Decoy Show Hurley Conklin Awardee: George Strunk

By Pat Johnson

George Strunk started carving ducks when a neighbor moved next to his family's summer cabin on the Delaware Bay shoreline and hung out a Decoy sign. The neighbor was noted decoy carver James P. Hand, protégé of Hurley Conklin himself.

"He started building a house and my father and brother asked if I wanted to meet the new neighbor so we went over and he was out chopping decoys. I got talking to him and he asked if I wanted to try it and I said sure—so he chopped me out a blank and I took it home and would bring it back and he would show me more. It was a square little bufflehead. I think I had a pocket-knife and a rasp—I don't know what I used exactly. My main goal was to have something to hunt with."

Strunk was born in 1958 and lives in Glendora, New Jersey, just around the block from where he grew up. He carves decoys full time now after retiring from his work as a Union ironworker when he worked on buildings in Philadelphia and Atlantic City.

Strunk mainly carves Delaware style decoys but also enjoys carving Barnegat Bay style birds, what he started with. "Jamie carved Barnegat style and so did I until I met a guy around here (Glendora) who asked me why I wasn't carving Delaware style, so I started that. I still do Barnegat Bay style occasionally." The difference between the styles is the Delaware 'puddle' birds have carved wing tips and more details than the traditional Barnegat Bay decoy.

He also carves shorebird stuck-ups, and upland birds like plovers, grouse, quail and woodcock. He has been a regular vendor at the Ocean County Decoy and Gunning Show starting in 1986. He has also won ribbons in the various decoy-carving contests.



George Strunk, 2025. Photo Credit: Pat Johnson.

"Even if I didn't get a table I always go. You meet a lot of people you don't see all year so it's good. I've been doing it for so long, I know just about everybody –it's fun, it's a great show."

Strunk, like many boys in rural areas, started hunting rabbits when he was 12 with his brother and cousins. He didn't have far to go as there were extensive woodlands and a creek near his home. "I grew up on the same block where I live now. Timber Creek is across the road and I used to hunt it until the 90's. It was nothing to walk down the street and cross the railroad tracks with your gun and dog and people would ask—'How'd you do?' But with urban sprawl I can't do that now. It was a totally different world."

When at his parent's cabin in Goshen he hunted ducks with his brother from a makeshift blind. Later as a young man he hunted with Jamie Hand and another noted decoy carver, Bob White. He learned a lot about painting from White—who wasn't a 'teacher' but was fine with letting a young carver watch and learn.

"I watched everybody I could—that's if someone would let you watch 'em."

Strunk said he doesn't hunt as much as he used to. "As you get older it's a bit harder, but I was a fanatical duck hunter when I was young...I clean them and cook them. With ducks I BBQ them or roast them sometimes...I read a recipe where you put an inch of Coca-cola in the pan. But the best way I like to cook duck is in a stew with onions, potatoes and carrots. The best eating ducks are teal, wood ducks, mallards, pintails... I also shoot quail and doves. Doves are the best eating. I used to have a cabin in Maine and I shot grouse. They're the best eating. I don't shoot anything I don't eat."

Hunting birds has been a boon to Strunk's decoy carving. "You get to handle them, see them up close—it helps. But today there are such great pictures on the Internet."

In his workshop behind his home in Glendora, finished, semi-finished and just-begun decoys are scattered around his workbenches. He keeps a very neat shop—tools and paints all have their place within arms length.



Gull carving by George Strunk. Photo Credit: Guyette & Deeter.

He likes to start with a chunk of Jersey cedar or northern cedar from Maine and adds details to his decorative birds-- beaks in poplar, glass eyes. He uses a pattern and then starts to chop out the body of the bird and the separate head using a hatchet. Then trims and forms them using a draw blade, gouges and knife.

"I like painting and I consider myself still learning. There are certain brush strokes that you learn—I'm always trying something new—I'm more relaxed painting than I used to be."

Strunk's decoys are now collector's items and after 40 plus years, he has the ability to, "...do what I feel like doing—I don't want to take a lot of orders I can't fill. I have enough people who know me and want to buy stuff and they usually ask, 'What are you working on?' I did deadlines for years and I think they come out better if you do something you want to do. That's where I am now."



Green-winged Teal decoys by George Strunk. Photo Credit: Guyette & Deeter.