



*This page, top to bottom: The artist at work in his studio; A lamp made from an old bronze fire nozzle and an inverted stainless steel funnel.
Opposite page, top to bottom: Setting up in the vise before a cut; Searching the scrap yard for mechanical gems.*

BEAUTIFUL MACHINES

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRIS EASTLAND

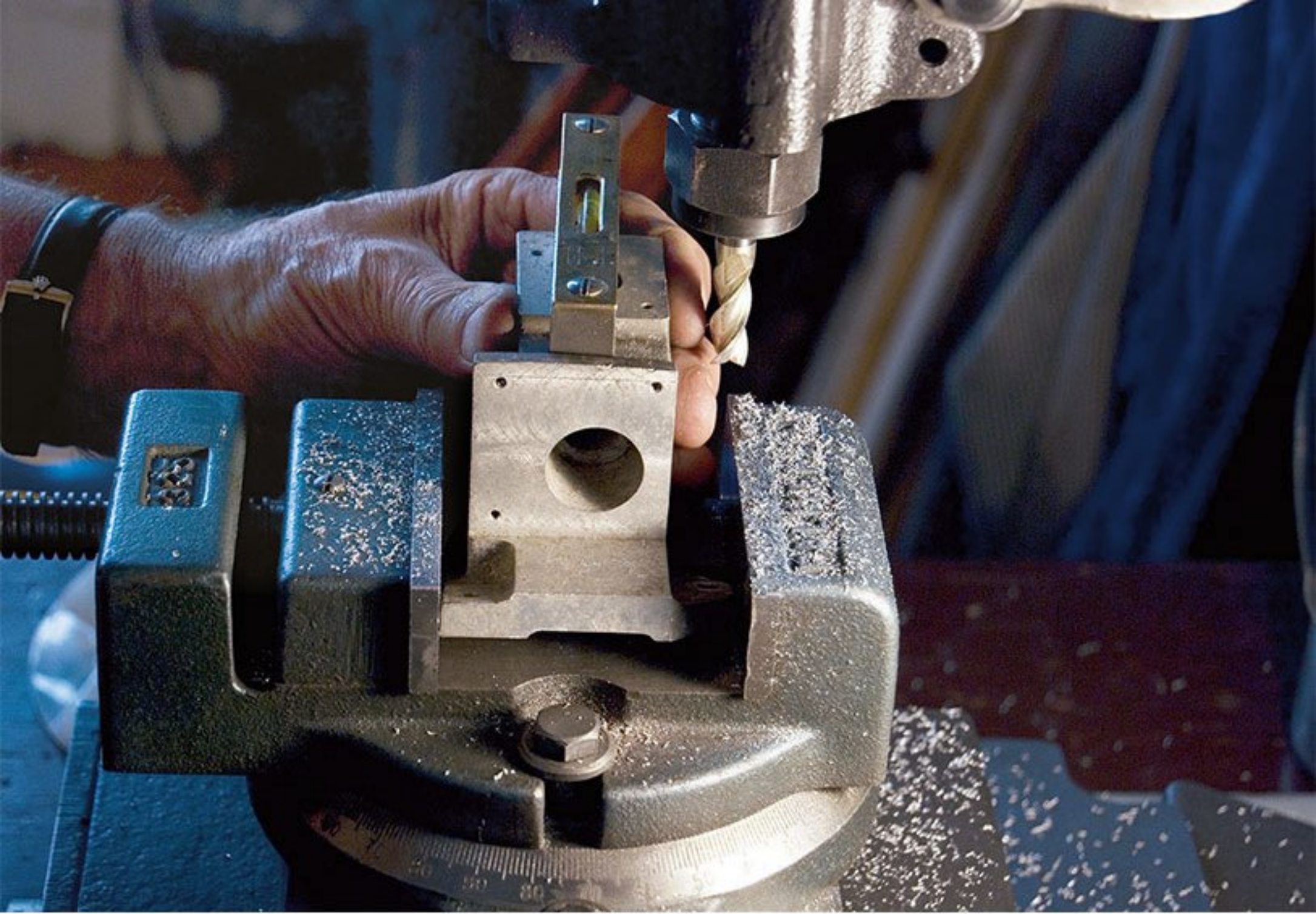
"I DO NOT MEAN by beauty of form such beauty as that of animals or pictures...I mean straight lines and circles, and the plane or solid figures which are formed out of them by turning-lathes and rulers and measurers of angles; for these I affirm to be not only relatively beautiful...but they are eternally and absolutely beautiful." —SOCRATES IN PLATO'S PHILEBUS 51 C

When I first visited the artist John Snyder's home, I was immediately drawn to the most extraordinary lamp resting on a table in his living room. Elegantly symmetrical, its delicacy belied its industrial beginnings. One by one, uniquely modern accents sprang forth from the room. A table made from an old industrial Fairbanks scale, a marine chronometer—bold in design and suspended between two cast-iron stove burners—even a dictionary stand with a built-in lamp.



An insatiable problem solver, he learned the machinist's craft early in his career when faced with the challenge of designing carpet-cutting tools, several of which were patented. He later became an executive director at Morgan Stanley where his ease with numbers allowed him to excel. The sculptor's studio is a work of art unto itself. A tightly woven web of tools, machine parts, bicycles, books, and charts, it is the birthplace of all his creations. I imagined the scene immortalized in oil paint as some kind of machine-aged Vermeer picture.

"John Snyder is a unique American sculptor, most notably so for his combination of ingenuity and modesty," says Colin Eisler, a leading art historian and Robert Lehman Professor of Fine Arts at NYU. Snyder, the artist, is known mostly for his creations with practical applica-





This page, top to bottom: Snyder at the bandsaw; Snyder's latest work, "Solar System," conjures ideas of some futuristic solar-powered factory. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: A stainless steel sphere, a magnifying lens, and the guts of a quartz clock motor are happily joined; The chopsaw showers itself with sparks; Careful measurements make all the difference. Snyder puts the final touches on his latest creation; Finding beauty in chaos; Snyder bores a clean hole through solid oak.

tions, but I had the distinct pleasure of documenting the creation of his work "Solar System," an abstraction based on Snyder's vision of a solar-powered station.

Vulcan Scrap Metal Co. in Stamford, Connecticut is a hot bed of inspiration for the artist. We spent one morning sifting through the long forgotten by-products from every kind of machinery imaginable. The place is crawling with bits and pieces, wires, electronics, bearings, screws, and even a discarded set of night-vision goggles from a tank. Snyder arrives with a clear idea of what shapes and structures will suit his work, but in the presence of such beauty as the scrap yard offers his imagination, his plans can take new and unexpected directions. In the studio, too, he works in an improvisatory man-

ner as exciting to watch unfold as it is to behold its product. Moving from lathe to milling machine, from chopsaw to bandsaw, Snyder has developed a facility with these tools which, combined with careful measurement and a keen eye for composition, produces stunning works of art that have functions.

"Such characteristic inventiveness is in the tradition of Alexander Calder and David Smith," Professor Eisler says. "Snyder initially discovered his own world in the technical constructions of others—clocks and lamps—but he is now off and running on his own." ♦

