

# Around the rim

Michael O'Donnell looks at a wide range of rims and how these can affect the aesthetics of a turned bowl

The rim is often the focal point of a bowl, drawing the eye in and leading it around the rim, balancing and reflecting the bowl as a whole. A good rim can enhance any bowl – making it more visually pleasing and it can also make it more tactile – particularly for functional bowls. A spectacular piece of wood can initially distract the eye from the rim, but the rim will always show through and take its part of the bowl.

The difference between an average rim and a nice one is just a few minutes thought and a few wood shavings. Think about the rim as part of the overall bowl design at the beginning, not leaving it until the bowl is almost finished and you are wondering what to do; at that point it is probably too late to make the best rim. Even experiment with rim designs and techniques – you

don't have to make a whole bowl, just the rim or even a drawing will help develop your ideas. If it works out – great – if not, there is very little lost.

There aren't any rules for rims but I do have a few guidelines for various types of rims that I tend to use as starting points, then I can deviate from them whenever I like.

**“A spectacular piece of wood can initially distract the eye from the rim...”**



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FLAT RIMS

In its simplest form, a flat rim, square to the outside surface, will work well for many bowls as it shows the thickness of the wall at that point – you might say it's 'WYSIWIG' (what-you-see-is-what-you-get).

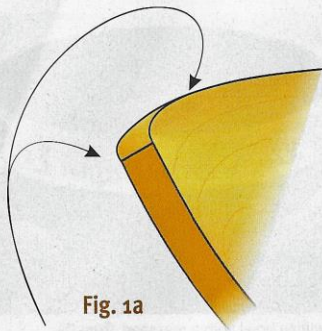


Fig. 1a

Rim at 90° to both surfaces

Wall thickness parallel up to the rim. Rim at 90° to both surfaces

The inside shape to the rim has a 'tactile aspect' as generally, it is easier to feel than it is to see. On something like a salad bowl, if the wall thickness is even up to the rim then that feels fine.

If the wall thickness is reducing up to the rim then it feels ugly as if it is going to slip

from the fingers. It also makes the bowl look shallower. On the other hand, when the wall thickness increases slightly inside to the rim, the eye is slightly deceived into thinking the bowl has more volume; it has a very nice feel in the fingers and it gives a good impression of the whole bowl.

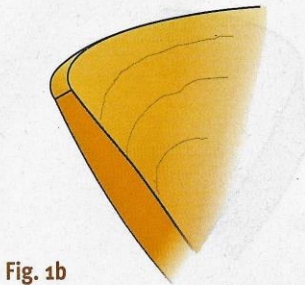


Fig. 1b

Wall thickness tapering to rim

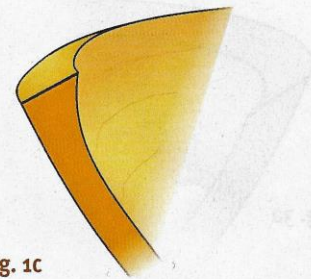


Fig. 1c

Wall thickness slightly flared on the inside to the rim

ADDING TURNED DECORATION

The simplicity of a flat rim can be enhanced by adding some small turned decoration just below it, particularly on bowls with a slightly 'closed shape' (one where the bowl turns inward), either a proud bead (Fig. 2a), a 'V' (Fig. 2b) or a groove filled with a resin (Fig. 2c). These rims emphasise the rim and draw the eye around the rim, taking in the whole bowl. Texturing a small area just below the rim, or colouring the rim (Fig. 2d) can have a similar dramatic effect, accentuating the rim and bringing it to life (Fig. 2d).

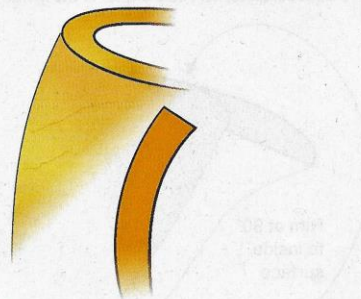


Fig. 2a

Flat rim, no decoration

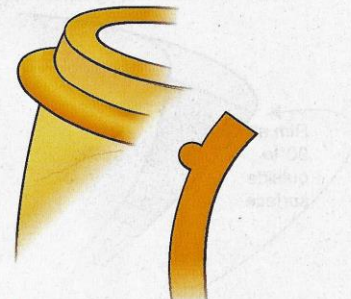


Fig. 2b

Proud bead just below the rim

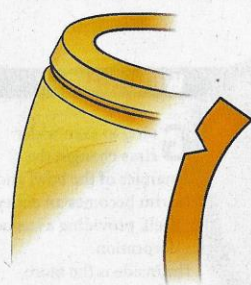


Fig. 2c

'V' just below the rim



Fig. 2d

Rim painted with acrylic paint

**Handy Hints**

1. The definition of the rim is important, so the edges should be 'sharp' but not so sharp as to cut yourself.
2. Practise using your fingers as callipers, not to measure thickness, but to feel the variation, or evenness in thickness.

