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wood CARVING

We take a look at
the exquisite work
of scholar and artist

**Stephanie
Rocknak**

DAVE WESTERN
investigates using
bent knives

PETER BENSON makes
a fun little house sculpture

STEVE BISCO
explores carving
an Easter Island
head in stone

PAUL PURNELL
carves a pheasant
head for a walking stick



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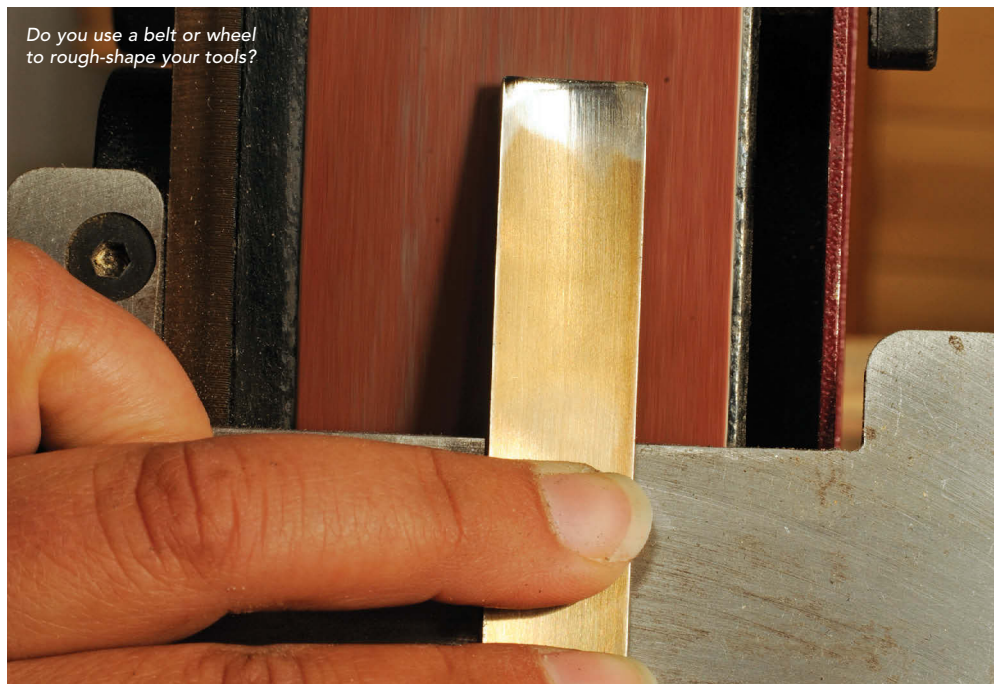
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Woodcarving is an inherently dangerous
pursuit. Readers should not attempt the
procedures described herein without
seeking training and information on the safe
use of tools and machines, and all readers
should observe current safety legislation.

Do you use a belt or wheel
to rough-shape your tools?



PHOTOGRAPH BY GMCANTHONY BAILEY

Do something about it!



I was talking with a group
the other day, who always
read my leaders and
wonder what I might pick to
comment on. One person
said that I'm not afraid to
speak my mind and address
issues that others might
not. I discuss things talked

about in the general carving community and
if they are discussed within our community
and relevant, I see no reason why I can't
comment on such things in my leaders.

Hot topics

The current hot topics at the moment are
clubs and national organisations getting
people involved, rather than sitting on their
backsides and letting others do the work.
I have said enough on this recently and I have
to say the ball is in each person's court to
judge what they will and will not do and face
the consequences of those choices. Hard
words? Maybe, but if you want something,
you have to be prepared to do something
to get it. I would like a new fly fishing rod –
I broke one recently, so it is a 'need' if I wish
to continue fly fishing. I now have to find a
way to afford a new one.

I am struggling with a piece I am working on
and have to put in the time to figure out how
to solve the problems with it. I need to do
some work around the house, so have to find
the time to do that. There is a list as long as
my arms of 'wants' and 'needs', and I have to

work out what I can do, how to afford some of
them and how to juggle time to do everything.
You get where I am going.

Where there is a 'need', we have to
find a way. We need to cut through all
the extraneous guff and find solutions to
problems. It is no use expecting the cosmos
or others to solve it for us. I hear a lot of
grumbling about 'this' or 'that' and rarely
are the people grumbling doing anything to
make it better or solve the problem. I think I
am going to ban all grumbling to me – unless
the person grumbling can offer solutions and
that means them being part of the solution
and not part of the problem! You can't see the
silly grin on my face about having written that
comment, but I am grinning. I promise.

Here I am, grumbling away in my leader and
I know there are some things I need to do so
I can play my bit in being part of the solution.
Carving is a wonderful thing and we face
many challenges. It is easier to face challenges
together and it makes easier work of dealing
with the challenges we all face. It is also more
fun working together.

I am off now to refine and sharpen some
tools. Let me know what you have been
making recently.

Mark Baker
Editor of Woodcarving

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on 01273 477374. Alternatively, save up to 20% on the cover price by subscribing.
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Stefanie Rocknak in Profile – see page 39
Front cover image courtesy of Stefani Rocknak

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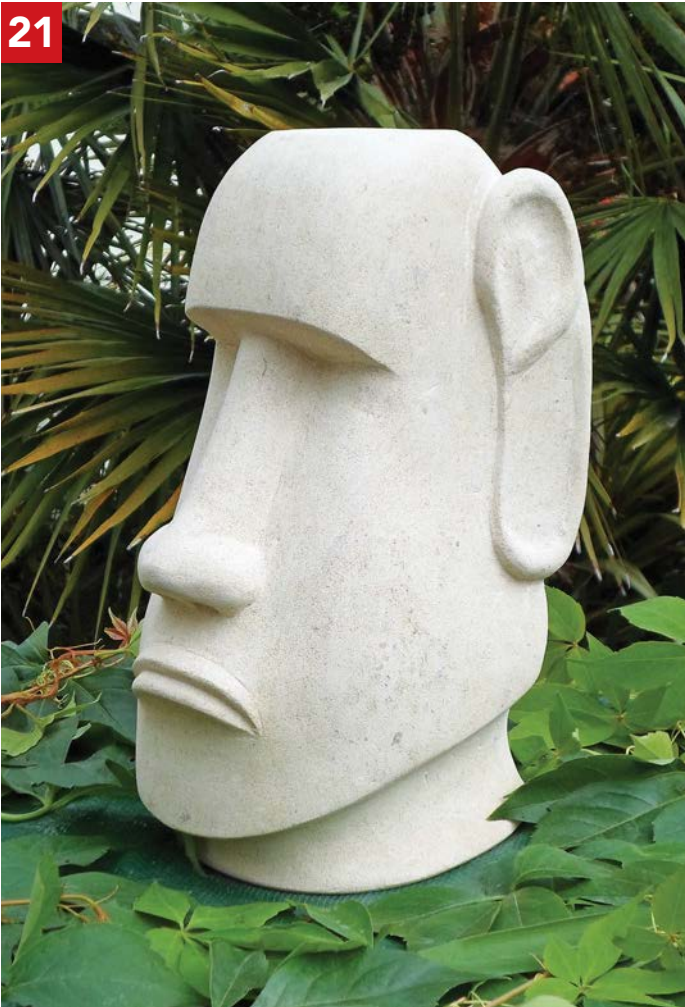
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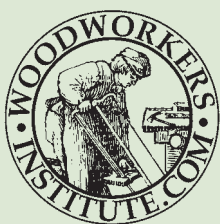
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The Woodworkers Institute web forum

