

BOWL ANATOMY

GARY SMITH AND WAYNE REXFORD

Three basic parts to a bowl. Body, foot and rim.

Utilitarian vs artistic

BODY

External and internal shape should follow each other most of the time.

Look at Chinese, Egyptian and Southwest Indian shapes. These are classic.

Suspended chain can help with these shapes. Does wood size determine shape of bowl?

Curve should be smooth—no flats. Ogee or parabolic vs circular. If ogee, curves should flow into each other. Best curves do not end at rim but give the feeling of continuing into space. Take bowl off lathe, set upright and look at it. Evaluate shape

FOOT

Foot should be 1/3 to 2/5 of opening or largest diameter of bowl.

Height of foot depends on depth of bowl. Calabash bowls have no foot while some tall vessels have a taller foot. Look at it and design it.

Foot should NOT interfere with curve into bottom. Should NOT make bowl look as if growing from where it is sitting. Should appear to just be added and unobtrusive.

The area of the foot should not be the whole bottom. Give some center relief.

To go under 1/3, be careful that it is balanced.

RIM

Utilitarian vs artistic Should force eye to look in or out but not static.

Form a shadow line—undercut, bead, slopes, surface decoration

Walt Young magazine Jan 03 platter design
Rim design The Woodturner's Workbook by Key
Rim decoration - do it before assembly
usually used to seal the internal edge. Inside mouth slope
Turned Bowl Design by K. Ruffan out of print
Joanice Beard w/ M. Pitt to use to eliminate chattering & use flat places. good continuous curve
form & texture ideas - ceramic books/magazines
Shape should look pleasing upside down as well as right side up.
foot should be 1/3 diameter
You don't want your foot to look like it is growing out of the table.
Foot should not break curve of the body.
Flat bottom bowls have to be from seasonal wood. Round can be green.
Calabash bowl Australia
People look at it the foot & inside curve 1/3 thickness

Anatomy of a Bowl

THE JOURNAL'S WOODTURNING EXPERT TAKES YOU THROUGH THE BASICS OF DESIGNING AND TURNING A BOWL.

BY BETTY SCARPINO

No doubt you have seen hundreds of bowls in your lifetime, but have you really considered what elements make up a bowl? Before you try to turn one, you should. At breakfast, take a look at your cereal bowl. Then line up all the bowls in your home — ceramic, glass, wood, metal — and figure out which ones you like. Ask yourself why you like them.

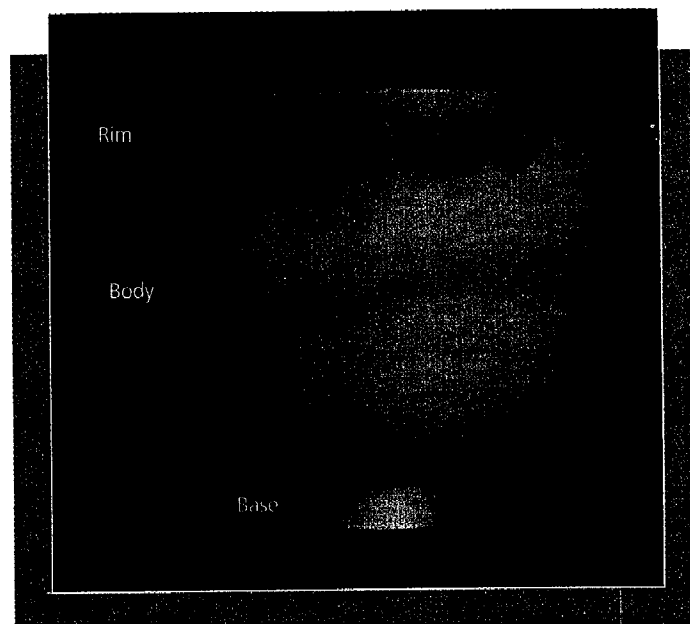
A bowl has three basic elements: a rim, a body and a base. Once you begin to critically consider the elements of bowls, you'll find that you have more control over your own creations, and I dare say have more fun making them! When designing a bowl, I find it helpful to draw or sketch different forms. Determine the size of the wood you will be using; then consider each of the three elements — rim, body and base — in terms of how they fit together in concert with the size and shape of your bowl blank. In many ways, this process is a bit like putting together a puzzle, but it's a puzzle of your own design.

Considering the Rim

When designing a bowl, the rim is very often overlooked by woodturners, yet it is a critical segment. A rim can be thin or thick, narrow or wide, natural-edged or finished. It can also be curved or flat, concave or convex, and it can flow toward the inside of the bowl or slope outward. An inward flowing rim invites the eye into the bowl; an outward sloping rim leads the eye out and away.

Wide rims are great for adding decoration such as carving or texturing. If you have selected wood that does not have a stunning grain pattern, consider making a bowl with a wide rim, then adding some texturing and/or coloring. If painting wood does not suit your fancy, perhaps bleaching a section to lighten an area is more your style. One advantage to bleaching is that it simply removes color, so the grain pattern remains visible. On the other hand, if you have a large piece of 2"-thick curly oak and you want to show off the grain, consider a bowl with a wide, curved rim and a small

THREE BASIC ELEMENTS MAKE UP A BOWL




body. The rim will certainly be noticed, and you'll have made the best of nature's bounty.

When selecting a rim for your bowl, considering function will help narrow your choices. A natural-edge bowl with the bark left on does not function well for eating popcorn. It does, however, look lovely as a decorative item on a shelf.