Pencil and paper are the best design tools for developing your turning, or a graphics program such as 'Corel Draw' which I use for the sketches in my articles

## SKILLS & PROJECTS

### Around the rim

#### CHAMFERED RIMS

To my eye, chamfered rims (Figs. 3a and 3b) i.e. significantly off square to the outside surface, and not balanced between the inside and outside surfaces, are a little problematic from a visual perspective. The

width of the rim, the thickness of the wood and the volume of the bowl conflict and as a result, do not usually sit comfortably together. And I am not even sure if the chamfer is the rim, or the fine edge it

creates is the rim. It hangs in my mind as an unresolved design concept. Although, when used on the Norwegian bowl (shown below) where the 'chamfer' has been designed to carry a message, this design works well.

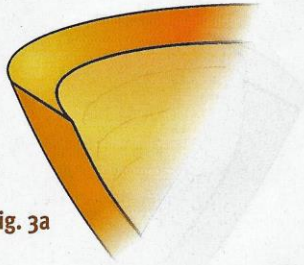


Fig. 3a

Rim chamfered inwards at about 55°

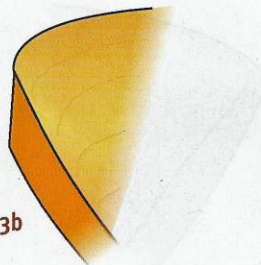
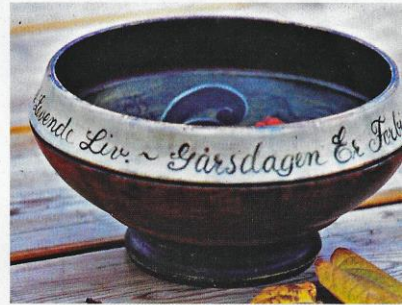


Fig. 3b

Rim chamfered inwards at about 55°



A Norwegian bowl with a message, from the collection of Hans Lie, Norway

#### FLARED RIMS

If I was looking for a wider rim on a bowl then I would either flare the outside out to create the wider rim (Fig. 4a), flare the

inside (Fig. 4b), or flare both (Fig. 4c). In the last cases I would sit the rim evenly across both surfaces, i.e. equal angles at the inside

and outside edges. This wider rim gives the opportunity for further decoration or to show off the natural beauty of the wood.

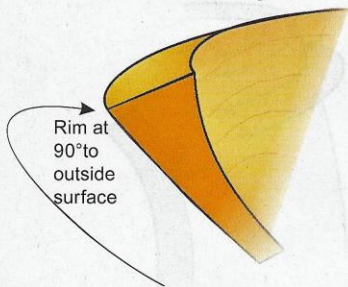


Fig. 4a

Wall thickness flared on the inside to give a wide rim. Rim square to the outside surface

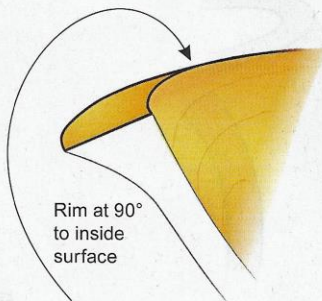


Fig. 4b

Wall thickness flared on the outside to give a wide rim. Rim square to the inside surface

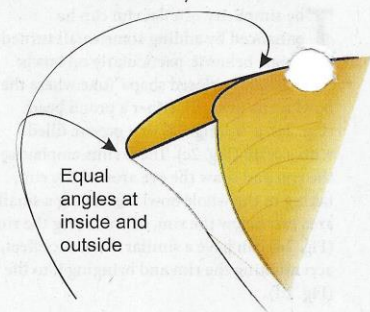
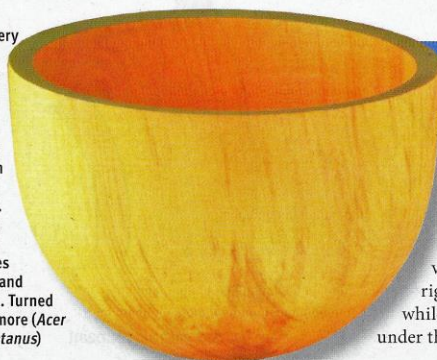


Fig. 4c

Wall thickness flared on both sides to give a wide rim. Rim even over both surfaces

RIGHT: A very simple functional bowl, a slight flare in just below the flat rim to give it a nice feel. The colour on the rim emphasises the shape and the weight. Turned from sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)