Why not join in the discussions on all matters woodworking on the Woodworkers Institute web forum? Covering all four GMC woodworking titles, including *Woodcarving*, you can view the work from fellow craftsmen, exchange useful hints and tips, or join in on the hot topic of the day on the live forums. To register, simply log on to www.woodworkersinstitute.com, click the register button, and follow the instructions.

Round & About

We talk to the BDWCA and take your letters from the forum and important dates for your diary to bring you the latest news from the woodcarving community. If you have something you want your fellow carvers to know, send in your news stories, snippets and diary dates to Briony Darnley at Woodcarving, 86 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1XN or to briony.darnley@thegmcgroup.com

BDWCA: Annual Show results



Northern Ireland Group with their winning wrens

One of the competitions at our Annual Show, which was held in Bakewell, Derbyshire in September 2015, was the Regional Group Competition. The subject, chosen by the previous year's winners, Cheshire Group, was one of our smallest birds, the wren. We had 45 wrens fly in to visit the show and the winning group was our Northern Ireland Group, with Thames Valley Group coming in second place and Trent Valley Group in third place. The award for Best Individual Wren was won by Richard Rossiter, of Thames Valley.

There were quite a few groans from group members when Northern Ireland announced the subject for 2016, the starling. Noisy and argumentative birds

which often arrive in gardens in flocks – not a bird that has inspired many bird carvers to reproduce it, in fact! It's not the carving that is worrying us, it's the painting! When you begin to look closely at reference material you see how much iridescence there is – purples, blues and greens – and a lot of fine detail with the white tips to the feathers. But we can't back off from a challenge, so once the shock had worn off, wooden starlings started appearing in workshops across the country – and internationally as well! It will be interesting to see how many 'flock to Bakewell' in September.

This year's show is on the weekend of the 10–11 September. Put the date in your diary and we hope to see you there.



Best Individual Wren by Richard Rossiter



Live starling reference picture

Contact the BDWCA

For further information on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk. Membership includes three issues of our full-colour magazine, Wingspan. Contact membership secretary: Mrs Janet Nash, 26 Shendish Edge, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire Tel: 01442 247 610 Alternatively, please email: pam.wilson@bdwca.org.uk

BWA: BWA Birch Egg Competition 2015

Late in 2015, the BWA ran a competition for members to carve something from a birch egg. Birch isn't necessarily the first choice of wood for a carver because it is a little harder than lime and the restricted dimensions of an egg-shaped piece, measuring 65mm in height and 45mm in diameter, made the prospect more daunting still.

There were no restrictions on what could be carved from the egg and no restrictions about adding other pieces of wood. Rather than all of the carvings coming back egg-shaped, a large variety of shapes and designs flooded in. It has demonstrated the astonishing breadth of

imagination in the carving community and just how some people saw what they did in an egg-shaped piece of wood, we'll never know.

The competition was run in *The Woodcarvers Gazette* and a prize for the editor's favourite carving was awarded by Jason Townsend, to Mick McCabe for his 'Skull'. Three other carvings were given runner-up prizes and a further three were given the award of highly-commended. A total of 69 carvings were entered and there was so much variety in the carvings that any judgement of them was very difficult.

This is a cheap and fun project that could work well in other

woodcarving clubs or even in woodturning clubs that want to try something a little different. All you need are some turned eggs in birch (or other wood) and some patience. Carving something out of a square-edged piece of wood can be challenging but you'll have to 'think outside of the box' when carving an egg.

We had flowers, birds, faces, bugs, small furry animals, caricatures and some fun word-play in the titles. The possibilities for carvings are endless and we're going to run the competition again this year to see what else people can come up with. Maybe you can think of a few more ideas and have a go yourself...

Conversion chart

2mm	(⁵ / ₆₄ in)
3mm	(¹ / ₈ in)
4mm	(⁵ / ₃₂ in)
6mm	(¹ / ₄ in)
7mm	(⁹ / ₃₂ in)
8mm	(⁵ / ₁₆ in)
9mm	(¹¹ / ₃₂ in)
10mm	(³ / ₈ in)
11mm	(⁷ / ₁₆ in)
12mm	(¹ / ₂ in)
13mm	(¹ / ₂ in)
14mm	(⁷ / ₁₆ in)
15mm	(⁹ / ₁₆ in)
16mm	(⁵ / ₈ in)
17mm	(¹¹ / ₁₆ in)
18mm	(²³ / ₃₂ in)
19mm	(³ / ₄ in)
20mm	(³ / ₄ in)
21mm	(¹³ / ₁₆ in)
22mm	(⁷ / ₈ in)
23mm	(²⁹ / ₃₂ in)
24mm	(¹⁵ / ₁₆ in)
25mm	(1in)
30mm	(¹ / ₈ in)
32mm	(¹ / ₄ in)
35mm	(¹³ / ₈ in)
38mm	(¹ / ₂ in)
40mm	(¹ / ₅ in)
45mm	(¹³ / ₄ in)
50mm	(2in)
55mm	(² / ₈ - ² / ₁ in)
60mm	(² / ₈ in)
63mm	(² / ₂ in)
65mm	(² / ₈ in)
70mm	(² / ₃ in)
75mm	(3in)
80mm	(³ / ₈ in)
85mm	(³ / ₄ in)
90mm	(³ / ₂ in)
93mm	(³ / ₂ in)
95mm	(³ / ₄ in)
100mm	(4in)
105mm	(⁴ / ₈ in)
110mm	(⁴ / ₄ - ⁴ / ₃ in)
115mm	(⁴ / ₂ in)
120mm	(⁴ / ₄ in)
125mm	(5in)
130mm	(⁵ / ₈ in)
135mm	(⁵ / ₄ in)
140mm	(⁵ / ₂ in)
145mm	(⁵ / ₄ in)
150mm	(6in)
155mm	(⁶ / ₈ in)
160mm	(⁶ / ₄ in)
165mm	(⁶ / ₂ in)
170mm	(⁶ / ₄ in)
178mm	(⁶ / ₈ in)
180mm	(7in)
185mm	(⁷ / ₄ in)
190mm	(⁷ / ₂ in)
195mm	(⁷ / ₄ in)
200mm	(8in)
305mm	(12in)
405mm	(16in)
510mm	(20in)
610mm	(24in)
710mm	(28in)
815mm	(32in)
915mm	(36in)
1015mm	(40in)
1120mm	(44in)
1220mm	(48in)
1320mm	(52in)
1420mm	(56in)
1525mm	(60in)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON TOWNSEND, COURTESY OF BWA



