

As the Wood Turns

NEWSLETTER OF THE
CHICAGO WOODTURNERS ASSOCIATION



30 YEARS OF ART, CRAFT,
TECHNOLOGY, AND
TRADITION.

AAW | AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF WOODTURNERS

June Newsletter

2018

Contents

- **President's Letter**
- **Last Month's Meeting**
 - Secretary's Report
 - Membership Report
 - Raffle Winners
 - Demonstration Report
 - Gallery Selections
- **CWT News**
 - Article Suggestions
 - CWT Members Help a Student
 - Turn-on Chicago! Registration, Update, Call for Volunteers
- **AAW News**
- **For Sale, Trade, or Wanted**
- **Reference**
 - 2018 Meeting Agendas
 - Chicago Woodturners Board of Directors and Committee Chairs 2018
 - About Us

President's Curls



Art vs Craft

This is not an easy topic. I'm sure that most of us have some opinions regarding the definitions of Art and Craft, but how does this relate to what we do? From my limited research, mostly internet-based, Art is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power, and Craft is an activity involving skill in making things by hand for a particular purpose, that have utility, either decorative, functional or both, depending on the use.

One of the articles I reviewed made the following comparisons. I don't necessarily agree with each of these but they are a good basis for an ongoing discussion:

Basis for comparison	ART	CRAFT
Meaning	An unstructured and boundless form of work that expresses emotions, feelings and vision.	An activity which involves the creation of tangible objects with the use of hands and brain.
Based on	Creative merit	Learned skills and technique
Serves	Aesthetic purpose	Decorative or functional purpose
Emphasizes	Ideas, feelings and visual qualities.	Correct use of tools and materials.
Quantification	Difficult	Easy
Reproducible	No	Yes
Emergence	Heart and soul	Mind
Result of	Innate talent	Skill and experience

Certainly some of us are Artists, some of us are Craftspersons and most of us fall somewhere in between. Does it make a difference? I think not. Are we always one or the other? I would say a

successful art piece should be well-crafted and a good craft piece always includes artistic elements. Art vs. Craft is not an either/or choice. Our own gallery table is a good example. We have the opportunity to experience, and encourage, the progress of our members on this journey.

Where do you fall on the continuum?

Andy Kuby, President

Secretary's Report

Frank Pagura

Andy Kuby started our meeting by asking a "Woody Question". How did you celebrate Arbor Day? Apparently Arbor Day, April 27 in Illinois, escaped many of us. This may be due to our large city lifestyle, which blurs the view of nature around us. Hopefully, we all marked our calendar for next year celebration. Check out "The picture of the month" on the CWT website; it will freshen up your awareness level.

The business meeting got on its way with the discussion of occasionally moving the monthly demo from the end of the meeting to the beginning of proceedings. The majority thought we should try it. Discussed as well was setting up a table for member selling or swapping tools etc. This was well received and a couple of times per year may be a good option. Planning will take place, and details will be announced for future meetings.

Roberto Ferrier announced he was accepted as a participant to the Highland Park Art Show on June 24-25. Roberto took this opportunity to thank the membership for the open arms welcoming support he received since joining. He presented Francisco Baur with one of his wall hangings for his special assistance. It is good to see what mentoring, helping and collaboration between members can lead to.

Francisco announced he had nylon tubes to give away that could be used to make vacuum chucks, among other things.

Andy had a brief reminder for the AAW Symposium and elaborated about the contributions the membership receives from AAW and the importance of AAW membership.

Brenda Miotke announced that Women In Turning (WIT) will have a class at Arrowmont on September 25. She also announced that a WIT meet-and-greet social will take place at the TOC symposium followed by "Crashing," the pen for troops event for some hands-on turning. Details will follow.

Andy made a pitch for membership involvement as demonstrators and gallery reviewers. He referred to an article, reprinted in April's newsletter, which he found very informative about the whole process.

Andy and Brenda gave a report on the Beads Of Courage presentation at Lurie Hospital. This was a heartfelt presentation showing the obvious impact on the receiver and the giver! It was good to see that five containers were brought tonight to start replenishing inventory for the next presentation. Don McCloskey suggested that making it the President Challenge event could enhance box making.

Don reminded everyone about Empty Bowls, Oakton College, December 1. Both he and Marie will accept donated items anytime. Rich Nye is organizing an Empty Bowls turning day at NORMAC. Talk to Rich or Marie about details if you are interested.

Pens For Troops will have a pen turning event at Bolingbrook Rockler May 19. Don also reminded one and all about the Pen For Troops turning event at the August TOC Symposium.

Rich announced that Kip Christensen will be doing one and two days classes after TOC August 6-8. Jason Breach demo is set for September 22, with full day classes on September 23-25. See Matt to reserve your spot in the demo schedule. Costs are \$30 for demos and \$125 for hands-on classes.

