Revisit a favorite project

Classy Clocks

By Bob Rosand

Years ago, Tom Gall spent a lot of weeknds together as crafts-show exhibitors, each of us trying to eek out a living and make names for ourselves.

One of Tom's bread-and-butter items was this mini clock design. A few years ago, Tom was in a car accident and suffered multiple broken bones. Today, after extensive physical therapy Tom is doing much better than anyone ever imagined, and he continues to recover. With his permission, I'll show you how to turns one of his best-selling designs.

These clocks require minimal wood and just a few tools. The clock inserts are inexpensive (about $10 each). Inserts are available from Craft Supplies USA (800-551-8876, woodturnerscatalog.com), Packard Woodworks, Inc. (800-683-8876, packardwoodworks.com), and Penn State Industries (800-377-7297, pennstateind.com). The 1½"-diameter clocks shown here require a 1⅜"-diameter recess.

Get started

For turning tools, you will need a ¾" spindle roughing gouge, ⅜" spindle gouge, and a parting tool. Optional tools include a ½" skew and Sorby spiral texturing tool At the lathe, you will need a 4-jaw chuck.

Select a 3×3" scrap about 1½" thick. The dimensions are not critical, but if the completed clock is too thin, it may not stand upright. It doesn't matter if you use end grain, side grain, or burl, but choose an attractive turning block.

Turn the clock

To make the best use of your blank, glue a round wasteblock to the back, centered. (I use a pine wasteblock because it doesn't mar the wood of the finished piece when I make a jam chuck described later.)

Grip the wasteblock with your 4-jaw chuck, and turn the blank to a 3" cylinder. Use a spindle roughing gouge on an end-grain blank and a spindle gouge on a side-grain blank.

With the blank turned to a cylinder, begin shaping the clock body. Don't remove to much material from the back of the blank (**Photo 1**) or it may fly off the lathe.

Install a Jacobs drill chuck into the tailstock quill, and chuck a 1⅜" Forstner bit. For the clock insert, bore a 9/16"-deep hole (**Photo 2**). When withdrawing the bit, hang on to the chuck. If the bit binds in the hole, it could pop the drill chuck taper out of the tailstock with ugly consequences.

Texturing adds interest

You may choose to cut a series of coves in the piece, texture it with a needle scaler, turn a series of beads, or simply sand the clock body. The goal is to have fun with this project and to come up with as many variations as you can.

I textured one version with a Sorby texturing tool. This tool

produces nice swirl marks on the surface and excels on end grain. And if your cutting technique is good, you never have to pick up a piece of sandpaper.

To use the texturing tool, keep the speed of the lathe up (??? rpm or higher), angle the tool to about 45 degrees, and tip it down to keep the teeth from grabbing. Engage the tool in the wood at the edge of the movement hole and texture the front of the clock body (**Photo 3**). Keep the tool moving. You can move it back and forth a bit.

To texture the entire clock, run the texturing tool to the widest diameter of the clock body and stop.

Complete the back

Continue to shape the back of the clock body and part it from the wasteblock. To hold the clock body for finishing the back, measure a tenon diameter on the remaining wasteblock for a friction-fit of the clock-movement hole (**Photo 4**). Then press the clock body onto the waste-block tenon. The clock body should fit snugly and run true. Smooth the back (**Photo 5**). Now texture or sand the back to match the front. (I tex-tured the back with the Sorby tool.)

To make the clock body stand up, cut an angled flat spot at the edge. To accomplish this, make a simple tablesaw jig (**Photo 6**). Position the jam-chuck tenon so the edge of the clock body protrudes about ½" beyond the edge of the ¾" plywood.

Press the clock body onto the tenon, tilt your tablesaw blade 6 to 8 degrees, and make the cut (**Photo 7**). I make two or three light cuts rather than one heavy cut. Sand the bottom, and apply a finish.

If I'm in a hurry, I spray my clocks with Deft satin lacquer and then buff them. If I have a bit more time, I oil the clocks with Waterlox and buff the clocks on a 4"-diameter wheel. Finally, insert the clock movement.

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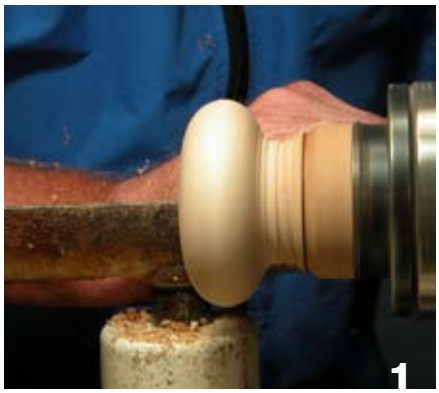

Leave a sturdy wasteblock on the back of the clock (1½" diameter shown *above*).

Advance the quill to bore a 9/16"-deep hole to accept the clock insert.

Engage the tool at the edge of the hole and move it toward the edge of the body.

Use calipers to mark the clock diameter on the wasteblock that will become the tenon.

Use your spindle gouge to smooth the back of the clock body.

Part off a short length of the jam chuck tenon and fasten it to a piece of plywood.

With the tablesaw blade tilted about 6 or 7 degrees, cut a flat spot on the clock body.