

FOOT BOWLS

Can you stand it?



PETER M. SMITH



THESE DELIGHTFUL SMALL, LITERALLY footed bowls are easy to make and are immediately enjoyed by all who see them—kids especially love them. We know there is nothing new under the sun, and the earthenware original from 4000 BC Egypt can be seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. To emulate the idea in turned wood was the challenge, and the results have been rewarding, with lots of room for variations.

The approach extends woodturning by the creative use of the band-saw and belt sander. Normally I shy away from freehand decorations and enhancements to my bowls—these don't usually work. I find that some people are natural artists and can draw a simple flowing line that just looks good, but there are many more of us who draw a flowing line and it just looks—awful. (I have always been impressed by Picasso's expressiveness with a few lines—his famous sketches of peace doves, for example.) If I'm striving for that integral smooth curve of a bowl, why risk botching it with a manual addition? Carving feet on bowls seemed to be asking for trouble. This design, however, uses more straight lines than you might guess. This is a relief. It is also straightforward and allows the bowls to become production

items, that is, reproducible many times with relatively consistent results.

Techniques

Small bowls seem more cute than large ones, and I have been using approximately 4x4-inch cylinders of green wood, with the grain parallel to the lathe bed. I super-glue the cylinder to a waste piece of hardwood on my faithful screw chuck, and then turn a rough goblet shape as per Figure 1. Dimensions are not critical. So far, this is easy, and even hollowing the end grain is not much trouble because the bowl is wide and shallow. Ellsworth-style bent tools with cobalt-steel bits are effective, as is the ring Termite tool. After drying for three months or so, I remount and true up, and finish the surface, ending with 400-grit paper with Danish oil. I then part the goblet off the lathe with a sharp parting tool, cutting down to the waste wood at a 10- to 15-degree angle.

Now to the bandsaw. I mark the saw lines as in Figure 2 on the bottom rim, and then carefully cut



through the rim to outline the feet by firmly holding the piece and guiding it into the blade. It is critical to use the toes-to-be to balance the body during the cutting, as band-saws and round objects are not good mates. It is actually easy enough since the foot rim is thin. The only tricky part is cutting out the waste between the legs; you have to use multiple overlapping cuts while avoiding slicing into a leg, (lots of sanding to cover up), a finger (more serious), or buckling the blade (another \$15 gone).

I use a wide belt sander to flatten the soles of the feet, and a thin belt

Fig. 1: Specifications

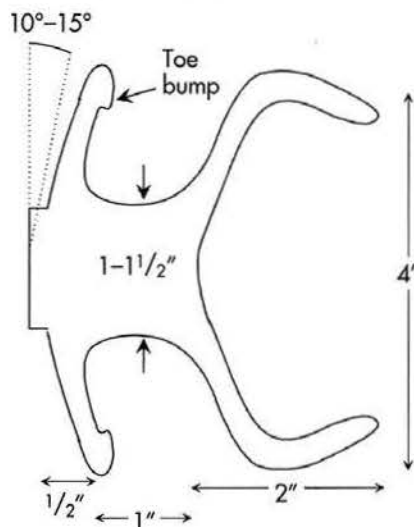
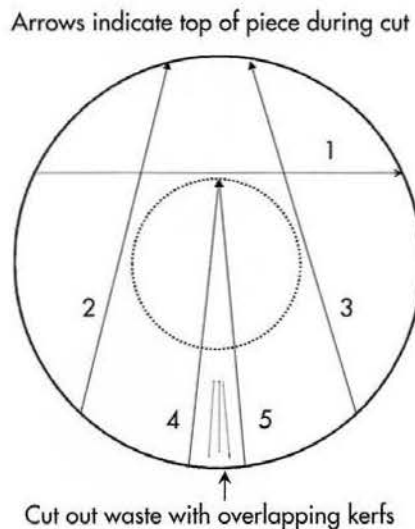


Fig. 2: Bandsaw cuts on lower rim



FINISHING OVERVIEW

Understanding the choices

ALAN W. HOLLAR

sander to shape the heels and toes. Finally, a Dremel tool completes the fine points: Dremel makes a thin $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-diameter saw, which is ideal for cutting the toe slots, and also for outlining the, how shall I put it, (optional) rear cheeks. But other saws and rasps would be effective. Some oil-sanding by hand on the edges and the new surfaces completes the work.

Variations

I like to leave a ridge on the outside edge of the foot rim which gives the toes some emphasis. I'm pondering how I might make the feet at different angles to simulate a real walk. It would also be interesting to add arms, or at least bring out the suggestion of arms, perhaps clasping hands over the potbelly. And I'm contemplating not just a bowl but a whole sphere on legs and carving a face into this to make it a walking head. (I have a ceramic piece that is wonderful.) Perhaps paint would add a new dimension. Yet the further away I get from those few straight bandsaw cuts, the more nervous I get and on the whole I think I'll leave these variations to the more artistic, and work on a production approach.

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Maple bowl ($3\frac{1}{2}$ " dia.), also shown on the facing page. This rear view exploits the grain for emphasis.

SINCE 1984, MY PRIMARY OCCUPATION has been the restoration of furniture, so you might say that I entered woodworking from the end instead of from the beginning. Of necessity, I have had to be familiar with a variety of surfaces, some less than ideal, and have a working, friendly relationship with an almost bewildering array of finishing materials and styles.

As my once job-oriented interest in woodturning has blossomed into a passion, I spend all my free time (and, increasingly, time not so free) at the lathe with more pleasurable and decorative ends in mind. As the time I spend turning has increased, so has the number of pieces requiring finishing. But unlike most of my fellows in craft, I have the luxury of access both to a wide choice of finishes and to the equipment and workspace for applying them. I have tried many different approaches, some more successful than others and will pass along some information and observations that have been useful to me as a woodturner rather than as a finisher of furniture or architectural woodwork.

Why finish?

With the availability of extremely fine abrasives and polishing compounds, some turners have achieved lovely surfaces without any applied finish at all. Perhaps it is personal prejudice, but I have reservations regarding this practice. Most of my work gets handled a bit before acquiring a home, and experience has shown me the corrosive power of skin oils, as well as the staining potential of dirty hands or lotions and hand creams. Since I also show up at some outdoor events, I know that a merely polished surface offers no impediment to water damage. I have

seen extensive grain raising and graying under water that beaded on bowls that had no applied finish. Finishing wood is a good idea.

Choosing the right finish

As protection is a valid concern, I should point out that almost any finish will provide enough protection for the majority of turned objects. Most finishes were developed for furniture or architectural woodwork, which suffer considerably more abuse than almost any decorative object is likely to receive. (Turned items intended for use outdoors, toys for children, and tools for workshop or kitchen are notable exceptions.) I will point out some differences that will determine the choices for various applications.

As finishes also provide a general enrichment of appearance, a carefully chosen combination of finish and wood will display deeper and more vibrant color. Smoother surfaces and the option of tweaking shade and color tone are easily obtained. More elaborate effects, such as staining, opaque coloring, either single colors or multiple bands, layers, and splotches, or antiqued and crackled patinas are possible with combinations of stains, finishes, and other materials. The more familiar you become with what is available and with how to play with combinations, the more you will be able to achieve what you imagine.

Of course finishes that protect can be decorative, and decorative finishes can also protect. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to achieve the perfect balance of both look and endurance, but there are alternatives today that should allow anyone to get mighty close to an ideal finish.

Applying a finish should be a more deliberate process than just