Finials

by Ed Malesky

Finials can add a lot of elegance to your lidded vessels or ornaments. However, poor finial design can seriously detract from the final impression you're trying to create from your piece. Elegant finials generally have three design concepts that set them apart from more poorly designed versions.

1. Overall length of the finial is properly proportioned to the size of the vessel or ornament
2. The finial generally contains long, smooth flowing tapers and is not chunky
3. The weight of the finial is in the first third from the base and the last two thirds are lighter, thinner and more flowing. The finial tip should not add too much weight to the end of the finial.

Here are some examples of finials that violate the above rules.





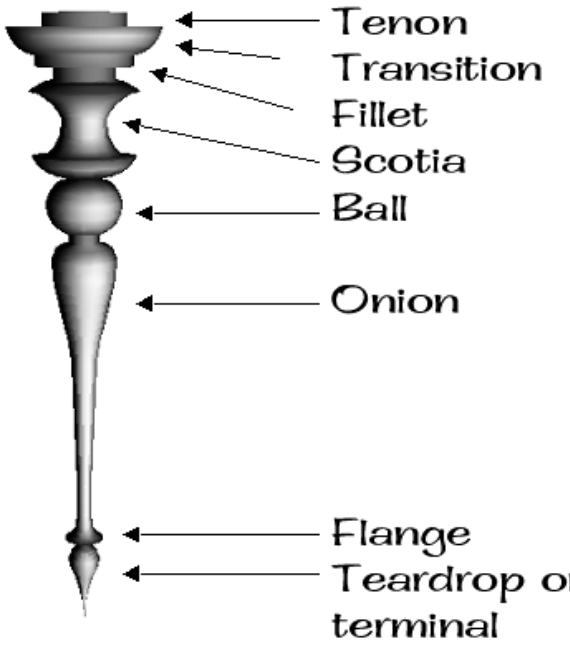
Here are some of the classic finials developed by Cindy Drozda and Dick Sing.





The difference is dramatic. In the first set the finials are clunky and draw away from the ornament itself. The weight is balanced across the whole length of the finial, rather in the first third, preventing the eye from flowing from the ornament.

Finial Parts



Terminals

Some Basic Rules

- Finials look thinner on the lathe
- Largest diameter part should be the transition from the tenon
- The "weight" of the finial should be in the first third
- The last third should taper to zero - unless ball end
- Make one element flow to another - fillets are OK
- Proportion the finial to the piece
- Standardize tenon sizes so that you can "mix & match"

Examples

- Base widest part (onion 56%)
- Weight in first third
- Tapers to nothing
- Elements flow together
- Uses flanges to improve transitions

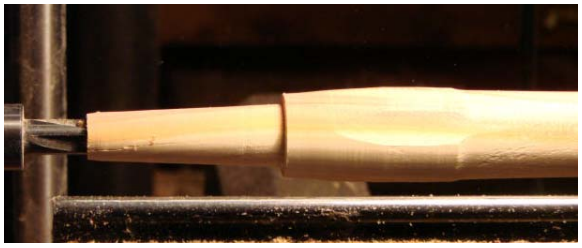
Cindy Drozda

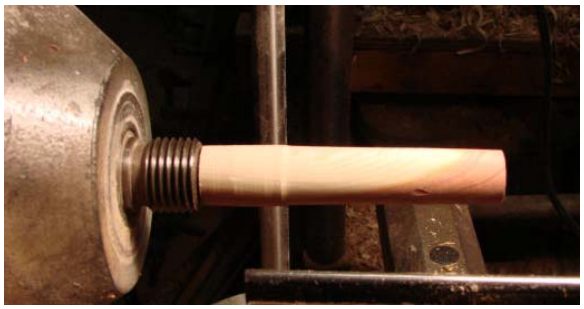
- Base widest part
- Weight in first third
  (33% to first taper)
- Each taper narrower than last
- Last taper longest - good flow
- Rounded fillet used for transitions

Dick Sing

Turning Techniques

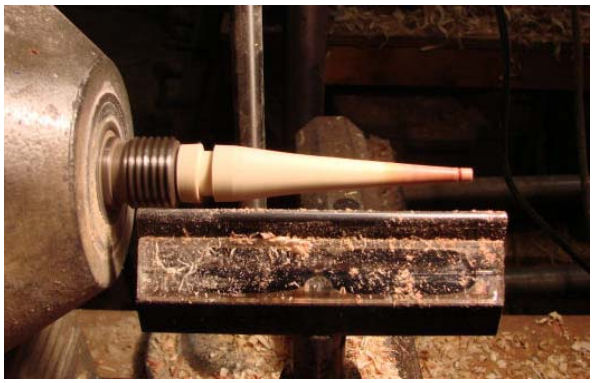
You can mount you blank either in a chuck with pin jars, or if you don't have pin jaws you can turn a Morse taper on one end and drive it into the spindle. You can use your calipers on an existing Morse taper to get the angles right. It is often good to bring up the tailstock when using this kind of mounting, especially until you've roughed out the blank.





However you mount, start by truing up the blank to a cylinder and then taper toward the tailstock end.

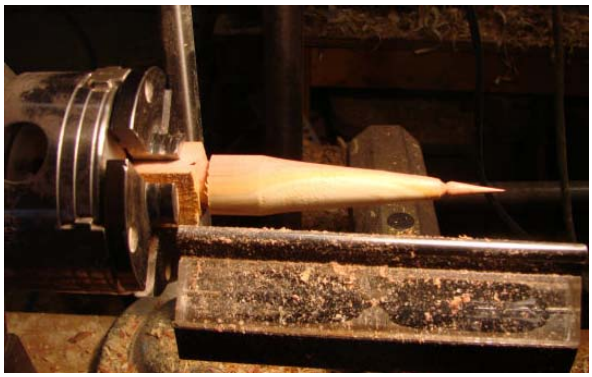
Add your tenon at the widest point to set a reference. I use a 5/8" tenon so that I can match the best finial to the specific ornament I need.



The small notch at the end of the finial blank shows how much I need to remove because of the live center dimple.

Finish the terminal, either to a point or a ball end. Support is needed to get a sharp point.

I usually start the terminal by defining the length of the terminal with a stop cut and then taper to a point, then create the top shoulder.



Notice the hand position to provide support at the tip. The pictures show how the index finger is supporting the last inch or so of the finial. You can support the tip whether you are doing a overhand cut (top) or underhand cut (bottom). In both cases I have the handle of the skew held tight to my body. I also use my thumb of the top of the skew to provide additional support.

From here on it's just a series of coves or beads until you complete your design.