A new take on Angel Ornaments
By John Lucas

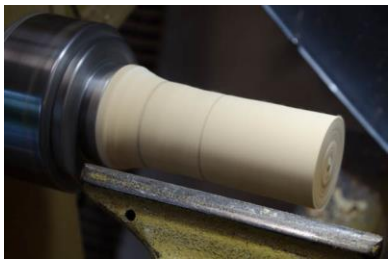
Nick Cook wrote a wonderful article about making Angel ornaments in American Woodturner Vol. 19.4 I loved them. I made quite a few back then and still make a few each year. This year I decided to do something a little different. I wanted to play around and give the Angels a little personality. I began experimenting with surface design on the body and wings. Then I decided the wings needed more and started playing with new ways to turn the wings and how texture and carving could be used to give the wings new life. This led to a little series that is still developing.

I start with the body that is very similar to Nick's. I start with a piece about 5" long. In this case I just used a piece of firewood of light color. I use a circle template to find the center.

I then use a spindle roughing gouge to turn a cylinder about 2 ½".

I mount it between centers and round it off and then turn a small tenon for my chuck on one end.

Mount this in the chuck and then turn it down to 2 ½" in diameter. Then mark a line 2 ½" from the end and another one 3 ½". This is for the head.



I use my parting tool to cut a line at 2 ½" down to 1". Then I move up to 3 ½" and cut another groove down to 1". Then clean up in between these 2. This will be the head. Now turn the skirt all except for the very top.

I turn the skirts anywhere from 1 ¾" up to 2 ½". I depends whether you want your Angel to appear tall and slim or shorter and wider. Both look good to me and probably 2" is good for your first one. I don't turn the shoulder area. I taper the skirt from the bottom up to the shoulder but leave it full thickness there. This reduces the chatter when you are hollowing. I use a spindle gouge for most of it and follow it up with the skew for the final passes. Once I have the outside turned I start hollowing. I first drill a 3/8" hole about 2 1/8" deep. This speeds the hollowing. I used to use my spindle gouge in a back cut with the flute pointed left and hollowing from the center out.

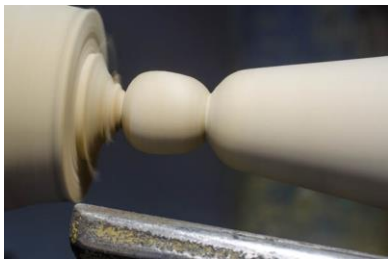
I have since found that the Hunter mini Hercules works better for me. I do a push cut straight in for about ¾" and the move out and do another pass until I reach the outside thickness. If you get a lot of chatter someone years ago taught me to put several rubber bands around the outside. It's hard to believe but it actually works. I will sometimes still dampen the vibrations with my fingers also but you have to stay away from the rubber bands. Then I cut another ¾" or so until that is the proper thickness.

You could probably leave it like that or start your sanding there but I like to use a Hunter straight ornament hollowing tool to clean up the inside. I cut from the center out in a bevel rubbing cut and then use the tool with the cutter facing the wall and do a shear cut out to the bottom.

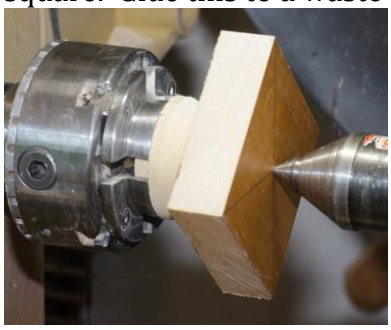
I can usually get the inside clean enough to sand with 220 grit or finer depending on the wood. Since I sign the inside with a permanent marker I like this to be sanded to at least 600 grit.

When I finish hollowing I round over the top shoulder of the skirt and start working on the head. I use my parting tool to cut away more waste to give me room. Then I start shaping the head.

I like to have the chin area smaller than the forehead. It looks nicer this way. I turn the head down to 7/8" at the maximum. This works really well for the Halo's I use. Round over the top of the head but leave a fairly large tenon to make sanding easier. After you sand go back and finish turning the head. I like to turn a small cone shape on top of the head and cut it off at the thin part of the cone. If you cut the top of the head off flush it will often pull out fibers in the top of the head that are impossible to sand out. I would rather carve off that little cone and sand what's left.



Now it's time to turn the wings. I start with a side grain ¾" scrap about 2 ½" square. Glue this to a waste block that you have in your chuck.



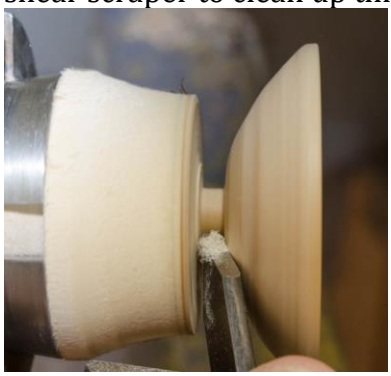
The turn the inside of a bowl shape.

