



The Journey from Penturning to Penmaking

by Kurt Hertzog

Shopping for Stuff—Oh, Boy!

Nothing is more uniform in the woodturning (and penturning) world than everyone's desire to shop for and explore new stuff—new tools, new materials, new magic sprinkles! Many of these items may not be exactly new; but regardless, I offer them as things you might want to look into in the joyous pursuit of shopping for toys. The disclaimer is that while I've used these products and I like them, I do not have any financial stake in any of them.

DNS PEN KITS

Most pen kits, even the higher-end ones, are made in high volume and are designed to hit a price point. Though many penturners say they would like a high-end kit, they really vote with their wallets and won't pay the price it takes for the really high-end stuff. For those who have made just about all the kits available and found them somewhat lacking, there is a family of kits available that really has brought precision and fine manufacturing to the kit world. The DNS kits (Drechselstube Neckarsteinach) are in a class by themselves. Designed and made in Germany, they remind me of a Mercedes, where precision and function come first. The DNS kits are available in both pen and pencil kits and allow you the freedom to create something unique. I haven't seen them, but have heard that there are fountain pen kits available now as well. The

catalog and instruction book includes design ideas and even has graph paper to sketch out your ideas. The company offers a complete set of everything you could need from the design and product catalog through the kits, drills, pen mills, and even the adhesives (see **Fig. 1**). The starter kit will cover your needs to get started (see **Fig. 2**). Currently, there are no distributors in the United States, but you can order through Phil Irons (www.philirons.com) in the United Kingdom. They are a bit different from anything else you've ever made.

HENRY TAYLOR ELF TOOLS

If you are looking for something to try for after-turning decoration, you may wish to try the *Henry Taylor Elf* tools. The product family includes the Elf tool with optional cutting inserts, a few specialty tools to prepare the surface, a short-bristled clean-out brush (see **Fig. 3**), and a helpful video of tool usage featuring Nick Agar. The video is available on YouTube, as well as in DVD form, and it gives you more than enough information to get you off and running. The tool itself uses different cutter heads to create features in your turning similar to other spiraling tools. The tricks to using these tools rests in the speed and feed of the material and the presentation of the cutter face. You can read the book or watch the video, but practice makes perfect.



Fig. 1

The DNS product offerings include a well-illustrated product and design catalog, as well as all the kits, including the support tools and adhesives.



Fig. 2

Manufactured by Schmidt, everything in the kit is top shelf—from the inkfills to the finely made kit components.



Fig. 3

The *Henry Taylor Elf* tools are familiar in their appearance and construction, yet quite different with their decorating potential.



Fig. 4

The M3 materials are available in an assortment of unique patterns and sizes to cater to making pens as well as other turning projects.



Fig. 5

The material functions just like wood, so all your drilling, turning, and finishing tools and techniques will work fine.

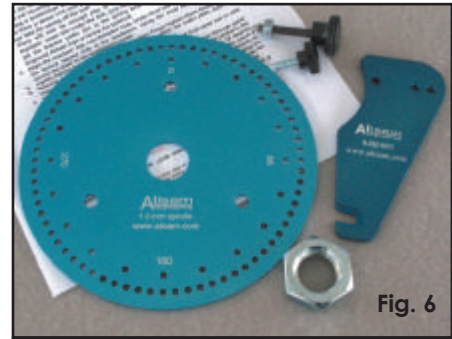


Fig. 6

The Alisam indexing system is provided with the anodized aluminum parts, hardware, and assembly and use instruction sheet.

My best suggestion is to face-off an end-grain piece of hardwood and experiment. I must admit, the results can be stunning when you hit it. I didn't hit it often, but it certainly isn't the tool's fault. The tools are typical Henry Taylor—well made and reasonably priced. The rest is time at the lathe to create special decorations on your work. The *Henry Taylor Elf* tools are available through most major turning tool retailers.

