

WESTERN CAPE WOODTURNERS ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER : JANUARY 2025

The Western Cape Woodturners Association is a group of folk with a common interest in woodturning and wood.

We aim to promote the art of turning wood and to create awareness of this craft in the community and encourage young members to join the fellowship.

Members meet every Wednesday at 6.30pm to do "hands-on" turning and get instruction and help.

The venue is the Pinelands Hobbies Club, Nursery Way, Pinelands, Cape Town.

The Formal Meeting is on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7pm.

Visitors are welcome .

JANUARY 2025 :

The first formal meeting will be on 15th January 2025, and the subject is still to be decided.



Wishing everyone a prosperous and healthy 2025, filled with long curly shavings and many wonderful turned items.

Western Cape Woodturners Association Committee :

Chairman

Gert Ferreira 083 265 5835

info@wcwa.org.za

gertff3@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer

Chris Briers 082 490 1157

chris.briers@uct.ac.za

Facilities Co-ordinator

Tanya Dreyer 082 781 1124

tanya.d@mweb.co.za

Training/Workshop

Johnny Wilsenach 082 3471972

mjrint@telkomsa.net

Multi-Media

Ian Sheard 082 553 9849

iansheard@gmail.com

Training/Workshop

Dudley Durrheim 084 645 2345

durrheimd@telkomsa.net

Newsletter

Peter Nicolle 083 325 9985

pnicolle43@gmail.com

Contents :

1. Editor's notes	Page 2
2. " This looks Interesting " - Roger Bennett's Silver linings Steve Forrest	Page 3
3. Add Beauty and Strength with an Inlaid Butterfly Patch, Ed Pretty	Page 9
4. Inexpensive Shopmade Chatter Tool, Bob Amarant	Page 14
5. Timeless Spindle Exercises - Boost Your Skills, Rick Rich	Page 16

Editor's Note:



At the start of a new year, I thought some articles for newer turners would be useful and give a fresh look at some ways to improve one's skills.

Rick Rich, a turner in the northwest corner of America, starts his article with words that also apply to our club in Cape Town : " It's not easy to be a spindle turner in a club full of bowl turners ". He also struggled to turn beads on a spindle with a skew chisel. His article discusses exercises to improve your skills with the skew.

Following our excellent symposium in September, and Phil Irons' talk on Kintsugi, I have included articles on enhancing work with silver wire inserts, and butterfly patches.

Also there is an article on making an inexpensive chatter tool to enhance the surface of items.

BIRTHDAYS in JANUARY :

CONGRATULATIONS and HAPPY BIRTHDAY to :

Doug Bruce-Brand, Alan Conolly, Eclavya Mistry, Alp Numanoglu,
Candace Philpott, Hugh Scholtz, Juri van den Heever, Carl Woermann.

Please Note :

The WCWA **AGM** will be held on February 19th 2025.

Also: We now have 94 paid-up members.

Grateful Thanks go to the American Association of Woodturners,
The American Woodturner publication, and authors Steve Forrest, Ed Pretty, Bob Amarant and Rick Rich for their permission to allow me to reprint their articles.

“THIS LOOKS INTERESTING”:

ROGER BENNETT’S SILVER LININGS

Steve Forrest

If you look in the *American Woodturner* archives, or if you have been around long enough to have watched the whole thing unfold, you will realize that modern artistic turning had a sort of “Big Bang” that lasted ten years or so. Everything since has been the further elaboration of a few key themes that were established early on—lightness and purity of form, hollowing and thin walls, surface embellishment, color. The trailblazers are well known: Ellsworth, Jordan, Gilson, Saylan, to name a few. Irish turner Roger Bennett’s work synthesizes many of the features that define modern turning, while retaining a unique and very personal voice. His work, like that of many artists, is instantly recognizable even as he explores variations on a theme. He’s one of the great Irish woodturners.

Origin story

Roger’s story involves more than a few big bangs of its own. Born in 1953 in an area so rural he names the county but not a town, Bennett grew up on a farm, surrounded by sheep and tillage, beets and barley. Despite the isolation, he felt it was a privilege to grow up where things were made and repaired, but there was also a world of books and ideas to explore. Flash forward to graduation from Trinity College in Dublin with a degree in modern languages, a nascent career as a secondary school teacher, marriage, and a young family. By all appearances, Bennett was set for a certain sort of genteel, urbane, middle class life. When asked if he had wanted to be a teacher, there was a moment of hesitation. “Yes and no,” he said carefully. “There were some good years.” After fourteen years, though,

he was definitely ready for a change. But to what?

Following the sad loss of a baby at birth in 1991, Roger took a sabbatical from his teaching position and took stock of his life. With his wife Siobhán Parkinson as the breadwinner, he happened to come across a woodworking event in a local sports hall. “This looks interesting,” he thought, a phrase that seems to have marked every big bang since. Among other demonstrations, five woodturners had their lathes going. Roger had never even *seen* a lathe before. This was 1992, and Bennett was 39 years old.

Enter woodturning

“It was magic—the ribbons of shavings streaming into the air,” he recalled. “I felt like a child in a sweet shop.” Roger returned home and knew he had to try woodturning. He took an initial class from an old-school gentleman turner named Tom Newman. “It was wonderful, like a teenager’s first kiss,” Roger said. His first project: the humble egg cup. Next came the small shed in the backyard, a small Record lathe, and years of throwing everything against the wall to see what would stick.

Fortunately, Siobhán’s work afforded Roger the opportunity to learn by doing. Rapidly building up both his



Untitled, 2001, European sycamore, water-based dye, Danish oil, 3" x 8" (8cm x 20cm)

Photo: Francis Morrin

With or without silver inlay, Roger’s work generally features transparent color and elegant, minimalist forms.



skills and his inventory, he started selling at local crafts fairs, benefiting from the direct feedback of potential customers. It's hard to believe now, but "those early bowls were awful—shapeless and thick-bottomed," he noted wryly. The early work "wasn't worth showing," but it couldn't have been that bad. Simple principles—a gallery owner noted that he needed fair curves—registered deeply. Richard Raffan's *Turned-Bowl Design* (Taunton Press, 1987) was a touchstone, as it has been for so many turners since.

The next big bang came when Roger saw a demonstration in 1993 by English turner Paul Clare. Clare was using color—bright color. Roger thought, "This looks interesting." Woodturning at that time was still mostly round and brown, and the people who were breaking that down ran into plenty of resistance. But color resonated with Roger, and he thought he could happily spend his time exploring it.

Leap of faith

So far, Bennett's story might seem like so many others: middle-aged person finds instant gratification through woodturning. But here is where being Irish gave Roger a particular advantage over his American counterparts. His teaching job afforded him a five-year sabbatical, and the Crafts Council of Ireland (CCoI, now the Design and Crafts Council) offered an intensive program in the business of making a living at craft. A modest living allowance, workspace, and tutelage were all offered, and in 1994 Roger became the first woodturner to enter the program. (Glenn Lucas and Emmet Kane followed soon after.)

Making the leap from teacher to professional woodturner wasn't easy. Bennett had to provide his own lathe and would return home on the weekends. Siobhán bore the brunt of it, between child rearing and keeping the

household going, but as Roger said, she made it clear she would leave him if he went back to teaching! It was readily apparent that he needed to go ahead and jump.

The CCoI program had the desired effect: opening doors, generating orders, and accelerating Roger's career. In 1996, he finally pulled the plug on teaching and became a fulltime wood artist. Happily, Siobhán also underwent a career change. Following the same event that prompted Roger's own transformation, Siobhán began writing stories for children. Successful writing became successful editing, then publishing, and now their son has taken over Siobhán's business.

Connecting the dots

Bennett's last big bang had a longer fuse. While Roger began using color even before starting the CCoI program, he didn't begin incorporating his signature silver dots until 2000. But it was during the CCoI course five years earlier that the seed for silver was first planted. One of the hallmarks of the program was that people from a variety of crafts were included, with the explicit goal of cross-pollination of ideas and techniques. One of the other artists, a jeweler, first suggested that Roger use silver in his pieces. A few turners had done this earlier—he mentions Garth May and Hayley Smith—but it was largely unplowed territory.

