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American Association of Woodturners

Rings & Things

By Nick Cook



“You need to find something small, inexpensive, and easy to make that everyone wants or needs.” Those words of wisdom from Rude Osolnik, my mentor, were spoken more than 30 years ago. Rude was right: Production work is what it’s all about.

For the past 20 years, I’ve adhered to Rude’s wisdom by turning small production gift items that sell for less than \$50. After getting started at crafts shows and then moving on to wholesale sales to gift shops and galleries, I have made a living turning everything from spinning tops, wine stoppers, baby rattles, letter openers, boxes, and ring holders.

Ring holders make great gifts for mothers, sisters, aunts, and friends. Ring holders are priced from \$15 to \$25 at craft shows.

You can turn ring holders from a single blank, as shown here, or by assembling the project from several pieces, as demonstrated by Bob Rosand in the Fall 2000 issue of *American Woodturner*.

Get started

For turning tools, you’ll need a $\frac{3}{4}$ " spindle roughing gouge, a $\frac{3}{8}$ " bowl gouge, and a parting tool. You could turn this project with a faceplate,

One of the projects Nick Cook will teach in the Youth Turning Room at the AAW symposium in Richmond is a ring holder. But don’t be fooled! This is a great lathe project and practical gift regardless of age or experience.

but a 4-jaw scroll chuck with #2 jaws will help you zip through the steps if you’re turning several ring holders for gifts or sales.

For turning stock, select a $3 \times 3 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ " hardwood blank. The ring holders shown on these pages are turned from canary wood, a dense, tight-grained hardwood from South America. As the name implies, its color is creamy yellow but it also has beautiful streaks of red running through it. It is relatively inexpensive and it turns and finishes well.

Easy turning steps

Locate and mark the centers on each end of the blank. Use a mallet to drive the drive center into one end of

the blank. Mount the blank between centers on the lathe and lock the tailstock and quill in place.

Position the tool rest just below the blank’s centerline, parallel to and approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the blank. Always rotate the blank by hand to ensure clearance with the tool rest.

Turn up the lathe to approximately 1,500 rpm and use the spindle roughing gouge to reduce the blank into a cylinder. Use the parting tool to turn a $\frac{1}{4}$ "-long tenon on one end of the blank and sized to fit your scroll chuck (**Photo 1**). To ensure maximum holding strength, always keep the diameter of the tenon as close as possible to the fully closed size of the jaws. Also make sure the shoulder of the tenon is tight against the face of the chuck jaws for the same reason. (You will be turning at the end of the blank and a slight catch could pull the blank from the jaws of the chuck.)

Remove the blank from between centers and mount it in the scroll chuck. Position the tool rest, rotate the material by hand, and turn on the lathe. (You may continue to use the tailstock for greater security.)

Use the spindle roughing gouge, spindle gouge, or the bowl gouge for basic shaping of the ring holder. Reduce the end to slightly more than 1/2" diameter and start detailing on what will be the top of the ring holder (**Photo 2**). Remember to remove about 1/4" off the overall length of the top to eliminate the hole left by either the drive or live center.

You have many options, among them: a ball, a point, an acorn or a series of beads. The important thing is to keep a 1/2" diameter so most rings will fit over the end of the ring holder (**Photo 3**). Now start working your way down the stem to create an attractive profile.

Once you are satisfied with the top and stem, shape the base. Options include bulbous, flat, or concave profiles to flow into the stem. If you wish, add a bead or a cove to fit in with your own design.

"Almost everyone knows someone who has space for a turned wood ring holder to place near the sink or on the nightstand."

—Nick Cook

Depending on how much detail you add, you can use the spindle gouge (ideal for beads and coves) or the bowl gouge (bulbous) to shape the base. Stop the base abruptly or add a small bead or fillet at the bottom to give it more lift. Use your parting tool to make a cut to define



1 With a parting tool, create a 1/4"-wide tenon that is sized for your 4-jaw scroll chuck.



3 Use a spindle gouge to detail the top of the ring holder.

the bottom of the ring holder (**Photo 4**). Do not cut it off the waste yet.

Finishing details

Determine the location of the bottom and make a slight parting cut to define it. Sand the entire surface, starting with 150- or 180-grit sandpaper, and continue through 400 grit.

I prefer oil-based finishes for this type of project. Apply one to three coats of oil with light sanding in between coats. After the finish is completely dry, rub out the finish with 0000 steel wool and paste wax, and then buff to a sheen.

Continue the parting cut to separate the ring holder from the waste in the chuck. Aim the parting cut toward the upper end of the ring holder and undercut the bottom slightly to ensure it sits flat (**Photo 5**). Sand and finish the bottom by hand with the same finish as applied on the rest of the project.



2 With a 3/4" spindle roughing gouge, turn the top of the ring holder to about 1/2" diameter.



4 Define the bottom of the ring holder but don't yet part from the lathe.



5 After the finish has dried, use a parting tool to undercut the bottom.

Nick Cook (nickcook@earthlink.net) is an *American Woodturner* contributing editor. Nick, who lives in Marietta, GA, will teach several rotations (including this project) in the Youth Turning Room during the AAW symposium in Richmond.

Photos: Marisa Pruss