

The Penturner's Corner

For the past several months my articles have been geared to modifying slimlines. I do hope the articles have been helpful and several new modified slimline pens are being made. It has been fun but it is now time to move on to another aspect of pen making.

One new thing that has taken off in the past year or so is the making of closed end pens. See **Figure 1**.



Figure 1

A closed end pen is usually made from those pens that have caps such as the the Jr Gentleman's or Junior Statesman from Craft Supplies USA (<http://www.woodturnerscatalog.com>) or the baron from Arizona Silhouette (<http://www.arizonasilhouette.com>). There are several other pen kits with caps and all of them are good candidates for closed end pens. Even the slimline can have the top half turned closed end and made into a unique style or a desk pen.

Turning these closed end pens is made possible by the use of a special mandrel called a pin chuck. An excellent article on making and using a pin chuck, written by Richard Kleinhenz, can be found here: <http://penmakersguild.com/articles/pinchuck.pdf> A pin chuck has a slot cut into the mandrel and a steel pin fits into the slot. See **Figure 2**.



Figure 2

The depth of the slot and the diameter of the pin must be the same. When the pen blank is slipped onto the pin chuck and rotated, the pin rolls against the brass tube and locks the blank onto the pin chuck or mandrel. When made correctly, the pin chuck holds the blank very securely. I often use the tail stock for a little added support and just cut a blank longer than required for the pen body. I turn the blank to the shape desired and part off the unused portion of the blank. Another article or two will be devoted to turning closed end pens from the kits with caps. However, this article will show how to use a pin chuck to turn a calligraphy or dip pen. Several pictures of dip pens have been submitted to the various penturning internet forums in the past several months. Along with fountain pens,

dip pens seem to be gaining popularity, especially with the calligraphy crowd. Some calligraphers only use these dip pens. What a great gift a wooden or acrylic dip pen would make for a friend or family member who is a calligrapher. So, let's learn how to make these unique pens.

A dip pen consists of three parts: the nib, the nib insert, and the nib holder-which is actually what I will call the pen. I suppose the most popular of the dip pens is the one we've all seen at the local crafts stores...the Speedball® nib holder and the assortment of nibs. **See figure 3.** This article will give instructions on how to make the pen, or nib holder and I will include some sources for both the nib insert and the nibs themselves.



Figure 3

Now, go and make those tools scary sharp. Half of this pen will require the proverbial light cuts and sharp tools. Once that your tools are sharp, let's get started. We will be making a nib holder somewhat similar to the Speedball® #9451 nib holder. **See Figure 4.**



Figure 4

The picture in figure 4 has letters A, B, C, and D which correspond to the 4 critical diameters of the pen: A - .466", B - .385", C - .475" and D - .130". However, these diameters can be adjusted to personal taste, or the pen can gently taper from the nib end. The blank needs to be 7-7.5 inches long. The nib holder itself is 6.5 inches long. The extra will be used for support with the tail stock. A longer blank tends to have too much flex and chatter when the pen gets smaller and smaller on the upper half. The end of the pen can be anything from plain as in the Speedball® holder or a little fancier. **See figure 5.**



Figure 5

A plain end can use a shorter blank and a fancy end pen can use a little longer blank, but keep the length as short as possible for the pen style. Remember this term: FLEX. You will need to learn to deal with it on this project. Drill a 7mm hole and glue in a 7mm tube from a slimline kit. Extra tubes can be purchased from any pen kit supplier. The tube will help hold the blank on the pin chuck and it will hold the nib insert which is used to hold the nib. Drilling a hole straight along the blank's centerline is important on this pen with its longer blank. We want the small end to be somewhat close to the center of the end of the blank. Otherwise, a new start will be in order. I think you know how I know that!

After the glue has dried the end can be squared with a pen mill and placed onto the pin chuck. Bring up the tailstock and the pen is now ready to turn. First, the blank needs to be turned round. Then the shaping of the nib holder can start. I found the most successful way was to work from the small end back toward the headstock. This leaves the most wood to drive the blank and offer support. But, turning toward the small end of the pen seemed to more natural and easier to envision where I was headed with the shape of the pen. Try several approaches and I'm confident a comfortable turning sequence for the nib holder will be found. I was reminded of turning a thin stemmed goblet where the turning is done from the base toward the rim end, turning the stem along the way. But, the goblet's stem is a constant diameter, and the pens diameter is getting smaller from the midpoint to the end. Continue to shape the nib holder with tools or sandpaper until the desired shape is achieved. I left the end treatment until the last, turning the end treatment only after sanding and finishing the pen itself. The end was turned and the extra wood parted off. The very end can now be sanded and finished.

