

# Readers' showcase

This month, blind turner **Dennis DeVendra** shows us around his workshop and explains how blindness hasn't hindered his enthusiasm for woodturning



## How I started

Woodwork has always been an interest for me. When I was growing up and still able to see, I would watch my father build functional items such as tables and jigsaws puzzles.

I had a friend who was also blind and he showed me a few things about woodworking and since then, I have continued working with wood and building my skills.

I bought my first lathe three years ago and slowly learnt how to use it. I bought a set of tools and a bench grinder to sharpen them but as I did not want to sharpen the tools freehand, I bought a set of jigs too. With the help of my wife, I used videos and recorded books to learn how to turn but it was like teaching someone how to drive by watching a movie about it!

## My first bowl

I became confident in turning pens but was ready to move on so I travelled 500 miles to visit my friend Venley who was going to show me how to make a bowl, step by step.

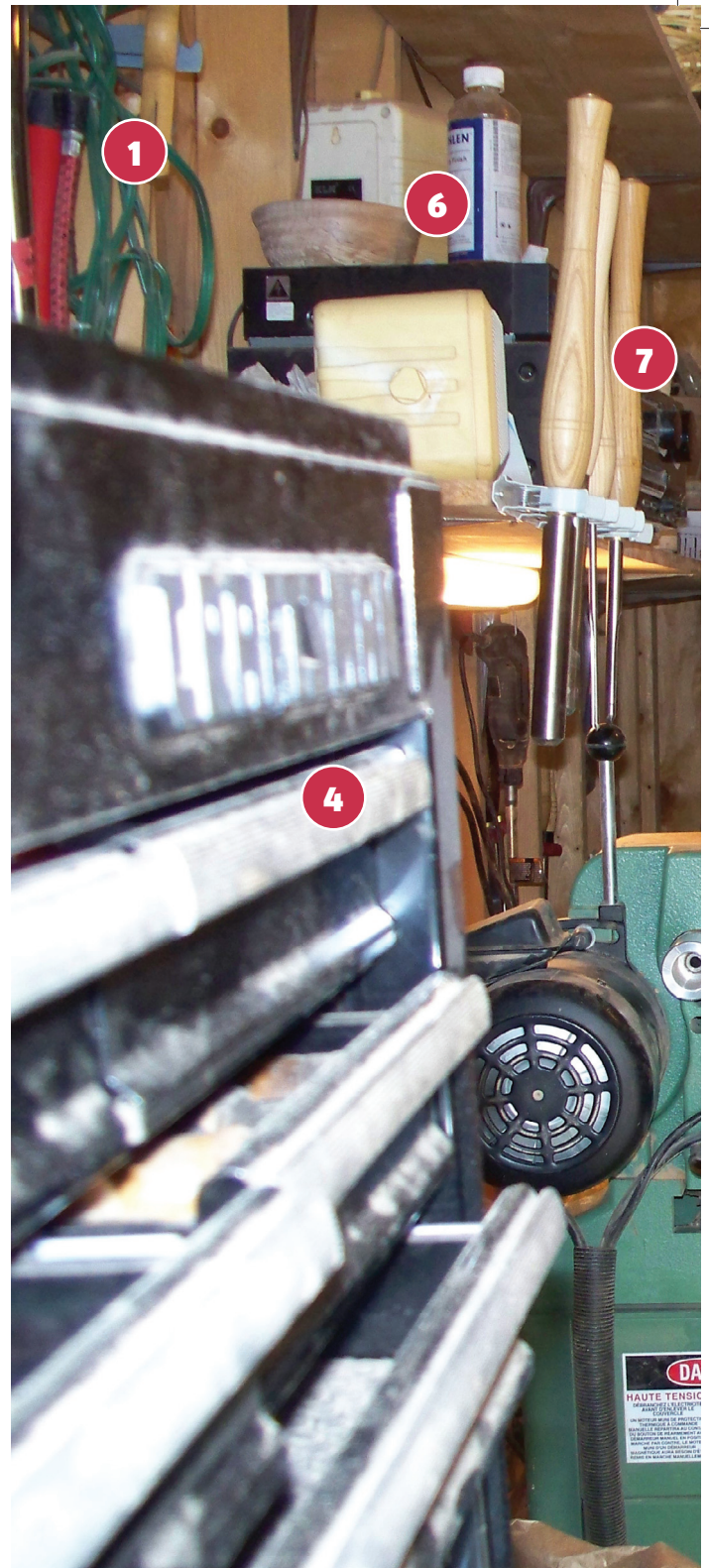
To mark the centre, we scored the wood with a punch. Venley had fashioned a piece of a broom handle with a nail in the middle to centre the

**M**y name is Dennis DeVendra. I am 54 years old and live in Columbus, Ohio. I have been blind for about half my life due to a hereditary eye disease. I have some light perception but no usable vision and I get around with the use of a cane. My best friend, biggest fan, and turning critic is my sighted wife Genia who provides me with support as well as transportation to the woodworking stores and woodturning club meetings.

My day job is as a manager at a utility company and my turning work is done primarily over the weekends or while I am on vacation. I have been turning for the past three years.



Dennis's first attempt at turning a bowl



**1** My workshop is a one car garage and is 3m (10ft) wide x 6m (20ft) long. I need to be able to fit the car in when I am not working. It is also important to keep it clean and tidy to avoid any safety hazards

**2** To maximize the space, I installed two levels of shelving secured to the studed walls

**3** I use a General lathe model 25-650 which allows for 405mm (16in) bowls and spindle work up to 1065mm (42in). The headstock can turn 360°. I use rare earth magnets to stick most of my accessories to the lathe

**4** This is my storage system for various tools. They are arranged in certain compartments