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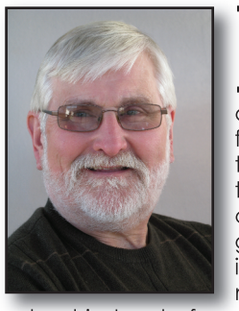
from the Editor



I'm trying a bit of an experiment in the article by Jim Rinde (American Dreamer, page 22). The dimensions in Jim's article are all in metric and I purposely left it in that format instead of changing it over to the English system. I've been a fan of the metric system for a while, and I think that it's much easier to work in millimeters rather than inches as long as you don't have to do conversions. I believe that the metric system has gotten a bad rap in the United States, and I think it's because so many of us were forced to do the metric to English (and vice versa) conversions in school instead of working directly in the system. It really is quite easy if you don't have to do all the math that conversion entails. In order to encourage you to try working in metrics, I've included a metric ruler on the edge of page 24. Photocopy the page, glue the ruler to a stiff background, and give millimeters a try. You actually might like it; I'd be interested in some feedback from those of you who do try it.

There was a question in the last Ask Dale column about buffing small objects. A reader has suggested wearing *Nitrile* gloves when buffing small ob-jects, as this provides better traction and allows you to hold the smaller objects tighter. *Nitrile* gloves also do not degrade as fast and will protect your hands from harsh chemicals—even superglue.

The date provided in the last editorial for the Southwest Association of Turners Symposium in Waco, Texas, was wrong. The correct dates for SWAT should have been listed as August 27 and 28, 2010. I regret any problems this error may have caused. Hope to see you there. As an aside, I was planning to rerun the entire list of conferences in order to update additional symposiums, but there wasn't any feedback with additional dates, so I decided not to run the list again.

The symposium season is getting started, and I'll be attending the Totally Turning Symposium in Saratoga Springs again this year and the Utah Woodturning Symposium in Oren, Utah. Both symposiums will have already taken place by the time you read this editorial, and I hope that I will have had the opportunity to meet many of you at these events. The trip to Utah will be rather special this year, as my three good friends and I will be taking a class from Richard Raffan at *Craft Supplies* after the Symposium. I'm looking forward to the class and will report on the event in a later issue.

This issue contains several very good projects. In addition to the Rinde box, my good friend Larry Miller will show you how to make a box modeled after the Washington State Capitol building. David Reed Smith explains how to make a square-in-a-circle inlay that you can use to enhance turnings. We have reviews on the *Serious* Lathe and the *Monster* Articulating Hollowing System that are informative. Barry Gross describes the process of inlaying minerals into the skeleton of a cholla cactus to make a uniquely styled pen. And last, but certainly not least, Bob Heltman describes making a molinillo that will enable readers to make a frothy, hot Mexican chocolate drink.

Finally, we are starting a new feature in the magazine. I've always wondered about the workings of some of the different vendors from whom we all buy. Do they work out of a fancy building with many employees or are they working out of their garage, using their kids for help? Just how do they operate? Kurt Hertzog will provide background on some of these businesses, starting with West Penn Hardwoods in Olean, New York.

Happy turning!

Joe

Woodturning Design

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We are indeed fortunate to have such a creative and knowledgeable group of turners on our list of writers for this issue. A more talented group of individuals would be hard to find:

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Leopold Frilot
Barry Gross
Robert Gulley
Robert Heltman
Kurt Hertzog
William Holland
Larry Miller
Dale Nish
Jim Rinde
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Behind the Scenes
with Kurt Hertzog

West Penn Hardwoods

Hope you enjoy this first edition of a series I have been planning and working on for some time. I've always been curious about the inner workings of places with which I have done business or have seen in my travels. We as customers see their advertisements and do business with them, but often never see the physical space or "meet the people." As we go forward, I'll give you a look behind the scenes of companies, places, and events with which you are probably familiar, but may never have had the chance to visit. Obviously, the focus will be on the woodturning oriented businesses and people, but we won't ignore other interesting diversions along the way. You'll get a look at the physical place, the people who make it happen, and an inside look at places that may only be an Internet order or phone call for you.

WEST PENN HARDWOODS

When you think of *West Penn Hardwoods*, what comes to mind? They have advertisements in all the major woodturning publications, an extensive web presence, and an ongoing eBay auction/store. Whether you phone, bid, or order online, you have access to a complete assortment of exotic woods for your woodturning or woodworking activities. You may be surprised at the inner workings of this well-known wood supplier. Come with me for a look "behind the scenes."