#### WIDE RIMS

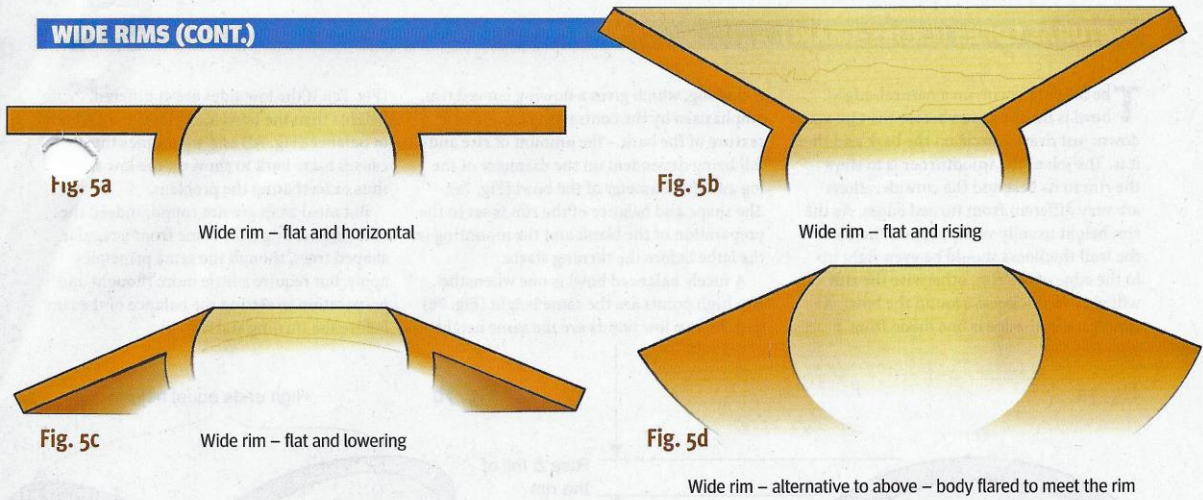
Going to even wider rims changes the dynamics of the bowl and the rim becomes an entity in itself, providing a surface for decoration.

The inside is the more visible part of the bowl shape, right up to the top of the rim, while the outside shape tucks in under the extended rim where it ends

in a sharp transition to the rim.

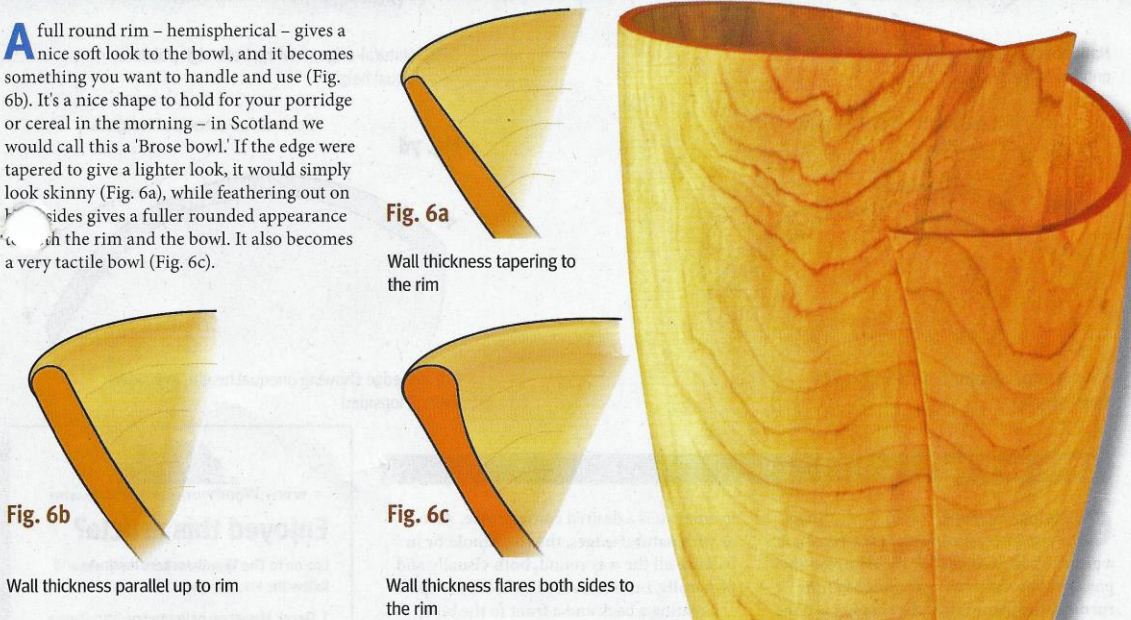
Making the rim flat is almost always pleasing (Fig. 5a) flaring the rim upwards – a little like the head of a thistle – and starts to change the bowl into a tall vessel (Fig. 5b). Turning the rim down hides the bowl shape and begins to look like the body of the bowl (Fig. 5c). In the extreme, the edge of the rim could become the foot. An alternative treatment could be to bring the body round the edge of the rim.