The basis for the competitors carvings – birch eggs



Galleon Egg by Bob Breakwell



Praying Hands by Dennis Smyth



Watch by Laurie Dempsey

Contact the BWA

Tel: 07749 769 111 Web: www.britishwoodcarversassociation.co.uk

Or write to: The National Secretary, 32 Beaufort Avenue, Kenton, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 8PF



PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM THOMPSON

Graham Thompson's carving of Grinling Gibbons

Grinling Gibbons

Dear Mark

I wonder if your readers can help in confirming or confounding my view that no likeness of Grinling Gibbons has been produced in wood since his death in 1721. Can it really be that the doyen of all decorative woodcarvers has been so neglected? 2015 saw the completion of my own portrait of the great man. Am I really the first in nearly three hundred years – surely someone has already beaten me to it?

Graham Thompson

A new club

Hi Mark,

I am starting a new woodcarving club in Oldham, Lancashire. The club is based at The Crossley Centre, Denton Lane, Chadderton, Oldham. If anyone is interested, please contact, Terry Kelly on 0161 2841731 or Bee Buckwalter on 0161 3450592 for full details.

Kind Regards, Terry Kelly

Promoting carving

I have read your latest leader article in *Woodcarving* and would make the following observations:-

I am a member of the BWA, West Midlands Branch, and we are based in premises at Birmingham University. We go to local shows, demonstrating and exhibiting our carvings. We hand out leaflets showing our position and times of opening, which is two evenings a week being Monday and Wednesday.

When budding carvers come along, and they do, from some distance in some cases, we give them an exercise, to teach them to use the tools, which we supply. We also have members who are prepared to spend time with these budding carvers to help them. They then decide for themselves what they wish to carve with input from the more experienced members on tap if required.

However the problem seems to be that unless they can be a Grinling Gibbons within say six weeks they disappear. There seems to be this feeling that everything must be instant gratification and not have to work at it. But we do have people who stick at it and become very good carvers, particularly female members. We have quite a large female membership which makes club nights quite a social occasion. We do have club competitions and social events. May I wish you and all at *Woodcarving* a prosperous 2016.

Regards John Turner

Thank you

To all who sent woodturning books, DVDs and videos, thank you all very much indeed. The response was swift, warm and very welcome. Although I offered reimbursement for postage costs, most declined, thank you for that.

We at Forfar Young Woodturners now have an extensive Library, with around 60 items in books and DVDs alone, covering all aspects of woodwork, not only woodturning, but carving and furniture, and sharpening also.

Special thanks to Jo Jones, who so kindly sent more than one parcel, accompanied by nice letters and comments, and also some tools, and all sorts of knick-knacks! These will all be put to good use. I will make sure of that!

Also thanks to Stuart Mortimer, who started all this, for his help, advice, and donations.

Thank you all once again for your generosity.

Best Regards, Peter Fordyce

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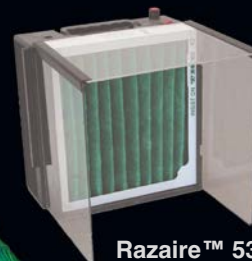


