

JEWELRY MADE EASY

Janice Levi



After twelve years of turning bowls, platters, boxes, and hollow forms, I collected boxfuls of scraps and nubbins. Some of the finial nubbins were beautiful exotic woods but too small for another finial. I began to experiment with using those scraps to make something different—jewelry. My first beads and disks needed a little refining, but over the past year or two, my techniques have changed and my designs have become more complex. While the skill required is within reach of beginning turners, the finished product can be quite stunning.

Selecting woods for the disks and beads is the easy part. You can use anything too small for any other project. Hardwoods, softwoods, acrylics, spalted wood with voids and cracks—all make beautiful jewelry.

A typical necklace of this design comprises the following elements:

- A feature pendant disk turned in crossgrain orientation, measuring about 2½" (64mm) in diameter
- Ten to twenty smaller disks turned in endgrain orientation, ranging in diameter from about ¾"–1½" (19mm–38mm)
- Ten to twenty beads with diameters varying from ⅜"–¾" (10mm–19mm)

Turning the crossgrain feature pendant

No special jigs or chucks are required to turn the feature pendant of your necklace, but you will need to turn two waste blocks to which the blank will be attached. Turn one of the waste blocks to a diameter of about 1½" with a flat end surface. Turn the second waste block to the same diameter but with an end ▶



1 Two waste blocks, one flat and the other slightly concave, hold the feature pendant blank with double-sided tape.



2 Mount crossgrain blanks onto a waste block and position a barrel washer between the tailstock and blank. Use a bowl gouge in shear scraping mode to shape the rounded front of the disk.



3 Remove the tailstock, make final light cuts, and sand to 1,000 grit.

surface that is slightly concave (*Photo 1*). The flat-ended waste block allows for the flat pendant blank to be safely adhered for initial turning, while the concave waste block securely holds the slightly convex-shaped pendant while turning the reverse side.

The feature pendant blank should be about $\frac{3}{8}$ "– $\frac{1}{2}$ " (10mm–12mm) thick to start. Use a compass to outline the circumference of the circle; then remove most of the waste wood on a bandsaw.

Using double-sided tape (I prefer SpecTape brand, as it does not leave a gummy residue on the wood), adhere a flat pendant blank to the flat-ended waste block, which should be slightly smaller in diameter than the finished disk. Use the tape sparingly so you will be able to easily remove the disk after turning.

Before pressing the disk firmly into the tape, pull up the tailstock and align the center mark from the compass with the live center. To prevent the live center from puncturing the turning disk, place a barrel washer (or pen bushing) between the point and the disk, then tighten the tail stock to help hold the disk in place.

Using a bowl gouge, make shear scraping cuts to begin shaping the rounded front surface of the disk. Switch to a spindle gouge to turn

the slightly rounded edge of the disk, which will end about half way through the blank's original thickness (*Photo 2*).

Remove the tailstock and barrel washer and use light cuts to smooth the rounded top surface. Hand sand or lightly power sand, going through all the grits (*Photo 3*).

Remove the disk and use a center finder to mark the center of the unturned side. Mount the turned side onto the concave waste block with double-sided tape. It can be a trial-and-error process to get the disk perfectly centered. Bring up the tailstock so the live center can aid in the centering process, and lightly press the disk into the tape. Again, use a barrel washer to protect the disk and apply very light pressure with the tailstock. Make light shear

scraping cuts with the bowl gouge to achieve the final shape of the second side of your disk. The outer edge should be no thicker than $\frac{1}{8}$ " (2mm). You are aiming for a thin, graceful disk, not a clunky chunk of wood (*Photos 4, 5*). Remove the tailstock and make the final light cuts on the second side of the disk. Sand through the grits as you did with the first side.

Remove the turned disk and apply the finish of your choice. Although I sometimes apply lacquer, oil, wax, or water-based polyurethane, it is often sufficient to simply use a three-step buffing system on both the front and back sides of the disks.

Turning endgrain disks

Because of the smaller diameter of the endgrain disks, it is easier to



4 Switch to a concave waste block and mount the turned side of the disk onto it. The final disk should be rounded on both sides, curving to a graceful, thin (but not sharp) edge.

turn them by using a chuck rather than waste blocks. If using a pen blank, insert the blank into a chuck with small jaws as far as it will go to help avoid vibration. Turn only the very end of the blank round using a roughing gouge or spindle gouge. With a spindle gouge, slightly round over the end of the blank (*Photo 6*). Since the finished disk will be $\frac{1}{8}$ "– $\frac{3}{16}$ " (2mm–4mm) thick, this is a quick process. Using a thin parting tool, angle the parting cut so that the back side of the disk is also somewhat rounded (*Photo 7*). Do not completely part off the disk, but leave about $\frac{3}{16}$ ". Hand sand the front of the disk and as much of the back as possible, going through all the grits (*Photo 8*).

Finally, finish parting off the disk. A fine-tooth saw may also be used to part off the disk with the lathe off (*Photo 9*). Hand sand any roughness on the back of the disk and apply finish.



6 To turn smaller disks in endgrain orientation, mount a blank with the grain running parallel to the ways of the lathe into a chuck with small jaws. Round part of the blank into a cylinder and create a convex surface on the end.



7 Use a thin parting tool, aimed slightly toward the headstock, but do not completely part off the disk.



8 Sand the right side, the upper edge, and as much of the left side as possible.



9 Part off the disk with a thin parting tool or fine-toothed saw with the lathe off. Hand sand the nubbin.

A sanding option

After turning the endgrain disks, there is an area on the back side that must be sanded further. This can be done by hand but an option I prefer is to mount a small sanding disk in the drill press and sand the back side of the disks, going through all grits (*Photo 10*). I collect a number of disks in a small container, then sand all of them at one time.

