

(Very) Discreetly Adding Color to Your Woodturning

by Bob Heltman, CMW, AAW © 8-2009

Once again our good CMW club President, Mike Fiantaca, threw down the gauntlet at our July meeting and challenged us to “add color” to a woodturning.

I resisted the very notion. Why? Because I generally put myself in the group of woodturners who prefer natural wood, enhanced only by a protective finish. That is the way woodturning got started, and how avocational and hobby woodturning largely matured. (Besides, I have to admit I am no great artist.)

It has only been in latter years that the starving artist crowd has descended upon woodturning, using wood as a canvas. Upon the wood canvas we have witnessed carving, piercing, metal leafing, and a vast array of painting types, methods, and colors. And, if the truth be known, some very beautiful objects have resulted. Sometimes, however, I admit to wondering if the job could have been done almost equally as well, maybe even better, using Tupperware®, Rubbermaid®, or even paper mache vessels, forgetting the time, trouble, equipment, and pleasure associated with turning wood!

So, given this conflict of interest, I pondered for several days as to what to do. For some reason the good humor of Clay Foster (from Texas - www.clayfoster.com) came to mind, a terrific and creative woodturner who demonstrated before our club in November 2005. Clay turned a hollow form, cut it in half, inscribed his name on the *inside*, and then glued the two halves back together! To read his name one would have to break the vessel, or use a small light and angled dental mirror through the hole under a removable finial; we all laughed about this.

Well, the idea began to form as to how to add color to a pretty osage orange bowl I was working on. Osage orange is a hard wood. It has been used to make hunting bows, and was often planted throughout the midwest as hedgerows to border fields, before the invention of barbed wire in

the 1870s. And, ever since Mike Hunter (www.hunterwoodturningtool.com) invented his turning tools which use a small round nano-carbide cutter, I've relied on that tool to undercut the rims on my bowls. Such rims make it much easier to quickly grab a handful of M&Ms or trailmix (if you are health minded), and the rim becomes a nice surface for decorating or just enjoying the wood's grain.

BINGO, the idea hit to put a colored ring UNDER the bowl's rim where it can't be seen, unless one uses a mirror. With a grim smile I saw how I could stay true to my belief that wood should look like wood, AND add some color. Now...how to do it.

I decided to cut a slot under the entire rim and fill it with a colored wood filler.

After trying a variety of hand tools, and since osage orange can be troublesome with end grain and sometimes with-grain splintering, I figured a router would work. My big “regular” router had no suitable bit handy, and I couldn't get it into the bowl which was just 7” diameter and under 3” deep.

So I tried my Dremel® Moto-Tool and a bit that gave a “V” groove in the wood. Fig. 1 & insert. By resting the Dremel on my tool rest, guiding with

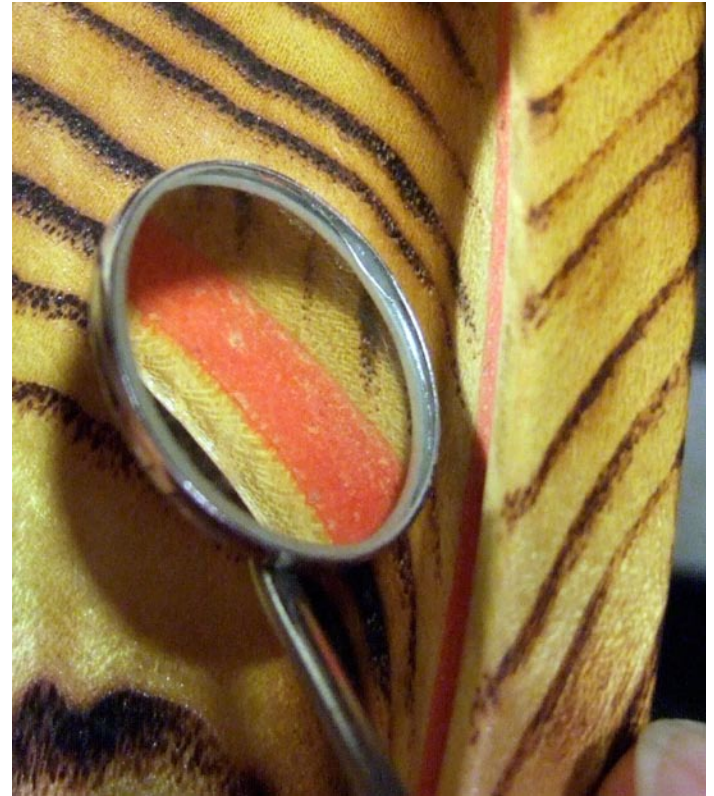


my finger, and slowly rotating the bowl by hand, I was rather easily able to cut the groove around the bowl. Next came filling the groove.

