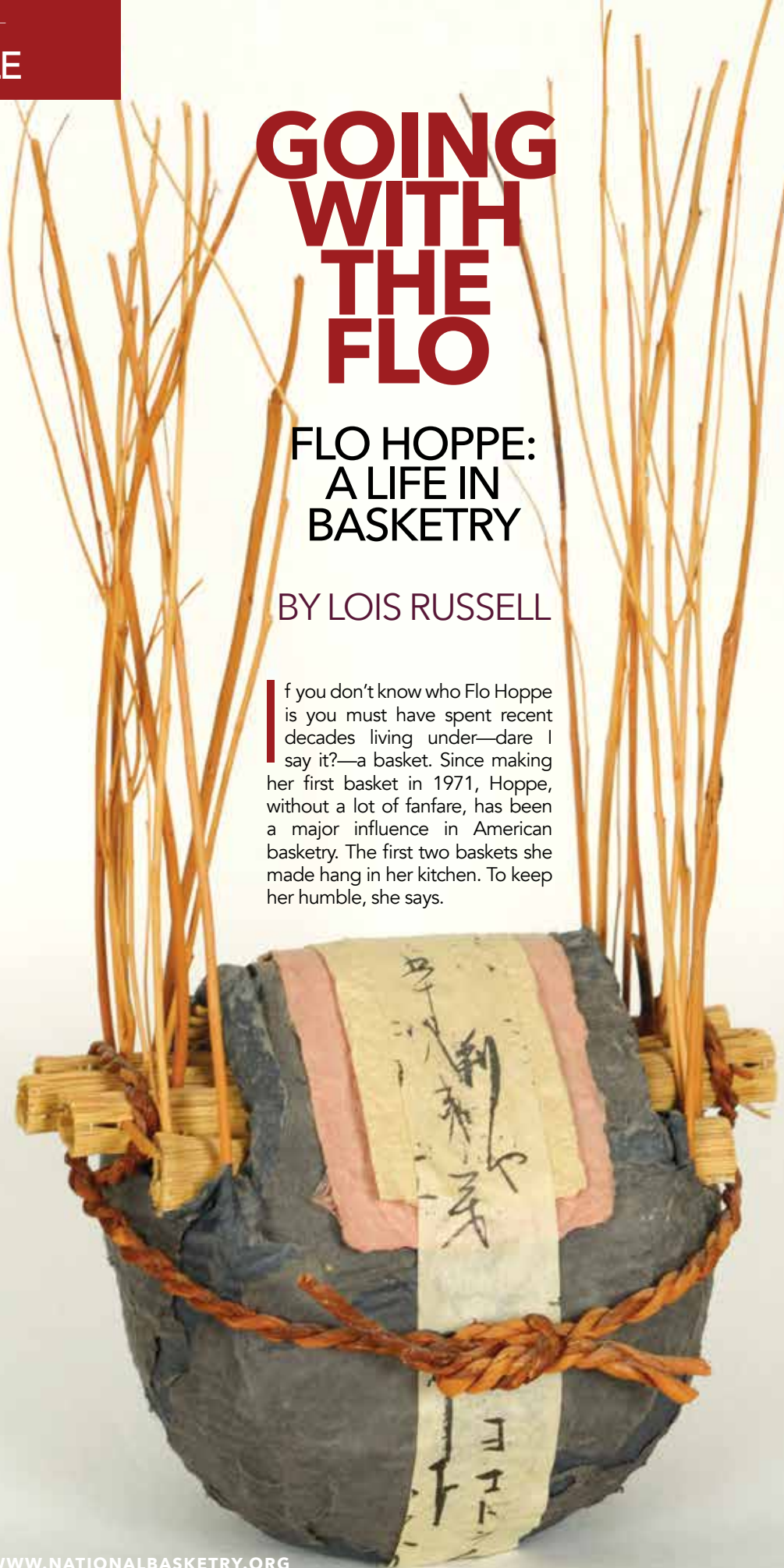


GOING WITH THE FLO

FLO HOPPE: A LIFE IN BASKETRY

BY LOIS RUSSELL

If you don't know who Flo Hoppe is you must have spent recent decades living under—dare I say it?—a basket. Since making her first basket in 1971, Hoppe, without a lot of fanfare, has been a major influence in American basketry. The first two baskets she made hang in her kitchen. To keep her humble, she says.



