



Curious Cholo isn't shy about visiting Tom Wirsing in his Colorado workshop.

A PEEK INTO SOME **PRO SHOPS**

Kurt Hertzog

How a woodturner sets up his or her workshop (content and layout) is an extremely personal undertaking that varies based on several factors. Differences can be noted between hobbyist and professional shops and, within both settings, between “one-off” and production setups. What the turner turns, or specializes in, also is key. Many woodturners simply let their workshop evolve on a meandering journey as their needs, funds, and space allow. Others meticulously plan every square foot, including equipment placement, prior to doing anything other than planning.

In addition to factors unique to your own needs, such as available space, budget, and your own woodturning goals, some considerations

are common to every shop. For example, the placement and availability of appropriate electricity impacts anyone setting up shop. Electrical service and shop wiring (including 220-volt outlets or in special cases three-phase power) may require modification and/or dictate placement of equipment. Assuming you can get your equipment in and placed, what about getting your raw materials in, stored as needed, and your debris out? For the penturner, this wouldn't be an issue, but for a production bowl turner, it certainly would be. If your raw materials are delivered as green logs and arrive via truck, you'll need to have a large enough chainsaw working area and sufficient storage for prepped and in-process blanks.

To illustrate how experienced turners with different needs have

set up and use their shops, I visited four well-known woodturners: Cindy Drozda, Keith Gotschall, Trent Bosch, and Tom Wirsing. Each has different specialties and therefore different needs, in addition to the elements common to most turning shops, such as strategically placed sharpening stations, easy access to a bandsaw, convenient tool storage, and good lighting. While at their shops, I took note of their particular needs and how they fulfilled those needs within any constraints they might have had. Along with discussions and photos, which follow in this article, I recorded video of them explaining their shop setups. See the video link sidebar at the end of this article for a virtual tour of the customized workspaces of these turners.



Cindy Drozda's larger stock resides in a separate building from her workshop. As needed, wood can be brought into the shop for acclimating.



This lathe is used for spindle work and is self-contained with compressed air, vacuum hood, task lighting, chucks, tools, and measuring equipment.

Cindy Drozda

Many woodturners are familiar with Cindy Drozda and recognize her distinctive work immediately when seeing the long delicate finials on her ornaments, lidded boxes, and hollow forms. Cindy can turn almost anything on the lathe but is also a talented cabinetmaker. Her current shop is in a stand-alone building, where she practices both crafts. Being an industrial building, it has large at-grade doors perfect for loading and unloading equipment, materials, or finished product. The very high ceilings give an airy feeling and allow for overhead wiring, dust collection routing, and air-filter system mounting.

With her bulk turning stock storage in a separate building (*Photo 1*), her workshop is divided into three separate areas. Her main shop is laid out with the turning area in one open bay and the woodworking shop taking the lion's share of floor space. Through an access door, you can find the finishing and photography room—a separate, clean area without the concern of contaminating dust or debris. Through another door, beyond the finishing room, is Cindy's computer room. Selling her work and tools and maintaining her

website and social media presence take quite a bit of computer time, so it was important to Cindy to have a dedicated space for this activity.

As Cindy reconfigured the building for her needs, she paid considerable attention to the lighting and power distribution. The walls are painted white from floor to ceiling, with overhead lighting maximizing the bright environment. Power and dust collection are routed overhead and dropped to points of use. To help with cleanliness and noise, Cindy located her cyclone vacuum and air compressor outside the building. She has all of the woodturning support equipment, such as bandsaws, drill presses, sanders, and more located around the shop for use as needed.

Her two lathes are set up for different types of work. One is set for larger work and hollow forms, and the other for detail and spindle work (*Photo 2*). She has positioned large dust collection ports right at the bed of the lathe. Storage for chucks, tools, and measuring equipment is located at the lathe, either on shelves underneath or on easy-access racks immediately behind the lathe. Materials that will be used soon are on shelves near the lathes; having them nearby lets

them acclimate to the humidity and be on display for easy selection. Cindy notes, however, that she stores her finial stock in the more controlled environment of a drying cabinet to ensure that special wood is dried and ready for use at any time (*Photo 3*).

