

The Journal of the American Association of Woodturners
Summer 2006 Vol. 21, No. 2 woodturner.org

Woodturner



Mary
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Page 16

French
Turners

Page 32

Step Up to the Plate

Page 1



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Here's a plan to add carved detail and an ebonized surface to your next turned platter.



Platter Embellishment

By Neil Scobie

If you have recently started turning wood or have been turning for awhile and need some new ideas, this project will be a good way to learn a few techniques that you can incorporate into any of your turned pieces.

If you have already made a few platters, then you are probably looking for new ways to embellish them. You will get to practice simple carving, stippling and ebonizing—each are basic techniques that don't require a lot of expensive equipment.

Get started

For lathe tools, you'll need a 1/2" bowl gouge and a 4-jaw chuck. For the detail work, you'll need a V hand-carving tool or a reciprocating

ing carving tool such as a Dremel or Foreman with a flexible shaft and a reciprocating head.

For power carving, I prefer a small ball-shaped burr. You'll also need a triangular file and ebonizing solution (more about that later).

For turning stock, choose a 8x1 1/2" material that has close grain. I selected Australian rosewood because of its rich color and close grain. Cherry is a similar North American hardwood that carves and turns well. Because of the high tannin content, both species ebonize well.

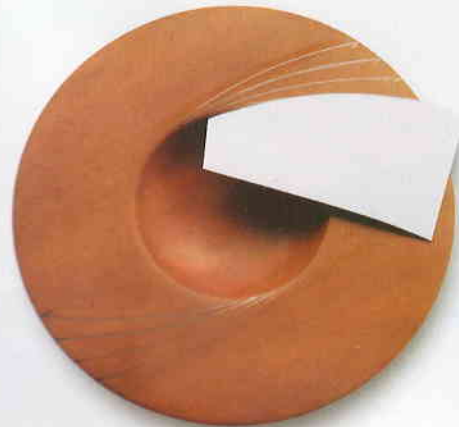
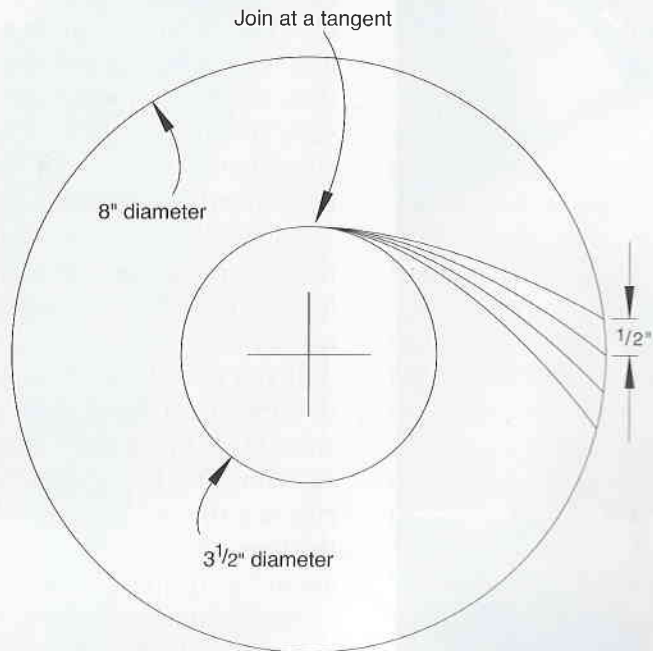
Turn the outside

Secure the blank on a screw center inserted in a scroll chuck. In the center of the top of the platter,



drill a 1/4"-diameter hole about 3/4" deep. If your screw center sticks out of the chuck more than 3/4", make a plywood spacer to take up the extra length of the screw.

Shape the outside of the platter with a 1/2" bowl gouge; turn from the center of the blank to the outer rim. On this step, point the gouge flute to about 10 o'clock so that you



are cutting with the bottom side of the gouge with the bevel rubbing against the wall of the platter as shown *opposite*.

After shaping the outside, turn a foot to suit your chuck and your style preference. I chose a 2"-diameter foot to fit the step jaws on a scroll chuck as shown *below*.

If you don't have access to a scroll chuck, turn a temporary foot (for attachment to a faceplate) and remove it at a later stage. Generally, a foot should be about one-third the diameter of the platter.

Sand the entire bottom of the platter to 600 grit.



