

John Jordan Hollowers

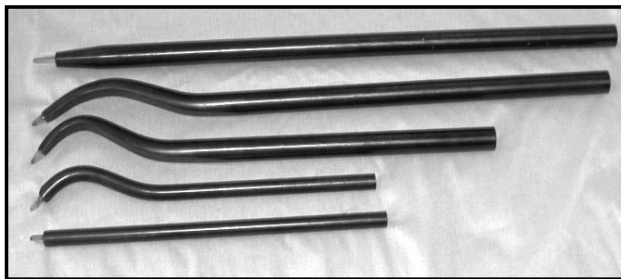
by Lyn J. Mangiameli

We as woodturners have been lucky to have many of our tools designed and made by persons who are active woodturners, and personally understand our needs. Nowhere is this more apparent, than in the area of hollowing tools. David Ellsworth and Lyle Jamieson, as just two examples, are persons whose names are associated with the hollowing tools they have designed as well as the hollow forms they make. Usually, such tools in some way come into being because existing tools did not satisfy the creative requirements of the turner. Thus we find that David introduced some of the first tools suitable for the then new techniques of blind hollowing through a small mouth, and Lyle introduced one of the first commercially available rotationally restrained boring systems suitable for the larger forms he makes.

The most recent entrant into the famous-turner-turned-hollowing tool-designer/manufacture club is John Jordan. For most, John needs no introduction, as his works are on display at such places as the White House and Renwick Museum in Washington, and are well represented in art books displaying the collections of serious collectors. Many of us have expanded our skills after having observed him at a demonstration, or having viewed one of John's videos on bowl making, or hollow forms or sharpening (and soon he will have a new video out, Woodturning: The Aesthetics and Properties of Wood). Though John has long been known as favoring the Stewart System for his hollowing work, many of us have been aware that he had custom versions of the Hooker shafts made to his specifications. Wishing to make similar tools available to his students and the larger woodturning community, John has tried for several years to have his custom designs manufactured by others. After several frustrations, but retaining a belief that his designs are significantly superior, John made the commitment of obtaining metal working equipment and is finally manufacturing his own hollowing tools. Having followed this progress, I leapt at the opportunity to obtain some of the first tools coming out of his shop.

The new hollowing tools from John Jordan are reminiscent of a number of other newer hollowing tools in that they appear to represent evolutionary advancements on previously available tools. Anyone who has experience with Don Pencil or Dennis Stewart tools will find John's new hollowers to be instantly familiar. At first glance, John offers:

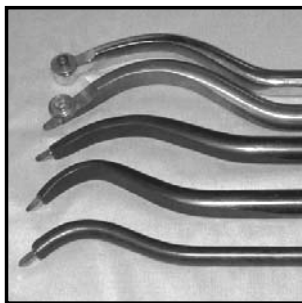
- a 3/4 in diameter, 20 inch straight shaft tool with a replaceable cutting tip that appears much the same as the traditional Stewart Omnitoole or Don Pencil straight boring tool
- a smaller straight tool with a thinner 1/2 inch diameter and shorter, 12 inch shaft
- a large 20 inch curved Hooker/Scorpion-style tool
- a medium 16 inch curved Hooker/Scorpion-style tool



John Jordan Hollowers: (top to bottom) 1) a 3/4 in diameter, 20 inch straight shaft tool with a replaceable cutting tip; 2) a large 20 inch curved style tool; 3) a medium 16 inch curved style tool; 4) a small curved style tool with a 1/2 inch diameter, 12 inch shaft; and 5) a smaller straight tool with a narrower 1/2 inch diameter and shorter, 12 inch shaft.



A selection of curved tools in the Author's tool inventory: (from the top) 1) Don Pencil Scorpion; 2) Dennis Stewart Hooker; 3) Jordan 3/4" Large Curved; Jordan 3/4" Medium curved; and Jordan 1/2" curved.



A closer view of the business end of the curved Tools. (Order and Identity same as above photo.)