Cindy noted that she continues to refine her shop as ideas and new solutions present themselves. ▶



An old freezer has been repurposed as a wood drying and storage cabinet, with the addition of a low-wattage light bulb and vents.

Keith Gotschall

Keith Gotschall's many years of cabinet-making and custom woodturning have transformed his workshop into a multi-purpose, versatile space (Photo 4). Keith's commute from home to workshop is about fifteen feet to a separate building. The wide-open space inside has a few items situated in a fixed place, but everything else is easily moveable via casters or hand truck. Keith says the open floor space makes cleanup easy, and he uses a roll-up dust collector that can be positioned near any machine in use.

A huge window runs most of the length of the front of the building, providing lots of natural light, which is supplemented by overhead lighting located at key equipment locations. The back wall of the building features

a large garage door that allows for easy movement of materials and equipment. Keith has located his large bandsaw right inside this door, where he can process wood on its way into the shop.

To keep the shop noise down as much as possible, Keith has located his air compressor and phase converter in an enclosed cabinet outside the main building (Photo 5). Because Keith often works with green (unseasoned) wood, he has a drying shed right outside the shop door (Photo 6). This well-sized shed is equipped with controls that allow him to dry and store work in process.

Keith's cabinetmaking requires that his shop has lots of equipment that most woodturners wouldn't need, but this doesn't interfere with Keith's turning.

The shapers, jointers, thickness planers, cabinet saw, and other machines are located out of the way and are brought into position as needed. Keith's main working lathe, which handles most of his turning, is located almost dead center in the shop, and a large bowl lathe sits adjacent to it. For heavy-duty work or larger architectural turnings, he uses a long-bed lathe, which when not in use works nicely to support several mini-lathes used for teaching (Photo 7).

Keith's sharpening station is on wheels, so it can be located anywhere in the shop. The cart is designed to be at the proper height for sharpening and holds two grinders with a variety of wheels and jigs. Wall racks provide storage for flat stock, while the roofing trusses spanned with sheathing allow overhead space for turning material. Not only does the overhead storage keep things out of the way, but also its warmer air helps dry in-process pieces not in his drying cabinet outside.

Configured with overhead wiring and electrical drops at key points of use, there are no cords cluttering the floor. Whether woodturning or woodworking, Keith has configured his shop for maximum efficiency and flexibility. But even as well as his shop is set up for various needs, Keith concedes that it is a work in progress and always subject to change.



4 Keith Gotschall's main lathe is located dead center in his workshop, with plenty of space and light.



5 To keep the shop noise down and conserve space, this compressor and phase converter are located in a small enclosure outside the shop.



6 Keith's drying box is located outside and has controls to set and maintain a temperature and humidity for drying.



7 When not in use, a long-bed Nichols lathe capable of large work such as long architectural spindles serves as a sturdy stand for mini-lathes that Keith uses for teaching.

Trent Bosch

Professional woodturner and instructor Trent Bosch conducts three distinct operations that require dedicated workshop space. On his property and well removed from his home are separate buildings that serve his needs for woodturning art, teaching, and his woodturning tools and equipment business. We'll cover only his teaching and woodturning art spaces here.

With the work buildings apart from Trent's house, there is a separation of home and business that is welcome by those working where they live. Trent's art studio building has been repurposed from its original farming use. A big woodlot sits behind it, where logs and big rounds can be prepped with a chainsaw for use by Trent or his students. There is a big sliding door at this end of the building that opens to a large bandsaw used to further prep material as it enters the shop.

The classroom area of this building houses an array of lathes for student use (*Photo 8*). Windows shower the room with natural light. Trent also has installed plenty of overhead and task lighting.

On the wall adjacent to each of the student lathes is a rack containing a full set of tools, including accessory items like calipers and chucks. The wall racks provide easy access for students, encouraging them to keep tools off the lathe bed when not in use; plus they allow for a quick visual check for completeness of the turning sets at the beginning and end of classes. The entire modernization of this building was planned for teaching. Electrical power drops from overhead, so the floors are clear of outlets and cords. Dust collection hoses are also dropped from the ceiling. The sharpening station



8 Trent Bosch's shop, set up for teaching, features multiple workstations in a line with all utilities dropped from overhead.



