

## Visiting Artist-Geoff Vine, Waunakee, WI

In 1992, Geoff set out to carve and paint a half dozen Bluebill decoys for the upcoming season. It was many months before the first decoy came off the bench, and many years before his skills caught up with his vision. Geoff now carves a couple dozen decoys each year. Most are commissioned by collectors, but a handful still make their way into Geoff's hunting rig. Enjoying a traditional hunting experience that includes his hand carved decoys is the greatest reward for his long hours in the shop.



His decoys are carved from Maine cedar with hand tools, then hollowed and constructed with time-tested methods. For many years, Geoff has brush painted his decoys with Jansen's acrylics. Now he's beginning to oil paint, another facet of the tradition that he's striving to master. Geoff's biggest influence, and his inspiration for oil painting, comes from New Jersey carvers like George Strunk, Sean Sutton, and Jode Hillman. Geoff believes their oil painting is what sets them apart. There is no better way to achieve the look, feel, and highly desired patina of a traditional decoy.

The influence of these modern day carvers, combined with the influence of the past masters of the decoy carving world, are where Geoff's unique style comes from. Geoff spends as much time researching and studying historical decoys and their makers as he does crafting his own art. Taking classes and learning new techniques will only get a carver started. The aspects of style like regional influences, large volume production, and geographical differences in use, must be studied from a historical perspective.

Geoff also enters his decoys in competitions throughout the country, although his unique style rarely fits a competition norm. He has enjoyed the most success at the Ocean County show in Tuckerton, NJ. Geoff won Best of Show in the Barnegat Bay division in 2007 and Best of Show in the Delaware River division in 2008. Having George Strunk as member of the judging panel made the 2008 award even more prideful. Geoff will have decoys competing in this year's Toms River show and hopes his New Jersey influence shines through.

Geoff's favorite part of attending the shows is meeting other contemporary carvers that are starting to make their way in the decoy world. There is a mutual respect between artists that leads to great relationships. Sharing and learning is always part of the fun. There is a growing fraternity of young men and women who will be the caretakers of the art and craft of decoy carving in the future. Geoff is thankful that he has a chance to be part of the tradition.