

# The Journey from *Penturning to Penmaking*

by Kurt Hertzog

## Pen Finishes Making Your Pens Look Good and Stay Looking Good

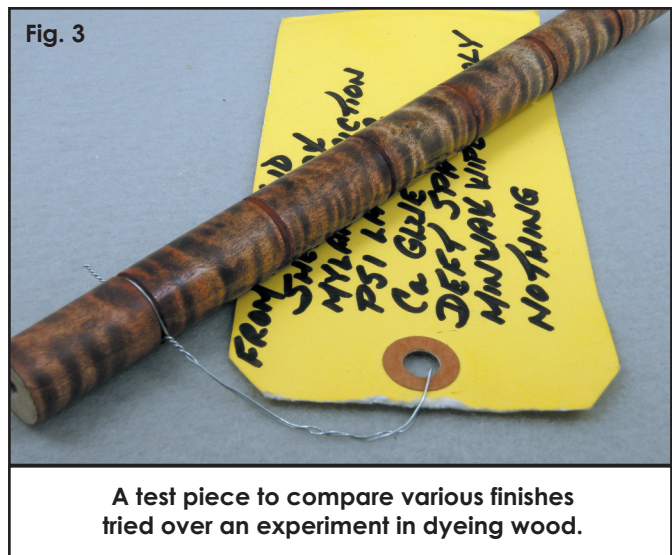
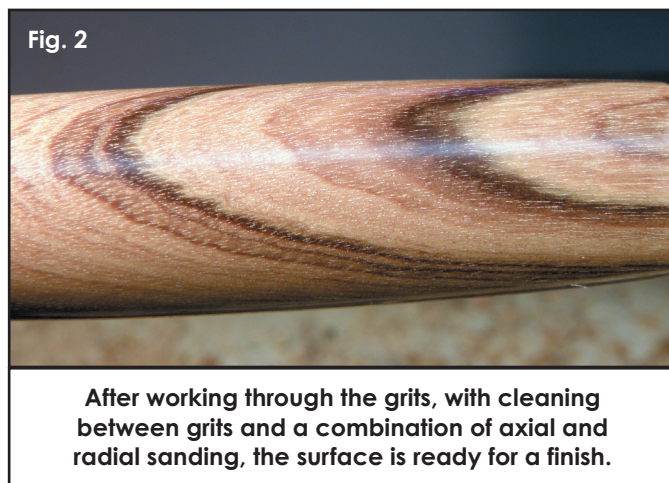
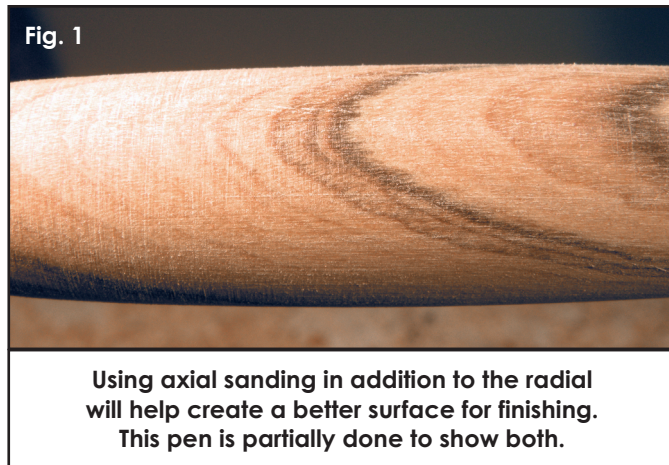
Past columns have taken you through turning your own components, freeing yourself from the centerband dimensional restrictions, and making your pens write their best. Now we'll visit making pens look good and stay looking good in the real world.

Most turnings sit on a shelf and collect dust, some get used to mix the salad, but a turned **for use** pen lives a very tough life. There are few turnings that get the amount of use and abuse that a pen does. Being thrown around in the desk drawer is the easiest part when compared to the bottom of the purse, the pocket with change and car

keys, the glove box or dashboard of the auto in the summer, and other common resting places that certainly take their toll on a pen finish. A pen made for looks rather than use can have almost any finish, but there is no such thing as too tough a finish for a working pen.

Regardless of the finish applied, it can only look as good as the preparation. If you hurry through the sanding, even the best applied finish will only highlight the suboptimal prep. Take your time working through all the grits of abrasive and don't move on until the current grit has done its work properly. Clean the turning between each sanding with a paper towel and wipe it thoroughly (rather than use compressed air) to ensure that you have removed any grit left from the previous sanding. Axial and radial sanding with each grit pays dividends (see **Fig. 1**). Depending on the material, use abrasives either made for the automotive finish industry or the *Micromesh* product. I don't believe you can go too far prepping for a finish (see **Fig. 2**).