Al Miotke reported on the continuing progress of TOC preparations. He, Frank Magnifico and Brenda visited St Mary University for a current update. Al showed a short video he took while driving through the gates and pathways of the university grounds. Here are just a few of the noticeable upgrades:

- 1) A new coordinator has been appointed; he showed a healthy interest in making changes..
- 2) New carpeting
- 3) Dining Hall work and surrounding grounds completed
- 4) Stepped up food quality.

All this will improve the attendees' experience. Al also pointed out that demonstrator's rotation schedules are almost completed with only a few tune-ups required. We still need to fill audio-visual and floater positions, so please see Frank. Eighty percent of volunteers know how to work cameras; the balance should take advantage of Jerry's instructions during future monthly meetings.

Woodcraft has a 15% off sale on everything that fits in the bag, on May 12.

Tonight's safety report was given by Joel Lamplough, the last safety book winner. The report stressed the importance of dust collection and breathing protection while turning. Joel pointed out that small dust particles generated by sanding are especially harmful. He had everyone's attention when he said that practically invisible dust particles that make their way to our lungs are very difficult to expel and can cause permanent damage. Joel is a new member who has already taken an active part in contributing to members' wellbeing. Thanks Joel! The June Safety Tip will be given by Don McCloskey.

Jason Clark reported about the Rocky Mountain Symposium coming up in September. He has some pamphlets if you are interested.

Roger reported on membership. Currently 140 members are paid up, and 69 are in attendance tonight. Jim Jackson is our new member.

Sol Anfuso reported tonight raffle totals were \$162.

Rich Hall-Reppen was our reviewer. As usual the table is full of a variety of turnings, representing the vast scope of the membership preferences. Different shapes, sizes, wood specimen and finishes made it an interesting review. Rich is very good at eliciting the makers' participation by asking pertinent questions. The result is that we get a better understanding of the project and get to see why things look the way they do. Often we get a funny explanation of the inevitable "Design Opportunities". This month selected review item, which will be displayed in the club showcase, is the Big Leaf Maple Burl Vase by Kurt Wolf-Klammer

The demonstrator was Rich Nye. His presentation dealt with getting the proper fit between box and lid, which often makes or breaks the box appeal. By looking at Rich's turning, it is obvious that practice and experience speed up the process, but his methodical patience and concentration are equally helpful in achieving the goal. Read Paul Rosen's "Demonstrations" for the nitty gritty of the process.

A good time was had by all!

Respectfully, Frank Pagura

Membership

Julie & Roger Basrak

The May meeting of CWT was held on May 8. Sixty-eight of the 140 paid members were present.

We were joined by one new member, Jim Jackson from Chicago. Welcome to CWT, Jim!

We invite all members to join us from about 6:00 p.m. until about 6:50 or so for the mentoring session prior to each meeting. These mentoring sessions are for guests, as well as new, not-quite-so-new, and all other members. Join the group around the lathe at the front of the room. It's a great opportunity to get to know other members and possibly learn a trick or two you can use on your next project.

Have you considered volunteering to lead or assist with a mentoring session? Feel free to contact Darrell Rader, Don McCloskey, or Al Miotke if you are interested.

If you have not yet paid your dues for 2018, you may pay with cash or a check at any meeting. Otherwise, feel free to send a check (\$30 for an individual membership or \$40 for a family

As the Wood Turns

membership) made out to Chicago Woodturners. Checks may be mailed to Chicago Woodturners, c/o Julie Basrak, 563 W. Ruhl Rd., Palatine, IL 60074.

We look forward to seeing you at the next meeting.

Raffle Winners

Sol Aufuso

Chatter Tool	Vic Promack	Holly Wood Blank	Nathan Wick
Pre-turned Cherry Burl	Rich Nye	Pen Blanks and Cases	Bob Gast
Ash Tool Handle Blank	Jim Kilmer	<i>Collected \$162</i>	

Demonstration

Paul Rosen

Clam Shell Box

Our demonstrator for May was Rich Nye. Turning a lidded box with a tight fit can be a challenge, until you learn how to do it properly. Rich explained that the shape is up to you. You can make it as thick as you want, in any diameter you want. You can make it shallow, with a mirror insert, or deeper, to contain something small, like coins, paper clips, pills, or jewelry. And the potential choice of hardwood timbers means you can replicate the design in big leaf maple, cocobolo, zebrawood, walnut, ash, cherry--in other words, a wide variety of wood species, just to keep it interesting.



Rich started with a 4-inch cube of what he thought was probably ash. He wasn't sure. Next, he marked the center points on opposite ends of the blank. He mounted the blank between centers,

As the Wood Turns

using a revolving center in the tailstock and the jaws of his scroll chuck in the headstock. Note that the jaws did not actually grip the outside of the cube. The piece was held in place solely by the pressure from the tailstock revolving center against the jaws of the scroll chuck. After he turned the cube to a cylinder, using his 3/8-inch gouge, Rich used his 1/8-inch diamond parting tool to make a 1/8-inch wide dovetail on the tailstock end of the blank. That dovetailed tenon would later be used to grip the piece in the jaws of the scroll chuck.



