Trash to Treasures

Wooden-Topped Jars

by James Duxbury

This basic turning project recycles interesting little jars and bottles that normally would be discarded, making them into one-of-a-kind custom gift items. It is also a great use for all those little scrap pieces of contrasting wood that seem to accumulate, but you just can't throw away. I have made many of these beautiful wooden-lidded jars; they are a big hit and are often used more as a decorative item than as a functional jar. We have been known to eat some very strange kinds of jams, pickles, relishes, and who knows what else just to get that specially shaped little vessel (see **Fig. 1**).

Transforming uniquely shaped containers by adding wooden lids is not a new idea by any means. Years ago, a variation of this sort of lidded container project was presented by the well-known woodturner Ernie Conover, who has written many articles (see *Woodturning* Issue 17, November 1993). And in the previous issue of *Woodturning Design* (#45), Scott Roberts explained how to cap ordinary plastic water bottles with wooden tops made from scrap.

PREPARE THE BLANKS

Start by finding a medium-size jar—somewhere around twelve ounces. Wash out the jar (of course), remove all labels, and measure the outside diameter of the metal lid. Select a piece of straight-grain hardwood at least 3/4" thick and cut a disk about 3/4" larger than the outside diameter. The hardwood disk will become the base of the lid. Cut a series of disks of graduated diameters and thicknesses to glue on top of this disk with yellow glue (see **Fig. 2**). Use contrasting colors and make the diameters fit your specific design. Be creative and let your imagination wander.


Fig. 2

Glue up contrasting pieces of stock to conform to your design.

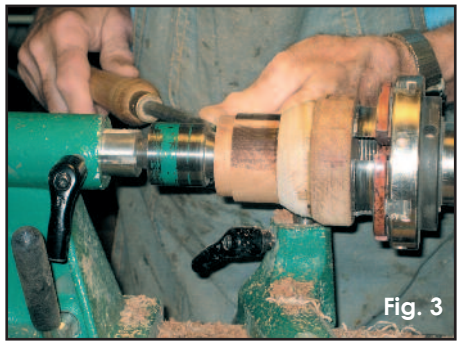
Fig. 3

Mount the blank on the lathe between centers and true it up so it is round.

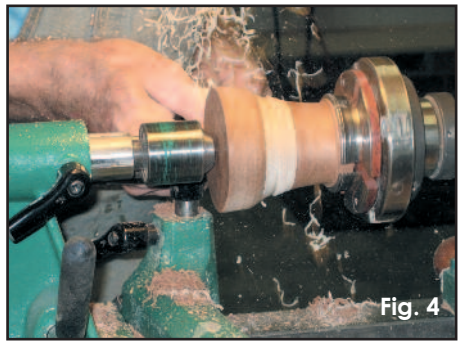
Fig. 4

Remount the blank on a 4-jawed chuck using the tenon formed earlier.

CENTER THE BLANKS

Locate the center on each end, once the pieces have been glued up and left to dry at least overnight. Mount the blank on the lathe between spindle centers or with pressure from the tailstock, compress the blank against the chuck jaw's outer surfaces, set the lathe speed to about 1200 rpm, and turn the blank round (see **Fig. 3**). It is a good idea to wear a full face shield when doing any turning on a lathe. Leave a tenon about 3/8" long on the small end. When completed, remove the piece and mount a chuck on the lathe if spindle centers were used. Clamp the tenon on the small end of the piece in the chuck and bring up the tailstock to secure the center of the large end (see **Fig. 4**).


Fig. 1

These jars make great gift items and are a wonderful way to get rid of those little scraps of wood that we ALL save.

MARK LID RECESS

True-up the outside of the piece and turn a flat surface on the lid end by the tailstock; remove the tailstock. Set calipers to the outside dimension of the metal lid (see **Fig. 5**). Move the tool rest to about 1/8" away from the flat lid end, turn on the lathe, and with the left point of the calipers, make a light scratch line that lines up with the right point (see **Fig. 6**). **Do not let the right point touch the wood at any time!** Doing so could cause the calipers to catch in the wood and be thrown back at you. Again, it is advisable to wear a full face shield.

