Lacework in Oak

Most anyone who works with oak quickly discovers that each of the wood's annual rings comprises two distinct layers—softer spring growth and harder, denser summer growth—and that these are crossed by prominent medullary rays, cells that radiate from the tree's pith to its perimeter. For Pascal Oudet, these are not just interesting facts but the foundation of his work in wood. In his barn shop in southeastern France, Oudet starts with chainsawn hunks of European oak and turns vessels with walls just 2mm thick (about 1/16 in.), then sandblasts them until the spring growth is scoured completely away. What's left is a kind of lacework, with just the threadlike medullary rays holding the summer growth rings in place. Oudet's pieces, turned green and deformed through drying, take on hauntingly beautiful shapes and present a revealing new portrait of one of the world's most well-known woods.

—Jonathan Binzen

Photos: Pascal Oudet

How They Did It Turn to p. 86 to see the work that goes into turning a lacework disk.

Audio Slide Show To see and hear about a wide range of Oudet's thin-walled pieces, go to FineWoodworking.com/extras.