Rich used a thin parting tool in about the middle of the cylinder, turning a thin slot down to a thickness of about 1/8-inch. The left-hand half of the cylinder (audience view) was then bisected in a similar manner, and then parted off. This piece, with the dovetailed tenon on it, was then mounted in the jaws of the scroll chuck. This would become the lid.

Now, consider design. Do you want it deep? Do you want it domed? Rich elected to cut a small dovetail on the tailstock end of the piece, and then placed his tool rest parallel to the face of the turning. With his thin parting tool, he made a small indentation near

the edge of the cylinder. This indentation marked the outside diameter into which the the bottom of the box would fit. It measured about 3 inches. Next, with his 3/8-inch gouge (spindle?), he started with the flutes perpendicular to the floor, and then slowly opened the flute to hollow out a small concavity, perhaps 1/2 inch deep. With the desired depth achieved, he would normally use a round-nosed scraper to put a smooth finish on the concave surface, followed by sanding.

Remounting the 2-inch wide cylinder at the headstock, Rich placed the 1-inch wide cylinder nearest the tailstock end, and used tailstock pressure to secure the pair. A shallow, straight tenon, perhaps 1/8-inch wide, was cut in the headstock end of the 1-inch cylinder. That tenon, after re-chucking, was used to grip the bottom of the box.



Rich then showed us a trick he learned from Bonnie Klein. With the tool rest parallel to the flat surface of the base disk,

he took a pencil and made a series of lines (concentric circles) about 1/8-inch apart, with the lathe running. He then moved the tool rest parallel to the lathe bed ways, and selected his skew chisel.

With the skew placed flat on the tool rest and perpendicular to the cylinder, Rich started to make repeated, small thrusts with the tool. After each, he would stop the lathe and try to fit the lid onto the thin tenon. This is how he fit the lid to the base. If the tenon was too wide, he would re-start the lathe and make another small indentation with the skew. Stop the lathe. Test the fit. Repeat. Oh...about those penciled in circles? You use those to gauge how far to advance the skew chisel as you approach the 3-inch



diameter indentation you made on the lid. Eventually, with repeated trial-and-error, you should be able to get a nice, tight fit. A word of caution here: don't get impatient. If you do, and if you go too far with the skew chisel, you can't add the wood back.

How tight do you want the top to fit the bottom? That's a philosophical question. Woodturners like a "piston fit," so when you pull the top from the bottom, you hear a "pop." Really cool. Problem is, women hate that. If you're making the box say, as a gift for a woman, she wants to be able to open the box with one hand, so she can place her jewelry or cocktail rings in it with the other. So a tight fit is inappropriate in this circumstance. Design your turnings to fit the needs of the end user.



Rich asked, "How many of you know how to make a jam chuck?" (I was in the second row, so I couldn't see how many hands went up to answer that one.) So Rich showed us how. With a sacrificial cylinder mounted in his chuck jaws, he smoothed off the tailstock end so it was flat. With his tool rest parallel to the flattened disk, Rich proceeded to make a series of indentations with his parting tool, to create a shallow hollow on the inside of the sacrificial cylinder. The idea here is to create a female socket into which the tenon on the box base will fit tightly. Once sized appropriately, the box base can be pressure-fit in place, and the outside of the base can be turned/finished.

A similar technique can be used for the lid, except that the diameter of the flat disk on the sacrificial piece must be progressively reduced until it can fit tightly inside the rim on the lid, using a pressure fit.

Rich showed us another trick I'd not seen before. On the sacrificial cylinder, he took a hand saw and made a small "V" cut at the flattened disk end. Why? Sometimes, if your fit between the workpiece and the sacrificial cylinder is too tight, it's really difficult to remove the workpiece. The "V" cut lets you insert something like a screwdriver shaft, to help lever-off the workpiece. Clever idea.



Postscript: The day after the demo, I went on Youtube and searched for "Clam Shell Boxes." My search generated all sorts of videos on boxes, but nothing on "Clam Shell Boxes." Rich, I think you've got an opportunity to be the first, here. Just sayin'.

Gallery

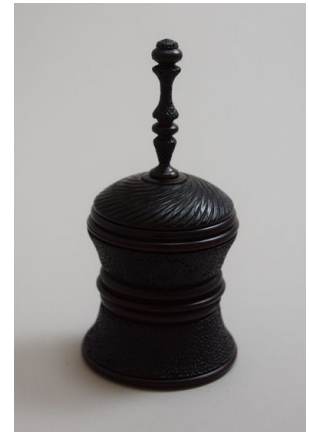
Jason Clark



Ken Staggs showcased a piece turned out of a small piece of maple burl, really letting the wood speak for itself by turning a simple form with minimal details. I like that he left it square with several large voids where the bark used to be. I don't mind that it's thick and heavy; the curves on the top and the bottom remove just enough weight and add some interest without overpowering what is undoubtedly a gorgeous piece of wood.

