

Tiny Challenges for Four Turners

By Betty Scarpino

Size matters: large turnings command attention; small objects draw the viewer in to hold and to touch. The limitation presented to these four woodturners was to create one or more small objects from a piece of wood measuring 2" x 2" x 4".

The creations of Ed Kelle, Bonnie Klein, Joe Seltzer and Jennifer Shirley have a presence that goes way beyond their size. Yes, size matters, but so do design and execution.

Many of these tiny objects were made using standard-size lathes; however, for those who have space limitations, a miniature lathe, a few tools and something to sharpen with are all that are needed. Well, wood's required, of course, and I've found there's plenty of that lying around everyone's shop: those precious scraps that are too good to burn, yet not large enough for major projects. In fact, even though I offered to supply everyone with wood, three of the turners selected pieces from their own stash.

Small-scale turning can open a wide range of possibilities for individuals who need to sit while working; for snow birds who travel; and for young children just learning to turn.



Most small turnings require the use of miniature or small-scale turning tools. But don't worry, they're easily available through woodturning catalogs and at woodworking stores. When it comes to tiny turnings, it's helpful to select a fine-grained wood. Excellent fine-grained species are boxwood, dogwood, pear, persimmon, holly, hard maple and many of the exotics. But don't forget to consider the branches of larger trees. For example, if I want to use ash wood for a small turning, I might harvest a small branch from a large tree. The growth rings will be closer together and finer-grained, helpful for small-scale turnings.

The ability to see well is of paramount importance. I recommend those magnifying lenses that fit on a person's head. They're sort of like wearing a pair of reading glasses, but easier to use when working at both medium and close distances. They're a standard fashion accessory for Bonnie, as well as for many other turners! I have my own pair.

Ed Kelle

Ed began turning in 2003 after he first saw a lathe being used at the Long Island Woodworking Show. Ed

says, "I was mesmerized by the curls rapidly coming from the bowl." After frustrated attempts using a poorly running larger lathe, he purchased a JET® mini-lathe and began making small-scale objects.

Ed sometimes uses small-scale tools, but generally he relies on standard turning tools for most of his work. For hollow vessels, he made his own small-scale hollowing tools.

I first met Ed a few years ago when I acquired a set of Ed's nested acorns boxes. They are made from cherry wood, with the tops textured and darkened. They looked like the real thing! The use of texture and detail on a small scale are two elements Ed uses to draw viewers into his work: "people can't help wanting to pick them up. They step closer and then see the details that are present."

Ed has a background in fine art, painting, drawing, sculpture and photography. He says, "Visual arts teach you the importance of concentrating on your subject, as there are no casual glances." He believes that form is the most important element in turning, and studying the art of other media can increase a person's knowledge base and visual skills.

He's not afraid to incorporate ideas from other fields and utilize skills from all areas of his life into his woodturning endeavors. He's made furniture, sculpture and jewelry boxes, often using the lathe for the beginning phases of his work.

Ed's "blossom" is made from walnut and measures 2" x 2" x 3 1/2". It is very thin, giving it the lightweight feeling of a real blossom. Ed textured the outside using



Ed Kelle



Ed Kelle's love and understanding of nature translate well to the objects he makes, like this tiny walnut wood "blossom."



Ed Kelle



Bonnie Klein



Joe Seltzer



Jennifer Shirley



Bonnie Klein



There is more to Bonnie Klein's boxes than first meets the eye: nested together with the lids off, the top of each box is the same height — but each box is still just the right amount smaller or larger than the next.

a Dremel® tool and bleached the end of the stem with two-part wood bleach.

Ed suggests that anyone who is interested in learning how to turn should take a few hands-on lessons. As a three-year member of the Long Island Woodturners himself, he finds there is always someone who can offer help or insight.

Ed now teaches woodturning, and generally holds lessons at his students' shops. It's easier to teach students in their own shops because Ed can evaluate their equipment to determine if problems stem from lack of technique or from machines and tools.

Bonnie Klein

In 1989, when I attended my first woodturning symposium, Bonnie was one of the lead demonstrators. I was totally mesmerized by her skill at woodturning, her ability as a demonstrator and her enthusiastic, positive personality. Hard to imagine, but she's gotten even better!

Last year, I saw Bonnie's presentation on how she prepares an animal bone for use in her woodturning. The small boxes and jewelry made from this bone look like ivory! To say the least, she likes to experiment with turning unusual materials.



Bonnie is known in the turning world for having pioneered the field of small-scale turning. She developed the Klein lathe in 1986, then followed that with the Klein threading jig in 1992. She has written a book and produced many videos.

It's an understatement to say that Bonnie loves the creative process. In her words, she is "addicted to discovery, progress and the fact that perfection is forever elusive, but as I strive for it, yesterday's challenges become the basic skills of tomorrow."