• a small curved Hooker/Scorpion-style tool with a 1/2 inch diameter, 12 inch shaft

The similarities are quite apparent, but closer inspection and use reveal a lot of differences from their predecessors. John's tools show the refinements that just aren't apt to be obtained from someone who hasn't personally encountered all the little frustrations common to many existing tools and then sought to overcome them. More personally, I find the Jordan tools to be exquisitely designed for the types of hollow forms I most often make, that is, gourd or onion shaped medium sized vessels with small mouths, and tall hollow vases that also have a mouth as small as I can get by with. In some respects, these forms are not much different in general shape from many of those made by John, and not much different from what a lot of hollow turners make or aspire to create. So for me, these tools seem custom designed for my purposes.

So what is it that makes these tools special? The first thing that captured my attention is that the replaceable tips on

all the tools fit directly into the working end of the tool. This is standard practice for most straight shafted tools, but generally not found on curved shaft tools. Mounting like this allows for more solid support of the cutting tip, and more consistent and precise positioning. The ends of the tool shafts are tapered, the inside of the curved shafts are greatly relieved (much more so than the Hooker), and the tip locking set screw sits flush on the larger three tools (unfortunately it protrudes slightly on his two small hollowers), allowing the entire working end of the tool to be fitted through a mouth just barely larger than the root diameter of the shaft. This is just what one wants in a hollowing tool, if the goal is to maintain as small a mouth as possible. Unfortunately, some hollowing tools fail in this respect, for example, the articulating head version of the Munro Hollower where the bulk of the cutting head requires an opening almost twice the size of the tool shaft. The Stewart Bottom Hooker with its bottom mounted tip carrier provides a similar problem.

Along these same lines, when dealing with what are often the long overhangs required during hollowing, one wants to be able to locate the tool rest as close to the mouth of the vessel as possible. Yet when dealing with narrow mouths, bulky cutting heads and protruding lock screws/bolts will catch on the tool rest, thus requiring the tool rest to be set further back or deliberately moved back each time the tool is withdrawn. The Jordan Hollowers make it easy to locate the tool rest very close, yet still allow the shafts to enter and be withdrawn from the form without changing the position of the tool rest. These things may not seem like a big deal to those making more open mouthed work, but for those of us

who seek the challenge of working through mouths less than 1/8 inch larger than our tools, John's design is a godsend.

Another little advantage associated with tip locking set screw, is that by being bottom mounted, it is much less apt to clog with packed shavings. Few of us have not spent some time digging with a pin to clear the socket of the more typically top mounted set screws. I also appreciate that the set screw socket is large enough to take a wrench size that won't easily strip with the forces of tightening.

I have always liked the Kelton Hollowers for the way they come in sets of curvatures that allowed for excellent transition from straight to very curved shafts. The Jordan Hollowers offer a similar transition in curves between the different shafts, but allow one to purchase only those meeting one's specific or immediate needs. Rather than mixing and matching between tools of various manufacture in order to be able to probe into all areas of a variety of hollow form shapes, manufacturers like Kelton and Jordan have already thought through the best transitions and overlaps, which for most turners will allow for the purchase of fewer tools rather than more.

Equally appealing about these tools is that they tend to fill useful niches that existing tools don't extend into. The great amount of side relief on Jordan's larger curved shafts, as well as the well thought out curvatures, allow the tools to work over a larger range of positions, and thus snake into more internal areas, than would be expected of tools of similar root shaft diameter. Both the large straight shaft and the large curved shaft are significantly longer than their counterparts in the Stewart/Sorby/Pencil lines. I suspect that I am not alone in sometimes wishing I could get a little deeper with my Stewart Hooker. Well, now we can with the Jordan large 20 inch curved shaft (a typical Hooker is about 15). Similarly, the straight shaft is 20 inches compared to the 16 inch Omnitoole, again providing a little more reach for those deep vases. Despite the added length, I find the 3/4 inch shafts to be adequately rigid when used to take advantage of the longer extension capability. When used with a traditional steel handle of sufficient bore (Kelton and Hamlet both offer one), or the Kelton Hollowing Rig, one can seat the shafts more deeply to reduce this overall length if less shaft extension is desired. If for some reason you would want John's curvatures in a tool with a shorter overall shaft length (say for use in a socketed boring bar), they can be obtained upon request.

John offers a relatively traditional steel handle that will work with his 1/2 inch hollowing tools (I shall be reviewing it next month along with his new bowl gouge), but John notes that he usually uses his hollowing tools in an armbrace. This is the way that I used them and I concur that for many turners this will be the most desirable way of mounting them. John also notes that his hollowers will work well in a restrained boring bar system like the Jamieson or Kelton. I only used mine like this briefly, but can again confirm that they work very well as part of these restrained systems.