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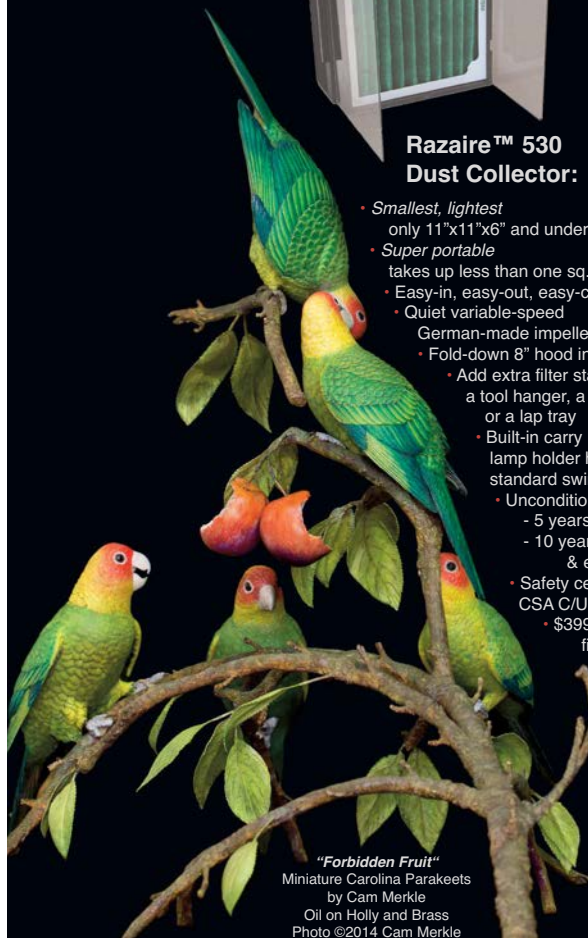
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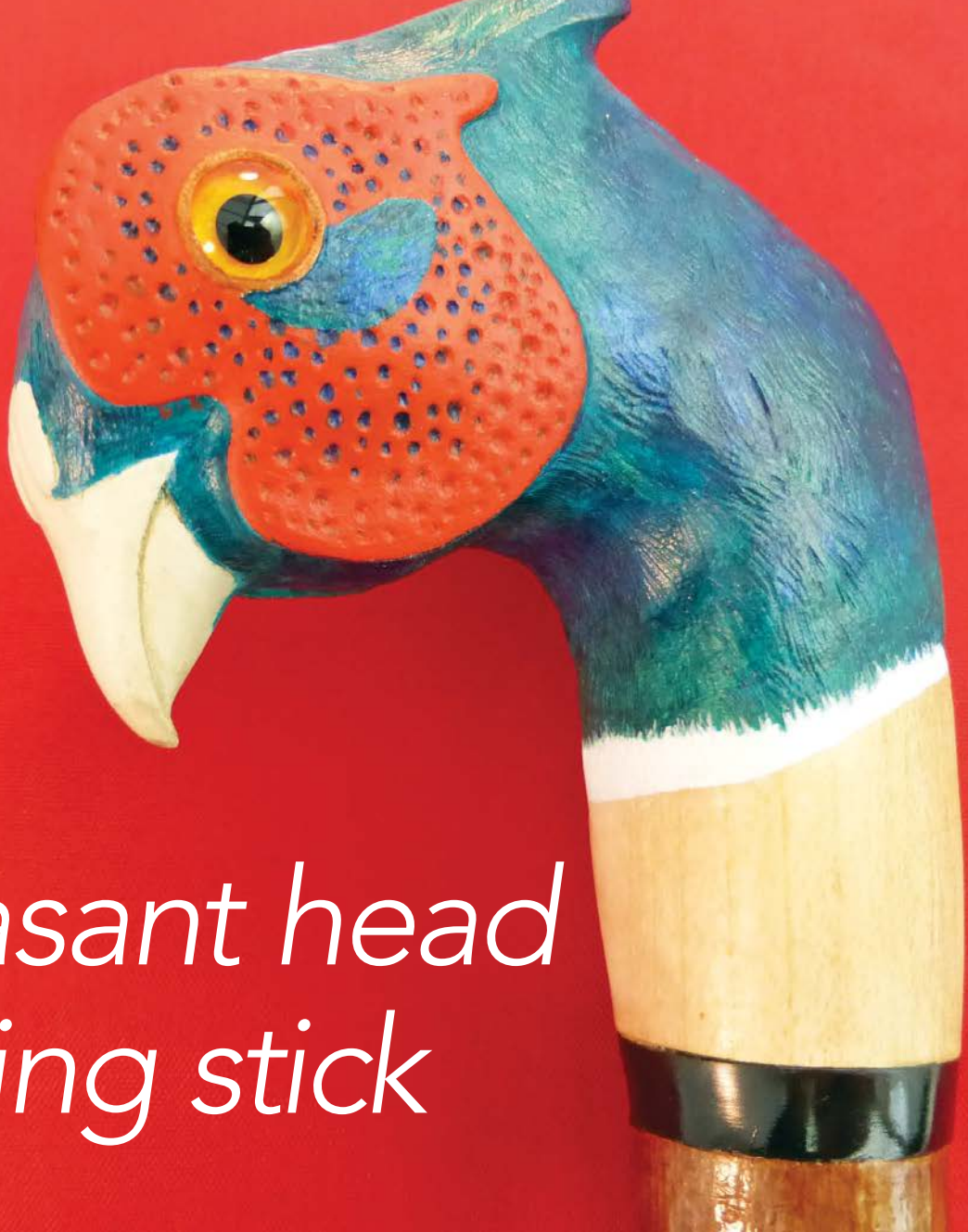
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Pheasant head walking stick

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL PURNELL

Woodcarver Paul Purnell carves a colourful pheasant head walking stick topper

I have been a hobby carver of birds and other wildlife for about 10 years now; however, owls and birds of prey are always at the top of my list when I decide on starting a new carving project. Living in Lincolnshire, I am blessed with some fantastic RSPB reserves with a huge variety of birds visiting throughout the year, providing endless inspiration.

Pheasant head walking stick

A spin off from carving-in-the-round is the carving of fancy, walking stick heads. This is a simple project of a cock-pheasant head. The addition of feathers, texturing and painting makes for a more realistic effect. This design of the head is for a tall hiking stick, which will be gripped by the shank. If you wish to adapt this project to a short walking stick, where the head is to be used as the handle, I would suggest flattening out the tufts, to lie more to the side than the top of the head. This will be more comfortable.

While I have listed the tools and equipment I have used, carving, to me, is about achieving the end result with anything you have to hand. For example: the dimples of this project were carved with diamond ball cutters – they could easily be achieved with the end of a nail or other similar pointed tool. With practice and experimentation you will find the tool and style that suits you. Above all else, enjoy your carving.

