

# How adding a rim can affect form

Adding a top edge, or rim to a turned bowl can greatly affect its overall character, writes **Derek Hayes**, in the latest instalment of his design series

**T**he treatment of the top edge, or rim, and its relationship to the form it terminates can have a much greater effect on the character of the bowl. Staying with the basic sphere the simplest rim can be made by cutting a hole in its top. Whilst the hole remains small, the eye is easily fooled into ignoring it and to sending a picture of a still complete sphere

to the brain. As the hole increases in size, this effect is reduced and the shape becomes a closed form. A simple definition of a closed form is a form that has an open diameter smaller than the form's maximum diameter. As the opening becomes greater than the diameter the form can be said to be open.

**“...the eye is easily fooled into ignoring it and sending a picture of the still complete sphere to the brain”**

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## USING ELLIPSES AND CROSS-SECTIONS

As an opening increases, the 'heaviness' of the form also increases with its 'centre of gravity' moving towards the base, (see Figure 1). The form of the ellipse behaves in a similar manner, (see Figure 2).

The open bowl form using the ellipse is more prevalent than the sphere, perhaps because of the way in which we purchase our blanks. We have also seen how the semi-ellipse mutates into other curves such as parabolas and catenaries with the idea of heaviness remaining.

Until now, we have been able to depict the wood-turned form in just two dimensions through the use of the silhouette or profile. Unfortunately, when a rim is introduced, this approach begins to break down.

As the rim becomes more complicated the silhouette produces an inaccurate depiction of the bowl design. For this reason when we consider rim design we need to use cross-sections.

As I said, the rim has a very powerful effect on the bowl – not simply because it links the outside with the inside but also because it 'frames' the interior.

Raffan says that "Rims can ensnare the eye while encircling secretive depths, or create illusions of thickness and thinness".

If we bare in mind the idea of balance, it is generally agreed that there should be a feeling of continuity between the two domains: the inside and the outside. This is of course unless the turner has set out to shock the observer through providing a more dramatic change.

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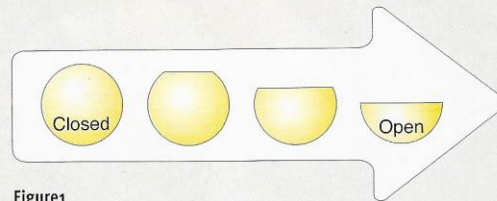


Figure 1

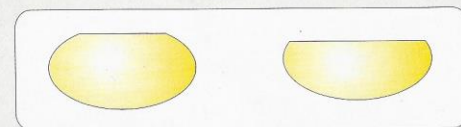


Figure 2

## FOUR GROUPS OF RIMS

Even with more prosaic rims, there exists a wide opportunity for variation in design. Raffan talks about four groups of rims: (see Figure 3) flat, inclined inwards, inclined outwards and rolled over. He goes on to extend these by making them thick, thin, convex, concave or ogee-shaped. Of course, the 'rule of four' is only a guide and in practice – the variants increase with the introduction of wane edge, carving, eccentric, burning and colouring etc.

As we are particularly interested here in form, I will ignore these ornamentations but we are still able to highlight the inside edge of a rim and reduce the harshness of a plain angle or a broad, unbroken line.

It is necessary also to consider health and safety – a very thin walled vessel, for instance, has the potential to be dangerous if taken to the limit. For utility objects, like the platter, it is often necessary to introduce a slightly thicker rim to allow it to be lifted with one hand.

A thick, or ledged, rim which might be complementary and particularly suited to a utensil, would almost certainly, appear of place as a border for a thin vessel. With a wide shallow bowl, the

thickness of the rim assumes greater importance since we are more likely to look down on it, and into the bowl, rather than contemplate the external profile.

The use of a large flat rim tends to destroy the simplistic beauty of an open form and, as we have seen, will certainly interrupt the flow of the curve forming the profile. We can however, greatly enhance the closed vessel, or hollow form, by including beads, coves and carving etc (see Figures 4 and 5).

So far, all of these diagrams have used a constant thickness for the bowl wall. Tapered rims often look good when the vessel has a thin wall, but are less attractive when the wall is thick. This is a case in point where taction (the idea of feeling in design) is often the final arbiter, as unless a 'plan' view of a 3D observation highlights the thickness, the profile will hide all the relevant information. (see pictures below).

