

Creating texture using paint – part 2

Carrying on from the last issue, **Michael Scarborough** takes us through the steps for creating his 'Afterglow' candlesticks

As I stated emphatically in my first article of this series, no one loves a well-turned and polished piece of wood with its natural beauty showing through more than I. But, with beautifully-figured and exotic wood in pieces large enough to turn becoming an increasingly endangered and expensive commodity, wood artists are more often creating decorative and painted finishes on less spectacular pieces of wood. And, more importantly perhaps, the world of wood art is simply evolving, as artists such as Binh Pho and Joey Richardson, with their delicately incised and colorful pieces, show us the tip of the iceberg in what is possible with this amazingly flexible and dynamic medium we all love. I will be the first to admit that the finishing techniques described in this series of articles

may seem extreme. After all, it isn't every day that a turner is asked to drop a handful of dirt onto the workpiece in his or her spinning lathe. But, while these projects may seem a bit avant-garde, it is my hope that they will serve as inspiration for those readers wishing to explore different types of surface finishes.

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MICHAEL SCARBOROUGH



About the author:

Growing up in Japan influenced Michael's turning style, which he describes as 'Japanese-inspired art'. He works with a broad range of materials and techniques and spent 25 years as a classical singer.

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◀ **GETTING TO WORK**

For me, getting to work does not necessarily mean picking up a gouge and turning on the lathe. A lot of thought, planning and drawing goes into the design process before any turning actually begins. And, while I am always willing to be flexible in making mid-project changes if I feel led to, I find that the more planning I've done before wood chips fly, the smoother the process will be.

Whereas I generally work in the Japanese aesthetic, the overall form of these candlesticks could be considered Eastern or Western. But, in avoiding the extremely tight beads and covets that might be found on a set of specifically European candlesticks, I managed to produce several wide areas on which to display the desired finish. I began this piece by turning two glued-up maple (*Acer campestre*) cylinders, and proceeded to

develop the form using a 12mm spindle gouge. Once the pieces were turned, I sanded them to 220 grit and then coated them with grain filler. After allowing the filler to dry overnight, I sanded the pieces working up to 12,000 grit using Micro-Mesh pads. This preparation work allows me to begin the finishing process, particularly the application of copper leaf, with a glass smooth surface, which is what is required to get the best possible effect.



Step 1: the maple cylinder turned and ready to shape



Step 2: the basic form begins to emerge

FINISHING BEGINS

Whereas the finish on my 'Afterglow' tea set – described in issue 258 – was somewhat subtle, I wanted to increase the visual impact for the candlesticks in this series and, therefore, decided to increase the depth of the finish – literally. I used oil-based sign writer's paint, black with a touch of Burnt Sienna, for the base coat, with a bit of spar varnish and enough turpentine added in to produce a mixture that flowed easily off the brush. I strain everything that goes into the paint cup. While this may seem redundant, considering areas of the piece will later be covered in soil, it makes a huge difference in those areas to be covered in copper leaf.



Step 3: the base coat sanded and ready for clay and copper leaf application

PLAYING WITH DIRT

I wet sanded and recoated the base coat on a daily basis for five days. On the seventh day I planned to rest, but on the sixth day, I liberally coated the chosen areas with a gloopy coat of black paint and then smothered it in the dry clay. While seeking a deeper and somewhat rougher clay coat on this piece that would not flake off when handled, I had to ensure that the clay fully adhered to the surface. So, once the paint coat had hardened, I sprayed the surface well with heavily diluted carpenter's glue, to



Step 4: smothering the wet paint in dry clay

PLAYING WITH DIRT (CONT.)

which a drop of washing-up liquid had been added. I then allowed a couple of days for the finish to fully harden.



Step 5: adding diluted glue to the clay



Step 6: the candlesticks resting before they are over-coated with black paint

BUILDING A FINISH

Once the finish was completely hardened, I over-coated the clay with a liberal coat of black paint to which a bit more spar varnish had been added for subtly increased translucence. This building up of increasingly translucent layers of finish creates a visual depth in the piece and, along with it, an increase in visual interest. Once this coat of paint was dry, I donned

my dust mask, turned on the extraction fan, and began sanding. I started with 60 grit sandpaper, worked my way up to 150 and stopped there. I went no further, because I wanted a surface that was visually related to the teapot surface, but not as smooth. Leaving some nooks and crannies in the surface allowed subsequent layers of finish to pool and reflect candlelight.



Step 7: back to black

Step 8: the clay/paint mix is sanded

Step 9: stop sanding when the surface is somewhat even



Working with metal leaf

While gold is certainly the best-known of the metal leafs, there is an excitingly wide range of others available for our use: silver, aluminium, palladium, etc. And, even though metal leaf is inherently beautiful in itself, I view it as a blank canvas upon which many finishes and patinas can be created.

