

The Turning Point

In this issue:

President's Report	2
November Meeting Notes	3
Woodturning and the NWG	9
Hoping to Buy	11
Cover Photo	12
Photo Credits	12
Guild Executive	13



The next meeting of the Nova Woodturners' Guild
will be held at Lee Valley Tools, 150 Susie Lake Crescent, Halifax
Sunday, December 7, 2025 at 2:00 PM

At the December meeting:
Christmas Social — See "Notes" below the President's Report

The President's Report

This being December it means one thing. It's time to take it a little bit easier so we can brace ourselves for the fast approaching Christmas season. It also means it's our annual exchange of ornaments and Christmas Wreath draw. We had some interest in our ornament challenge with them being displayed on the floor at Lee Valley, so have a look prior to the meeting.

Looking forward to seeing everyone this Sunday.

Happy turnings

Bob Earle – President

Notes about the December meeting:

Our December social gathering will be on December 7th at 2:00 PM in the Seminar Room at Lee Valley. Featured events & happenings include:

- Ornament exchange: bring one or more ornaments of your creation, each in a plain paper bag and take home the same number of ornaments by other turners for your collection.
- Wreath raffle: turn some extra ornaments to donate to the wreath with will be raffled and the winner takes all.
- Pot luck snacks (coffee, tea and drinks will be provided by the Guild).
- Show & Tell.

Notes from the November Meeting

Back to Basics:

The meeting was called to order by President **Bob Earle** at 2:00 PM with 10 members present, four members online and two guests: Anya and her friend Thia. Anya has been taking some lessons with **Stephen Zwerling** and has been encouraged to check out the Guild to continue her learning as a relatively new turner.

Announcements & Discussion:

- We are trying to hold most of today's meeting both in person and online with the Jitsi platform.
- Next month's meeting will be held December 7th and will be our annual Christmas social gathering. Look for more details in upcoming emails, but the gathering will include the blind ornament exchange, donations of ornaments for the "Wreath raffle" and of course, potluck snacks.
- The Guild will be holding an auction for the tools recently donated by longtime member and Guild Photographer, **Chris Palmer**. Watch upcoming emails for more details on how to participate in this fundraising event once all the details are worked out.
- The online ornament show held last year that several members participated in will not be held again this year. However, the Guild will again be presenting a display of ornaments for a small show in the show room at Lee Valley in Halifax. Turners wishing to show ornaments can drop them off at the Lee Valley Seminar Room on November 22nd or 29th between 12:00 and 3:00 PM. Ornaments will be displayed in a secure case in the showroom during the month of December.

Main Demonstration:

The main demonstration was given by **David McLachlan**, on his process for *Turning Finials for Ornaments* — just in time for your seasonal ornament projects.

Safety note:

- When turning finials or any other small objects, you will have your hands and arms quite close to the chuck and in contact with the rapidly spinning blank. Ensure that you have no loose clothing or jewelry (rings, etc.) that could catch on the blank or chuck and cause serious injury.
- As you will be working with very small details on small parts, magnifying glasses can be a big help to see better what you are doing.

Preparing the Blank:

- Start with a blank of the desired species about 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " square and about an inch longer than you need for your desired finial.
- Mount between centres and turn a $\frac{5}{8}$ " tenon on one end. This tenon will be held in a collet chuck during turning and will eventually be the tenon used for mounting the finial to the ornament body.

- Once the tenon is turned, mount the blank in a collet chuck with a $\frac{5}{8}$ " collet installed.
- Turn the blank to round using a skew chisel or spindle gouge. Once you have a smooth, straight cylinder, you are ready to start to create your finial design.

Initial Shaping:

- Start by turning the blank into a straight cone that tapers towards the tailstock end and is of sufficient diameter to accommodate your planned design — yes, it is a good idea to plan out what you want to end up with, so that you don't end up not having enough wood at one point or the other to provide what you desire!
- Keep the tailstock in use to provide support during the initial shaping and to support the blank during heavier cuts for waste removal.
- Using a small spindle gouge turn down the tailstock end of the blank to form the first detail of the finial (this will be the bottom detail of the lower finial, or the top detail of the top finial).
- Dave uses small “mini-gouges” of his own design for turning finials. They have small, short handles and short tool sections to allow one handed use with the left hand. This one-handed use of the tool allows Dave to use his left hand to support the blank — essentially using his fingers like a spindle steady rest to support the blank. This makes turning very fine details and thin shafts more successful.

