

Ask the Pro

Finishing the Foot of a Natural Edge Bowl

Between September 2009 and March 2010, the C.O.W. newsletter featured a forum in which members could ask the club's more experienced woodturners questions. What follows is one of the questions asked and a pro's answer.

I have turned a "natural edge" bowl but don't know how to hold the bowl to finish the foot. How do you do this?

Floyd Anstaett:

Natural edge bowls can present a problem relating to holding them while finishing off the bottom due to the irregular nature of the edge of the bowls. I think that most professional turners who turn a lot of natural edge stuff generally use a vacuum chucking system. The rest of us have to make do the best we can using various types of friction drives.

First off, it's always helpful if during the initial rough turning process a mark is made on the bottom of the foot or chucking spigot that will identify the exact center of the foot or spigot.

I'm going to assume that the bowl in question has been turned, sanded and finished inside and out and either a scroll chuck or a faceplate was used to hold it during the initial turning and finishing processes. If this is the case then you will need to locate as nearly as possible the exact center of the bottom of the chuck or faceplate mounting spigot and mark it.

I would then place a block of wood into my scroll chuck or on a faceplate that is long enough to reach the bottom of the inside of the bowl. Turn the end of this block to a size and shape that will fairly closely match the profile and size of the inside bottom of the bowl. This block will be used as a friction drive.

I would use a piece of Scotch Brite burnishing pad to pad out the bottom of the bowl and, hopefully, prevent the friction drive from making a mark inside the bowl. I usually make this piece a little larger than the diameter of the friction drive block. Place this pad in the bottom of the bowl, slide the bowl over the friction drive block and bring the tail stock up placing the live center on the mark that indicates the center of the bottom of the chucking spigot. Tighten the tail stock just enough to make the bowl spin without any slippage between the drive block and the bottom of the inside of the bowl.

At this point, you can make careful and light cuts on the bottom using a sharp gouge. You will have a small piece left in the center that can be removed with a sharp knife or chisel after you have removed the piece from the lathe leaving you with a small amount of hand sanding to do.

The forgoing may or may not be of any help to you as there are almost an infinite number of ways of finishing up the bottom of these pieces depending in many cases on the skill level of the turner and the type of equipment that he or she is using.

I would suggest that you watch the video "Bowl Turning with Del Stubbs" as he shows finishing the bottom of a natural edge bowl using a friction drive set up.