Bennett finally acquired a Dremel and some silver wire and started experimenting. With a well-established style using subtle color and delicate form already in place, Roger reacted to his silver dots in typical fashion: "This looks interesting." He first offered bowls with silver ornamentation for sale in 2001, and they took off. In fact, the use of silver dots has become his signature technique, offering endless opportunities for variation. The bowls don't just provide a neutral field for the silver patterns, their three-dimensional forms and colors combine with the graphic element of the silver dots for a powerful, cumulative effect.

Exploring the work

I first saw Roger's work in the pandemic-induced Virtual Instant Gallery generated by the AAW's Virtual Symposium in 2020. In clicking through the photos, I took note of the pieces that spoke to me, and I kept coming back to Roger's 2018 bowl. It was an almost black-and-white image, with a simple flared bowl with a narrow base, thin walls, delicate, and reminiscent of Japanese-style work. The wood grain was very faintly sublimated, and across the surface were several flowing, curved tendrils of silver dots, like seaweed, or the tresses on Botticelli's *Venus*. It conveyed a sense of both balance ►



Untitled, 2018,
European
sycamore,
argentum silver,
water-based
dye, Danish
oil, 3" × 11"
(8cm × 28cm)

Photo: Trevor Hart

Untitled, 2004, European sycamore,
argentium silver, water-based dye,
Danish oil, 2" x 4" (5cm x 10cm)

Photo: Trevor Hart



and movement that made me gasp. Elegant—no wasted motion, nothing extraneous, all of it powerful. I thought, “This looks interesting.”

Welcome to Roger Bennett’s work.

Roger’s early pieces were promising, for sure. But the addition of the silver dots truly elevated his work to a new level.

By 2004, Roger had already explored a number of approaches. With the bowl at left, the silver is emphasized by the contrasting black interior, set off against the blue glow of the outer wall.

The pattern is “controlled random,” an idea Bennett has returned to repeatedly. The bowl form, of course, is classic, understated, perfect—nothing random there. The walls, while thin, still have some substance. There is a lovely, quiet tension in the piece that is constant across virtually all of Bennett’s work.

Further work in 2004 explores the same elements in a variety of ways. With this piece (*second down, left*), the walls have been thinned down, the form is now flared up and out from a tiny base, and the inside is divided between a wide textured band and a smooth center with a spiral leading our eye inward. Here, he has inlaid 18-karat gold instead of silver.

Sometimes the silver pattern is randomized, and other times, geometrical; there may be a contrasting texture. The colors range widely, but they are almost always transparent. The wood is not highly figured—usually European sycamore, which is like maple, but softer—but the grain is not invisible. Instead, it provides a subtle, organic contrast to the human-imposed order of the silver dots. Moreover, since the dye absorption is variable depending on the grain direction, the color itself has a fluid, almost shimmering quality. (Glenn Lucas noted that early on, he sold the unused cores from his sycamore blanks to Roger, thereby providing the perfect source, and demonstrating just how small and interconnected the Irish woodturning world is.)

The silver pattern is frequently a dominant graphic element, but not always. It took some encouragement, but Roger eventually tried silver on silver (shown at *left*), with a plume of just three wavy lines, and the effect is sublime. And while the silver color is distributed over the entire piece, the tiny dots themselves retain a delicate, filigreed quality.

In 2019, Bennett was part of a coterie of wood artists who received



Untitled, 2004, European sycamore, gold, water-based dye, Danish oil, 3½" x 10¼" (9cm x 26cm)

Photo: Don Giovanni Studio

Untitled, 2015, European sycamore,
argentium silver, water-based dye,
Danish oil, 4¼" x 5½" (11cm x 14cm)

Photo: Roger Bennett



Untitled, 2007, European sycamore,
argentium silver, water-based dye,
Danish oil, 1½" x 6¼" (38mm x 16cm)

Photo: Estelle Barrett-Morgan

unfinished blanks from Ray Key's widow. His completed "collaboration" was one of Key's characteristic forms, with just a dyed rim inlaid with Bennett's gold. The piece presents seventy-six dots, one for each year of Ray's life. Roger has also extended beyond his signature bowls by going smaller with jewelry and larger with wall pieces, but always relying on the flow of silver dots played out against the canvas of dyed wood.

A note on scale. As with much wood-turning photography, you can't tell how big or small the pieces are from the photos themselves. Roger's work tends to be small—on the order of 4" to 6" (10cm to 15cm) in diameter. Paradoxically, much of the power of the pieces is derived from their diminutive size. The delicacy, complexity, and precision of the silver patterning, expressed on the thin bowl walls, have a cumulative power that catches the viewer by surprise. How can something this small be this epic? The work is quite literally breathtaking.

Bennett's work has achieved wide notice, showing up in museums, Irish national collections, and the pages of this and other journals, as well as being featured in a number of exhibitions. *Growth Spiral* was Bennett's entry in AAW's 2020 POP exhibition, *Nature/Nurture*.

He was included in the prestigious Homo Faber 2022 European and Japanese Craft Collection as well as Made in Ireland 2022, and was named one of Ireland's fifty Craft Heroes. Emmet Kane, President of the Irish Woodturners Guild, said that part of Roger's influence has been to raise the bar for excellence, and he has led the way in demonstrating museum-worthy quality. Irish turner Max Brosi said, "Roger's work has forced other woodturners, including myself, to re-evaluate what attention to detail means. His proportions, finesse, and attention to detail set a benchmark in Irish craft." ►



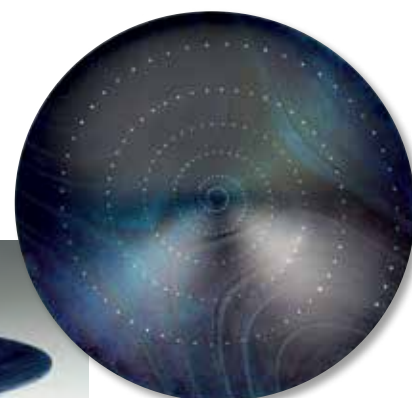
Roger Bennett/Ray Key collaboration, Bowl, 2019, Ash, gold, water-based dye, Danish oil, 2" x 6" (5cm x 15cm)

Photos: Paul Hannaby



Much of the power of Bennett's pieces is derived from their diminutive size.

Photo: Shane O'Neill



Growth Spiral, 2020, Cherry, silver, water-based dye, argentine silver, 1½" x 6" (38mm x 15cm)

Photos: Tib Shaw/AAW



Roger Bennett (right) explains the details of his work to Irish President Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina at Dublin Castle, 2021. The event was a celebration of the 50th anniversary of Design and Crafts Council Ireland.

Photo: Leon Farrell



A gathering of giants in Irish woodturning, from left: Mary Leahy (Liam Flynn's partner), Glenn Lucas, the late Liam Flynn, Roger Bennett, and the late Brother Ciarán Forbes. At the opening of the *Fine Forms* exhibition during the Éigse Arts Festival, Carlow, 2004. Glenn had invited Liam and Roger to exhibit with him; Ciarán opened the exhibition.

Photo: Cornelia McCarthy

Behind the scenes

So how does he do it, inlaying hundreds and hundreds of tiny silver dots? It starts with a drawing using an old-school computer program, Corel Draw, that lets him play with the dots, systematically varying the arrays until he arrives at his desired pattern. He then prints and cuts it out by hand, and sticks it to the wood. Then it gets tricky. Roger punches through the pattern to mark each dot on the wood, then drills each hole to the precise depth so as not to pierce the wood. (Recall that many of his pieces may be as thin as 3mm.) It turns out that the pattern, perfectly spaced and aligned on the inner face, gets distorted if it is projected onto the larger surface of the exterior wall, so that is why the pattern only appears on the inside. The diameter of the dots themselves ranges from 0.5 to 1.0 mm. Magnifier glasses are a critical tool for this work.