Shaping Your Finial:

- As you turn down the end of the blank to create the first detail, you will reach the point where you can't go any further with the tailstock in place. At this point you can remove the tailstock, as the blank is held very securely in the collet chuck.
- As you do the final turning on the first detail, support the blank with the fingers of your left hand to help the blank resist the sideways pressure of your cuts.
- **Important:** Do not rough turn all the details of your finial at the start. Leave the blank thick (at the headstock end) to support the wood as you are working. You will work through the full process of rough shaping, final shaping, sanding and finishing before you move to the next detail along the finial. Once you have turned down the body of part of the finial to a thin shaft, there will not be enough wood to support any subsequent work on any details you previously created further out on the finial.
- Once you have the first detail shaped, sanded and finished, you can move along to create the next detail.
- Repeat the process of shaping, sanding and finishing each detail in sequence as you move along from the finial tip to its base.

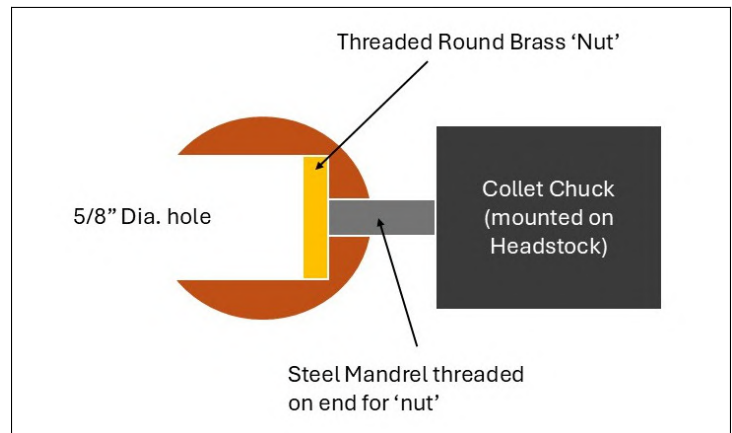
Final Shaping:

- As you get to the base of your finial (the last detail), you need to shape the surface that will connect to the body of the ornament.
- As ornament bodies are often shaped with curved surfaces at the top, it is important to undercut the mating surface of the finial where the tenon starts. This will allow the finial to seat fully down on the surface of the body and not have a distracting gap between the finial and body.
- When the whole finial is shaped, sanded and finished, part it off leaving only a short tenon. Be ready to catch the finial as it separates from the rest of the blank. If you are not comfortable with the

“part and catch” approach, or if you are dealing with a very long, fine finial, it is best to turn it down until it is almost parted off, then turn the lathe off and finish cutting it off with a small, fine-toothed hand saw.

Hollowing Ornaments:

- Normally Dave will drill a $\frac{5}{8}$ " hole through the body of an ornament which allows him to make top and bottom finials with consistent $\frac{5}{8}$ " tenons so that all finials will fit any body. This also makes it easy to replace a finial on an ornament if it gets damaged.
- Dave starts by drilling a smaller ($\frac{5}{16}$ " hole into one end of the body, then drills the $\frac{5}{8}$ " hole from the other end to the desired depth with a Forstner bit. **Important:** this creates a small “shoulder” inside the body of the ornament. Dave then inserts a round brass “nut” into the hole so that it rests on the “shoulder”. The nut is threaded to accept a $\frac{5}{16}$ " mandrel that can pass through the first hole drilled and secure the body. The mandrel is then held in a collet chuck in a $\frac{5}{16}$ " collet. This securely mounts the body for hollowing.
- Dave hollows out ornament bodies using a small “swan-necked” hollowing tool with a round carbide cutter, taking light cuts due to the small size of the work piece. Pull cuts work best for hollowing small ornament bodies.



The same process is used to create the top finial for the ornament, including drilling a small hole in the top end to accept a small wire “eye” for hanging.