Bonnie's nested boxes are made from boxwood, coveted for its superior turning properties, as well as its lovely color and texture. It's not enough that the boxes all have lids: each lid is threaded and screws to its

corresponding base. Lined up, they show Bonnie's skill in tool control and her eye for detail. The surprise inside is a miniature top. It spins, perfectly.

Bonnie volunteers a lot of her time teaching youngsters how to turn. She travels with 10 lathes, tools and wood in the back of her van to teach classes. At the American Association of Woodturners' annual symposium, Bonnie heads up a program where a bank of lathes is set up, and each child has a volunteer mentor to assist. They make a preplanned project and take it with them when finished.

Bonnie's advice: it's more important for the tools to be in proportion to your workpiece than to the lathe. Higher RPMs will produce smoother surfaces right off the tools, provided they are used correctly.

Joe Seltzer

Joe was one of the first people I thought of when the idea of high-lighting tiny turnings was presented to me. Joe likes small turnings and



Joe Seltzer



Joe Seltzer likes being able to carry a dozen of his tiny turnings — many of which he gives away — around in his pocket.

has a vast collection of small-scale objects, all less than 7" in size. As a hobby, he also turns miniatures.

Joe started turning in 1998. Although he had been collecting for years, he didn't initially try turning himself because he thought he would hate sanding. Well, he does hate it, but with small pieces, sanding is minimal. He joined the Bucks Woodturners chapter of the American Association of Woodturners in 1995. They had a loaner lathe he borrowed, and he took a few lessons. He got hooked.

Now, a number of his friends have collections of his work, which pleases him greatly. He derives pleasure from turning and then giving.

Joe's favorite woods are boxwood and pink ivory because they turn so well. He also likes highly figured woods or those with a sharp contrast of sapwood and heartwood. Joe decided to use boxwood for this project. The piece he selected had two attractive knots, so he incorporated them into the finished pieces. He turns most of his objects endgrain-fashion, so that the stem of the goblets have the strength of the long grain. I love the way the grain pattern on the small plate subtly follows the curve of the plate's edge.

Joe is a professor of management at LaSalle University in Philadelphia. His profession has little to do with turning or collecting, which is his hobby and passion. He is the vice president of the Collectors of Wood Art and also VP of his local chapter of woodturners. He's on the steering committee of an event called Echo Lake, held every other year. A group of woodturners get together to turn, create and let ideas flow between participants. This year, they held their 10-year retrospective at the Wood Turning Center in Philadelphia.

Joe's advice for people interested in turning small items is to buy some small tools. He likes the Klein gouges and scrapers and the Sorby mini-turning tools. Scrapers can be ground to different radii. Attach the



Jennifer Shirley

Jennifer Shirley couldn't resist decorating her mini canteens. She used a wood burner for the designs and added texture with an electric engraver, modified by inserting a dull tip into the end.



wood to the lathe using a faceplate with a waste block or use a chuck with small jaws.

Jennifer Shirley

Jennifer has two lathes, a full-size General and a JET mini-lathe. Years ago, her son, Weston, learned how to turn using her mini-lathe. Jennifer works in a one-and-one-half car garage converted to a studio.

Jen primarily uses native Indiana hardwoods, often rescuing timber that might otherwise find its way to a fireplace or landfill. The wood she used for her spice canteens is pear wood, given to her by a friend ... actually, given to her by two friends. I live about two miles from her in Indianapolis, and a little over a year ago, I helped myself to a couple of those small pear wood logs stacked in her backyard, sawed them up and dried them. I gave a hunk back to Jen for this project. It's a lovely wood to work!

An educational grant from the American Association of Woodturners allowed Jen to attend a turning class at the Arrowmont School of Arts and Craft in 2002. In 2006, she studied for a week at the Appalachian Center for Craft. Learning new skills helped Jen launch her own career as a teacher.

Jennifer is in regular demand at Marc Adams Woodworking School as a studio assistant. This year, she will teach her first class there,

a weekend session on embellishing turned objects.

Jen's initial thought for this project was to make two decorated hollow forms; however, after remembering some little chili containers that Alan Lacer brought to a class at Marc Adams, Jen decided to make her own version, calling them spice canteens. Her recent interest and activity in cooking has introduced her to a variety of new spices.

The piece of pear wood was just large enough to make two canteens. She hollowed them with a mini hollowing tool made from a piece of drift key and a tiny HSS cutter, brazed on with silver solder. Jen enjoys the challenges of making her own small-scale turning tools.

The canteens are ready to fill with your favorite blend of spices, tuck into your pocket or purse and head to your favorite restaurant or pub!

Jen has always been intrigued with tiny objects and miniatures that resemble their larger counterparts. When she was a kid, she loved Matchbox® toy cars and wished she could fit inside them. She sums up her participation in this challenge by saying, "the world of turning small-scale is very exciting and challenging, and this project was really a treat to be involved with!"

Betty Scarpino and her stash of pear wood reside in Indianapolis. The pear wood is well hidden from the stray eyes of visiting woodturners!