

# Betty Scarpino Demonstrates 6-16-07

Betty Scarpino Presents to CMW

## Overview

John Hill introduced Betty Scarpino as a changing point in the way he thought about woodturning. He was fairly new to turning and everything he saw was "Round and Brown." He watched Betty develop her pieces into art by cutting them up, bleaching, and adding color. She started out teaching Industrial Arts and decided to focus on woodturning.



Betty now calls Indianapolis home and has spent the last thirty years creating woodturning art. At the AAW tenth anniversary in 1996, the theme was "Growth through Sharing." This was her first national exposure and she created the "Altered Plate." In 2002, the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC opened the "Woodturning in North America Since 1930" exhibit in the Renwick Gallery. She was one of four women featured in this event.

In the *Woodcraft* magazine article published about

Betty in July 2005 (volume 1 number 4, pages 52 - 57) she was quoted as saying, "When I am interacting with a piece of wood and it is interacting with me, that is when I am an artist. The process is more meaningful than the label." The article reviewed her interaction and creation of art through woodturning.

## Morning Session

Betty started with a slide show that illustrated many of the pieces that she has created over the last thirty years. She discussed some of the thought processes she uses as she works each piece. The transformation of turnings to art begins with cutting the piece, partially or completely, and carving to accentuate the cuts. She uses various finishing techniques that include stippling, texturing, bleaching, staining, dying, painting, and liming wax to transform her turned pieces into unique pieces of art.

One of the pieces she highlighted incorporated the stand into the piece. When the piece is displayed it could be shown leaning on either side to create a different feel to the piece. Another series of pieces was created as part of a demonstration using an old Powermatic® lathe that had a really long bed. She showed three pieces that were seven feet



tall and then carved them. This was a change for her because she started woodturning with a lathe that had a twelve inch capacity. She now uses a Oneway® lathe that allows her to do much larger pieces.

Today Betty demonstrated the various steps in creating the pod, the disc, and an egg. She also showed how to use various tools and finishing options that she uses in the creation process.

### The Pod

For today's pod project, Betty used a whole log of Poplar that John Hill cut fresh. She told the story of the wood search, cutting, and retrieval adventure. They went into the woods with a chain saw to harvest some Poplar for today's project. John had to leave and get a second chain saw to retrieve the first chain saw.



In mounting the Poplar in the lathe she tries to center the piece on the pith in an effort to reduce the chance of cracking. Once mounted, Betty starts turning the log into the pod shape. At this point she has to consider two things: 1) the maximum diameter of the finished turned piece based on the capacity of the band saw, and 2) the finished length and how it will look in comparison to the diameter. The question was asked what ratio between length and diameter she used in determining the final

shape. Betty has no rule of thumb or ratio that she uses to determine what will look the best. Her main goal is to move away from the globe shape and so she stretches the shape into the oblong shape. Betty stated that she prefers the longer lengths because she feels they look more elegant.

As she turns the wood into the pod shape she leaves the ends heavy to prevent the chance of the wood cracking and breaking while in the lathe. Since the pod has only a small area that supports the wood and since the band saw is a very dangerous power tool, she creates a jig to hold and support the piece during the cutting process. There are various ways of making a jig from adding wedges, strips of wood, etc. She chooses to use a piece of plywood that she hollows a trench for the pod to sit in. To create the trench she uses a rotary carving tool. She emphasized the use of hearing protection in addition to eye protection because of the long exposure to the continuous noise levels present during the carving process.

After the trench is finished Betty decides where the cut will be made. She prefers to cut with the grain. Once she has determined the location of where the cut will be made, she tapes the turned pod to the plywood in alignment with where the cut will be made. She completely wraps the pod with tape to ensure that it stays secure during the cutting process. Betty emphasized that it is better to have too much tape than not enough, since the band saw will be pulling down on both of the unsupported ends. She adds hot melt glue to the exit end for added support since the tape will have been cut through by the time the blade exits the pod.

Now that the pod is securely fastened to the plywood, Betty draws



the shape of the cut onto the pod. The band saw is fitted with a 3/8" blade and the pod is pushed through the band saw ensuring that her hands remain on either side of the plywood. After cutting the pod in half, the tape and hot melt glue is removed. One half of the pod is now secured into a clamp. The carving should never be performed without the piece being held securely. If you have a clamping system on the bench, use it. For the demonstration, Betty used a large parallel clamp to hold the piece and a ratchet clamp to hold the other clamp to the table. The piece can be taken from wet wood to the finished piece or, as Betty often does, to hollow it to a specific point. She often does several pieces at one time. She will wrap up each piece and place it in a paper bag to dry while she decides how she will finish it. When she does this, the piece has to be hollowed to the point that the pith is removed to try to reduce the chance of each piece cracking. Betty starts hollowing with a rotary carver. She removes the original blade that comes with the tool because it is light weight and can break. One of the drawbacks to the rotary carver is the amount of dust that it generates. In her studio she uses a Trend® filter mask, or a Dust Be-Gone® mask, and a dust collection system.

