

An over-sized bottle opener using purchased hardware is a great skill-building project, and it makes the perfect housewarming gift.



Big Bottle Opener

Hefty handle builds spindle skills

AAW Editorial Staff

Here's a simple, useful project that is great for practicing the core spindle-turning skills of roughing to a cylinder, shaping, boring, and detailing. I have found a turned bottle opener is always a welcome gift, beautiful and functional.

This project makes use of commercially available opener hardware, or kits, which come in varying styles from online woodturning suppliers. Some include a threaded insert, which you glue into your turned handle, then screw in the opener part. Others borrow the common

7mm-tube design typical of pen kits. The style shown in this article involves just the opener hardware with threaded post, which is screwed directly into a hole bored in the turned handle.

Just about any species of wood will work fine for this project, but I recommend maple, ash, walnut, or other hardwood. Softer woods such as pine and cedar will quickly become dented from frequent use and knocking around in a kitchen drawer.

Rough-turn a cylinder, form a tenon



1 Rough-turn a cylinder with the blank mounted between centers. Here, I am using an over-hand grip, pushing the tool down on the toolrest. The glove protects my hand from the shavings that come flying down the tool's flute.

Rough-turn cylinder, form tenon

You can make the opener handle any size you like. I prefer making them over-sized for a dramatic gift and ample leverage during use, so I'll typically start with a blank about 12" (30cm) long and 2" (5cm) square. The extra length also allows for some waste material adjacent to the chuck. I mill most of my own turning wood and air-dry it before use. With this kind of stock (and this forgiving project), finding the exact center at each end for mounting it on the lathe is not critical. Just get close to the center and the work will become concentric when you rough it to a cylinder (**1**).

After you have rough-turned a cylinder, form a tenon at the tailstock end, sized to match your chuck. A simple way to do this is with a parting tool (**2** and page **17**).

Drill and test-fit

Remove the cylinder from the lathe and remount it by holding the tenon in a chuck. This will leave the tailstock end of the workpiece accessible, so you can bore a hole to accept the threaded opener hardware. But prior to drilling, true up the cylinder mounted in the chuck, using the tailstock for support.

Drill a hole in the end of the handle blank, sized to accept your opener hardware (**3**). The threaded post on my openers call for a 3/16" (5mm) hole. When boring with the tailstock, mount the drill bit in a drill chuck, bring the bit up to the workpiece, and lock down the tailstock.



2 At the tailstock end, form a tenon to fit the scroll chuck. A simple parting tool leaves a square shoulder and a flat-sided tenon (see sidebar on tenons, page **17**).

Drill hole, test-fit thread



3 With the workpiece remounted in a scroll chuck and the tailstock in place, true the blank, then replace the tail center with a drill chuck and bore a hole sized to accept the threads on your opener hardware.



4 Test-fit the metal opener, then remove it while turning the handle; it would be dangerous to run the lathe with the opener hardware attached.

Shape opener end



5 The goal is a smooth transition from wood to metal.

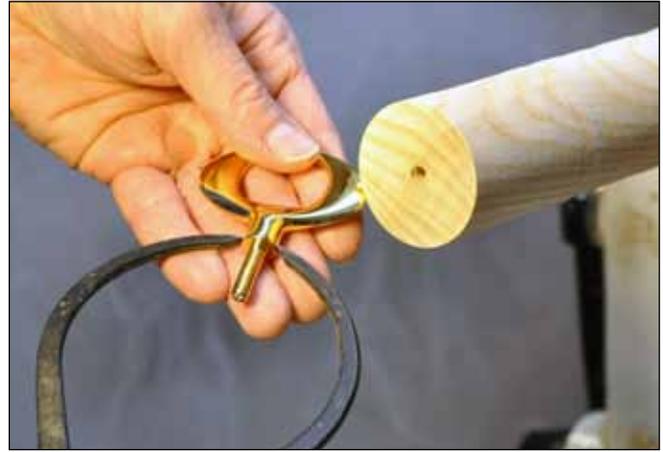
With the work turning slowly, advance the tailstock quill a little at a time, pulling the bit out frequently to clear the chips. Drill a little deeper than the threaded post on your opener hardware.

Before turning the handle shape, test-mount the opener hardware in the handle. I find it sufficient to use the opener's threads to cut threads in the wood, but you could also do this with a tap meant for that purpose. Screw the opener into the hole a few turns at a time, backing it out frequently to remove wood chips (**4**). When you are satisfied that the metal opener seats nicely on the wood, remove the metal and set it aside while you turn the handle.

