

## Ashes to Ashes...or Bowls

I'd love to recommend a book that all of us turners, chiselers, gougers, scrapers, strikers, whackers, splitters, whittlers, and general admirers of wood will find rapturously intriguing.

*The Man Who Made Things of Trees*, Robert Penn, Penguin Books, 2015, 240 pp.

Beyond beautiful and mischievous writing, Penn traces the history of Man and Wood, the science of why different woods are used so differently for the things that make civilization click, and the almost spiritual way that men and women experience the woodlands. It also describes, with exceptional accuracy and respect, the craft of people who are still making traditional wooden tools even in the day of steel frame carriages, rubber wheels, fiberglass axe handles, aluminum kayak paddles, and plastic spoons. I think we can say the same for wooden bowls and wine barrels in the era of stainless steel vessels.

The book focuses upon the European common ash, which is quite similar to our North American white ash (the crack of the bat, not the twinky *doink*). This wood, because of a nearly unique combination of strength, ability to absorb impact, dimensional stability, resiliency without fracture, and straight splitting, has an exceptional history with the development of handled tools, weapons, paddles, furniture, and a huge number of farm and household implements...including bowls. Ash works great for utility barrels, sure, but oak gets the nod for beverage barrels.

You'll like it. We are not alone, after all!

Wells (2019)



Ash bowl from my early days at the lathe

Larger format photo same image