**WIDE RIMS (CONT.)**



**ROUNDED RIMS**

A full round rim – hemispherical – gives a nice soft look to the bowl, and it becomes something you want to handle and use (Fig. 6b). It's a nice shape to hold for your porridge or cereal in the morning – in Scotland we would call this a 'Brose bowl'. If the edge were tapered to give a lighter look, it would simply look skinny (Fig. 6a), while feathering out on both sides gives a fuller rounded appearance (Fig. 6c). Rounding the rim also makes the bowl a very tactile bowl (Fig. 6c).



**THIN BOWLS**

On a thin bowl, an even wall thickness and a square edge looks good; feathering to a fine edge make it look lighter, which it certainly does, though it loses definition and contributes less to the look of the piece. It is also a high-risk strategy as it greatly increases the risk of it splitting. Rounding the edge softens the look of the bowl whilst retaining the weight – it is ideal for the rim of a goblet.

**“Rounding the edge softens the look of the bowl whilst retaining the weight...”**

**ABOVE:** This was a nice vessel even before we carved the rim to look like a 'wrap around,' and coloured the rim. It has a definite front and back and is turned from sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). See page 16 for more created rims

## SKILLS & PROJECTS

### Around the rim

#### NATURAL EDGES (CROSS-GRAIN)

The face of the rim on a natural-edged bowl is finished even before the tree is cut down: just draw a circle on the bark and there it is. The job of the woodturner is to show the rim to its best and the considerations are very different from turned edges. As the rim height usually varies around the bowl, the wall thickness should be even right up to the edge of the rim, otherwise the rim will vary in thickness around the bowl. A simple natural-edge is one made from a

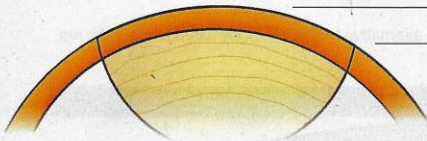
round log, which gives a flowing curved rim, emphasised by the contrasting colour and texture of the bark – the amount of rise and fall being dependent on the diameter of the log and the diameter of the bowl (Fig. 7a). The shape and balance of the rim is set in the preparation of the blank and the mounting in the lathe before the turning starts.

A nicely balanced bowl is one where the two high points are the same height (Fig. 7b) and the two low points are the same height

(Fig. 7c). If the low sides are at different heights then the bowl looks lopsided and out of balance (Fig. 7d) and sometimes this causes more bark to show on the low side, thus exacerbating the problem.

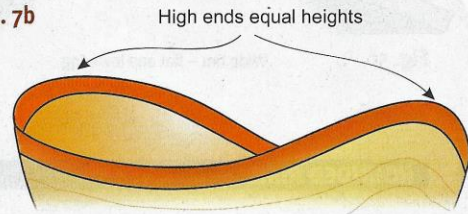
But most trees are not round, indeed the most interesting rims come from irregular shaped trees, though the same principles apply, but require a little more thought and preparation in setting the balance of the rim before the turning starts.

Fig. 7a



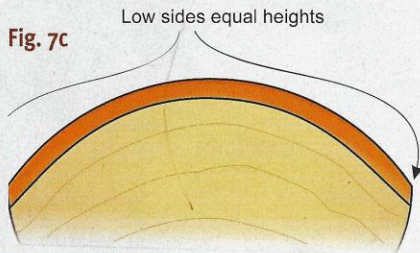
Natural-edged bowl in the log showing the rise and fall of the rim

Fig. 7b



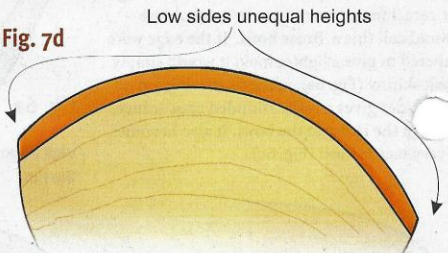
Natural-edge showing both high points at equal height

Fig. 7c



Natural-edge showing both low points at equal heights

Fig. 7d



Natural-edge showing unequal height, low sides, looking lopsided

#### CREATED RIMS

Changing the shape, colour or texture of the rim after turning can greatly enhance a piece; it can even change the nature of the piece. While the shaping is done after the turning, the planning of the shaping is done before the turning.

As with natural-edged rims, keep the bowl wall thickness even, otherwise the rim thickness will vary as it is cut away – that

is unless it is a desired consequence. Also, as with natural-edges, the rim should be in balance all the way round, both visually and physically, i.e. make sure it still stands up.

Creating a back and a front to the bowl allows for some differences. Again, colouring or texturing the rim enhances it visually and different tools create different textures. For your first attempts, keep the shapes simple.

#### CONCLUSION

It is the way in which you design your bowls even before the blank is cut that will improve your turning. The rim is an important part of that design which can make all the difference between a mediocre bowl and a good bowl.

**“The rim is an important part of the design...”**



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