

## Birdhouse Ornaments-2024

**Woodturner's Prayer:** I'm a woodturner, and I can stop buying wood, if I have to, I guess.  
(With all due apologies to *The Red Green Show*.)

### Introduction

Much of the information I have learned here came from watching others. We have had Dick Sing come in for a demo, Cliff, one of our founding members, presented a demo a few years ago and several books that I found helpful. *Dick Sing Turns Miniature Birdhouses* Text and Photos by Donna S. Baker, Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2004 and *Woodturning Christmas Ornaments* with Dale L. Nish, Fox Chapel Publishing Company, East Petersburg, PA 2012 are fantastic resources. There may be others out there. You can also look on *Pinterest*, *YouTube* and other resources on the internet.

### Finding Wood

When I first started turning ornaments and birdhouses, I bought my wood. You can get bottle stopper blanks, turning squares, and even large spindles. All of them will work. I have stopped buying wood specifically for ornaments and birdhouses and I just use cutoffs. I have plenty of small pieces of wood that are too pretty to throw away. I have cut offs from all kinds of spindles—usually 1" to 3" square. I also have leftovers from turning pens, wands and candle sticks. I throw them in a box and use them when there are too many boxes in my shop. These are fine for the bodies and the roofs. There are people who seem to think I need more wood and they give me their cut-offs for free. Oh, and since I was sick with a myriad of diseases, I cleaned my basement and discovered **TEN BOXES** full of stuff. I am set for a long time

For the finials, I have plenty of cut offs from pen blanks that will work. I also have plenty of wood that I keep as scrap from my flat work. I have no shortage of wood to use for finials. As to the perches, I have found that I lose far too many little pieces of wood when I turn them. Rather than get frustrated, I have taken to buying 1/8 inch spindles from *JoAnn Fabrics*. Yes, I go there. My wife is a quilter and I have lots of time to waste as I wander the aisles. You can get a package that will last you quite a while for a rather reasonable amount. Don't buy more than one package. Trust me.

### Wood To Avoid

I ran into some problems using oily/waxy woods. The glue did not stick too well, neither did the finish. Bocote, Rosewood, Bubinga, Cocobolo, Ipe, Lignum Vitae, and Teak can all cause problems. Yes you can turn the speed up and just polish the wood, but I have no idea how long the shine will last. I also read that Purpleheart is an oily wood, but I've never run into problems with it not glueing too well or taking Danish oil. Oh, Santos Mahogany is also supposed to be oily, but I've never bought any yet.

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### Tools and Equipment

These are the tools I use—there aren't many. You may use what tools you find useful.

- ❖ 1 and 1/4 inch Roughing Gouge-I have big hands a smaller one works just fine.
- ❖ 1/4 inch and 1/8 inch parting tools
- ❖ 3/8 inch spindle gouge ground to a very sharp point
- ❖ 1/2 inch bowl gouge with swept back wings.
- ❖ bedan tool
- ❖ 7/8 inch Forstner bit
- ❖ 1/4 inch and 1/8 inch brad point bits for holes in the body.
- ❖ 7/8 inch Hardwood dowel when needed to hold the body in the chuck-you can make dedicated wood chucks as Dick Sing suggests.
- ❖ Four jaw chuck-I am lucky as I have acquired many chucks over the years-Record Power makes a cool small one for around \$100 that I find very handy.
- ❖ Sandpaper-I sand through the grits to 320 grit
- ❖ Finish-you can use anything you'd like. I prefer danish oil; it's quick, easy, and the smell is not too annoying. I've used polyurethane and lacquer, but the lacquer smell makes me cough and it's harder than heck to apply-sorry, I was too cheap to buy it in spray cans. The wipe on poly doesn't work well in winter.

### Instructions Birdhouse

1) Select the wood for the body. I like to put it in my 4 jaw chuck, but you can turn it between centers to make it round. You can drill the holes when the blank is still square, but sometimes this places the hole in the wrong place. Trust me, you want to drill the holes after rounding but before hollowing.

2) Look for a good place to put the entry hole (1/4 inch) and the perch hole (1/8 inch). Use a straight edge to draw the lines on the round body. Drill out the holes.

4) Drill out the body. The size of the drill bit depends on the size of the body. I try to leave at least a side depth of 3/16. I usually drill just past the perch hole but no deeper. 7/8 works the best most of the time.

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5) Use the 1/4 inch drill bit to drill through the bottom of the body for the finial, if you want one; some, like acorns, won't need a finial.

6) **WARNING**—Be careful! The body is now fragile. It's easy to crack the body if too much pressure is applied in the following steps!