Dan Gascoigne took the opposite approach on another small piece of wood that I also believe was maple, and I really like it as well. Dan has multiple beads, spirals from a texturing tool, stipple texture from pyrography, and some very dark dye, so that none of the original wood is visible.

Ken and Dan took very different approaches, and I think both succeeded in what they were trying to accomplish. I'd be happy to add either piece to my personal collection.



CWT News

Ebonizing: Two Articles on Working with Black

Andy recommended two articles, which are attached to this newsletter, that include helpful suggestions working with the color. The end of one of the articles, written by Alan Lacer, concludes by pointing out that, "The challenge for artists working in wood is to use black effectively, given its many forms and variations, the many reactions it can evoke, the variety of techniques—all point to the depth and range of this color." Studying these articles and the pictures they include will enable turners to more fully understand and use this color.

As the Wood Turns

www.chicagowoodturners.com

June 2018

Chicago Woodturners Fulfill a Student's Request

By Dr. Scott Barrett & Dr. Richard Nye

In early May I was contacted by the mother of a 12-year-old middle schooler with a request of helping her son turn a baseball bat. Brad Crawford, an avid baseball player, had an opportunity to visit the Louisville Slugger factory over his spring break in Louisville, Kentucky. As a member of a "gifted language arts class" at Springman Middle School in Glenview, he wanted to participate in the making of a bat and share the experience with his classmates. It has always been an important part of our club's mission to involve youth in woodturning. We have participated in Boy Scout events, high school pen turning fairs, and multi-discipline art programs. This was another opportunity to not only fulfill a request, but also possibly build a foundation upon which a future in woodturning could be built.

Since Brad was a pitcher on his local baseball team and a fan of the Chicago Cubs. I enlisted the help of my fellow club member Richard Nye, (Chicago Cubs, 1966-1970), to help with the bat-turning project. As an added bonus, Richard has become very adept at woodturning wooden baseballs and using pyrography to reproduce the stitching. You can imagine the excitement this generated when I presented Brad with the news that we had arranged for his bat (and ball) turning experience.



Following his baseball game on May 12, we met at my shop. Brad was accompanied by his father and grandfather. I had done some pre-turning of the ash billet in preparation of his arrival. After a brief introduction of safety equipment and tool use, Brad began some rough turning. In the early stages we stopped frequently to reinforce proper technique. He was a quick learner and soon has shaped the 30-inch billet into a rough bat shape. Richard, with his fine tool control, took over to blend the barrel into the handle and butt. Within about 90 minutes Brad was handling sandpaper and putting a professional quality finish on his bat. It was finished with two coats of shellac and removed

from the lathe ready for his next "at bat".

After completion of the bat, we all watched as Richard placed a square piece of maple between centers. Through a series of cuts with a sharp gouge, in 30 minutes he had a near perfect sphere. Brad's eyes were nearly as round and wide when he saw this project completed efficiently and quickly. Rich proceeded to take a seat and burn in the stitching. Following the completion of the two projects Rich began sharing baseball stories with his young "protégé".



This day brought great joy to a young man. He, his father, and grandfather were duly impressed by the "magic" produced when a sharp tool meets spinning wood. I have little doubt that at some future date Brad Crawford will once again find himself covered in shavings and looking back at this day in May as his inspiration for a love of woodturning.

As the Wood Turns

Register Now for Turn-On! Chicago 2018



The Chicago Woodturners are on target to host another five-star symposium. Past symposium attendees and demonstrators have told us this many times. Thanks to everyone who is already volunteering and those that will be helping in August. We can't do it without the support of our club members.

With only two months to go, the majority of CWT members have not yet registered. If you are not already registered, I hope you are considering attending. This event is a significant opportunity for every woodturner in the Chicago area and it's designed to be both enjoyable and educational for EVERYONE whether you are just getting started or are an experienced turner. Only a handful of clubs in the country have the ability to put on a regional symposium with 12 experienced educators from all around the country. It's an opportunity to see the best without the added expense of traveling. Some of you might not be able to attend all three days due to work or family commitments. Consider registering for two days or one day. I am confident that you will be glad you attended for whatever time you have available.

I realize that many of you are not familiar with what these demonstrators do or which rotations are the best match for your experience and interests. I am glad to help you pick the best demonstrators for you. Contact me at abmiotke@comcast.net with any questions you have.

