

# Effective Design

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## OVERVIEW

Creating any work on the lathe requires one to be a designer. To successfully accommodate the characteristics of the material, or even using mistakes as an opportunity, requires knowledge. It is important to understand that there are no formulas or rules that will guarantee success. Good design is a very complex process where the turner manipulates the elements of design to achieve the best results.

## THE ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

- 1. Craftsmanship:** The well crafted piece will not contain unintentional flaws such as torn grain, sanding scratches, inadvertent tool marks, poorly fitting parts, etc. The mastery of the materials and tools has a great impact on the overall perceived quality of the work.
- 2. Pleasing Curves:** In works where curves are a part of the design, it is important to take a close look at what it is that makes some curves better than others. Basically, pleasing curves should contain no flat spots. Additionally, curves that vary are usually considered to be more pleasing than curves with a constant arc. Understanding that even simple curved lines that connect two points can vary almost infinitely, selecting the best curves from among all the possibilities can be a lifetime quest. There is no rule or mathematical formula that can be used to identify the best line. The ability to “see” a good line is a skill developed by the experience of looking carefully at, and examining and analyzing curves side-by-side. With experience and time, the ability to perceive even subtle variations can be developed.
- 3. Thematic Coherence:** In most designs the individual elements should be supportive of the design goal. The shape of the parts of a design, as well as the textures, colors, and size of the components should all work together to support the theme or intent of the work. Given the number of possible variables to assess, however, makes evaluating the consistency of any design a challenging task. An example where thematic coherence is an issue is where a segmented turning is created to resemble Native American pottery. The shape of the work should fall within certain parameters established by the rich tradition of existing pottery, as well as including related concepts of repetition, variety, rhythm, and balance. In a well designed piece, the individual elements are all involved with each other in a way that makes some logical sense.

## **SCALE/PROPORTION**

The size of a work is an important issue to consider. Generally, the larger the piece, the more it attracts attention. Some turners produce very large pieces as a way to dramatically showcase bright colors, large patterns or dramatic texture. This can be effective for certain pieces. It is important to remember that size is a design element that should be purposely chosen to support a design goal. Whether large or small, the size element should be a part of the design that makes sense. Proportion is another size related concept. The relative size of the opening or foot of a bowl or vessel is a frequently debated issue. To critique proportion, it is necessary to be familiar with established conventions and to have a good familiarity with the possible variations. Wide exposure to a variety of styles of work is very helpful.

## **USE AND FUNCTION**

In some works, practical considerations are important. The design elements must take into consideration how an object is to be used or displayed. If it is to be shown on a bookshelf, it must not be too tall or wide. Designing for a particular décor requires knowledge about the established rules. For example, a piece designed for a modern house would be styled differently than one designed for a colonial themed space. Our ability to make a good judgment regarding use and function is again dependent on our knowledge and experience. Comparing designs that work with ones that are lacking is a good place to start.

## **MEANING FEELING**

Lying somewhere beyond the basic design elements listed here are the attributes of a piece that elicits deep feelings and meanings. Certain colors, forms, textures, embellishments, patterns and shapes are chosen to communicate these emotional messages. As in other art forms, it is often not possible to explain why a particular piece conveys the meaning that it does. Suffice it to say, as we develop and grow in a particular culture, our brains are in fact programmed to respond to certain visual stimuli in a particular way. As individuals, our experience leads us to develop unique responses to things we might encounter later. The feelings of a designer give some guidance during the process of creation. To use meaning/feeling effectively requires that the designer/critic develop good social knowledge and cultural sensitivity.

# Evaluation Form

Comments:

Piece Identifier: \_\_\_\_\_

## Finish: Comments

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Form/Line Elements: Comments

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Style Elements: Comments

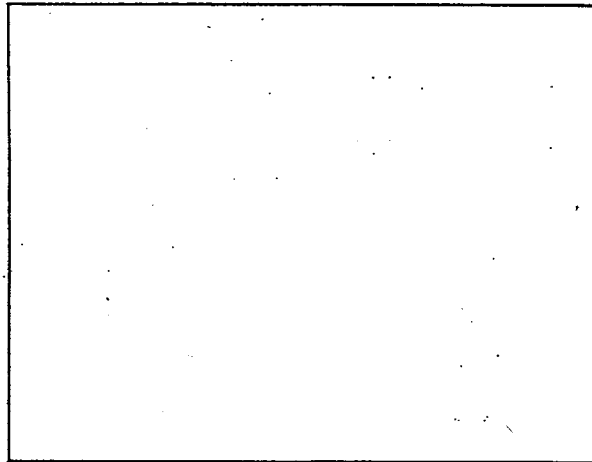
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Possibilities: Comments

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



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### LEVEL I Beginning woodturner Finish Elements

- Torn surface (wood fiber broken rather than sliced cleanly).
- "Bruised" surface (dark area in finish indicating damage beneath the surface of the piece).
- Sanding marks (visible scratches or lines).
- Tool marks (ripples, break in line continuity, gouge, spirals, or chatter marks).

### Form/Line Elements

- Inside lines are inconsistent (inside and outside shapes are inconsistent).
- Flat or high spots (lines that do not flow smoothly or transition smoothly).

### Thickness

- Too thick (a judgment call; form does not relate to function or where object is not aesthetically pleasing).
- Too light (piece is not usable or too fragile to be practical).
- Balance (object is too top heavy or bottom heavy to be pleasing).

### Style Elements

- Consistency (style elements do not fit together).
- Size (style elements not sized correctly to be aesthetically pleasing or practical for use).

### LEVEL II Intermediate woodturner Finish Elements

- Finish is not consistent (may vary in thickness, gloss, color).
- Finish gloss/smoothness not appropriate for piece (finish impractical or not consistent with style).
- Texture (if used) is not appropriate or texture detracts.
- Minor flaws in surface (small places where surface flaw detracts from overall quality).

### Form/Line Elements

- Inconsistent style elements (features clash with the artistic style or intent).
- Shape does not achieve potential for form. A piece made in a certain style may vary greatly in the shape of its elements; certain shapes can be deemed more effective.
- Minor areas where lines do not flow (minor curve issues characterized by subtle bulging or straightening of the line).
- Form is not consistent quality when viewed from all angles. Size and execution of some elements may not add to the work's quality.

### Style Elements

- Overall design below potential. Suggest changes in materials used for construction, selection/execution of design elements, color/finish.

### LEVEL III Advanced woodturner

A critique using Level III checklist items is generally reserved for well-executed pieces that generally receive no criticism on Level I and Level II checklist items. A critique at this level is more focused on helping the craftsman take a great piece of work and make it better or use it as a springboard for new directions.

### Finish Elements

- A different surface treatment would likely add appeal. A different surface would add to or enhance the piece; be prepared to describe and tell why a change would help.
- Color/stain would help. Color warrants change; describe the potential effects of a color change.

### Form/Line Elements

- A change in size would improve the impact of the work. Scale impacts how we view a work; describe how scaling up or down would help.
- Some changes/additions/deletions of elements would increase the impact of the work. Sometimes simplicity (and conversely, complexity) improve a piece. Identify specific possibilities and describe how they might help.

### Possibilities

- Future potential. Provide the artist with some ideas for changing the work or using it as a basis for new work; this is important to advanced turners who may need new ideas to keep growing and developing as woodturners.

Thanks to Jim Christiansen for developing this form.