



Dave Chapman, wood turner

Jon : That's a very neat piece of lathe-turning there, Dave. Could we switch off the machine, and I'll ask you a few questions. So, what is that?

Dave: It's what they call "spalted beech," which means it's a piece of beech wood, but it's got fungus that's got inside the wood. If you can keep it at a nice cool temperature, you can stop the fungus from attacking the wood anymore, so you keep the patterning of the fungus and the strength of the wood.

Jon: It's like an ink dye, isn't it?

Dave: Yeah, it's – the good thing about it is all nature. It's nothing you could actually replicate yourself. It's all what Mother Nature's actually done to the wood itself.

Jon: Right, so what is that actually going to be in the end?

Dave: It's just a small pot. One of my neighbors has asked me if I can just make a little small pot for his wife. I think he's after currying her favours, I think.

Jon: What makes your wood-turning distinctive is that you actually apply paint at the end as well, don't you?

Dave: I do. As long as it's not like the spalted wood, it's got a really nice grain. If it's a boring pale colour like you find in sycamores and maples, and tulip wood, then I tend to apply different art effects, whether it's just ordinary acrylic paints or whether it's airbrushing, or even texturing by using carving tools. Because even though the bowl might look nice, to be honest, it's quite boring and pale. So, rather than just be round and brown, I want to add an artistic, a bit of artistic flair to it as well.

Jon: That's not very common. Most wood-turners just leave it as natural wood, I think, don't they?

Dave: In France you'll find that virtually every wood-turner will actually just leave it as turned wood. But now in the UK, a lot of wood-turners now are actually starting to experiment with different paints and everything. Years ago, it was like, you know, frowned on, really frowned on, to actually paint woods. But now, what the wood turners have realised is that they can turn that artistic flair. They can still turn a beautiful item, but they can actually enhance the item by using various mediums to actually improve it.

Jon: Going back to the wood, I mean, what wood has a very interesting grain?

Dave: Well again, for grains, I tend to stick to the European woods. I don't, if I can help it, I very rarely touch exotic woods, mainly because of the price, and they're restricted because you have to buy them from managed forest areas, so, course, again that also reflects in the price, because it's from managed woodlands. So, I tend to use European woods, and out of those, what I tend to like are wood like ash, which has a very, very open grain and then yew, which doesn't have an open grain – it's a tight grain – but it's just the effects you get if you can get a piece that's had lots of branches near it.



Jon: So, sorry, what's the difference then between an open wood and a close-grain wood?

Dave: The closed-grain wood is that the fibres of the wood are very tight together, so you could actually carve it in straight lines. Whereas if you have an open wood, where ... if anybody's ever cut a piece of pine, that's very open – it will splinter and it will go in all directions because the grain is very wide apart. You find that your ashes tend to be like that. But, having said that, that grain effect can be used to artistic effect, again enhancing on Mother's Nature. However, the grain's been put in; you can actually, I use what they call a bronze-wire brush, and where the grain is, that wood is softer than the other wood. So, if I use a bronze-wire brush, I can actually take wood out of the grain, so then, what I can do then, is I can stain it or paint it, and then I can make the grain a different colour. So, I can have black, silver or gold, so we could have a bowl, say, a black bowl, but it's got all the grain work is in gold or silver.

Jon: Interesting. But, you're also a carver, as well, aren't you—a wood carver?

Dave: Yes, I like wood carving as well. I actually did wood carving before I started wood-turning.

Jon: And you showed me, not so long ago, a head, on a stick. What wood did you use for that?

Dave: That's lime, because it's the easiest of the woods to carve. You can carve oak, but again, oak's very hard. You can carve tulip wood, and you can also carve sycamore. But you find most woodcarvers tend to use a lime, because of its nice, tight grain.

Jon: So, would this be easy to carve?

Dave: This? It would, if ... well, beech is another one that is a tight grain which would carve well. But, it'd be a shame to actually take a carving tool to it with the patterning that's actually on the wood. If it was a plain piece of beech, then, yes I would take something like, a carving, me carving tools to it.

Jon: It's a very distinctive wood. Is this very difficult to find, this particular – what was the technical word again?

Dave: It's called "spalting."

Jon: Is that common?

Dave: It is in woods like the beech, yeah. The thing is, I mean, I've never seen it for sale here in France. This is a piece of my woodman's firewood, that I've managed to salvage from the log stall. In the UK, what you will find is that they will charge premium prices for this kind of wood.

Jon: So, give us an example. That little chunk of wood there, which is probably about four inches big. How much would that be?

Dave: Well, 'cause it's four inches, the thickness of it, four inches deep – before I started cutting it, it was about six inches – you'd probably be talking, in the UK, I would think you'd be talking probably £12, between £12 and £15.



Jon: And if it were ordinary beech without the sapling, without the stripping, without the spalting?

Dave: You're probably talking about a fiver.

Jon: Quite a big difference then?

Dave: Yeah.

Jon: But it does look good.

Dave: Yeah. The reason being is, because if you – this one is an average tree from a log stall, but if you're buying it from a reputable company in the UK, they've had to dry it and they've had to also had to be able to know when to stop drying it, and that the spalting effect has reached its effect. Because, if you let it go on too long or if they dry it too much, what happens is the wood just goes to powder. So when you try and turn it on the lathe, it's just impossible to get a finish on it; but it just goes to dust. So, they are charging you for their ability to be able to stop it.

Jon: OK. You'll have to take our word for it, but it does look very good. You've got a couple of exhibitions coming up.

Dave: Yes. What I've found is that the better outlet for me is the actual artisans' markets, rather than your standard markets.

Jon: Why is that?

Dave: Well people in France tend to go to the market for food. And, unfortunately you can't eat what I produce, although I get plenty of very nice comments, and admiring looks, because I think they have this psyche where, "I'm going to the market, I'm going to do me shopping, and I'm going for food and veg and whatever," it tends to get a little bit over-looked.

Jon: Yours is a luxury item, I think.

Dave: It is a luxury item to them, and that's not what they've gone to the local markets for.

Jon: OK, thanks to you very much for spending time talking to us and we'll let you get on with your work.