

Carve and texture a hollow form like John Jordan

John Jordan takes us through the steps to adding carving and texture to one of his hollow forms

The visual and tactile contrasts of carving and surface textures have always been the focus of my work, and the hollow vessel makes a perfect palette for these techniques. Sometimes the carving and textures are organised into patterns or designs that may be fairly precise, sometimes a bit looser or more organic. Other times I want the surfaces to appear more random. The silver maple vessel I produced here will be carved with a series of panels, using several different carving techniques and a couple of simple textures.

I would like to make a few points about carving and texturing before moving on with this piece. Unlike turning, which requires fairly specific techniques if done well, carving and texturing can be done with a wide variety of tools and methods, some of which may be somewhat unorthodox; there really is no right or wrong. There is a huge variety of carving tools, both hand and powered. Rotary tools, both electric and air, tiny to large, are used by many people. Reciprocating carvers which drive traditionally shaped carving gouges are a favourite of mine. Torches and woodburners, rasps and files, wirebrushes, nails, punches and anything else that can

impact the surface may be useful. A lot of experimentation, and trial and error is the key to success.

What you don't want to do is take a nicely turned piece, and attempt to carve or texture the surface without a good idea of what you are trying to accomplish, and some certainty that you know how to achieve the desired result. It is important to experiment and practise on reject pieces, boards, or shapes turned just for the sake of practice. Many of my favourite surfaces are the result of something that may not have been particularly successful at first. Keep samples around to see and think about, and most of all look around at the things that surround you. Inspiration and ideas are everywhere. Nature and the man-made world, both provide an endless supply of patterns and surfaces from which to work.

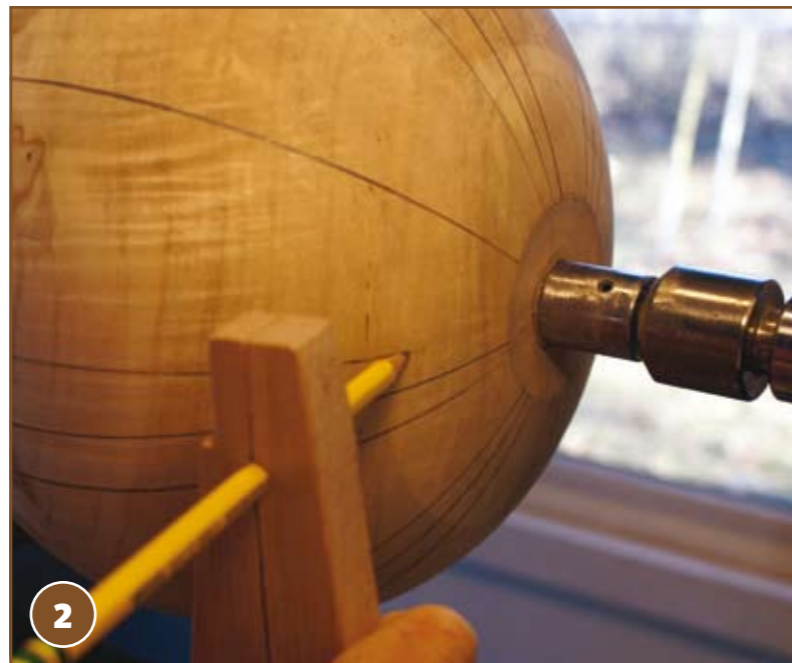
As always for me, this piece was turned from green wood, and was allowed to dry in the cabinet for a couple of weeks. Deep carving in a green piece could result in cracking along the cuts, but many types of carving and textures can be accomplished while the wood is green, as long as care is taken to not let the outside of the piece dry too quickly.



