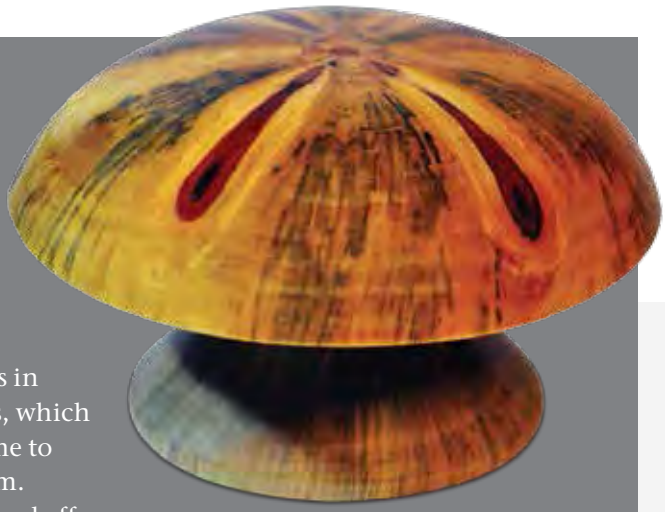
A MUSHROOM FOR MELISSA



Franck Johannesen

A few years ago, one of the most pleasant members of my local woodturning community asked me to make her a toadstool. I was both flattered and anxious—I had never made a mushroom, but it sounded like a fun and rewarding project. I used Norfolk Island pine, a wood readily available in Florida. *Mushroom Hunters Guide* showed mushrooms in loads of shapes and colors, which provided full license for me to create a fantasy mushroom.

The project is enjoyable and offers endless possibilities for dyeing, shaping, and other surface embellishments. Carvers, piercers, and asymmetric turners should enjoy making one as the project lends itself to these skills. ■

Franck's past endeavors have been as an engineer, optician, and tree farmer. He is currently a full-time woodturner and has demonstrated at AAW's symposium, taught at John C. Campbell School, and founded the Sarasota Woodturners.

I mounted a turning blank between centers, using a Oneway Big Bite drive and a live center in the tailstock. With the lathe set at a slow speed, I trued the cylinder using a spindle-roughing gouge.

Next came the opportunity to check the alignment of the knots and adjust the center to provide a pleasing star pattern. Experience tells us that the pattern could be just as interesting off center as perfectly centered—consideration of design features will affect results.

With the cylinder now properly aligned, I squared the tailstock end and began to fashion the top of the mushroom, leaving enough material for a tenon or small faceplate.

I remounted the cylinder into a four-jaw chuck so that the base of the mushroom was toward the tailstock, and began shaping the stem.

A flared stem provides a broader footprint, but I needed to reduce its thickness to avoid checking as the piece dried. First, I drilled out the stem, using a drill bit, and then finished thinning the walls with a gouge.

To finish the mushroom, I reversed the piece again and used a cone chuck with pressure from the tailstock. After reducing the tenon to a small nubbin, I carefully parted it off and sanded the top. The toadstool was ready for finish.

At this stage, the knots in Norfolk Island pine should be coated with thin CA glue to prevent them from cracking during the drying process. A mouth sponge (medical supply) is a convenient applicator, which limits the spread of the CA glue. As a rule, Danish oil will provide the light luster this piece requires.