Turn the inside

Mount the foot of the platter in the scroll chuck and turn the rim and bowl sections of the platter. Turn the top of the rim using the same process you used on the bottom of the platter.

On the inside, cut from the outside (rim) toward the center as shown *above*. When turning the inside of the platter, roll over the bowl gouge so the flute points to 2 o'clock. Cut with the bottom side of the flute, and the top section of the flute will be well clear of the timber. When you are pleased with the shape, sand the surface

completely. I mount a 180-grit sanding disc in an electric drill and progress through 600 grit.

Add carved detail

To lay out the consistent curved lines detailing this platter, make a cardboard template like the one shown *above*. The drawing *above left* will assist you in laying out the template. Follow the measurements to draw the curved lines on either end of the platter.

You'll need to secure the platter while you carve the lines. One method is the carving pole held in the tool post as shown *below*; you can adjust this up and





down and rotate the platter in any direction. Another option is to leave the platter on the chuck and then secure the chuck in a bench vise. The main thing is to have the chuck held securely so it does not move during the carving process.

For carving the lines, you can use either a V tool held by hand *left* or one held in a reciprocating carver, *below left*.

If you don't have access to either of these, use a sharp knife with a short blade to cut the V shape on each line. It is best to take small cuts at a time so you can follow the lines more easily. Carve each V about $\frac{3}{16}$ " deep.

Now, round over the surface between each of the lines as shown *below*. To do this, roll over the V tool and work with the grain to remove the corners next to each V.

After rounding over the grooves, sand the beads. To make this process easier, wrap 120-grit abrasive around an expired credit card to give it rigidity.

If you intend to stipple the beads, you only need to sand to 120 grit to remove any hollows or hills. If you are not going to stipple, you will need to sand all the way down into each V through 600 grit.

During the sanding process, you may unintentionally round the bottom of a V, so you may need to sharpen them again. To do this, you could run down each V with a sharpened carving tool. Or, sharpen the end of a triangular file to refine the shape.

Stipple the surface

This is a time-consuming process—it is quicker to sand the beads completely rather than stipple them. You can use a ball-shaped burr held in any rotary



would be texturing with a smaller-diameter burr (about $\frac{3}{32}$ " is my preference). Ask your family dentist for discarded burrs. They tend to use the burrs only a few times before pitching them.

When stippling, it is important to be comfortable and have good lighting. I like to sit in a comfortable chair on my workshop veranda with the rotary tool hanging beside me. I find it best to stipple in a random pattern rather than in lines. Cover all the areas on the beads and up the V-wall evenly so that the dots run into each other.

To accent, ebonize

You may think the platter has enough happening visually without turning the beads black. If so, skip this step. But if you decide to ebonize an accent on the piece, first carve and stipple a small bead as a trial to a waste piece of turning stock. Ebonize the surface on the scrap to make sure the result pleases you.

To make the ebonizing solution, fill a quart jar with about 3 cups of cider vinegar, then add a pad of unused steel wool or steel nails. In just a few days, the chemical reaction between the vinegar and steel will create ferric oxide—your ebonizing solution.

Paint on the ebonizing solution with a small brush. If you want to be extra careful, you could first mask off the areas not being ebonized. (I did get a few little bits on the top of the rim, but these sand off easily.)

Let the ebonizing solution dry for a few hours before sanding off any areas where it has bled beyond your detailed area. Sand the platter with 600 grit to remove undesirable marks. Sign and date the platter before applying finish.

Apply finish

Most finishes are compatible with the ebonizing solution, so you can apply your finish without fear of spoiling your platter. I use a non-toxic oil to finish all my pieces—I like the results, and the oil is not detrimental to my health. Here's what works well for me.

Brush or wipe on finish liberally and allow it to soak into the grain for 15 minutes. Wipe off the oil remaining on the surface. The next day, repeat the process and allow it to dry overnight again.

Before applying the third coat, rub the surface with 0000 steel wool or a fine scouring pad. Blast off the dust with compressed air, then apply a third coat. After 15 or 20 minutes, remove all oil that doesn't soak into the wood.

For a lasting finish, apply a fourth coat the following day, repeating the steps described above.

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tool to do the job, but it is much more comfortable to use a flexible shaft with the burr in the chuck. If you use a $\frac{1}{8}$ "-diameter ball-shaped burr, you can quickly cover the area. However, the final texture won't be as attractive as it

