

# Turning a decorated pen



## Introduction

Pen turning is not just limited to simple kit form pens but may be expanded by exploring many decorative techniques. The techniques I use most frequently are discussed in this article. What is needed is a pen kit, preferably one with a single tube, a light-colored wood, a lathe with indexing of 12-24 divisions, and a wood burning setup. The coloring pens can be purchased through art supply dealers. Here are the steps I follow in creating these colorful gift pens.

## Prepare the pen blank

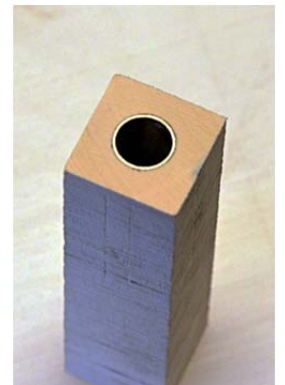
I do all of my drilling on the lathe itself as it affords me the greatest drilling precision and takes little time. For coloring I prefer to work with Holly as it is very white and easily accepts the dyes and pigments.



I insert my brass tubes into the drilled pen blank with thick CA glue after having roughed the brass tube with course sandpaper to increase "tooth".

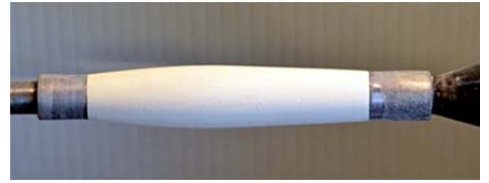


I sand the ends of my pen blanks using a disc Sander and a 90° fence. The end is well sanded when the shiny brass tube is revealed uniformly at each end.



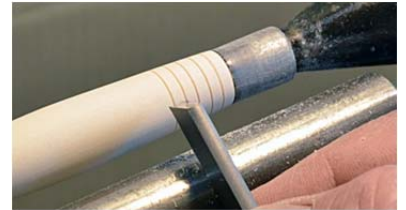
## Turning the blank

The shapes for decorated pens should be kept simple so as not to conflict with the decoration. After the blank is created it is sanded to 220 grit.



## Marking out for the burned lines

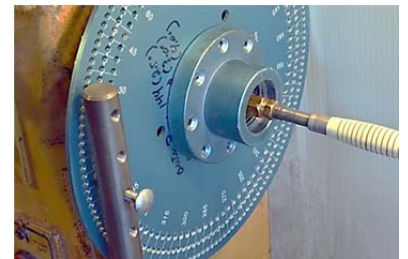
Circular lines are laid out with the tips of a beading tool to mark equally spaced scratches



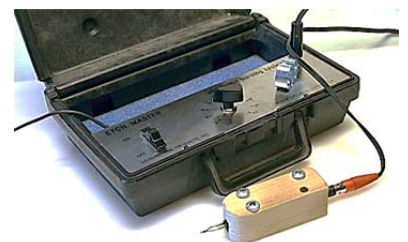
These scratches hold the fine burning wire that deepens the grooves while cauterizing the fibers at the same time. I keep a set of burning wires (all with handles) to burn different widths of grooves for different affects.



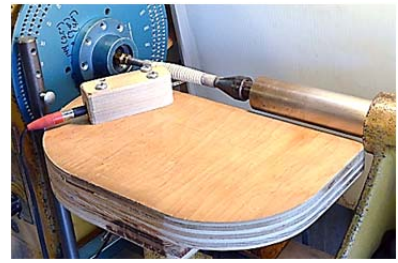
In order to mark out longitudinal lines it is necessary to have an indexing system on your lathe. Most modern mini lathes have 12 – 24 division indexing built-in. My older Powermatic lathe does not have indexing so an external commercial plate was purchased and used.



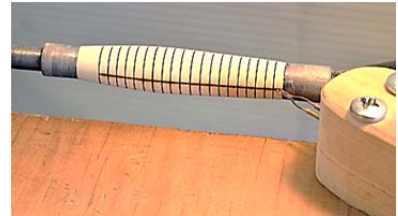
To burn these horizontal lines I use a commercial pyrographic instrument; mine was very inexpensive. I have mounted the pen between two blocks of wood to allow it to lay flat on a support table attached to my lathe's banjo.



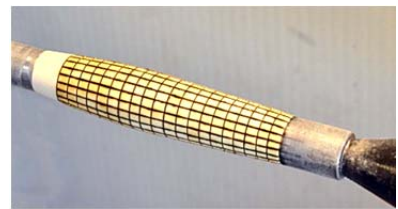
The pen burning tip is placed on the platform and the platform adjusted so that the burning tip is at the exact center of the pen blank. I prefer a skew tip for its finer lines.



The lines are burned by lightly dragging the pen along the table from one end of the blank to the other.



The indexing is advanced and another line is drawn. For most pens I use 12 – 24 longitudinal lines.



When all the lines have been burned in a light sanding to 220 grit is done to sharpen the detail and remove the accumulated whiskers from the wood surface.



## Coloring the blank

The blank is removed from the lathe and the pen colors are chosen from my palette of colors.



I currently am using the Copic brand of markers because they have very small pen tips, are colorfast, and acid-free. Other brands also can be used with equal ease; search for a brand that has very small pen tips and has the range of colors that you prefer. Check with your local art supply dealers.



When you apply the color with the marker the dye leaches to the edge of the burned rectangle. The cauterized wood fibers prevent the dye from leaching further which aids in color application.

## Completing the pen

After the color has been added, the blank is placed back on the lathe mandrel and a fixative is sprayed on; this prevents the dyes from running when a topcoat is later applied.

I allow this to dry overnight before applying acrylic or lacquer sprays.



Three top coats of spray Krylon give me the right high-gloss finish and protection for the pen. After an additional 24-hour drying, the pen blank may be buffed and or waxed if you desire.



The pen kit is assembled per the instructions provided by the manufacturer.



## Summary

There are many pen kits that can be used. I prefer single tube kits but others also have been tried successfully. With your choices of colors, grid patterns, and design ideas there is no end to the possibilities you can create. Gifts to everyone and no two alike!