Started in 1995 by Kim and Rocky Mehta, the origins of the business were in domestic wood. They soon branched out into figured domestic woods. An early adoption of the web had them offering bundles of dimensioned lumber and figured woods. This, being pretty straightforward and a bit boring, led to their exploration of exotic woods. Their first experience as importers of exotic woods was with a container from Argentina. It took over two years to sell that wood. Undaunted, they started doing shows in 1999 and went from doing everything themselves to having two employees.

On a wood-buying trip out of the country in 2004, Rocky had an eight-hour flight layover in Orlando. That chance layover coincided with the AAW Symposium and led Rocky to visit his first woodturning show. The rest is history. Seeing that trade show floor and the sales potential in the turning world, *West Penn Hardwoods* took their first vendor booth at the Totally Turning Symposium in Albany, New York. Along with a helper, Rocky did a box-office business and was hooked on providing exotic woods to the turning community.

The business has grown from one container load of exotic woods imported every two years to importing five containers a month. Although they import and sell the popular exotics, they are always searching for the "unknown" species they can offer to their customers. Rocky travels to the country of origin to select and buy the woods, and arranges for importation to the United States.

Along the way, *West Penn Hardwoods* has grown to twenty employees. Their original building was expanded several times until it covered over 20,000 square feet and now they've outgrown that. The new location, still in Olean, New York, is a converted supermarket chain, food distribution warehouse they've purchased. With that additional 85,000 square feet, they should have room to continue to grow for a while. The business has grown explosively for them in the wholesale arena and is currently about 70% of their volume, with the remaining 30% split between their website, eBay store, auctions, and walk-ins. Yes, you can still walk in and hand-select woods. If you are ever in the Olean area, give them a visit. You'll really enjoy it.

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Fig. 1 The original *West Penn Hardwoods* building is an unassuming structure a few blocks from Main Street in the small town of Olean, New York.

Fig. 2 Kim and Rocky Mehta are the owners of the company.

Fig. 3 The packing and shipping area is a small corridor in the horseshoe-shaped floor plan.

Fig. 4 There are rows and rows of neatly stacked wood, with the spillover still on skids in open spaces.

Fig. 5 Although you can order on the web or by phone, walk-in customers are still welcome to hand-select their purchases.

Fig. 6 Around the bend is the flat stock, the origins of the business, and some spillover storage for exotic turning woods.

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Fig. 7 Regardless of the hustle and bustle, there is always an open door and a meal for the less fortunate in the neighborhood. Here, Clover, a recently adopted stray, gets a warm home and no longer lives on the streets.

Fig. 8 Many of the species, some the newer and more unknown ones, are left on pallets and will be sold long before they get shelved.

Fig. 9 When I visited, they were just getting things set up in the new facility and the rigors of running two different locations were evident.

Fig. 10 With the expansive space that is available, it is a lot of work just getting the shelving erected and the remodeling done.

Fig. 11 With 85,000 square feet, loading docks on both sides of the building, and mostly two-story-high bay area in the floor plan, the warehouse has much potential for growth.

Fig. 12 Though exotic turning woods have monopolized the business, there is still room for the figured flat stock.

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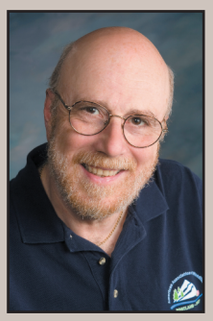
Fig. 13 Thuya burl anyone?

Fig. 14 Pallets of stock continue to arrive as the shelving goes up.

Fig. 15 Remembering the new facility's background as a supermarket helps explain the carts available for the walk-in shoppers as Bill Blasic discovered.

Fig. 16 Although the company has grown and prospered, you can still get the president to do a "grocery carryout," as my friend Bill Noce discovered.



Kurt Hertzog

Kurt Hertzog is a professional woodturner who enjoys everything from making his own turning tools to photographing his finished turnings. A frequent demonstrator and instructor on many facets of woodturning, he particularly enjoys teaching tool sharpening, work-holding, and advanced penmaking.

Kurt is a regular feature columnist for *Woodturning Design* magazine and one of the five Council Members of the Pen Makers Guild. He was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the American Association of Woodturners. His woodworking interests also include flatwork, and he is a past chairman of the Rochester Woodworkers Society.

Kurt's work can be seen at www.kurthertzog.com, as well as www.penmakersguild.com. You can contact him at kurt@kurthertzog.com.