Assembling Your Ornament:

- Once you have the body, top and bottom finials finished, you are ready to assemble your ornament.
- Dave predrills holes in the ends of both the top and bottom finials. These holes are then tapped with a thread tap to create threaded holes in the ends of the finials.
- The finials and body are then assembled using a short piece of threaded rod to hold everything in place. No glue is used in the assembly. This allows a finial to be replaced easily if it gets damaged, or if finials of a different species are desired for the completed ornament. The holes drilled in the end of the finial blanks and the tap used must be the correct sizes for the threaded rod you will use.

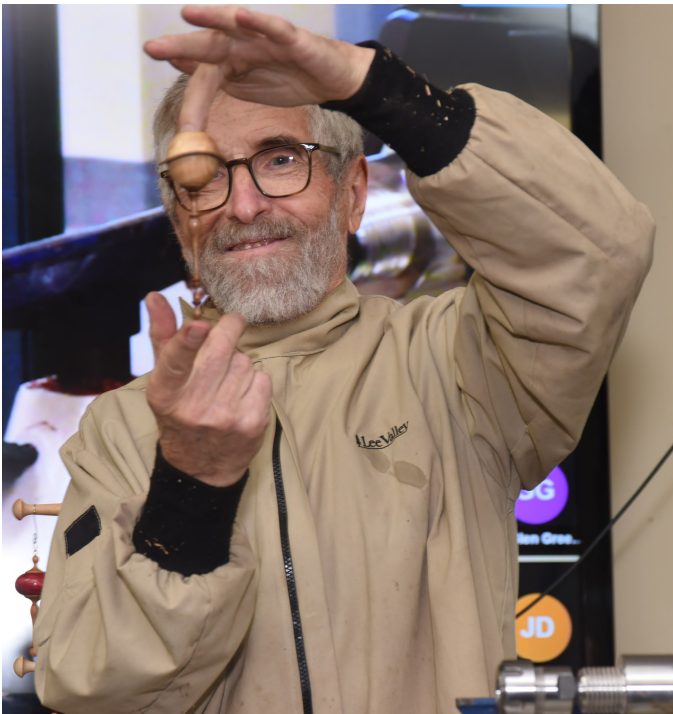
Dave then presented a slide show of a wide selection of finials by various turners and discussed design considerations:

- The shape of each detail should complement the adjacent ones so that the design “flows” from one detail to the next.
- Larger details like beads or bulbous elements can make a finial look heavy if they are too large.
- The size (diameter) of details should complement the size of the item (ornament, box, etc.) that the finial will be used on, so that (for example) a small, fine finial does not look lost on a larger body.

- Adjacent details can be visually separated with beads or fine ring details to create a visual change.
- It often works well if the top and bottom finials echo or complement each other in the design of their details and overall shape.

Here are some pictures from Dave's demonstration. Correlating the photos to the notes above is left as an exercise to the diligent reader. — Editor





Show & Tell:

Mark Hazen

showed off a vase in Maple that was drilled out to accept a glass test tube liner, so it can be used with water for real flowers.

He also presented some small snowmen ornaments turned from blanks of different species that he glued up from small waste offcuts from other projects.



Dave McLachlan showed a top finial that he had turned from a blank of laminated thin layers of Holly and Padauk to create interesting color shape effect on the finished finial.

Raffle Results:

Chris Palmer added “The Lathe Book” by Conover to his library.
Gary Landry won a bundle of pen or finial blanks donated by Chris Palmer.
Charles Nieforth took away a bundle of Woodturning magazines for his reading entertainment.
Bob Earle collected a Cherry blank for a future project.
Mark Hazen also scooped a bundle of Woodturning magazines for his collection.
Bob Earle added a walnut plank to his wood collection.

The meeting wrapped up at 4:15 PM.

Calum Ewing — Secretary

Woodturning and the NWG

I've always loved working with wood. When I was in school, they didn't let girls take shop class — which is what I wanted. We had to take a class in cooking and sewing. Well, I already knew how to cook and sew, thank you very much. I wanted to work with wood! So, when I got a chance (as a university student) to take a class at a nearby community college, I jumped at the chance. And I loved it as much as I predicted I would.

