

Words from the Shop

by

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I did not fully appreciate how much I received out of our club until the meetings were brought to their temporary close. Oddly, that may be the lesson for each of us in 2020 that we only appreciate the freedoms and privilege to life in America when there is some part of it disrupted.



One of things I have appreciated this last year was the tireless work of our Editor in bringing us a newsletter and keeping some dialog going between us. So in a small way to say thanks to Tom, I decided to write something for the newsletter. I hope one or more of you will follow suit and do the same.

So, what is new in the shop? Well I have been spending time trying to get more out of a bowl gouge by really trying to understand the geometry of the tool, the various ways to obtain a better cut and how to use a greater percentage of the potential out of the tool. When we get back together I will try to share what I have learned, but experiment with different grinds, watch how small differences in angle and your stance can achieve better (or worse) results, stop the lathe more often and look at the surface you are cutting and lastly, sharpen far more often. Learning how to really move myself to better steer the tool has created a better result here.

Milk Paint Bowl Project

I recently completed a small project that I thought I could share with you, a group of red oak cereal bowls with a milk paint finish. I have been moving towards making things that are usable in daily life and don't just sit on shelves. These bowls were a recent series of work in that overall shift in my focus.

The criteria for the bowls were several fold.

- First, I wanted them to look hand made. They very slightly in shape and dimensions but look like a set. So that meant no templates or guides, just turning them by eye. I didn't measure anything.
- Secondly, I wanted them to stack. Cupboard space is always at a premium so it seemed that they needed to be something that would fit in their allocated space.
- Third, they should look like, well a cereal bowl. Cereal bowls are stable, so they have a base wide enough so that they do not tip over. They are big enough to hold food, but not so big that the food is dwarfed by the bowl. They are tough enough to get knocked around, but not so chunky that they are hard to grab.
- Lastly, they should brighten the table, but not overpower me before I have had coffee. I thought the muted colors of the milk paint would add that dimension and offer something that became even more pleasing over time as the natural irregularities and wear characteristics of milk paint added to the charm. The goal was to create something that would be used, not something to be stacked and dusted.

I made a prototype bowl and brought it into the house about 9 months before the project. It has been used every day, washed and dried and kicked around the kitchen. The prototype taught me several things that were helpful.

- Wooden bowls were practical for daily use.
- The rim needs to be rounded and allow entering and exiting the bowl with hands and utensils without a sharp edge.
- The bowl shouldn't be more than 2 – 2 ½ inches deep inside.
- The base needed to be at least 40% of finished diameter, but not more than 50% so that it was easy to pick up and handle, yet stable.
- Watco Danish Oil didn't wear out over 100+ washings and still looks fine.
- Sanding past 400 grit didn't make a better daily use bowl.

In designing the bowls I chose a milk paint because I like the patina that milk paint creates on wood and I liked the challenge of mixing powdered paints to create the muted colors I was looking to achieve. Milk paint also allows crisp masking without bleedings unlike dyes it allows a very nice line which I thought would add interest over time to the work.

As for wood specie I spent some time thinking about options. Maple bowls work out well in the kitchen. The prototype bowl was spalted birch, and although it is fine, birch didn't seem as strong and durable. Although the prototype survived a few drops to the floor, I was always surprised when I picked it up and it wasn't cracked. I gravitated towards Ash or Oak and settled on Red Oak. I think Ash, White or Red Oak would have all been fine.

Making the Bowls

The bowls are approximately 6 inches across at the rim, and 2 ¼ inches in overall height. The wall thickness is around ¼ inch uniformly though the vessel, and the dovetail tenon on the bottom remains to be the base of the bowl (it is 1/8 inch high). The bowls have a rounded soft rim, are slightly thicker at the rim than right below to allow for easy handling.

a bowl), and then masked off the inside with regular painting tape. The goal of the masking was to create crisp contrast between the wood and the paint. Watco danish oil makes red oak come alive and really shows off the grain.

Milk Paint Mixing and Application

I chose traditional powdered milk paint from the Old Fashioned Milk Paint Company. Their powdered milk paint is in historically correct hues. Come in powder form, just as milk paint used to be made, can be inter-mixed to create custom colors and hold tenaciously to bare wood. I have used it before and it takes a little skill to make it work well, but I love the results and I think its worth the work.

The four colors used for a base was Lexington Green, Soldier blue, Barn Red, and Marigold Yellow. Each was cut with equal parts Oyster White to create a more muted hue. Mixing each with about an equal part water (add slowly and sneak up on the final consistency of heavy cream). A yogurt jar is good choice. Only mix enough for one coat, as milk paint doesn't keep once mixed. Let them set for 5-10 minutes (time for a coffee break) and then mix again. It should have no lumps, so mix thoroughly. Use a disposable brush, as you cannot clean milk paint off brushes very effectively. Put on an apron and disposable gloves so that you keep it from sticking to you and your clothes.

The first coat does not completely coat the wood so don't worry. After the first coat dries in two hours I scrubbed it with a green Scotch-brite pad. (220 grit sand paper also works). Tack cloth the bowls and then mix another coat, and use a new set of brushes. The second coat covered all but the yellow bowls (which got 3 coats). After two hours of drying I scrubbed them again. Then after an overnight drying I removed all the tape, and vacuumed off the dry flakes of milk paint. Then they were tacked

down and a coat of Watco Danish Oil was applied. A day later another coat was applied. Then I let them sit for a month to dry.

The End Result

The bowls I think speak for themselves. The design elements that I sought out to achieve I think came through in the end. Hopefully in 10 years they will still be in use and become a cherished part of someone's daily life.



Mark uses Old Fashioned The Genuine Home Made Milk Paint that comes in 32 colors.





Mark's process of coloring bowls with milk paint.



The final results from Mark are stackable bowls for everyday use.