

Katherine Kowalski

“Fine, Refined Turnery”

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Color Rim Bowl

Please see my web site www.KatherineKowalski.com for additional handouts, a supplier list, and more information.

Use natural or dyed plywood, or even natural wood with prominent grain lines, to create a bowl with an illusive center, and a rim which pulses with color. Natural wood possibilities include: zebrawood, ash, bocote, and other hardwoods in which the early wood contrasts with the late.

Suppliers of Dyed Plywood

Cousineau Wood Products
<http://www.cousineauwoodproducts.com/>
3 Valley Road
North Anson ME 04958
(207) 635-4445

Rutland Plywood
<http://www.rutply.com>
PO Box 6180
Rutland, VT 05702
(802) 747-4000

I recommend using the non-resin-densified material: it has less of a dulling effect on tools, and the colors tend to be more brilliant.

Caution

ALWAYS use proper safety gear, especially eye protection. Prescription glasses are NOT safety glasses. Always wear safety glasses and/or a face shield. Be sure to take dust protection precautions too: use a dust mask, respirator, or dust collector to remove dust during the sanding process – it can be very harmful to breathe dyed plywood dust.

Tool Selection

If possible, use powdered metal tools to cut dyed plywood – they are able to withstand the abrasiveness of the glue better than standard HSS, and the edge lasts much longer. Otherwise, use *quality* High Speed Steel (HSS) turning tools to achieve a good finish.

The Blank

Two ways to create the blank – either cut two diagonal corners, or plane both surfaces, cut a diagonal through the center, and glue the halves together. Note: the panels that are available through the above retailers are NOT perfectly flat – they must be planed if one wishes to laminate them.

The size of the bowl is limited by your bandsaw capacity, (or that of your neighbor's!) Cut a bowl blank only as large as your re-saw capacity. Cut one side $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch longer than the other to allow for diagonal shift.

Begin by deciding how many layers you want to show on the rim. This may be affected by your desire to decorate the piece with carving, pyrography, or another technique. Mark a diagonal line on the longer side, going through the exact number of layers you have chosen.

Sand on a belt sander, (to make relatively flat), then press the diagonal side against the bandsaw fence to resaw again, producing a parallel surface. Depending on the depth of your project (bowl vs. platter), mount using a screw chuck, or cut an internal chucking recess.

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Chucking

Using a chucking tenon is a good choice for bowls. However, make light cuts on the inside, or the tenon might just decide to break off!

An internal chucking recess is my choice for platters. Make the internal depth twice as deep as for the height of the foot. (If it is the same size as the foot, this thin area has a *high* probability of breaking off.)

Shaping

Dyed Plywood isn't as stable as solid wood, especially when cut at an angle – ALWAYS use light cuts. Chatter marks on thinner areas like the rim and upper sides are common – make sure you cut or sand them out before finishing.

When working the inside of the bowl, especially if you have a relatively flat bottom, the nature of the plywood will become apparent – it chips out fiercely! Use a “bottom bowl gouge” – a bowl gouge with a bevel between 60°-85°, sharpened flat across the top. The bevel helps lay down the wood fibers and makes it much easier to achieve a good cut.

This wood responds extremely well to negative-rake scraping, and is especially effective for evening out a curve. (A skew held on its side is a good choice for convex curves, while an arc tool is excellent for concave ones.)

Rim Style

Try different rim styles to achieve different effects: a convex rim will produce a “crescent” at one end. Meanwhile, a flat one will produce simple bands of color (similar to the look of the band-sawn blank).

Sanding

Dyed Plywood is extremely easy to sand, and polishes to a high-shine. A normal working pattern for me is to power-sand to 600 grit, then finish. (Do not skip grits). This material can be sanded to even higher grits and achieves an even greater luster. (Try 3M Finishing Papers or Abralon in 1000 to 4000 grit).

Decoration

The rim of the bowl is decorative and unique as it is, yet there is further room for creativity:

Turn beads on the rim to achieve a “feathered” look, where colors layer upon each other, like the feathers of a bird's wing.

For a decorative, (non-utility), bowl:

Let the design you've created inspire a picture, either abstract or realistic. Pyrography is an excellent choice for decoration, producing both lines and texture. Pyrographize the piece *before* applying finish for best results. (Wood burning *through* a finish is more difficult, and also results in additional fumes.)

Carving techniques may also be utilized to create a truly unique piece. Because the wood is in layers, carving through will reveal other colors, allowing contrasts to be made. Dyed Plywood carves very easily with diamond or carbide rotary-tool tips.