

# SOME THOUGHTS AND GUIDELINES ON CRITIQUING YOUR OWN WOODTURNINGS

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**Introduction:** Evaluating your woodturning while in progress and at the final stage of producing the piece is a continuous process – checking your work against quality standards you set for yourself at each step of the way. Developing a routine which includes evaluations of the following criteria at each step enables the turner to return to the stages needed to correct any deficiencies before continuing with subsequent techniques. This all comes down to decision making and quality control.

**CRITIQUING DURING THE TURNING PROCESS:** While at the lathe, evaluate the piece for the following, which are critical in establishing the major aesthetic characteristics of the piece.

- ▶ **Form:** Is the form appropriate to the figure of the wood? Is the choice of wood appropriate for the desired form?
- ▶ **Proportion:** Are the dimensional proportions of the piece pleasing? Any obvious shape inconsistencies, asymmetries, etc.?
- ▶ **Lines/Curves:** Are all curves continuous and smooth, with no abrupt changes? Are there any straight lines or “flat” surfaces?
- ▶ **Lift:** Do the lines interacting with the supporting surface convey a sense of ‘lift’ or does the piece look ‘heavy’?
- ▶ **Surface:** Has every trace of tear-out been removed? Are all surfaces visually and texturally uniform?
- ▶ **Aesthetic:** Does the shape accentuate the visual characteristics of the wood? Any obvious mistakes or defects repaired?

**CRITIQUING DURING THE EMBELLISHMENT PROCESS:** If surface embellishment, coloring, texturing, etc. are being used, the following attributes should be evaluated:

- ▶ **Appropriateness:** Are the embellishments appropriate for the wood being used? Will they visually detract from the piece?
- ▶ **Quality of Treatment:** Are the carvings, burnings, texturing, coloring, etc. all done with the same quality and detail?
- ▶ **Uniformity:** Are the sizes, placement, spacing, orientation, etc. of embellishment details uniformly distributed on the piece?

**CRITIQUING DURING THE SANDING/PRE-FINISHING PROCESS:** A critical component of preparing the piece to receive finishes, the sanding or other pre-finishing techniques (e.g. grain fillers) should be completed meticulously and evaluated for quality as if no finish was going to be applied.

- ▶ **Completeness:** Have all surfaces been sanded to same grit without skipping grits? “Stopping grit” appropriate for finish?
- ▶ **Remaining Sanding Marks:** Is there any evidence of remaining sanding marks (e.g. on end grain? circular marks? crossgrain)?
- ▶ **Surface Uniformity:** Have all surfaces been sanded with no differences between end-grain and side grain?
- ▶ **Grain Filler:** If used, has it been applied uniformly, and all traces remaining on surface completely removed?
- ▶ **Subtle Changes:** Relying on sanding for shaping? (“80 grit gouge”) Use of abrasives for fairing curves? “Last chance shaping”?

**CRITIQUING YOUR FINISHING PROCESS:**

- ▶ **Choice of Finish:** Is the finish appropriate for piece? Does sheen, clarity, and durability of finish meet the desired outcome?
- ▶ **Application:** Has a finish been applied too lightly or too heavily? Brush marks? Orange peel? “Starved” areas?
- ▶ **Uniformity:** Is the finish uniform on all surfaces (end-grain vs. side grain). Are there runs, sags, or extra finish present?
- ▶ **Secondary Finishing:** Are gloss finishes completely glossy or in need of polishing? Is there a need to ‘finish the finish’?
- ▶ **Surface Defects:** Are there any visible flaws, embedded debris, bubbles, scratches? Is drying complete?

**CRITIQUING THE FINAL PIECE:** Once all of the turning, surface preparation, and finishing techniques have been completed, a final self-critique of the piece should be done. It is best to allow some significant time between when you call the piece “done” and when the final critique is done – hopefully a few days at a minimum. If deficiencies are perceived, they can be fixed (if possible) with subsequent work. Some can’t be fixed at a late time, stressing the need for critique early in the process.

**Checklist:**

- Overall Visual Evaluation** – Is the final form aesthetically pleasing? Does it accentuate the wood’s figure?
- Evaluation of Shape** – Does the piece look “heavy”? Too light? Is wall thickness appropriate for shape and size?
- Choice of Finish** – Is the finish used functioning to bring out the desired characteristics of the wood? Would you use it again?
- Quality of the Finish** – Does the piece pass the “strong low-angle light” test? Are all surfaces of the same sheen/texture?
- Technique Specific QC** – Are segments glued with perfect joints? Do turned pen parts align perfectly with kit parts?
- Reflection** – What would I do differently or what could I do better next time? Am I pleased with the outcome?

**Additional Reading:**

Russ Fairfield – (March 1998; Revised 2001) - “Evaluation of Our Work” - [www.woodcentral.com/russ/russ1.shtml](http://www.woodcentral.com/russ/russ1.shtml)

Jim Christiansen (2004) – “The Art of Critique” in *American Woodturner*, Spring 2004, pages 52-55.

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