MIKE PANTO

When it comes to basketry in America, her fingerprints are everywhere.



Worn, torn, water-warped copies of her books are basket makers' standbys. The articles she wrote with Cynthia Taylor for NBO are collector's items. By her own estimation, Hoppe has taught thousands of students, some of whom are now teaching. When it comes to basketry in America, her fingerprints are everywhere.

One reason is that Hoppe knows her stuff. Basket makers rely on her. Can't quite remember how to make a twined arrow? *Contemporary Wicker Baskets*, page 22. Want to try a Rinko base? Page 38.

During a tour of a collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Hoppe found some mislabeled items.

"There were a couple of baskets in the Japanese display that had either the wrong materials listed or a wrong technique. Things like that just jump out at me—or at any knowledgeable basket maker," she explains, adding, "I just happened to be the culprit."

Right there you have the combination of expertise, humility, and humor that is Hoppe. She has not sought acclaim. No juried exhibitions and booth shows for her. An award here and there: in 2013, NBO awarded her the Lifetime Achievement Award. Her humility, her wicked sense of humor, and her genuine warmth have helped build a sense of community.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Interior/Anterior; 2000; rattan, handmade paper, willow; 12" x 8"

THIS PAGE:
Sarabande; 2008; rattan, Japanese cane, tiger bamboo; 10" x 10"



Flo Hoppe displaying her Lifetime Achievement Award.

Hoppe didn't set out to have a lifetime in baskets. To hear her tell it, it just happened. She made a basket because she was looking for something to do. She got hooked the way basket making can hook you. There were no good books to learn from, so she wrote a book. Then she started writing articles for magazines. One book led to another and another, as did the articles. There were no classes, so she started teaching. And the invitations to teach came in, first from all around this country, then Japan, Australia, and Russia.

Hoppe studied textiles in college, but it wasn't until five years later that she made her first basket. She and her young family were on their way from a military posting in Japan to one in New York and had stopped at her mother's house in Chicago. This is the mother who had taken Hoppe and her brothers all over the city nurturing in them an abiding love of all things creative. It was also the mother who always had a project to hand and, in her basement—down

there with the Maytag washer and the ping-pong table—was a hank of round reed and a booklet from 1912. Flo had gone there "to look for something to do" and met her future.

"I don't know what it was," she says, "I just enjoyed it. Three-dimensional work appeals to a lot of people. It's more lifelike. Work in two dimensions hangs on a wall. You can't interact with it."

Using library books as resources, she tried all kinds of materials and techniques, but always came back to round reed. But for Hoppe, the exploration of all things basket didn't end there.

To her, what she doesn't yet know about baskets is as important as making more baskets. She picks up "import" baskets just to see how they are made. Even though the materials are poor, they

THIS PAGE:
Khamari; 2001;
dyed rattan; Japanese cane,
tiger bamboo; 11" x 10"

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Tower; 1990; rattan, linen
thread, handmade paper,
vines, onion skins;
12" x 6"

"Flo is always willing to help unravel the mysteries of the toughest of techniques".

— JoAnn Catsos

demonstrate a range of interesting techniques. Some just need a look, others come home, but none are pulled apart.

"Flo is always willing to help unravel the mysteries of the toughest of techniques," says fellow maker JoAnn Catsos. "She is always up to, and loves, a challenge."

Her books grew out of her need to document and pass along what she has learned. The first book, *Wicker Basketry*, was the one she wishes she had when she was learning, and the second, *Contemporary Basket Weaving*, was written because she had learned so much more. The articles written with Cynthia Taylor for the NBO magazine are comprehensive in their attention to research and detail.