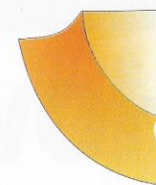
Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Three different examples of rim design

## DIFFERENT EFFECTS USING A RIM

Extending the rim into the bowl, although not affecting the profile, will affect the view from above. If for instance, we roll the rim into the bowl, we reduce the form's effective diameter and lose the openness of the profile. But there is scope for its use in design. Figure 6 shows how, while the profile is the same in the two hemispheres, the openness is maintained in the second but lost in the first due to the change in wall thickness. I would suggest that for the same reason the variants shown in Figure 7 also don't work.

If however, we extend the rim outside the profile, it will affect it, but still maintain the open form, (see Figure 8). Here, a simple upturned bell profile maintains an open form both visually and by definition. This is also true for an irregular wall width, (see Figure 8 also). For the same reason the rims shown in Figure 9 will also work.

Now, we might as well remind ourselves that it doesn't mean we can't ever use these rims, only that their use may eliminate a true open form. If you aren't trying to achieve an open form, when you don't need to worry!

Consider the effect of the rims in the turnings you see. Do they draw the eye into the contained areas or perhaps slow their journey down with the rims, forming a 'border control'? Is there a feeling of security drawing you in, or a sense of danger keeping you out?

There is certainly a psychological problem with the rim leading you into the bowl the rim - 'flows' from the outside and attracts the eye, taking it across, and into the centre. If the rim is too wide, the eye may possibly feel the journey across it is too great and will get bored.

Remember to view the bowl from different angles and, if possible, hold the bowl while viewing. The brain appears to have little trouble in coping with the extra sensory information brought about by touch.

There is a fine line, often literally, in how many obstructions by way of beads, coves, edges etc can be used before the bowl loses its attraction. The big advantage with the rim though is the opportunity

to remove that huge overhang or bead right up until the last minute of turning the bowl, should you change your mind.

It is interesting to note that these very same 'stop signs' are what often make closed forms so intriguing, but that's another design story.

**“Extending the rim into the bowl although not affecting the profile will affect the view from above”**

Figure 6

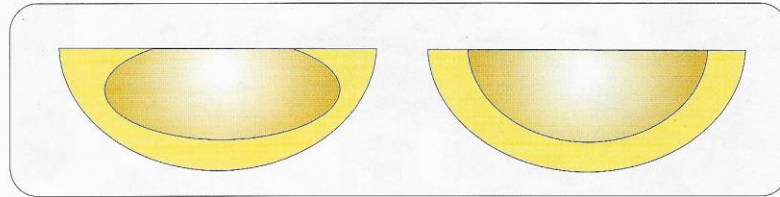


Figure 7

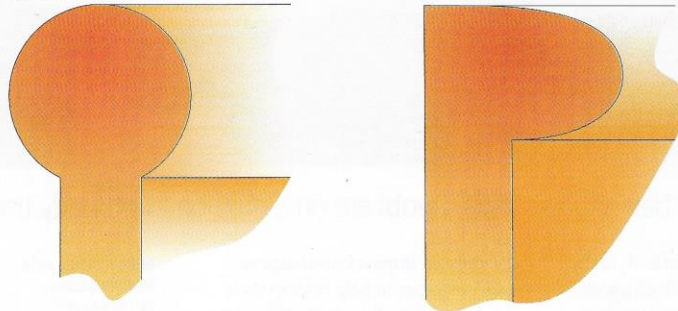


Figure 8

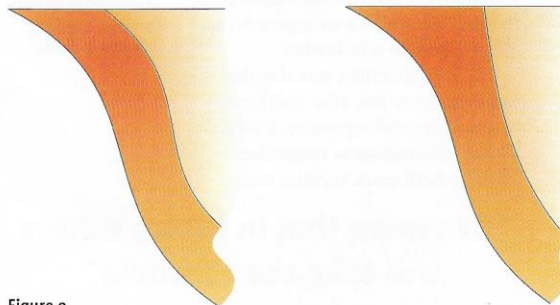
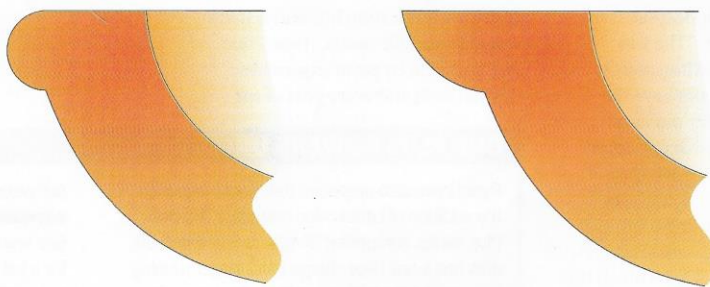


Figure 9



**NEXT MONTH...**

**Derek Hayes considers asymmetry and how it can be used in the design of edges**