

WHOOPS — WOW

Looking at blowouts in a different light

FREDERICK C. HILL

I HAVE BEEN A WOODTURNER FOR A number of years. I guess I could be lumped in that large category of “vase, platter, normal thing” turners who turn traditional pieces that look like something familiar.

I have developed a high comfort level with the lathe and would say that my skills are fairly well developed. Even though I tend to be a creative right-brained guy, I really hadn't experimented to any extent with unusual shapes or combinations of shapes with the lathe.

Last fall my brother and I attended “Turning 2001”, the Ohio Valley Woodturning Guild symposium, and had the good fortune to watch Michael Hosaluk and Christian Burchard work their magic on wood.

I was very impressed with the unusual items that they were turning and resolved at that time to develop my creative side to a greater extent.

Let creative juices flow

When I got home after the conference I began to let my creative juices flow and produce items that were “different”. Interestingly, the first of these came about when I was making a hollow sphere and had it nearly completed when a flaw in the wood broke and out came a large segment from the piece. After saying the requisite swear words, I discarded the item into my burn barrel and, after cooling off, forgot about it.

Later, I was thinking about the creative items we had watched Christian and Michael make when I thought about my broken sphere. I retrieved it from the barrel and began to study it. Quickly I realized that this was an opportunity, not a disaster!

After studying the broken hollow sphere, I made a small solid cherry sphere that I inserted into it, turned a



Disaster to birthday present: the author rescued a ruined piece from the scrap pile and decided to be creative. It has since become one of his wife's favorites.

nifty cherry stand and, as if by magic I had created an interesting piece of art, “Inner Space”, shown in the photo above. By the way, I gave “Inner Space” to my wife as a birthday present and it has since become her favorite.

After this initial experience I began to look at my turning in a different light. I still turn the “normal” items but, when I have a blowout, I put it up on a shelf and study it to see what I can do with it that will make it a work of art.

A couple of interesting items are “Flying Saucer,” shown in the top photo at right” and “Broken Promises, bottom photo at right.”

The disc on “Flying Saucer” started out as a thin plate but when I cut too deeply into the center, it broke out and I again resorted to a cherry ball and stand but with a very different appearance.

“Broken Promises” occurred when some very dry, brittle black locust blew up as I was completing a deep bowl. I salvaged the top of the bowl by sawing and sanding away the broken bottom resulting in the broken ring on top of the platter. Burning the wood and then turning away the lower burned section to reveal the fresh wood produced the black top of the ring. I then turned a butternut base, which I also blackened by burning prior to turning.

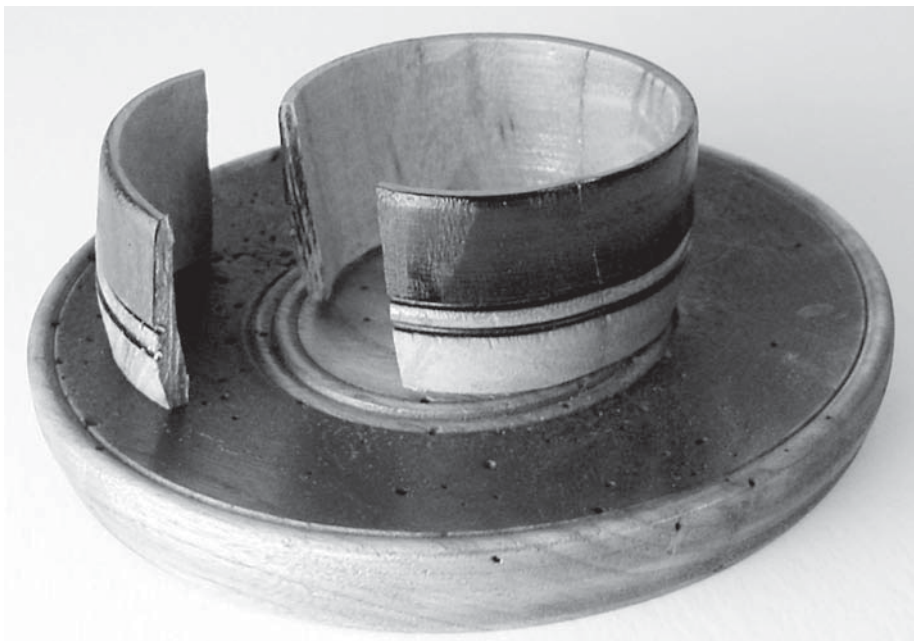
Since I've had a few failures in my turning career, I was especially interested in Lyle Jamieson's comment in (American Woodturner Volume 17, No. 1 Spring 2002) on how fear of destroying a piece during the turning process frequently dictates how it will turn out.

Lyle was talking specifically about measuring devices and how his unscientific poll, indicated that a majority of turners use fingers, calipers or some other measuring device to judge wall thicknesses and still have blown through the side of a vessel or bottom of a bowl.

“So I believe many turners have tried to measure wall thicknesses, and failing, have SETTLED for the



"Flying Saucer" was a thin plate until the author cut through the center. His design opportunity to repair the situation called for a cherry ball and a stand



"Broken Promises" began when a brittle black locust bowl blank blew up. Sawing, turning and burning, plus a new butternut base kept the piece out of the scrap pile.

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I now find myself more relaxed at the lathe and even look forward to having pieces blow up on me on occasion. I now treat them as opportunities instead of failures."

— Frederick Hill

finger method which leads to uneven wall thicknesses and heavy, thick bottoms. Fear lets the wood remain in control. Fear of blowing up a piece dictates how you turn. I prefer the fun and satisfaction of being in control. Fear is stifling to creativity and is certainly not fun. How do we rid ourselves of fear and get in control? It's easy to say but not so easy to do."

Obviously, we want to develop good turning techniques to avoid having blow-ups, but when they occur, why not make something out of them?

I now find myself more relaxed at the lathe and even look forward to having pieces blow up on me on occasion. I now treat them as opportunities instead of failures.

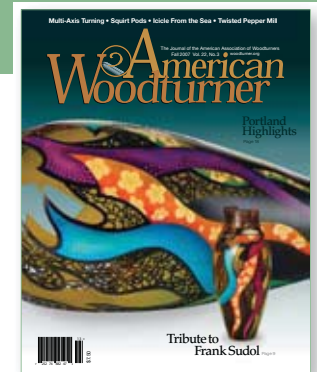
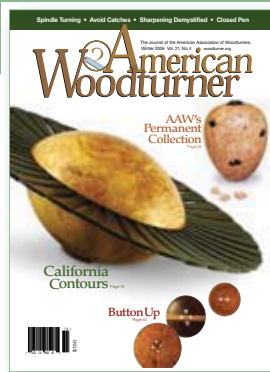
My burn barrel is starving now and I am having a blast creating interesting "Whoops--- Wow" art objects.

Obviously when someone asks about the piece, I tell them that I thought long and hard about how to create the item and never mention that the item is a "Whoops--- Wow" piece!

Frederick Hill is a Biology Professor at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania and a recreational woodturner who says that he would starve if he had to rely on his income from woodturning.

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