

Off Center Bowl/Platter

Jerre Williams extract. from an article by
Keith Gotschall in American Woodturner Vol 33, No. 2 Summer 2007

1. Choose a sound blank of wood i.e. no cracks, knots, or flawed material.
2. You will need
 - a. A scroll chuck with a screw chuck and spacers
 - b. A spindle gouge
 - c. A bowl gouge
 - d. Whatever else you want to use to create lines or make a dovetail tenon or sheer scrape.
 - e. Let's face it, except for a bowl gouge, the rest is optional.
3. Select a blank size suitable for your lathe. Off center turning is, by nature, out of balance, so remember to allow for the extra amount of swing in the off center mode.
 - a. For a 14" swing, 10" by 1 1/2" is nice,(but 1 3/4" is better to start).
 - b. You will lose at least 3/16" when you turn away the first dovetail tenon and whatever over you waste from cleaning up. Then another 3/16" making the second dovetail tenon. You must still have room to cut the bowl from above at least deep enough to erase the screw (3/4"? 9/16"?) screw chuck holes.
4. Make the blank semi-round. (Use a band saw or a scroll saw. Tom Canfield has a dandy circle cutting jig for band saw that you can make from plans available on the hillcountryturners.org site in the Projects section.)
5. Drill a proper hole in the center suitable for your screw chuck about 3/4" deep. (Use spacers to limit the depth of the screw if it is longer than 3/4" deep. I found that 9/16" deep holds adequately.) You can bring the tailstock up for extra safety.
6. Drill a second offset screw chuck hole that will be the center for the final turning of the piece. Drill the hole in-line with the grain of the wood. For a piece of 10-1/2" the center of the hole should be offset no more than one inch. That will be enough, since you will add highlight grooves etc to the original centered top that will emphasize the offset nature of the resulting bowl. Scale the amount of offset relative to the size of the overall bowl/platters. [At this time it would be good to test the blank by mounting both the center and the offset hole to the screw-chuck to check that you have firm holding and little wobble.]
7. Now, mount the blank in the center hole.



8. In the center of the platter, make a dovetail tenon of suitable size for your 4 jaw chuck (a tiny bit bigger than the closed chuck, use calipers to check.) Keith Gotschall says 1/8 to 3/16 deep is good enough. To start, choose the larger. The dovetail will give you added safety, but don't get too cocky or clumsy with the tools. Don't bother with cleaning up the tenon or decoration because you will turn this tenon away later.

9. Establish the platter rim. Keep the edge rather thick at first, because you will be cutting into the upper part of the platter and don't want to cut through. K.G. likes 3/8" or so. Later, with other platters, with experience of knowing how deep your decorations go, you can try a thinner rim. For now, you can adjust the rim thickness only at the expense of a lot of hand sanding and shaping.



10. Take the bowl off of the screw chuck and reverse the platter to hold it in the expansion jaws. Check that the jaws are tight and seated firmly against the bottom of the tenon.

11. Clean up the surface of the upper part of the bowl to make it true. You will not need a perfect surface since you are going to do some carving on the top. You are now going to cut up the surface in concentric decorations that will later highlight the off-center nature of the bowl/platter.
12. Clean up the edge of the platter. Decide on the surface decoration which can be whatever you want as long as it has some concentric nature to make the off-center effect stand out. You can use:

- a. Beads
- b. Coves
- c. V-grooves
- d. Deep grooves
- e. Surface decoration – burning, drilling, cross grooving, coloring etc. within a concentric framework.
- f. You don't have to, of course, carry the patterns to the center. That will be cut away. You can safely end with a groove that is a half inch outboard of the offset hole.



13. Sand the surface work and sand the outer rim. You won't get a chance to easily do it later. Much of the sanding can best be done on the lathe because of the narrow nature of the work. At this time you can also use thin wedge of dark hardwood to burn in deep grooves and emphasize between beads.



14. Reverse the platter and position it on the offset screw hole. Start the lathe at a comfortable speed. You will find that there is less vibration as the lower section of the bowl becomes centered. Speed up as much as you need and can tolerate.



15. Cut the off-center base of the bowl. As with a square bowl, one must watch the shadow and move the tool carefully, starting at the edges. Watch out for the edge of the wood that you can only see by shadow. Work the outside of the shape, but keep away from the already established upper rim. Check your progress frequently. Stop turning the bowl as soon as you can see that the new cutting is completely around the bowl. Stop the lathe and check your progress frequently. Use care to cut near



the rim and intersection where the bowl and the rim meet.

16. Now clean up the bottom. Leave the bottom relatively wide. A narrow base would not be easily seen and results in a tippy platter. Turn away the first dovetail tenon, which is now off-center. Stop as it disappears. Clean up the bottom leaving it with a slight concave shape to insure the base will sit well on a flat surface. You might even cut a very shallow foot if you wish. At the center, make a new dovetail tenon. Clean up the dovetail and embellish as you wish, because this will be the bottom of the finished bowl. Inspect and sand the whole bottom of the bowl and rim so as to be ready for a finish.



17. Now the last flip. Remove the platter and remount in the dovetail tenon. Bear in mind the shape of the lower bowl. You can decide between thin or thicker wall, but a heavier body will be more stable. In this operation do not "hog" out the material or you may knock the platter out of the chuck. Mark on the tool rest where you plan to cut the inside rim of the bowl, as it will be harder to see the see the expected edge with the offset wood shadow confusing the image. You need to slice away the rim carefully and sharply to minimize the damage to the already established top decorations. To cut, start with the bowl gouge at the "3 o'clock" position so that the cutting edge is slicing the top of the decorations. Once you are in solid wood, move the gouge to a more efficient position and continue cutting the bowl to a pleasing shape. Bowls tend to have some flat at the bottom because of the necessity of cutting out the last traces of the screw chuck holes. Sand and finish.