

## Chat notes on Ornaments by Kurt Hertzog

### Decision 1 – Tree hanging or stand hanging display?

Before you even begin, you're first decision is to decide how your ornament will be displayed. If it is to truly hang on a tree, it needs to be constructed light enough so you can hang it without it flexing the branch and allowing it to fall off. If you are going to display it on a stand, weight is not an issue so you are free to leave your ornament solid (or thicker wall thickness). There is no problem if you want to display a light weight ornament on a stand but you can't hang a heavy ornament on a tree. Deciding on a stand display opens up many avenues to construction and size that are precluded with tree hanging ornaments solely based on the weight of the final result.

### Decision 2 – How ornate or difficult do you want to make?

Depending on your desires and skill levels, you can make a variety of very nice ornaments that are solid. These are simple spindle turnings and can be further decorated with colors, ribbons, etc. A few examples of these are shown on the ornament examples page. No ornaments are difficult once you know some of the tricks and are willing to practice.

Think about the ornament attributes such as size, weight, color, hanging technique, delicateness. Are you going to turn all of the components or do an assembly of components by using shells or other "body" pieces?

### Decision 3 – What materials are you going to use?

If you are going to make an assembly, you already know what some of your constituent parts are made from. If it will be a total creation, you are faced with what to use for materials. Assuming that you are going to use wood, what species should you choose? Green wood works nicely for bird house ornaments. It's usually free and the species is unimportant since it will twist and warp anyway. The natural look. For globe ornaments, the body material can be an good looking wood that turns well. Soft carving types are out! Maples, walnut, exotics, and spaltds will turn well and look nice.

There are only three woods that I believe lend themselves to finials and actually only two are really great. You can use walnut. It turns and finishes well. It will go with a variety of other materials but it's the third out of three in my opinion. The world's best finial material, bar none, is African Blackwood. Don't confuse black with Ebony. There is no species of Ebony that turns and finishes as well as Blackwood for finial applications. If you like the long, slender, delicate lower finials, you need to pay particular attention to the grain direction with respect to the cutting of the blank. To successfully turn a long, yet strong, thin finial, you need to insure that the grain is running absolutely parallel to the turning axis. If it doesn't, you are wasting your time. It will break during the turning, finishing, or transport unless you make it a "beast". The other species that works well for finials is Snakewood. For all of the rumors and old wive's tales, Snakewood is a joy to work with and will produce a graceful finial that will last for years.

### Decision 4 – How many pieces?

If you are making a bird house ornament, are you going to make a two piece, three piece, or more pieces design? If you are going to make a globe ornament, will it be solid, hollow, one piece, two piece, three piece, or more? Depending on your selection, your turning setups will be different. We can discuss the combinations and permutations of turning techniques during the chat.

## Decision 5 – Hanging techniques?

There are a variety of ways to hang ornaments. You need to select your method during the fabrication phase as it may alter your assembly and finishing processes. If you are going to use a “hook eye” threaded into the ornament, you need to drill it while you have your top finial, roof, or whatever is the highest point in the lathe. Depending on the species, you can drill a pilot hole or an almost clear hole. Blackwood is so hard and dense, you had better drill a hole that is close to the O.D. of the threads. Brass eyes don’t have a lot of strength. Other species can be drilled with a pilot drill to the root diameter and the threading of the brass eye will cut the threads as it goes.

Other hanging ideas are a metal rod through the roof, a loop of fishline, or even embedded magnets. Plan on making the appropriate hanging arrangements while you have the piece(s) in the lathe. It’s a whole lot easier to find center in a lathe, that holding a round and wobbly turning under the drill press.

## Decision 6 – Finishes

There are a host of finishes available and any one will work well. Ornaments, unlike pens, get a minimal amount of handling so just about any finish will be durable enough. The question is what are you comfortable with? Obviously, friction finishes must be applied while each of the pieces is mounted in the lathe and easily accessible. Painted and sprayed on finishes can be done to the various components prior to assembly or after assembly is complete. You can choose what works best for you. If you decide to paint, you will need to plan for masking, holding, and drying. Again, think through the process before you start.

## Decision 7 – Which one should I try first?

Pick one that you will be successful at. Perhaps the thin turned, pierced ornaments aren’t your best choice. There is plenty of time. Try the easy ones and work your way up. Don’t make ornaments only a holiday turning. You can do them all year. There is no limit to the imagination that can be brought to bear. Have fun.

## Resources:

Inside out turnings – Article by Ellis Hein

<http://www.wnywoodturners.com/nl/freeproj8.pdf>

Source for ornament hangers

<http://www.nationalartcraft.com/>

Source for sea shells (urchins/other)

<http://www.seashells.com/>

Source for hook eyes, hangers, etc.

Walmart craft department, Michaels, A.C. Moore, JoAnn Fabrics, etc.

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