There are many finishes available, ranging from friction waxes and shellacs to clear enamels. For my money, the two that lend themselves to beauty, ease of application, and maximum durability are lacquer and cyanoacrylate glue (CA or superglue). Both are easy to apply right on the lathe and will provide protection for years of use. Personally, I use both finishes and don't really have a



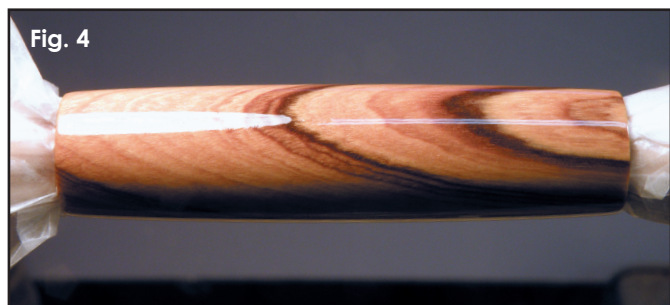


Fig. 4

**You can build as thick a coat of CA as you wish, provided you do it with repetitive *THIN* coats.**



Fig. 5

**The finished product brought back from gloss to let the beauty of the wood show rather than the high gloss.**

favorite. **Use plenty of ventilation and proper protective equipment** for either of these finishes.

Both of these finishes are multiple coat, build-type finishes. Let them work to your advantage by building them with many light coats rather than fewer heavy coats. Don't forget to allow for the dimensional changes that will occur with build coats. It can amount to thousandths of an inch. Over time, you'll develop your favorite and know what the build amount will be.

Lacquer finish can be shot right out of a spray can. You can choose a brand ranging from the economy no-name brands through the more widely known big names. Run the lathe slowly and mist on each coat. Light coats will dry in moments. Allow a few minutes and mist on another coat. With good prep and light coats, there is little need to do any leveling between coats. Once the last coat is on, I let it cure for as long as I can (overnight, days, or longer) before the final light sanding and buffing. I use gloss, but a semigloss can look good when you want the beauty of the wood to be more of an attraction than a high-gloss finish. You can always bring a gloss finish back to semi or matte with fine steel wool.

CA is a plastic, so applying it as a finish encapsulates a pen with a tough plastic membrane. There are many techniques for applying a CA finish. Some penmakers are fans of the CA-BLO (boiled linseed oil) method. Others have their own special method of application. You can find several great write-ups on the various CA finishes on

the Penmakers Guild website ([www.penmakersguild.com](http://www.penmakersguild.com)) as well as other pen and turning-related sites. Try the various finishes and finishing techniques on practice pieces until you find the one you like and master it. Don't be afraid to make test turnings with a variety of finishes so you can compare them (see Fig. 3). For those who are new to CA finishes (and even those who are not so new), keeping a bottle of debonder or acetone nearby is a wise idea. The same application technique as lacquer applies to CA finishes. More thin coats are better than fewer thick coats (see Fig. 4). Build as desired. The advantage to CA is that it is ready for sanding and buffing in minutes. It truly is a tough, durable finish done on the lathe and ready for use in a matter of a few minutes (see Fig. 5).

Which finish is better? I like them both. I think both will work nicely once you've given them a try and worked with them a bit. I like the CA for a quick, tough finish, but I think it goes on better on multipiece pens as opposed to longer, one-piece pens (see Fig. 6). For the long, one-piece pens, such as desk pens, I tend to go with lacquer. As you move your penmaking skills forward, improving your prep for finish and finishing techniques should be part of the journey.

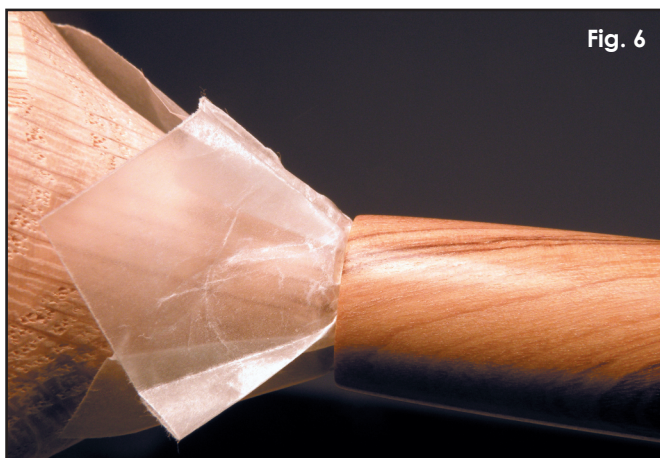


Fig. 6

**Waxing bushings isn't my way, so I use waxed paper on my own tapered mounts, which I use for turning as well.**

### Kurt Hertzog

Having been a turner for about 10 years, Kurt Hertzog is enjoying the entire continuum of woodturning, from making tools to photographing turnings. A regular columnist for *Woodturning Design* magazine, frequent demonstrator, and instructor on many facets of woodturning, he particularly enjoys teaching sharpening, workholding, and advanced penmaking. A past officer in several AAW chapters and current officer in two, Kurt is also one of the five council members of the Pen Makers Guild and past chairman of the Rochester Woodworkers Society. You can see examples of his work at [www.kurthertzog.com](http://www.kurthertzog.com) and [www.penmakersguild.com](http://www.penmakersguild.com).

