

## The Simple Birdhouse Ornament

There are a number of techniques for constructing birdhouse Christmas ornaments and the resulting ornaments vary from simple to very ornate and complicated. It has been my experience that fitting the roof to the house and having it sit straight can be the most time consuming part of constructing any bird house ornament.

My technique eliminates having to repeatedly test the fit of each house with its respective roof. Using this technique, any house will fit any roof. If you so desire, you can make and finish a bunch of houses, then a bunch of roofs, and then decide how to combine them for the best look.

### The Body

To construct the body of the house using my technique, a blank that is at least 1.25" by 1.25" by at least 4" is required. The finished house is 1 1/8" so using this size blank does not leave much of a margin for error,

In this demo, I started out with a blank that is larger than the minimum, but that only means that I have more margin for error and will have to remove more wood.



I roughed this in to a cylinder about 1.5" in diameter.



At this point, I pick the side for entry hole and mark the location. I am using a "story stick" that has all of the measurement that will be used to make the house. The hole is about 1" down from the top.



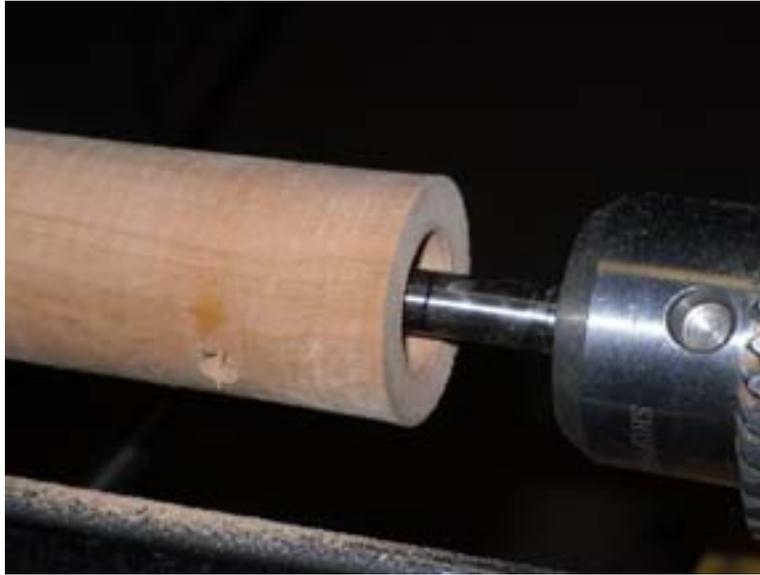
This is a picture of my “story stick.”



I drill a 1/4" entry hole before turning the house to final size to help prevent tear out around the hole.



I use a 7/8" drill bit to hollow the body to a depth of about 1 3/8". I mark the depth on the shaft of the drill bit to eliminate repeatedly having to measure.



At this point, I turn the body of the house to its final diameter of 1 1/8". This diameter of 1 1/8" is critical to fitting the roof using this technique. Again, I use my "story stick" as a gauge. Turning the house to an outer diameter of 1 1/8" with an inner diameter results in a house with a wall thickness of 1/8". If you so desire, additional wood could be removed from the inside to decrease weight. I do not find the result to be worth effort.

I also bring the tailstock up to lightly support the top of the house as I size the outside. Realize that it is possible to split the house if you apply excessive pressure.



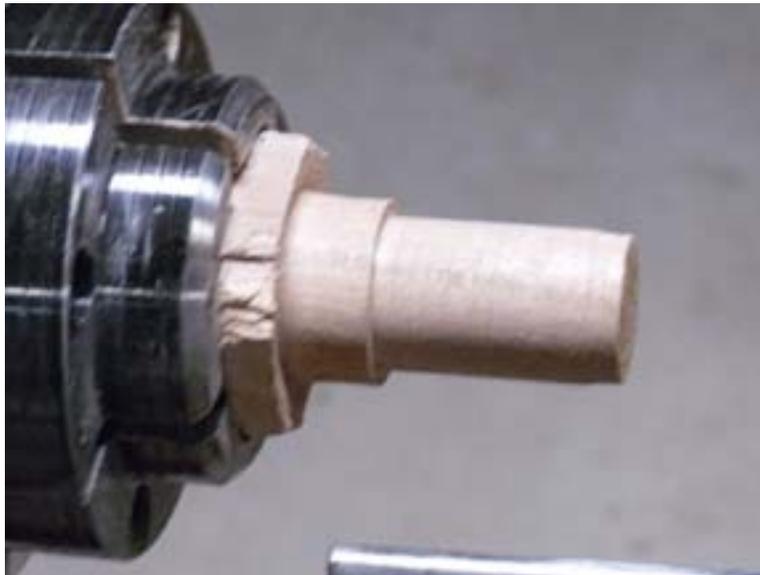
After turning the house to its final diameter, I again use the “story stick” to mark the approximate depth of the inside of the house.



I next rough the lower end of the house, sand and apply a coat of lacquer to the upper portion of the house. I keep a squeeze bottle of 3/4 lacquer, 1/4 thinner near my lathe to use to finish small objects. I slow the lathe, and wipe it on with a paper towel. It will dry in less than a minute. After the lacquer dries, I cut the unfinished house from the blank.