The sooner you can register, the more it will help us finalize plans for this successful weekend. And remember, any profit the club receives from this event is used completely to provide the benefits of CWT membership and help with our community outreach. Go to www.turnonchicago.com for information on the event and to register.

Al Miotke
Turn-On! Chicago Co-Chairman

Volunteer for Turn-On! Chicago 2018

Hello all! This is your Turn on Chicago Facility Chairperson, Frank Magnifico.

Our Symposium has become one of the best woodturning events in the Midwest. All the TOC Chairpeople want the 2018 TOC Symposium to once again earn that status. But, it takes a lot of help from a lot of people. Are you planning to attend? If you are attending, can you spare a couple of hours during the Symposium to volunteer?

As the Wood Turns

We need to fill these positions:

- * Floaters for each of the rotations to:
 - help prepare the rooms between rotations
 - help move demonstrators to their next room if needed
- * Room assistants to run the cameras during the demonstrations
- * Volunteers on Thursday to:
 - move equipment from the parking lot to the rooms
 - help set up rooms
- * Volunteer during lunch on Saturday to:
 - help pack and move auction items to the Doubletree Hotel.

So, if you can spare a couple of hours during TOC please contact me by email and let me know your name and email and what position you prefer:

- Floater
- Room assistant
- Thursday volunteer
- Saturday packer

With your help, TOC 2018 is sure to be another success!

Frank Magnifico
Toyzmanhere@gmail.com

AAW News

Are you a segmenter who wants to learn new techniques? Are you new to segmenting and interested in learning the basics from some of the best? Do you want to see one of the largest and most amazing Instant Galleries of segmented work ever assembled? It's all happening this fall when the Segmented Woodturners, an international on-line chapter of the AAW, will be hosting the **6th Segmented Woodturning Symposium** from October 11-14 at the Marriott St. Louis West Hotel, featuring 45 demonstrators, including CWT's own Al Miotke. Registration is at www.segmentedwoodturning.org. (See at right segmented vase by Scott Holman.)



After being inspired by Turn-on Chicago, you might want to journey to Texas for the Southwest Association of Turners Symposium. Each year, the SouthWest Association of Turners (SWAT) holds one of the largest woodturning symposiums in the world. In 2016, over 800 attendees enjoyed this outstanding event in Waco, Texas. SWAT is an all-volunteer organization, which allows the price to remain affordably low. The symposium features nationally and internationally recognized turners, as well as outstanding regional turners selected from participating clubs and across the country. The 2018 Symposium will again be held at the Waco Convention Center, 100 Washington Ave, Waco, Texas. The SWAT Symposium will offer something for every level of Woodturner. For more information, see <http://swaturners.org/>

As the Wood Turns

For Sale, Trade, or Wanted

Shop Light

Magnetic Lathe Lights. A limited number of Magnetic Lathe Lights, similar to the ones on all of the Chicago Woodturners demonstration lathes, are available for \$40 each. Contact Andrew Kuby, 847-922-8201 or riverwoodsturner@gmail.com.

Meeting Agendas

Date	Gallery Review	Demonstration
June 12	Tom Boerjan	Roberto Ferrer
July 10	Paul Shotola	TBD - Boxes
August 14	Clint Stevens	TBD - Chainsaw Sharpening
September 11	Darrell Rader	Marie Anderson - Ornaments
October 9	Paul Pyrcik	Don McCloskey - Open Segmenting
November 13	TBD	TBD - Embellishments & Tricks

Chicago Woodturners Board of Directors and Committee Chairs 2018

President	Andy Kuby	847-922-8201	riverwoodsturner@gmail.com
Vice President	Don McCloskey	847-420-6978	mccloskey@ameritech.net
Secretary & Safety	Frank Pagura	847-524-0231	fpagura@att.net

As the Wood Turns

Treasurer	Matthew Schmitz	847-439-6023	angelhaus@comcast.net
Past President	Al Miotke	847-297-4877	abmiotke@comcast.net
Newsletter Editor	John Whitehurst	847-356-7636	johnswhitehurst@gmail.com
Gallery Review	Jason Clark	480-668-9291	jclark58@gmail.com
Membership	Julie Basrak	847-471-2047	cwtjulie@hotmail.com
Librarian	Robert Schultz	815-245-7495	grislanders@att.net
Webmaster	Scott Barrett	847-420-5155	dr@bdental.net
Raffle	Sol Anfuso	847-963-1994	solanfuso@comcast.net
Tools & Equipment	Don McCloskey	847-420-6978	mccloskey@ameritech.net
Audio-Video Co-Chair	Jerry Kuffel	847-895-1614	tokuffe@gmail.com
Audio-Video Co-Chair	Dawn Herndon-Charles	630-588-8431	dcharlesster@gmail.com
Education	Darrell Rader	815-648-2197	d.rader@woodfineart.com
Demonstrations	Rich Nye	630-406-1855	nyewoodturning@earthlink.net



About us

Membership in the Chicago Woodturners Association is open to anyone wishing to increase their turning skills through education, discussion and critique. Annual dues are \$30 for a single membership and \$40 for a family. Visit our website for an application or contact: Julie Basrak, Membership Chairman.

Meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, 7:00-10:00 PM at Christian Liberty Academy, 502 W. Euclid Ave., Arlington Heights, IL. Please join us. All are welcome.

Chicago Woodturners is a chapter of the American Association of Woodturners. Visit the [website](#) for more information.

As the Wood Turns

www.chicagowoodturners.com

June 2018

“EBONIZING” AND COLORING with Clean Lines

Garry Knox Bennett

Over the course of my career as a furniture designer/maker, I have had plenty of occasions to ebonize and add color to my work. In cases where I want clean line definition between colors, I use the simple process described in this article. Each time I use this method in my work, I have a nagging suspicion that it might prove helpful to my many woodturner friends since the technique would work just as well on turned work as it does on flat pieces. When done correctly, the technique leaves a crisp, clean line between colors.

Prepare the wood

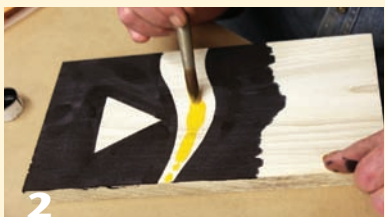
I opted to use a flat poplar board to demonstrate the process, but the

Prepare the wood



Use a sharp blade to incise borderlines according to your chosen design.

Add color



The incised lines will confine colors to a defined area. Add color slowly and carefully to allow the dye to absorb up to but not farther than the cut lines.

concept is the same for wood of any shape. Tight-grained hardwoods, such as maple and walnut, work well for this process. Lighter-colored woods are best for adding color, and you can control the color's density with the number of applications. As with any technique, practice and experimentation are advised to ensure success.

Incise a line, design, shape, or outline using either a small box-cutter or hobby knife (*Photo 1*). A clean, sharply indented, even cut is important, as the gap between the two edges bordering the cut is what will stop the dye/color from migrating. After the design is inscribed, lightly sand the surface of the cut with fine abrasive to remove any raised areas on the edges of the cut. Then vigorously blow off the piece, making sure the inscribed line is clean—any dust remaining in the cut will “carry” the dye/color instantly beyond where it should be.

Apply color

For adding color, I use water-thinned, artist-grade gouache or watercolor paint because it can be lacquered over without compromising the color. For adding black, I use Fiebing's leather dye (USMC Black) as an alternative to traditional ebonizing methods. This dye really penetrates and I have found it to be far superior to various inks or other ebonizing techniques. The Fiebing's dye is an alcohol-based formula and performs better than acetone-based versions. Apply it with a swab, brush, or rag, but wear gloves, as it will take days to wash from your hands. I do not dilute this dye but use it full strength.

With a soft-bristle brush, begin applying the dye, starting a bit back from the

cut edge and working carefully toward it. Fill in the larger areas with long, even strokes. As you bring the dye up to the cut, it will stop abruptly at the line and will not fill or cross it. The technique is to gently and slowly “float” the color just to the edge. Notice when you start just how rapidly the dye bleeds/flows into the wood. This absorption rate will vary from one wood species to another.

When applying color inside an outlined area, use the same process, starting in the center and “floating” the color to the edges. The color will stop at the cut line (*Photo 2*).

Add a clear topcoat

Before finishing with a topcoat, let the colors dry completely. Then very carefully buff the surface with fine (0000) steel wool. If you are not careful, the buffing can cause the dye to transfer to other areas. If you notice this happening, stop buffing with the steel wool, wipe down the surface, and apply a light application of the clear topcoat finish you will be using. After this coat dries, then go again with the steel wool to get a nice, burnished finish. Complete with final coats of your preferred topcoat (mine is a clear lacquer).

Practice and experiment to reveal the possibilities of using this technique. ■

Photos by A.J. McLennan.

While Garry Knox Bennett is known primarily for furniture, he studied painting and sculpture at California College of Arts and Crafts. With regard to his furniture and jewelry, he is self-taught and enjoys pushing the limits to find alternative methods. Color and contrast have always been part of his lexicon, especially in furniture. For more, visit gkb-furniture.com.

Woodturning in Basic Black

By Alan Lacer

Woodturners and woodworkers have long valued the use of woods either colored black or naturally having that color. The first turning book in the Western world (*Le Art De Tourner* by P. C. Plumier, first edition 1701) offers no less than five recipes for the ebonizing of wood—more than for any other color. African ebony has been highly valued for its richness, density, and almost jewel-like qualities for millenniums.

