

## Carving on turnings

By John Lucas

In this class I will discuss and demonstrate many tools for and techniques for carving on turnings. As part of the demo I will carve flutes into a bowl to demonstrate a very simple technique.



To start off the discussion I will start with 4" angle grinders. Without a doubt the most dangerous of the tools to use. I will discuss the various styles of cutters and show how to safely use this tool and which cutters are the safest. I have not included the Arbortec cutter in this photo simply because I don't own one. It is however just as dangerous as the Lancelot Chainsaw cutter.



I have found the Mini Arbortec to be many times safer than the Lancelot or 4" Arbortec. The reason is its simply smaller and cuts so easily that catches are almost non existent. It does take a range of cutters. This tool is very easy to control.



The Foredom and other flex shaft machines take a wide range of cutters and sanding drums. This is a very flexible tools because you can also get a reciprocating handpiece that allows carving with gouges and other shaped edge tools. I like the rotary burrs because they have a very short learning curve and are pretty safe to use.



The Dremel is a very versatile tool but is not very powerful so it's main purpose is for smaller turnings or finer details. I buy these at flea mkts and yard sales. I've found them as cheap as \$15. When they die I simply toss them because it's less expensive to simply buy another used one than it is to send them to Dremel for repair.



Sanding drums and sanding mops are extremely useful to carvers. Not only do I use them for cleaning up carvings I also use them to carve certain details like flutes. I prefer the kind that use flat sandpaper. They come with a jig to allow you to cut the sandpaper to the proper size. I find these much more versatile than the drum style although those do come in smaller sizes. I find these incredibly useful for final shaping after other carving tools are used. Carving and shaping with cutting tools often leave facets which is fine if you want those. However these drums are great for fairing the surface and eliminating those facets.



Scotch Brite radial bristle discs are incredibly useful for cleaning up finer details. Also very good for softening sharp edges and cleaning up little fibers left from Carbide burrs.



Hand carving with edge tools can be challenging. Learning to sharpen them is the most critical aspect. It's also necessary to learn to read the grain of the wood and always carve down hill with the grain. One advantage of hand chisels is the lack of dust you breath and the fine details that you can achieve. They do have a learning curve.



One alternative to hand carving is the use of Reciprocating carvers. The Ryobi pictured is no longer available but there are several alternatives out there. Automac is the high end one. Foredom sells a handpiece that is inexpensive if you already own a flex shaft machine. These are less sensitive to grain direction than hand held chisels and can remove larger amounts of material quickly.



Probably my most used tools are wood rasps and sandpaper glued to sticks. These are often used after many of the other tools to refine the shape or clean up tool marks. Cheap wood rasps are barely useful. The Nickelson wood rasp is far better. Much better but quite expensive are the French made wood rasps. They have hand cut teeth that are random so they don't leave deep scratches like the other rasps. Currently Woodcraft carries these high end rasps. I love sandpaper glued to sticks. You can pick whatever grit you like and custom shape the sticks to the project you need.



I still use some of the older carving methods for certain projects. You can find Drawknives, spokeshaves and side hatchets at flea mks. They do usually take considerable reconditioning but then some of us just enjoy that process.



One tool you will find almost indispensable is a way to hold the turnings for carving. There are a lot of different carving stands out there. Do a google search and you will find them. I use the Bestwoodtools carving stand. I also like the Trent Bosch carving stand. Both of these have advantages and disadvantages over each other but they both work extremely well. The Bestwoodtools carving stand will fit in your Banjo or in a work bench mounted stand that comes with the tool. They come with a threaded adaptor to fit your chucks so it's very easy to mount work on these.



The most important tools for carving is patience. I won a carving competition with this piece which was my first real carving. I did not have any carving tools to carve the legs and used my bandsaw, a coping saw, a jewelers saw, lots of sandpaper glued to sticks and even fingernail files. I used my pocket knife for finer sharp details. Very slowly sneaking up on the finer shapes and details is what made the difference. This piece is called The Biological Clock.