Once the holes are drilled (and they frequently have subtle, intentional variations in their diameters), he glues the silver wire into place, then snips it off,

leaving a nubbin of silver to be sanded down afterward. The wire is tarnish-resistant argentium silver, which can be sanded down perfectly flush to the wood. Any given piece might have hundreds of these dots, and some pieces might have well over a thousand.

It is exacting, precise, repetitive work, but the cumulative effect is astounding. As Roger noted, though, form comes first. It's only worth doing if the base piece can stand on its own merits. Roger had already perfected his forms and bowl-turning technique, long before introducing the silver element. Water-based dyes provide the transparent color he desires. His tool needs are fairly limited: a couple of bowl and spindle gouges, a jeweler's drill, and a draw plate for ensuring the silver wire is sized correctly.

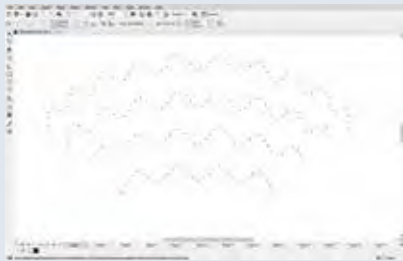
Roger's style is a harmonious combination of aesthetics and logistics. He knew he needed to get good enough at something distinctive to make a living. Rather than seeing art and commerce as opposites, he has found a result that

allows him to make what he wants and that people want to buy. His urban workspace is small; he was never destined to make large-scale work. He likes color and is innately attentive to detail. Brosi said, "Obtaining a flawless finish at the scale Roger works at is unequalled." And, as Kane said, "By God, he is patient."

Above and beyond

Not only is he patient, he's considerate. More than any other word, this kept coming up in interviews about Roger. Glenn Lucas and his wife Cornelia McCarthy sang Roger's praises, noting that his quiet encouragement was very important early on for Lucas, who started turning before Roger did but joined the Crafts Council program the year after Roger. "You always walk away feeling better" after talking with Roger, Glenn said. Max Brosi said Roger "has been incredibly generous in his encouragement and support of my own development as a turner. Roger's work really reflects his personality as a humble, kind, and generous master of

Paper pattern to wood



The work starts with a detailed drawing in a graphic art program. The patterns can be manipulated until the desired effect is achieved, with the computer doing all the work of keeping and adjusting distances and ratios. After printing it out, Bennett sticks the pattern to the blank and begins punching through the pattern to mark the wood. He then drills to the appropriate depth.

Insert, snip, sand, finish



After drilling the holes, short lengths of silver wire are dipped in cyanoacrylate (CA) glue and inserted. The wire is then nipped off close, followed by sanding the dots flush. This exacting process is repeated for hundreds of individual dots. Sanding, dyeing, and oiling complete the demanding work.

his craft. His persona comes through his work; what's in the heart comes out through the hands."

As if all this weren't enough, Roger is also a prolific writer who has profiled a number of illustrious turners and has written about other crafts and crafts-people. As with his woodturning, so it is with his writing: his prose is thoughtful, quiet, carefully measured, but still sensual. Cornelia McCarthy said that, even more than a teacher, Roger is an educator, the sort of person who leads people to engage in their own learning, rather than handing ideas down from on high. People seek him out as a source of wise reflection. He has written about the joys and heartaches of turning wood, about the meaning of craft, and about a touchstone bowl. Roger has also written extensively about ceramics, finding much in common between clay and wood.

Roger works not just on his own turning, but also on shining a light on others' work. Mary Gallagher, who owned a gallery in Wexford, Ireland, for many years and has curated major crafts expositions, spoke glowingly of Roger's attention to and encouragement of other makers, and of those involved with the arts at any level. "He's always measured, thoughtful, constructive," she said. "He's kind, but not soft." Gallagher also appreciated Bennett's capacity to get others to think twice, to look again. She admitted that before she met Roger in the early 2000s, she had thought of woodturning as "crude salad bowls." Roger's work couldn't be further from that description.

Just as his woodturning is a distillation and an extension of many of the major threads in modern turning, Roger's influences range far and wide. They include Irish turners Liam Flynn, Ciarán Forbes, and Liam O'Neill; English turners Ray Key, Bert Marsh, and Mick O'Donnell; as well as American turners Al Stirt, Merryll Saylan, William Hunter, and Virginia Dotson. And of

“ Roger’s work really reflects his personality as a humble, kind, and generous master of his craft. His persona comes through his work; what’s in the heart comes out through the hands. —Max Brosi

course, there's Richard Raffan. Long before he even dreamed of becoming a woodturner, Roger and his wife received as a wedding gift in 1978 a salad bowl of Brazilian walnut that still gets daily use. But it wasn't until many years later that "the penny dropped," as Roger is fond of saying, and he realized the signature on the bottom was Raffan's.

One particular landmark for Roger has been the work of groundbreaking ceramicist Lucy Rie. Rie's work is elegant, at times veering to severe, but is instantly recognizable as part of the development of modern forms. Photos of some of her work look like they could have been turned and carved out of wood as readily as clay. Along with Raffan's book, Rie has been a constant influence on Roger's aesthetic. Ceramicists Grainne Watts and Jennifer Lee also rate highly in Roger's list of inspirations.

In a second-hand shop, Roger once stumbled across a beautiful little oak bowl that spoke to him. He has written eloquently about the depth of feeling the bowl evoked in him. Flipping the bowl over, he found that it was signed by the late Ciarán Forbes. A masterpiece of simplicity, turned by one of the leading lights of Irish woodturning, languishing for a couple of euros in a charity shop—it sits on Roger's shelf now where he looks at it every day.

The only gap I found in the esteem people expressed for Roger was that, as Glenn Lucas said, "You can't have a good bitch with him." Unlike with Ciarán Forbes, apparently there are no off-color stories, no juicy bits of gossip, no late-night adventures involving, say,

a few pints and an errant tool. No, with Roger, there are just warm feelings for a serious, talented turner who invariably focuses his attention, and his light, on others. "It's all about the aesthetic with Roger," said Cornelia McCarthy. "He's working for purity and lasting power." Roger Bennett is who he appears to be.

"Chance and circumstance play a huge part in every career," Roger has written. His career is the living embodiment of that sentiment. But it's not just random. Mary Gallagher spoke with feeling about the sheer technical skill and bravado it takes to make Roger's work. Emmet Kane said that "the intensity of Roger's work is extraordinary. He's making treasures for the future." Working on such a small canvas amplifies every detail and every flaw. Quite simply, there is no margin for error. That exceptional skill isn't developed by chance and circumstance. The romantic part of Roger's story is that he dropped everything in middle age, followed a dream, and made it work. But that belies the quiet determination and relentless focus it took to reach those heights. Roger Bennett's story continues to get more and more interesting. ■

For more, visit rogerbennettwoodturner.com, and follow him on Instagram, @rogerbennettwoodturner.

Steve Forrest is a former RN and teacher whose third act is as a woodturner. He also gets to combine his various interests and skills as an editor and occasional writer for American Woodturner and Woodturning FUNDamentals. He is the current President of the Wine Country Woodturners in Sonoma County, California, where he lives with his wife, pets, and lathe. See his work at steveforrestwoodturning.com and on Instagram @steveforrestwoodturning.

Add Beauty and Strength with an Inlaid Butterfly Patch

Ed Pretty

Over the years, I have admired butterfly patches (also known as dovetails, dutchmen, bowties, or pewas) in turned pieces. Aside from becoming a primary visual feature, they add value to the piece by demonstrating the maker's skill. Additionally, being able to turn a finished bowl with a crack in it extends your usable wood inventory.

Adapting to a curved surface

Butterfly inlays are common in flat work. Traditionally, the maker scribes around a hand-cut butterfly, drills or routs out most of the recess, then uses a chisel to work to the line for a perfect fit. But I wondered how to transfer that process to the curved surface of a bowl. I was doubly impressed with turners who had used butterfly inlays in turned work.

