

Finishing Approaches for Woodturners

Introduction

This document has been conceived as a practical and easy-to-consult guide to choosing and applying different finishes to wood.

The first chapter covers the preparation of wood for finishing. Chapters 2 to 10 are organized around families of finishes. These chapters start with a short discussion on the reason to use a particular finish, followed by definitions where appropriate, then by a step by step guide for the application of the finish, followed by a table suggesting where to buy the products discussed, and finally advice from experienced turners is presented. Chapter 10, coloring wood, is more of a discussion on the approach itself followed by a discussion on how to apply it (although some techniques are not considered as finishing). Chapter 11 was added to provide advice on altering the properties of the wood or the wood itself as they have a profound impact on the appearance of the piece and on the finish that may be subsequently used. Finally, the last chapter presents the finishing approaches used by well-respected turners; this section will grow over time as fellow woodturners share their experience. This section, we believe will be of interest to many of us.

There are no hard and fast rules on what finishes to use; it really depends on the intended use of the turning. For novice turners choosing which finish to apply can be a daunting proposition. As a result they may limit their repertoire to one or two finishes, most often oil and wax. Hopefully this guide will encourage them in trying new finishes. For more experienced woodturners, it is hoped that this guide will hone your skills.

Here are some points to consider in deciding which family of finishes to use.

- There is still considerable concern about finishes being food safe. In fact, all the oils/varnishes and other clear finishes available to wood turners are food safe. However, if you or your customers are still concerned, consider leaving the wood bare.
- For pieces that will see heavy use, where they will likely get scratched, an oil finish is easily repaired – Chapter 4.

- To bring out the full natural beauty of the wood, especially burls, think of using wipe-on varnished, followed by buffing and wax – chapter 5
- A high gloss finish with depth best displays a highly figured and a complex grain pattern. This can be achieved with French polish or high gloss lacquer – Chapter 6, 8.
- For a quick and easy attempt to obtain the effect of a French polish consider a friction polish such as Shellawax – Chapter 7
- To keep the colour of the wood from yellowing use water based finishes such as water based lacquer or water based wipe-on varnish – Chapter 5, 9
- For a smooth professional finish consider spray lacquer. To many this is the ultimate finish – chapter 8