Wooden Bowl Finishing

By Abe Sloan

Basically, finishing a wooden bowl involves removing the marks of the previous operation until you get a smooth surface then applying a coating that will maintain that surface while working to further enhance the surface. I've written this to show you how I do that.

My Salad Bowl Finish Process

Step 1

Shear scraping to remove turning tool marks.

- I use either a shear scraper on the outside, or the edge of a bowl gouge on the inside.

Steps 2-6

Sand on the lathe using grits 80, 120, 180, 220, and 320.

- I use 2 inch sanding discs on a drill with the lathe turning 500 rpm or less. I blow the dust off and inspect the piece after each grit.
- All scratches must be eliminated and problem areas corrected before moving to the next level of grit.
- If scratches seem stubborn, return to the last used sanding grit to get them out. Some problem areas are best worked on with the lathe off, but be careful not to leave a noticeable flat spot on your piece. It's easy to do.

Step 7

Hand sand with 320-grit sandpaper. That's right, 320 again.

Step 8

Apply your favorite finish.

- I use Waterlox for nearly everything. I choose this finish because I can control the level of gloss and therefore the final look of the piece.
- The first coat I apply liberally with a paper towel and allow to soak for a few minutes.
- I then re-dampen any areas that have soaked in completely and rub with a fresh paper towel until all the way dry.

Step 9

Allow to dry 12 hours or more. Then hand sand with 400 grit.

Step 10

Apply second coat of Waterlox. Immediately rub dry with soft cloth.

Step 11

Allow finish to cure for a week or more to allow the finish to get good and hard, then sand with 600 grit.

Step 12

Polish with your favorite wax.

- I use the Beall three-step buffing and waxing system, finishing up with carnuba wax.

Some Final Bowl Finishing Tips

This is the process that works for me. It may take some trial and error to find what works best for you.

If you're using oil, wax, oil and wax mixture or commercial salad bowl finish you can stop after Step 8. If you are making a piece specifically for food use it is best to use a finish that is certified food safe.

If you want a higher polish repeat steps 10 through 12, followed by some extra time on the buffing wheel until you get what you want. Whatever method you use will take some time and effort to get a superior result.

Remember, it's what you do last that will make your bowl's first impression.

Best of Luck!

