

# The Wooden Teapot

Raymond Overman

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## Wooden Teapots

Over 5000 years ago the Chinese began making tea. There are now tea ceremonies, parties, and gatherings based on the consumption of tea. It's no wonder with the heritage of tea that the implements used in making it have become collector's items and objet d'art. With that in mind, we come to wooden teapots.

Obviously, a wooden teapot is not made for the actual making of tea, but as an art object. There are many galleries that have teapot exhibits and the entries range from ceramics and glass to stone, metal, and in our case wood. As an example, the del Mano Gallery in Los Angeles, CA has an annual exhibition called "Hot Tea!" (<http://www.delmano.com>)

A few of the woodturning artists whose pieces show up in the exhibition each year include Art Liestman, Jacques Vesery, and Alan Mailland. I highly suggest you check out their work and the other artists that are showing for inspiration.

### Design

There are a couple of ways to tackle the idea of making a teapot using woodturning as the main shaping technique. The problem with woodturning is, of course, you have to work within the confines of the circle defined by the piece on the lathe. With my first two teapots I approached the problem by just creating a small hollow form and attaching pieces to it. This works well but left a few things to be desired. For one, the joints left where the spout, legs, and handle attach are hard to incorporate without a seam. Fixing something along the curved surface and making it flow is difficult. I'll be the first to admit, I look back at the first two teapots I made and think, I could have done better with fitting the pieces to the body of the teapot.



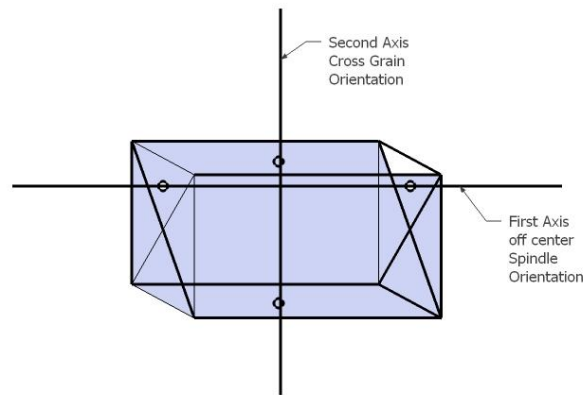
A couple of solutions come to mind, instead of turning a hollow form and using the hole in the top where the lid fits to the teapot, make the hole you used to hollow the piece of wood the spout. Art Liestman uses this design in his series. There is a seam expected where the teapot and lid fit together so the design solves the problem at the spout. Now all you have to do is fit the handle and the legs.

Another idea, which is the one I'm currently using and developing, is to use a multi-axis turning to shape the handle and spout areas on the body of the teapot. This is the process that this document will

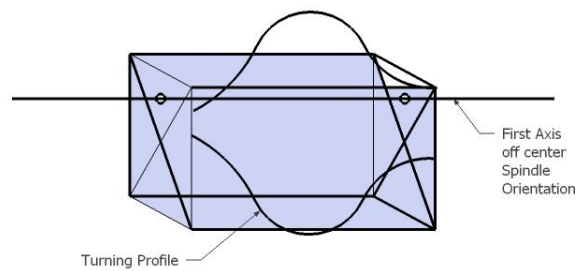
be concerned with and what my demo will be based on.

## The Process

With these designs in mind, I started thinking about how I could use the lathe to turn a teapot and incorporate at least part of the spout and handle into the body so that it doesn't look like they are just hanging on the side of the teapot. I came up with a multi-axis solution. First, the rectangular block of wood is oriented in spindle orientation with the grain running the length of the lathe.



A rough shape defining the spout and handle portions are made and the bottom of the teapot is made using a spindle gouge. At this point, you have a choice to further define the handle and spout by moving the headstock or tailstock center along the Y axis or you can carve those areas later by hand. I prefer to offset the spout end and shape it further with the lathe rather than carving the waste wood away. This also sets the spout in a different line than the handle and gives the piece more movement.



After turning the piece in spindle orientation, the blank goes back between centers in face grain orientation and I define the base of the teapot as well as add a tenon. I'm careful not to reshape the spout by cutting too far into the piece but since the handle is usually higher on the teapot I'll take this time to shape the bottom of it.

After getting a tenon and shaping the bottom, I'm ready to turn it around and put it in a chuck. I then shape the top of teapot, again being careful of the spout since it's on the high end this time, and start the hollowing. This part is fairly straight forward and similar to turning a small hollow form. I use a range of tools such a straight boring bar, a curved boring bar and a 45 degree boring bar to get all the corners inside the piece.

I'm not looking for a textbook thin hollow form here however because I want the teapot to have at least some weight to it. Also, I still have to carve the outside of the piece and clean up any lines that may have been created when I changed axis. I can define the handle and spout with a coping saw and rotary carver later.

After finishing the hollow form I turn my attention back to the outside of the piece. I use the rotary carver to remove and smooth as much of the lines as possible where I've changed axis. I clean up everything so I can see how the handle and spout will fit against the body.

I use a drill with a long bit to make the hole in the spout. I'm careful to define the angle that I want the spout to go. At this point I've left a lot of wood around the hole for stability. I'll use a rotary carver to carve the shape of the spout around the drilled hole.

I then use a band saw or coping saw to remove the bulk of extra material around the handle and use a rotary carver to finalize the shape. There are a lot of options for creating the handle and you have to use your imagination and find what works for you. So far I've attached extra pieces of wood for the handle (as of March 08) but my next step is to carve the handle out of the blank itself.

The finial, like the handle and spout, needs to be creative and match the overall design of the piece. You don't want to just sit something on top of your newly created teapot. I like to have contrasting colors so usually I'll go with at least some ebony or blackwood against a lighter wood and use both turning and carving in the design.

## **Summary**

I would say that this technique isn't for the production of the same piece over and over again. There's definitely some imagination and differences required for each teapot. The basic technique can be daunting since there is off center turning and multiple axis changes but overall I think the end product can be very rewarding. Take some time and try it for yourself. You'll be surprised what you come up with.

## Contact Information and Resources

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or burlled and figured wood that you need to get rid of. I'll be glad to help you.

Raymond Overman

[raymondo@overmanshop.com](mailto:raymondo@overmanshop.com)

<http://www.overmanshop.com>

<http://www.nakedwoodturner.com>

704.907.1830