SAFETY NOTE!

EXPLORE!

Turning wood with cracks in it carries inherent risk, and not all wood with cracks is salvageable. It can be dangerous or even deadly to turn wood that is not structurally sound, so evaluate the turning blank carefully. If cracks run all the way through the wood, eliminate the workpiece as a viable option. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a full faceshield and/or helmet, and use the lathe's protective guard if it has one.

The AAW's online archives has valuable resources on this subject. Log in at

woodturner.org and use the Explore! search tool.

- "Safety Matters: From the Eye of a Survivor," by Lynn Yamaguchi, June 2014 (vol 29, no 3, page 27)
- "Avoiding Cracks in Bowls and Hollow Forms," by David Ellsworth, August 2015 (vol 30, no 4, page 17)
- "When Good Wood Cracks," by Dennis Belcher, August 2015 (vol 30, no 4, page 20)



The opportunity for me to learn came when I offered to repair a broken bowl for a desperate customer. A bowl (made by another turner) had been dropped and all but broken in half. I researched various methods of repair and landed on the one I knew I could

do with the tools I already had. I decided to use butterfly patches using a router with an inlay guide-bushing set and a pattern to make both the recess and the insert (*Photos 1, 2*).

I chose a different bowl to illustrate the process in this article (*Photo 3*). ►

Repairing an existing bowl



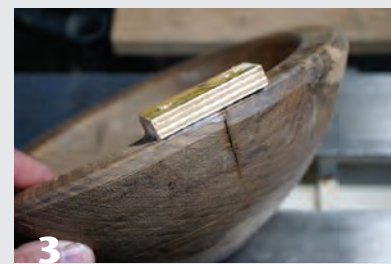
1



2

The author's repair job on a customer's bowl, which had been dropped and broken. These dovetails are "blind"—only visible from one surface. The customer appreciates the beauty of the repair and now displays the bowl upside down.

A good candidate



3

This rough-turned bowl had a crack even before it was cored, but the glued-on wood "bridge" prevented further cracking during drying. A blank like this, with a surface crack that doesn't go all the way through the wood, is still structurally sound.

The right router for the job



A small router can be maneuvered by holding the base rather than handles, allowing for greater control. The ability to advance the bit while it remains centered is key.

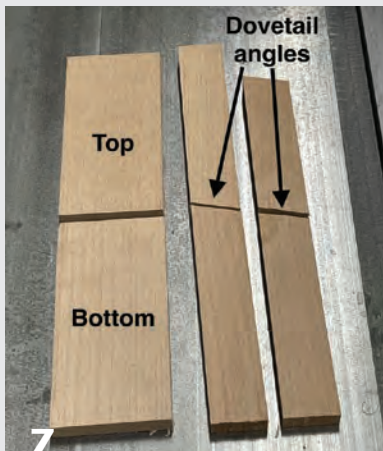
Guide bushings and router bits



(5) A typical inlay bushing with removable collar. Leave the collar on for routing the recess, and remove it for routing the butterfly inlay.

(6) Downward spiral router bits work well. Be sure to match the bit diameter to the bushing size.

Materials for a butterfly pattern



The author uses $\frac{3}{8}$ "-thick hardwood for a pattern. The 15-degree angles will form the dovetail, or butterfly, shape.

Note that the grain of the butterfly inlay must run 90 degrees to the crack to give it full strength. If it runs the same direction, the butterfly itself could eventually break. Usually, I prefer the butterfly to be of a contrasting wood, but that is a matter of preference. Choose wood that is strong but relatively easy to work by hand because you will typically have to do a little tweaking with a chisel or knife. I usually use black walnut for dark patches and birch for light patches.

Router considerations

I originally used an old Craftsman router with good success, but its motor was often misaligned, and it required a lot of care to advance the bit and keep it in the same relative position. Although the handles were fairly high

on the base, I didn't find it a problem, but when I tried a friend's small plunge router (trying to solve the misalignment issue) with even higher handles, I found it had a very "top heavy" feel and was hard to maintain fine control.

I decided to get a new router, a smaller one for ease of handling, with as much power as my old router, and handles as low as possible. Variable speed and a soft start are also nice features. But most important of all, it had to be able to stay on center when I advanced the bit. While there were several choices on the market, I bought a Bosch Colt (*Photo 4*).

Inlay bushings and router bits

Inlay bushings are made to attach easily to most router bases, with the face flush

Glue and trim pattern



(8) A simple clamping jig features a base and cauls covered with cello tape to prevent the glue squeeze-out from adhering to it. The angled shims, at right, apply ample clamping pressure, and the clamps and cauls prevent the pattern from buckling.

(9) Glued and clamped. The small block between the points of the dovetail ensures all four angled pieces will come together at the same distance apart.

(10) Once the glue is set, it's a simple matter of trimming off the excess to square up the sides.

to the bottom of the base. A centered protrusion around the bit follows a pattern and has a removable collar that allows for negative and positive shapes (recess and insert). Leave the collar in place to create the recess, and remove it to make the insert (*Photo 5*). Before you purchase an inlay-bushing set, confirm that it will work with your router base. In my case, I used the lathe to turn a custom router base from ¼" - (6mm) thick acrylic, so it would accept the bushing with a perfect fit.

While it would be possible to make the cuts using a bit with straight flutes, spiral cutters make much cleaner cuts (*Photo 6*). Downward spirals leave a very clean cut at the surface but tend to load the recess with shavings. Upward spirals clear the chips better, but they tend to rip the surface of the wood. So if you find yourself installing a butterfly in a finished bowl, an upward spiral would be a poor choice. My preference is the downward spiral cutter; I simply clear the chips between levels of cut. Router bits are available in ⅛" (3mm) and ¼" diameters, so you must take that into account when choosing a removable collar for an inlay bushing.

Make an inlay pattern

As far as I can tell, all commercially available inlay patterns are made from acrylic, so I had a friend with a laser engraver make my first one. I found pretty quickly, however, that I wanted more sizes because the inlays should be in proportion to the turned piece. So that I wouldn't have to constantly go cap-in-hand to my friend's shop, I came up with an easy method of making the router patterns from wood. Choose a hardwood like hard maple, oak, or similar.

A pattern should be large enough for the router to ride on it securely without rocking. About 3" × 5" (8cm × 13cm) is good, as it will work for most "bowl-size" butterflies and still provide a stable platform. If you had to make a significantly larger butterfly, consider increasing the outside dimensions to maintain stability. I now make my patterns ⅝" (10mm)

thick, rather than the more common ¼", for two reasons. First, I found (sadly, during an IRD) that because the pattern was barely thicker than the inlay bushing, the router teetered on the bushing on a small-diameter bowl, messing up the cut. Second, a thicker pattern allows more room for shavings, which helps to prevent build-up.

An inlay pattern requires a top, bottom, and four center sections cut to your preferred dovetail angle for the butterfly (*Photo 7*). After some trial and error, I chose to make my dovetail angles 15 degrees.

Make a simple clamping device and glue and clamp the components, as shown in *Photos 8 and 9*. *Photo 10* shows the completed inlay pattern, trimmed and ready to use.

Rout the inlays

As described earlier, the router bushing set has a removable collar. Take the

collar off, leaving the small-diameter "follower" when cutting inserts. Before adhering the pattern to the wood with hot-melt glue, I put masking tape on both the pattern and the wood being machined. This allows for easy removal of the pattern and the hot-melt glue.

Rout as many inserts as you can get from a piece of waste wood, making them as thick as you want. I make mine at least ¼" thick, from wood that is at least ½" to ¾" (13mm to 19mm) thick. You'll have to re-attach the pattern for each insert. When you have as many routed as you want, cut the inserts out at the bandsaw (*Photo 11*). If you don't have a bandsaw, this can be done with a handsaw or table saw with a zero-clearance table insert.

