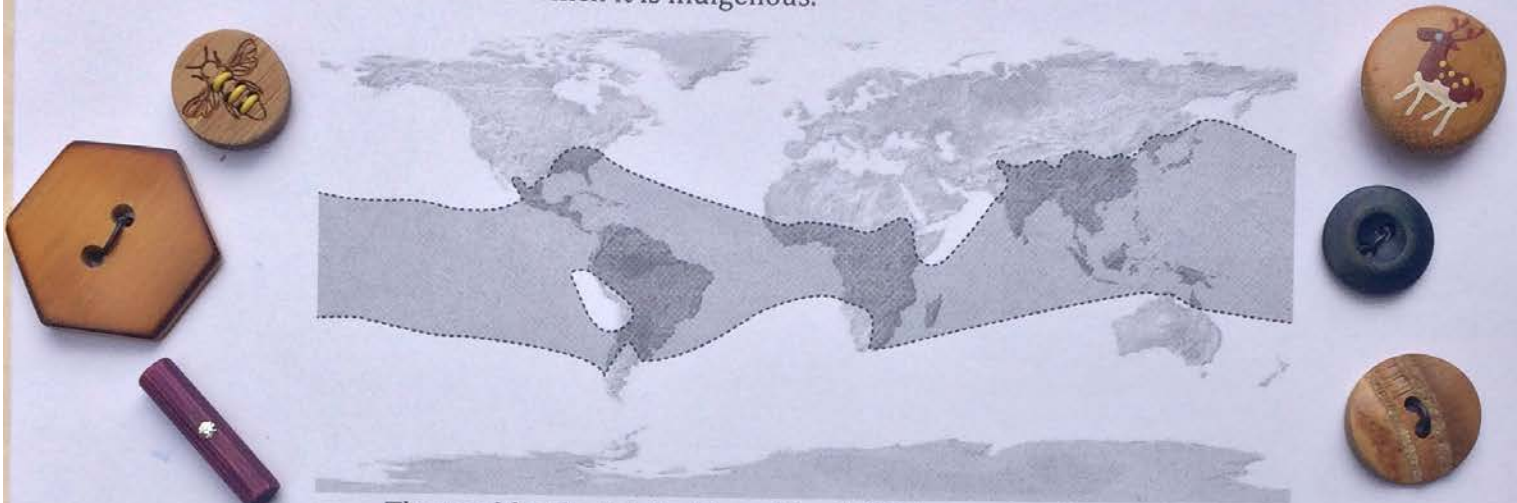


~BAMBOO BUTTONS~

-- by Beth Schaut, WSBS 2018 --

Bamboo is one of the most versatile natural materials known to mankind. It is an easily cultivated and highly sustainable resource that has been utilized in various ways from as early as 2000-1000 BC. Because of man's long time association with bamboo it also plays a leading role in mythology, symbolism and culture in many of the areas around the world to which it is indigenous.

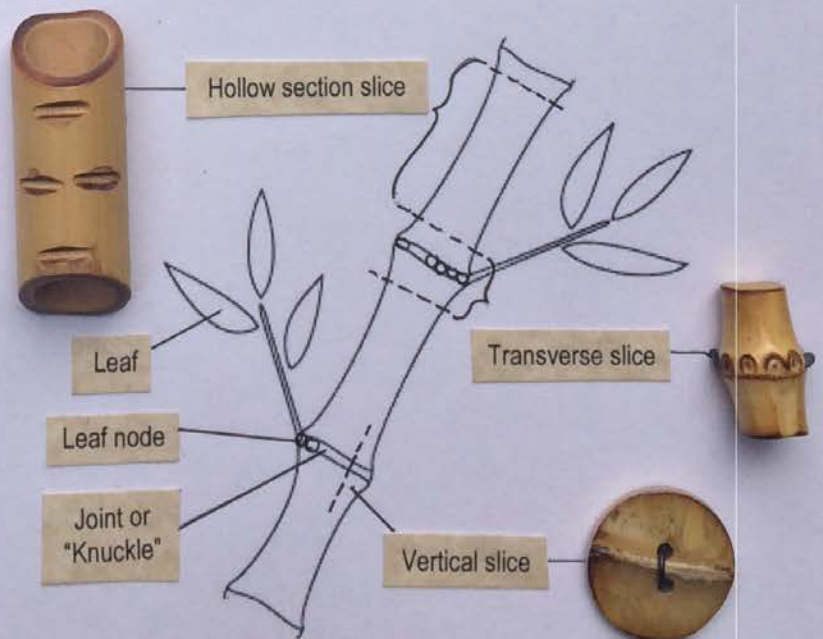


The worldwide distribution of the 1,462 known bamboo species.