7) I put the dowel/jamb chuck in the four jaw chuck to turn the rest of the body round. I bring up the tailstock for support and install a cone drive center. Be careful with the pressure or the body will crack. I then turn the bottom round and sand through the grits to 320 grit.

8) Make sure the bottom of the body is flat or the finial will not seat properly.

9) Set the body aside someplace safe. Gravity sucks and broken bodies cause headaches.

10) I then chuck in the piece for the roof. I turn the wood round and then use calipers to find the inside diameter of the body and make a tenon to fit inside the body. Not too tight and not too loose.

11) I use my parting tool to put a very shallow flat spot next to the tenon. This gives the glue more surface area to adhere to.

12) Finish shaping the roof and sand through 320 grit.

13) I chuck the finial blank in a four jaw chuck and shape the end to 1/4 inch and check the fit with the body. I shape the finial to match the body. I try to be creative.

14) The birdhouse is now ready to be glued together. Dick Sing uses white wood glue. I use super glue. Any glue residue that squeezes out will have to be cleaned/sanded off or your finish will be ruined.

15) After the glue dries, use the finish of your choice.

### **Instructions: Lighthouse Ornament**

I had nothing better to do one summer day and I turned three ornaments that looked like lighthouses. People like them-read my relatives wanted loads of them. I have also made a few that look like princess towers. I have made some light enough to hang on trees and some heavier that just sit on a shelf. The idea is the same, the steps are the same, you just need a bit more planning.

#### **Finding a base**

I hate throwing away wood. I had some natural edge cutoffs that I glued together for bases. There are woods with bark inclusions that look cool. You can buy some fantastic burls that would make excellent bases. I even have one that was a rotted branch from a cherry tree, but my niece

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pestered me until I gave it to her. I often buy wood that has an interesting end that I will cut off. Be creative.

1) Select the wood for the body. Some lighthouse have white bodies, some have red bodies. You could also dye some curly maple red for a very cool effect. Mark the centers on the ends. Put in the four jaw chuck, turn the body round, drill the holes for the opening and the perch. If the lighthouse is long enough you can drill more holes. In Dick Sing's book he has a picture of one that has 3 or four holes. Drill half way through one side then turn the blank around and rill the other half through. **(Again—the size of the bit depends on the size of the body—make sure to leave enough room for the tenon on the bottom of the body and the body will be narrower at the top than at the bottom.)**

2) While the blank is still in the chuck, I use my narrowest parting tool and put a flat ledge right at the top of the blank. (Of course, you can just use your miter saw or table saw to square up the ends first. Why I saw someone use a bandsaw to square up the ends of a blank.

3) Bring up the tailstock with a cone center and turn the blank round. I sand through the grits to 320.

4) You will have to taper the body. I usually start with 1 1/2 inch stock and leave an 1/8 inch tenon on the bottom.

5) I have seen other people turn a plastic tube for the lighthouse *light* section, I have even seen people use small lights to actually have lighted lighthouse, but I use the lightest colored wood (maple or holly) I have. I match the diameter to fit that ledge and then drill through the blank. Sand through the grits to 320 grit.

6) I then make the roof following the above steps. The only difference is I put a finial on the top of the ornament. I often use my wood burner to make roofs that look thatched or shingled. People seem to like that. I have also marked lines on the body and used the wood burner to make lines that look like the lighthouse or princess castle is made of blocks or bricks.

### Instruction Bat House

This is my version of the Bat House Ornament I found in *Woodturning Christmas Ornaments* with Dale L. Nish, Fox Chapel Publishing Company, East Petersburg, PA 2012. In the book, they use a segmented blank for the body. I use maple for the body and just dye the body orange. I bought some tiny bats off Amazon; there were 60 of them for \$7. I'll never make 60 of these guys and gals.

1). I selected a nasty chunk of 2" by 2" by 2" of Wenge I had because it looked cool. I had a 1 3/8" by 1 3/8" by 2" maple for the body. For the finial and the perch, I used a 3/4" by 3/4" by 4" piece of ebony.

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2). I made the roof first; drilled a 1" hole for the body an 1/8 inch deep. I tried to make it look like a witch's hat, but Wenge splinters like mad. So it ends up looking like a pretty normal top of a bird house ornament. I sanded to 320 grit and set the top aside.

3). For the body, I made the mistake of drilling the holes first; That turned out poorly since the perch ended up pointing down so I had to make another body, drill holes, drill the body out, and use the 1/4" drill bit to drill for the finial. The body then gets stained orange-you know, to make it look more Halloween-ish. I glued it together and finished it with Lacquer.