

Making Rosette Head Blocks for Old House Trim (Sometimes called bulls eyes or targets)

Thirty years ago if you needed an old house head block with a bulls eye or rosette in it you had to buy premade ones or there were a few rosette cutters on the market. Both were too small for a typical old house renovation. Now there are some rosette cutters that have interchangeable blades with the ability to have custom knives cut. They are too expensive, especially if you only need to make a few rosettes. Rosette cutters are hard to use on a drill press as they tend to chatter ruining the work. My 1975 Craftsman has a little play in the bearings so it will not work with a rosette cutter.



Over the past few years companies have come up with larger rosette cutters in a nice variety of patterns for old house lovers. The photo at the right shows ones from Japan Woodworker company. Many companies are also making larger rosettes to match the width of typical old house trim which is often 5 ½ to 6 inches. The problem comes when you are trying to duplicate rosettes to existing ones in a house.



A few years ago I was looking at an old catalogue for house trim. There was a section called turned rosettes. I had an epiphany!!! That's how to make custom bulls eyes – you turn them on a lathe with a faceplate like you do for a bowl. Everybody else in the world probably already knew that but it had never occurred to me. I have an architectural woodworking business and have made hundreds since then. I can now make one in any pattern in a matter of a few minutes. Here is how it is done:

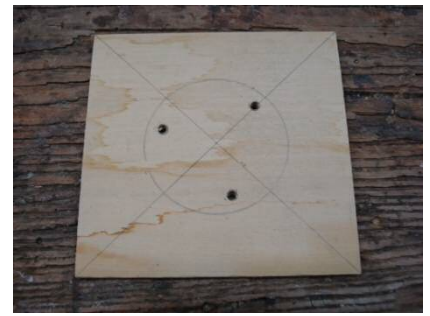
This is the rosette I wanted to duplicate. I had eighteen to make. The paint was so thick that the lines and depths of cut were not clear so I took a heat gun to it to remove enough of the paint to get a clear view of what I needed to duplicate.



I cut squares to the desired size and thickness. Mine were 5 ½ inches square and 1 1/8 inches thick.



Make a template for the holes for the faceplate so that you do not have to lay out each blank individually. I used ¼ inch plywood



Screw the faceplate to the blank making sure to use short screws that you will not hit when turning the other side.



Make a little story pole to show where the key lines are in your turning.



Mount the stock in the lathe and while the lathe is turning use a pencil and the story pole to mark the key junctures.



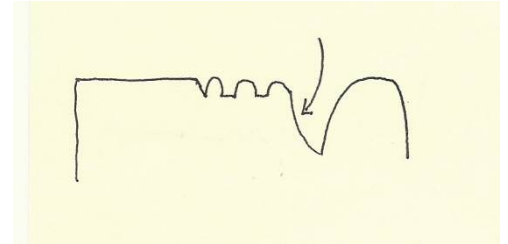
The beads on the rosette I was duplicating had a little flat bottom not a typical pointed valley where the pointed end of the skew would work so I ground my own little flat parting tool whose end was the desired width. You can buy thin parting tools but I did not want to wait. With a marker I marked the depth of the two cuts I was making on the parting tool. You cannot use a caliper here to check for thickness like on a spindle. I then cut my key transitions with my parting tool.



I used a skew chisel in a scraping move to round over the beads and the center. Turners will tell you to use a small spindle gouge to round them over but I find the skew easier to use. I have ruined too many pieces with a catch using a spindle gouge. Scraping does take a little more sanding.



To get the subtle curve leading up to the center piece shown at the right, I use the tool shown below at the right instead of the spindle gouge. The gouge is hard to get in there. The point of a skew could be used.



The tool at the right works very nicely to get into the tight spot without any chance of getting a catch. It has become my favorite tool for things like this and making coves in a spindle. I bought mine from Woodworker's Supply but it does not look like they sell them anymore. Craft Supplies sell them. They call it a cove maker and here is the link to it



<http://www.woodturnerscatalog.com/search?term=088-2152> It is much easier to use than a gouge and a lot easier to sharpen. The first time I read about it the article described how to make your own out of a steel rod. Simply grind the end to sharpen and then rub the sides with a stone to get rid of the burrs. Add a homemade handle and you're ready to go. Ten times easier than getting the correct finger nail tip on a spindle gouge. A little more sanding as you are scraping but I gladly do that in exchange for ease of use.

Here is the end result. A very close match to the original.

A lot of fun to make and very satisfying.



Here are some others head blocks that I have turned. The top and bottom of this were made separately on a bandsaw and then attached with biscuits. This matched exactly ones from an 1890's house.



Three of these were added to an old house window hood for decoration. Marks were there so I knew they were circular. The rest was my interpretation.



The one at the right was so long it had to be turned on the outboard side of the lathe. Keep your speed low. The bottom is cut with a bandsaw after it is turned. Make a little sled to screw it to, to insure it stays perpendicular while cutting. The turned portion has to be in the center of the piece of wood or your lathe will fly away. If the end result is not centered cut away or add on after turning.



Turned bulls eye



Bulls eyes installed



An applied decoration for the window hood of an old house.



The original little flower on the bottom of the picture at right was about 40 feet up applied to a bracket as a decoration on an 1870's home. I had seen it for years and always wondered how they made them. I assumed they were hand carved. When I took a broken one down to duplicate I noticed it was simply a turned bulls eye with sections cut out with a bandsaw to make the flower. Clever idea!! I made 20 for the restoration.

B rackets showing the flowers. Note the use of rosettes.



I made several of these for a restoration



And lots of these, all using this turned bulls eye technique.



An old house often has three of these in the panel below a large picture window as shown at right.



Some homes in the 1890's had trim head blocks that were a quarter of a circle. They can be made with the same method on a lathe.

Cut a round blank a little larger than you need to be made a perfect circle on the lathe. Connect it to the faceplate just like you'r making a bowl.



Turn it on the lathe as you would a bowl.



The finished circle



Mark and cut into quarters



Quartered head block with molding scraps



Head block installed with moldings. These exactly duplicate the original.