Bamboo as a material has many inherent qualities. It has been and continues to be utilized in many diverse ways including; construction timber, weaponry (including cannons), roads, rafts, furniture, in agriculture and aquaculture, as food (both human and animal), medicinal applications (antioxidant and anti-bacterial), for cooking and eating implements, musical instruments, for fuel, charcoal making, writing tablets and implements, basketry, textiles (linens and diapers), toys, sports equipment (bicycles, snowboards, skateboards, fishing rods), fire crackers, landscaping, decorative items including jewelry and many others. For our interests bamboo is most fascinatingly used to make buttons.

As button collectors we are most likely interested in how to identify the bamboo material (Blue Book listed as Sec. 15 Other Material) and how it has been used to make our collectable treasures.

Bamboo is essentially a super sized grass. The stems, or canes, are hollow and there are solid, thickened nodes along the shaft from which the leaves and rarely flowers emerge. These structural qualities are exploited in the construction of and the artistic rendering of buttons.



The narrower diameters of bamboo canes can be used whole and relatively unaltered.



Pin shank

Pyrography

Larger canes can be worked by slicing the thick sides which can then be used as is or further refined by carving. Bamboo splinters easily so the carved technique is a nice find.



Carved



Turned

Bamboo's lengthwise grain will be very straight and very narrow and can be confused with some tightly grained woods.



Bamboo



Wood



Tiny dots = Bamboo

One way to determine the difference is by looking at the end grain. Unlike wood there are no growth rings and the end grain will have a speckled or dotted appearance.

Growth rings = Wood



This can be confused with other materials like palm wood. Bamboo will have much smaller "dots".



Palm wood

The leaf node or "knuckle" of the cane can be sliced off to allow both the joint and/or the round leaf nodes to be featured as a design element.



Studio - Tom Meringer, note natural depression



Solid slice, note the leaf nodes around edge

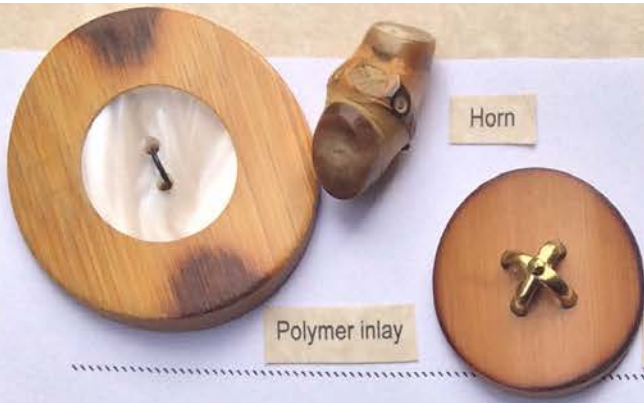
Joint without leaf nodes -unusual self shank



Joint with leaf nodes



If the bamboo is cut transversely, directly above and below the node, you will get a solid, sliced piece that isn't hollow.



Polymer inlay

Horn

Yellow metal

Bamboo buttons, having had their heyday in the 1930-50's time period, aren't too difficult to find and are affordable. The Italians embraced the inexpensive, natural material and offered many modern designs.

Bamboo buttons are so successful the "look" is sometimes imitated in other materials including plastics and wood.



Polymers

Wood



Small

Medium

Large

The painted faces of the simplest turned designs are charming and are an inexpensive item to look for. All four pictorial sections can be found in this type. Look for small, medium and large sizes.

Usually a bamboo button is presented as a single piece construction type. However, laminates can be found which will diversify a tray of assembled bamboo examples. Different color tones can be quite striking when presented this way.



Plywood laminate

End grain type



Laminated to horn

Set in metalized polymer

Laminated to wood

Bamboo also can also found as an embellishment on other materials.

Points to remember:

- Shank types are varied and can include: self-shank, sew through, pin and inserted.
- Look for Other Material Embellishments (OME) and Decorative finishes (DF).
- Bamboo can also be found set in metal as seen previously as well as an OME on other materials.
- Gaming pieces are considered to be "make ups" and although interesting are not suitable for competition.



Bamboo and bone Mahjong tile