

Ikebana Flower Vases



Introduction:

The word Ikebana is from the Japanese (The literal translation taken from www.japan-zone.com/culture/ikebana.shtml) is *flowers kept alive*) There is a lot more to Ikebana than just the arrangement of flowers as a quick Googling of the word provides upwards of 1500 references to Ikebana. Go to any large bookstore or library and you will discover many tomes providing information on the topic. In Japan and elsewhere around the world there are many schools and organizations teaching Ikebana as it is a very complex way of arranging flowers by creating a harmony of linear construction, rhythm and color. In Japan three of the most popular schools are Ikenobo, Sogetsu, and Ohara. There are different styles of arranging the flowers depending on the school, the vase and the plants used. In the west flower arranging is mostly done for decoration while in the east it is steeped in history. Ikenobo goes back to the school founded by the Buddhist priest Ikenobo Senkei in the 15th century. The following is taken from the history of ikebana found on the web site <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikebana>: “ Ikebana began as a kind of ritual flower offering made in Buddhist temples in Japan during the sixth century. In these arrangements, both the flowers and the branches were made to point toward heaven as an indication of faith. A more sophisticated style of flower arrangement, called *rikka* (standing flowers), appeared in the fifteenth century. The *rikka* style reflects the magnificence of nature and its display.”

Bear with me a bit longer as I feel a little more of the history and background may be of interest to some folks, especially those who will be making this project for a gift or adding it to

their craft lines. Once again pulling information from the Japan-zone web site, it is stated that modern ikebana can be divided into two styles referring to the size of the vase

Whether (moribana) shallow or (nageire) tall vase styles. There are a series of patterns to help, beginners create their own arrangements that involve the use of three different levels or branches; the *shin* (truth) branch, the *soe* (supporting) branch and the *hikae* (moderating) branch. Diagrams are available on the web site or in one of the many books written on the subject to help explain and to show the arrangement of the three branches. My short description, that I use to simplify what could be a long dissertation on the subject, is the following; “that one needs only three flowers of varying heights to produce a very elegant flower arrangement that is based on a more spiritual vision of the arrangement.”

Thoughts on Design:

Wood choice is very important to the overall look and beauty of the vase. As most vases will not contain flowers all the time, it is important the vase looks and feels good when it stands alone. The use of figured and unusual woods aids in the overall appeal of the finished piece. The observer's eye is drawn to the beauty of the wood and the subtle curving lines of the turned vase. There are a variety of shapes to choose from such as the donut or bagel shape, what I call my flying saucer shape, a slightly curved and tapered top, you can even try your hand at a square or rectangular shape. For true Ikebana, a simple form or shape, with clean lines is best, as it is the flowers representing the three levels or branches that should dominate. John Hill pointed out to me that anything works in Ikebana Flower arranging and that there is a huge untapped market for wood turned Ikebana vessels. If turning a square or rectangular shape the sides should be square and perhaps the edges sanded prior to turning. It is extremely difficult to sand the edges once they have been turned and are a bit thin. One tip for turning square or rectangular pieces is to turn the speed up higher than you would normally turn. The wood spinning makes an awful sound almost like a plane propeller, do not let this scare you into turning down the speed as you will obtain much smoother and cleaner cuts at this high speed. First time out turning a square or rectangular piece, I would advise getting some instruction from an experienced turner.

Using three live flowers set at different levels makes a striking flower arrangement. A major consideration is the type of finish to be used. Keep in mind that water droplets may affect the finish if not wiped off immediately, so be sure to use a water resistant finish. Some thought should be given to holding the Ikebana frog or insert in place. Especially if you are selling the vases, as the customer will pick it up look at the bottom and the insert will fall out and damage your other work or the table top. Be aware, one must also consider that the inserts may need occasional cleaning. I have used double stick tape and soft candle wax inserts designed to hold candles in their holders. I have found that a drop of silicone caulk works best but unfortunately, makes it more difficult to remove the insert for cleaning. Something new that I found that scrap book tack dots work very well and it is easy to remove the inserts the only draw back is that in cold weather it hardens and the insert may fall out.

Materials:

Interesting block of wood 2 X 6 X 6 min
2 X 7 X 7 or larger preferred
2 X 8 X 8 is my preferred size but larger sizes work well.
Ikebana Insert with or without a flange
Zots (TM) Clear Adhesive Dots (available at Michaels in the scrap book section)

Optional silicone or something to hold insert in place so that when vase is inevitably turned upside down the insert will not fall out and dent your table. Good quality double stick tape is a very effective method for temporarily holding the inserts. Zots brand adhesive dots for scrap books are very effective. I found them at a Michaels Store or any scrap book supply store.

