

Coloring Burl and Figured Wood

Introduction

Coloring burl wood with a combination of transparent acrylic paints, dyes, and inks can produce stunning multi-layered designs. The results are especially beautiful on the globes for Christmas-tree ornaments. Burl or figured wood is best suited to the coloring process because of the pronounced presence of both hard and soft wood. Water-based colors penetrate the hard and soft woods differently, resulting in striking multi-layered colors

Preparation

Sanding, the key to a beautiful finish on any turning, is especially important when coloring wood. Fine sanding (600 or 800 grit) the wood surface is essential to remove imperfections and prevent them from rising or showing above the surface grain when color is applied. It is a good idea to wear latex gloves when working with paints, inks, or dyes.



Goals of Coloring Burl

For a single-color turning, the medium used is not critical. If the goal is to produce a blended or multi-layered color, the sequential application of the coloring medium is important. The medium with the thicker viscosity is used first. For example, use:

- paint *then* dye,
- paint *then* ink, or
- ink *then* dye.

Other sequences include, but are not limited to, the following:

- paint *then* thinned paint *then* ink,
- paint *then* ink *then* ink,
- paint *then* ink *then* dye *then* ink,
- paint *then* ink *then* dye, or
- paint *then* ink *then* dye *then* dye.

If at any time you do not like the results, just sand them away and start over.

Woodturning Tools, Techniques, and Projects

Color Application

Directions are given below for sanding and applying color in the following sequence: sanded wood *then* paint *then* sand *then* ink *then* sand *then* dye *then* sand *then* lacquer *then* sand *then* polish.

- Apply the paint. Use a brush or paper towel to apply the paint. Small turnings, such as ornament globes, can be placed in a container filled with the coloring medium.
- Lightly blot off excess paint with a paper towel.
- Allow the paint to dry completely.
- Lightly hand sand with 600 grit. Sand enough paint off to show the natural color of the hardwood while leaving the color in the soft wood.
- Wipe or blow off any powered residue left from sanding.
- Apply the ink.
- Lightly blot off excess ink with a paper towel.
- Allow the ink to dry.
- Lightly hand sand.
- Apply dye or additional ink if desired.
- Lightly blot off excess dye on ink.
- Apply finish, up to six light coats of spray lacquer is recommended.
- After applying the 3rd lacquer coat, sand lightly between this and all further coats.

Characteristics of Coloring Mediums

Dyes

Because they are primarily water, dyes are the thinnest and slowest drying of the coloring mediums. They are less color fast but more brilliant than the other mediums. The fact that dyes are slower drying sometimes makes them easier to use. Follow the directions below to mix dye concentrates or powdered dyes.

- Mix dye concentrates with 3 parts dye to 1 part water.
- Mix powdered dyes with water according to the package directions.

Inks

Inks can be used straight out of the bottle. They are a good colorfast medium and hold their color longer than dyes. Inks, which are slightly faster drying than dyes, should only be mixed with other inks of the same brand.



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Transparent Acrylic Paints

Because they allow other colors to show through, transparent rather than opaque acrylic paints should be used to achieve a multi-layered look. Although they are slightly harder to apply than inks or dyes, acrylic paints are a good medium and are equal to inks in colorfastness. To better enable transparent acrylic paint to penetrate the wood's surface, it should be thinned with water before use. However, over-thinned paint will saturate the wood and keep the pigment from penetrating the surface. The drying time for acrylic paints is very sensitive to heat and humidity.



Coloring Non-figured, Straight-grain Wood

To color non-figured, straight grain wood rather than burl, use dyes and inks but not paint. However, black or white gesso can be used as a base, followed by transparent paint and or dyes. For a multi-layered color on straight-grained wood, pat the color on with a paper towel or sponge. With straight-grained wood it is not as effective to use sanding to cut through color because the hard and soft wood is not as pronounced as with burl.

Materials

There are many colors, mediums, and manufacturers available, but the following media and colors would be good to start out with. All of these are water-based mediums because of their effectiveness, ease of use, and quick clean-up.

Dyes

- Liberson/Star metalised water dye concentrate—red, blue, and yellow

Inks

- F/W Acrylic Artist's Ink—indigo blue, process magenta
- Higgins—green

Paints (transparent)

- Golden Fluid Acrylics—turquoise, ultramarine blue and quinacridone crimson
- Golden Airbrush Colors—quinacridone red
- Medea-Com-Art Colours—transparent ultramarine

SOURCES

Some of the numerous sources for coloring mediums are listed below.

- Wood Finish Supply, Mendocina, CA, catalogue available, www.woodfinishsupply.com
- Liberson/Star metalised water dye concentrate
- Local Craft and Art Supply Stores
- Higgins Inks
- F/W Inks
- Medea Paints
- Golden Paints