Once the pith is removed, Betty switches to a heavy duty reciprocating carver to remove the remaining wood. This carver allows her to get into the ends. It also allows her to open the end that has the pith running through it. One of the features of the reciprocating carver is that you can turn it on and the blade does not do anything until the blade contacts the wood. From a safety standpoint, Betty pointed out that you just need to keep



everything you don't want cut to remain behind the blade. Betty was asked if she ever dries her pieces in the microwave. She stated that she has tried it once with Box Elder and she zapped it once and steam came out. She zapped it again with the same results. So she tried it again and fire came out the ends and Box Elder really smells bad when burned.

Once Betty gets both halves carved out to the desired depth she switches to the (Automach®) reciprocating carver. It is expensive but it is more compact and lighter to use, and it produces a finish that resembles hand carving. This unit costs approximately \$300.00 and is available from Smokey Mountain Wood Carvers. This unit will operate for approximately one thousand hours.



However, it can be repaired and when it is beyond repair they will accept it on trade for parts. Betty gave some tips for lengthening the life of the tool that she has learned along the way: 1) keep wood out of the vent openings to prevent the unit from burning out, 2) keep steel wool away from the vents because the unit is magnetized and even compressed air will not remove the steel (with the same results as in number one), and finally, 3) grease the front bearing with mechanic's grease. To use this carver, cut a curl of wood from one direction and remove the curl from the other direction.

#### The Disc

Betty uses dried wood, either kiln or air dried, in the creation of this piece. You can mount the disc in a chuck but she wanted to retain the full thickness of the wood. Options for retaining the full thickness of the wood can be achieved by using a glue block but the best way is to turn between centers. The disc is

designed to be hung on a wall. The separate pieces can be placed standing vertical on a table or shelf, or holes can be drilled to create a candle holder. Also, the disc can be turned rounded from one side only or from both sides. If the rounding will occur from one side only, Betty will power-plane the other side for a smooth, flat finish. The decision needs to be made of where the curve will end: in the middle or off-center. For this project, she chose to round both sides and meet in the center.



Betty uses the skew on the flat to cut a set of grooves, evenly spaced, and the set of grooves will equal a width of approximately one to one and a half inches wide. To make the grooves, she first cut grooves evenly spaced by first making a reference line, and then deepening those marks. She then rounded the edges, again with the skew on its side using the point. Betty learned to use the skew while taking the Industrial Arts classes. Her instructor was a patternmaker, and patternmakers must make precise cuts. As a result the scraper is used and laying the skew on the side creates a very sharp scraper resulting in clean cuts. Betty maintains a horizontal position except when working around the tail stock and then she raises the skew handle to clear the tail stock. To accentuate the grooves, she again used the skew to cut into the wood on either side of the set of grooves to create a raised feature.

Once the feature is created, Betty cuts a concave feature from the grooves up to the curved edge and then concaves from the grooves going into the center of the piece. There should be no flat areas, just curves. With the front side complete, Betty

created the curve coming forward on the back side until it met the center line and met the front curve, creating a continuous curve. This completed the morning session.

#### Afternoon Session

With lunch over and the Instant Gallery presented, Betty was ready to make the cut on the disc. This is the time to decide where the cut should be made and how it will



look. Betty cuts with the grain and in this instance created a stretched "S" shape. To cut the curve, she goes to the band saw. Since the back is flat, there is no need to create a jig to hold the piece steady while cutting. If the piece did not sit flat, this is where a jig would be created to hold the piece secure while cutting.

To demonstrate what happens after the cut, Betty showed a bowl that she has started altering and enhancing the cut. If you left the cut alone, all it would be is a cut - no character! But by carving the surrounding wood down into the cut creating a "V" the eye follows the cut like a river. The carving creates the rough valley that needs to be attended to with a file to have the feature go from the flat into a progressive curve into the cut. This is followed up with sanding, and a disc or drum mounted in a drill press gives move control. It is important to keep the piece moving because that continuous motion produces consistent curves. This is then followed up by hand sanding, stepping through the grits from 100 grit up through 320 grit. Betty likes to use foam backed sandpaper that she purchases from Abrasives ASAP ([www.abrasivesASAP.com](http://www.abrasivesASAP.com)) in bulk. It is also available in sheet form from both 3M and Norton. Betty also likes to use the foam and cloth discs (Grip-A-Disc) because they conform to the smallest of the eggs she creates.

## Making Grooves

Betty placed a piece of walnut that she had grooved and bleached to show how you could proceed if you did not like the results. The piece was mounted on a faceplate and the face was concave. She removed the bleaching and grooves with a pass of the bowl gouge. To create the grooves



start, at the inner most starting point. Utilizing the skew, keep it on the flat, move the point into the wood, pull it away, move over slightly to widen and deepen. Keep the grooves evenly spaced. After each groove, move to the next position and repeat. Keep up, moving in one direction. There is no need to sand the grooves when you utilize a sharp skew and make good cuts. You need to determine the width of the group of the grooves or to do the whole piece. Betty stated that you could do the entire outside of a bowl and eliminate the sanding process.