Shape opener end

The goal in shaping the opener end is to create a smooth transition from wood to metal, as shown in **5**. Since this style kit does not use a mandrel with a sizing bushing, gauge the diameter of the metal opener's shoulder using calipers (**6**). Then begin tapering the handle's end to that diameter (**7**). A workpiece this long requires tailstock support during turning, such as this cone center attachment with the cone's point inserted into the drilled hole. It automatically aligns the workpiece on center and does not damage the newly turned handle end. Stop the lathe and check your progress frequently (**8**).

When you are satisfied with the wood-to-metal transition, bring up the tailstock with cone center again for support as you shape the length of the handle.



6 Use calipers to gauge the diameter of the opener's metal shoulder, above the threads.



7 Cut downhill with a spindle gouge to taper the end of the handle to a smooth transition from wood to the metal shoulder.



8 The calipers indicate that the wood is about the same diameter as the metal opener.

Shape handle



9 The spindle roughing gouge shapes a long, shallow cove. The overhand grip is strong but chips will hit your hand.



10 The underhand grip offers good control and gets your fingers out of the chip path.



11 Define the shape of the handle's end with the spindle gouge, cutting downhill from large diameter to small.



12 A parting tool helps remove some waste material to give yourself room for tool access.



13 Take light cuts to clean up the handle end and leave no torn grain.

Shape handle length and tail end

Turn the handle to your desired shape. A long, sweeping cove feels comfortable in the hand and is easy with a spindle roughing gouge (**9, 10**). Stop turning periodically to test the handle in your hand.

When you are satisfied with the handle shape, begin forming the tail end. I use a small spindle gouge to roll a gentle curve, essentially the left side of a bead, for the end (**11**). A parting tool can remove waste material to make room for final-shaping in this tight area (**12, 13**). Leave a stub of wood about 1/2" (13mm) diameter for now so you can add details and sand the handle before parting it off.

Sand the handle, **14**, with the lathe speed low. For a project like this, I work through the grits up to 400. After sanding the final grit with the wood spinning,

Sand it smooth



14 Sand by applying gentle pressure with the lathe turning slowly, no faster than about 800 rpm.

Add burn lines



15 For an easy way to add visual interest, form grooves using a pointed scraper.

turn the lathe off and sand the handle along the grain by hand. This will remove any remaining sanding scratches.

Burned grooves

On opener handles made of plain-looking woods, I like to add burn lines, which I think visually separate the handle's center area from its ends. To do this, form a groove using a small pointed scraper, then apply a burn wire into this groove, pushing downward until smoke appears (**15, 16**). Never wrap a burn wire around your fingers or around the workpiece; a snag could pull your fingers in, causing a nasty cut.

Part off and finish

Move your toolrest to the tail end of the handle, and continue turning the end down to a very small holding point (**17**). With very gentle pressure, sand the newly turned end.

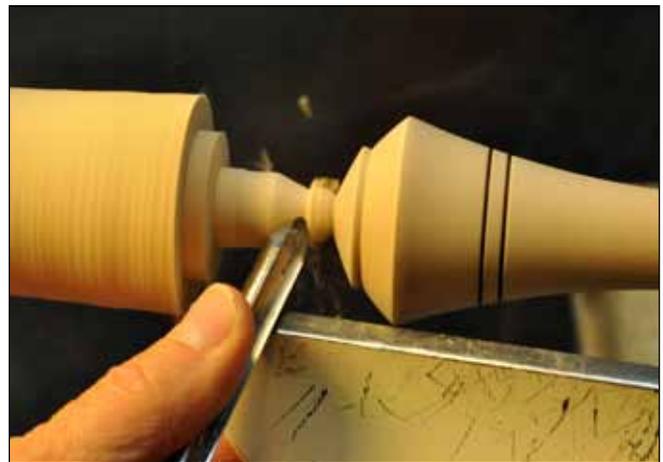
Turn the lathe off and remove the opener handle by cutting it free with a fine-tooth handsaw (**18**). My preferred finish for a bottle opener handle is a spray-on varnish, which provides good wear and water resistance. If you choose to apply a finish while the piece is still on the lathe, do it before reducing the holding wood at the tail end so you'll have enough support for the pressure.

Finally, screw the metal opener part onto the turned handle, and the opener is ready for bottles. Salud!



16 Press the taut burn wire into the groove until it smokes, creating a dark accent.

Parting off



17 Turn the end of the handle to a small nub. Sand gently.



18 Remove the workpiece by cutting it off with a handsaw with the lathe off. Hand-sand the remaining nub. ■