TURN THE BLANK

Once the size of the lid has been marked, use a parting tool to carefully form a recess that will fit the lid (see **Fig. 7**). The depth of the recess should be about 1/8" deeper than the thickness of the metal lid. Periodically, test-fit the metal lid to be sure that it seats firmly in the bottom of the recess. (*Note:* Shallow grooves can be cut into the bottom of this recess to increase the glue surface area.) Once this has been completed, bring up the tailstock and form the base of the lid and about 1" up the side of the piece. Sand this section to completion. When finished, remove the piece from the chuck, turn it around, and carefully expand the chuck jaws into the lid socket. Use the tailstock for alignment of the opposite end. Be sure not to put too much expansion pressure on the inside of this socket, as it is fairly


Fig. 5

Carefully measure the outside diameter of the lid with calipers.


Fig. 6

Do not allow the right point of the calipers to touch the wood!

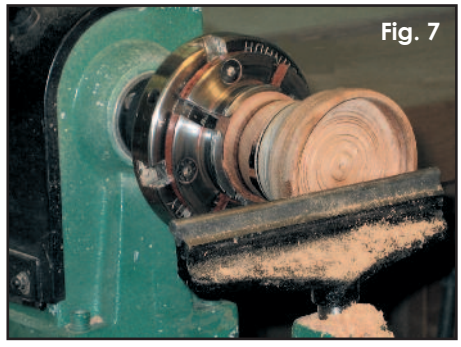
Fig. 7

Carefully form a recess with a parting tool.

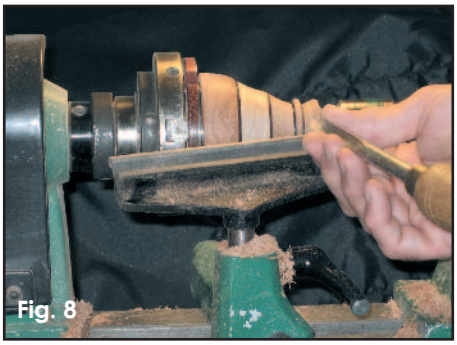
Fig. 8

Remount the blank in the chuck using the lid recess as the mounting point.

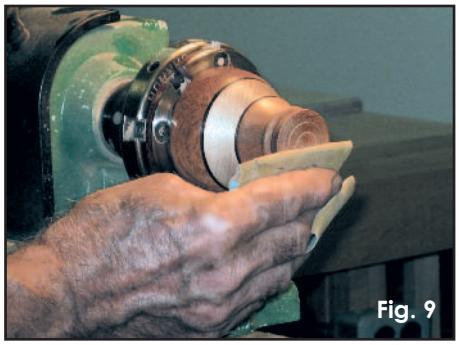
Fig. 9

Add any details and sand to remove imperfections.

Fig. 10

E-6000 has proved to be a better adhesive than epoxy for this task.

thin and very easy to split out. Turn the majority of the remaining lid with the tailstock in place (see **Fig. 8**). When this is done, remove the tailstock and carefully finish turning the top, burn decorative lines, and sand to complete the lid (see **Fig. 9**).

FINISHING

I finish these lids with about four coats of high-gloss lacquer, lightly sanding between the final coats.

GLUING

The metal lid can be glued into the socket with epoxy glue; however, recently I have started using E-6000. It takes longer to cure, but it allows for expansion and seems to hold very well (see **Fig. 10**). You can find E-6000 at most craft stores.

FINISHED PRODUCT

The glue should cure for a day or so before the lid is removed from the jar. Completed jars can be made in sets or in miscellaneous sizes. Fill with colorful candies, jellies, or your personal specialty item, and the wooden-lidded jar is ready for display or gift-giving.

James Duxbury

James Duxbury, woodturner and inventor, is the kind of guy who thinks and creates "outside the box." His turnings are unique and he seldom turns the same thing twice. With the help of his pet parrotlet, Bean, creativity abounds—all sorts of fine turnings are made from small bottle stoppers to bowls, and even a working Foucault Pendulum.

Jim's kaleidoscopes are a signature item, custom designed, and have been the recipient of numerous blue ribbons. Although Jim quit working in 1996 and has claimed to be retired, he has since obtained two U.S. Patents and has a third one in progress.

The inventor of particulate dust respirators, his company, Duxterity LLC, markets the Resp-O-Rator™ and Resp-O-Rator Jr™, while Elegant Creations markets his gallery of fine wooden objects, including Kaleidoscope Plans, Kaleidoscope Building DVD, and custom wooden Kaleidoscopes. Details can be seen at www.duxterity.com.

Jim welcomes your questions and comments, and can be reached by e-mail at cyberdux@bellsouth.net.