Hoppe lets her curiosity about baskets take her where it will. A workshop with Vladimir Yarish led her to the dangerous woods of Russia (think killer mosquitos, not bears) to harvest, which led to a five-year project with Yarish and Jim Widess resulting in a book, *Plaited Basketry with Birch Bark*. A 1994 trip to Japan with Dianne Stanton, Judy Olney, and Chris Lamb, influenced the work of all four artists, and still feeds Hoppe's current work and research. It was on that trip that she developed her interest in embellishing with many layers on a fairly straightforward basket.

"Watching them do it, I could just understand," she says. "It was like open sesame."

Public interest in basket making comes and goes, Hoppe points out. She has worked to promote the craft, supporting NBO and helping create opportunities for other people to teach. For several years Hoppe helped run a small conference in Rome, New York, where she lives. One year a couple from Vermont came, enjoyed it, and went home to encourage their daughter to call Hoppe about getting a similar program in Stowe, Vermont. That daughter, Merry Vigneau, did just that, and Hoppe's





conference evolved into The Stowe Basketry Festival. Hoppe still reviews the applications every year and has taught there each of the 27 years of the event. (When it falls on her birthday her husband drives over, gives her a bouquet and a smooch, and heads home.)

Vigneau estimates that Hoppe has taught 126 different original designs at Stowe. "That is a lot of creativity," she says. "How many students have taken her classes? There are a lot of people that she has touched."

Hoppe's own teaching is a natural extension of her enthusiasm and research, but it takes more than knowledge and skill to gain the reputation she has. "She has a calm demeanor which inspires confidence in her students, even as she is teaching them a complex Japanese-inspired weave structure," explains Catsos, who has taught next to her many times.

According to Hoppe, teaching is about listening and kindness. "You need to be aware of who needs help, going around and around and around. Always be aware. Keep circling the room."

Her students have come to expect a fair dose of good old-fashioned fun. "There is also a mischievous

THIS PAGE:
TOP: **Neolithic Braid**; 1999; rattan; 15" x 10" x 7"

CENTER: The first basket Flo Hoppe created, circa 1971.

BOTTOM: The second basket Flo Hoppe created, circa 1971.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Mai; 2015; rattan, cane; 10" x 9"

side to Flo," says Joanne Howard, a repeat student, "She is always up for an adventure."

One year Hoppe dressed in pink from head to toe to help out at an NBO auction. As "Flomingo" she waltzed auction items around the room, raising spirits and bids. And then there is the "Toilets of the World" slideshow, perhaps her most famous (infamous?) prank. During a routine teacher slideshow at one conference, the audience suddenly found themselves looking at a very peculiar toilet. "You know how it is," she says, describing a typical lecture. "Then I made this basket...then I made this basket...so then I threw in some toilets from all over the world. I have seen some pretty interesting ones."

What is next for Hoppe? She plans to cut back on teaching even though she can't give it up. "It is pure enjoyment, watching people get a hold of it. It is theirs forever. I remember one woman who was so excited she was like a wiggly puppy."

There are Japanese basketry pamphlets to explore and patterns to design. And there are sure to be more jokes. "I do like to laugh," she says.

Hoppe will be teaching Japanese Basketry Techniques at the 2019 NBO Conference. Learn more about Flo Hoppe and her work at www.flohoppe.com

Lois Russell is a basket maker living in Somerville, Massachusetts. www.loisrussell.com



"I do want to say that I take my work seriously, but I don't take myself seriously. That would be way too much work". — Flo Hoppe



LEARN FROM FLO HOPPE

Spiral Weave Wicker Basket Instructional DVD

Flo Hoppe demonstrates, in step-by-step detail, how to create a spiral weave basket done with a 3-rod wale. All the techniques in this basket are very basic for making round baskets, and should inspire confidence in making any basket in round reed. Run time 56 minutes.

Available for purchase at www.nationalbasketry.org/store