

Rick Urban Woodturner

Help Desk

What can Yin and Yang Teach us about Woodturning?

A few months ago I told you "Don't do it!" Then I told you "Do it now!" Then I suggested you shouldn't get a new tool or try a new trick. Now I am going to suggest you remain open to considering new stuff. It's all about balance. I guess it's one of those Yin and Yang things.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with the old adage that says, "A closed mouth gathers no foot." I thought I would paraphrase that and suggest that a closed mind gathers no tricks. Here's an example.

For years I have been grinding my general-purpose bowl gouges somewhere around 45 degrees. I was happy with this. It worked for me. I was also wary of turners that say it must be a certain number of degrees, not more, not less. At the last Turning Southern Style symposium Stuart Batty seemed, to some, to fit that description, but as I listened (carefully) further he explained his rationale for why he did things his way.

In one example he was talking about his 40 degree gouge grind. To come to the point quickly, I listened. I tried it. It works as well as 45° for me, and with this 5° change I no longer had to rough cut the tenon with my 45° gouge and then pick up a spindle gouge to complete the dovetail on the tenon while leaving a flat to contact the outer rim of the chuck jaws.

Stuart also likes his negative rake scraper and offered his detailed view. Bah, humbug! A scraper is a scraper. The only difference is handle position when the cutting edge properly meets the wood. Not so fast! What he said made sense. Maybe I should give this a try before I condemn it once and for all. I'm still not convinced the spinning wood cares how that 80° angle was ground, but the more stable horizontal tool orientation did allow me to better control what was going on and achieve better results than before. The 80° angle was my idea. I don't remember Stuart mentioning an angle. I chose 80° because it allows me to grind it on the same tool rest I've set for the 40° gouge grind. Just grind one side, flop it over, and grind the other.

Sooo... Keep an open mind, be willing to change, (with the right argument), and keep your Yin and Yang in balance.

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Changing the way you think about wood... one piece at a time.