I have a mandrel that I made from scrap that is 7/8" in diameter and about the length of the hole I drill for the interior of the house.



The house is secured on the mandrel with a strip of duct tape.

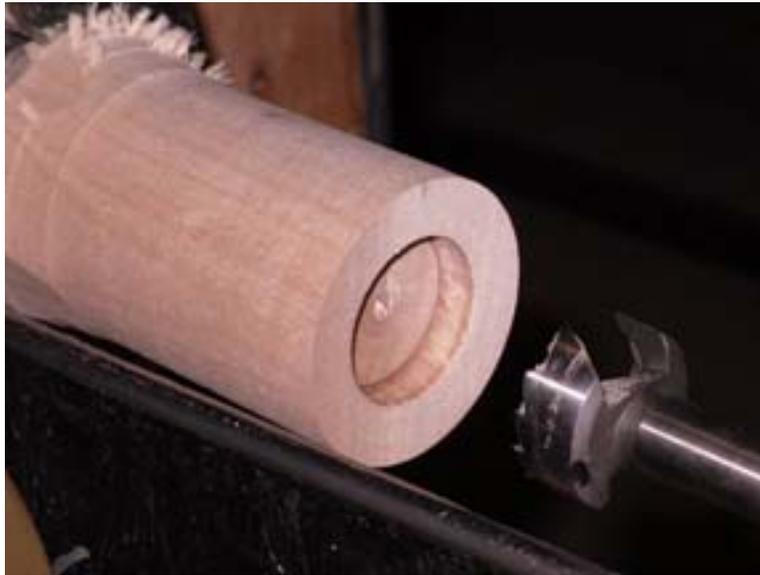


After adding detail to the bottom of the house, it is sanded and a coat of lacquer is applied.



## The Roof

A suitable sized and colored piece of wood is selected, rounded, and drilled using a 1 1/8" Forstner bit to a depth of about 3/8".



The inside of the roof overhang is cut, sanded and finished. Note the small rim that is left to sit on top of the sidewall of the bird house body (partially highlighted in black). Also, some of the inside of the upper part of the roof is removed to decrease the overall weight of the ornament.



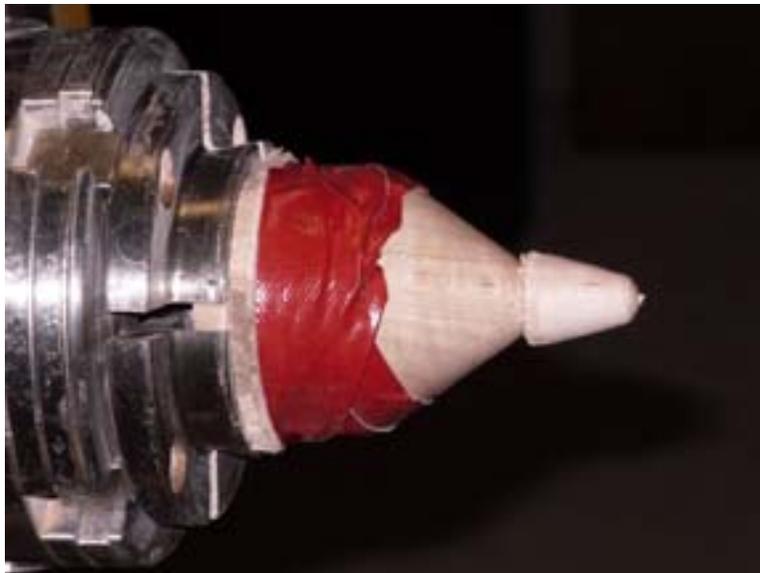
The outer surface of the roof is shaped, sanded and finished with a wipe-on coat of lacquer. At this point the roof is cut free leaving enough material to fashion a decorative finial on the peak of the roof.



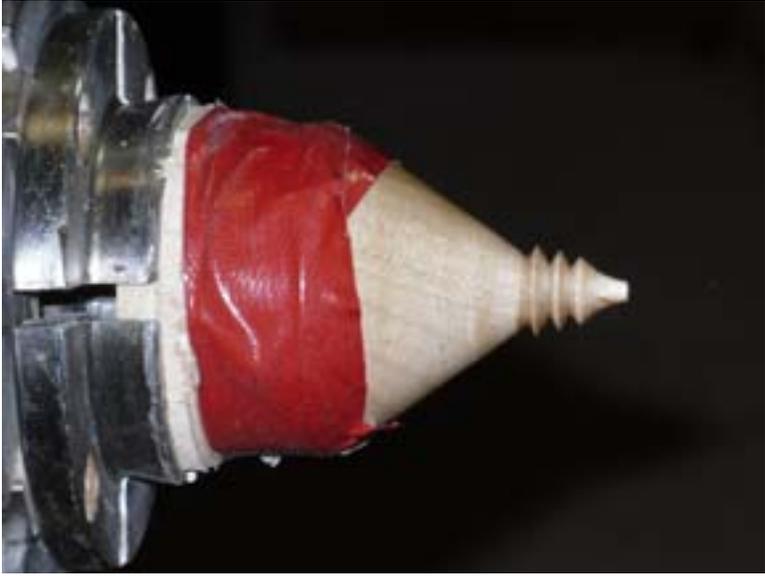
A simple jam chuck or mandrel is fashion to fit the 1 1/8" recess in the roof.