Rout the recess

Butterfly inlays are generally "blind," meaning they don't go all the way through the vessel wall. If you have a ►

Rout the butterfly inlays



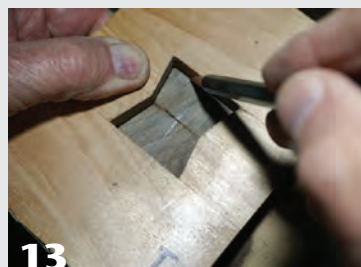
Once several butterfly inserts have been routed, remove them from the parent wood using a bandsaw or table saw with a zero-clearance insert.

Hold the bowl for routing



Mount the bowl (on or off the lathe) in such a way that the cracked work area is horizontal.

Scribe butterfly shape on bowl



Scribe around the inner portion of the pattern to mark the placement of the butterfly inlay.

thin-walled vessel, where the butterfly does go right through, be aware that the small amount of handwork in fine-tuning the recess must be precise. Any cuts that aren't 90 degrees to the surface of the bowl can show up as a gap on the inside.

I like to re-mount the bowl on my lathe at an angle, using the face of the chuck and the tailstock to position the work area as horizontal as possible (Photo 12).

Determine where you want the butterfly inlay, place the pattern on the crack, trace around the inside of the pattern with a pencil, then check to see if the shape, orientation and proportions are to your liking (Photos 13, 14). Place masking tape outside those lines in any place you expect to place hot-melt glue (usually the full outside dimension of the pattern). I use blue painter's tape because it tends to

conform to the compound curve of a bowl nicely.

Apply a spot of hot-melt glue at the two points that form the "waist" of the butterfly, and secure the pattern in place. Once it is in place, glue wedges under the four corners, or wherever possible, to provide adequate support while routing (Photos 15, 16). *Important: Be careful to maintain the angle of the pattern so that it is tangent to the surface of the bowl.* I usually have a selection of wedges at the ready, dry-fit them, then apply a dab of glue on the top and bottom of the wedges before affixing them. Having long wedges keeps your fingers away from the hot hot-melt glue.

Butterfly inlays just $\frac{1}{8}$ " thick will provide adequate strength, so I rout the recess at least that deep, plus an allowance for any finishing cuts on the bowl during

turning. After setting the router-bit depth so that it is contacting the surface of the bowl, I put a piece of tape on the router's depth scale at the full depth to make it easier to see. I like to use one of the corners for the "home" corner, extend the bit while the router is running, then move the router clockwise around the pattern (Photo 17). Be sure to remove any wood remaining in the center as well. I usually take a $\frac{1}{8}$ "-deep cut, remove the router to clear the chips, go back to the home position, then lower the bit the rest of the way. If you can't lower the bit while the router is running (like my old Craftsman), extend the cutter away from the pattern and enter the cut somewhere away from the edge before moving it to your home corner. *Always* let the bit come to a full stop before removing the router from the pattern.

After routing the recess, it will be necessary to cut the dovetail corners to a sharp angle, as the router will leave them rounded (Photos 18, 19). Alternately, you could leave the rounded corners as is, in which case you would have to not only round the corners of the insert to match but also do all the fine-tuning on the insert, not the recess.

Fit and glue the inlay

Test the fit of the inlay in the recess to see which way it fits the best, then mark an "X" on one end so you will always test the fit in the same position. The inlay bushing creates a fit that is actually "too" exact, so the fit will have to be relaxed a bit. Place the insert over the recess, hugging one side of the recess with one side of the insert, and scribe around the other side and both ends with a sharp craft knife (Photo 20). Use that line to locate the chisel to take off fine shavings as required. Alternately, you can work the sides of the butterfly insert to adjust the fit. It is safer and allows greater accuracy to hold the insert with a clamp while making these cuts (Photo 21). You can touch the ends on a belt sander or use your chisel. I've

Adhere pattern, rout recess



(15-16) Apply masking tape to the area where the pattern will be adhered. Use a good-quality hot-melt glue to affix first the pattern at the dovetail's waist points, then wedges to hold the pattern level.

(17) Rout the recess. Note the tight control of the router with the author's hands down low on the router base.

Refine routed corners



The recess cut by the router will have rounded corners. The author uses a mortising chisel ground to fit tightly into corners to clean up the butterfly tips.

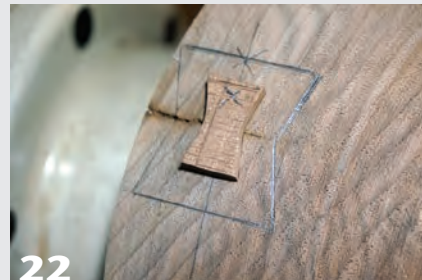
Fine-tune the fit



20 Use a sharp knife to scribe a fine line on the bowl, indicating how much material to remove from the sides of the recess for a good fit.



21 The author holds the insert with a C-clamp while chamfering the corners to ease the fit. When dry-fitting the inlay, don't push it in too far, as it will be difficult to remove without damaging it.



22 When I teach new turners, I emphasize the need to honor the wood, to give it their best effort. Using butterflies to salvage a broken piece or to make use of wood with natural imperfections is a way of honoring the wood. The Japanese call the art of repairing broken pottery vessels *kintsugi*. Cracks are part of the “scenery” and history of a vessel and should be honored, rather than disguised. A butterfly repair on wood is no less attractive than figured grain and becomes part of the story of a wooden vessel. ■

taken both approaches and have found that adjusting the recess is easier.

Chamfer the inside edges of the insert to make for an easy entry into the recess. The fit should be a nice push fit or even a tap fit. Don't put it all the way in until you apply glue, as it probably won't come back out (*Photo 22*) without damage.

While cyanoacrylate (CA) glue is acceptable, I prefer regular woodworking glue, as I feel it offers a more permanent hold. If possible, drive the inlay home with a clamp, making a glue bond at the bottom of the recess (*Photo 23*). Depending on the glue brand you use, clamping is usually required for an hour, with full strength in 24 hours. However, there is very little stress on a well-fit butterfly while turning, so it is reasonable to turn in an hour. I have never had an insert move during turning.

With regular glue, there is usually some squeeze-out into the crack. I try to “dam” the crack with a sliver of wood to prevent that, as shown in *Photo 24*. You could also remove the squeeze-out with a series of pointy blades, slivers of wood, and/or dental picks.

With the butterfly inlay glued in place, continue turning the bowl as you normally would.

Closing thoughts

Generally, cracks that need a repair are obvious, but some aren't. My feeling is

that when the wood's moisture content has reached equilibrium with the surrounding atmosphere, as with a rough-turned bowl that has sufficiently dried, it will not move or crack further. So if a crack is clearly minor, while others on the same bowl have been patched, most people will understand that the bowl will remain stable in its current state.

I am often asked if filling a crack (along with using a butterfly) is a good idea. If you have a salad bowl with a crack low on the walls, filling the crack would maintain the bowl's functionality. But for more aesthetic pieces, I would leave it unfilled. You may also just simply *want* to fill it. In either case, I would fill after inserting the butterfly, in case the placement of the butterfly breaks the bond between the filler and the wood.

Glue in butterfly inlay



23 With glue applied, set the inlay into the recess. If the patch is near the bowl rim, a clamp will do the job; if not, gently tap in the inlay.



24 A wood wedge, or splinter, is used as a dam to prevent glue from squeezing into the crack.

INEXPENSIVE SHOPMADE CHATTER TOOL

Bob Amarant

The New Jersey Woodturners is an educational and charitable organization. Like many other chapters, we contribute to various charities. Our favorite activity is turning spinning tops. We make hundreds per year and 100% of the donations collected go to the

Children's Specialized Hospital of New Jersey. We have roughly thirty members who participate in this outreach effort.

