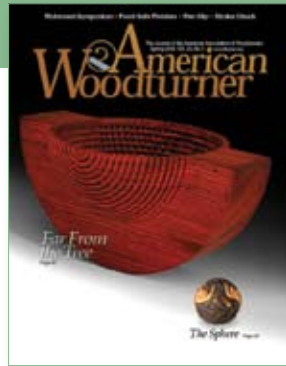


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American Association of Woodturners

Go beyond round

# Circles to Ovals

By Alan Lacer

In a previous issue of *American Woodturner* I wrote about a historic turning shop, the Old Schwamb Mill near Boston, renowned for more than 150 years for its oval picture and mirror frames.

An oval-turning device made the process possible. I also mentioned that a modern version was being developed. A sophisticated oval chuck is now available, and it offers a different geometric dimension to woodturning.

German professor Johannes Volmer (volmer--ovaldrehen.de) and the Vicmarc Company of Australia developed the chuck based on oval devices used in Europe for at least 300 years. The modern version, the Vicmarc OD (oval device), offers some significant improvements. One key advancement is an internal balancing system to oppose the out-of-balance forces encountered in oval turning. There are also adjustments for easily varying the width and length of the oval.

Turning an oval is a change in thinking and execution from traditional lathe work. First, there is no identifiable center of the piece. The "center" is spread out across a horizontal plane. For turners, this change involves getting accustomed

to cutting along this plane, and not going above or below it. If you turn outside of the horizontal plane that serves as the center, you will be working on a different elliptical shape.

Some turners find a trapped tool (as used in hollow turning) works well to stay in this plane. A few turners have used lasers that

shoot a horizontal beam to guide them along the correct path. I have excellent luck just staying in that plane free-hand; I can feel the difference when I get above or below the line.

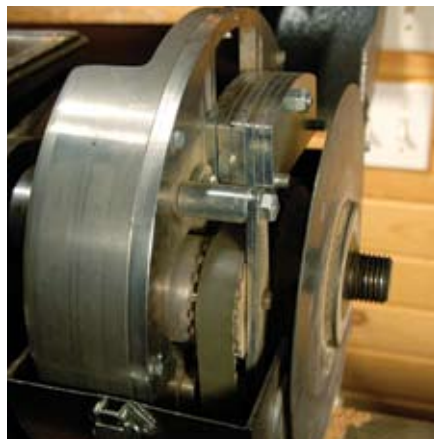
What are the design possibilities? Platters, plates, and bowls are well-suited for this type of turning. A natural-edge oval bowl is next on my list to explore.

For me, boxes have proved to be a little more challenging.

In the hands of contemporary turners, I expect to see some amazing applications. Chapters may want to consider purchasing an oval chuck and making it available through their tool library.

The VO1343 chuck retails for around \$2,000 and is available in four thread sizes (1" × 8 tpi, 1¼" × 8 tpi, M33 × 3.5, and M40 × 2) at Craft Supplies USA (craftusa.com) and Woodworkers Emporium (woodworkersemporium.com).

Alan Lacer (alan@alanlacer.com), an *American Woodturner* contributing editor, lives near River Falls, WI.



**Above:** The inside of the Vicmarc VO1343 includes belts, adjustable counterweights, and adjustments for the proportions of the oval. **Right:** Turning stock attaches to the device with a standard 4-jaw chuck or faceplate.

