

## Where did *that* spring from ?

Most turners will carefully plan a project. It's all worked out on paper before they go near a piece of wood. There are many advantages to working this way if you know exactly what you're trying to achieve, but it's less helpful when you're trying to produce something original. A shape may look promising on paper, but it may be impossible to execute as you intend, or it may simply not be effective in 3D.

Plain turners will often start with a general idea, but will modify it in response to the grain and the shape that's appearing in front of them. The final piece may be quite different from the first concept. I'm not good at imagining 3D shapes. I like to see them developing, and modify what I'm doing to produce a satisfying result.

I often go into the workshop without any clear idea in mind. I'll decide on a simple exercise, probably based on the way the machine's set up from the last project, and see where it leads me. In this case, I'd been attempting end-grain patterns using unreasonably deep rosette and swash plate. I thought a deeply ribbed dome might look interesting. It took a long time to cut, and wasn't worth the effort.

When I'm cutting shapes in Ash for burning, it's often effective to cut a curve as a series of concave steps. I re-cut deeper into the dome, and found I was producing claws rather than ribs. That was interesting. Re-chucking the dome to hollow it looked difficult, so I hollowed a second piece of wood. (Eventually I cut a claw from the first dome to add to the final piece.)

I started cutting the outside from a cylinder, so I had plenty of time to see what was happening and to modify the shape. I found that stretching the bottom row, and flattening the top, gave an interesting tension to the shape. I could almost imagine it springing open and biting my finger. I pierced through between the claws, leaving enough wood at the knuckles to retain a bit of strength.

When I was a caver, I often saw fossils standing proud of the rock, where the limestone had dissolved away around them. Translating this idea into a box presented some problems. The size of the "rock" was obviously limited. Genuine "solution" shapes are impossible to reproduce convincingly. I settled for an "eroded" stream-cobble shape, which the brain tends to register as "rock". The principle's easy. The shape must be asymmetrical. Start by cutting flat facets, then round-off all sharp edges. Keep going till you like the result.

I had a chucking recess in the base, for hollowing the box. The lid was to sit in a simple cylindrical hole. As I deepened the recess, I noticed that it enhanced the sinister aspect of the lid. You could see it as a fossil, but it also began to look like something which had taken up residence in the hole, and which might spring out if dinner came near.

It's remarkably difficult experimenting with a psychological effect like this. I normally put work-in-progress on the bedside table so I can absorb the shape in a relaxed frame of mind. I quickly realised this wasn't a good idea with "Claws". You need a degree of arachnophobia to respond to the shape. I moved it downstairs, and checked under the pillow before I could relax. I'm told that one eminent rose turner was having trouble sleeping, and started thinking about ways of developing the pattern. It didn't help his insomnia.

"Claws" is just a first attempt. It would have lead to further "fossil" shapes, but I fear that the idea of Gothic horror has grabbed me. Who knows where it might lead. I must find some good cobwebs.

Most of the techniques I'm using are straightforward. I've been trying a very narrow cutter (c17

degrees) with a broad 0.5 mm radius point. I hoped it would just cut with the point and not the flanks. It doesn't. The plunge cuts are ridiculously steep.

My belt sander broke as I was shaping the "rock". I finished it off with a homemade drum sander (turn an MDF cylinder to fit a small sanding belt).

I'm very fond of burnt Ash. First you shape the wood, then you sand away any toolmarks on the hard grain. The soft layers of grain burn quite easily, but the hard layers are very resistant. You have to heat the surface with a blowlamp until it glows red, then cool it down quickly with a water mist-sprayer. It's quite controllable once you get used to it. The charred surface is then brushed with a bronze brush. A brass brush with thick bristles will scratch the surface, but some fine brass brushes are usable. You'll probably find areas which need attacking again.

**This provides plenty of opportunities to set the workshop on fire. Take care.**

If I had grit-blasting facilities, I'd probably use them in preference to burning.

I tend to colour the pale bits of the surface with spirit dye, then apply various coloured waxes.

Piercing a piece like this cleanly is tricky. It shows up any inaccuracies in your rosettes. I generally cut convex lobes with a powerfile- a wonderful invention which removes surplus brass at an astonishing rate. I can cut fairly accurately to the scribed line, but I suspect my marking-out leaves something to be desired.

It's inevitable that there will be some break-out at the edges of the holes. This could be minimised by filling the dome with foam filler (after putting cling film inside). I just tidied up the biggest holes with a needle file, then filed the rest to match. A traditional turner would want a perfect finish. I'm more interested in capturing the spirit of the piece.

When I have a working internal cutting frame, I'll have to try shaping the inside of the dome. Getting that lined up accurately will be fun.