We add texture to the tops with a variety of tools, including chatter, spiral, and knurling tools. Commercially available chatter tools can cost up to \$100. I find making my own tools is a great way to spend a few hours in the shop and save some money in the process. This article details the process of making a shopmade chatter tool.

and 4" long. For the actual cutting tool, I repurposed a jigsaw blade, and to hold it in place, I used a cap screw $\frac{1}{2}$ " long $\times$ $\frac{1}{4}$ " (6mm) diameter with 20 tpi (teeth per inch). I also turned a length of wood for a handle and used a piece of 1" (25mm) inside diameter (ID) copper pipe for a ferrule (*Photo 1*).

You will also need a $\frac{1}{4}$ " twist drill, a center drill, a $\frac{1}{2}$ " twist drill, and a $\frac{1}{4}$ " $\times$ 20 tap to cut threads, along with a #7 drill for the tap. *Note: The video referenced at the start of this article shows an alternate method of holding the blade to the handle using two hose clamps, requiring less metalworking.*

Process

Chuck the metal rod or bolt with a maximum of 1" overhang for rigidity and concentricity. Drill a small starter hole/dimple using the center drill (*Photo 2*). If you don't have a center drill, use a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) twist drill to form a dimple on one end. Once the dimple is formed, drill a $\frac{1}{4}$ "-diameter hole about $1\frac{1}{4}$ " (32mm) deep (*Photo 3*). Keep the lathe speed low, about 500 rpm. A drop of oil while drilling metal helps to lubricate the cutting and evacuate the chips.

Once you have drilled into the end of the bolt (or rod), use a drill press to drill a side hole for the cap screw (*Photo 4*). The cap screw will hold the jigsaw blade in place. Use a #7 drill bit to prepare for the thread tap. Cut, or tap, the threads in the hole (*Photo 5*). If you have never cut threads before, refer to my companion video for helpful tips.

For the cutter, I started with a jigsaw blade that was 4" long, put it in my metal vise, and used locking pliers to snap it in half. Don't forget your safety glasses! Grind the teeth off using a grinder or benchtop belt sander to form

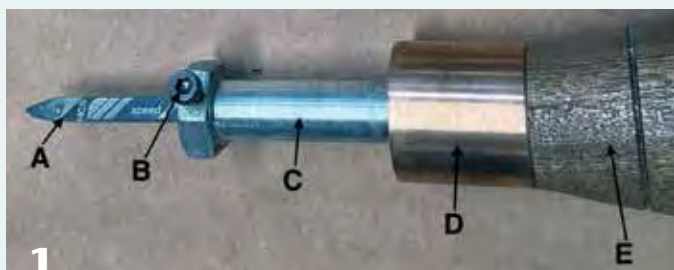
Accompanying Video!

Bob Amarant has created a video that illustrates some of the finer points of making a chatter tool. To view the video, visit tiny.cc/chattertool or scan the QR code.



Materials

When I make tools, my goal typically is to use components already on hand to save money. In this case, you'll need a length of steel rod 4" to 6" (10cm to 15cm) long and at least $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) in diameter. Steel rods are available in the big box stores in 12" (30cm) lengths. In my case, I simply used a hex-head machine bolt that was $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter



Chatter tool parts

A: repurposed jigsaw blade, B: cap screw, C: bolt, D: ferrule, E: woodturned tool handle.

Drill hole for the blade



Use a center drill to create a dimple, or starting point for the drill bit.



At a slow lathe speed, drill a hole in the end of the bolt (or rod) to accept the chatter blade.

Drill and tap for cap screw



The author drills a hole and then taps threads for the cap screw, which will hold the blade in place during use.

Shape jigsaw blade



A jigsaw blade will serve as the chatter tool cutter. Grind off its teeth and shape it using a grinder or belt sander.

either a pointed or rounded profile on one end (*Photo 6*). Commercial chatter tools feature an angled bend, but this detail is not necessary. Grind the other end to fit snugly in the $\frac{1}{4}$ " hole in the bolt or rod.

Turn a handle

I'm a big believer of making your own tool handles. Over time, you can save hundreds of dollars and it's another good excuse to use your lathe. Plus, handles are great beginner spindle projects.

As with any spindle-turning project, mark the centers on each end and initially turn between centers. Form a tenon on one end to fit into a scroll chuck, and then mount the blank in the chuck.

At the tailstock end, form another tenon to accept the copper pipe to be used as a ferrule. Once the ferrule is in place, use a drill chuck and a $\frac{1}{2}$ " twist

drill to drill a hole $1\frac{1}{2}$ " (38mm) deep. The ferrule will be glued on later.

Bring up your live center and rough out the spindle. Then shape the blank so it is both attractive and comfortable for your hand (*Photo 7*). Consider adding a few accents with a point tool or perhaps some beads. Sand and finish with your favorite finish. I usually use boiled linseed oil for tool handles. I've also used my favorite EEE polish combined with a friction polish if I want a shiny finish.

Part the handle from the lathe, sand the end, and apply finish to that area. I use five-minute epoxy to attach both the ferrule and the bolt (or rod). When the glue has cured, insert the blade and lock it in place with the cap screw.

In use

The chatter tool creates patterns in the wood because its flexible metal blade skips on and off, cutting intermittently.

These tools work best on endgrain. Our club uses hard maple for our tops.

I have found that presenting the blade slightly below center and pointing it down to about the 8:00 position produces good chatter (*Photos 8, 9*). Other designs can be achieved by pressing just the tip or side of the blade into the wood. If you hear the blade make a screeching sound, you are probably getting good results. Experiment with different blade lengths, lathe speeds, and presentation angles. There are numerous videos on YouTube demonstrating various possibilities. ■

Bob Amarant is president of the New Jersey Woodturners, which meets at the Essex County Environmental Center in Roseland, New Jersey. Bob has produced hundreds of videos on his YouTube channel, "Bob's Woodshop Bob Amarant." Email Bob at bobamarant@gmail.com.

Turn a tool handle



Turn a handle with a ferrule. A hole drilled into the end will accept the bolt, or rod.

Chatter tool presentation



The author presents the side of the flexible blade to the hardwood endgrain, producing intermittent cuts. Adding color accentuates the chatter marks beautifully.



Timeless Spindle Exercises

— BOOST YOUR SKILLS —

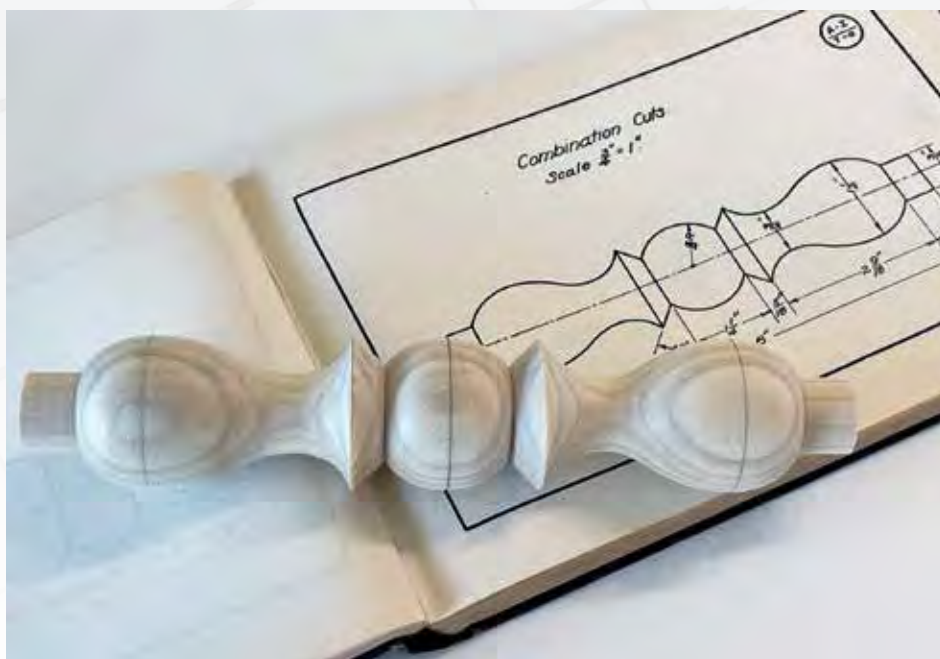
Rick Rich

SYMPOSIUM DEMONSTRATOR IN PORTLAND!