While turning the smaller half of the pen, I used one hand to offer support on the back side of the pen. I kept the support pressure just ahead of the tool and moving with the tool in the direction I was cutting. **See figure 6.**



Figure 6

Keeping the support ahead of the tool offered the best remedy for the FLEXING that was happening. Offering support for the tool with one hand directly opposite the tool seemed to offer little solution for the FLEXING that I was experiencing. Also, I became aware that the support pressure had to at least equal the tool pressure being applied. This is another good reason for sharp tools. The use of sandpaper to do some final shaping of the nib holder was also done. Is that cheating? I think designing a steady rest for pens may be in order if I turn very many more of these.

When the desired shape and end treatment are done, the pen is now ready to be sanded and finished. Use your normal sanding routine and the finish of your choice. I have become quite a fan of using CA glue as a finish. The CA finish is clear, glossy, durable and is quickly becoming a popular finish. Several techniques or instructions are bouncing around the pen turning internet forums. My CA glue finish instructions can be found on most of them or they can be ready from my website. Here is a link to how I use CA glue as a finish for pens: http://www.RedRiverPens.com/CA_finish.pdf

The finished pen should look like the pens that I made for this article. **See figure 7.** The pens are made (top to bottom) from bocote, walnut, and mesquite. The finish is CA glue with boiled linseed oil.



Figure 7

To use these pens a nib will be needed. Nibs are available from any hobby or crafts store. I get nibs from Hobby Lobby and Michaels. There are also several online sources for nibs, nib holders, and ink. Here is a partial list of just a few online sources of calligraphy supplies follows:

<http://www.dickblick.com/zz209/09/> for nibs

<http://www.dickblick.com/zz208/23c/> for ink

[http://www.reuels.com/reuels/Speedball Nibs in Carded Twin Pack.html](http://www.reuels.com/reuels/Speedball_Nibs_in_Carded_Twin_Pack.html) for nibs

<http://www.quietfiredesign.com/byhandproductscalligraphynibs.html#speedball> for nibs

The only source of the nib inserts that several of us have found is in England. But, they sure make holding the nib convenient. The website is:

<http://www.stilesandbates.co.uk/shop/showmproduct.cfm?pid=227> and other turning supplies can be found there also. And remember, paper quality is important when using fountain pens or calligraphy pens.

A special thanks goes to John Solberg for allowing me to use a picture of one of his closed end pens in figure 1. Thank you John! More of John's work can be seen in his gallery at the Pen Makers Guild. Also, I should thank Anthony Turchetta for allowing me to use a picture of one of his calligraphy pens. Anthony's pen is the pen in figure 5. More of Anthony's work can be seen <http://www.penchetta.com> or in his gallery at the Pen Makers Guild.

Parting Off

The Utah Woodturning Symposium is quickly approaching. On Wednesday, June 20, Craft Supplies has their Open House and that evening the Yahoo! Penturners Group will be sponsoring the 5 annual Penturner's Rendezvous. I would like to encourage any of you who will be attending the CSUSA Open house to consider also attending the Rendezvous. All information about the Rendezvous '07 can be found on the Pen Maker's Guild website at <http://penmakersguild.com/provo07.htm> . Also, there are pictures of the past Rendezvous. There will be SEVERAL door prizes given away, including a mini lathe. Well, I think we have a mini lathe to award...we have each year the Rendezvous has been held. Last year we had over 100 registered pen aficionados registered. It was a great time to visit with other pen makers to share and talk all things pens. While at the Pen Makers Guild website, take time to browse the pen galleries of some of the members. Also, several members have made articles on pen making techniques available for all visitor's use. There are some incredible pens in those galleries. Kick off your shoes, pour a cup of coffee visit awhile and see some very innovative pens being made on both wood and metal lathes. Just go to <http://www.PenMakersguild.com> and click on galleries...enjoy!

Next month the pin chuck will be used to turn a closed end pen as pictured in figure 1. I will also explore other ways to hold the pen blank to turn a closed end pen. Several options are available. Closed end pens are getting lots of promotion in the pen turning internet forums. They are becoming quite popular. They are so popular that one pen kit supplier is having special mandrels made to hold the various sizes of tubes used in these kits with caps. But, I'll report more on that next month.

I still encourage feedback from the readers. Send comments, suggestions, or ideas for future column topics to me at don@RedRiverPens.com

Do a good turn daily!

Don