

Side-Hollowed Christmas Ornament

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I was asked to do a Christmas ornament demo for the Tennessee Association of Woodturners. They have seen many of my Christmas ornaments and several members asked if I would do a demo on texturing. I decided to see if I could combine both. So I designed an ornament that would be easy to turn and let the turner experiment with texturing. I call it a side-hollowed ornament because the hollowing is done by drilling through the side, which is the opposite orientation used for most traditional ornaments. To make a side-hollowed ornament, you will need to make a simple jig that can be used as an expansion, or collet chuck. The steps are easily accomplished.

Let me give you a bit of insight on how this started. When I use a chatter tool, I often use it on a large turned endgrain blank because you need endgrain for a chatter tool to work best. My preferences are woods with very little grain color that would otherwise obscure the chatter effect. Cherry and maple are both good choices. Ebony and blackwood can be chattered with a beautifully elegant effect. When using very dense woods, even crossgrain can be effectively chattered. I experiment with the chatter tools to see what results I get. Each wood responds a little differently. More pressure must be applied to denser wood to achieve



a successful chatter effect. If I don't like the result, I simply turn it away and try again. When I get what I like, I part off this textured "button." Then it's easy to insert the button into the lid of a box or the interior of the lid, or around a platter rim, etc.

There are endless possibilities, one of which is this ornament. It also is fortunate that tools like the Sorby texturing tool and the Henry Taylor Elf also work on endgrain, so I can practice all I want and save these buttons for possible use elsewhere. The long endgrain blank also gives me a chance to try crossgrain texturing with these tools to see what might work. I can turn this portion of the blank away and still have the endgrain portion for my ornaments. Whatever you do, I urge you to spend a lot of time on scrap wood practicing with the texturing tools because there are so many variables. There are some good videos available to get you started.

Turning the Sphere

For this project, I'm using some dry ash cutoffs. Mount an endgrain blank 2 1/2" x 2 1/2" x 4" between centers and turn a tenon on one end. Mount this in a chuck and use a parting tool or spindle gouge to turn the diameter down to 2 1/4" (Photo 1). Measure 3/4" from the end and turn the diameter to a little less than 1" on the left side of the 1" mark (Photo 2).



Photo 1 - Turn the endgrain blank to a diameter of 2 1/4".
Photo



Photo 2 - Reduce the diameter 1" from the end to a little less than 1".



Photo 3 - Use a Forstner bit to create a 1/8" deep recess.



Photo 4 - Shape the ornament using a spindle gouge.



Photo 5 - A texturing tool can be used to create a pleasing design on the side of the ornament.



Photo 6 - Adding color to the textured area adds interest to the ornament.



Photo 7 - Use the Forstner bit to drill all the way through the ornament.

Mount a 1 1/8" Forstner bit into a drill chuck mounted in the tailstock and drill a shallow hole, approximately 1/8" deep. This will show you where the border of the insert will be (Photo 3). Use a spindle gouge to round both sides, shaping the ornament. I find that a round, bead-looking shape looks best for the final ornament (Photo 4). It's important to sand at this point. Use a texturing tool of your choice and create a detail outside the hole. In this case, I'm using the Henry Taylor Elf (Photo 5). I use a three-point tool

or the nose of a skew to cut one or two rings defining the textured area. Once that is done, use a permanent marker or a paint marker to color the textured area (Photo 6). After these steps are completed, use the Forstner bit to drill the rest of the way through, which frees the ornament (Photo 7).



Photo 8 - Prepare the expansion, or collet, chuck blank by turning a tenon on each end. (The ring moves the ornament out a little so the collet chuck works better.)



Photo 9 - Drill a 5/16" hole through the collet chuck to accommodate a threaded insert.

Turning the Expansion, or Collet Chuck:

To mount the ornament in reverse to decorate the other side, turn a 1 1/2" x 1 1/2" x 3" endgrain blank between centers and turn a tenon for the expansion jaws of a scroll chuck on one end. Mount this end into the chuck and turn a 1 3/8" tenon about 3/4" long on the other end. Leave a good square shoulder on the base of the tenon since it will be used to align of the ornament (Photo 8).

to align of the ornament (Photo 8). Use a 5/16" drill bit mounted in your tailstock and drill all the way through the workpiece. Taper the hole at the end of the long tenon so that it matches the taper on the head of a 1/4" screw. Now turn the blank around and center drill it for a threaded insert. I used a 1/4x20 threaded insert (Photo 9). Put a ring on the 3/4" tenon to keep it from splitting and screw in the threaded insert. You can also bore a shallow hole and epoxy a nut inside the opening instead.



Photo 10 - By tightening the screw, the collet jaws expand and hold the ornament securely.



Photo 11 - Matching the designs on the two sides is an option.