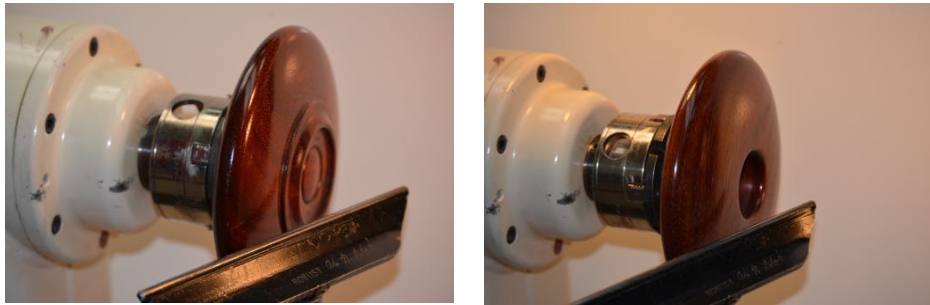
Procedure:

1. Locate Top; in most cases the best figure will result with the bark side on top.
2. Mark the center points on both sides by drawing an X with a straight edge.
3. Draw circles with a compass
4. Mark the overall outside diameter
5. Draw two circles for the flanged insert;
 - A. 1 3/4" circle represents the 1 3/4 hole for the cup
 - B. 2" circle represents the inset for the flange
 - C. If you are not using a flanged insert skip this step just marking the center is sufficient or if you feel confident that you will remember which side is intended to be the top.



6. Use a band saw to rough cut the blank to a circle
7. If using a screw chuck, drill a 13/32" hole if using an Oneway chuck (or the size that fits your screw chuck) in the center of the top where the frog (flower arranger insert) will be inserted later. If turning between centers, use a mallet to insert the two prong spur drive in the top. The bark side should face the head stock as that is usually the preferred top side.

Tip: I have started pre drilling the hole for the insert on my drill press for two reasons one to save time when doing a production run and the other to make it possible to mount directly on the chuck. If using this method, I mount the blank onto the chuck using the chucks #1 step jaws. If pre-drilling the hole remember to drill it a tad deeper as the top has not been faced off. When using a screw chuck the top must be fairly flat for the piece to seat properly on the chucks jaws shoulder to minimize vibration.



8. Rough out the bottom shape. Leave a large foot for mounting in a chuck. Your foot can be designed to be gripped either externally or internally. I now prefer to grip my foot internally (I expand the jaws into the foot) so that I can always remount the vase if I need to work on it at a later date. Occasionally it may get damaged at some point and need some touch up work The foot needs to fit the jaws of your chuck but should be approximately 1/3 of the diameter of the vase plus or minus as your design permits as this is a functional piece.

9. If using an internal (expansion) grip foot you can go ahead and sand the bottom. This is another reason why, I now prefer to use an internal (or expansion) grip design on my feet as it saves having to reverse turn the vase.

10. Mount the blank in the chuck. Next, using a Jacobs chuck with a 1 3/4" forstner bit, drill the hole, for the frog to the depth of the frog (flower arranger insert) plus the flange adding a bit of depth to compensate for shaping and sanding.

Tip: If you have predrilled the hole, for the insert skip this step.

11. I use a 3/8" beading and parting tool or a flat nosed scraper to make the recess to accept the flange on the frog (flower arranger insert). I sneak up on the final size of the recess stopping the lathe often and testing the fit with the flanged vase insert reversed. Leave a little space between the edge of the flange and the edge of the wood on the top to accommodate any wood movement due to changes in humidity. With some frogs you may need to round over the edge where the hole meets the flange recess to accommodate the welded joint where the flange attaches to the cup.

12. Shape the top and final sand it.
13. If you need to reverse turn the vase? You can expand a set of #1 jaws into the hole that was drilled for the insert.
14. Finish with your preferred finish. On dark woods I use Watco Danish oil, let it sit for a week or more and then apply Watco gloss wipe on poly or spray it with lacquer.
15. I use a dab of clear silicone caulk or Zots adhesive dots, on the bottom of the frog to keep it from dropping out when customers invariably turn the vase upside down to look at the bottom.
16. Find three exotic flowers, cut them to different lengths, add water and step back to admire your beautiful work

Tips:

When doing a production run of vases, I sometimes pre-drill the hole for the insert in the top of the vase. When doing this I drill the hole a tad deeper than required as I have not yet faced off the top of the vase and the finished top will be slightly lower than the rough blank's top. Before taking the finished vase off the lathe, check to insure that the hole is deep enough. Be careful not to drill through the bottom of the vase. This method works best if the blanks used are fairly consistent in thickness or have been previously surfaced.

The reason I apply Watco Danish oil to the darker woods is to help bring out the rich color of the wood. It is best to wait thirty days for the solvents in the oil to completely cure but the label on the can says 76 hours is sufficient depending upon humidity. In my area we have relatively high humidity, so I try to let the finish cure for at least a week or longer.

On the lighter woods I apply only the wipe on poly or sometimes I use Super Blond Shellac that I mix myself from flakes or when in a hurry I just spray them with lacquer. Generally I try not to darken the color of the lighter woods at all. In the near future I may try some water based polyurethane, as I have had some bad luck with wipe on Polyurethane lately.

When turning a square shaped Ikebana:

1. Cut blank perfectly square and then sand all the outside edges, as they are easier to sand before they are turned down to a thin edge.
2. Make sure that all hand and body parts remain safely behind the tool rest and that your hands remain clear of the spinning corners at all times as making contact with the spinning edges could prove to be quite painful and bloody.
3. When starting to shape the wings the bevel of the bowl gouge points in the direction of the cut and gently glides across the surface with very little or no pressure on the bevel. Any pressure on the bevel when performing this cut will result in vibration and a very poor cut and as the wings get thinner this vibration could start to resonate and cause the wings to explode.
4. For best results run the lathe at a very high speed. Be sure to stay alert and pay careful attention to your turning and check the thickness of the wings often, so that they do not get too thin and fragile.



Alan N. Leland
alan@alanleland.com
www.alanleland.com