

Mark Baker – March 2012

Cheam welcomed Mark Baker for another informative and entertaining evening in March. He started by talking about experimenting with shapes and colour. He encouraged us to have fun with our woodturning telling us that the average club turner makes 15 pieces per year and at 1 piece per 3 weeks we can suffer from lack of practice. Mark was demonstrating unsupported vessels – that is ones that do not have an integral base but rely on sitting on a separate piece.

He started making a square shallow platter, where he uses sycamore or ash because the corners are less likely to fragment. He mounted a piece of sycamore between centres and was using a new on-test Elio drive (review in Spring 2012 Woodturning Magazine, available from [One Good Turn](#) in the US) on the headstock and a revolving centre in the tailstock.



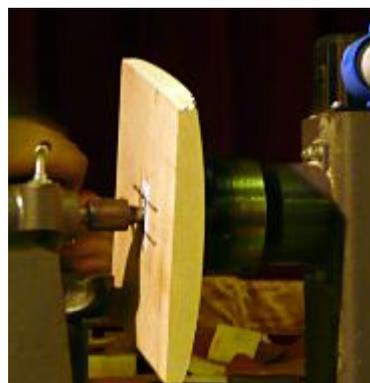
He started by making the 1st cut to define the spigot using a swept-back bowl gouge then beginning from the outside edge removed a small amount at a time with a pull cut at low speed, initially to even up any unevenness in the thickness. He had marked a line on the sides of the wood to follow, ensuring that the pointed wings exit through the side wall. He continued with a push cut with the flute at 10 o'clock in line with the bevel, using micro-cuts to take off the corners. The drawn line allows you to leave enough to cut from the top and gives you a visual reference. A direct light is essential to see the edge.



He removed the ridges, dropping the handle of the bowl gouge and using it as a shear scraper. He spoke about sanding – always going one grade of abrasive coarser than you think you need. He uses sanding pads and said he would finish off the wing tips by hand – not while the piece is spinning if you want to keep your fingertips!



The piece was turned round, still using the tail stock to support the work. Working on the inside, Mark removed the wood in stages each of about 2½ inches from the outside – this is essential to keep a large centre for stability.



As the edge gets thinner he uses a sanding block held on the back of the piece while turning the edges to stop flexing – this requires good management of the gouge one-handed. He reminded us to use sound as well as keeping an eye on the sight line – the pitch goes up as the wood gets thinner – when you hear nothing you've gone too far!

While turning Mark spoke about a variety of issues, including moisture in wood – this is usually around 8-10% in a house and when turning a box it is a good idea to take it into the house for about 2 weeks before finishing it off to allow for movement.



He told us to slow down if necessary when going into the centre, removing as much of the centre as possible with the piece still supported by the tailstock. Drop the handle arcing toward the centre – use a pull cut for better surface and a scraper for blending the section.



Once the inside is finished Mark turned the piece round to finish off the base – this would be smooth and rounded. He used a turned block as a support padded with kitchen paper and again used the tailstock for support. If possible this should be wider, perhaps a revolving step centre or failing that use blue-tak and a washer on the tailstock to prevent the pointed centre going through. He blended it in with a scraper and then removed it and took off the final 'pip' by hand



Mark then talked about the options for a base – you could use a hollow ring but he had brought with him 2 pyramids, one with a flattish top and one pointed – these were coloured and made an interesting contrast to the platter



After the tea break Mark went on to his 2nd demonstration – a round decorated bowl with a bronze and verdigris finish. Whilst this would not be something everyone would want to make it included interesting techniques and offers ways of using what would otherwise be a plain piece of wood and also has the option of a variety of separate bases.



The bowl was turned with the widest point 1/3rd of the way down from the top. Mark smoothed the outside with a scraper which has a negative rake with the tool held horizontally to the work. He sharpens the scraper with a diamond file just on the underneath edge and only re-grinds the top when the negative rake has worn away.



The outside was beaded most of the way down with an Ashley Iles beading tool that had the tips ground off at 45°. The tool was held at 45° to the wood, lifting it at the end to finish the bead.

Mark usually cleans the grooves with a nylon bristle brush fitted on a drill but in this case just used folded sandpaper.



The bowl was turned round and mounted on the spigot to hollow the inside, using a bowl gouge and finishing it with a scraper. It was turned round again to remove the spigot. It would then be coated with cellulose sanding sealer and denibbed with abrasive nylon mesh.



Mark showed us how he coloured the bowl, initially using a toothbrush to apply 2 coats of bronze paste, which he finds works better than sprays. He then produced 'one he had made earlier' where the paste had been applied to the whole surface.



The bright bronze was then sprayed a light dusting of ebonising lacquer to mute it down. This was followed with a coating of verdigris (green) coloured wax. You can also use liming paste coloured with a powder colour spirit dye. This should be left for a day and a half to 2 days to dry.



A dome drill brush mounted in a jacobs chuck on the lathe was used to unevenly brush off the verdigris, at a slow speed with a gentle touch, creating highlights on the surface – this will take around 15 minutes. This finish is not food safe.

Mark finished off by talking about ways of mounting round bottomed vessels. He showed us a ply stand which was curved and drilled out, a small separate turned stand, the ply 4-sided pyramids and a flat thick plank carved with a pattern, painted black, which with the decorated bowl and a pair of chopsticks on a support made a Japanese food bowl.

