

# Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers some readers' questions

## Assembly press recommendations

**Question:** As I shop for a pen assembly press, the more advice I read on the internet or hear from friends, the more confused I get. Do you use a pen assembly press? Whose press would you recommend?

**Answer:** Yes, I have an assembly press. Actually, I think I have every one that is made. Over the years I've evaluated the various presses available and often written reviews about them. Some are useable and some are pretty useless. There are three problems I see with any dedicated pen assembly press product. First, to be of much value they must be rigid and therefore pretty heavy. Most are too flexible and flimsy. Unless they are firmly mounted to a base and clamped to a bench, they usually slide around, making operations awkward.

The presses have an arm that must be levered through an arc during the compression process and, for the most part, it does its real work at an inconvenient part of the rotation of the arm swing. There are ways around this issue but it takes fiddling with the settings to position the arm for best operation. For repeated assembly of the same mechanisms this is okay, but to just walk up and assemble something, it is inconvenient.

Finally, the pre-sets, or end stops that can be used to assemble to a pre-set point, are inconvenient and a pretty coarse adjustment. With the typical screw, adjust and locking nut it is difficult to perform fine adjustments precisely. Personally, I'd suggest you bypass the discrete pen assembly press and use that money for some other turning items on your wish list.

I think you can do quite nicely with one of my favourite assembly tools that you already own – the lathe. It is the best pen assembly press available. It provides inherent stability and incredible force as desired, yet superb resolution when needed, a convenient mechanism that uses rotational operation rather than a lever arm – and you already have it in your shop.

A couple of wooden plugs to slip into the tapers, costing virtually nothing but a few moments' turning, are all you need. By positioning the tailstock as needed with the plugs in the headstock and tailstock tapers, you have the best assembly press available with the quill advancement adjustment being forceful, precise, and with resolution and touch.

You also have a press with incredible length range. My suggestion is that you don't make the turned tapers on your wooden plugs fit tightly. Sloppily loose still works great and they can be removed by hand. There are even commercially available plastic plugs that work on this idea. These two simple plugs will work in your shop, deliver all the benefits of a superb assembly press, travel well if you need them elsewhere, and fit the other lathes you'll encounter on your travels. You can get as simple or as fancy as you like and when the faces become too tattered, simply clamp-turn them again or make another set.



Since they will reference and perfect align on the tapered face on the shoulder, I make my plugs removable by hand with a very sloppy taper diameter fit



Your lathe is the greatest pen press you can ever have. It is already there and exhibits all the attributes of a press



You can turn a couple of plugs simultaneously between centres using scrap wood. Here I'm making my tapers from a length of white oak



Lop off the scrap at the ends of the tapers on the bandsaw and these plugs will provide years of service

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KURT HERTZOG

## Damage limitation

**Question:** Should I charge a customer for repairs to a turning that has been damaged? It was perfect when they bought it but now they expect me to repair some damage. Should I fix it for free or, if not, how much should I charge?

**Answer:** You've asked about a very touchy subject. My best answer is, 'it depends'. Only you can really answer this, but let me give you some thoughts. I don't think woodturnings come with a warranty like most consumer products. However, let me pose these questions to you. First and foremost, is it a good customer you hope to continue with or is it someone you'll probably never see again? How long ago did they buy the turning? Was the damage caused by an accident, by the customers' improper use, storage or handling? Did it happen because you did something poorly? Is the damage easily and quickly fixed or will it consume a fair amount of time and effort? Is the damage really repairable? Has the customer been back before asking for some kind of repair? Like return privileges at the store, this can be overdone. Is the turning a one-of-a-kind piece of art or a functional piece? What was the selling price versus the cost to you, time and materials, of repair?

A long-time customer or collector will deserve more lenient consideration than the one-time purchaser from an event. The more recent the purchase was probably fares better than one from many years ago. If the customer's cat knocked a fragile artwork from their fireplace mantel to the far-below floor then you certainly can deal with it in a different way to how you would if your grain orientation at a join is the cause of the damage. Scratches to a table centerpiece bowl requiring a total sanding and refinishing probably will fall lower on

the obligation scale than a custom, high-end jewellery display requiring only a small replacement spindle. That time of repair with respect to the original sale price can certainly have an impact on the decision. How expensive it was might sway your feeling of obligation to the owner.

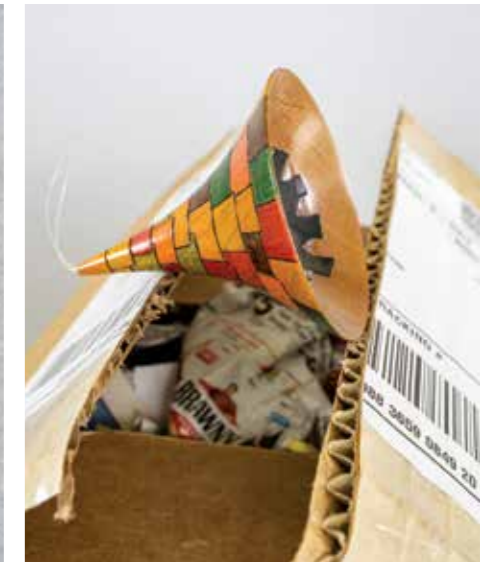
Sometimes, regardless of the owner of the fault, it is easier and less painful to just get it done. Chalk it up to good will and bite the bullet. Do it and move on. Often, it is far better to do it for nothing than to charge some minimal sum. There are occasions when the damage

really is beyond any repair that will be successful. Doing a repair that will always be mediocre and having something that can be an embarrassment out in public really doesn't help your brand. Perhaps this is a good occasion to sell a different piece to them at an attractive price so you can keep the beyond repair piece in your possession.

With all of that said, you need to decide whether the repair is feasible, and an appropriate charge or not, dependent all the factors mentioned. Good luck with your decision.



A replacement egg being test-fitted for a repair. The owner's glass shelf that was above my ornament accidentally slipped from its mount



An eggshell ornament that arrived needing to be 're-egged'. The owner's cleaner accidentally dropped it while dusting the display shelving

## Contract query

**Question:** I've been asked to demonstrate and been sent a contract to sign. Is this normal? Do I need to sign it? Do I need an attorney? If I do it myself, what should I look for?

Most, but not all, woodturning events I've demonstrated at over the years have used a contract for demonstrators. It is rare at club meetings or their events but common at region, national, and international symposia. I can't dispense legal advice about contracts and what you should do but I can tell you that I've personally never retained an attorney for these types of contracts.

Also, if the event has sent you a contract and you can't or won't sign to its terms or mutually agreeable amendments, it will usually 'uninvite'

you to demonstrate. I do read contracts thoroughly to understand what I am signing up for. The contract typically spells out all the details about what will be paid, such as rotation fees, travel reimbursement, hotel and meal allowances, complimentary event admission, etc. The contract also details what is expected of you in the way of number of rotations, duration, pre-event publicity materials, video capture at the event rights, fundraising donation request, and other miscellaneous items.

For the most part, the contract isn't

used as a big legal hammer but more as a way to capture what both sides have agreed to. I'm certain if you decided you were going to change the rules, the event could have recourse based on your signed contract.

Over the past 20 years of my experience demonstrating at and running events, from regional to international, I've never been party to any of these issues from the legal aspects, although on occasion using the contract as a reminder of agreed arrangements has been appropriate.

Send your questions to Kurt's email: [kurt@kurthertzog.com](mailto:kurt@kurthertzog.com)