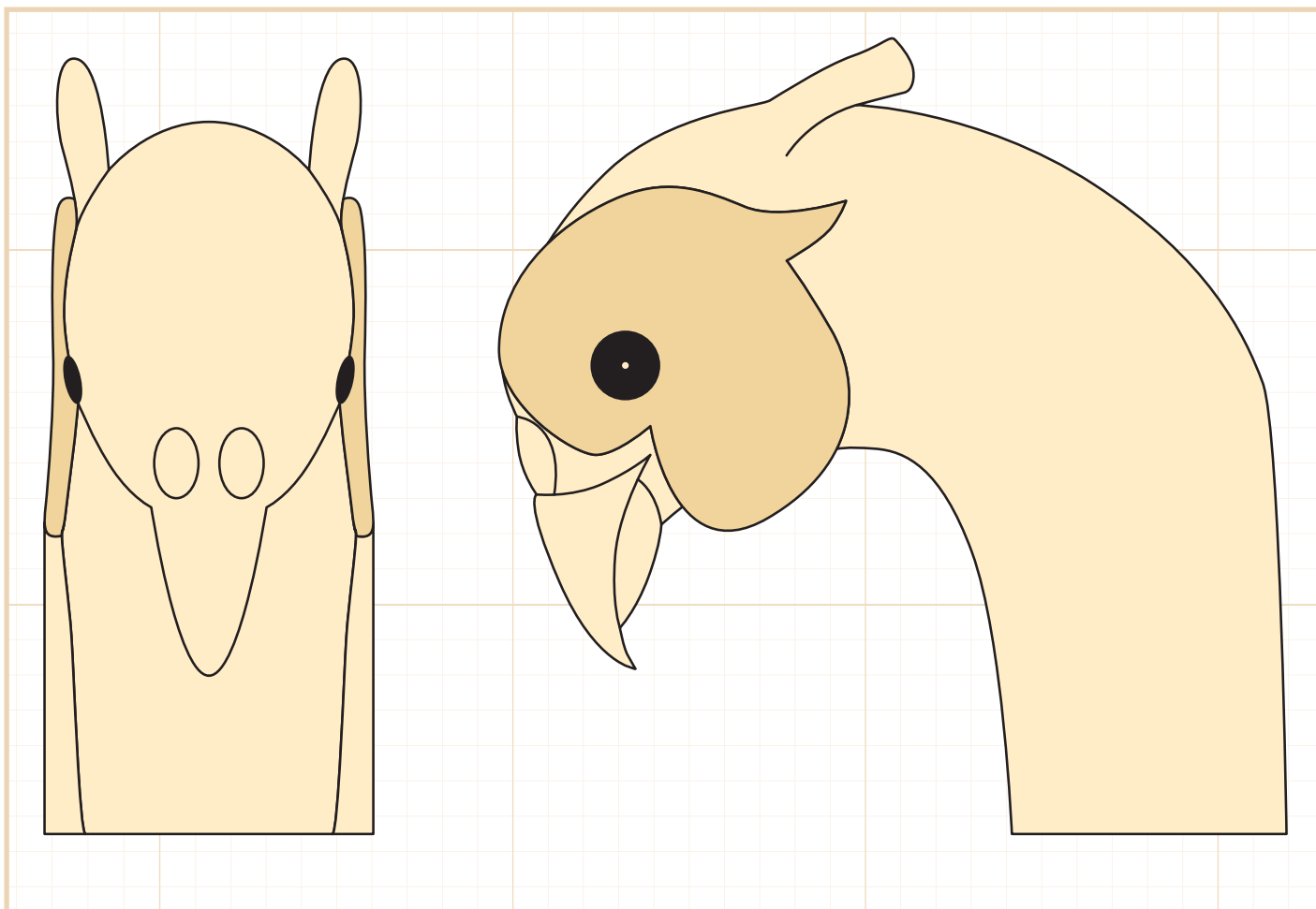
Things you will need...

Tools:

- Bandsaw
- Rotary carving tool
- Coarse carbide cutter
- Selection of diamond burrs
- Selection of blue ceramic cutters
- Carving knife
- Junior hacksaw
- 12mm wood drill
- Scalpel/craft knife
- Cushioned sanding drum
- Cloth abrasive – various grits
- Hazel shank
- Buffalo horn spacer
- Brass ferrule
- Epoxy putty and glue
- Glass eyes: special pheasant 9mm
- Acrylic paints

Wood:

Lime (*Tilia vulgaris*) – 100 x 90 x 450mm



1 First, cut out a template of the side view, then mark out the blank – ensure the grain runs vertical. Cut out the side view with a bandsaw. The head is to be fitted to the shank by a dowel that will be carved from the shank. To do this find the diameter at the top of the shank, add 2mm. Find the centre point at the bottom of your blank and with this measurement mark a square around the centre point. Use a 12mm drill bit to make a hole to the depth of 32mm

2 Draw a centreline around the blank and all features to be carved, and rough out the head, beak, tufts and wattle using a coarse, blunt-end typhoon cutter. Do not remove any material from the bottom of the neck

3 Remove wood in small steps. After each step sand with 120 grit abrasive. Whenever a stage of carving removes the pencil marks, draw them back on again

4 Continue to refine the beak, nostrils and tufts using a blunt-ended diamond cutter. The nostrils are small, oval flaps that open on the outside edge. To represent these, cut small slits with a scalpel

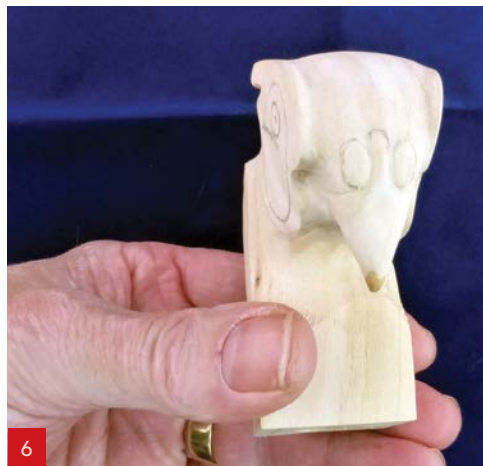


PROJECT

Pheasant head walking stick



5



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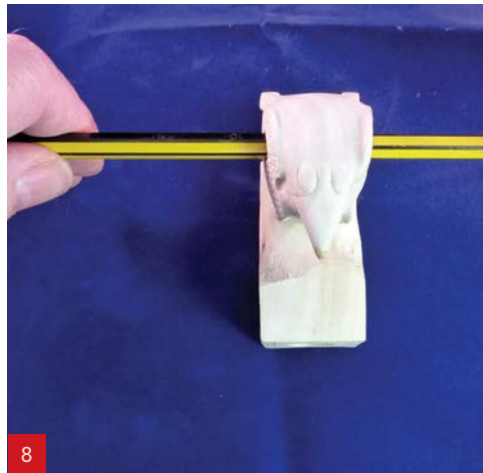
5 Separate the upper and lower sections of the beak using a carving knife. Be careful when carving the tufts as the grain goes across; so leave a bit of thickness

6 Continue work on the beak and nostrils until finished. Sand everything with a combination of sanding methods. Start sanding with 120 grit, finishing with 400

7 Mark out the positions for the eyes using small pins. Make sure that the pins line up from both the front and top of the head



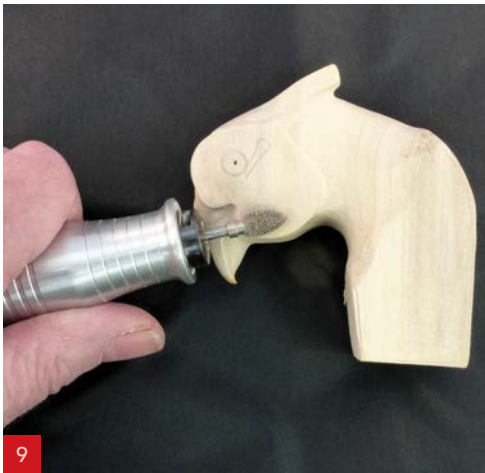
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8

8 The eyes for this project are 9mm – two coloured pheasant eyes. Drill the two holes using a medium, flamed burr. Ensure the eyes fit freely into the holes. Leave a gap of about 1mm all round the eyes, which allow for some fine-tuning of their final position. Check alignment using two pencils from both the front and above

