

Safety Tip - Using an arm brace for hollowing compliments of Gary Guenther

A couple of recent threads on the Wood Central forum discuss the potential danger of using an arm brace when hollowing. The originals are at:

www.woodcentral.com/cgi-bin/turning.pl?noframes;read=175533&v1=e2vrt43&v2=woodturning&v4=Japanese+chisel&v5=ly34ts5w

www.woodcentral.com/cgi-bin/turning.pl?noframes;read=175665&v1=e2vrt43&v2=shellac&v4=Freud+bits&v5=n4bpyf9g

Turners have had arm and shoulder injuries resulting from having their arms effectively locked to the tool during a bad catch, as opposed to being able to have the tool jerked out of their hands. On the other hand, not only do many turners report using arm braces for decades without a problem, they go farther to express the thought that the better control they feel with an arm brace actually reduces the frequency and severity of the catches they experience. Furthermore, having a loose tool flying around can be dangerous too. There were also comments about the fact that the pistol grip part of the arm brace provides a better, more natural, angle for the wrist that can prevent tendonitis and repetitive use (carpal tunnel) syndrome.

Turning tools and techniques are very personal, and each turner has to achieve a level of comfort in their unique situation. The question comes down not to if you use an arm brace, but how you use it if you use it. There is a right way and a wrong way, and that is the point of this Safety Tip.

There was complete agreement in the above dialog about the fact that when you use an arm brace it is very important to keep your elbow tucked in tight to your body. Do not, repeat, do not hold the arm brace away from your body. The question that comes immediately to mind is: "How can I use it that way?" There are a number of possibilities. If you have a short-bed lathe, there is no problem. If you have a long-bed lathe, here are some possibilities:

- sit on the lathe bed (Ron Brown demonstrated this approach at our January meeting);
- work off the back side of the lathe; and
- reverse the direction of the lathe rotation (only if your chuck locks to the spindle and you know what you're doing!).

The bottom line is keep your elbow in tight to your body and move your body. This is basic turning technique. Don't be reaching out there where a catch can wrench your arm and shoulder.

Safety First and Always.