

# Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT HERTZOG

**1** Shellac is an easily applied finish that cleans up nicely. It has many attractive properties, including as an intermediary between other finishes **2** A shellac finish can really make grain pop. While it can give your turnings a stunning look, it provides limited protective qualities. **3** The real aficionados make their own shellac freshly as needed from shellac flake and alcohol. Flake, like mixed shellac, has a finite shelf life

**I just found a can of shellac. It is about eight to 10 years old. I know it is well past its expiration date. Is there any way to revitalise it or should I just toss it?**

Your idea of just tossing it is the best since there isn't any effective revitalisation method that I know of. Mixed shellac does have a finite shelf life. Being that old, it certainly has passed its useful prime. The effective date of any shellac commercially mixed and in a can is about three years max. At least, that is what the manufacturer will tell you. But that is stretching it a bit in my opinion. Those who mix their own shellac with flake and alcohol know that the flake itself, even properly stored, has a far longer, yet still finite, usable shelf life. Shellac is a marvellous finish for those 'shelf queen' turnings that will get gentle and minimal handling – looks great but doesn't provide too much durable handling or abuse protection. Just for chuckles, you can test any shellac usability by taking a bit of it and putting a couple of drops on a piece of glass or a mirror. Let it harden. I'm sure yours won't do anything except be a tacky blob, never truly hardening. That is the test for the efficacy of any shellac. If it truly hardens as the alcohol flashes off, it is good to use. If not, it's garbage since it will never do anything except jelly up. BTW... Most of the rub and buff products are a mixture of shellac and various oils. Apply, provide friction heat, and voila, a quick, shiny finish. If you are more curious about shellac, you can find more information from me in *WT285* (11/15) and *WT306* (6/17).





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4 Good practice is to perform heavy work directly over or close to the toolrest post. Downward forces there are transmitted directly to the banjo. 5 When you shop for toolrests, check out the fabricated rests available. The many sizes and shapes offer improved service and features 6 Some fabricated rests offer a hardened steel rod attached as the lip. It is almost impervious to dings, dents, and other damage from abuse 7 Speciality designs available offer platforms for box-type work as well as adjustable curve positions for bowl-type work

**I have a 'fill in the blank' lathe. I was trying to make a bowl and immediately my toolrest broke. Thankfully I didn't get hurt. Here is my toolrest and I was wondering where can I buy another one? Can a different brand fit into my 'fill in the blank'? What would you recommend?**

I'm glad you were fortunate and not injured with your breakage. The lathe is one of the shop machines that is deceiving. Even with no moving cutting edges, rotating machinery does require respect. Serious situations can develop in mere moments. I am unsure how or why your toolrest broke. Your comment 'immediately my toolrest broke' tends to indicate it was flawed out of the box. I'm curious about that situation. Is this the first time you've ever used it? Is the toolrest right from the box? Has it worked for other items and only broke when you tried to make a bowl? From the image and apparent wear, I'm guessing that it has been working nicely all along and when you overstressed it, it broke. What is particularly telling is the break in the casting. I'd suggest that you got a catch that put an incredible stress force into the toolrest. Most likely you were working too far out on the wing for the level of forces presented. I've seen cast toolrests break on initial use but it is extremely rare from my experience. Many times, inexpensive equipment has lower-quality castings that aren't as durable as the components in higher-priced machines. I'm betting that this isn't infant failure as suggested but a huge stress situation amplified by the moment arm working farther out on the wing. The best advice I can share is to do your heavy work directly over, or as close as possible to, the tool post,

especially in heavy load situations. Forces presented there are directed down into the banjo and lathe bed. The farther you stray away from the tool post, the more likely you are to break things when you ask too much of the casting. The farther away from the post, the more you stress things with downward force. You can replace that broken rest with another OEM part, a different brand with the same post diameter, or a different style. Replacement toolrests should be readily available at your local retailer or via online order. Since your toolrest appears to be the standard 5/8in (0.625in) tool post, you'll find plenty to choose from. The two most used tool post sizes are 5/8in and 1in diameter. My suggestion is that you replace it with a fabricated steel rest rather than the cast type. There are many manufacturers offering different styles and designs of fabricated toolrests. Although they are probably more costly, I think you'll find them far more durable and able to absorb the potential abuse that occasionally occurs through use. I recommend that you get one of these that fits your tool post diameter that is reasonable short. The longer it is, the more you'll be tempted to work further out on the end rather than moving the toolrest as needed. That working close to the tool post technique along with a fabricated toolrest as a replacement should be a big improvement. You also might want to look at your bowl turning techniques. What tools do you use with what types of cuts and what point of the bowl creation process? Depending on the material, size of the work, rpm, tool type and sharpness, along with the varying cuts available, you may be asking too much of the tools and equipment. A good rule to live by in woodturning is sharp tools and light touch. That is usually the winning ticket for most turning situations.





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8 A handy shop tip for solvents is to have small chemical bottles with the six most-used solvents, in order of aggressiveness, already decanted and ready for use 9 Be certain any transfer bottle is clearly marked with the contents. I keep this plastic tote handy for use right at the lathe. Precise dispensing and then capped

**I have a problem getting CA glue to adhere to gaboon ebony. It's like there are spots in the wood that repel the glue. I've tried prepping the surface by giving it a clean with an alcohol wipe, just in case it was oil from my fingers, but it still has spots that the glue literally just seeps away from. I'm lost.**

I'm pretty sure your issues with gluing gaboon ebony aren't from oils from your fingers. It is the high oil content found in the wood. This will cause problems with gluing even when you try to remove it. Obviously, an alcohol wipe isn't getting the job done. What may help is to prep

everything for gluing, clean the areas to be glued with a generous amount of acetone on disposable paper towel using a concerted cleaning/wiping effort. Repeat that degreasing process as much as is needed then glue your pieces as soon as the acetone flashes off from the cleaned surface. Do this before the natural oils can migrate from the wood interior to the surface. Denatured alcohol may work as a cleaning agent but I've always found degreasing efforts are more successful with acetone. This degreasing then gluing technique will work with many of the other species that have a high oil content. Do use your PPE as appropriate for the chemical and safely dispose of your paper towels when dry.



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