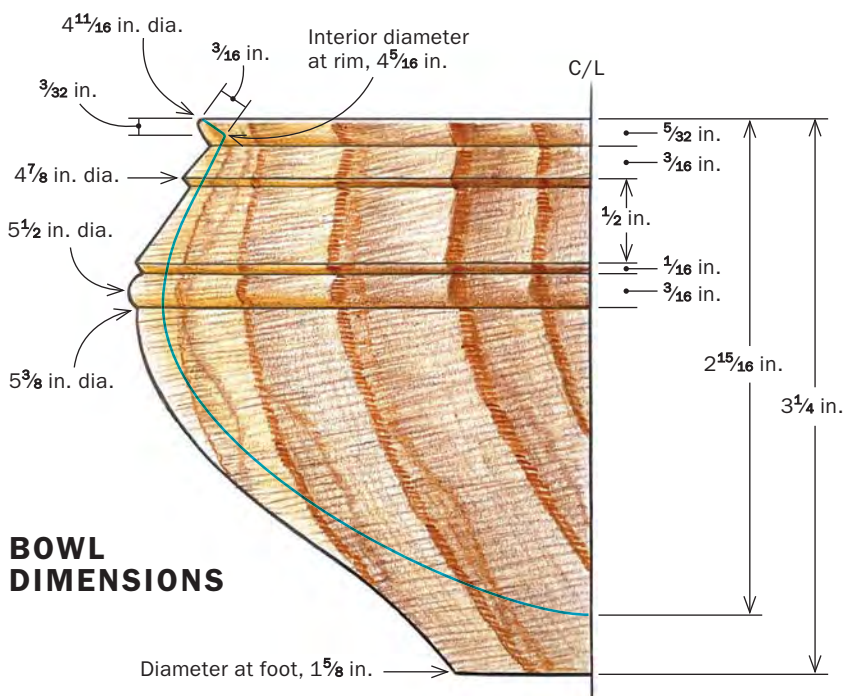




Turning a Southwestern Bowl

A signature piece that takes cues from classic ceramics

BY MATT MONACO



I see this bowl as wooden pottery. I've made scores of iterations of it, and I think of it as my signature piece. Growing up in the American Southwest, I came to love the ceramic vessels made by indigenous potters there. And later, when I was working as an in-house production turner at ShackletonThomas Furniture and Pottery in Vermont, I was lucky enough to work in proximity to master potters. From those two sources I developed a deep appreciation for vessels with a clean, classical simplicity of shape. I also learned that fine detail, if properly handled, won't distract from an overall form but instead will provide punctuation in the flow of the piece's silhouette, helping to clarify and complete the visual statement.

Roughing down and shaping outside

I begin the bowl by bandsawing a blank, drilling a centered pilot hole in its rim face, and then mounting it on a wormscrew chuck. After truing up the exterior of the bandsawn cylinder, I true both flat faces.



TURN THE EXTERIOR

Threading the blank. After bandsawing a cylindrical blank and drilling a pilot hole into the center of the top face, mount it on a wormscrew chuck.



True up the bowl blank. Using a bowl gouge with a swept-back grind, first make truing cuts across the cylindrical exterior of the blank, then true up the two flat faces.



Sizing the foot. Before shaping the exterior of the bowl, use calipers to transfer the interior size of a four-jaw chuck to the blank. This will determine the size of the mounting tenon (which will later become the bowl's foot).



Shape the exterior. After some initial rough shaping with a swept-back bowl gouge, refine the exterior shape with a flat-ground bowl gouge.



Tapered tenon. Once you have refined the exterior curve of the bowl, shape the tenon at the foot, giving it a slight taper.



SHAPING THE RIM

Reversal. To prepare for hollowing the bowl's interior—and shaping the upper inch or so of the exterior—reverse the blank, and mount the dovetailed tenon in a four-jaw chuck.

I'll do most of the roughing and shaping of the bowl's exterior with the blank mounted on the wormscrew chuck. But before that, I set a pair of calipers to the inside span of a four-jaw chuck and transfer the measurement to the foot of the bowl blank. After roughly shaping the lower curve of the bowl, I cut a tenon to the caliper marks. I give the tenon slightly dovetailed sides, which will let me mount the bowl firmly in the four-jaw chuck when I reverse the blank to hollow the inside. (Eventually, the tenon will be reshaped and become the foot of the bowl.) Next, I get the bowl's outer curve close to where I want it. I also establish the width of the margin at the top of the bowl that will encompass the fine detail from the main bead to the rim.



The beveled band below the rim. After truing up the top face of the bowl, make an initial sweeping cove at the rim.



The bead at the base of the rim. Having smoothed the outer shape from rim to foot with a spear scraper, use a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. shallow detail gouge to form the lower bead.