Most hollowing tools traditionally



A selection of straight tools in the Author's tool inventory: (from the top) 1) Jordan 20 inch straight tool, 2) Don Pencil 16 inch straight tool; 3) dennis Stewart 16 inch Omnitoil; and 4) Jordan 12 inch tool.

have had shafts of 5/8 inch or larger, and 3/8 inch or smaller diameter. John's 1/2 inch diameter tools fill a void that has been only partially filled by the 1/2 inch Kelton Hollowers. I suspect these smaller Jordan tools are going to be perceived as very valuable for all who like to make forms in the 5-8 inch range (and makes these tools a very good match for those who make hollow forms on a mini lathe). Furthermore, the small curved shaft is also just wonderful for working just inside the mouth of a larger form.

The HSS tips look traditional as they sit in the shafts, but are different from any others that I am familiar with. All of the curved shafts are bored in the end to take a 3/16 inch diameter round rod. The replaceable tips, accordingly, have a round section that seats in the shaft, but the bevelled cutting section is formed from 3/16 inch square stock. I am unaware of a source for these, other than direct from John (who likely is custom turning down the end of square cutters), but it seems to be an excellent choice of tip in that it allows for a smaller bore in the shaft (thus allowing the working end of the shaft to be tapered quite narrow), but a wider cutting surface at the very tip. All the curved shafts use the same cutting tip, regardless of size or curvature.

The 12 and 20 inch straight shafts are bored to 1/4 inch, which allows them to take a more conventional 3/16 inch square cutting tip. I really like that the straight shafts have this larger bore, as it makes it possible to fit any of the three Termite rings into their ends (as all these tips are meant to mount into a 1/4 inch hole). As somewhat of a devotee of cutting tools, I like this added ability to use John's long shaft with its extra reach and strongly tapered end with a ring tip as well as the scraping tip it comes with. The 1/4 inch bore also allows use of other tips like the Stewart 1/4 inch gouge tip, round point scraper tip and a cut down version of the right point/left point scraper. John's short straight shaft also makes a great holder for sharpening any of these tips.

One thing you can't help but be impressed with is the attention to detail that goes into these tools. As anyone who has had a chance to examine his turnings knows, John is a perfectionist, and his perfectionism carries into the metal working of these tools. The tips are impeccably ground and serve as a perfect model for how they should be maintained in the future (John will be including sharpening instructions with the tools, but they were not yet ready when I was sent mine). The shafts are smooth and have areas of taper and side relief to maxi-

mize their capabilities. The black finish is consistent and attractive. Frankly, I don't see how he can afford to offer the level of detail and finish he does for the modest prices he charges (which might be a good reason to get your order in early before he discovers this).

My only complaint (and it is a minor one) is that John did not mill small flats on the upper and lower surfaces of the shafts where they will be locked into handles by set screws. Lacking these flats the set screws will cause craters that will need to be filed smooth occasionally so as not to interfere with fitting in handles. Such flats would also help insure proper alignment of the tool shaft. Of course not having the flats makes it possible to rotate the shaft up or down slightly from having the cutting tip at precisely a 9 o'clock position with respect to an armbrace or restraint system handle, but as I see it, this limited flexibility does not overtake the advantages that would come from having the flats milled (which is done on the Stewart and Pencil versions).

So where do John's new Hollowers fit in amongst the myriad of existing hollowing tools? My sense of this is that they are the perfect counterpart to a cutting system (like the Proforme or Munro) and/or a great addition to an existing armbrace or rotationally restrained boring system. If you don't already have an armbrace, I'd suggest the Don Pencil Scorpion Armbrace, in part because the Pencil comes with adapters that will allow John's 1/2 inch diameter tools to be used with the Scorpion armbrace as easily as his full sized shafts. If you already have another armbrace, or might prefer another brand, the Sorby and Stewart will work just fine for the large shafts.

