

**Session 6**  
**Discovering & Exploring the Wonders**  
**of Shape & Form**



**Introduction:**

The focus of this session is on developing an eye and a feel for good shape and form. This session probably should be covered over two or more days as there is a ton of material to be covered. I have included in the manual an outline for a week long class that focuses on Shape & Form with a bit of embellishment thrown in to enhance the forms. This session is still a work in progress as I am exploring and developing a series of exercises designed to help students work their way through some of the finer points of shape and form. At one point I used some of my ideas to teach a week long class on Shape & Form at the John C. Campbell Folk School with Frank Penta. After getting feedback from the class and myself I realized that the week long class needed more development and refinement to make it more interesting and beneficial for the students. There are some guidelines to help one create a pleasing form but developing a feel for these guidelines is a bit more elusive. If one follows the guidelines to the letter the object will look and feel static and not be nearly as appealing as a form that is based on the guidelines but tends to flow on its own and that has a more kinetic feel and flow to its lines. The purpose of the exercise is not only to refine tool techniques but to see while turning how the various proportions can change the feel and look of a piece. The plan is to help students discover through hands on exercises just what constitutes a well shaped and refined object. Class discussion and participation in the critiques is critical to the success of this session. The first part of the session may seem to be a bit fundamental, but once some objects have been turned and made available for a class critique the learning can begin through visual and verbal discovery. Once the class opens up and begins to openly and freely discuss the shapes turned, then we can begin to share ideas. Students will then provide suggestions as to how the objects may be made more appealing, perhaps by removing a bit of wood here or there, maybe shortening the piece or shrinking the diameter of the turned piece to

help make it a more appealing form. The best way I have found for studying shape and form is through the turning of spindles. Unfortunately the majority of my students and many clubs are more interested in turning bowls and hollow forms. For instance when invited to demonstrate for SWAT (Southwest Association of Turners)(one of the largest regional woodturning symposiums in the country), the clubs filming my demonstrations were totally unprepared to do the videography for a demonstration on turning spindles. They claimed that they had not had the opportunity to video a spindle turning demonstration. To make this study of shape & form more attractive to potential students I feel that this study of form should be done through the turning of hollow forms and bowls.

### **Tools & Materials:**

#### **Tools:**

Eye Protection Face Shield Mandatory

1 ¼" or ¾" Spindle Roughing Gouge

3/8" Spindle Gouge

3/8" Bowl Gouge with Side Grind

3/8" Bowl Gouge with Traditional Grind

¾" Round Nose Scraper

1/16" Chris Stott Style Parting Tool

¾" Skew

Hollowing Tools for Small Vessels

Sorby Texturing Tool

¼" Point Tool

Carving Tools/Grinders/Shaping Tools hand and powered

Dyes/ Paints/Inks

Medallions/Buttons/Finials/Glass Beads/Precious Stones/other Decorative Objects

Sandpaper

Anything you can think of that can texture, color or add to, or alter a turned piece

**Students should be encouraged to bring in examples of their current work**

#### **Wood:**

2" x 2" x 14 ½" or 2" x 2" x 11" (if using Mini Lathes) (1 or 2) per student

for practicing Vase Shapes

3" x 3" x 12" Poplar for practicing Bowl shapes

3" x 3" x 4 ½" Poplar or Maple

3" x 3" x 6" Boxes

3" x 3" x 7" for Shaping Hollow Forms

2" x 11" x 11" Blank for Platter shapes

3" plus x 8" x 8" or larger Greenwood for Bowls

**Demonstration:**

There are many directions that can be taken to begin this session. When the skill level of the students is unknown and if there is time I like to start off by practicing four of the cuts most often used in shaping a piece of wood. Start by taking a 3" x 3" x 4" block of wood turn it to a cylinder and mount it in the chuck. Then using either a spindle or bowl gouge use a facing cut to face off the end of the blank, followed by turning a full bead followed by turning a cove and then by practicing turning ogees by turning in one motion a cove that runs into a bead and vice versa. This exercise is intended to provide a feel for making continuous flowing cuts. The end result should be a nice fare curve that is not interrupted by any flats. The idea is to waste the block away practicing these cuts. This should be a short quick exercise twenty minutes tops.

From the practice block we can move on to practice turning shapes. There are many ways to approach this next step. A quick exercise would be to turn egg shapes to work on developing a feel for turning fare curves. An exercise that I have used that helps students understand the different ratios used for laying out forms such as boxes and hollow forms, is to turn a 2" diameter cylinder that is 14" long and divide it into 3" long by 2" in diameter sections with approximately a 3/8" wide by say 1" diameter part in between the sections to separate them and to use later as a tenon for mounting in a chuck. The next step would be to lay the different ratios such as 1/3 to 2/3 or 1/4 to 3/4 or 1/2 to 1/2 and most importantly the Golden Section ratio of 3/8 to 5/8 (some folks use the ratio of 2/5 to 3/5 to represent the Golden Ratio either one works as one is slightly above the golden ratio (.625) and the other is slightly below the golden ratio (.600). The object is to try to turn a Hollow Form shapes leaving the largest diameter at the intersection of the ratios as they are laid out. It should be obvious that the 1/2 to 1/2 ratio is not very appealing. Later the class will look at these shapes and discuss ways to improve them. Sometime during the session these shapes can be used to experiment with color and texturing and can be parted of the original cylinder and each form can then be mounted in a chuck to rework the shapes and make a pleasing Hollow form. For some this exercise may seem too basic, but the idea here is to get a variety of forms quickly so that there will be some examples to spark discussion of good shape and form. Provide some of your own forms to add to the discussion and to help get the critiques started and focused in a constructive direction.

A similar exercise can be done for bowl shapes. A cylinder 3" in diameter by approximately 12" long could be used to lay out sections 2" long separated by a 1/2" plus wide by 1" diameter tenon, that can be used later to mount the individual bowl blanks in a chuck. Next lay out the different ratios and turn bowl shapes leaving the line that marks largest diameter for the different ratios. Once again the 1/2 to 1/2 ratio just does not seem to make a pleasing form. While still on the stick get the class together to discuss the shapes and come up ideas that will make for more appealing shapes. Once again these bowl blanks can be parted off the stick and mounted in a chuck to finish turning. They can then be used to experiment with texture, color and other embellishments. The whole Idea behind turning these small forms is to provide a number of shapes quickly to provide material for discussion and experimentation. This session is not about turning out finished work. It is about exploring, discovering and developing a feel for what constitutes good design and form. This is a time for play and

experimentation. Egos must be left behind for all the work created in this session is up for critique.

After playing with Hollow form and bowl shapes it is time to free students to create objects of their own design and interest. Once again these new creations will be held up for class critique so egos must be left home. All critique should be constructive in nature and should be geared toward improving and growing ones work.

Feel free to develop your own exercises that will help students develop a sense and a feel for good design. Part of the focus of the class should be in helping participants to develop their own voice or style of work. Students should be encouraged to take chances and to refrain from copying others work.



### **References:**

- Vessels of Illusion** with Trent Bosch
- Hollow Forms & Lidded Vessels** by Mike Mahoney
- Making A Hollow Vessel** with Mike Jacofsky
- Surface Design on Thin Wall Turning** with Binh Pho
- Thin Wall Turning** with Binh Pho
- Gilding & Chemical Patinations**, with David Marks and Grace Baggot8