It is customary to undercoat the area to be leafed with a paint colour similar to that of the leaf. So, I initially chose a light sepia colour that would balance well with both the copper leaf and the clay areas. However, upon seeing the sepia colour in place, I found the contrast to be too stark and

decided to revert to a black undercoat. This base colour acts as a background to minimise the appearance of tears or breaks that inevitably occur in the process of laying the leaf. And, in this case, bits of black showing through only added to the aged look of the candlesticks.

◀ **TURNING TO THE LEAF**

It was now time for the coved areas to be addressed. I wiped them down with a turpentine-dampened cloth to remove any soil residue left from the sanding. Due to the thinness of the copper leaf, any imperfections on the surface would be magnified through

the leaf once it was laid. Were this gold leaf, the necessity for smoothness would be tenfold, as it is, literally, of microscopic thickness. Working with copper leaf is good practice. I applied leaf adhesive, also referred to as size, using a thick-bristled brush, as I wanted a

heavy coat with some brushmarks left visible. I want to control the imperfections, but do not mind if some of the leaf breaks and allows some of the black base coat to show through. For me this is the epitome of Wabi Sabi, or intentional imperfection.



Step 10: applying the gilding size



Step 11: the intended effect is now starting to take shape

BACK TO THE DIRT... AGAIN

Using a felt pad soaked with lemon oil, I then buffed the previously sanded areas of black, first with pumice, then with rottenstone. These abrasive powders are fine enough to smooth the surface of the finish but not reduce its depth. The oil also serves to visually darken, tonally warm and cause the matt paint to glow. I also allowed the excess lemon oil to flow

onto the leafed areas. Once the oil had been allowed to penetrate for an hour, I buffed the candlesticks to get them as dry as possible.

“I buffed the candlesticks to get them as dry as possible”

MIXING IT UP

I then mixed a series of paint colours, oil-based clear glaze and a touch of the clay itself. Each of these mixes was applied using a 25mm pounce brush in the following sequence: the tip of the brush was dipped into

the paint; it was then blotted on wax paper; then pounced onto the copper leafed areas. As each application of paint dried, the next was applied. I cannot emphasise enough how subtly this all must be done. The overall effect

TO THE LABORATORY...

I then brushed a mixture of ferric chloride, ferric nitrate and distilled water onto the copper leafed areas to create a subtle, warm brown patina. This was followed by a solution of white vinegar and salt to add a touch of green. Once dry, I sealed the leaf areas with a thin coat of shellac. While these chemical processes served to create a foundation, the bulk of the patina on the copper leaf was created using paint.

is achieved by applying numerous thin layers, not heavy coats.

I pounced all three colour mixes onto the leafed areas, gently blotting any excess paint using a blue shop towel. I then used



Step 12: paint mixes



Step 13: pouncing – this area of Sienna will be blotted



Step 14: ready for final buffing

MIXING IT UP (CONT.)

‘mix 3’ sparingly on the black areas. Being particularly stingy with the red, I literally spotted it on in tiny, well-spread dots on

various areas of the candlestick. In the end, it is pretty much invisible to the eye, but the brain seems to know it’s there. It also allows

the candlesticks to harmonise well with one of my red bowls, should they be placed near each other.

THE END IS IN SIGHT

After these multiple layers of paint had been allowed to harden for several days, I then waxed the entire piece. I’d added dry pigments to the wax in the same colours as the paint I’d used. Again, while these are hardly visible, they add to the visual interest in the piece. Once buffed, the piece has a leathery aged glow.

As a final step, I inserted cut-iron nails to secure the large candles that will grace these candlesticks. As you can see, there is an endless array of colours and materials that can be used to heighten the visual interest of wood art. I hope this series of articles has encouraged you to try using different paint and adding texture on your pieces.

Below you can see the ensemble, ‘Afternoon Tea with the Abbott’, now part of the exhibition, Turning Twenty, at the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, Maine. The pieces, ‘Afterglow Candlesticks’, ‘Winter Afternoon Tea’ and ‘The Head Abbott’s Bowl’, demonstrate how using the same basic colour recipe can harmonise pieces chromatically. ●

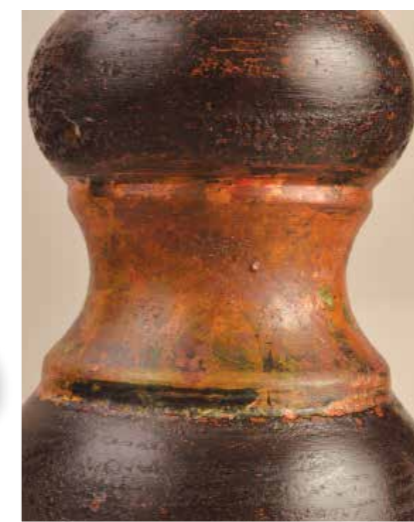


The completed candlesticks



Close-up view of the applied copper size

Here you can see the technique achieved



The completed ensemble entitled ‘Afternoon Tea with the Abbott’