

Coloring dyes, inks and transparent acrylics

The use of dyes, inks and transparent acrylics can enhance the natural beauty and design of a woodturning if applied correctly. However, applying color to the wood is only one of the elements to be learned. Wood preparation and finishing techniques are equally important aspects to be considered in producing a gallery quality turning.

1. Woods

- A. Grain orientation -- It is important to note that end grain will take color differently from side grain. End grain will absorb more of the color than side grain and thus look darker.
- B. Figured vs. non -- figured – Figured wood will show more contrast with colors than non figured wood, that is why figured wood is usually preferred.
- C. Light vs. dark -- Light wood such as holly and maple will show color more accurately than dark wood.
- D. Dry vs. wet -- Dry wood will absorb and hold color better than wet wood.
- E. Hard vs. soft grain -- Soft grain wood will absorb more of the color median than hard grain wood.
- F. Burl vs. non burl -- Burl wood is excellent for coloring because it has both hard and soft grain wood, as well as, a lot of figured grain. Recommended burls include box elder, maple, and redwood.

2. Wood Preparation

- A. With each grit sand with the lathe on and then use the same grit to sand with the grain while the lathe is off to remove any scratch made while the wood is rotating. Wipe the wood down lightly with water to make sure that all the sanding marks have been removed.
- B. Wood bleach can be used to lighten the wood before coloring. Color will show up better on lightened wood. Make sure to lightly sand after bleaching if the grain has been raised.
- C. The shape of the wood will affect the coloring, because grooves and texture will darken more than smooth surfaces.

- D. Sharp edges will take more color and be darker; they are also harder to sand. Flowing curves are easier to color and sand.

3. Water based Color Medians and their Characteristics

- A. Dyes are the easiest to use whether they are fabric, aniline, metalized or alcohol.
- B. Inks dry quicker than dyes and can be purchased as opaque or transparent. However, opaque inks cannot be thinned and made transparent.
- C. Paints also dry quicker than dyes. They are available as opaque and transparent. Opaque paint cannot be made transparent. Transparent color is recommended for layered coloring.
- D. Auto Airs-iridescent, flair and flakes can be thinned to the point that little color shows, but still shows the iridescent flakes.

4. Using Dyes, Inks and Paints

- A. Preparation -- Dyes can be thinned with water, however, the more water used the weaker the color. This is also true with inks and paints. If using fabric reactive dyes, you must add a dash of soda ash.
- B. Application Tools – Sponges, paper towels, air brush and hand brushes can be used.
- C. Methods – The dyes may be applied by wiping, brushing, spraying or dabbing.

5. Layering

- A. Any of the medians can be used over the others once they have dried.
- B. Sand after applying each color, removing some of the applied color to achieve a layer effect.
- C. An alternate method is to apply a base color followed by dabbing different colors onto the based color letting each application dry before applying the next color.

6. Finishing

- A. The finish may be sprayed or wiped onto the turning.
- B. I use an oil/varnish mix on bowls, etc. The mix is wiped onto the piece.
- C. I use a spray lacquer finish with small items such as ornament globes.

7. Finishing the Finish

- A. After applying the finish, I lightly sand with a 3000 grit pad. I then rub the finish with a soft cotton cloth with a plastic cleaner. I then rub the finish with car wax.

8. Recommended Materials

- a. Dyes – Dharma fabric reactive dyes
- b. Inks – FW and Higgins inks
- c. Paints – Golden transparent colors, Auto-air candy colors and iridescent colors, Createx airbrush colors.
- d. 3M Trizact 3000 grit pad.

9. Sources of Materials

- e. Dharma Trading Company for the dyes.
- f. Craft and art supply stores for the inks and paints.
- g. Automotive stores for the 3M Trizact.