

Since becoming a member of IWCS in about 2001, I initially started a wood collection of the standard specimen sizes. For several reasons, primarily the fact that I enjoy making things from wood, the 3" x 6" x 1/2" specimens were given away in favor of a collection of my Maple Leaf Lapel Pins. It soon became obvious that a few others were also collecting different forms of "Wood Art" including Pens, Eggs, Bells and a few others. More recently a new idea came to mind after one of my granddaughters asked if I could make some "Wooden Buttons" to accent some of her knitting projects. She was very pleased with the several buttons I made from some rare and beautifully colored woods, and a lot of other folks were quite impressed with them as well.

A number of these buttons were shared with some of the ladies in IWCS and an idea for a new wood collection medium was born. Since there are very few ladies in our group who actually collect wood in any form, perhaps this could be the spark to get them started. To my knowledge, this has not been done before, so I'm throwing out the idea to determine if there may be an interest.

When granddaughter Kendra and I first embarked on the project we discussed just what we wanted to achieve. It was agreed that it was important to accent the wood grain and color as much as possible. Several designs of the button face and back were considered and created. We settled on a fairly plain face that was slightly dished and a back that had a raised portion about 1/32" high, just a bit larger in diameter than the thread holes. It was also determined that the flat grain orientation of the wood was preferable to end grain or vertical grain as it best displayed the beauty of the wood. I will describe below, the process that we are now using. Since neither of us can be considered master wood turners, I'm sure there are many other turners who are far more accomplished than us on the lathe, so there may well be better ways to get the job done.

TOOLS REQUIRED

Most standard lathe tools with which you are comfortable, will suffice for the actual turning process. You will also need a faceplate that has screw holes

to fasten it to a wood block. A 4-Jaw chuck for the final button finishing process will also be required. One special tool we used is a thin parting tool made from a large hacksaw blade which saves a lot of wood when parting the buttons off the wood blank.

GETTING STARTED

Select a wood species that you'd like to make into buttons and laminate, if required to get a thickness of about 2-3 inches. Mark the button outline on the flat grain and saw it out on a band saw. I found it worthwhile to saw it a little oversize to allow for truing up the round when it's on the lathe. Below is a photo of the button blank.



Sawn Button Blank

Next, glue the sawn blank to the wood block screwed to your faceplate. I use the thick CA Glue for this operation. It is also wise to check to **make sure**



Button Blank Glued to the Faceplate

the gluing surface is fairly square as it minimizes the turning to make it truly round and has a smooth surface. At this point, turn the blank until it is truly round and sand as required. It is best to use a tailstock for this turning as it can be unstable without it. You will find that the end grain on two sides of the rounded blank will be somewhat rougher than the rest. A higher turning speed and a sharp tool will remove

most of this, but additional sanding is also required. Once it is ready for turning buttons, remove the tailstock and dish out or otherwise shape the button face as shown in the next



Shaping Button Face



Sanding Button Face

photos. Shaping and sanding the button face at this point is a real timesaver as it is much easier than when it is clamped in the 4-Jaw chuck.

Next, determine the thickness of your button and using the thin parting tool, make a cut leaving about 3/4" at the center of the button. Now, make another cut that will leave about 1/16" raised surface on the back of the button when you part it off the blank. At this point, repeat the process as required to get all the buttons from the blank before doing the final finishing. Also, when you take the last one off, flatten the surface of the wood block on the faceplate to make ready for gluing on the next blank.

Before the final finishing of the button, mark and drill the required holes to make it look like a real button. Use a small countersink bit to bevel the holes on both sides of the buttons.

Now you'll want to get out your 4-Jaw chuck to prepare for finishing the backs of the buttons. I've found that it is quite helpful to make some leather grippers to go inside the jaws of the chuck to protect the button edges.

Two or three rings of leather about 1/8" thick works quite well for this. I then put in one button face forward and the next one with the back exposed. At this point, flatten the raised portion and the outer portion of the button and



Finishing the Button Back

sand as required. (You will find that the smallest diameter button in the lot is best to be used as the inner button as it allows for more firm clamping of the larger buttons.) Of course, the back side of it will need to be finished in the same way.

The final finishing of the buttons required a bit of trial and error work as the pressure from most spray guns will blast them off the surface on which you have carefully placed them. I solved this problem by arranging a number of small pedestals, made from PVC pipe about 3/4" long and a headless brad in the middle. One of the thread holes in the button is then placed over the brad which holds it in place quite well while spraying. Four coats of a good grade of lacquer on the front and two or three on the back is usually sufficient. In some cases, a coat of sanding sealer on each side, prior to the lacquer provides a better final finish.



Thin Parting Tool



Finished Buttons



Finished Buttons