

Ho Hum

Has your penturning hit the doldrums? Doldrums...you know, a period of slump or stagnation. Are you tired of turning the same old pens...nice wood, nice kit, bushing to bushing? Did the just past busy Christmas season find you turning pens for gifts and customers? And were you using familiar kits with familiar wood and doing nothing really creative? If so, consider yourself headed into the penturning doldrums, or maybe you have already arrived. Are you looking for a way out? Keep reading!

Try doing something different with your penturning and get those creative juices flowing. Step out on a limb. Think outside the box. I don't really know what that means since our kits come in baggies. Maybe we should be saying "think outside the baggie". But, how is that done", you ask? Well, there are several ways to be creative with pens and pen kits. A few of the things that can be done to make penturning just a little more creative and challenging include, but are not limited to, kit modifications, alternative materials, resin casting of your own blanks, dying lighter woods, and mixing different materials on the same pen. I will be giving some ideas in next few issues and I will explore some of the ways to kick your penturning up a notch or two.

One of the easiest things that can be done to keep interest high is to use some new materials. Use some materials that you have not used before. Get some of those materials that are on your "to try" list. These might include a nice piece of stabilized wood, a piece of antler, or any one of the various plastics and resins available, or even homemade resin blanks. I have been casting rattlesnake blanks similar to the ones sold by our penturning suppliers. Others have been developing their skills with segmenting. Find yourself a niche and work to develop it.

Another way to redirect your doldrums is to modify the slimline. Several modifications are available. A good place to start is Russ Fairfield's website. Russ has several pages devoted to slimline modification. **See Fig 1.**



Figure 1

Russ has excellent instructions on making the slimlines pictured in fig. 1. The address to Russ's site is <http://www.woodturnerruss.com> . Click on 'Pen Pages' for the slimline modifications. Read about finishes and finishing. Russ's advice is excellent. I have a photo album of modified slimlines and it can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/y2nmj5> .

Another simple enhancement is the addition of bands or rings using a variety of materials. Thin slices of veneer can be dyed. Contrasting wooden slices can also be used. Any turnable material can be used. Some of the choices that have worked are: (1) colored fiber washer, (2) brass or copper washers or rings,(3) guitar pick-guard material, (4) washers or squares cut from credit cards or hotel keys, or any other material. Keep your eyes open and your creativity working. Grooves can be cut with a parting tool and filled with stone dust(such as turquoise) or with embossing powder. Embossing powder can be found in the scrap booking department of any good craft store. Figure 2 shows a few of these ideas. **See fig 2.**



Figure 2

Lighter woods can be dyed to produce great results. The more figure the wood has the more striking the results will be. Curly maple and bird's eye maple are two of my favorite woods to dye. Turn the pen, sand with your favorite sanding routine then apply wood dye. A little friction with a cloth will dry the dye and allow immediate finishing. I use aniline dye which is a water soluble powder. Alcohol soluble dyes are also available. I apply the dye with a cotton swab and use a CA finish immediately after drying the dye. Figure 3 shows figured maple pens colored with red aniline dye. **See fig 3.**



Figure 3

One activity that can take your penturning to the next level is to visit with another penturner. Just recently I have had the privilege to take a road trip to visit Ron McIntire. Ron makes extremely creative segmented pens. One of my favorites is the pen Ron calls "The Morning After". **See fig 4.**



Pen by Ron McIntire
Used with permission

Figure 4

Ron has demonstrated on several occasions how he makes this pen. His instructions can be found at <http://www.penturners.org/content/SegPenBlanks.pdf> and more of Ron's creations can be seen at <http://www.McKinneyPens.com>. Also, two other penturners recently had extended visits to my home town, and made the effort to contact me. I had a wonderful time spending a day with each one of them. We traded penmaking tips and techniques. I learn something new each time I visit with another penturner. I challenge you to find another penturner and learn something new from another.

There are three great places to see other penturner's work and read how they do that special thing that makes their pens unique. Sharing ideas, posting pictures, and making tutorials available are just a few of the services provided by these penturning websites. They are really email lists where penturning questions are asked and answered, comments and critiques of pens are requested and given, and instructions on "how did you do that" are provided and available. These three email lists require that potential members join and instructions for joining are posted on the home pages. The three sites are, from oldest to youngest, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/penturners>, <http://www.penturners.org>, and <http://www.ThePenShop.net>. Another penturning web presence is The PenMakers Guild. To be approved as a member and Master Pen-Maker, you will need to provide some evidence of your work, a master-piece writing instrument you have made. More information and application instructions can be found at <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/penmakersguild>. However, The Guild has its own website where members post pictures of pens. Also, articles written by guild members are posted there. The picture galleries and the articles are available for anyone to view and read. Check it out at <http://www.PenMakersGuild.com>.

Several ideas and suggestions have been given on how your penmaking can be taken to the next level. I do hope each reader of this column has the time and enthusiasm to research the resources given and try something new and exciting. Join one or all of the penturning groups. Visit with other penturners. Try something new. I do hope the doldrums are broken for each of you soon.

Parting Off

I am often asked, "How long did it take to make that?" I'm asked that of my pens and other turnings. I found this poem and want to share it with the readers of this column. It is

used by permission from the author of the poem, John A. Styer, aka The Lathe-meister.
Thanks John for allowing me to print your poem. John's website is
<http://www.Lathe-meister.com> . Enjoy!

How Long Does It Take To Turn One of Those?

A poem by John A. Styer—The Lathe-meister

Do you mean...

not plant the tree, but find the wood,
just 'see' the piece, (as if I could)?

to find a highly figured burl,
a crotch, an eye, or pearly curl?

And once I spy it, perhaps buy it,
inventory, store, and dry it?

Then saw or cut it, possibly I kiln it'
glue, imbue with fill, or drill it?

You mean, that once I'm satisfied
it's stopped the warps, checks, cracks, once dried?

And mounted on the lathe, to turn it,
(which takes much practice, just to learn it;

and then employ a gouge, or two,
or use a skew, which I don't eschew,

to mold it, shape it (what's your pleasure?)

by all means, I'm sure to measure,

then sand it smooth, please wear your mitts,

from coarse to fine, 10,000 grits,

then braze, or burnish, paint, or polish,

(the goal: enhance, and don't demolish)?

Is that your question, start to end,

how long's that path, its way to wend?

Or do you merely want to know how long it turned?

Ten minutes, or so.

I would love to hear your comments, suggestions for future articles, or just an
email to visit. I can be contacted at the following email address:

don@RedRiverPens.com

Do a good turn daily!

Don