So what stands behind this enduring interest in black or blackened wood, both by makers and viewers of such work? The color black has more complexity behind it than perhaps any other color—it is even debated whether black is a color. There is certainly the psychology of black, its conflicting and often contradictory meanings and associations. Plus there is the visual impact of black as the only color used or when effectively used, in conjunction with other colors. The role of black and its impact can readily change by how it is used by the artist.

Woodturning in Basic Black, an exhibit sponsored by the AAW, opened Nov. 1 at Sculptured Objects & Functional Art (SOFA) Chicago. Alan Lacer's essay first appeared in the SOFA Chicago 2007 catalog. Reprinted with permission.

A piece of wood blackened with heavy pigments, grain filled with either finish or filler, could imitate pottery, glass, plastic, or metal—it may well be hard to know the material except through closer inspection. However, a blackened wooden piece that retains its pores and grain patterns is unmistakably wood—it has its own power and presence that separates it from these other materials.

The color of black

Anyone attempting to color wood black will make several observations. First, black is not always, well, just black. Sometimes there are hints of red, blue, violet, brown, or gray working through the black. Another challenge is finding a coloring process that allows the artist to achieve the desired look he/she is after and the fact that end-grain and face/side grain react to coloring techniques quite differently. Moreover, in some techniques, the underlying wood might contribute its own color or change the color of the blackening process to something less desirable than intended.

Woodturners who construct three-dimensional work in the round face their own set of



"Hollow-Faceted Chunk"

by Jim Partridge. 14½x11¾x11¼".

concerns. In an all-black piece you cannot hide the form from the viewer—it is a naked form. Wood grain and other colors can fool the eye when it comes to judging a piece, even its shape. Black generally makes the form less competitive with other features or colors. This unusual aspect of blackened wood is sometimes invoked as a teaching technique to instruct good form development with woodturners. The completed turning is painted black in order to better evaluate the form absent of grain, figure, or color. Likewise the blackened turned work is not relying on highly figured or rich color of other hues to create eye-grabbing work.



“Lidded Vessel” by Matthew Hill.
Maple; 8½×8½". This piece is included
in the *Basic Black* exhibit.

Photo: Carl Shortt



“Irish Ebony Bowl”
by Ciaran Forbes. Bog oak; 6×7×8".

Photo: David Ellsworth

When used in combination with other colors, black can make colors more intense or call attention to details on a woodturning. An all-black turning except for a few details, makes these details explode or at least brings the eye to quickly focus upon them. In the case of large-pored woods created in black, with the pores filled with another color such as white, a striking surface effect will be created. In these cases black is excellent at framing or highlighting important details of the work.

Taking this thought a bit further, black often does more to reveal than hide. Have you ever heard it said that black clothing shows everything? Black in an unusual way illuminates—which one would think is only the domain of bright lights. Imagine a remote and rural farmhouse on a very dark night. A single light from

that house draws attention to the farm, but it may very well be that it is not the light that calls attention, but the darkness that surrounds the house. If it was a bright day or there were many farmhouses all lit up at night in close proximity, that single farmhouse might well go unnoticed by the viewer. Black is excellent at framing what you desire to see or emphasize—is that not what a black picture frame or black matting does to a painting or photograph?

Other media certainly have explored and exploited the powerful features of black. The painters Pierre Soulages, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella created works that explored the power of just black, mixtures of

black with other colors, or the power of light as it falls onto black—revealing the depth and complexity of it. Raku pottery has its own beauty with regions and streaks of black from the firing process. The work of Pueblo potters from Santa Clara and San Ildefonso such as Maria Martinez, and Hopi potter Nampeyo, are in a league of their own in terms of elegance, beauty and mystery of their black-on-black pottery.

Black turning stock

Creating the impact of an all or partially black piece has several sources for woodworkers. There are woods that are quite black in their highest grades: ebony, African blackwood, and bog oak, sometimes called Irish ebony.

Basic Black at AAW Gallery

An encore exhibit of *Woodturning in Basic Black*, featuring many pieces from the SOFA Chicago exhibit, will be on display Jan. 11–April 18 at the AAW Gallery in St. Paul.

Gabon ebony is often considered the blackest and most consistently black form of ebony. This wood has been valued since ancient times—used as a symbol of wealth, power, trade, or as a form of currency. Other varieties of ebony (or lower-grade Gabon ebony) might have brown or white streaking, which can be beautiful in its own right. African blackwood, a true rosewood, is another source of blackish wood but with larger open pores than ebony and lacking some of its deep black richness.

A Mexican wood, katalox, is a source of very black wood, although it's a rather small tree with lots of white sapwood. Another African wood, wenge, almost looks all black, but really is a mix of black and brown. American persimmon is a true ebony and may have rich areas of deep black, sometimes referred to as carbon, or almost always has flecks of black in the wood.

