



THINKING OUTSIDE *the* BOWL

Ted Beebe

Recently, I was contemplating a project that required a shape other than round, and of course I wanted to create the form on the lathe. The oblong bowls shown in this article evolved from that initial inspiration.

My approach in making an oblong bowl was to start with a hollow form that was completely enclosed—no opening at the top or base. This was accomplished by making two bowl-like forms having the same diameter at the rim, and then gluing them together. You can do this with solid wood or with a segmented blank. I then cut the hollow form down the middle, from tenon to tenon, resulting in two oblong bowls. The shape of the halved pieces is determined by the profile of the turned hollow form prior to halving it. The possibilities are endless.

Turn the form

To illustrate this article, I started with a mahogany log about 18" (46cm) long. I mounted the log on

the lathe between centers and commenced to round it and remove the bark (*Photo 1*). Toward each end of the log, I started to shape the outside of what would become an oblong bowl. I formed a tenon at each end, beyond the bowl-shaped ends. In the middle of this form, about halfway between centers, I left the piece quite straight and flat. As you will see, the center area will become the eventual bottom, or foot, of the oblong bowl. With the basic shape established and a tenon on each end, I removed the workpiece from the lathe.

Halve it crosswise

To cut the form in half on the bandsaw, I wanted to be extra cautious to ensure I was working safely. Cutting a round piece on a bandsaw can be extremely dangerous. The blade can grab and pull the unsupported wood from your hands or pull your hands into the blade. I needed to make my round workpiece square so it would have a flat to register on the bandsaw table. To do this, I took

two pieces of plywood, and with the workpiece sitting flat on a flat surface, I screwed through the plywood and into each tenon, as shown in *Photo 2*. Use at least two screws in each end. The longer the plywood pieces, the better, as you'll get more contact with the bandsaw table.

With the workpiece amply supported, I was ready to cut the form in half, crosswise. I could simply cut straight across the piece, but doing so would have raised two concerns—one is the challenge of matching up the grain when I glue it back together, and the other is ensuring the glue joint is strong enough. Gluing endgrain to endgrain leaves a lot to be desired. So I made a wavy cut (*Photo 2*) across the piece. (Next time, I will make a more pronounced zigzag pattern, which will result in even more gluing surface, some of which would be sidegrain.) Now, when I glue the two halves back together, there would be only one way they can go together, which will automatically line up the grain

perfectly. I'm guessing that this type of glue joint is several times stronger than a straight cut across endgrain. After cutting the piece in half, I removed the plywood from the tenons.

Hollow the ends, reassemble

The next step is to mount and hollow each end (*Photo 3*). As I hollowed each piece, I left the edges quite thick because I planned to flatten a section of the long edge to serve as the bottom, or foot, of the oblong bowl. I thinned the walls to 1/2" (13mm) but probably could have gotten away with 3/8" (10mm).

After both ends were hollowed, I glued them back together. I left one mounted in the chuck and attached the other to it, using the tailstock to apply gluing pressure (*Photo 4*). After the glue dried, I turned the outside again to clean up the outside of the glue joint.

I then sanded the outside, knowing that the tenons would still have to be removed. I could have removed one tenon at that point, but I wanted to keep it in place to ensure safety when cutting again at the bandsaw.

Before taking the workpiece off the lathe, I locked the spindle and used the

Turn an oblong profile



Starting with a mahogany log 18" long, the author turned the outside profile of an oblong bowl, knowing the piece would eventually be cut in half to make two identical bowls. He also turned a tenon at each end.

toolrest as a guide to mark a straight line down the length of the piece. This would become my cut line.

Form base, halve it lengthwise

Before cutting the piece lengthwise at the bandsaw, I reattached the plywood to the ends for safe cutting. I put at least two screws in each tenon,

one on each side of the path of the bandsaw blade (*Photo 5*). I oriented the cut line so it was facing straight up so I could see it easily.

I knew that after making this halving cut, I would end up with two oblong bowls that wouldn't have a bottom, or defined foot. So before making the cut, I created a flat that would become the bottom of each ▶

Halve it, hollow it, reassemble



The turned form is cut in half crosswise at the bandsaw. Note the square plywood pieces attached to the ends for safe cutting.



Each end is mounted on the lathe in a chuck and hollowed.

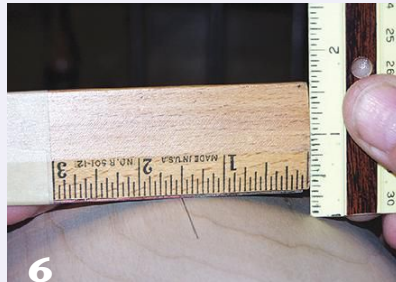


The two hollowed halves are glued back together, resulting in a fully enclosed oblong hollow form.