Remember the shape your bowl will be the shape of the wings. This is where it's fun to play. You can make it shallow or kind of deep depending on the final wing shape. Then you have to turn the outside of the bowl. If you start at the rim and cut down you will most likely get a catch. This is because you are turning into the grain. I use either 3/8" detail gouge or my Hunter mini Hercules to shape the backside. Measure as you go so you have a consistent wall thickness. I use my Johnny Tolly thickness gauge but a homemade bent piece of wire also works.

I use a parting tool to cut down to about ½" and then cut stair steps so I very roughly shape the outside of the bowl. Then use the Hunter tool cutting from tenon

up to the lip of the bowl. Do this In multiple passes until it's as thin as you want it. Sand this. Then go back with the parting tool and turn the tenon down to ¼".

Now this is the fun part. I actually use the sloped edge of the parting tool as a sort of shear scraper to clean up this area.



The flat side of the tool acts like the bevel and the sharp sloped edge does the cutting. It works. Honest. You could use the toe of the skew or your 3/8" spindle gouge if you have enough room. I use the parting tool because it's already in my hand and it works. Sand this and then cut it off leaving a very short tenon. This will be used to glue the wing onto the Angel.

Draw the wing shape on your blank.

To shape the wing I use a flat board with a V notch clamped to the work bench. I use either a coping saw with a fine tooth blade or a jewelers saw with a blade that is appropriate.

To find out what blade to choose measure the thickness of the wing. Then use a blade that has about 3 teeth per that thickness. A courser blade will tend to grab the wood and make it harder to cut. A blade with 20 to 24" on the coping saw works OK. A little finer would be better if you turn the wings really thin. Usually I cut the V notches or inside portion of the wings with the saw and I shape the outside with my disc sander. At home I usually use my scroll saw to do the work but it's really not that much faster than the coping saw. I use my disc sander and Dremel to fine tune the shape and clean up the edges if the thickness wasn't the same.

To glue the wing I cut a ¼" shallow hole in the Angel using my Dremel. I use a 13/16" drill bit and set the shank exactly where I want the hole. Then I simply draw around this.

The thickness of the pencil line makes it really close to ¼". I cut the hole with my Dremel.

I test fit and cut more until the tenon fits. Then I simply glue it in with medium CA or fast set epoxy.

The wings above always have a sort of wide spread shape, which is fine if that's what you want. I wanted to experiment with wings that went back or possible up or out. To do these what I do is turn a sort of yo-yo shape. A shallow deep yo-yo makes the wings go almost straight back. A wider yo-yo gives a flare that is in between the first bowl wings and the straight back.

The biggest difference is the wings sort of fold forward instead of backward like the bowl shaped wings. It's fun to play with these shapes and personalizes your Angels. You also get 2 wings per yo-yo, which is nice. To turn these I do a glue up the same way on my scrap block but the wing blank might be anywhere from 1" to 2" in length. 2 ½" square is still a good size. Turn the inner yo-yo shape and then hollow out the bowl portion on the end away from the chuck. You can hollow out some of the other end but you will have to reverse chuck the yo-yo to finish the wing. Since I'm going to shape the outside of the wing more when it's done I simply reverse the yo-yo and place it in my chuck jaws. The jaws can leave little dents of course but I'm going to sand or cut these away anyway. Now you simply use your coping saw to shape the wing. At home I use my Scroll saw.


You also have to shape the part that goes against the body of the Angel. This will be your glue surface. Most of the time I simply glue this to the body but sometimes I drill it and glue in a short ¼" dowel to give me more glue surface and help with alignment as the glue dries.

Now comes the fun part. Actually I usually do this before I glue on the wings. I start playing with any texturing technique I can find. So far my favorite has been to use a small round pyrography pen to make a series of dots in whatever shape I want. The idea was to create what looks like indian bead work. After I get everything burned I use JoSanjo Irridescent paints and just sort of paint small patches of different colors all over the burned dots. It's amazing how much it looks like hand bead work. I did find that minwax wipe on poly shows off the beads better than thicker laquer finishes. Another fun easy one is to make little burned snow flakes all over the skirt. Puff paint or 3 dimensional T shirt paint is fun to add flowers or 3D dots all over.

Texturing and carving the wings has been a lot of fun. One thing that I'm still playing with is woodburning something like feather shapes using my pyro skew pen or a shader. Then I paint the wing to cover the black lines. Then I spray the wings white or silver with Krylon spray and then use Krylon Glitter Blast diamond dust or Glitter Shimmer Glistening Gold spray . This is a really nice look and you could spend as much time as you want to really make it pop. Of course just using good looking wood is always an option and skip the paint.

For the Halo I use 3 different methods. One is to simply turn a ring out of wood. I do this similar to turning a captured ring but once it falls off the shaft it's easy to sand the inside. The other Halo's I found at Hobby Lobby. One is simply a brass ring. They look nice but have a joint that shows. I always place the joint toward the rear of the Angel. The newest ones I also found in the jewelry section of Hobby Lobby. They are actually called Halo's and are plastic. They appear twisted. I really like the looks of these and they glue down really well with thin CA.

You can easily put a hanger on top if you want these to be Christmas ornaments but since some of my Angels are not necessarily Christmassy and people tend to put them on a shelf I don't put the hangers on until I ask.

Here is a just a sample of some of the possibilities.