Turning endgrain beads

Pen blanks or even smaller end grain blanks prepared on the bandsaw can also be used to turn beads. Insert the square-edged blank into a chuck with small jaws so that only 2"–3" (5cm–8cm) of wood is exposed. This will help prevent vibration. Chuck a $\frac{1}{16}$ " (1mm) drill bit in a Jacobs chuck in the tailstock, and with the lathe

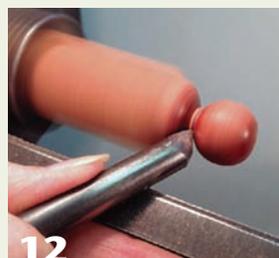
running at about 600 rpm, drill the center hole of the bead slightly deeper than the finished diameter of the bead (*Photo 11*). Use a skew point to create a small recess in the blank so the drill bit will center properly. (Note: Larger holes can be drilled, but the advantage of using a smaller drill bit is to allow for the use of finer assembly materials.) ▶



10 As a sanding alternative, chuck a sanding disk in the drill press and sand the rough areas on the back side.



11 To turn endgrain beads, start by drilling a center hole.



12 Use a spindle gouge or skew to turn the bead. Sand and apply friction polish or wax before parting it completely off.



13 Sand and apply friction polish or wax before parting it completely off.



Oak disks with woodburned leaves are separated by ebony disks.



A metallic phoenix graces African ebony disks.



Native American-inspired necklace featuring pyrography and colored pencils on Chinese tallow and maple.

Using a spindle gouge, turn a cylinder to the desired diameter, leaving the bulk of the blank unturned. Depending on your comfort level, use a spindle or detail gouge or a skew chisel to shape the right side of the bead. Then shape the left-hand portion of the bead, but do not cut all the way through. Sand the bead through all grits and apply friction polish or wax (*Photos 12, 13*). Finally, use a skew, parting tool, or fine-toothed saw to part off the bead. A small nub may remain. Hand sand and dab the area with friction polish or wax.

Assembling the necklace

A few tools are necessary to make the assembly process easier (*Photo 14*). I recommend anyone interested in jewelry-making spend some time in a local craft store looking at the many findings

and tools that are available. At a minimum, you will need two sets of small needle-nose or jewelry pliers, round-nose pliers, small wire cutters, jump rings (not the spiral kind), pins with flat heads for attaching the beads, necklace chain, and a neck clasp. I have

found that the gunmetal color of chain is most complementary to the wood; silver and gold often detract from the wood's beauty. A useful tool to have is a hand-held rotary tool (such as a Dremel) and Dremel drill press with bits smaller than $\frac{1}{16}$ ". Although the small holes



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Some of the tools and jewelry findings you will need.

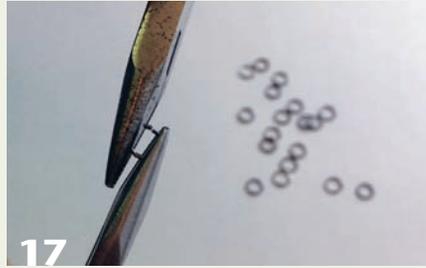


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Cut two lengths of necklace chain.



16 Drill a small hole (about 1/8", or 1mm) into one edge of each disk.



17 Use two sets of jewelry pliers to open the jump rings.



18 Slide the jump ring through a disk and a chain link. Close the jump ring. Repeat until all disks are attached.



19 Insert a flat-head pin into the bead and remove all but 3/8" of wire. Use round-nose pliers to create a small loop in the wire.



20 Insert an open jump ring through the loop and through a chain link. Repeat until all beads are attached.



An array of turned "buttons" and beads of maple, blackwood, and black palm are clustered tightly on multiple chains and cord.

in the disks can be hand drilled, the drill press makes the task easier.

Cut two lengths of chain, one 28" (70cm) and the other 23" (57cm) (Photo 15). The longer chain will hold the disks and the shorter chain will hold the beads. Do not attach the neck clasp at this time. Use the rotary tool to drill a hole about 1/8" from the edge of the feature pendant (Photo 16). Next, drill mounting holes into all the smaller disks. Depending on the thickness and density of the wood, the hole may be closer than 1/8" from the edge.

Using the two pairs of jewelry pliers, separate the jump rings (Photo 17). Do not pull the ends straight apart, but rather push one end of the ring away while pulling the other end toward you, creating a spiral shape. This makes it easier to maintain the ring's circular shape when closing the ring. Slide the open ring through the hole

of the feature pendant; then slide the ring into the center link of the longer chain (Photo 18). Use the two sets of pliers to close the ring. Attach all the remaining disks in the same way, mixing and matching size and color on each side of the feature pendant.

To attach the beads, insert a flat-head pin into the bead and remove all but 3/8" of the wire. Use round-nose pliers to shape the wire into a small loop above the bead (Photo 19). Open a jump ring and insert the ring through the loop, then into a link in the necklace chain. Close the jump ring. Attach beads in various sizes and colors along the chain (Photo 20).

When all of the disks and beads have been attached, use jump rings to connect the two upper links of chain to each end of the neck clasp. The necklace is finished, but don't forget complementary earrings. Disks, beads, or a combination of

each can be attached to ear wires using jump rings and pins in the same way as to the necklace chain.

Now it is time for your imagination to take over. Use a skew to cut small "v" grooves or a chatter tool to enhance the disks and beads. Purchased metal bead separators add elegance, and pyrography and color can further embellish the end product. With jewelry, the rule of the day is, "It can never be too gaudy!" ■

Janice Levi is a past president of both the Brazos Valley Woodturners in Waco, Texas, and the Southwest Association of Turners (SWAT). Janice teaches hands-on classes and demonstrates at various clubs throughout the Southwest. To see more of her work, visit janicelevi.com.