Ring in the Holiday Season with a Teacher's Bell

By Bob Rosand

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American Association of Woodturners

I'm convinced that I could make a very good living turning nothing but Christmas tree ornaments. That is if I could *stand* making nothing but Christmas tree ornaments year-round.

Christmas ornaments are relatively easy to make and profitable. But you do have to keep coming up with variations each year in order to keep your customers happy. This point hit home one year when some loyal customers returned to my booth at a local crafts show and asked what I had that was new. When I was unable to show them "this year's new improved model," they went away disappointed—and I left the show with less money in my pocket.

This bell ornament is partially the result of being married to a teacher and partly attributed to an ornament that turner Fritz Spokas brought to a Mid Penn Turners Christmas party a few years ago.

Turning the bell

This teacher's bell is relatively easy to turn and requires no special tools except perhaps a set of spigot jaws to help you grip the turning stock.

The finished dimensions of the bell are about 1 7/8" wide at the base and 1 1/2" long. The narrow diameter is about 1" and the decorative ring around the narrow diameter is about 1 1/8" above the base.

To turn this bell, you will need bell stock about 2" square by about 3" or 4" long. You can turn the bell

Continued

stock from oak, maple, cherry, walnut, or whatever you happen to have on hand. For the handle, I like to use scraps of leftover ebony about 3" long and 5/8" square.

For tools, you will need a roughing gouge, spindle gouge, small skew, 1/2" round- nosed scraper, and a parting tool.

I begin this project by placing the bell stock in my chuck and turning it to a cylinder. If you don't have a chuck with spigot jaws, no problem. All you need is a faceplate with a waste block (preferably oak or another hardwood) attached to it.

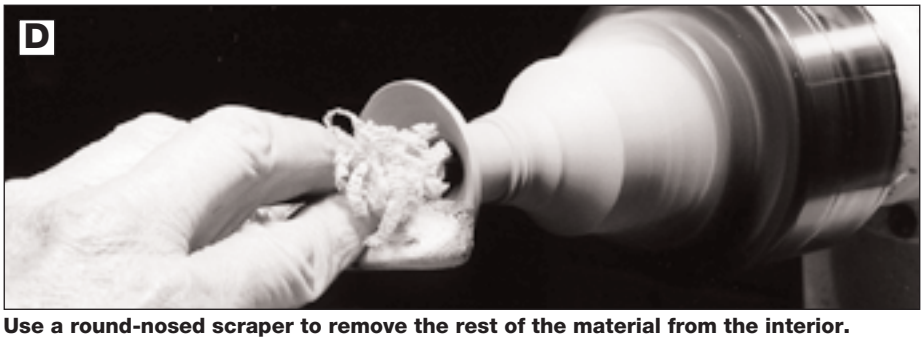
You will then need to turn a tenon on the turning stock and glue that into a hole that you have turned on the waste block. The trumpet portion of the bell is shaped using a roughing gouge (a 1/2" roughing gouge works great) and spindle gouge. I position the long point of a skew down to define the decorative ring and finish shaping it with a small spindle gouge (Photo A). Leave enough material at the top of the bell to allow you to hollow it without getting a lot of chatter.

To hollow the trumpet portion, use a spindle gouge to remove some of the interior (Photo B) followed by a 3/8" drill bit to determine how deep you should hollow (Photo C). Then use the 1/2" round-nosed scraper to finish the interior of the bell (Photo D). Then, sand the bell inside and out. Refine the top of the bell with a spindle gouge (Photo E). After sanding the bell portion, part it from the lathe.

Rough-shape the bell and refine the decorative ring around the bell.

Begin hollowing the bell with the spindle gouge.

With a 3/8" drill bit, drill the final depth of the bell.



Use a round-nosed scraper to remove the rest of the material from the interior.

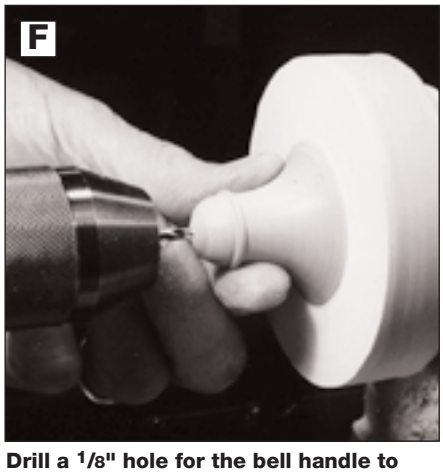
Refine the top of the bell before parting it from the lathe.

To attach the handle to the teacher's bell, you will need to drill a 1/8" hole in the top of the bell. The easiest way to do this is to reverse the bell, friction-fit it into a waste block, and drill the 1/8" hole (Photo F). This will ensure a perfectly centered handle.

The handle

Mount the handle stock in your chuck. Use a roughing gouge to turn the stock to a cylinder. With either a parting tool or a small skew laid flat, turn a tenon to fit the 1/8" hole in the top of the bell. Check the fit of the handle tenon with the bell (Photo G).

Then drill a 1/16" or smaller hole in that tenon. (Later you'll mount the bell clapper wire to that hole.) Turn the handle using the roughing gouge and spindle gouge (Photo H). Part the handle from the lathe and glue to the bell with either five-minute epoxy or cyanoacrylate (CA) glue. The finished length of the handle is about 1 3/4" long by about 1/2" in diameter.



Drill a 1/8" hole for the bell handle to accept the handle.

The clapper

When I first started making these bells, I didn't bother to make a clapper. The bells still sold well, but I felt as though I was cheating. Now, all the bells I turn have clappers, and they are really easy to make.

I use 2" pieces of 1/8" or smaller dowel and glue a small turned "ball" on the end to act as the clapper. After cutting the clapper to length, I drill a 1/16" hole in the other end and glue a short piece of copper wire stripped from an old electrical cord. I "age" the clapper with a bronze paint and patina, then glue the clapper into the bell. The wire allows the clapper to move a bit.

Although they don't ring, the bells now appear more realistic.

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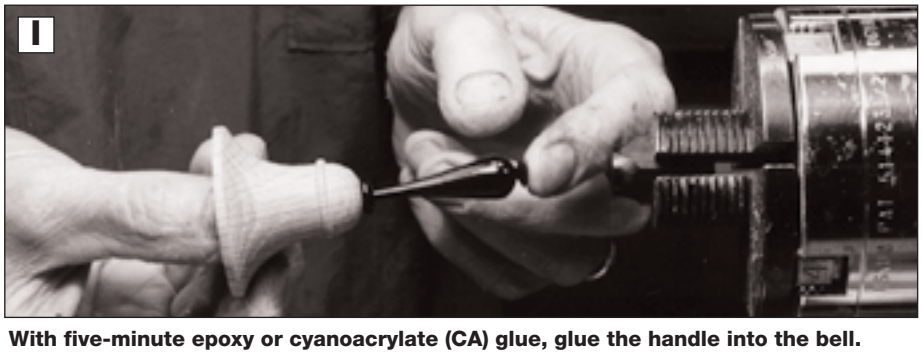
After rough-turning the handle, check the fit of the handle tenon into the bell.

Refine the shape of the ebony handle with a spindle or roughing gouge.



With five-minute epoxy or cyanoacrylate (CA) glue, glue the handle into the bell.