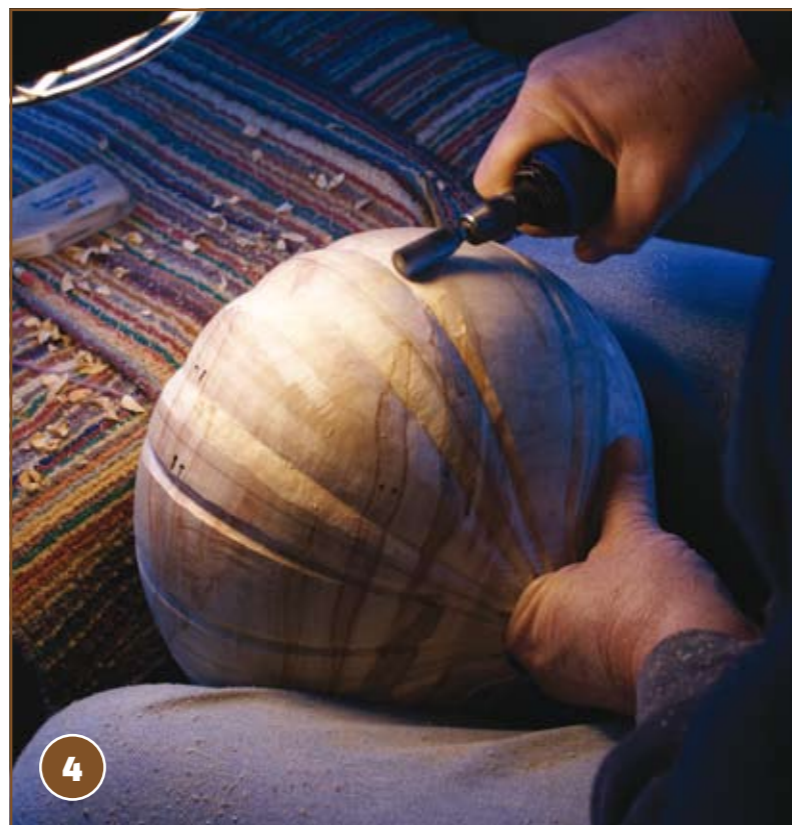
1
The first step is to divide the piece into the number of desired segments. I don't use the index to divide the piece, as I prefer to do it by eye. This lends a human quality to the work, even if the effect is intended to be fairly precise. It's not too difficult to be accurate if need be, and if it doesn't look right, it can be erased and done again. Choose where you want the divisions, taking into account the grain direction, features of the grain pattern and colours, as well as movement/shrinkage. Usually on a side-grain piece like this, the number of divisions will be even, as there is a symmetry to the piece – it has two 'sides' and two 'ends', and it will be a bit oval after drying. I will divide it into halves, quarters, and then eight divisions in this case



3
Then, I define the lines with a reciprocating carver using a freshly sharpened, or stropped V-gouge



2
Next, mount the piece between centres, using a tenon in the opening, and a flat revolving centre so as not to mark the bottom. A pencil gauge is aligned with each pencil mark, and drawn along the lathe bed to the bottom. This is simply a



4
Next, the panels are shaped with a carbide spiral-cut burr in a pneumatic die grinder. This burr is made for cutting non-ferrous metals and is quite aggressive. There are a variety of finer spirals which are available, and will give a slightly smoother cut and are less aggressive. It takes a fair amount

quick and easy way to get a line from top to bottom, and on smaller pieces I often just draw the line by eye. For this piece I want some width to the lines and so drew another line to either side of the original line, which will not be carved

of practise and a light touch with this tool, as things can go wrong very quickly. Therefore it is important to take your time at this stage. I used to do most of this rough shaping with a large carving gouge, which works just fine, but the die grinder speeds up the process for me



5
The next step in the process is defining and fairing the line with a small round rasp. Further shaping is then carried out with coarse and fine wood rasps

After sanding to P150, I shape the lip sections, starting with a small craft saw. Further shaping and refining is accomplished with a carving knife, small 'V'-gouge and rasp, and sandpaper. A small, fine file is used to further define the edges



8
After each sanding step, the piece is wetted with water which pops up damaged grain and makes it easy to see where I need to work



6
I use thin 3mm (1/8in) sticks padded with thin leather as sanding aids. Sticky-back paper is wrapped and trimmed to fit, and I usually start with P100 grit. The flexible stick is very effective at shaping and fairing the surface, and I will progress through several grits depending on the type of wood and

the texture to come. For this piece the smooth, wider, sections are sanded up to P320, but the narrow segments only to P150. This is because these narrow segments will have a texture that removes the existing surface, so they only need to be shaped well and not damaged

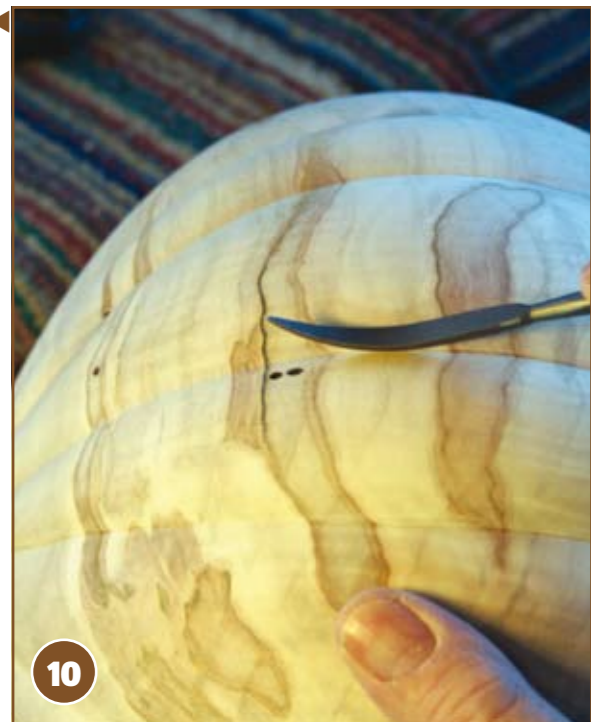


“Sticky-backed sandpaper folded over onto itself, and cut into small sections and strips is very useful in this detailing”