That said, it's curious how I got into woodturning. I and my ex were both amateur, hobby woodworkers when we met. (So, I made sure there was a place for a workshop when I bought a house here in Nova Scotia.) We both did what woodturners call “flat work” — making things like cutting boards, knife racks, some small furniture. One year I mentioned to him that I'd love a drill press for Christmas. And he bought me — a lathe. . . . Hmm. I'd never used a lathe; I had no idea how to use a lathe. It turns out the issue was he wanted a lathe. Then, when we broke up, it was my lathe.

So then I had to figure out how to use it. This was well over twenty years ago and there were not a lot of options if one wanted to learn how to do woodturning. I bought books, watched the few videos then available. Then Lee Valley started offering woodturning lessons. I took the basic “Intro to woodturning” — from Stephen Zwerling — three years in a row. In my defense, I was working full time and didn't get a lot of time to practice my hobby. I joked that I was a slow learner. Stephen quipped “Or, I'm a really bad teacher. . . .”



Photo by Stephen Kennard

Eventually I got the main idea, and I started my hesitant journey forward. Once, when I was at a wood show of some ilk, I was looking at a display of woodturning and some lovely pieces of wood. There was a woman there (I confess I never got her name) who encouraged me to join the local woodturners group — the Nova Woodturners Guild (NWG). I decided I would. They were very supportive and I learned a lot from them about turning techniques, tools and jigs. Even though I was often the only woman in the group, I was welcomed.

I remember meetings at the Nova Scotia Community College in Dartmouth. I watched Jim Diamond dutifully, month after month, load boxes of woodturning periodicals onto a dolly, hauling them in at the beginning of the meeting and back out again at the end. What dedication! I also remember that there was nowhere to sit at those meetings. Even back then, I much preferred sitting to standing, but I enjoyed seeing all the different techniques and the work the members did.

When I was in Victoria, BC for a year's sabbatical I attended a woodworkers' meeting. They asked for new people to say a few words about themselves, and I mentioned I was a woodworker and a novice woodturner. At the break several woodturners came up to me and suggested I join their group as well — which I did. A couple of their members let me use their shop, and then, after a few months, the group there — the Island Woodturners Group — loaned me their demo lathe to use. (I could get my

turning tools to BC, but not my lathe. . .) And so I did lots of turning that year and precious little flat work — which is what I had expected to be my focus in my non-working hours.

I turned more and more pieces and took more classes: back in Nova Scotia at Lee Valley as well as further afield. I got in person instruction from: Bonnie Klein, Jimmy Clewes, Marilyn Campbell, Steven Kennard, Micheal Hosaluk, Richard Raffan, Glenn Lucas, Stuart Batty and many others. I attended woodturning symposia, including the AAW national symposium and the “Totally Turning” event in Saratoga Springs, NY. I followed online instruction from Cindy Drozda and many others.

Needless to say, I was hooked! Goodbye flat work.

Over the years I became more active in the NWG and served many years on the executive, including several years as president. I really appreciate all the work and support that the others who voluntarily give up their time to serve on the executive then and now. I especially appreciated working with Dave McLachlan — he was vice president when I was president, and then we switched roles. He was pivotal in helping to organize the very successful juried exhibition we had at the Mary Black Gallery. He continues to give a lot of his time and effort to the NWG — taking excellent photos of the competition pieces year after year and serving as treasurer.

I also really appreciate others in the NWG, such as Darrell Eisner who taught me the ins and outs of turning a pen. “Still tons of wood there, tons!”, he’d say as I hesitantly thinned the pen. . . And Richard Ford who has given me lessons and helped with various challenges, including kindly coring some lovely walnut for me.

Of course, there are all kinds of tools and jigs and kits one can buy, and I was a sucker for them. As the saying goes among artisans of many trades: “the one who dies with the most tools wins”. I admit that my tool collection pales in comparison with those others have gathered. However, I did my bit. I remember one time going into our local Lee Valley store — there were seven people behind the counter and six of them said “Hi, Dianne!”. Oh my. . .

And then, of course there is all that beautiful wood! Wood from wood stores — wood from local trees. Like many others, whenever I’d see a hardwood tree coming down, I’d stop and ask if I could have some of the wood. Once I was in a kiosk at a farmers’ market that sold handmade wood products – and wood. I kept coming back to look at this one lovely burl. After a few times of my stopping by to look, the merchant asked me “Do you suffer from wood lust?” I laughed and said “Oh, does it show?” Of course, I bought the burl. . .

