



Turned Ornaments

Three-piece decorations shaped and polished on the lathe

by Michael Sage



Elegant shapes on the lathe—Ornaments turned in three parts save small pieces of figured wood from the scrap bin and help embellish a tree or a window.

I turn wood for a living, and I sell just about everything I make. But there are a few things I like to turn just for family and friends. Wooden ornaments, turned from brightly colored or highly figured woods, are my favorites (see the photo at right). They're great for stocking stuffers or for dressing up a home during the holidays. These ornaments don't take long to make, and they're a great way to use up odd scraps of wood.

I make them in three parts: a bell, a stem and a finial (see the drawings on the facing page). Each part is turned separately. Glued together, the parts make a simple, bold form that really shows off a beautiful piece of wood. I have used clear, solid

woods as well as spalted, segmented, in-laid, dyed and bleached woods. I have even used Colorwood, which is a dyed plywood made of 1/16-in. maple veneers (Craft Supplies USA, 1287 E. 1120 S., Provo, UT 84606; 800-551-8876).

Start by making the bell

The bell begins as a 2-in.-sq. blank of wood 3 in. to 4 in. long. It's chucked between centers on the lathe and turned to a cylinder with a 1-in.-dia. by 1/2-in.-long tenon on one end.

I remount this piece on the lathe for final turning with a glue chuck, which is nothing more than a scrap block, with a hole drilled in it, screwed to the faceplate (see "making

the glue chuck" on the facing page). The tenon in the end of the bell piece is glued into the hole in the glue chuck. After the glue has dried, I snug up the tailstock and turn the outside of the blank to roughly the shape of the bell (see "turning the bell" on the facing page).

Hollowing out the bell of the ornament gives it a more delicate feel. To make an access hole for hollowing, I slide the tailstock out of the way and drill a 1/2-in.-dia. hole in the end of the bell about 2 in. deep.

I find that a hook tool is the best thing for hollowing. I made mine from a length of 3/16-in. drill rod. I bent the rod into a hook shape, sharpened it and added a wooden handle. When hollowing, I leave a 1/4-in.

shoulder so I can glue on the stem. After hollowing, I move the tailstock back in place, turn the bell shape the rest of the way and then sand it. I use a skew to part the bell from the lathe. The end has to be hand-sanded.

The stem adds form to the middle

For the stem, I start with a blank of wood 1 in. sq. by 3 in. long. I often use a wood that contrasts with the bell and the finial. I mount the blank between centers (a mini-drive works well at the headstock) and turn the blank into a cylinder.

I turn a 1/2-in.-dia. by 1/4-in.-long tenon on the tailstock end of the cylinder. Then I remove the tailstock and check the tenon's fit in the hole in the bell. If the fit is good, I replace the tailstock and turn the rest of the stem shape. I taper the headstock end down to 3/16 in. dia. (see "turning the stem"), but I leave a rim of waste so the spurs of the drive center stay secure. Then I sand the stem smooth.

The finial crowns the ornament

I use the same kind of wood for the finial as I did for the bell. I mount a 5/8-in.-sq. by 1-in.-long blank on the lathe using a friction-type drive. To make a drive, I take a 3/16-in.-dia. drill rod, grind the end to a chisel point and then snug it in a Jacob's chuck fitted to the headstock, as shown in "making the finial."

A friction-type drive, by the way, also can be used to hold the bell part of the ornament on the lathe. It's quicker than using a glue chuck. For the bell, though, I'd use a 1/2-in.-dia. drill rod.

The drill rod fits in a 3/16-in.-dia. by 3/8-in.-deep hole in the center end of the finial blank. I slip the blank on the drive, and with the tailstock providing extra support (see the drawing), I turn and sand the finial. I back off the tailstock and drill a 3/64-in.-dia. hole in the tip of the finial.

