Go beyond the lathe for beautiful vessels

BY JONATHAN BINZEN

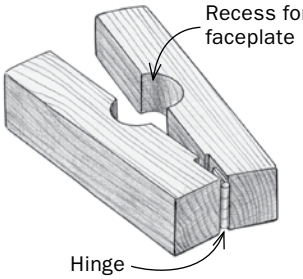
The beautiful overall shapes Liam Flynn creates on his lathe immediately draw the eye. Yet much of what makes his vessels so memorable happens afterward. The signature double lip found on many of his pieces is made on the lathe but modified at the workbench. And all the fluting is done with the vessel off the lathe. A lathe by nature generates perfectly symmetrical forms, but Flynn has found a way to produce turned vessels that are equal parts symmetry and asymmetry, perfection and imperfection. He may be aiming to find "the perfect line," but while he's pursuing it he lets the irregularities of work done by hand and by eye become part of the composition. Flynn turns and carves his pieces while the

THE DOUBLE LIP

Many of Flynn's vessels feature a distinctive double lip with an asymmetrical profile. He creates the lip partly on the lathe and partly at the bench.

Establishing the inner lip. *After hollowing the vessel with a bowl gouge, Flynn uses a hooked scraper to define the shoulder of the inner lip. He uses the same tool to smooth the inside walls.*

Last lathe step. *Using a round-nosed scraper that's been ground back at an acute angle, Flynn shapes the recess between the inner and outer lips.*



Faceplate leaves the lathe. *Flynn turns all but the bottom inch of the vessel, then takes it to the bench for carving. He uses a shopmade jig (above) to hold it solidly in the vise.*

Slanting the lip. *Flynn makes a sawkerf to provide a depth gauge as well as a relief cut (above left) before carving down the outer lip. Working toward the kerf, Flynn uses a shallow gouge to cut an incline (right). Having reached the bottom, he does the same thing from the opposite direction.*

Photos: Brendan Landy; drawing: John Tetreault

FLUTE MUSIC

Flynn stays at the bench to carve the flutes. When most of the carving is done, he returns to the lathe to turn the foot, then completes the flutes.

Freehand fluting. *Flynn cuts the flutes without layout lines (far left), preferring the slightly irregular effect it creates. When only a small space is left unfluted, dividers help him assess the width of the final flutes (above).*

wood is still green—he chainsaws the blanks from sawlogs—so there is always some distortion of the overall shape as the piece dries. To minimize distortion, he cuts out the blank so that the vessel's height is oriented perpendicular to the length of the log. He often turns the vessels from English oak (American oaks would be suitable, too), and he uses the prominent medullary rays as a guide while he's roughing out the turning: If he has it oriented properly, the rays should form vertical lines on two sides of the vessel.

Flynn begins a piece by screwing his blank to a faceplate and turning the outside form down to within an inch or so of the foot. Then he hollows the inside and creates the double lip.

Now comes the carving. Flynn takes the vessel off the lathe but leaves it screwed to the faceplate—which he uses to help hold the vessel for carving. With most of the carving complete, Flynn removes the faceplate and mounts the vessel between centers to finish turning the foot. Then he completes the carving off the lathe. □

Back on the lathe. *After unscrewing the faceplate, Flynn puts the vessel between centers on the lathe to turn the foot. The vessel is held between a cup center in the tail stock and a cylinder chucked into the headstock (left). He leaves a small spigot (right), which he removes later with a chisel.*

Post production. *To do the last bit of fluting, Flynn inverts the vessel on a cylindrical post clamped in a vise. Perfection is not his aim, Flynn says. "They're imperfect; that's the way it is. They're not machine-made." Certainly not.*