

Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog gives some answers to readers' questions

Colour fade

Question: I've heard all wood turns to brown eventually. Is this true? What can be done to prevent this?

Answer Cream and light-brown colours will darken with time and ultraviolet exposure. Darker woods will deepen. Some woods are more desirable as they darken and take on a patina, such as cherry. Blackwood, ebony, and many rosewoods are already dark browns, greys, purples, and blacks. Commonly used woods with their non-brown colours are holly (cream or white), verawood (green and yellows), purpleheart (purple), padauk (orange), yellowheart (yellow), and more that can exhibit changes depending on their storage. Per your question, nearly every wood will change colour to some degree over time with UV exposure and oxidation. Most will tend towards brown or a deeper brown. Since UV wavelength light is present in sunlight in high quantities, anything you'd like to remain colourfast, ranging from wood to photographs, should be kept out of sunlight, especially direct sunlight. Direct sunlight is brutal on everything from wood to your skin. That is why the sunblock for skin protection is rated by its UV protection factor.

To my knowledge, there is no clear

finish available to use on your wooden items that will provide permanent and total UV protection and still show the wood well. Spar varnishes will provide UV protection and slow the ageing process. These are typically an outdoor, weather-resistant finish and not usually used on fine woodworking or indoor items. Of the spar varnishes, Epifanes is touted for having the maximum UV-blocking ability. Remember also that even indoor artificial lighting will give off some UV light. There are glass and plastics that will attenuate UV light. These are used as picture frame glass to reduce the UV damage to photographs. These UV filtering glasses and plastic materials can certainly be used in curio cabinets, display cabinetry, and even windows. They are pricey and would certainly add to the construction costs. Consider the UV ratings of your finishes when selecting. Keep your wooden creations in subdued lighting when possible. Most importantly, keep wood out of direct sunlight to maintain its initial colouration as best you can.



Keeping incredible natural colours, such as in this box elder burl, requires minimising the turning's exposure to UV light

Tool selection

Question: I'm a beginner and purchased my first lathe. Looking for advice on beginner chisels. Any suggestions?



Newcomers might wait on the skew but roughing, spindle, bowl, and detail gouge and a narrow parting tool make a perfectly capable and versatile kit

Answer You don't indicate whether you have a sharpening system yet and what kind it might be. That is one key to your woodturning success. The ability to sharpen tools in an ongoing manner is one of your necessary fundamental skills. I suggest several things. The first is to join a woodturning club if you

haven't already. There you will find experienced turners who can share their expertise with you and get you headed on the correct path. Be certain to hook up with the experienced turners who can convey the materials to you in a building block manner to get you started properly and continue to add to your skill sets.

As you spend time with your mentor(s), you'll get a chance to see their tools – brand, type, and size – as well as probably use them. This is the 'try before you buy' benefit that comes for free. Your tool selection will be dependent on what your turning plans are. For example, if you intend to turn small desktop items, you'll probably have little use for a large bowl gouge. If you'll be mainly a bowl turner, you may not need an extensive collection of spindle gouges, opting for one or perhaps two. My suggestion is that you avoid the multi-tool sets that are offered by the shops and manufacturers. They profess to save you money by buying many tools at once in the set. The problem is that you're likely to have tools in the set that you'll never use or would rather have in a different size or style.

Buy each tool one at a time as you need it. Depending on your learning plan and goals, you might start with a 20mm wide roughing gouge, a 10mm spindle gouge and a narrow parting

tool. Those might be followed by a detail gouge. Regardless of the progression, buy what you need, as you need it, and get the correct size for what you intend to turn. Buy them for the long haul. Good tools will last a long time and will command a better resale price. There is no shame in buying used tools since high-speed steel and beyond are difficult to ruin. They might look ugly from the previous owner but proper grinding can put them back into shape. Unless you wind up being a busy professional turner, proper sharpening skills will allow your tools to last for many years. Do not buy the bargain-basement, cheap tools, whether new or used. They rarely hold up for long and will be marginal taking and holding an edge. I'd change your phrase from 'beginner chisels' to basic tools. Having matching names, steels, or product families is unimportant. Go slowly as you purchase your tools. Get what you need, when you need it, with the best quality you can afford.

Making a living from woodturning

Question: Does anyone make a living from woodturning? I'm interested in giving it a try but don't want to tackle something that is near to impossible. Any advice?

Answer Yes, there are folks making a living from woodturning but yours is a loaded question. It hinges on how you define 'making a living'. Are you going to work for someone else or yourself? Will you be a husband-and-wife team providing home, cars, food, healthcare, retirement and more together, or be a single earner taking care of all? Do you live in Ames, Iowa, or on the outskirts of London? What are your needs for your living? If you have a significant other with an income – healthcare, retirement, etc. through their employer – you can certainly help make a living as a co-contributor, whether a woodturning employee or an independent businessman. If you are

the sole breadwinner, you can do it but, depending on your location and needs, you'll have challenges. The folks that I know who are solely earning a nice living by woodturning have many irons in the fire. As turners, most are independent businesses as production turners taking on quantity turning projects, from architectural to retail sales items. In addition, they supplement the production work with artistic, collectable, and commission work when they can. That is higher dollar value for them but not as regular or predictable. Nearly all of the folks I know who earn a living from woodturning are also supplementing turning earnings with demo and teaching

gigs. Writing, videos, and signature tools are also used to add to the revenue stream if they can get into them. Are there folks making a living by just turning columns and balusters or kitchen wares? Sure, but nearly all I know have to continually include all of the items I've listed as part of their earnings to really succeed. For most who are quite successful at it, it is long hours, lots of travel, and lots of flexibility with earning streams to make it work well. Not for the timid or unambitious, it is being done successfully. If you decide to try it, by all means give it a go but do make that decision being informed and with your eyes open. ●



Nearly all of the pros need multiple income streams, including teaching, demonstrating, writing, videos, and endorsements

Send in your questions to Kurt's email: kurt@kurthertzog.com