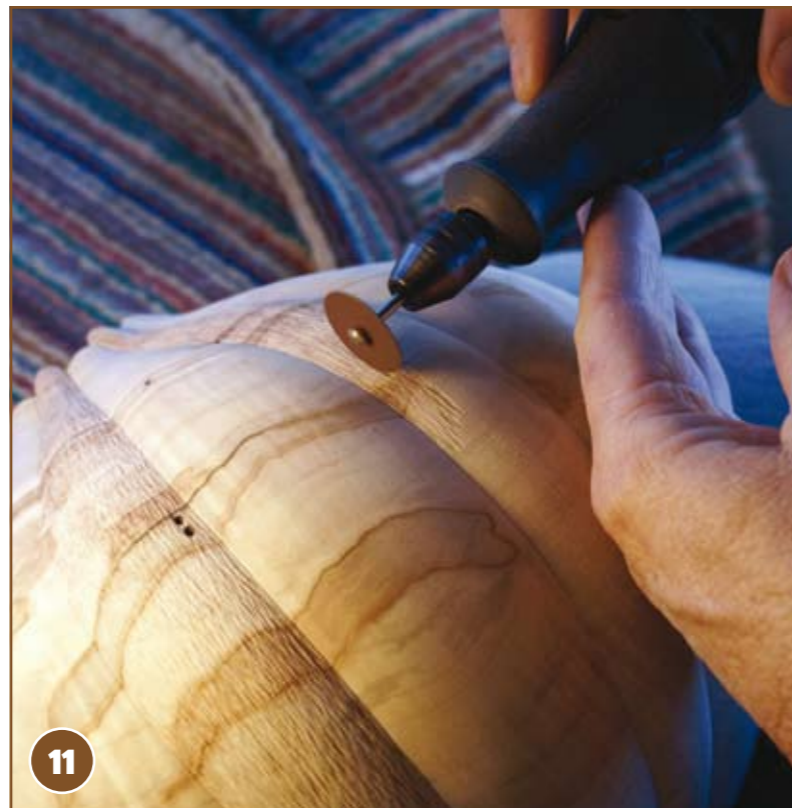


9
I continue to detail and refine with the small gouge and file and sandpaper. Sticky-backed sandpaper folded over onto itself, and cut into small sections and

strips is very useful in this detailing. This detailing continues, becoming finer after each step of sanding. This is where much of the time and effort is spent



10
The last step before texturing is using a 'V'-shaped riffler to put a fine line to separate each segment. This separates the different textures, and provides a shadow line which helps to visually pop each segment

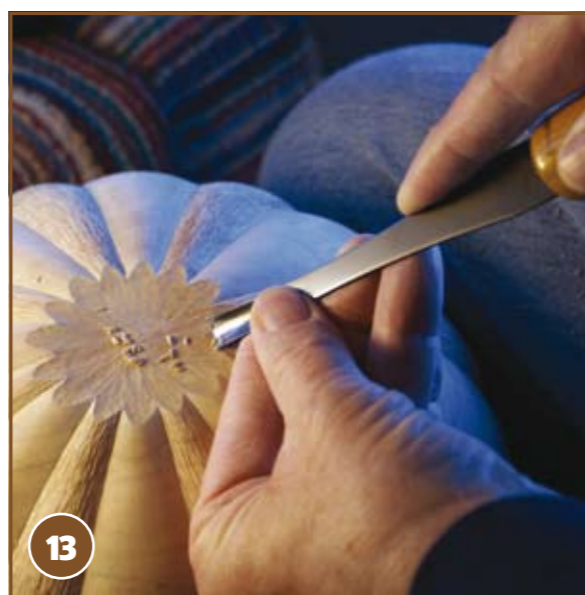


11
A Dremel rotary tool with a cut-off disc is used to texture the narrow segments. I use a light touch and tap or stroke my way down each segment, taking reasonable care not to touch the adjacent segments



12
Next, I flatten the bottom with a sanding block and carve the bottom with a small gouge, until it is slightly concave in shape.

“I really like the bottom to be as interesting as the rest of the piece”



13
I like to leave the texture from the gouge, so I make the cuts radial and as clean as I can. I really like the bottom to be as interesting as the rest of the piece



14
I go over the piece again to be sure that the sanding and detailing is complete, and then I apply the finish. I use an acrylic spray lacquer that is intended as an artist's fixative. It is quick drying, matte in appearance and can be selectively polished up for contrast. The finish is applied on this piece now, as the smooth, finished surface will aid in doing the final texture



15
The textured narrow bands are taped off with fine-line masking tape, which prevents damage from “stippling” or “hammering” in the next step



16
A small polished point is used in the reciprocating tool to “stipple” or “hammer” the smooth, finished surface. It's not a terribly complicated technique, but requires some practise to learn to vary the touch in different grain areas so the look is the same. End-grain hammers differently than side-grain and so forth



17
After I'm happy with the surface, the masking tape is removed and another coat of finish is sprayed on. I'll buff the surface lightly with a paper towel, and then apply my signature with a vibrating engraver