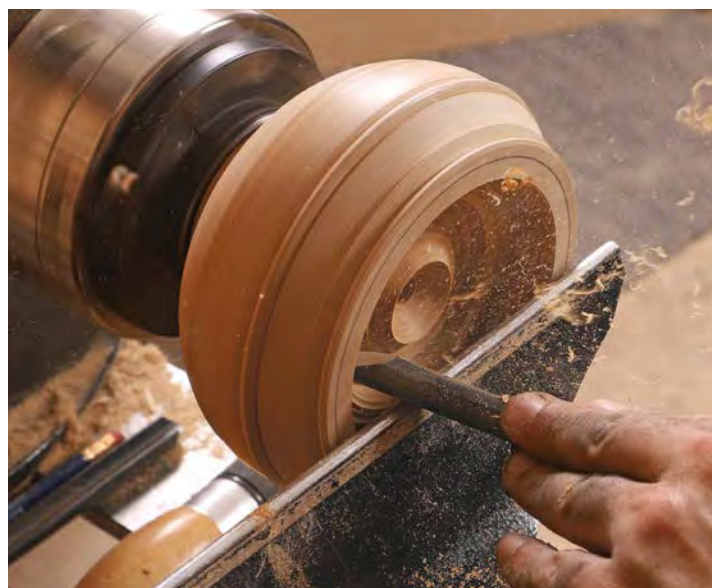


Shaping the rim bead. After turning the bead at the rim with a spindle gouge, finalize its surface with a shear scraper.



INTO THE HOLLOWING

How deep do you go? You can use a twist bit marked with tape to drill a depth hole that will guide the hollowing of the bowl.



Excavator. Begin the rough hollowing at the depth hole and move outward, using a flat-ground deep-fluted gouge. Then, as here, use a swept-back deep-fluted gouge to hollow the incurved area under the rim.

Getting the rim right. The swept-back deep-fluted gouge is Monaco's tool of choice while refining the beveled upper surface of the rim.



Finishing up inside. With the flat-ground deep-fluted gouge, take the bowl to final depth and then smooth the walls right down to the bottom.

Detail work outside and hollowing inside

To refine the rough shape of the outside of the bowl and add detail, I remove it from the wormscrew chuck, turn it around, and mount it in the four-jaw chuck. I true up the bowl's profile below the top margin and add the bead details and the beveled bands.

With those complete, I use a drill bit fitted in a long handle to enlarge and deepen the hole left by the wormscrew chuck. I wrap tape on the bit as a depth gauge and drill to within about $\frac{3}{8}$ in. of the shoulder of the tenon. This will be my rough depth guide as I hollow the bowl. I start hollowing at the center and progress outward, cutting downward roughly midway into the bowl. After excavating inside the incurving upper walls of the bowl, I continue with deeper hollowing, again beginning at the center and working outward.

Once the interior is finish-turned, I dry-sand inside and out with 220-grit paper, and then wet-sand with food-safe oil, beginning with 220 and going up to 600. I follow that with carnauba wax and give the bowl a buffing inside and out.



On with the oil. Before removing the bowl from the four-jaw chuck, dry-sand the interior and exterior with 220-grit sandpaper, then wet-sand with mineral oil and 320- and 400-grit paper. After that, buff with carnauba wax.



FINALLY THE FOOT

Turn a jam chuck. To finalize the foot, mount the bowl on a jam chuck sized to the bowl's rim. Use calipers to measure the interior diameter of the rim, then transfer that span to the face of the scrap you're using to make the chuck. Take your time turning the flange on the jam chuck, aiming for a snug fit.

The third mounting

To complete the turning at the base of the bowl, I make a jam chuck to fit inside the rim. After mounting a circular scrap on the headstock, I scribe a circle with calipers just shy of the interior diameter of the rim. I create a flange to that diameter and about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. deep. Once the bowl is fitted snugly to the jam chuck, I slide the tailstock into place with a live center for additional support while I blend the lower curve of the bowl into the tenon.

For the last bit of turning, I slide the tailstock away and rely on the jam chuck alone to hold the bowl. Working gingerly, I sweep across the bottom of the foot to be sure it is just slightly concave, so the bowl won't wobble. Then I carefully cut the small detail beads that decorate the underside of the foot. Last, I repeat my finishing regimen.

Matt Monaco calls Kansas City, Mo., home, but he turns in shops and schools all across the country.



Transforming the foot. With the bowl mounted on the jam chuck and the tailstock snugged up for support, transform the dovetailed tenon into a foot with a slightly coved base.



Fine detail on the foot. Remove the tailstock and use light pressure with a $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. shallow detail gouge to embellish the bottom of the bowl with delicate grooves.