

## AN ODE TO A WOODTURNER

### ALLEN HOSKINS

I start the lathe, oblivious to the gentle hum as the wood revolved at 1500 rpm. Holding the steel gouge on the tool rest, I gently move the tip until it makes contact with the rotating wood. Initially a few slivers fly up and as I move the tip deeper, fine curls of shavings materialise and stream away. Gently, as the pressure is increased, more shavings fly into the air and over my hands. The hard Jarrah resists and the debris becomes hotter until I am forced to move my fingers further up the shaft.

"Careful", I cautioned to myself, too much pressure could cause a dreaded 'dig in'. A dig in occurs when the steel tip of the gouge catches in the wood causing **an instant transformation from a controlled operation to a wild surge of splinters**. This is a scenario woodturners are familiar with.

Woodturning is an ancient art. Cheaper lathes and better tools has led to an escalation in interest in this craft and places this hobby prominently in the lifestyles of many individuals, especially retirees. It takes a lot of time, infinite patience and some would say, a masochistic make up to master woodturning.

The desire to control to create, to master. Rough billets of wood are made to unlock their secrets and in doing so, are transformed into an object of beauty. The hidden grain is exposed as lustrous layers of compressed splendour.

Watching an accomplished turner, the process looks maddeningly simple but this is the case with many crafts needing a degree of manual dexterity.

There are three stages in a woodturners life.

The first is the novice or learning stage. High in frustration, low in productivity and the mountain you have chosen to climb seems to be beyond your capabilities. Dig ins abound, almost completed pieces are ruined and a good finish seldom materialises despite ceaseless sandpapering and burnishing. The associated costs are a constant concern.

Reaching the second stage, the turner has attained sufficient proficiency to control most tools and the confidence to tackle many projects and can even argue the relative merits of lacquer finish versus waxes and oils. This creates a mentality to turn out as many pieces as possible in an attempt to recoup some of the escalating costs. There is always another tool you need even though you have exceeded your initial budget by hundreds, if not thousands of dollars.

The third stage is gasping the holy grail. You are confident, acclaimed by your peers and now disdain the routine turning and look for greater challenges. You've developed a more creative outlook and have come to terms with design, balance and form. It is rumoured, the lustrous finish on your object's d'art is a closely guarded secret. It would be an affront to your dignity to publicly equate your masterpieces in dollar terms. This is a plateau aspired by many but achieved by few.

Wood becomes an essential ingredient in your daily life. The network is vast and almost every tree felled, is logged in the woodturners grapevine. Wood such as Camphor Laurel, Sandalwood Huon Pine and other exotics are highly prized, so council curb side pickups become a bonanza.

Gardening, house maintenance and other mundane pursuits become tiresome distractions and are deprioritised down the list. The urge to be covered in dust and veneer your workshop with shavings is compelling.

Why is there an ongoing conflict for my time?