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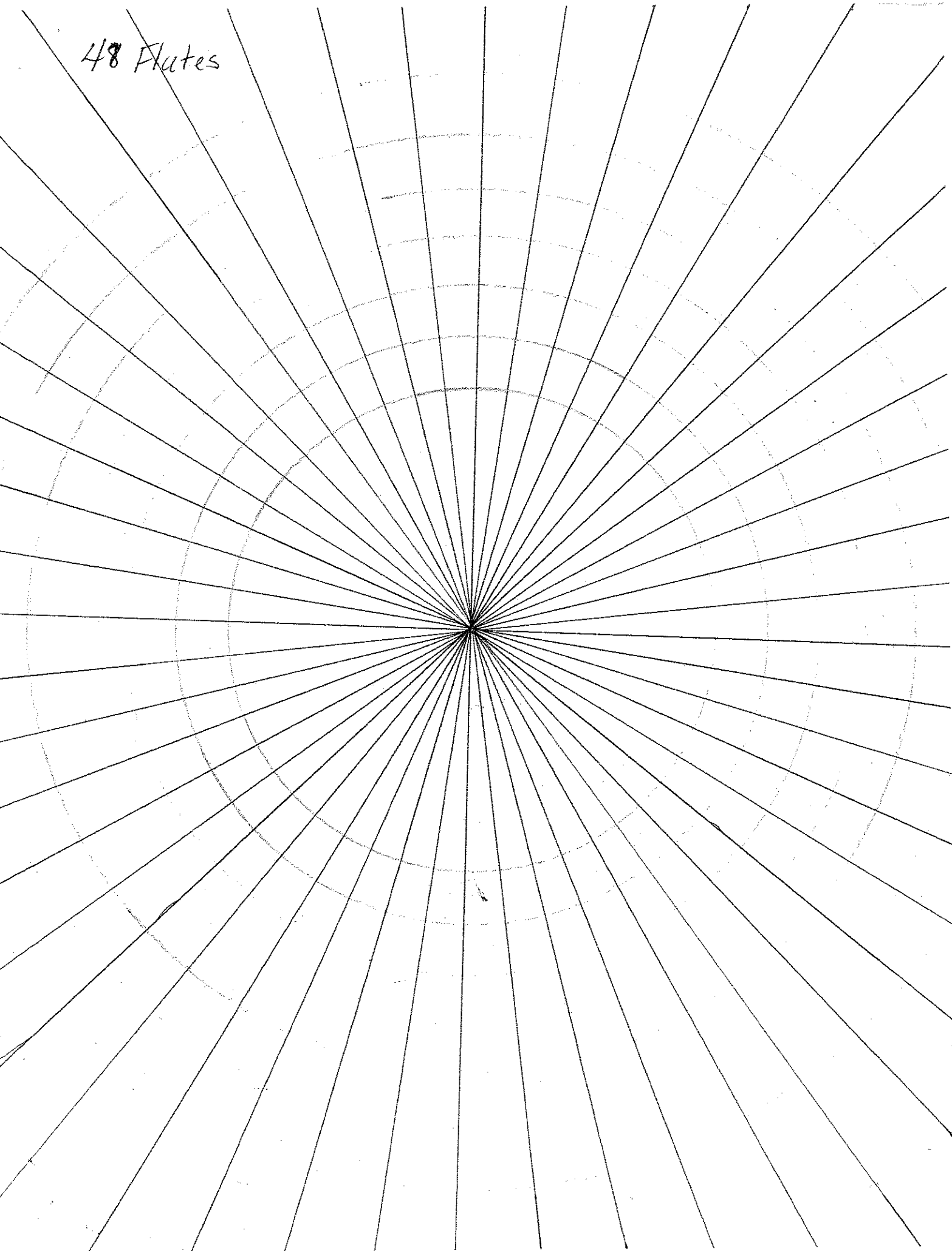
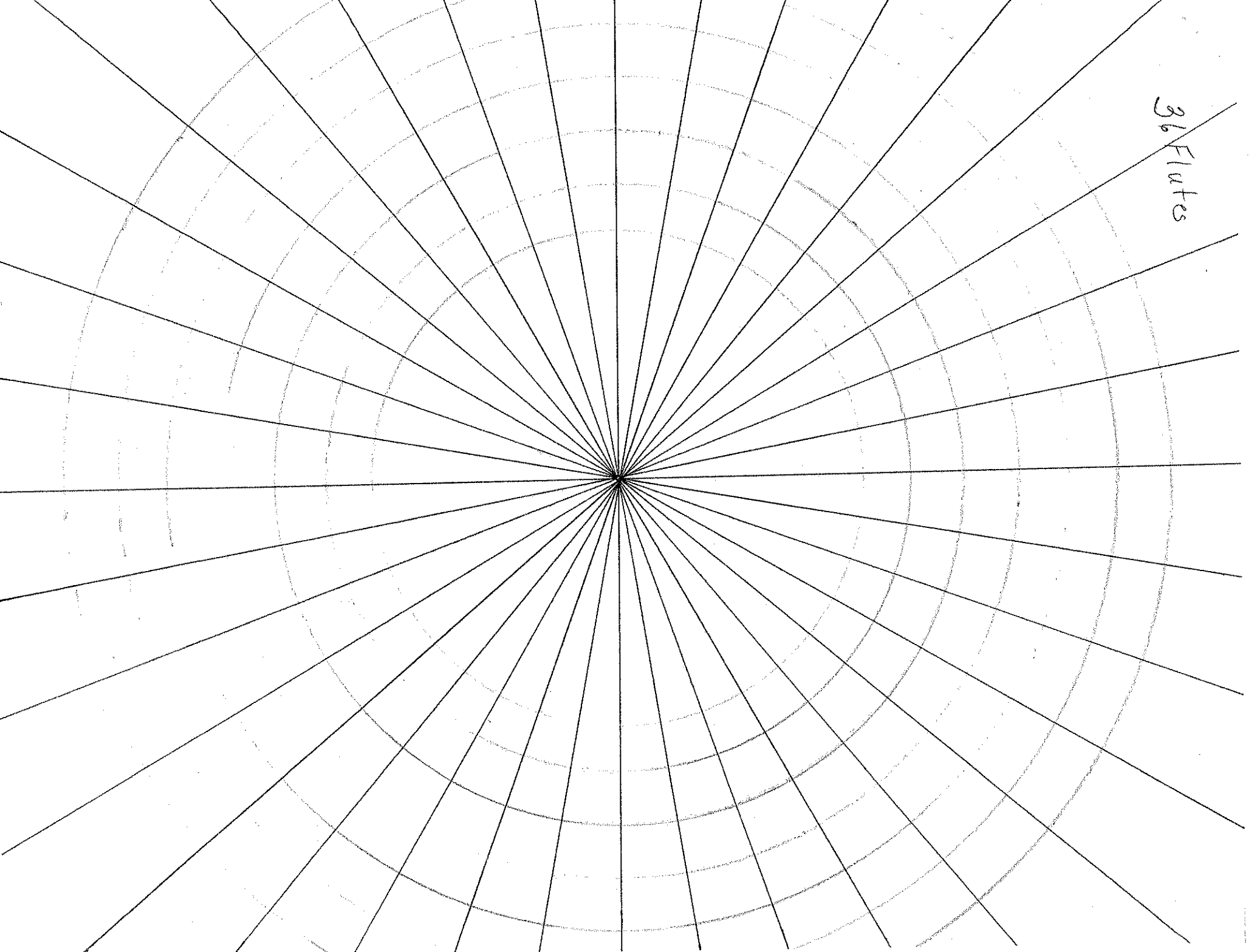
Bowl Fluting

1. Sand inside to 320 grit
2. Shear scrape to make outside smooth enough to write on
3. Mark flutes using template
4. Complete marking using tool rest
5. Shape edges using micro-plane
6. Complete flutes using carving tool
7. Return bowl to lathe for finishing touches

48 Flutes




36 Flutes