



Dave Fox made 2 burners that he uses individually or in tandem to create art. One is made from a microwave oven transformer.

Electricity Produces Unique Art

“Factual Burning” is a new way to create art that uses high-voltage electricity to make artistic branch and root-like patterns on wood and gourds.

“I like the unpredictability. I can only control where it starts and stops by turning off the electricity,” says Dave Fox, a Michigan woodworker who has been fractal burning for about a year. Following instructions he found on the internet, he made two burners that he uses individually or in tandem on larger boards. One is made from a microwave oven transformer and the other from a neon sign transformer.

The neon transformer may be safer, because it is already wired, but Fox prefers the microwave burner because it is “faster and more exciting”.

It can also be deadly.

“If you touch the board while it’s burning it will kill you,” Fox says, noting there are contradicting opinions about how much voltage the transformers produce.

The safest way to operate either burner is to plug and unplug it. Fox added a switch and light bulbs to his burners so he knows when it is on. That’s especially helpful for the neon transformer, which is silent.

Fox’s setup also includes a piece of pressed insulated board with two blocks of wood on top to support the piece of wood he burns. He uses clips to hold the wires in place.

After the wood is prepped with soda water (Fox uses 1 tbsp. baking soda to 1 cup water), he turns the burner on and the current takes over until he turns it off. When the piece is finished it can be cleaned off under running water with a stiff brush. Fox prefers to use a piece of Scotch-Brite® sanding pad on a rotary tool to buff out the char and soot before blowing it off with an air hose. After a light sanding, the wood is ready for a finish. Fox typically sprays on Rust-Oleum® Triple Thick Glaze.

With experience he has learned to read wood grain and that he prefers closed cell dense woods like walnut, cherry, aromatic cedar and hickory. Other fractal burning artists use other woods and even plywood.

For a little control, Fox says he leaves some areas of the wood dry. He uses the open spaces to woodburn in names, sayings



He uses high-voltage electricity to make artistic branch and root-like patterns on wood and gourds.



and other customized wording. His heart- and state-shaped plaques with a quote about family and roots have been very popular. He sells them along with coat racks, canes and other items at craft shows and through his website.

“People sometimes bring their own items that they want burned,” Fox says. “Gourds have to be very clean and have the wax coating off. They tend to burn with a lot more fine detail because of the density of the material.”

Because of the danger, he doesn’t demonstrate fractal burning at shows, but customers can watch a video of it on his laptop.

For Fox, who has experimented with a variety of woodworking crafts over the years, fractal burning is a fast, exciting art that allows him to sell beautiful items at reasonable prices.

A video on his Facebook page shows how the fractal burning is done. There are several websites that show how to build and use fractal burners.

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Photo shows Jeb Clark in the process of converting an old grain bin into a poolside gazebo, complete with a walkway that’s covered by bin panels.

Old Bin Transformed Into Poolside Gazebo

Jeb Clark turned a rusty old grain bin into a fun and funky poolside gazebo. Nicknamed Binzilla, the top ring and part of a second ring from the bin now shelters Clark’s family and friends when grilling, relaxing or enjoying the family pool.

“I have some landscaping to do yet, but we’re extremely happy with how it turned out,” says Clark. “It rests on a concrete pad and there’s a walkway that I covered with other bin panels.”

Clark got the bin for free from a neighbor who had just purchased the property it sat on. It was too far gone to hold grain, and Clark offered to take it down.

In order to do so, he needed a way to lift the top ring of panels and roof. He fashioned a 16-ft. boom for his skid loader. It consisted of 4 lengths of previously salvaged, 1 1/2-in. angle iron reinforcing a center piece of 3-in. square tubing.

Clark butt-welded the angle iron and tubing to a quick-tach plate. “I hung a cable from the boom through the hole in the top of the bin and attached it to a wheel and tire inside the bin,” says Clark. “I wasn’t sure what weight the boom could carry, but it plucked the top right off the bin.”

Clark carried the bin top back to his yard

where he set it down and marked spots for support legs. After shifting the bin out of the way, he rented a posthole auger and drilled holes for 8 support posts, placing them just inside the bin circumference.

“I left the posts loose and lowered the bin top over them and lag-bolted them to the inside of the bin,” says Clark. “I only had to enlarge one hole before filling in the post holes.”

In order to ensure ventilation, Clark raised the top of the bin about 2 in. above the top ring of panels and reattached them with spreaders.

“The rain can’t make it in, but the air can,” he says. “I used wire mesh over the gaps to keep out small birds.”

Clark fashioned a backhoe for his skid loader so he could lay electrical cable to the site.

The rounded end of a 500-gal. propane tank made an ideal fire pit, and a tailgate from an old truck was repurposed as a glider bench.

“Iowa summers can be pretty hot, so I added a fan,” says Clark. “It also has lights, a clock and a thermometer.”

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He made a 16-ft. long boom for his skid loader and used it to lift bin’s roof and top ring of panels.

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