

Penturner's Corner

By Don Ward

Roughing In

I do hope that some of the ideas presented in this column are being put into practice by those of you who also make pens. I will do another couple of slimline modifications in the Penturner's Corner then I'll move on to some other aspects of penturning. Your ideas, suggestions, and comments are welcome. Just send them to me at don@RedRiverPens.com. If the articles are not of interest then tell me that also. I can take it and will try to write articles that are both informative and interesting....just make your wishes known to me.

This month's pen, actually pens, well, actually a pen and pencil set, will accomplish several objectives. The pen and pencil set will be made using maple flooring from the basketball court at the high school gym where I taught. The gym was destroyed by a severe storm in 2003 and I salvaged a few hundred feet of the better figured boards before they went to the dump...70,000 linear feet sent to the landfill. I sure wished I'd had a place to store it! The boards are 1" thick, tongue and grooved flooring. The gym was built in 1962. The maple flooring is yielding beautiful pens and I've sold several to former students who played in the gym on that floor. So, one objective of this month's article is to make readers aware of free wood or wood that has some sort of historic or sentimental value. Be on the lookout in your community for buildings being torn down, trees being trimmed or removed, and other sources for wood that would otherwise be taken to the dump. I've made pens from bowling pins, baseball bats, furniture pieces, a couple's first Christmas tree, 35 year old tree houses, barn beams, wooden golf club shafts, trees from various local government buildings, wood from other buildings, and similar sources. I just recently cut 100 bowl blanks from mesquite trees pushed into piles to make way for a new housing development. The pieces I trimmed off making the bowl blanks made another 125 pen blanks. Be sure to obtain permission before harvesting.

Another objective is to make an identical pen and pencil set. To do this I made blanks instead of just using blanks from the same wood. The pen and pencil were both made from the same 5.5 inch section of flooring. They are actually side by side as pen and pencil as they were in their prior existence as a piece of flooring. **See Figure 1** for the piece of flooring cut into the blanks.

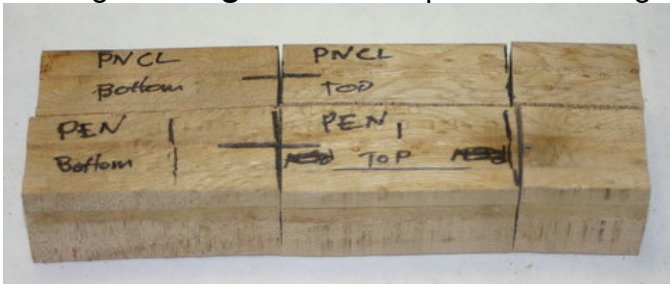


Figure 1

The final objective is to eliminate the kit CB on both pen and pencil. The pencil was made from one blank and the blank was made using 5 parts as was the

pen's blank. But, the pen's blanks will remain two pieces as normal. Read on to learn how to build these blanks.

When I mention the bottom blank I'm referring to the half blank on the nib end and the top or upper blank is the half blank on the clip/finial end. The kits used for this article are slimline kits from PSI. Other manufacture's kits can be used but small adjustments in blank lengths may be needed. CB will mean the center band and/or coupler.

Building the Blanks

To eliminate the CB on the pencil I used a single tube of the appropriate length. The length of the pencil's tube assembly is critical for proper operation of the pencil mechanism. So, I made the pencil's blank first and then the pen's blank to match. The pencil's blank is one piece glued together from 5 parts and the brass tube needs to be one piece also. Two choices for the pencil tubes are possible. First, the two tubes can be pressed onto the CB coupler and even glued into place. The CB can now be ground down to the same OD as the tubes themselves. **See Figure 2** which shows the pencil tubes pressed together before the CB diameter was reduced.



Figure 2

See Figure 3 which shows the pencil tubes with the CB ground down resting next to the two pen tubes.



Figure 3

The second choice for the pencil tube is to use a single long tube. Longer tubes are available from most of our pen kit suppliers. Also, notice that the pencil's tube combined length is longer than the pen's combined tube length. The difference is the length of the pen's CB. So, to make the blank's lengths work out correctly I choose to make the lower blanks on both pen and pencil longer than the upper part. The lower blanks of both are 2.200 inches and the upper blanks are 1.900 inches. These lengths can be changed but the total length of both blanks should be the same and the length of the pencil's finished blank is the most critical. Make the pencil's blank first and then make the pen's blanks to match.

Here is what will be needed to build these two blanks. These dimensions can be manipulated if the total length required by your pencil kit is maintained and the pencil's blank is built first then the pen's blank made to match.

For the Pencil:

(1) Your choice of blank: I suppose material other than wood could be used. But, I like the fact that these two pens will be a matched set. Remember one of the objectives? Cut the pencil blank into sections 2.2 inches (bottom half) and 1.9 inches (top half) long. Actually, the bottom blank squared should have a final length of 2.2 inches. The top blank will be shortened to it's final dimension later.

