April 2023 - Alan Thomas

Alan Thomas was demonstrating the construction method used in the making of a two part hollow form with finial (similar to the one shown but without the colouring) so I was looking forward to seeing that.

Alan stated at the start that only 3 tools would be used namely 3/8” bowl gouge, spindle gouge and a 1/8” parting tool, the latter being ground with a a slight skew to match the profile of the jaws being used - a clever and reliable time saver.

Two blanks of sycamore about 6” x 2” and as identical as possible were used for the demo but in practice the same process is used for much larger projects up to even 19”!

Mounting the ‘top’ blank in the lathe, a 10mm no-go area was marked to be excluded from the shaping process to enable adjustments of the join to be made once the top and bottom halves are glued together. Use push and pull cuts using the bowl gouge to shape, and then create a tenon of about 40mm diameter which will be used to hold to piece for the hollowing process and also form the lip on which the finial will sit. Drill a 12mm diam hole about a 1” deep to hold the finial - not too big to prevent enquiring customers getting their finger stuck!

Remount the blank and hollow out, but first create a slight groove in from the edge which will provide a surface for gluing the two halves together but also act as a ‘safety’ groove to prevent damage when hollowing out. Soften the edge of the hole so that when viewed from the top the customer perceives a thinner bowl wall and then sand and seal. Finally, make sure that the outer edge is flat with a very very slight taper inwards - check using a steel rule to ensure that the two halves when glued will fit seamlessly together.

Repeat the process with the ‘bottom’ blank and create a foot to support the bowl, undercutting slightly to prevent the bowl from rocking.

After matching the grain as far as possible, the two halves were then glued, using superglue for speed (in production the advice is to use PVA) and support in the lathe until fully set …

When the glue had set the curves at the join were blended cutting from alternate sides and then sanded. The join can be disguised by making a groove with a further two grooves either side and then the grooves burnt in using wire or formica in the usual way. Note that if the join does not appear to be in the centre of the hollow form then it may be possible to use the join for one of the outer grooves.

Just as softening the hole when hollowing out the ‘top’, do the same on the outside of the neck to give the illusion of thinness of the hollow form sides. An added consideration when making this project is to experiment with the combination of wall thickness vs hollow form diameter to ensure the customer doesn’t think it is too heavy or too light i.e. get the ‘heft’ right.




Sadly Alan announced on the evening that he is retiring this year after a lengthy career in woodturning. We are hopeful though that he will be able to return in August for another interesting and informative demonstration.

David Langan