Cut four slots in the end of the small tenon. Cut the slots as far back as you can without hitting the threaded insert. I found that it was hard to get the collet chuck to expand properly so I added a ring that moves the ornament out a little so the collet chuck works better. As you tighten the screw, the bottom of the tapered head pushes against the jaws and opens them up, clamping the work securely in place. Photo 10 shows the ornament clamped in place and ready to sand, texture, and color on one side. I try to match the other side, but it's your ornament so use your own imagination (Photo 11).



Photo 12 - To safely drill the hole through the ornament, build a V jig.

At this point, you can hollow a little if you want your ornament to be lighter. Don't hollow too much because you will be drilling through the side to fit the finials into place,

and I find it easier to keep the finials aligned with each other if the holes have more thickness, about 1/8". I use a V jig mounted on my drill press to drill a 1/4" diameter hole all the way through (Photo 12). My V jig is made from a piece of 1x4 stock with a "V" cut in the edge of the stock. I use a thin piece of plywood and a clamp to complete the jig setup. The jig makes using the drill press much safer and the hole can be accurately drilled all the way through the ornament. Drill very, very gently as you exit the bottom or it will chip out. If you get chip-out, I find that carving a slight cone or recess disguises it. At this point, I coat the surface with wipe-on poly. I dab it on the colored areas and try not to smear it. Always do a test on your markers and finish to see if they are compatible. One way to assure that the markers do not run is to spray the surface with two to three coats of fixative, a product that artists use to set pastels and charcoal.



Photo 13 - To turn the button, use a hardwood endgrain blank.



Photo 14 - Sand the button insert before texturing the surface. Use whatever tool you prefer to texture the surface.

Turning the Button Inserts

Mount a hardwood endgrain blank measuring 2" x 2" x 2" between centers.

Use a parting tool to turn a tenon on one end, then mount the blank into a chuck.

Slightly round over the outside, leaving it fairly flat (Photo 13). Measure 1/8" from the end and use a parting tool to reduce the diameter to 1 1/8". Make sure this is

the proper size to fit the opening in the ornament sphere. Turn down the button

portion to a 1/16" thickness or slightly more. Sand at this point because you cannot sand after texturing (Photo 14).



Photo 15 - Texture the button with the texturing tool of your choice.



Photo 16 - Gold Rub-N-Buff adds a festive touch to the ornament.



Photo 17 - Here are the completed parts for the body of the ornament.

Texture the button with a texturing tool of your choice (Photo 15). After

texturing, I used gold Rub-N-Buff (Photo 16) then I used a three-point tool to define the textured area. If some of the Rub-N-Buff spills over onto the untextured area, it can be removed with 400 grit abrasive. Finally, apply a coat of wipe-on poly. Now you make another button for the other side. The parts for the body of the ornament are now completed (Photo 17).



Photo 18 - Support the finial with your fingers while turning.



Photo 19 - The parts are turned and ready to be assembled.

Turning the Finials

I use my 1" spigot jaws to turn the finials.

I support the finial with my fingers from the back side of the piece while taking light cuts. Turn from the bottom of the finial at the tailstock end toward the top

at the headstock end. Once the tip is turned, do not go back to this area.

This reduces the chatter. If you are burning your fingers, you are pushing too hard on the bevel of the tool. By using a sharp

tool, light pressure on the tool bevel, and making light cuts, turning the finial will

not be too difficult (Photo 18).



Photo 20 - Inks, dyes, markers, and an abundance of texturing tools can be used to enhance the ornaments.



Photo 21 - A simple ball cutter attached to a drill can create interesting designs.



Photo 22 - Silver on a recessed button creates an unusual illusion.

Before parting off the finial, be sure the tenon is the same size as the hole you have drilled into the ornament. Photo 19 shows the finials and all the parts for the ornament ready to be glued in place. I use medium CA to glue everything together, although wood glue can also be used but additional time will be needed for the glue to dry. One of the joys of making ornaments is the opportunity to experiment with variations.

In Photo 20, I used calligraphy ink to dye the red and blue ornaments. I painted one finial black. I used various texturing tools to alter the button appearance. If you don't have a lot of texturing tools, you can create them by using a Dremel and various ball cutters or by using a small drill fitted with ball cutters. I colored one ring with a blue marker and then used my Dremel outfitted with a ball cutter to carve through the blue. When I made the insert, I sprayed it silver, turned through

it, and colored the middle with the same marker (Photo 21). I continued to experiment by making a recessed cone, texturing it with the Elf tool, and painting it silver (Photo 22). There are lots of possibilities: perhaps pierced buttons, maybe even a real button insert, or perhaps a small magnifying glass, or a mirror. Let your imagination take over and I'm sure you'll think of all sorts of ways to enhance your ornaments.