9 Because Trent's personal work often requires large blanks, his overhead lift system is capable of handling pieces up to two tons.



10 In a separate teaching area, students have access to adjustable workholding stands used when carving, piercing, or otherwise embellishing work after it has been turned.

is conveniently located and well equipped with jigs and fixtures. With task lighting attached to each lathe and generous anti-fatigue matting, the entire teaching area is set up for convenience, safety, and a good learning experience.

Adjacent to the teaching area is Trent's large lathe (*Photo 9*). It is an extremely long-bed, heavy-duty lathe capable of nearly any type of turning. He has an overhead chain lift on a rail to be able to load the lathe with heavy blanks.

For those learning the more artistic aspects of woodturning, Trent has a carving, piercing, woodburning, airbrushing, and sandblasting area. Equipped with adjustable stands to mount the work, Trent and his students can perform nearly any operation with air and/or electric tools (*Photo 10*). Trent has also brought in plenty of dust extraction that can be strategically placed for working in this area. The entire building has been tailored to its purpose and works well for both teaching and for creating artistic works. ▶

Tom Wirsing

Tom Wirsing is well known for his large, stunning platters. Living in Colorado, he can't count on locally available woods for his turning. No chainsaw preparation or pickup truck drop-offs here. Virtually all of his platter woods are specially selected by him and shipped from various dealers. Tom uses a large bandsaw for cutting platter rounds prior to mounting the work on the lathe (*Photo 11*).



Tom Wirsing at the bandsaw, an almost indispensable piece of equipment in any woodturning shop.



Adjusted for proper height, Tom's lathe is located against one wall, with all of the needs for turning right at hand.



Tom is very particular about his grinders and grinding wheels, and his sharpening station is located right behind him when he's at the lathe.

Tom's shop is in a stand-alone structure, separate from his house, so he isn't concerned about noise or dust interfering with the living space of his home. He is an avid cabinetmaker as well as a woodturner, so his shop is equipped for both of these endeavors. With both of these crafts demanding floor space, Tom has only a few pieces of equipment that aren't on mobile bases. This allows him to configure the shop in a dynamic way.

For loading and unloading equipment, raw materials, and finished work—particularly large cabinets, drawers, and tables—Tom's workshop has an at-grade garage door. This door can be left open in the warmer months to allow for ventilation and additional light. Even with plenty of overhead and task lighting positioned at specific locations, the addition of natural light and fresh air is an added benefit.

The layout of the shop, storage, support materials, lighting, and dust extraction were all planned for maximum utility and effectiveness. Of special interest to woodturners is the adjustable hood for dust and chip extraction fitted right to his lathe (*Photo 12*). The hood can be positioned and locked in place to remove dust and debris as it is generated. While it doesn't totally eliminate the need for personal dust protection (like a dust mask or ventilated helmet), it certainly makes for a much cleaner and safer environment.

Another good practice for all turners is adjustable task lighting. Tom has a high-intensity, positionable light source attached to the lathe that is protected from accidental breakage by design. For efficiency, Tom has his lathe near one wall that contains tool storage, a table to his right that can be used for incidental needs, and his sharpening station immediately behind him. When he begins turning, everything he needs is at hand.

Tom employs very particular methods for sharpening his tools. He has made special grinder stands for his two grinders with special wheels set for his typical needs (*Photo 13*). Making mainly platters, he uses bowl gouges and scrapers. His grinders are set not only for his desired grind angles, but also for the types of metals within his turning tools. He has tool steels and special shapes that he favors. He is able to simply turn around and touch up any of the tools he uses quickly, easily, and accurately.

Even as well as Tom's workshop appears to be working for him, he says that it is a continuing work in progress. ■

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You read the article— now see the video!

Kurt Hertzog visited the workshops of the four turners noted in this article.



The accompanying online video gives you a peek into their workshops, with each turner providing a guided tour complete with shop setup tips and ideas. To see the video, visit tiny.cc/proshops or scan the QR code with your mobile device.