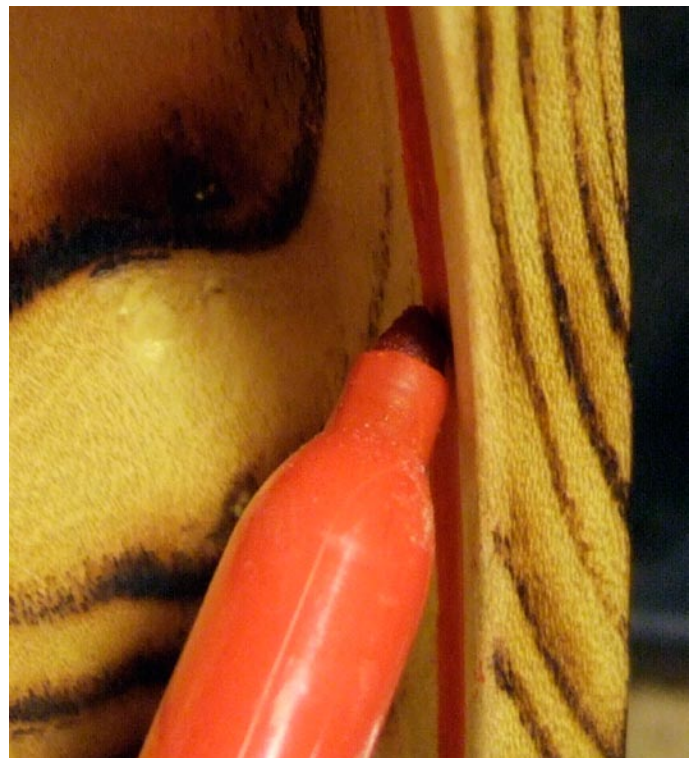


For this I used an epoxy type filler, mixed with red Tempura® powdered paint. Fig. 2 I remember purchasing jars of this Tempura powdered paint 5 or so years ago, for under \$4.00 per jar. Each jar has enough powder to last down through several generations of woodturners. The epoxy itself gives a reinforcing ring of strength to the rim, too.

When this was cured, overnight to be sure, I sanded it going from 80 grit down to 180. Then came examination, which I had to do using an angled dental mirror (it pays to be friendly with your dentist). Fig. 3 The result showed that while the process worked, there were a few places where the colored inlay was



speckled, as though a few small pieces of sawdust became embedded as I pressed the curing epoxy mix into the groove. Of course, this left me a bit peeved, and faced with a new problem. Looking about I saw a red marker. Using a similar technique as used with the Dremel, I carefully backed





the marker into the bowl and brought it to rest on the surface of the inlay. Slowly I turned the bowl as a red stripe was laid on top of the red inlay. Fig. 4

As Fig. 5 shows, this worked half well when examined with the dental mirror. The dad-blamed marker was too long to allow enough tilting to fully cover the red inlay, giving both a deep and a pinkish red set of circular stripes under the rim.

I thought about cutting the marker in half and covering the open end with duck tape, or shopping for a shorter red marker, but instead decided to exercise the "Design Opportunity" option of leaving things just as they were. Sooner or later the questions will be asked, "How did you get the two toned inlay striping?" At that time I will respond wisely with something like, "Yes, yes, that WAS a bit of a challenge." And leave the question hanging.

As an aside, you can see that the growth rings of this osage orange bowl are blackened, as though burned. They were, using a micro-butane torch and carefully "painting" each growth ring with the flame. I have learned to coat the wood with a

spray lacquer before torching, and then sanding that coat lightly before torching. That way, after scorching the wood, a light sanding will remove any "whiskers" coming from the heat, but the dust will not embed in the yellow part of the wood. At this point I sprayed several coats of gloss lacquer inside and out, except for the outside bottom area which was yet to be turned. After sanding with a plastic Brillo© pad to knock off a tiny protrusions, a good coat of wax was applied and polished with a rotary brush. Using a brush shoves wax particles into any voids and also gives a very lustrous finish.

As you can imagine, at this point there is no normal way anybody can see or realize that "hidden color" has been applied to this unique vessel.

Another few nights of reflection led me to search the internet for small hobby mirrors. www.bj-craftsupplies.com had them and I ordered several



pouches in 3 sizes, 1/2", 1" and 2" diameters. The price was very moderate. Fig. 6.



The next task was to use my Bedan turning tool, and cut out a 2+ inch diameter shallow recess in the inside bottom of the bowl. Fig. 7. An easy job.

To attach the mirror I needed an elastic glue. Three possibilities came to mind: 1 - Elastic superglue, 2 - silicone rubber caulk, 3 - Mighty Mendit - as advertised on TV by the late Billy Mays (R.I.P.). I chose the Mighty Mendit because acetone is the solvent and if some of this glue squeezed out between the mirror and the wood, cleanup would be rather easy. Experience with this glue on fabric disclosed that when cured it is quite rubbery. Fig. 8



I squeezed a circular bead of MM glue well inside the recess and added a dab in the very middle.

When the glass mirror was gently and evenly pressed in place, I was very lucky as none of the glue seeped out!

This was let cure overnight. The next steps would be to again thoroughly wax the interior of the bowl, assuring wax was pressed in between the mirror's edge and the wood. A careful buffing would follow, and then by using a vacuum chuck I could finish the outside bottom.



Fig. 9 shows a top view of the finished project. Fig. 10 shows the red epoxy ring, both as a reflection in the bottom mirror, and as seen by viewing



across one side of the ring to just under the far side. Figure 11 shows the bowl's bottom. A almost always show the name of the wood, month and year finished, and my name. In this case I added "M1" to

record the fact that this is the first bowl to which I



have added a mirror.

Reflecting back over this "President's Challenge" from Chairman Mike draws the following thoughts:

1 - It is beneficial to belong to a woodturning club for the learning opportunities, challenges, and joy of fellowship.

2 - An invention is defined in two ways: a) the creation of something brand new (very rare), b) the combination of old things in new ways. In this case mirrors have been used in creating wood turned hand mirrors; it is just a different application here.

3 - There sure is a very deep satisfaction that comes from turning wood into a unique and attractive creation.

Cheers! 😊😊