(2) Two slices of contrasting wood: The slices used here were .100 thick, drilled with a 7mm bit and squared on both ends. Again, this thickness is adjustable as long as the total finished blank is the same as the two tubes plus CB coupler. I squared the pieces with a pen mill, but other squaring methods can be used. Use your regular method of squaring. I cut the slices with a compound miter saw, 80 tooth blade and a homemade zero clearance fence with a stop block to insure the slices are of equal thickness. These slices tend to be pretty much square when cut this way. One problem with cutting thin slices is they fly away. For this same effect I have used strips of veneer and hand cut them to the desired size with a utility knife and soaked them in wood dye to achieve the desired color. Aniline dye, which is dissolved in water, is my dye of choice. Or, naturally contrasting wood can also be used. The slices for this demo were cut from a stabilized, red dyed maple blank from <http://www.arizonasilhouette.com> . I used red and white because that's the school colors at the school where this maple flooring was obtained.

(3) One $\frac{3}{4}$ inch square section of credit card or motel room key card. A 7mm hole was drilled in the card piece. The expired Chevron card I used was .030 inches thick. If a pen mill is used to square the wooden slices, then the credit card slice needs to be cut into a round disk with scissors to a diameter just smaller than the footprint left by your pen mill. This will yield a nice tight glue joint for the card piece sandwiched between the two red wooden slices. Also, if the disks are squared with a pen mill then I pre turn the ends of the two wooden sections to a diameter just smaller than the pen mill's footprint. This is done to insure as tight a fit as I can get. **See Figure 4** for a view of the slices used in the pen blanks made for this article.

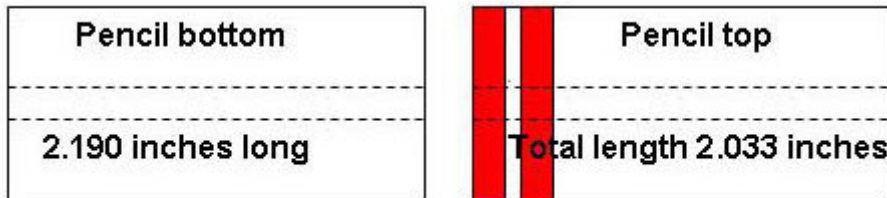


Figure 4

(4) Brass tube: For the pencil, use either one section of brass tube or the two kit tubes pressed onto the CB coupler. Grind off the coupler until the diameter is the same as the brass tube so the tube assembly can be inserted inside the blank sections. For the kit I used here, the final length for

the pencil tube was 4.223 inches. Check your pencil kit and make small adjustments as required. Refer back to **Figure 3**.

The pencil blank's parts are now ready to be glued together to make one blank. I use two part 30 minute epoxy which gives me plenty of working time. I would not suggest using CA for these glue-ups. Onto the brass tube glue the bottom blank, one red wood slice, credit card slice, second red wood slice, and top blank and clamp. Make sure the tube is flush at the nib end of the bottom blank. The upper blank will be just a little too long and can be shortened and squared after the glue sets. See **Figures 5a and 5b**.



These will be glued together with no gap between them.
All five pieces on the tube to make one blank.

Figure 5a



Figure 5b

For the Pen:

The blank for the pen can now be made to mirror the pencil blank. But, the pen will have two blanks. The bottom blank will be one piece of maple, and the top or upper blank will be the other maple piece with the red-white-red CB glued onto it. I like to keep the wooden parts oriented as they were prior to cutting, so mark them and be careful not to glue the red-white-red pieces on the wrong end or onto the wrong blank. Of course it has never happened to me, but it could, AND, YES, IT HAS! Do be careful.

Now let's turn

After the glue has set, the blanks are ready to be turned. I turned the CB section of both pen and pencil to a diameter of .445 and, of course, used regular slimline bushings on both ends. I just turned the pens to a shape that please me. The CB section can be made smaller or a little larger according to your taste. Just be sure to make the upper barrel small enough as to not interfere with the clip's function. This diameter will vary with the use of different supplier's kits and even with the different clip styles available. A bushing from another kit or a slimline bushing can be used for the center bushing. Diameters are regulated using a caliper. If you are comfortable doing so, then no bushing

is needed and the two pen blanks can be butted against each other and turned as though they are one blank. **See Figure 6** for turned and finished blanks.



Figure 6

Which one is the pencil blank? Now follow the kit instructions and assemble both the pen and pencil. **See Figure 7** for the finished set I made for this article. And, by the way, the top blank in figure 6 is the pencil. Now, off to the shop with you!



Figure 7

Parting Off

I do hope that some of you are finding time to try these slimline modifications about which I've been writing. I find them more fun and challenging than making the normal slimline. I would really like to see some pictures of pens made from these articles. Email them to me at don@RedRiverPens.com along with any comments or suggestions about Penturner's Corner. Suggestions for future articles are also encouraged. Let me hear from you.

I mentioned in an earlier article that I've been using Abranet for sanding and I still like it. I've sanded several pens since the last report and the product seems to last longer than the sandpaper I've used. I have heard reports of turners who don't like Abranet. The most frequent complaints are that it is a little pricey and that Abranet doesn't seem to last as long as their favorite sandpaper. I can't agree with either of these. It is more pricey than sandpaper, but I find that Abranet outlasts sandpaper which, for me at least, negates the price issue.

Join a penturning forum and send me some pen pictures along with your comments. Send to don@RedRiverPens.com

Do a good turn daily!
Don