M3 MATERIALS

Though not brand new, the M3 (Macro-Molecular Metals) materials may not be as widely known as they deserve to be (see Fig. 4). As a technology that was created in the space program, the proprietary M3 process can create some unique designs in a metal that processes like wood. M3 has some interesting properties. It is lighter than metal, yet looks like metal and is scratch resistant. The most interesting characteristic is that it cuts and sands the same as wood. Rather than cutting like metal that cuts with woodturning tools, it really acts like wood. The turning process and the sanding process is so wood-like, it's hard to believe that it's metal. The only special consideration is the particular polishes that can be used to bring the finished product to a superb finish. It is an A and B material that is used one at a time. For those who are interested in metal patination, the M3 materials react with the same chemicals. The M3 metal pen blanks are pricey, but they certainly will let you create something out of the ordinary (see Fig. 5). More information about the materials can be found at www.metalpenblanks.com and through woodturning supply retailers.

ALISAM INDEXING SYSTEM

For those of you who have a built-in indexing system on your lathe, you are aware of all the things for which it is extremely useful. If you are doing segmented work, drillings, on-lathe layout, or after-turning adornment, it is a valuable aid in keeping things looking smart and accurate. What if your lathe is not equipped with an indexing system? There are many ways to make "homemade" systems and many of them work nicely. However, if your time

is limited or you aren't that handy in the jigs and fixtures category, there are add-on versions available. Alisam Engineering has a kit for mini-lathes, as well as others (see Fig. 6). The fabricated parts are aluminum with a top-shelf anodizing job. The hardware is quality, rather than the inexpensive imported type. Installing the system couldn't be much easier. Everything can be done with a screwdriver and crescent wrench (and you really don't need the crescent wrench). There are various selections available for the lockpin, providing for almost any rotation stepping desired (see Fig. 7). The indexing system for the mini-Jet and other lathes is available directly from the manufacturer at Alisam Engineering. They can be reached at PO Box 75, Lima, New York 14485, or on the web at www.alisam.com.



Fig. 7

The system allows for almost any needed adjustment by using the drilled holes in the index wheel and the positions available on the locking pin assembly.

CACTUS JUICE

There are many suppliers of stabilized turning blanks for pens, bottle stoppers, and more, and there are vendors who will take in work for stabilization (see Fig. 8). However, for all the "home brew stabilizers" out there, there hasn't been much that was safe or successful. Check out the Cactus Juice stabilization system from TurnTex if you would like to try a reasonably priced home-use system that will give good results. A variety of materials can be bought, including the stabilization resin, dye compounds, and even a vacuum chamber (see Fig. 9). The MSDS (material safety



Fig. 8

Though there are stabilized blanks and stabilization services available, the Cactus Juice Stabilizing Resin lets you stabilize your own materials.



Fig. 9

The resin, colorants, and even a vacuum chamber are available for beginning your own stabilization at home.



Fig. 10

The Easy Wood Tools Easy Pen Turner is sized and weighted for the penturner and sports a sharp-looking bubinga handle in the EWT design.

data sheets) says that everything in the system is safe and nontoxic. According to the system inventor, you can even freeze the cactus juice with no ill effects to its efficacy. You can't, however, store it above 85°. It's fairly simple to use: "Take your blanks to be stabilized, put them into the vacuum chamber, submerge in the resin, and draw a vacuum on the chamber." Time required varies by the material porosity and your desired outcome, but it is a relatively quick process. After the resin has been drawn into the material, you bake the blanks in a non-food-use toaster oven to cure the resin. Once cool, you are ready to use the blanks. There is a wealth of information on the TurnTex website (www.turntex.com) for you to learn about the material and process.

EWT R2 cutter on the now familiar EWT design handle. This 2" radius cutter allows for everything from roughing blanks through finishing cuts, with the corners slightly swept back and out of the way (see Fig. 11). The beauty of all the carbide cutter tools is that the user needs only to rotate the cutter to present a brand-new edge until all are spent. The replacement cutters are readily available and easily changed for those who would favor the tools with the carbide cutter edges. The tool's size and weight have been tailored for the penturner, so that handling is comfortable and dexterous. Not only does this tool work nicely, but the bubinga handle makes it a good-looking tool as well. Available from Craft Supplies USA and Easy Wood Tools.

