

WITH THESE  
HANDS



# The Cutting Edge

With Easy Wood Tools, wood never looked so good

by Julie Wilson Photos by Rideout Photography

**Y**ou know those people who can look at a cloud and immediately see an elephant or a rabbit? For Craig Jackson, his muse of choice is wood. You see a log on the side of the road, he sees a bowl.

So after years of working in corporate management, Jackson bid adieu to the six-figure salary to start Easy Wood Tools, which specializes in woodturning tools.

Wood ... yet Jackson's background is in machinery. But he's a crafty fellow, and when he got the woodturning bug, the available tools didn't quite live up to his taste. "I wanted to make a bowl, and I didn't like the tools that were out there," shared Jackson from inside his Lexington factory.

Fair enough. So what exactly was out there? "If I had started from scratch to develop the most complicated and dangerous cutting system for a hand-held application, I would've invented

traditional woodturning tools," said Jackson with no hesitation. "They say with traditional tools it takes you three years to be crappy at woodturning. With these tools, in a Saturday morning you can make a bowl."

Wait a minute.

Woodturning isn't a new trend; we're talking depictions in Egyptian hieroglyphics. "What hinders people from adopting the latest technologies is they've invested at least three to maybe 20 years. To grab this new technology kind of discounts all that time and effort, they feel like they're throwing that away," admitted Jackson. "But as a society, we always move forward, we







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always embrace improvement. Or we'd still be in a cave or using straight razors.”

Which leads us to a befitting analogy of Jackson's Easy Wood Tools vs. old-school woodturning tools. “It's almost exactly like the difference between a straight razor and today's razors,” explained Jackson. “Our tools are kind of like the Gillette razor – replaceable heads, and you almost can't cut yourself.”

Part of the reason is that Jackson has streamlined the necessary woodturning tools down to three: three basic cutter shapes in three different sizes. That's all you need, he says, to make any shape known to man. “The thing about woodturning, there's nothing more than an inside curve, an outside curve or a straight line. When you couple those, you create every geometry in the universe,” said Jackson.

Easy Wood Tools allows crafters to focus more on the art of woodturning than the journey it takes to get there. “Woodturning is really like a treasure hunt because you never know what the next cut will reveal,” explained Jackson. “The piece is spinning and you hold the tool, you see the shape come into existence. It's too cool.”

This from a guy who used to prefer the precision of what metal – aluminum, stainless steel – would reveal. “It took me a long time to really accept the character and the defects [of wood],” admitted Jackson. “But the variations are the beauty, so now I don't cut the knots out. As you let go, you grow.”

And grow he has. From the garage in his Owensboro



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backyard in 2008 to today’s spacious facility on the west end of Lexington. From his team of he/himself, working 80 hours a week, to the 20 employees he has today ... and still needing more.

His need for a larger staff is thanks in part to the 12 countries Easy Wood Tools ships to each year. “We are the largest woodturning manufacturer in North and South America,” said Jackson. The largest on two continents ... all from their facility. And all from word-of-mouth until March of this year, when he



hired his first salesperson. Before that, it was just Jackson and the positive testimonials from his customers and retailers.

So what’s his secret? “I thought to myself ‘I’m nobody really special, how come nobody’s already done this?’” Jackson recalled. “I can’t give you the answer to that. I don’t know. When that question comes to your mind, whatever your field of expertise, that’s telling you to take that path.”

Yet the path isn’t without its potholes. “My goal is to inspire other people, that it’s not just an idea but an action,” Jackson explained. “It’s always taking that step of faith. Then you’ve got to take another one; it’s never just laid out in front of you.”

What lies ahead for Jackson is, well, a trade secret. But you’re certain to hear of it soon. In the meantime, you can see Easy Wood Tools in action on PBS’ *Rough Cut* or learn by doing with Jackson’s DVD for newbies. “Like that one golfer said, ‘The more I practice, the luckier I get,’” said Jackson, laughing.

Though it’s evident his success has nothing to do with luck.

➔ See Jackson’s easy woodturning system online at [EasyWoodTools.com](http://EasyWoodTools.com).