9 The wattles are domed around the eyes and slightly concave above and below them. Use the medium flame to define these areas. Sand the wattles down to a thickness of 2mm and gently round over the edges from the front face. Finish sanding with 400 grit



9



10

10 Mark the small featured area below the eyes. Use a 1 and 2mm diamond ball burr to achieve the dimples on the rest of the wattle. Dimple in a random manner to a depth of about 1–2mm

11 The pheasant head, ready for the eyes to be fitted in due course

Preparing the shank

12 Mark the depth measurement of the hole drilled in the bottom of the neck together with any spacer on the end of the shank. Transfer this to the shank and make a mark. Using a straight edge piece of paper, wrap the straight edge around the shank at the bottom of your mark. With a junior hacksaw, cut around this line to a uniform depth around the shank. Assuming the diameter of the top of the shank is around 25mm, the width of a junior hacksaw blade is roughly the right depth of wood that needs to be removed to form a 12mm dowel at the centre of the shank. To be safe, cut down to a depth of around $\frac{3}{4}$ of the blade width. Make a mark in the centre of the shank and use this and the depth of the hacksaw cut for reference when carving to form a dowel



11



12

➔ **13** Cut a notch around the circumference of the shank with a carving knife

14 With the knife, carve away the shank to form a round dowel that will fit into the 12mm hole drilled in the blank. Work methodically around the circumference until the dowel is a good fit. Do not try to force the dowel as it may split the wood of the neck. Drill a 12mm hole into the centre of your spacer and chamfer the edge that will be up against the shank. This will make it sit better

15 Once the dowel is the correct size, place the head on and turn it until you find the one point that gives the best fit. Mark the shank, spacer and head at this point

Roughing out neck area

16 Rough out the neck and spacer while in situ on the shank, using the course typhoon cutter. Wrap a couple of layers of masking tape around the shank to prevent any damage from the cutter. If you find that the head is slightly loose at this point, use a wrap or two of masking tape around the dowel until the head fits tight enough to be carved without movement

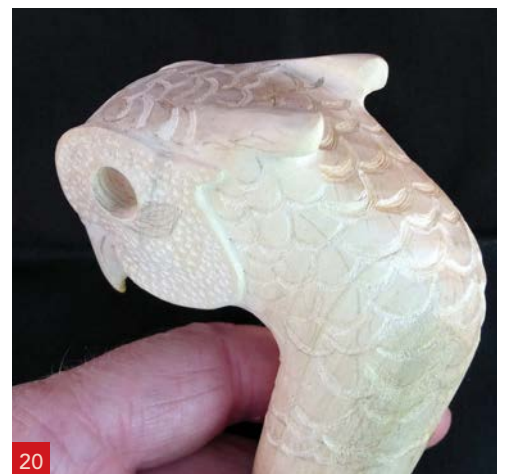
17 Continue carving the neck with the typhoon and the medium flamed burr. The ideal finished piece should have the back of the neck in line with the back edge of the shank. Make sure you leave enough material to allow for the several rounds of sanding

18 Use a cushioned drum sander to sand down through the grits, from 120–400. At this point the back of your carving should look something like this, after the sanding process

Feathering and texturing

19 Mark out the feathers, ensuring correct flow and outline with a diamond flame burr. Remember to leave an area that adjoins the shank free from texturing and painting

20 Knock off the shoulders and tips of feathers using the same diamond burr. Lay the burr more horizontally for this step and do not carve too deep; the idea is to achieve gentle undulations



PROJECT

Pheasant head walking stick



21



22

21 Now, sand the feathers down through the grits to 400

22 Use the bull-headed ceramic stone to create soft waves, use a carving knife for a couple of splits and the diamond-shaped blue stone for the final texturing. Work from the bottom upwards and from the base to the tip of each feather. Ensure you overlap the feather beneath

23 When texturing the feathers try to achieve a forward and reverse 'C' shape. Add some 'S' shapes to break up any uniformity. Do not texture in straight lines



23



24

24 Next, fix the eyes using epoxy putty. For the eye-rings, roll out a small amount of putty in to a thin worm, around 1mm. Place this around the eye and press lightly into place. Shape the putty to form a ring around the eye to a width of 1mm. Using a craft knife, or similar, lightly press indentations into the eye-ring

Painting and fixing

25 Water the paints down to the consistency of non-fat milk and use several layers to build up colour. Apply a light-grey gesso undercoat, paint the wattle with medium cadmium red mixed with a hint of Raw Umber, then paint the white strip at the bottom of the neck. Use Buff Titanium with a hint of Yellow Ochre and Raw Umber on the neck. Once dry, apply a couple of weak washes of Raw Umber to dull the beak and create darker shadows

26 For the remaining areas mix Phthalo green with a touch of Phthalo Blue. Apply three to four coats and a hint of Windsor violet to a few patches

27 For the final coat you want some iridescence. To do this use an iridescent blue and green paint straight from the tube or mixing an iridescent medium into the final mix of Phthalo green and blue

28 Apply several coats of finishing oil to the shank. Fix the head and spacer to the shank with epoxy glue. If the stick is for show purposes, finish the head with a matte indoor varnish. If it is to be taken outside use an outdoor varnish. Finish the tip of the shank with a brass ferrule. Your finished project should look something like this ▶



25



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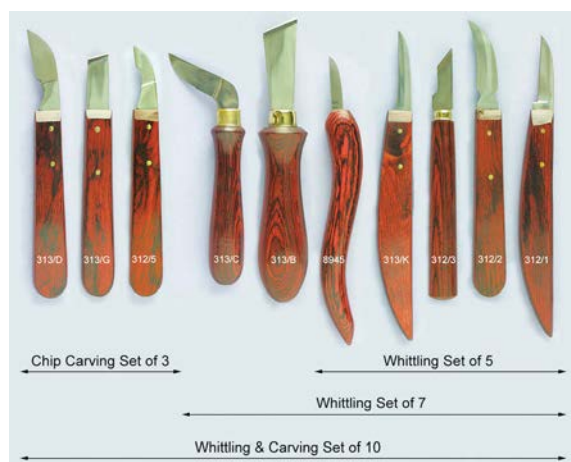
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Using northwest coast style bent knives

Dave Western looks at using northwest coast style bent knives in his carvings

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Western is a professional lovespoon carver and the author of two books on the subject. He carves to commission and also teaches carving classes. His books, *The Fine Art of Carving Lovespoons* and *History of Lovespoons*, are both available through GMC Publications. You can find out more about Dave and his woodcarving by visiting his website: www.davidwesternlovespoons.com



to undertake a vast range of complex concave and convex carving with far fewer tools than would be required using European-style gouges and chisels. Having been exposed to bent knives several years ago, I now find them an indispensable and favoured part of my tool kit. Although they may not be as readily available to British carvers as they are here, a number of exceptional Canadian and US craftsmen are now making them for the commercial market and they can be mail ordered with little difficulty.

