

The Exuberant Les Thorne gave a great demonstration of how he makes his textured 'curly top' box. Les was excellent at keeping us informed of what he is doing, the tools and how he uses them at all times, plus a smattering of jokes (he says he has only 3) plus general information on woodturning. The techniques discussed here can be found on Les' DVD "No Turning Back".



He started with an ash blank from which he had removed the corners to speed roughing time. As he was making a box the first decision to be made is where it will be divided, he mentioned the golden rule of one third, but in this case as the lid was bigger than the base Les used a proportion of 2/5 to 3/5ths. He spoke about the type of fit for the lid – he prefers a looser fit as the 'click' fit doesn't work in ash – the fit needs to be initially tight for the lid to be jammed on for turning and then relieved slightly when the lid is finished. The

lid and base can also be made up with 'egg rings' or pewter fittings.

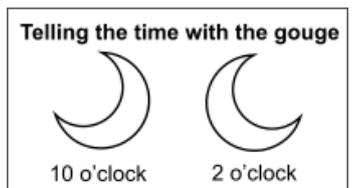
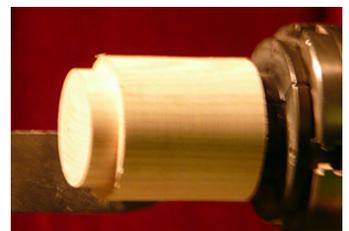
Les delivered a continuous stream of helpful advice, hints and tips and comments on his own working methods, preferred tools, etc, drawing diagrams to illustrate various points. While parting off the lid from the base he talked about parting tools, saying he found the 1/8" to be the most versatile, he uses his parting tool as a scraper and reminded us we should never part off between centres.

He demonstrated the advantages of pull or push cuts for hollowing showing us the angles by talking about the clock face – where the pull cut is made with the gouge at 10 o'clock and the push at 2 o'clock. He used a spindle gouge with ground back wings so it doesn't catch. He went into the centre and pulled back, pivoting at the centre to avoid the 'pimple' – he went in at 10.00 turning the gouge to 9.30 and then 9.15 as it comes out. He reminded us to make smaller cuts to get a better finish. Les finished off by roughly shaping the outside.

Replacing the hollowed out lid with the base, leaving a witness mark on the base for fitting the lid, Les hollowed out the base with a flat bottom using a pull cut – starting with a 'pretend' cut – cutting air and arcing the tool in to cut the wood gently, starting at an angle and arcing the tool to remove stock. He starts at 10 o'clock and turns to 9 o'clock up the side. He used a round



nose scraper with a negative rake to clean the bottom and then used a 1/2" round skew to get the sides straight. He also showed us what to do if we don't quite manage to remove the centre 'pimple' – making it a feature with ornamental detail. He removed small amounts of material at a time turning the skew slightly on its side and being careful to keep the sides parallel and not to undercut so that the lid fits snugly into the base. Les used a push cut with a bevel rub to finish inside the box, wax sanded it and then roughed out the shape for the outside.



Les then replaced the lid onto the base and secured it with masking tape to work on the outside of the box to shape the lid. He worked out how much of a curve he wanted on the pointed lid of the box (which will be off-centre) then turned it to allow for this curve. The fish tail point was carved using a sanding burr on a power tool – he mentioned the Saburr tooth rotary tools available from the [Tool Post](#) and the Kutzall accessories available from [Woodworks Craft Supplies](#) in Wales.

Having shaped the point Les removed the masking tape (this is where the fit needs to be tight) and used sanding strip before texturing. He made a v-cut either side of the join between the top and bottom to set the parameters for the texturing areas and turned a little step to emphasise the join. Les used a ball cutter with a power tool such as a Dremel – he finds the ball cutter from the Decorating Elf to be a good size. He said the wood should be brought to the tool, not the tool to the wood and hand turned the wood away from himself, texturing the whole marked out surface – not leaving any flats.

Once the texturing was completed he used a rotary sanding bristle brush – produced by 3M (but very expensive), and sprayed it with clear lacquer which gets a shine and matt effect once the raised surface is sanded. He sanded the flat part reminding us always to sand behind, never on top before spraying the entire surface with black ebonising lacquer. He doesn't bother about using sanding sealer. Once the lacquer is dry he sanded back the top surface to expose the natural wood before colouring the piece (holly is good if you want to retain the white/black effect as holly will remain white).

He removed the dust and used Chestnut spirit stains put into spray bottles – always using gloves and spraying onto a rag. He used an artistic technique he refers to as 'splodging' trying a range of colours and then merging them together with yellow, which also has a brightening effect. He finishes with 2 or 3 coats of satin lacquer, cutting back after 2 coats. If there are any white spots they can be filled with felt tip pens.

He then carried out a final fit of the lid to the base by sanding very gently, starting with 320 grit and onto 400 before turning the sanding strip over the burnish the surface.

To remove the spigot from the base he turned a jam chuck cut with a taper and always uses a softer wood for this chuck so it doesn't mark the box, remarking on the different finish a push and a pull cut will make on end grain.

The piece should be finished with 3 coats of lacquer.



In answer to a question he suggested he would sell the piece he refers to as a sculpture rather than a functional box, for £60 in the UK, £120 in the US.



This rounded up a very entertaining evening where even if we didn't want to create an identical piece there was plenty of information on techniques to keep us happy.

Les finished off reminding us about his DVD and also said he runs classes at his workshop and if a group of 5 wanted to book together he could offer a special rate of £50 each.

