



No. 11, Tiki Lantern—an introduction to palm wood.



The graphic nature of squinting, hollow eye designs were largely inspired by Hopi Kachina Dolls.



The Hollow Eye design began with the very first Tikis carved from Eric Rindal designs.

# CRAZY AL'S TIKI CORNER



"Tiki Lantern," my Tiki #11, introduced me to the interesting nature of palm wood. It was also a major step in defining my style and remains one of my favorite Tikis. As with many of my first tikis, the palm stump of Tiki #11 came from my original Tiki log hunt in Arizona during the summer of 1996. In the fall of 1998, Greg Escalante and Doug Nason asked me to be a part of their first public "Tiki Art" show. It was held at the incredible Bahooka in Rosemead, Calif. While plotting what Tikis I might carve for this show, I discovered the old Queen Palm stump in the garage and noticed an interesting change—the vast amount of water in the palm wood had evaporated, leaving a huge void in the center of the stump. I saw that the star shaped gap went clear through its 24-inch expanse. Could I sculpt this thing? I thought, "Sure, I had sculpted a similar type of wood in miniature before." Some of my first carving was in Yucca cuttings. The inside of the Yucca stem is almost all-fibrous pulp. When it dries it creates a perfect wood tube, which I carved into Tiki-faced candleholders with open mouths. An idea popped into my head. A giant Tiki Lantern, with a big ol' flame. That would be cool! Hollowing out the inside was easy. It was soft and still moist. Carving the outside was another story. I have since learned that the Queen Palm is a close sister to the Coconut Palm. The wood is just as beautiful a dark red-brown as coconut wood when polished. However, the wood, when cured, is just as hard as the extremely hard coconut wood. I bent more than one chisel carving the face of Tiki Lantern.

The thin walls of the hollowed out lantern lent itself to a shallow relief carving. The large open mouth forced an economy of space for the design of the eyes and nose. They also carried the "Hollow Eye" gene inherited from the first Tikis I carved from Eric Rindal designs (my art school friend and founder of the band APE). The combination hollow eye and squinting look would become a trademark feature of my style. The graphic nature of the eye design may have been inspired by growing up around Hopi Katsina [Kachina] dolls, with faces that look like they were designed by Mondrian. A straight, stark black line on a primary color backdrop invokes all the spiritually mystical awareness you might want in the eye of a supernatural being. The realization

of the lantern's design sealed my conviction to follow my own style. The merger of Tiki and this Modernistic look was nothing new. In contrast to other attributes such as body style and technique, however, I felt satisfied with the path I was heading down.

The mouth design also emerged as a definitive signature in my work. The mouth was another characteristic started from Rindal's drawings. A broad, symmetrical outline around the teeth became a canvas on which to add Polynesian Tapa influenced designs. Later, more elaborate traditional Fijian Tapa design would be incorporated as my technique progressed. This direct association to the art of Polynesia was my way of connecting my otherwise very non-Tiki stylings to their origins. "Decorating" Tikis with these complex and beautiful designs also harkens back to the Katsina dolls, adorned with body paint and intricately patterned tapestries depicting their spiritual origins. As the Katsina dolls influenced me, I influenced others. I soon found similar oral decorative treatments on Tiki Diablo mugs. Later, I saw similar designs on Gecko masks accompanying my own work at Tiki's Grill and Bar in Waikiki. About 90% of my Tikis, excluding those carved with my band APE, have a mouth design related to Tiki #11.

As one of my favorites, Tiki #11 has stayed in my own collection. I have brought it along to many events. It lit the stage poolside at Tiki Oasis 3, Tiki Dive In. It would become the first Tiki that I used as a reference to create designs for Bone Production products in collaboration with other artists. In 2004, I commissioned Sam Gambino to do a portrait of my Tiki Lantern in his own particular style. Sam interpreted it as a meteorite ball of fire. Tiki #11 was also selected to be part of the header for the Critiki website. The unique nature of this seemingly unusable Queen Palm stump certainly created a launching point for many more Tikis. But it's just another Tiki in the corner ... on fire.

King Tiki and its commemorative mug can be found at [www.Tikimania.com](http://www.Tikimania.com).

Photos courtesy of Tikimania.com

