

**MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

**ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS CLIFFORD “SKIP” JOHNSON**

Clifford “Skip” Johnson, the former boy wonder, passed away in Fitchburg, Wisconsin on Wednesday, September 9, 2009 at age 81.

He was born in Painted Post, New York on June 14, 1928. While serving his country in the Navy, he met his wife Joan Lage. They married on December 15, 1951.

Johnson received a bachelor of science degree from the State University of New York at Oswego and a master of fine arts degree from the School of American Craftsmen at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He was one of the first three graduates of the new wood program at RIT. He started his teaching career in 1960 at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He then moved to Madison to establish a fine art wood program in the Department of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He taught from 1965-1990 and retired as professor emeritus.

Even after retirement, Skip continued his role as an educator in all aspects of his life. He was a wonderfully creative man with a great sense of humor and was loved by all who knew him. He was inherently generous as a friend and teacher, so his students usually turned into lifelong friends. Many graduates from Johnson’s woodworking program went on to be prominent woodworkers and/or teachers in some of the best woodworking programs in the country.

In addition to being a world-renowned master woodworker and a master of hi-jinks, Skip enjoyed horseshoes, gardening, travel, curling and beer. He and his wife Joan hosted an annual party at his farm in Stoughton that always took place on the Saturday of Syttende Mai. Skip and Joan’s party was so much a part of their friends’ annual calendar that the Johnson’s did not even bother to send out invitations. If it was Syttende Mai weekend, that meant it was time to head over to the Johnson farm for live music, highly competitive croquet matches played with a stunning Skip Johnson-fabricated croquet set and lots of dancing. One notable aspect of the gatherings was the very wide age range of three to four generations of folks mixing and catching up on news. The event attracted a huge crowd with cars overflowing the farm fields and parking up and down route 138. Many of the attendees were former students of Johnson’s who returned annually to visit their mentor and friend.

Johnson’s artwork was included in 121 national and international exhibitions and 26 major art-related publications. He was the recipient of 32 awards and 19 grants including a National Endowment for the Arts Craftsman Grant. Over the course of his career he gave an amazing 74 workshops and lectures at venues all over the country and in Costa Rica. He was a frequent member of the summer faculty at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina and at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. The Penland School always played a special role in Johnson’s life as he was the first pioneering wood resident when that school was setting up its internationally renowned residency program, which has served as a model for many other subsequent artist residency programs. Many of his best lifelong friends are from those days at Penland as many of the early residents went on to very prominent and successful artistic careers.

A furniture-maker by training, Johnson drew from the surrealist sensibility of dream-like, fantastic images that associate with another imaginary world that combined playfulness with and pointed messages. His work often explored humor and narrative through objects comprised of exquisite, lathe-turned parts made from various woods. The woodworking world is often divided between those that excel at lathe turning

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and make exclusively lathe-based work, and the non-lathe world. Skip Johnson was unique in that he crossed effortlessly between both worlds and was recognized and admired by both distinct “camps” for his adventurous designs and his incomparable technical skills.

Another of his masterpieces was the imaginary cemetery he constructed along route 138. Drivers passing at 60 miles per hour might not realize that if they stopped and investigated, they would find the tombstones memorialized such lost treasures as the ten cent cup of coffee, the 2-cent library fine, and the polyester suit.

Perhaps his official letterhead stationary says it best: C.R. “Skip” Johnson, Wisconsin’s Wonderfully Wild Woodworking Wizard and All Around Good Guy.”

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