This picture shows the roof stuck on the jam chuck and the following one shows the roof secured with duct tape. Of course, any type of tape will work, but I had duct tape at hand and I have not had a problem with it leaving a residue.



Here the peak has been embellished with a couple of v-cuts. Note that the tip is left a bit broad and flat because a hanger will be inserted into it. The exposed section of the roof is sanded, and a coat of lacquer is applied.



## Hanger, Stand and Finishing Touches

Most people use small screw eyes to hang their homemade ornaments. I personally find that screw eyes appear oversized, and if you are going to use them, you must have a fairly large tip on the finials to accommodate the screw. I use the eye and shank of a fishhook as a hanger. Fishhooks are cheap, come in multiple sizes, and are readily available at sporting goods stores, Walmart, and other retailers.

I use wire cutters to cut hook leaving about 3/8" of the shank attached to the eye.



I use a section of the shank inserted into an electric drill to make a hole in the finial. I then just push and twist the eye into the hole and find that glue is rarely needed to keep it in place. If the fit is loose, putting a slight bend in the shank will generally make it fit tightly.



It is at this point that I glue the two parts of the house together. I use medium CA glue, but any type of glue should work. After applying the glue, I leave the completed house upside down to prevent unsightly glue runs.



After the glue has hardened, I insert the perch (section of a round toothpick) and spray on another coat of lacquer.



I typically make a stand to go with each ornament that I make. The bases range from a simple section of a 3-5 in log to a turned and finished piece of wood or acrylic.

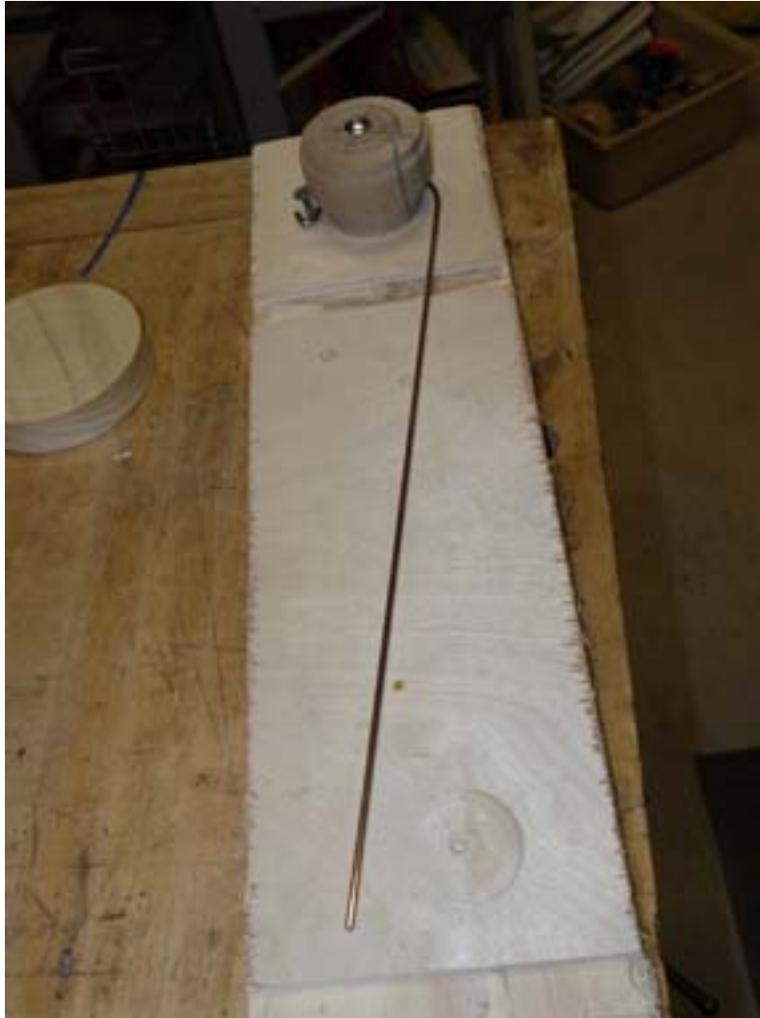


I use 5/32" steel welding rods that are available by the pound at any welding supply store. They come with a gold colored rust inhibitor coating. Other metals such as brass are also available at a higher price. The rods are 36"

long which is enough for two stands. The first step is to bend a small hook on one end using a pair of pliers.



I made a simple bending jig out of a scrap of plywood, the remains from a turned “work of art” and a couple of screws. The previously bent hook on the welding rod is hook on the screw (seen in the upper left) and the rod is bent around the round wooden “peg.”



The shank of the stand is cut to an appropriate length. A 3/32" hole is drilled in the base and the rod is pushed into the hole. The fit is generally tight enough to not require any glue.