Make a flat, then split lengthwise



Before cutting the piece lengthwise at the bandsaw, the author creates a flat, one for each bowl, that will become the foot. Careful measurements reveal how much wood removal is required for a 3"-wide foot—in this case, $\frac{5}{16}$ " (8mm). Make sure to leave ample wall thickness to accommodate this flat or plan for another type of foot altogether.



resulting bowl (visible in *Photo 5*). You could do this by sanding a flat on each side of the assembly using an edge sander or disk sander, or you could cut a flat surface on the bandsaw, to be sanded later.

When making a flat for the base, you run the risk of sanding or cutting through the wood if you are not aware of the thickness. To determine how much of the bowl thickness would be consumed in this process, I placed a ruler across the piece to serve as a gauge, as shown in *Photo 6*. If you want a 3"- (8cm-) wide flat, measure out $1\frac{1}{2}$ " (38mm) from each side of the centerline (where the ruler touches the piece). The distance from

the ruler's edge to the wood at the $1\frac{1}{2}$ " mark shows how deep you will need to sand to get a 3" flat.

Of course, you could also opt for a different type of foot that wouldn't require sanding a flat.

After I established the base, I cut the hollowed workpiece in half lengthwise. Each oblong bowl still had a half-tenon at each end, so I cut those off at the bandsaw and sanded those areas, as well as the inside of the bowls.

Options to explore

In the mahogany sample project shown in this article, I turned the log so that both ends were the same. This meant that both ends of the

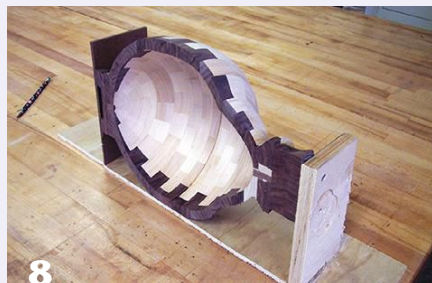
oblong bowls would be the same, too. However, I could have shaped the log so that the ends were different from one another. One end could have become narrower and the other end could have been more bulbous. The result would have been very different. I suspect there are any number of options and combinations that could be utilized.

I explored this idea with a segmented hollow form, or vessel. I constructed two segmented bowl blanks, or halves. One was fairly typical, my intent being to make a resulting shape for this half of the hollow form be as rounded as I could make it. It was half as deep as it was wide. The second bowl was the same as the first from the rim down two-thirds of the way, where the arc that I had been following took a turn so that the bottom one-third was 1" (25mm) deeper. I used maple with some walnut segments positioned so they would end up as the rim of the resulting bowls (*Photos 7-9*). This odd shape offered no functional purpose, but did add interest.

Conclusion

As you can see, there are endless possibilities for bowls that aren't round, and the end product does not need to be a bowl, for that matter. One idea I plan to pursue is the making of a boat.

A segmented, asymmetrical example



Rather than turning the two ends the same, the author made them asymmetrical, resulting in an odd-shaped but interesting form.

There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of styles of boats that have been made over the centuries, so I need to decide on a style to determine the shape of my vessel. Should I make a kayak, canoe, dingy, lobster boat, sailboat, rowboat? Do I use solid wood or segmented? When I get the basic shape

built, do I trim it out and paint it, and how will I get it to sit on a shelf?

There are endless possibilities for odd-shaped projects—bowls, platters, boats, ukulele or guitar soundboards, wall hangings, fish, picnic baskets, etc. Some of these are on my drawing board and will be on my lathe in the

not-so-distant future. I will still make plenty of traditional bowls and platters, but I will continue to experiment, thinking “outside the bowl.” ■

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The Making of “Basket Bowl”

Thinking “outside the bowl” gave me the idea to make a deep bowl, then cut it in half and rejoin it at the rim. In this process, a deep bowl becomes an oblong bowl. If you are doing this with solid wood, just keep the grain orientation consistent and make sure the rim is very flat before cutting the bowl in half.

I did this with a segmented bowl, and that effort came with a problem and a solution with a nice benefit. The problem was that, when I cut the bowl in half and went to glue the two rims together, I noticed the ring segment joints were not staggered; they lined up. To make them staggered, I added

another ring between the two halves, and this ring became a handle.

First, I constructed a segmented bowl blank (Photo a) and made an extra segmented ring, which I set aside. I turned the bowl inside and out and sanded the inside. I added the extra segmented ring (which was made with wide boards so that the segments extended nearly to the center) and held it in place temporarily, no glue, with tailstock pressure. I turned this ring flush with the outside of the bowl and sanded the outside (Photo b).

Next, I removed the extra ring and used a jigsaw to cut it into a handle shape. I then



sanded, routed, and sanded some more to complete the handle (Photo c).

I then cut the bowl in half at the bandsaw (Photo d). Finally, I glued the rims of the two halves to the handle to make a bowl that I call a “basket bowl” (Photo e).



a A traditional ring-segmented bowl is turned, with an extra ring pressed (but not glued) to the rim with the tailstock. After it is turned flush, the extra ring is removed and cut into the shape of a basket handle.



The segmented bowl is cut in half at the bandsaw, flat rim registered safely against the bandsaw table. Then the two halves are reassembled with the handle in the middle.