I love working with wood. It’s fascinating to see a lump of wood turn into something beautiful, something useful, or just fun or lovely to see. And I love the planning, the dreaming, the “maybe I can. . .” Sometimes reality hits and reminds me “well, actually my dear, you have neither the skill level nor the tools to do that.” That reminder, of course, does nothing to stop me dreaming and fantasizing about possible projects. And so I turned things, lots of things - mostly gifts for family and friends.

And, the years crawl on, and the body slowly starts to balk at standing for any length of time. This and that ache and pain constrain how long I can stay in my shop — not very long at all these days, I fear. A partial hour at best. And not every day. And the dreams and fantasies refuse to die. So, I’ll still do what I can when I can.

After a recent period of doing little or no turning, I found I could at least put my love of turning into another form. So, I (with a lot of help from my tech savvy son, David) recorded this little ditty about how I “Love to play on my lathe”. (Note: any photos that show me at the lathe without protective headgear are posed photos — I never actively turn without safety protection.)

I hope you enjoy it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tc3yWlwpYrc>

And, do support the NWG — it’s a great group and you’ll learn a lot!

Dianne Looker

Hoping to Buy

Guild brother Greg McMullin is looking to buy a new banjo for his lathe. (*Unfortunately, the type of lathe was not available at press time.*) If you might be able to help him out, please contact him directly.

Cover Photo



In the summer of 2003, travelling Australian wood-turner Ernie Newman made it up to our corner of the planet, and the Guild was happy to have him put on a couple of hands-on seminars for us (which were graciously hosted by Steve Zwerling at his workshop in Boutilier's Point). (2003??? Can it really be that long ago? And was Ernie really just trying to escape the brutal Australian winter?)

Among the items Ernie demonstrated (and then got the participants to try) was a Christmas ornament made with softwood, and, I might add, a somewhat brutal use of a skew. To make this, round a piece of wood to a cylinder. Save a bit of room for the base and the cove under the tree, and then turn the rest down to a cone with a small bulge at the top. The cross is formed by turning a small disk at the very end, then a larger disk, then another smaller disk. A chisel is later used to pare the disks down to the cross shape seen.

To turn the cone into a fuzzy tree shape, the point of the skew is driven into the wood, with the point travelling more or less parallel to the turning axis, heading from the top of the tree to the bottom. The softwood happily turns over into partial curls, giving the soft fuzzy look.

Jim Diamond

Photo Credits

Thanks to Chris Palmer for photos from last month's meeting. The other photos were taken by Steve Kennard (as mentioned below the picture in question) or by the person who made the item in question and/or wrote the article. The diagram in the November meeting report was provided by Calum Ewing, who rightfully observed that a picture can be worth at least 1,000 words.

Nova Woodturners' Guild 2025/26 Executive

All members of the executive, as well as committee chairs, can be reached by using the email address associated with that position. That is, a note sent to (for example) the president will go to whomever is president at that time. The following <address>es should be followed by @novawoodturnersguild.com to send mail to the person holding that position.

A 'C' after a committee member's name indicates they are chair of that committee.

Position	<address>	Incumbent(s)	
Executive	executive (sends the message to all executive positions on the list)		
President	president (or) pres	Bob Earle	
Vice President	vice-president (or) vp	Bill Maes	
Secretary	secretary	Calum Ewing	
Treasurer	treasurer	Dave McLachlan	
Director at Large	director-at-large	vacant	
 Committees			
Library	library	Jim Diamond	C
Web Site	webmaster	Richard Ford	C
Membership & Promotion	membership	vacant	
Newsletter	newsletter (or) news	Jim Diamond	C
Competition	competition	vacant	
Guild Photographer	photographer (or) photos	Chris Palmer	C
Fund Raising	raffles	vacant	C
Members Group	members	members	

The [members](#) address forwards the email to all members **who have signed up to be on the members list**. To add or remove yourself from the [members](#) list, email webmaster@novawoodturnersguild.com.

If you wish to send an email to **all** current members of the NWG, send your message to secretary@novawoodturnersguild.com with a request to forward your email to all members.