

Rick Urban - Woodturner

Help Desk

Three Tips to Improve Your Forms

Most woodturning tips deal with tools, techniques, and other topics relating directly to the removal of material from that chunk of spinning wood you wrestled onto your lathe. Here I will deviate from that norm and offer you something different. Because I am so confident your work will improve if you do these things, I offer them to you with a double-your-moneyback guarantee.

1. Paint It Black.
2. See if it fits.
3. Pick Three

Form matters!

Paint it Black or find some other method to help you ignore that beautiful figure that can distract you and your trusted friend giving you the critique from seeing the beautiful form you intended to create. Look critically at the profile for curves that do not flow into one another or change too abruptly. Curves that are too sharp or tight or fast where you have placed them may not work to create a pleasing shape. Curves that are too gentle or slow may appear too close to flat or straight, and straight lines and flat spots are seldom found in turned shapes you really like and that feel good to you. When you learn to notice small things about your forms that you just don't know if you are in love with, figure out what they are. It's not very useful to say (or hear) I don't like (or like) it. Force yourself or encourage your friend to articulate objectively what seems to work or not. Once you are able to determine the very small things having a major impact on the outcome you have a powerful new tool to use the next time you mount a chunk of wood on the lathe and start removing what keeps it from being your next masterwork.

See if it fits in a rectangle with a proportion of 3 by 5 or 5 by 8. While many shapes can qualify as pleasing proportions, if there is just something you are not quite sure about when you critique your work it could be the proportion. If you need a place to start trying to figure it out 3x5 or 5x8 is a good beginning. There is a lot of history and math behind it, but let's not go there now.

Pick three similar shapes to compare. It can be a real eye opener to look at three shapes side-by-side, each of which is beautiful alone. Don't be surprised if one blows the others away, but it is more likely that differences will be subtle, and it will be tough to pick the one that works best. Even if you can pick a winner it likely be difficult to determine and articulate objectively what characteristics contribute to the judgment.

If you put lipstick on a pig, it is still a pig.

I just finished a week at Arrowmont with Jacques Vesery in which the focus was on form. What valuable lessons I learned from him and others in the class! These tips are my effort to share some of that wonderful experience with you. Jacques doesn't use the pig and lipstick to illustrate his point, but he might well say, "No matter what you do to a dog bowl after it's turned, it's still a dog bowl."

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