There are some advantages the standard Hooker/Scorpion style curved tools have over the Jordan versions. The Jordan is really designed for use only with the supplied tip (though as noted above,

the straight shafts do allow for mounting some others). The Scorpion, in particular, will mount a much wider range of tips, including traditional metal cutting bits, teardrop scraper blades, and via an adapter, even cutting tips such as the Proforme, Hamlet and Munro. I suspect that John would say that you hardly need these options as his tools work so very well with his supplied tip, and this is somewhat true (they really are the only tools he uses for his own hollowing), but I think most turners will appreciate having the added flexibility that a standard Hooker or Scorpion (particularly the latter) shaft allows. However, I don't see these as substitutes for each other, but rather as desirable compliments to each other. Thus, I can see most turners being very happy having a combination of the Stewart/Sorby or Don Pencil Scorpion Systems (at least the armbrace) AND the Jordan Hollowers.

In some respects, the Kelton Hollowers and the Jordan Hollowers are the tools that most overlap in function. I have long had a fondness for the Kelton Hollowers, for many of the same reasons I am so fond of John's new tools. Based on my current experience, the Kelton Hollowers have advantages in covering a wider range of sizes (of course it takes twelve shafts to do so) and having a tip that is more capable of being oriented for shear scraping; the Jordan tools have greater reach, have replaceable tips (potentially making them a better long term value) and allow one to purchase the tools individually rather than in sets. With respect to ring and hook style cutting tools, the Jordan tools are not as aggressive as most cutting tools in rapidly removing large quantities of material, and they are not as catch proof as the guarded cutting tools like the Proformes, Exocet and Munro. Still, I suspect that many will not find them as troublesome or finicky to adjust as some guarded cutting tools, and of course, John's tools will never clog.

In the end, I can't avoid saying that I am just in love with these tools. What impresses me the most is that the curvatures of the Jordan tools just perfectly match the work I do, better than any of the other tools I have with the sole exception of the Proforme canted shaft (up until now, the Kelton Hollowers came the closest). This is likely to be a individualistic experience, based on the exact types of forms you create, but it is remarkable to me that John's tools go exactly every-

where I want my tools to go. For a long time, I have thought that it is important to have a very wide range of hollowing tools to be able to hollow a variety of shapes through a small mouth. My experience this year, particularly after working with John's new hollowing tools, is forcing a change in opinion. I think that matching the Don Pencil Scorpion system with John's new hollowers will allow you to tackle, with the exception of miniatures, nearly every style and shape of hollow form a typical woodturner might desire to make. This is still a few tools, but not nearly as many as I have felt the need for in the past.

John says in his typical manner "These are the best hook tools available for doing small opening hollow turnings - period. If you don't think so, I'll refund our money." Well, if your experience is anything like mine, I think John won't be faced with any requests for refunds.

Information on ordering the tools can be obtained via John's new website:

<http://johnjordanwoodturning.com/>
(it's still in development and the cross linking is not yet fully sorted out) or by email:

John@johnjordanwoodturning.com

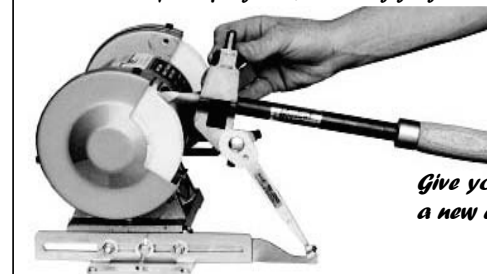
Addendum: For those who care about such things, I now have and have used nearly all the hollowing tools commercially available in the US. By early next year, I hope to have an update of my Brief Review of Hollowing Tools (this time to be the Comprehensive Review of Hollowing Tools). The following are the ones that I find I most regularly select when creating small to large hollow forms (in approximate order of use). Keep in mind these suit me for best for the type of small mouthed hollow forms I like to make, your preferences and needs may be very different.

1. Don Pencil Scorpion Armbrace (used to hold almost everything)
2. Woodcut Proforme, Canted Shaft
3. John Jordan Hollowers (all sizes and shapes)
4. Don Pencil Scorpion Curved Shaft (particularly with teardrop scraper tip)
5. Kelton Hollowers (various sizes from 5/16 to 5/8)
6. Munro Hollowers (both articulating and fixed head versions)
7. Woodcut Deep Bore Handle (lead filled) - primarily for deep vases
8. BestWoodTools, modified pin rest with shop made Phil Iron's style Delrin gates.



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