## Bleaching

Bleach is difficult to find because of shipping restrictions. It is available through Rockler, Woodcraft, and paint stores. Betty uses Klean-Strip® brand which is a two part mixture. These parts are mixed in equal parts in either a glass or plastic container. This is not the same as Clorox® or acid. When using bleach, you need to do so in a well ventilated area and wear gloves. You can store it in

a container with a cover laid on top to slow evaporation but it should never be stored in a tightly sealed container. (In a tightly sealed container it will build up pressure and explode.) To apply the bleach to the piece, Betty uses a cotton swab because she has better control and no drips. You can use a regu-

lar paint brush or a foam brush for larger areas. Let the first coat dry before ap-



plying the second coat and the same for the third coat. For all woods except Osage Orange three coats is enough but Osage requires up to twelve coats.

The question was asked about neutralizing the bleach. Betty no longer neutralizes because she had several pieces turn to a yellow tint. She now leaves the piece unfinished or she will coat with a finish. Leaving the piece unfinished allows the piece to be re-done if necessary.

Another question was if she uses a barrier of some kind to restrict the bleach affecting adjacent areas. Barriers do not work because they sit on the surface and since the bleach goes into the pores it bleeds under whatever barrier is put in place.

## Painting

Betty uses either milk paint or milk paint mixed with acrylic. Milk paint is non-toxic. If milk paint is used alone and a texture is to be applied into the surface, it will flake off. Milk paint comes in a powder form and is mixed with water and needs to sit for approximately fifteen minutes, mixing periodically. You may apply a single coat or build up coats in layers with various colors. Paint applied in layers can be sanded through to reveal the various colors below the top coat.

Acrylic paint comes in either a squeeze bottle which has more pigment and is a thinner consistency or in a jar that has less pigment but is thicker. When mixing acrylic with milk paint the ratio between the two is determined by the finished shade that is desired.

### Texturing



Highlighting of the wood's rings can only be performed on woods with open pores alternating with closed pore surfaces (ring-porous woods). Ash, Oaks, and Elms are the main selection of woods for this technique, with Ash being the best. After the turning of the egg has been completed, it has to be completely sanded. Betty uses Behlen® brand stain which is alcohol based. She prefers black or blood red and applies it with a paper towel. She



applies the stain thoroughly until the wood will not absorb anymore and then lets it dry for a couple of hours. Once the stain has dried she sprays the piece with Deft semi-gloss finish. When spraying an egg she places it on a stand made up of a piece of wood with three nails hammered

through it. When the finish has dried she smooths the finish with 0000 steel wool. Betty applies liming wax to the egg using a gloved hand. Liming wax has a white pigment that is pushed into the open pores of the Ash. Before it fully dries, the liming wax is wiped off. To remove any remaining liming wax from the surface, Betty rubs it with 0000 steel wool. When complete, the liming wax remains in the pores and highlights the stained solid areas around the pores. Betty has tried to use an acrylic paste but has experienced trouble removing it from the non-porous areas.

### Rotary Chisel

At the AAW Symposium in Louisville this past year she found a rotary chisel that comes in two sizes and a couple of cutter styles. The smaller size fits in a Dremel® tool.

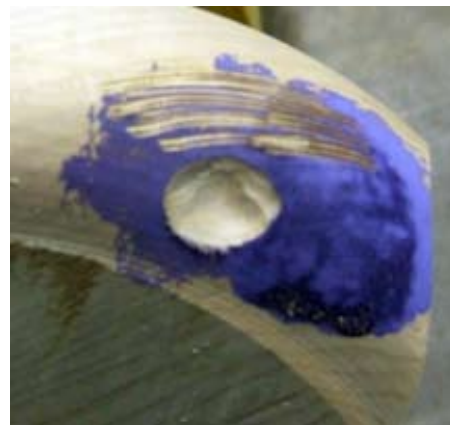
For safety the chisel shaft needs to be inserted so that only a ¼" of the shaft sticks out of the collet. If more is exposed and you have a catch, it will bend the shaft. Plus, the farther out the shaft is the more vibration will need to be dealt with. Betty recommends that a face shield is used with this tool. The benefit of this tool is that it carves the



wood instead of bruising the wood.

### Conclusion

Betty stated that the pleasure is how to apply the various tools and techniques



to your pieces and develop your own style. You can copy another artist's style as a starting point but some time you need to be creative with your ideas.

Betty's presentation was both informative and entertaining as she laced the information with light banter and humor. As the day came to a close, the audience had received information that opened up new options beyond just the turning of wood. Betty introduced a variety of finishing techniques that can take your piece to a different level of creativity. Thanks Betty.

By Anthony Napoli - CMW



Different pods are shown at left, inside and out, with various textures. Betty's demonstration workbench is shown above.

John Hill arranges for our many talented demonstrators to be with us, often in connection with their teaching at Arrowmont, etc. Betty sits to the right just before being introduced.