Regular *Woodturning
FUNdamentals*
columnist Rick Rich
will be a demonstrator
at AAW's International
Woodturning



Symposium in Portland, Oregon, May 23-26, 2024, where he will share his insights on copy turning and spindle work, among other topics. Don't miss this chance to learn from Rick, live and in person! For the latest details, visit aawsymposium.org.



Required reading

It's not easy being a spindle turner in a club full of bowl turners. Like most beginners, I struggled when learning to turn beads on a spindle with the skew chisel. But I know that doing bead-and-cove exercises is time well spent, especially since a construction-grade 2" × 2" (5cm × 5cm) can be cut into multiple practice blanks, providing hours of inexpensive turning practice. However, systematic and structured practice is even better for providing a logical sequence of learning. Years ago, I found two excellent teaching manuals that provide a highly organized method of learning. These manuals are more than 100 years old and were used for teaching woodturning in

high schools—back when woodshop was taken very seriously.

I found the first book serendipitously when I purchased a reprint of *Elementary Turning*, by Frank Henry Selden (Manual Arts Press, 1907). As I went through the book and completed the prescribed spindle exercises, I saw that each one built upon the last. The author notes, "A careful examination of the text by one who understands this line of work will reveal the fact that the elementary principles are covered very completely, and yet there is not in the regular set a single exercise which may be dispensed with, without a real loss to the average pupil." After the last exercise, I started over and did them again. Then I taught a spindle-turning class for my club using the

book as a reference. I found the teaching methodology worked very well, and of course Selden's book became required reading for my course.

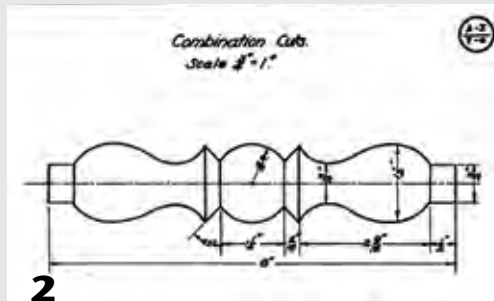
Sometime later, I found another old woodturning instruction book online, *A Course in Wood Turning*, written in 1919 by high school teachers Archie Seldon Milton and Otto K. Wohlers (published by The Bruce Publishing Company). This book offers several spindle-turning exercises similar to those found in *Elementary Turning*, but most exciting to me were the many *different* ones included. Of course, I tried each of them.

These two books are available to download free of charge, as their copyrights are now expired and they are in the public domain. Because I

Vintage books, timeless lessons



Two older books, now in the public domain, still used by the author to teach spindle-turning to club members. *A Course in Wood Turning*, by Archie Seldon Milton and Otto K. Wohlers, The Bruce Publishing Company, 1919; and *Elementary Turning*, by Frank Henry Selden, Manual Arts Press, 1907.



From *A Course in Wood Turning*, p. 97, the author's favorite spindle-turning exercise.

prefer physical books I can hold in my hand, I eventually found both originals on eBay (Photo 1). To view an electronic copy, visit the website of either the Library of Congress (loc.gov) or the Internet Archive (archive.org) and enter the book title into the search bar. Both sites have made it easy to find many old books on woodturning—and on woodworking in general.

The authors evidently believed that spindle turning should be taught *before* faceplate turning, as both books begin with thorough explanations and exercises on spindle techniques. It is only after these exercises and projects that faceplate turning is introduced. I agree with this approach and have found that as my own spindle-turning skills improved, bowl and faceplate turning became much easier, too.

A favorite exercise

After doing the spindle exercises in both books, I found one in particular that covers all the elements of spindle-turning basics. This exercise builds upon each previous exercise, and the design is a nice blend of graceful curves using basic tools. It's called "Combination Cuts" and is found on page 97 in *A Course in Wood Turning* (Photo 2 and the lead image for this article).

Start with a blank of softer wood, such as poplar, 8" (20cm) long and 1¾" (4cm) square. Selden points out in *Elementary Turning*, "The material for the first exercises should be of pine, because it is easy to work, when the tools are used properly; and because any attempt to scrape the piece to shape is easily detected." In *A Course in Wood Turning*, the authors note, "Certain cuts must be fully mastered,

I have found that as my own spindle-turning skills improved, bowl and faceplate turning became much easier, too.

and it takes a good deal of experience and absolute confidence in one's self in manipulating the tools before it is possible to attempt skillful work. If scraping is allowed the educational value of the work is lost."

Begin by locating the centers on the ends of the blank; eyeballing it is close enough. Then mount the blank between centers. Set the toolrest just above center height, which is easily determined by positioning one corner

of the blank straight up and using the corner closest to the toolrest as a height gauge. Turn the lathe on with the speed set low, and increase the speed to around 2400 rpm.

Now turn a true, even cylinder using the spindle-roughing gouge (SRG). The cylinder is the first problem in both books, and each successive and more challenging exercise begins with this humble starting place. The exercise specifies a maximum diameter of 1½" (38mm), so starting with a 1¾" blank allows for a few practice passes to see how smooth you can make the cylinder using the SRG. Just remember to stop when the cylinder is roughly 1⅝" (41mm) diameter, so some material is left for the planing cuts with the skew.

With the SRG, starting with the ABCs (Anchor, Bevel, Cut) is necessary for a clean cut rather than a scrape (Photo 3). The wide rounded flute of the SRG creates a lot of cutting edge, and the tool can be rotated to a sharper part of the edge if the area in use becomes dull. As Selden cautions, "Do not attempt to cut the piece rapidly, but rather see how fine and how even you can cut the shavings." Good advice then and now.

Next, part the cylinder to just over 1½" diameter using an outside caliper with rounded tips and a parting ►

Begin: the humble cylinder



Both instruction books begin with the humble cylinder. Rough it round, indicate diameter with parting tool and caliper, and use planing cuts with a skew to reach final diameter.

Notched story stick



A story stick with pencil notches, held on the toolrest, is essential for repeatability in spindle turning.

Bead with skew



The “Combination Cuts” exercise calls for a central bead. Define the width with V-grooves, then roll the bead.

tool (Photo 4). Then use the skew to plane-cut the cylinder. When used correctly, the skew will result in an exceptionally clean, smooth surface. *Skew Presentation Tip:* Start about 1" (25mm) in from either end. Lay the skew on the cylinder with the cutting edge above and at an angle of 45° to 60° to the surface. Slowly draw the tool back and at the same time raise the handle until the skew begins to cut slightly above the heel. Make a planing cut to the end of the cylinder and then begin again at the other end (Photo 5).

Cove with spindle gouge



On both sides of the bead are coves that lead to a bulb, or vase shape. The author uses a spindle gouge to form the coves.

Now it is time to use a measuring stick, as it is called in *A Course in Wood Turning*, or a story stick, as I call it. This stick can be made of a piece of scrap wood. It should be straight, at least as long as the turning blank, and about the thickness and width of a ruler. On one long edge, mark the points where calipering is required, as well as the details of the beads and coves. Use the diagram in the book to get all the measurements for the stick. Then use a file to make a pencil-tip groove at each mark on the stick.

While the lathe is spinning, hold the stick on the toolrest with one

Tenon with skew



At each end of the spindle is a tenon, which the author handles easily with a skew—first peeling cuts (handle down), then short planing cuts to the desired diameter.

Bulb, or vase shape



Finally, the spindle exercise is completed with the shaping of a bulb, or vase, shape adjacent to the tenons.

FOR FURTHER READING: WHY CATCHES HAPPEN

EXPLORE!

Sure enough, AAW members have published information on what causes turning tools to catch. Log into the wealth of resources that is the AAW's online archives at woodturner.org. Use the Explore! search tool to find these and other articles.