EWT PENTURNER TOOL

With the coming of age of carbide tools for woodturners, this certainly would be a time for the penturners to have their own specialty tool (see Fig. 10). The folks at Easy Wood Tools (EWT) now have a penturning tool in their product line. The *Easy Wood Tools Penturner Tool* sports the

PAUL HUFFMAN VISE

The Paul Huffman vise and press design goes back quite awhile. Marketed exclusively by Roy Rabaldo at www.classicnib.com, this nicely built and sharp-looking fixture works well for drilling pen blanks (see Fig. 12). With the V-shaped jaw position, it accommodates round,

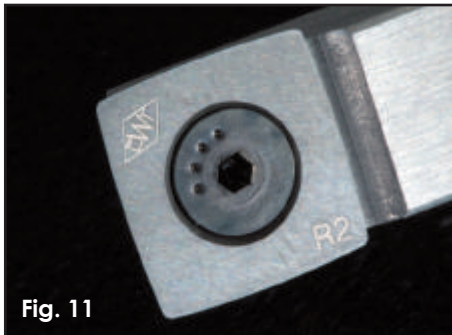


Fig. 11

The carbide cutter has a 2" radius on the cutter face, which keeps the corners out of the way, unless you desire to use them for a feature.

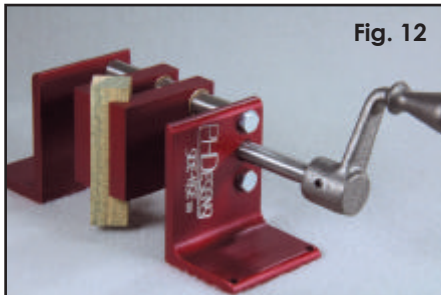


Fig. 12

The PHDesigns pen-drilling vise from Paul Huffman is not only a solid performer in the pen blank and bottle stopper drilling arenas, but it is also a sharp-looking fixture.

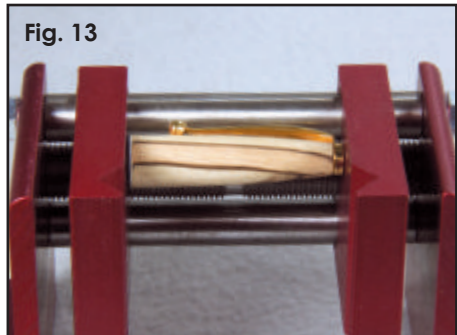


Fig. 13

Similar to most drilling fixtures, the Huffman vise does a great job of performing as an assembly press as well.

square, rectangular, and even irregular-shaped blanks. The anodizing really sets off this fixture in the shop. Four mounting holes allow you to fasten the vise to a wood block for added stability both in footprint and for clamping. The clamp construction materials, fit and finish, and ability to accommodate not only drilling, but press-assembly tasks, make it a valuable addition to the penturner's shop (see **Fig. 13**).

MORE TO COME IN A FUTURE COLUMN

I've tried to include a mix of tools, processes, fixtures, and kits, and I hope you found something to add to your shopping list. There are many more things to show and discuss, but space dictates that they wait for a future column. Perhaps we'll group those with some additional shop tips and tricks.

In a past issue, we spoke about where to go to learn more about penmaking. I'm pleased to announce that the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts will be in their third season of offering pen classes for those interested in more in-depth and advanced hands-on sessions. You can find out more at Arrowmont.org.

Kurt Hertzog

A professional woodturner, demonstrator, and teacher, Kurt Hertzog enjoys the continuum of woodturning, from making his own turning tools to photographing his finished turnings.

Kurt is a regular feature columnist for both *Woodturning Design* and *Woodturning* magazines, one of the five Council Members of the Pen Makers Guild, and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Woodturners.

Kurt's work has been featured in the American Association of Woodturners "Rounding The Corners" Exhibit, and he has been published in *Woodturning Design*, *American Woodturner*, *Woodturning*, *Pen World*, and *Stylus* magazines. You can see his work on his website at www.kurthertzog.com.



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Ornaments by Kurt Hertzog