

Gabon ebony is often considered the blackest and most consistently black form of ebony. This wood has been valued since ancient times—used as a symbol of wealth, power, trade, or as a form of currency. Other varieties of ebony (or lower-grade Gabon ebony) might have brown or white streaking, which can be beautiful in its own right. African blackwood, a true rosewood, is another source of blackish wood but with larger open pores than ebony and lacking some of its deep black richness.

A Mexican wood, katalox, is a source of very black wood, although it's a rather small tree with lots of white sapwood. Another African wood, wenge, almost looks all black, but really is a mix of black and brown. American persimmon is a true ebony and may have rich areas of deep black, sometimes referred to as carbon, or almost always has flecks of black in the wood.

One of the most fascinating sources of naturally colored black wood is timber (especially oaks) buried in peat bogs in areas of Ireland and Scotland. Logs that have lain in the highly acidic peat bogs of this region, combined with their own tannic acid and iron from the soil, impart a wonderful deep black color to the wood. The process is a slow one, often occurring over thousands of years. Similarly, buried ancient logs found in Japan also produce this rich black coloring. This wood, called *umoregi* in Japanese, has really reached the level of petrified wood, but can still be shaped into wonderful objects. Its look can be almost the same as ebony, with some figure to the material, but certainly much harder.

“Creating a wood-turned piece that is totally black is truly a challenge. Given the absence of color, the onus is put upon form, with secondary elements of the piece responsible for holding attention, and providing opportunities for discovery and subtle surprises.”

— Molly Winton

Adding black

Naturally occurring black woods are rare in a world that commercially lumbers over 8,000 different types of wood. In reaction to this reality, woodworkers and woodturners have resorted to coloring the wood black. Woodturners in particular have taken this blackening process in many different directions. One method is by fire: charring in a fire or with a torch, sometimes wire-brushed or sanded, sometimes oiled and burnished, to achieve the deep charcoal black that is often the target. The amount and depth of the burning can create quite a variation of effects.

Arizona woodturner Phil Brennion utilizes one of the more unusual methods of fire—he covers the piece with gunpowder, and ignites the powder to produce



“**Night Run**” by Molly Winton is part of the *Basic Black* exhibit. Cherry; 5¾×3¾”.

regions of black for a wonderful black speckled look that gives an ancient look to his work. Another way to blacken is by using friction while pieces are spinning on a lathe. A simple wire can create lines of black by burning into the wood, while a piece of heavy cardboard held against the spinning wood—usually at a very high speed—can create larger zones of black.

Today most black pieces are created using more traditional or obvious wood coloring techniques. There is a wide range of methods, utilizing everything from printer's inks (in paste form), India ink, acrylic- and oil-based paints, spray paints from a can, extractions of logwood, leather dyes, aniline dyes made from coal, traditional fabric dyes, pigmented paints (such as oil base or acrylic), black gesso,