What is a bent knife?

Bent knives differ from European-style hook knives in that they are seldom 'fair' curved. Most often they begin flat near the handle and increase curve as they near the tip. This varied radius allows the user to carve a variety of curves by simply altering the angle of blade attack and by subtly adjusting which region of the blade makes contact with the wood. The blades themselves can range from wire thin, short blades to hefty, wide blades of several inches length. Blade radii range from nearly flat to almost



A small sample of the dramatic variations possible with bent knife hooks

Over the last few years, a large number of woodcarvers have discovered the pleasures and convenience of carving with bent knives. I am particularly fortunate to live on the west coast of Canada where a vibrant Indigenous Art community has developed a number of versatile blade designs. These beautiful and highly functional blades enable carvers

➡ circular and the hooks can vary from sharp to shallow, from just the tip to the entire blade. The bent knife is generally sharpened on both sides of the blade, a feature that allows multi-directional cutting. The bevel may occur on the outside or inside of the curve depending on the type of carving to be undertaken. Inside bevels are generally more aggressive and outside bevels allow the knife to cut tighter radiuses.

Bent blades can come in many lengths and widths depending on what they will be used to carve



How are they held?

Whether shallow or deep, the principal purpose of a bent knife is to facilitate smooth cutting of curves. They are exceptionally aggressive, but are easily controlled and can be used for both rough cutting and delicate finishing. Although the cutting is

primarily done on the pull stroke for maximum control, the knives cut equally well on the push stroke. They are most often held in a fist grip with the thumb protruding along the handle where it assists the wrist in levering the knife along the cut.



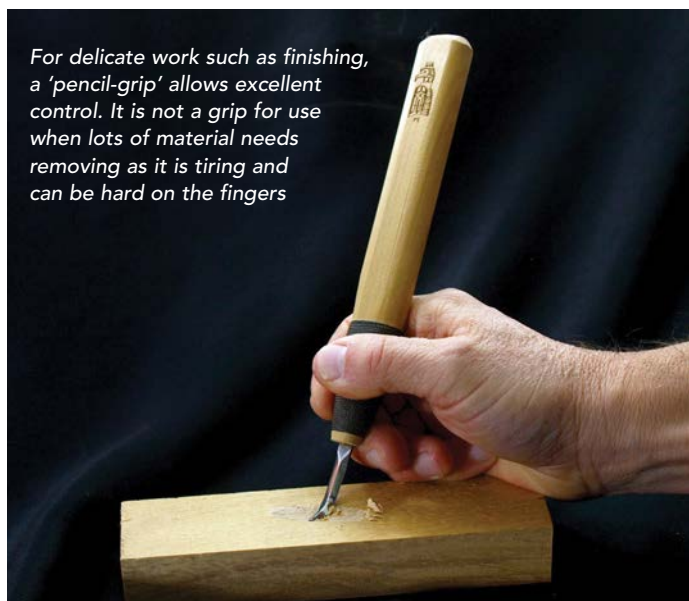
The thumb helps lever the blade through the cut, pushing out as the wrist and hand are drawn inward



Reversing the motion allows a carver to cut on the push stroke



Holding the handle with two hands is the safest grip if more control is required or if a beginner is uncomfortable with a single-hand grip. Be sure to clamp the work piece securely so that it doesn't move during the cut



For delicate work such as finishing, a 'pencil-grip' allows excellent control. It is not a grip for use when lots of material needs removing as it is tiring and can be hard on the fingers



Holding the knife in the fingers (NOT in the palm) with the thumb trailing at a safe distance is a good compromise between a pencil grip and the more robust fist grips. It is imperative that the thumb be kept from the path of the knife blade. Holding the handle in the fingers gives tighter control and limits the sweep of the blade, keeping the thumb safer than it might appear in this photo!

How are they used?

Thanks to the double-sided blade, the knife can be drawn or pushed. Well sharpened, it can be drawn along the grain or across it. A bent blade is remarkably versatile, but can be aggressive. Beginners should take care not to try and cut with them as they would with straight knives. Bent knives are greyhounds and will take off like rockets if allowed.

Inevitably this manifests itself in deep cutting that jams almost immediately and causes terrible frustration.

To properly cut with a bent blade, lay the back of the blade flat on the face of the work piece and gently begin drawing the knife toward yourself. Even without an angle being applied, the tool will very likely begin grabbing at the wood and will start cutting.

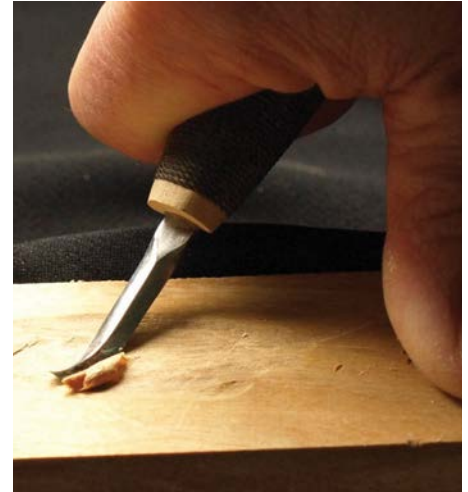
As with gouges, the bottom of a curved cut can create some problems for bent knives. This area where the grain changes direction can easily be torn away or can cause the blade to jam. The bent knife can be used to overcome this by cutting from both directions and even across the grain. Just be certain to keep the cuts very shallow.



