

It's a Small World



The turnings exemplified by the pieces in this gallery illustrate some of the decorative range within this nearly lost art of ornamental turning, known as OT.

When applied to a carefully designed piece, OT can enhance a plain-turned piece with a subtle level of embellishment that supports and accents the natural beauty of the wood. OT can also completely define all surfaces of a piece, which is highly effective when the figure of the wood is muted, as with African Blackwood.

Practiced today by no more than a few hundred artisans worldwide, ornamental turners use specialized lathes, with custom and often esoteric apparatuses, to produce a limitless range of decorative effects.

See page 46 to learn how to build an ornamental lathe and turn projects.



A box lid with a six-lobe rose pattern includes five bumps between high lobes.

James Harris, Red Rock, Texas

Above: "Bamboozled." Myrtle burl, African Blackwood, black bamboo; 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ ×7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". "This piece represents a minimalist approach to ornamental turning, where the technique is used to create a unique decorative lid on an otherwise undecorated object. The lid has a spiral-fluted pattern executed on the dome form. The blackwood lid mount for the lid is decorated in a bricklay pattern cut with a concave half-round bit to create a vertical cutting frame. A tiger's-eye cabochon accents the top."



Gorst du Plessis, New Orleans

Left: "Reciprocated Box." Cocobolo and African Blackwood; 10x2¾". "The cocobolo box's wood pattern was so striking, especially as the curves of the cuts gave it movement as you walked around it." *Far left:* "3 Gold Bowls," each about ¾" tall and 2" to 3" diameter. "My three little African Blackwood bowls were cutoffs from other projects. I gold-leafed the insides using Jacques Vesery's technique. The pattern is cut at .00002" difference—it is amazing what the eye can see."



**Al Collins
Lawndale, California**

Left: "Airbox." African Blackwood body with lid inlaid with boxwood and pink ivory; 2½x2½". "This was a new piercing adventure to bring out the interior. My challenge was to complete the pierce-cutting with a loose plug to enable pre-finishing the interior." *Below:* "Mopane Box." Mopane body with interior of African Blackwood, and pink ivory; 2x2½". "Mopane is a beautiful wood that takes ornamentation well."



Dave Arnold, New Albany, Indiana

Left: "Ivory Tower." Holly bowl, figured Makore lid, holly finial; 8½x5½". *Far left:* "Bamboo Box." Body from boxwood; lid and stand from Macassar ebony; 5x3". "You don't have to have an ornamental lathe to do ornamental work. I turned and decorated 'Bamboo Box' on my conventional General 260 lathe using a Foredom flex tool with a ⅛" beading cutter mounted on the tool post."

**Jon Sauer
Pacifica, California**

“Three Castles.” African Blackwood and pink ivory; 3" to 5" tall and 1¼" to 2¼" diameter. “The inspiration for the ‘Castles’ was Holtzapffel’s book on ornamental turning and Neuschwanstein, the Bavarian castle. As a woodturner of small items, a chess set has always been in the works, so these could be the rooks. The pieces were made using conventional indexing on a Holtzapffel lathe, utilizing the vertical, horizontal, and drilling cutting frames. Each individual cut is made one at a time.”



Joshua Salesin, Santa Cruz, California

“Pierced Box Set.” African Blackwood, snakewood, and tiger’s-eye quartz gemstone; boxes range from 2¼x1¼" to 3¼x3". “This set of three boxes with matching interior and exterior carved patterns was fashioned using an antique rose-engine lathe. The screw-top lid features hand-cut threads, and the pierced-through detail adds a delicate quality. The design evolved out of 18 months of repeated experiments, variations, and refinements. Part of what spurred me was the opportunity to explore how various elements come into focus when changing scale. Even more, the box form in general, with its multiple surfaces—hidden and exposed, flat and round, convex and concave—provides a perfect canvas for a few of the infinite possibilities of ornamentation.”

**Jon Magill
Clinton, Washington**

Right: “Waves of Change.” Threaded box of African Blackwood; 2½x2¼". “The combination of various rosettes and the ability to tip the tool at an angle make the possible patterns via this technique nearly infinite.” *Far right:* “Thorny.” Holly threaded box with cocobolo insert; 2½x2¾". “This illustrates the addition of a geometric pattern to a primarily plain-turned piece. I was inspired by the wavy-thorny edges of the holly leaves as I started working on this box. I devised a pattern that reminded me of the leaf edges and that brought it all together for me.”

Bonnie Klein, Renton, Washington

Box with threaded lid. Acrylic with rose-engine work inside; 1¼x2½". "Although I enjoy using various woods for the OT work, I particularly like the challenge of working with acrylic. Since the rose-engine work in acrylic can't be polished without losing crispness, the cut must be absolutely clean right off the cutter. As you look through the piece, any flaws or defects would show up when the outside is highly polished. I've been doing OT work on my Lawler lathe for nearly 15 years."



**Jim Richardson
Sierra Madre, California**

Lidded vase. Grafted claro and English walnut, African Blackwood, and bloodwood; 7½x4½". "This piece exhibits spherical fluting (18 flutes), piercing (9 bloodwood pearls showing), and rose-engine work (18 lobes). The walnut vase has a wall thickness that tapers from ½" at the base to ¼" at the top. The detail photo of the inside of the lid

shows rose-engine work on the blackwood lid and bottom of the bloodwood finial. All the ornamental work is based on 18 or 9 elements to give even, consistent spacing."



Len Scherock
Mount Pleasant, Michigan

Right: "Tazza." Turned from six pieces of African Blackwood with 50 moonstones around the rim; 6×5". The piece won first place in the 50th anniversary competition of the London-based Society of Ornamental Turners. *Below:* "Kaleidoscope." African Blackwood and red chacate; 9×3". "This is one of a trio of the same design but incorporating different woods and ornamentation."



Bill Brinker, Boulder, Colorado

Above: Three 3½"-diameter picture frames and two 2⅝"-long kaleidoscope pendants. "The frames are cased in sterling silver with gem-set 18k gold appliques on a guilloché enamel ground. The guilloché kaleidoscopes have 18k gold mounts and rock-crystal cabochon diffusers." *Left:* Close-up of 2⅝"-long kaleidoscope pendant, this one set with diamonds. "The optical object consists of natural semiprecious gems suspended in liquid coupled with a rutilated quartz cabochon diffuser."



Robert Sakauye, Morgan Hill, California

Above: "Three Bowls." African Blackwood, boxwood, tulipwood, and bloodwood; each ¾" tall and 2" to 2¼" diameter. Left: "Top Box." Boxwood, bloodwood, and African Blackwood; 3×2½". "I have been fascinated with using the different rosettes in combination with the cutting frame to produce the beautiful patterns on the wood. When using different colored woods combined with the rosette pattern, the patterns are multiplied, as can be seen in the mini bowls."



Randy Knapp, Brookings, Oregon

"Ornamental Parlor Scope." African Blackwood, faux ivory, acrylic, and lamp-worked glass; 10×12×6". "One interesting thing on the parlor scope is the acrylic object cell installed on the ivory rotator with a four-lead left-hand thread I cut on my Lawler lathe. Paul Fletcher, an OT master from England, is my inspiration. I met Paul through some collaborative work we did on kaleidoscopes. I was totally amazed with what he could do with his rose engine. I had never seen such precision done in wood before. Then Paul taught me how to make my own lathe, which is similar to the lathe published in this issue. Once I had it working and understood what to do, I made another lathe in metal. Now I am working on my fourth lathe. I enjoy building the lathes as much as using them.

"A person could spend a lifetime trying to learn all the different aspects of rose-engine work alone."