- “Learning to Avoid Spiral Catches,” by Joe Larese, *AW* June 2012 (vol 27, no 3, page 46)
- “Safety First: SRGs, Skews, and Humongous Catches,” by Harvey Rogers, *Woodturning FUNDamentals* (vol 5, no 5, page 28)
- “Whittle and Dance to Avoid Catches,” by David Ellsworth, *AW* June 2019 (vol 34, no 3, page 18)



hand and use a pencil to mark the details onto the blank. Start with the skew, turning the V-grooves first. This also serves to open up the sides of the center bead, which will be turned next (Photo 6-8).

The exercise then calls for using a spindle gouge to turn the coves, with the bottom of the coves being exactly (or close to) $\frac{3}{4}$ " (19mm) diameter (Photos 9-10). The center-bead half of these coves will remain, while the outside half will be turned down when forming the “vase” shape from the largest part of the diameter (Photo 11).

Next form a tenon on both ends of the spindle, each $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) long and $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter, using a skew chisel. With the tool handle low,

make a series of peeling cuts until you are close to the final diameter, then use planing cuts to sneak up on the final diameter (Photos 12, 13). Lastly, shape the outside half beads of the vase shape using the skew (Photos 14, 15).

The exercise is complete, and the best part is that it's only practice on scrap wood. If you get a catch, examine what caused it. (Hint: Usually with the skew, it is caused by the bevel losing contact with the wood.) Then keep going—mount another scrap and do it again!

Footstool leg with pommel

Elementary Turning offers some excellent projects, and on page 158 we find “Fig. 248. Footstool Leg,”

which features a pommel—the transition from a square section to round (Photo 16). I liked the look of the leg and because it doesn't give measurements for the length of the pommel, fillet, “vase” shape, or foot, I made a few legs until I arrived at one that looked very similar to the drawing. I used this turned leg to make a story stick and then turned three more to match. Finally, I put them together and made a handy footstool (Photo 17).

Practicing turning the pommel element will boost your confidence, so when asked to make a table with turned legs with pommels for the mortise-and-tenoned aprons, you can say, “Of course I can!” ▶

Footstool leg with pommel



From the 1907 book *Elementary Turning*, page 158, an exercise that includes the pommel—transitioning from square to round.



The author's use of this exercise—a footstool (in progress). The legs' square sections allow for traditional mortise-and-tenon joinery with the apron pieces.

Because the story stick will be presented only to the rounded portion of the blank, the stick need only be as long as the round part—in this case, just 4½" (11cm) long. Mount a leg blank securely on the lathe between centers. I prefer to position the square part of the leg on the headstock end. Lay out the pommel location with pencil lines on one side of the blank. When the lathe is spinning, these layout lines should be visible; if not, darken them a bit. The top line is where the cut begins, and the lower line (as seen looking toward the tailstock) is where the cut ends and transitions to round (*Photo 18*).

The pommel transition is essentially half of a slightly rounded V-groove. Begin by forming this groove with the skew on the lower line (*Photo 19*). It is helpful to start

Pommel lines



Begin by making pencil lines (with the lathe off) to note the pommel's location and width. Use a skew chisel to form a slightly curved V-groove, half of which will serve as the transition from square to round.

with a scoring cut at the exact center of what will become the groove. I prefer to present the skew with its long point down, as it gives me more visibility of the cut, but either end works. Then swing the handle a little to the right and at the same time tip the skew so the cutting edge is slightly out of line with the cut.

The handle is then raised, and the point begins to make the cut. Swing the tool to the other side and take a similar cut. Continue this process, cutting one side at a time, until you have achieved the angle and depth desired—in this case, just until the bottom of the groove is fully cylindrical.



Rounded leg section

Rough-turn the rounded section of the leg, use a story stick to indicate key locations, and part down to the desired depths.

Once the pommel is cut, turn the remainder of the leg round using the SRG (*Photo 20*). Next, using the story stick, make pencil marks on the spinning blank by dropping the pencil tip into the slots (*Photo 21*). Now use the parting tool and a caliper to make the diameter-sizing cuts (*Photo 22*).

Start with a slight tapering toward the foot. Then cut the coved section just above the foot with a spindle gouge to a depth of about $\frac{3}{4}$ " (*Photo 23*). Using the skew, turn the foot with a few narrowing planing cuts, followed by large coving cuts to remove waste from the large part of the vase-shaped leg (*Photos 24, 25*). A few smoothing cuts finalize the vase shape (*Photo 26*).

Finally, form a transition from the fillet beneath the pommel to the rounded leg below (*Photo 27*).

Skew-only garden dibber

Sometimes it's fun to try a project using just one tool. I suppose most bowl turners would opt for the bowl gouge, which would work, but not as well for this crafty item. I turn garden dibbers for fun and profit (meaning I "profit" from the experience). Try turning this simple yet useful garden tool using just a skew (*Photo 28*).

Any hardwood blank will do, 10" (25cm) long and 1½" square. Mark the centers with an awl, and mount the blank between centers. Try making roughing cuts with the skew's long point down. This cut is a little tricky at first, but once you realize that the key is maintaining bevel contact, it will become fast and clean (*Photo 29*). Learning this cut is somewhat "school of hard knocks"; when the bevel comes off the wood, it becomes very apparent, as you are likely to get a catch! These roughing cuts also form the

overall shape of the dibber—a slight taper.

I made a story stick noting both the handle and dibber shaft markings (*Photo 30*). Begin the turning by forming a V-groove at the handle transition, then turning the handle as a half bead and a shallow cove

(*Photos 31-33*). The bottom of the V-groove in the cove provides a nice marker for the depth of the cove cuts, and the very bottom of the groove is left in the handle. To complete the handle, two additional shallow V-grooves are formed to act as a kind of handle grip. ►

Cove and foot



(23) A cove above the foot is formed with a spindle gouge.

(24) The author uses a skew to make planing cuts on the foot.

Shape the leg



Above the foot, the cove transitions up to a gentle vase shape culminating at a fillet (flat) just below the pommel.



Skew-only garden dibber

Try turning a garden dibber using only a skew chisel—a remarkably versatile spindle-turning tool. Let the catches teach you well.



29



30

Roughing with skew

(29) Most of us learn to rough-turn a spindle with a spindle-roughing gouge, but a skew is equally up to the task.

(30) A story stick indicates the handle location and shape, as well as the dibber shaft's incremental depth lines.

Use the story stick to locate the remainder of the marks on the dibber shaft. At each of the 1"-spaced marks, from the tip to the handle transition, form a scoring V-cut with the long point of the skew (*Photo 34*). This also has the effect of raising the wood on each side of the cut. Make final planing cuts to smooth not only the rough-shaping marks, but also the raised wood at the scoring cuts. Finally, turn a half bead to make a somewhat rounded yet pointed end

suitable for digging a hole in the earth for planting.

Practice, practice, repeat

I have found that the woodturning lessons from a century ago are still valuable today. The exercises present problems that must be solved through acquired skill. Only repeated practicing and a willingness to suffer a catch, or many catches, will reward the turner with this skill. When the tool makes a "run,"

or spiraling catch, the turner must determine the reason and adjust the tool presentation accordingly. This kind of skill comes especially from proper hands-on instruction and, of course, repeated practice. ■

Rick Rich is a part-time woodturner from Washington State. He is a member of the AAW, the Cascade Woodturners in Portland, Oregon, and a founding member and past president of the Southwest Washington Woodturners in Vancouver, Washington.

Form handle: V-groove, bead, cove



31

A V-groove marks the top of the handle.



32

The handle's large bead is cut "downhill," from larger diameter to smaller.



33

For a cove cut, the skew is used in the opposite manner to bead turning. Instead of rolling down the cut, the tool is used to "scoop" out the waste material.

Add dibber depth lines



34

Shallow V-grooves made with the skew, long point down, serve as depth gauges for creating holes in the ground when planting bulbs.