements of design just to get you thinking. If you'd like to read more, please check out the [featured book of the month](#) below. It is a well written book with plenty of stunning art pieces and wonderful photography to illustrate the points of design.*

Tip of the Month: Shop Safety - Dust Collection

This month, [Debbie Kishineff](#) has graciously shared her setup for safe and dust free indoor carving. The parts she uses are relatively inexpensive and easy to obtain. Debbie is fairly new to gourds, but she is already on the right track in protecting herself from future respiratory problems.

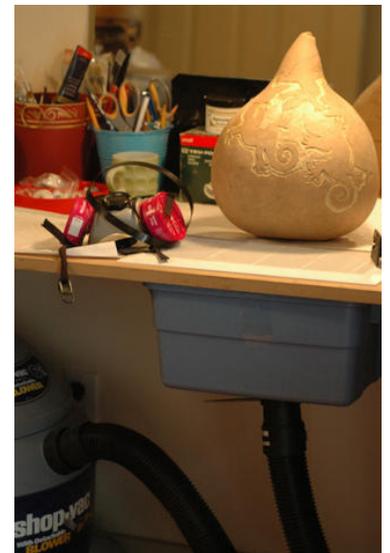
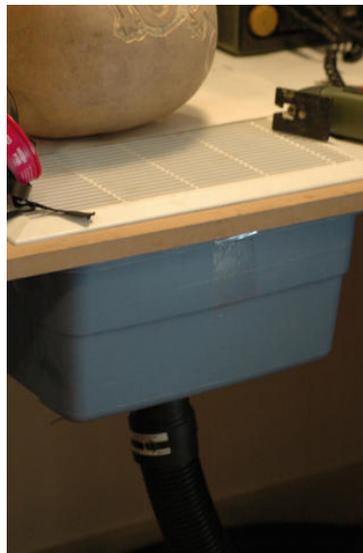
Because she needs to work indoors, and was worried about her long-term health, she purchased a good respirator to use while cutting and carving. For additional protection, she added a homemade dust collection system. She started with an inexpensive plastic heater vent screen which was inset into a cut out section of her workspace table. She also purchased a small rubbermaid tub that was about the same size as the vent, and a [shop vac adapter](#) (about \$10) Cut a hole of the correct size in the bottom of the tub and bolt the adapter right into the tub. Inside the Rubbermaid tub, she also added a sheet of semi rigid plastic cut into 4 wedge shaped pieces that were taped together to help funnel the dust down into the adapter. (You could also cut off the top part of the tubing on the adapter which reduce the need for this additional funnel.) The Rubbermaid tub was then screwed onto the underside of the table, directly below the heater vent screen. She hooked a 6.5 HP [shop vac](#) (hers cost about \$100 - you can use smaller ones, but more power will produce a better vacuum) to the adapter. To make sure the hose wouldn't slip off, she drilled a small hole on opposite sides and ran a piece of coat hanger metal through the holes. (A hose clamp would also work.) This system sucks up every bit of dust, with no gourd dust either in the air or on the table. She still uses the respirator - just in case - but the system works very well and is a relatively inexpensive solution to the dust problem! (You can also use the shop vac to clean your work area afterwards. Just unattach the hose from your setup.)

If you don't have the luxury of a permanent workspace, you might want to consider a simple lapboard setup. Cut a hole in the center of a large lapsized board (plywood or even heavy foamcore) and attach a shopvac adapter. (I would mount it to the bottom of the board through an appropriate size hole, and cut the top tube flush with the work surface.) Run your shop vac hose directly to the adapter and place the board on your lap with the hose extending down between your legs. Cover the top of the hole in the lapboard with a piece of cheesecloth or screening to keep carving bits and small tools from being sucked into the vacuum hole. You might also consider adding a lip around the edge of the board to keep things from rolling off the lapboard while you're working, and adding some foam or toweling to the bottom of the board for comfort.

One type of shop vac adapter.
(The staggered tube allows the use of many different vacuum hose sizes.) [Click on photo to view this item at Amazon.com](#)



Photos to the right show Debra's set up - note the plastic heater vent screen on the table top, and the hose and shop vac attached below the tub.



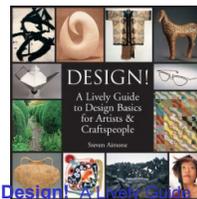
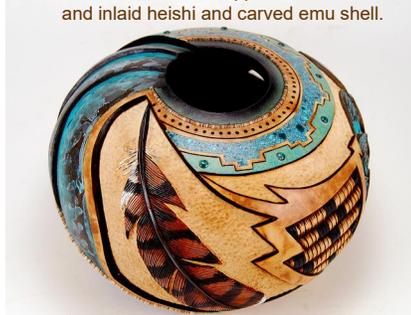
**Do you have a tip or tutorial we can feature here? Please [contact me](#).*

Featured Gourd of the Month:
Water and Wind

Featured Book of the Month:

This is a wonderful resource for

This gourd was started as a demonstration piece in a few of my classes, so it has a wide variety of techniques! The photos below show the front and back sides. This gourd features Inlaid inlay, patina paint, inlaid turquoise cabochons, carved feathers, ripples, waves, faux basketry, and inlaid heishi and carved emu shell.



[Design! A Lively Guide to Design Basics for Artists and Craftspeople](#)
(Softcover)

[Design! A Lively Guide to Design Basics for Artists and Craftspeople](#)
(Hardcover)

those interested in learning more about designing your own art - what works and why. All of the elements of design are beautifully illustrated with photos of beautiful art objects (which are inspiring in themselves!) The book also incorporates some simple and informative exercises that will help you to get some hands-on learning.

This book got wonderful reviews and is one I have personally purchased and enjoyed.

**Be sure to visit all these different book pages to see some of the many other titles that are available. Click on each topic to see a variety of books about each subject.*

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