One of the most fascinating sources of naturally colored black wood is timber (especially oaks) buried in peat bogs in areas of Ireland and Scotland. Logs that have lain in the highly acidic peat bogs of this region, combined with their own tannic acid and iron from the soil, impart a wonderful deep black color to the wood. The process is a slow one, often occurring over thousands of years. Similarly, buried ancient logs found in Japan also produce this rich black coloring. This wood, called *umoregi* in Japanese, has really reached the level of petrified wood, but can still be shaped into wonderful objects. Its look can be almost the same as ebony, with some figure to the material, but certainly much harder.

“Creating a wood-turned piece that is totally black is truly a challenge. Given the absence of color, the onus is put upon form, with secondary elements of the piece responsible for holding attention, and providing opportunities for discovery and subtle surprises.”

— Molly Winton

Adding black

Naturally occurring black woods are rare in a world that commercially lumbers over 8,000 different types of wood. In reaction to this reality, woodworkers and woodturners have resorted to coloring the wood black. Woodturners in particular have taken this blackening process in many different directions. One method is by fire: charring in a fire or with a torch, sometimes wire-brushed or sanded, sometimes oiled and burnished, to achieve the deep charcoal black that is often the target. The amount and depth of the burning can create quite a variation of effects.

Arizona woodturner Phil Brennion utilizes one of the more unusual methods of fire—he covers the piece with gunpowder, and ignites the powder to produce



“Night Run” by Molly Winton is part of the *Basic Black* exhibit. Cherry; 5¾×3¾”.

regions of black for a wonderful black speckled look that gives an ancient look to his work. Another way to blacken is by using friction while pieces are spinning on a lathe. A simple wire can create lines of black by burning into the wood, while a piece of heavy cardboard held against the spinning wood—usually at a very high speed—can create larger zones of black.

Today most black pieces are created using more traditional or obvious wood coloring techniques. There is a wide range of methods, utilizing everything from printer's inks (in paste form), India ink, acrylic- and oil-based paints, spray paints from a can, extractions of logwood, leather dyes, aniline dyes made from coal, traditional fabric dyes, pigmented paints (such as oil base or acrylic), black gesso,

pigmented stains, lacquer mixed with graphite, nails or steel wool soaked in vinegar.

One of the most intense practices of coloring wood black is the process of Japanese lacquer (*urushi*). The *urushi* culture of Japan has a history dating back 6,000 years. Made from the sap of a tree, this process requires great skill and considerable time to achieve the rich black, wet-looking color. The processed sap, with the addition of either iron or carbon black, creates this effect.

Today black is the most widely used color in *urushi*, either alone or in combination with other colors or materials such as powdered gold and silver.

The impact of the blackening often depends on whether the wood is colored with dyes or



“**Lagniappe**” by Gorst du Plessis is part of the *Basic Black* exhibit. African Blackwood and turquoise; 7½×3”.

pigments to achieve the effect. Think of the use of pigments as painting—small particles of color mixed with binders—while the use of a dye is much like dyeing fabric. Dyeing generally gives greater depth of coloring and more clarity, as the material is absorbing color rather than just having it floating on its surface as is the case with pigments. Each approach has its practitioners and each has its strengths and weaknesses. If you make use of pigments, the color of the wood has not quite the same factor of darkness as dye stains.

The downside of pigments is that they tend to obscure the figure and natural color of the wood more so than dyes, but this might be desirable. With dyes

“*Black is the absolute color where form rules.*”

– Gorst du Plessis

there tends to be more clarity, if applied well, and more control over the shading of the color. Each new coat tends to darken the color, even black, whereas multiple coats of pigments, once a good base is established, will be the shade of the original pigment—remember pigments are just tiny particles of the same color. The inherent color of dyed wood contributes to the overall effect—whether desired or not. For example, the same colored dye on maple will look quite different over a red mahogany. The pigment approach will tend to color both woods more uniformly, with one great difference—maple tends to look sploshy from pigments, but looks great with dyes. A lesson to be learned when you try to color wood: Different species of wood, and sometimes individual pieces of wood, often react differently to different techniques.

The challenge for artists working in wood is to use black effectively, given its many forms and variations, the many reactions it can evoke, the variety of techniques—all point to the depth and range of this color. Explore this special exhibit slowly and methodically—and be prepared to experience the richness of black with a new appreciation.

Alan Lacer (AlanLacer.com) is an *American Woodturner* contributing editor who lives near River Falls, WI.

Photos: Tib Shaw/A&W



“**Inner Rimmed Vessel**” by Liam Flynn is one of the pieces in the *Basic Black* exhibit. Oak; 13×8”. In this piece, carving adds patterns but also changes the way light plays along the surface of the blackened work. “At its most basic, black works for me because it removes any distractions from material. What interests me primarily are form and texture, and how the grain structure interacts with the line of the vessel. The blackening process that I use does not obliterate the grain; instead it brings the structure of the wood into a sharper focus.”