Body Building

The body of a bowl is the prime focus of our turning efforts, where the majority of the wood will be removed to create the cavity. The scope and variety of possible forms and shapes for this section are vast, with some shapes more personally pleasing than others. The size of the bowl blank often limits your



Bowl-turning is an exciting opportunity for all turners and skill levels. But, a well-designed bowl still requires some consideration for form and function.

options for the body of a bowl. I prefer curved, round bodies for bowls. Curves in wood often show off grain patterns better than flat surfaces and are organic and sensual. Flat, straight sections are seen as formal.

Once again, it's important to consider the purpose or function of your bowl. If it is to contain fruit or popcorn, a curved body is more compatible. If your bowl is purely decorative, anything will work. Curves can be slight or exaggerated; one- or multi-dimensional such as an 'S' curve. As before, the size of your blank will constrain your options.

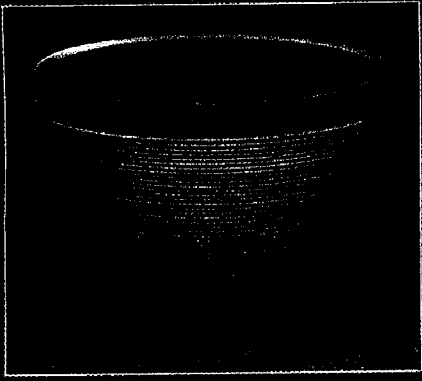
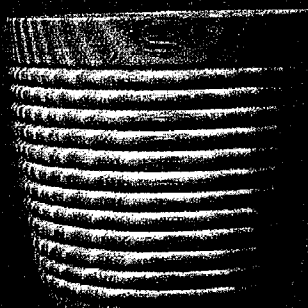
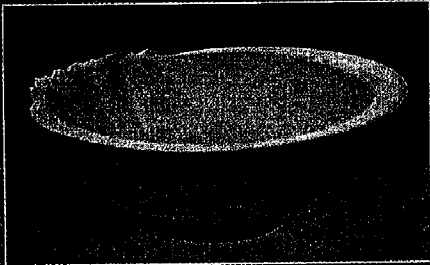
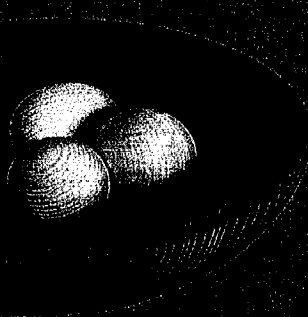
For flat or straight bowl sides, consider the look of an outward sloping side versus an inward sloping side. One is inviting, while the other gives the feeling of protection and secrecy. Often, a beginning turner will attack a bowl blank and cut straight in ... leaving no option but to have a flat-bottomed bowl. While this design isn't bad, many beginners who end up with straight-sided bowls did not really want a flat bottom.

A great way to overcome this tendency is to shape the outside profile of your bowl first, then remove the wood on the inside of the bowl. You will not be breaking any secret turning laws.

The Lowly Base

Here's an important tip ... don't overlook the importance of the base of your bowl! Even though the bowl may not be picked up and closely examined, its base determines how the bowl will be presented to the viewer. A fun exercise to try is experimenting with different bases quickly made from leftover pieces of wood. Pair them up with those not-quite-good-enough bowls you'll likely have littering your shop. (You'll find them in my shop!) Start with a tall, thin base and then a very tall, thin base. What would it look like with a tall, thick base instead? Consider a wide, thin base. (I'm sure you can see where this is leading.) As with a bowl's rim and body, bases can slope inward or outward, be straight or curved, convex or concave. You can model some

WIDE, SHORT, TALL OR ROUND



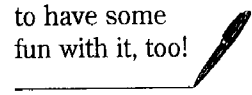
of these shapes by cutting profiles out of 1" lumber using your band saw. These three-dimensional visual aids will give you a fair idea if the shape works well with your design.

But, after saying all that, your bowl could actually look quite elegant with the body serving as the base of the bowl ... sort of a bowl-with-no-base. This type of treatment is particularly useful when your bowl blank is not very thick, and it is easy to achieve with just a bit of sanding (off the lathe) or by reverse turning.

Designing and Turning with Intent

Here's an example of how I'd approach making a salad bowl: My client likes color and carving on kitchenware, so I will make a medium-thickness rim. It functions well, and it also leaves room for a small amount of decoration. I can either paint the rim and/or carve it. I will make this salad bowl slightly larger than I think will be needed: tossing a salad, especially for messy folks, requires plenty of contained space. (I know that the recipient of this bowl tends to be a bit wild when tossing a salad.) So, I will make a bowl body that is round and slightly curved inward to help contain the contents as they are enthusiastically prepared. It's only after this thought process that I select the wood, sketch a simple form and proceed to the lathe.

A quick aside about wall thickness: By now the turning community is fairly well in agreement that thin-walled vessels and bowls are not necessarily a measure of perfection. I prefer to think in terms of intent. If your intention is to make a thin-walled, even-thickness bowl, then strive for that ... but if you like thick walls, make them that way. I think the goal is to make it look like you meant to do what you just did! To do that, you need to carefully consider your options and create with intent. But, be sure to have some fun with it, too!



Actually putting a knife to wood is the second or third step in creating a bowl. After going through the design steps related here, the author shapes a bowl from a cherry blank.

