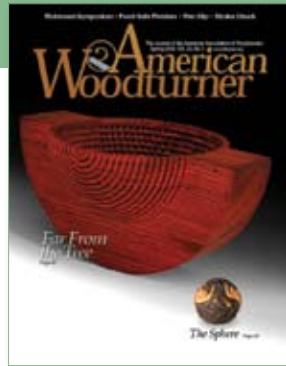


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Tree-Trimming Medallion

By Bob Rosand

If you turn and market Christmas ornaments, you'll find that every year you need to come up with a new ornament, or at least a new variation on the ornaments that you already have.

This point was succinctly made one year when a good customer came into my booth looking for something "different." When I didn't have a "new and improved" Christmas ornament, she responded by saying, "Oh," and exited the booth without buying anything.

The medallion came about because I was trying to come up with a new ornament, and also trying to provide a canvas on wood for my wife, Susan. I also had a lot of scraps and cutoffs that were just too good to throw away, but not big enough for bowls or platters.

When I started writing this article, I was a bit concerned that people would not attempt turning this ornament because they could not paint. Fortunately, that is not a problem. If you can paint or have a spouse who paints, this project is great. But you can make numerous variations without being skilled in art. The first is not to paint the ornament at all, but simply to turn the ornament and accentuate the wood. You also can texture the center of the medallion with a Sorby texturing tool or a chatterwork tool.

A second method is to make stencils or purchase them at a crafts supply store and stencil a decoration such as a wreath, reindeer, Christmas tree, dove, or snowflake in the center of the ornament.

A third method is to purchase appropriate ink stamps, stamp the center of the ornament, and then use a pyrography tool to burn the stamp into the ornament. If your penmanship is good, consider customizing the ornament with the year or with the name of a grandchild. Be creative and come up with your own variations.

Get started

For turning tools you will need a 1/2" or 3/4" spindle roughing gouge, 3/8" spindle gouge, parting tool, 1/2" beading tool (I use an Ashley Iles tool), and texturing tool (Sorby makes the only model I'm aware of).

For turning stock, use end-grain scraps about 4 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 1/2". End grain works great, especially with the texturing tool or the chatterwork tool, but side grain also works.

The pieces shown on these pages are turned from ambrosia maple.

Turn the front

Sand one face of the blank flat on a belt sander and glue it, centered, to a wasteblock. For end grain, use a 3/4" spindle roughing gouge to true up the outside of the blank. For side grain, use a standard spindle gouge. Turn the blank to a 4" diameter. Then use a spindle gouge to true up the face of the blank. Note that the tool is turned on its side with the flute pointed in the direction of travel (toward the center). The bevel is rubbing, giving control of the tool. Do not cut with the tip of the tool.

Next define the perimeter of the ornament with three beads with the flute pointed down (Photo 1). With the rim complete, use the spindle gouge to slightly hollow the center of the medallion.

If it helps, think of the medallion as a small plate, which it essentially is. If you plan to use a stamp or stencil on the center section, make the medallion a bit flatter so you don't have trouble transferring the stencil or making an impression with the stamp. Now use the spindle gouge to round over the edge of the medallion and start shaping the

back. Finish-sand the face of the ornament and the turned portion of the back.

Detail the back

For me, now comes the fun part. To finish the back of the ornament, reverse the disc and hold it in a vacuum chuck. The vacuum chuck used on this project is from the Summer 2006 issue of *American Woodturner*. You can find a copy of that article on the AAW website (woodturner.org).

Note: If you don't have a vacuum chuck, make a jam chuck from a wasteblock and friction-fit the medallion into it. When making multiple medallions, carefully turn each medallion to fit one jam chuck, or make a new jam chuck for each different-size medallion.

I always had a difficult time centering work on the vacuum chuck; it was always off just a bit. The solution is incredibly simple.

First measure the inside diameter of the tailstock quill with calipers. Measuring with the calipers, turn a taper on the wasteblock of the medallion (Photo 2), part it off, reverse it, and place the taper into the tailstock quill. Slide the tailstock up to the headstock, press the medallion against the vacuum chuck (Photo 3), and turn on the vacuum pump. The piece should be perfectly centered. Just to be safe, put the tail center in place to hold the medallion while turning the back.

When most of the back is turned, back off the tailstock and turn away the remains of the wasteblock (Photo 4). Take gentle cuts or you may pop the piece loose.

With the back of the medallion turned and sanded, you can texture or finish it. I used a Sorby texturing tool to cut decorative spiral lines (Photos 5 and 6).



1 Use a beading tool to cut three beads into the rim of the medallion.



2 Turn a tapered tenon on the medallion wasteblock using calipers to check the diameter.



3 Insert the medallion taper into the tailstock quill and press it against the vacuum chuck.



4 Back off the tailstock and carefully turn away the remaining small tenon.



5 Texture the back of the ornament with a Sorby texturing tool.



6 The Sorby texturing tool cuts a beautiful spiral pattern.

Use the tool as a scraper with the cutting end of the tool angled down and the handle up. I also tilt the head of the tool to about a 45-degree angle. Engage the tool at the edge of the medallion and move it toward the center. It is important to get the cutterhead rotating before moving the tool along the tool rest. If you don't, you risk getting scratch marks as the tool begins to rotate. Experiment with different cutterhead orientations to make different texture patterns.

Now decorate the medallion. Don't forget to drill a $\frac{1}{16}$ "-diameter hole at the top of the medallion for hanging on a Christmas tree.

Finally, apply a finish (I use Deft satin lacquer).

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