

Simplified Woodturning Photography Outline

A fairly simple approach for taking consistently good photos of your woodturnings. The most important steps occur before you press the shutter release.

1. Backgrounds - simple, plain, white or light grey seamless paper
 - 1.1. Colored backgrounds cause problems
 - 1.1.1. fool white balance of camera
 - 1.1.2. reflect colored light onto wood, distorting its colors
 - 1.1.3. fool the color perception of the viewer's eye/brain
 - 1.2. Gradients can work, but often are distracting
 - 1.3. Slanting background away from piece creates a natural gradient
 - 1.4. "nature," "dramatic," and blurred backgrounds are often too busy or distracting
 - 1.5. "Quick and clean": Find a place at your house, where you can leave things set up for when you need a quick shot - maybe a table or pedestal on the porch, or near a north window, with a permanent acceptable backdrop, such as a neutral-color plastered wall.
 - 1.6. We will have more on background issues later
2. Lighting - simple, 2-point lighting works for most turnings
 - 2.1. Natural light plus white foam-core reflector is easiest
 - 2.1.1. Open shade or north-facing window best
 1. If sunlight is coming through nearby window, light on piece changes quickly
 - 2.2. Broad lighting is usually most effective
 - 2.3. Main light from one side, 45-70 degrees, and somewhat above
 - 2.4. White reflector on other side, 45-80 degrees
 - 2.5. If using artificial light, color temperature and Color Rendering Index are critical

- 2.5.1. CRI 85 or above, and daylight bulbs can be mixed with natural light
 - 2.6. Moderate shadows and highlights are necessary for object to appear as 3-Dimensional
 - 2.6.1. Eliminating too many shadows can make the piece look like a painting, rather than a woodturning
 - 2.7. Watch out for your own shadow, and your own reflection on glossier pieces
3. Stability - blur comes from focus PLUS camera movement
 - 3.1. Use a tripod - It makes everything in a photo repeatable and improvable.
 - 3.1.1. Arca Swiss style quick releases are widely supported; shop made accessories are easy
 - 3.2. Use an electric or manual cable release or wireless remote control
 - 3.2.1. Self-timer is an option, if you are desperate
 - 3.3. Wind can cause stability problems outdoors
 4. Camera position
 - 4.1. Lower than you might first expect
 - 4.1.1. For a bowl, start just high enough to see the rim as an ellipse
 - 4.1.2. For a hollow form, start at about 5/8ths of total height
 - 4.2. Each piece will require some experimentation
 - 4.3. Accept that you can't show everything about a piece in one shot
 5. Camera
 - 5.1. DSLR and Mirrorless offer interchangeable lenses, highest cost
 - 5.1.1. Macro lens probably needed, significant expense

- 5.2. “Bridge” cameras offer built-in macro, great zoom range
\$500-\$800
 - 5.2.1. As an extreme example, the Nikon P900 has macro, 24-2000mm 35mm Equivalent – 83.3X zoom range! ~\$600
 - 5.2.2. Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ1000 ~\$700 has excellent mix of features for general photography, including woodturning
- 5.3. Many “point and shoot” cameras have macro and good zoom
- 5.4. Manual controls useful
- 5.5. Cell phone cameras can give amazing results
6. Lens - macro lens/macro setting needed for photographing many medium and smaller woodturning pieces
 - 6.1. manual or selectable focus: adjust your point of focus to a bit back from front of piece (1/6 to 1/3)
 - 6.2. maximum depth of field = small aperture/high f -stop number, such as f -22
 - 6.2.1. aperture priority or manual mode
 - 6.3. A longer focal length (100-200mm equivalent) is usually easier to work with, allowing the camera to be farther from workpiece.
7. Exposure - remember to use a cable or wireless shutter release
 - 7.1. White balance - turn on your camera with it pointed at background with the final lighting
 - 7.2. bracket exposure, with three or more exposure settings: 1 stop over, 1 stop under, and normal
 - 7.3. Take extras - it will never be easier than now
 - 7.4. Take different angles - you, or the editor, or the jury will want them later
8. Archive - find a way of naming, organizing, and storing your picture digital files that works for you

- 8.1. Finding the shot you need, months or years from now, is impossible, if you don't have a system
- 8.2. Online photo storage and local backups are very important

Background Check – Example photos shown at meeting

Problem photos

1. Busy background
2. Dark, horizon line, low separation
3. Distracting, strange color, shapes
4. Gradient w/odd color, color shift
5. Green background distorts color
6. Halo conflicts with form
7. Haze, insufficient separation
8. Horizon line distracts
9. Hot spot distracting
10. Light bland, doesn't show form well
11. Light dramatic showy, but too much
12. Too glossy, photographer visible

Successful photos

1. Blurred dark background
2. Color blue background
3. Dark grey background
4. Gradient natural white
5. Gradient paper grey
6. Gradient vignette
7. Hot spot
8. Inverse gradient
9. Natural background matches bowl
10. Natural color contrast
11. Not much gradient
12. Shadow and light
- 13.