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# Birdhouse Ornaments

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## Introduction

Much of the information I have learned here came from watching others. We have had Dick Sing come in, Cliff presented a demo a few years ago and several books that I found helpful. *Dick Sing Turns Miniature Birdhouses* Text and Photos by Donna S. Baker, Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2004 and *Woodturning Christmas Ornaments* with Dale L. Nish, Fox Chapel Publishing Company, East Petersburg, PA 2012 are fantastic resources. There may be others out there. You can also look on *Pinterest*, *YouTube* and other resources on the internet.



## Finding Wood

When I first started turning ornaments and birdhouses, I bought my wood. You can get bottle stopper blanks, turning squares and even large spindles. All of them will work. I have stopped buying wood specifically for ornaments and birdhouses and I just use cutoffs. I have plenty of small pieces of wood that are too pretty to throw away. I have cut offs from all kinds of spindles—usually 1" to 3" square. I also have leftovers from turning pens, wands and candle sticks. I throw them in a box and use them when there are too many boxes in my shop. These are fine for the bodies and the roofs.

For the finials, I have plenty of cut offs from pen blanks that will work. I also have plenty of wood that I keep as scrap from my flat work. I have no shortage of wood to use for

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finials. As to the perches, I have found that I lose far too many little pieces of wood when I turn them. Rather than get frustrated, I have taken to buying 1/8 inch spindles from *JoAnn Fabrics*. Yes, I go there. My wife is a quilter and I have lots of time to waste. You can get a package that will last you quite a while for less than \$2.

### Supplies

These are the tools I use—there aren't many. You may use what tools you find useful.

- ❖ 1 and 1/4 inch Roughing Gouge
- ❖ 1/4 inch and 1/8 inch parting tools
- ❖ 3/8 inch spindle gouge ground to a very sharp point
- ❖ 1/2 inch bowl gouge with swept back wings.
- ❖ bedan tool
- ❖ 3/4 inch Forstner bit
- ❖ 1/4 inch and 1/8 inch bits for holes in the body
- ❖ hard wood dowel when needed to hold the body
- ❖ four jaw chuck
- ❖ sandpaper

### Instructions

- 1) Select the wood for the body. I like to put it in my 4 jaw chuck, but you can turn it between centers to make it round.
- 2) Look for a good place to put the entry hole (1/4 inch) and the perch hole (1/8 inch). Use a straight edge to draw the lines on the round body.
- 3) Drill out the holes.
- 4) Drill out the body. The size of the drill bit depends on the size of the body. I try to leave at least a side depth of 3/16. I usually drill just past the perch hole but no deeper.
- 5) Use the 1/4 inch drill bit to drill through the bottom of the body.
- 6) **WARNING—Be careful!** The body is now fragile. It's easy to crack the body if too much pressure is applied in the following steps!
- 7) I put the jamb chuck in the four jaw chuck to turn the rest of the body round. I bring up the tailstock for support and install a cone drive center. Be careful with the pressure. I then turn the bottom round and sand through the grits to 600 grit.
- 8) Make sure the bottom of the body is flat or the finial will not seat properly.
- 9) **Set the body aside someplace safe. Gravity sucks and broken bodies cause headaches.**
- 10) I then chuck in the piece for the roof. I turn the wood round and then use calipers to find the inside diameter of the body and make a tenon to fit inside the body. Not too tight and not too loose.
- 11) I use my parting tool to put a very shallow flat spot next to the tenon.
- 12) Finish shaping the roof and sand through 600 grit.
- 13) I chuck the finial blank in a four jaw chuck and shape the end to 1/4 inch and check the fit with the body. I shape the finial to match the body. I try to be creative.

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- 14) The birdhouse is now ready to be glued together. Dick Sing uses white wood glue. I use super glue. **Any glue residue that squeezes out will have to be cleaned off or your finish will be ruined.**
  - 15) After the glue dries, use the finish of your choice. I use wipe on polyurethane.

### Lighthouse Ornament

I had nothing better to do one summer day and I turned three ornaments that looked like lighthouses. People like them. I have also made a few that look like princess towers. I have made some light enough to hang on trees and some heavier that just sit on a shelf. The idea is the same, the steps are the same, you just need a bit more planning.

#### Finding a base

I hate throwing away wood. I had some natural edge cutoffs that I glued together for bases. You can buy some fantastic burls that would make excellent bases. I even have one that was a rotted branch from a cherry tree. Be creative.

- 1) Select the wood for the body. Some lighthouse have white bodies, some have red bodies. You could also dye some curly maple red for a very cool effect. Mark the centers on the ends. Put in the four jaw chuck and drill half way through one side then turn the blank around and rill the other half through. **(Again—the size of the bit depends on the size of the body—make sure to leave enough room for the body and the body will be narrower at the top than at the bottom.)**
- 2) While the blank is still in the chuck, I use my narrowest parting tool and put a flat ledge right at the top of the blank.
- 3) Bring up the tailstock with a cone center and turn the blank round. I sand through the grits to 600.
- 4) Drill the hole for the perch and the entrance hole using the directions from above. If the lighthouse is long enough you can drill more holes. I prefer just the two holes.
- 5) You will have to taper the body. I usually start with 1 1/2 inch stock and leave an 1/8 inch tenon on the bottom.
- 6) I have seen other people turn a plastic tube for the lighthouse light section, but I use the lightest wood I have. Holly and maple work well. I match the diameter to fit that ledge and then drill through the blank. Sand through the grits to 600 grit.
- 7) I then make the roof following the above steps. I often use my wood burner to make roofs that look thatched or shingled. People seem to like that. I have also marked lines on the body and used the wood burner to make lines that look like the lighthouse or princess castle is made of blocks or bricks.