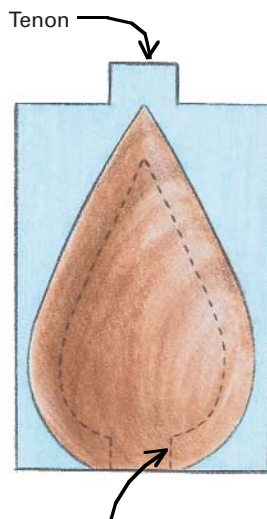
Polish the parts while they're on the lathe

I finish the ornament parts while they're still on the lathe (see the photo at left on the facing page). Or I'll hold the parts against a buffing wheel. After I polish the pieces, I glue them together. I drill a tiny eyelet in the top of the finial for hanging the ornament. □

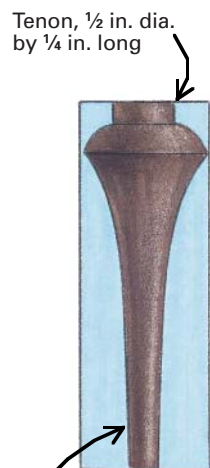
Michael Sage turns wooden artwork in Mountain View, Calif.

An ornament in three parts

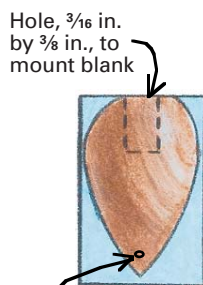
A tenon on one end of the stem is glued into the bell. The other end of the stem is glued into a hole in the finial.



Shoulder, 1/4 in. deep

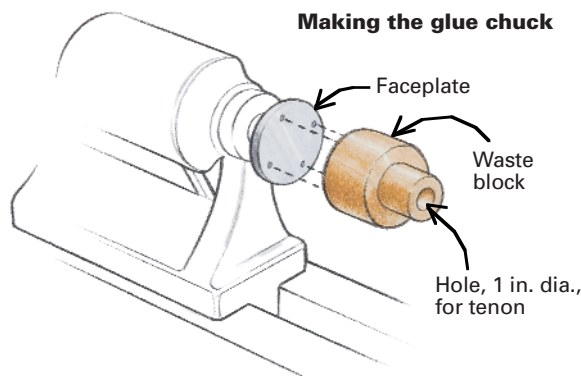


Stem

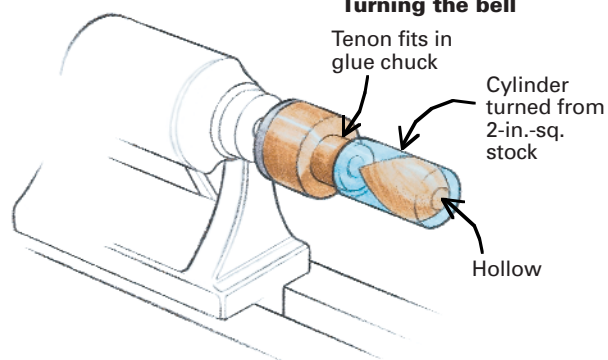


Drill 3/64-in. hole to hang ornament.

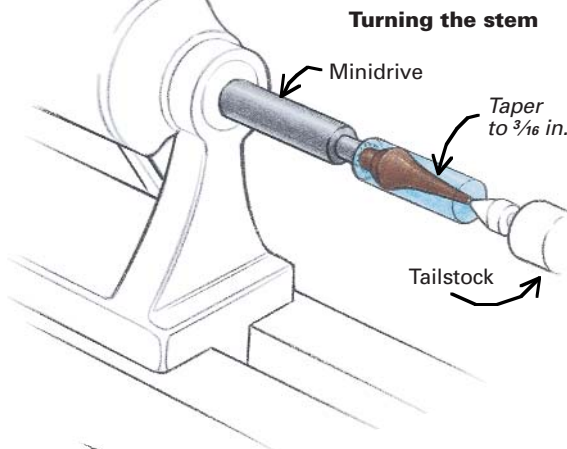
Making the glue chuck



Turning the bell



Turning the stem



Making the finial