Gently rock the blade side to side and you'll feel when the tool is lying down. When you are happy it's back is flat to your piece, orient it to the direction you wish to cut and begin moving the blade along the wood



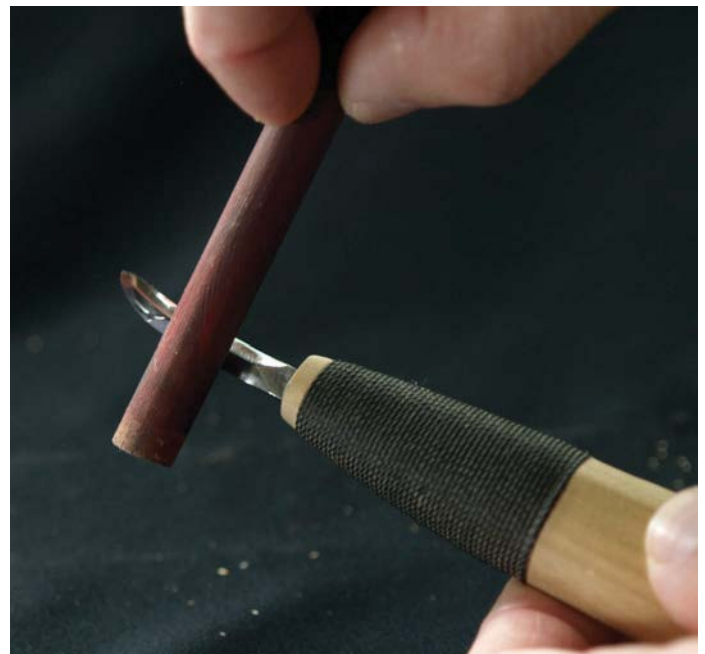
Even without applying any angle or pressure, the blade will begin to connect with the wood. Incrementally angle the blade so the back side is raised very slightly upwards as you maintain a flowing, unlaboured forward movement. If the blade starts to 'grab', lower the cutting angle until it stops. If it slides along without cutting, increase the angle until a shaving begins appearing



As you gain confidence, increase the cutting angle and the 'bite'. Like all woodcarving, don't try to take too much at once, or you will work too hard, the tool will cut too deep and inevitably there will be problems. With a bent knife, three quick shallow cuts are always better than a single deep one

How do I sharpen them?

Well-sharpened bent knives, which aren't being abused, maintain their edges for a long time. Frequent honing will enable you to retain the razor-sharp edge that makes these knives the wonders they are. Sharpening is simpler than it might seem but it must be undertaken carefully and conscientiously to ensure the correct angles are maintained and maximum sharpness achieved.



Ensure your stone or rod is lying flat along the bevel taking care not to lift it, thus creating an unwanted secondary bevel. You can sharpen by pushing the stone outwards away from the blade in a diagonal motion (which prevents the stone being caught on the blade's edge and gives more control in the sharpening motion), or by sliding the stone along the blade from base to tip and back. Either way, exercise caution to keep the stone flat on the bevel at all times



As the stone or rod nears the hook, the angle of presentation must change to accommodate the radius or the tip will not be sharpened correctly. Follow the flow of the bevel at all times



If you find that sharpening the second bevel is awkward, turn the knife to face you and you'll be able to maintain your directional orientation

What could possibly go wrong?

Aside from the usual problems that accompany all knives such as getting slashed by them and cutting off too much material with them, the main problem for bent knives is damage to the blades. If the edges come in contact with other metals or hard objects, they are easily nicked.

A major problem, especially for aggressive beginners, is a tendency to snap the blade tips off. This happens when they are used to pry a cut, when they are dropped or bumped or when they are yanked out of a stuck cut.



As with all carving tools, take good care of them and they will look after you... mistreat them at your peril



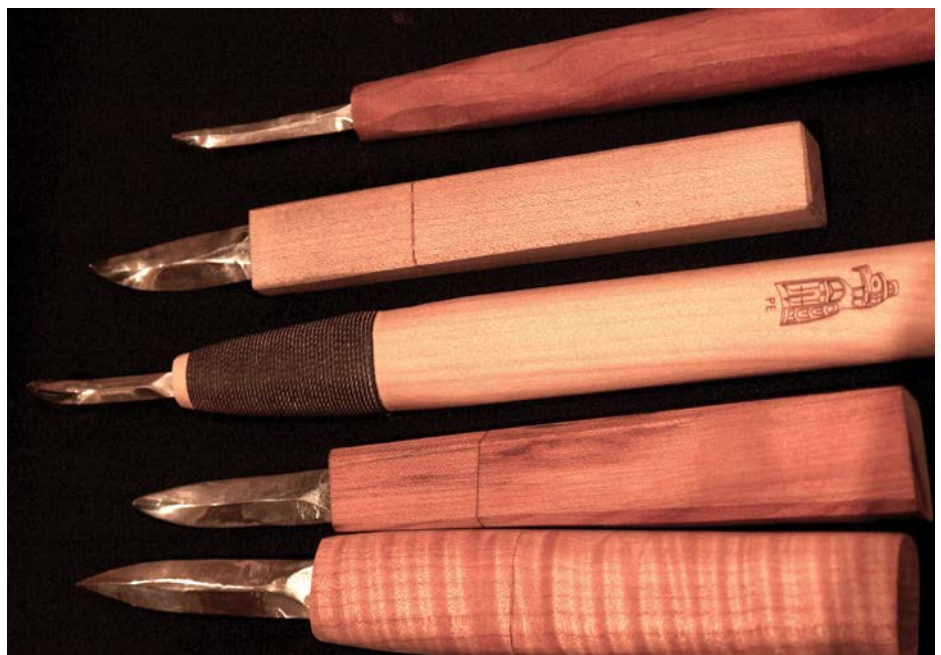
Occasionally, they can snap in half, an outcome that usually results in a bout of pitiful foetal position wailing!

Where do I get them?

Once upon a time, because they are handmade, bent knives were difficult to source unless you were 'in-the-know'. In the last several years, however, a number of metal craftsmen have stepped up to offer a range of fabulous blades at extremely competitive prices.

A quick Internet search will reveal several excellent makers all of whom are dedicated to making excellent tools. Many knives come complete with handles, but several makers will sell blades that you can finish at home with handles made to your personal specifications and hand size.

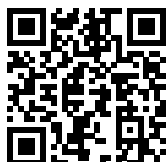
Making your own handle is fairly simple and straightforward and is an excellent way to use up that beautiful scrap of wood that you've been storing under the bench for the last 10 years! A bent knife or two makes an excellent addition to a woodcarver's arsenal and even the most die-hard chisel and gouge aficionado will appreciate the versatility of these unique tools. ▶



A commercially made knife centres this collection of home-handled knives. Making your own handle allows you to shape it to your hand or tailor it to the type of work the tool will be doing

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Easter Island Head

Steve Bisco carves an Easter Island Head in limestone

The giant heads of Easter Island in the South Pacific are among the most famous and iconic images of Polynesian art. Although generally referred to as Easter Island Heads, most of the statues do, in fact, have torsos buried below ground. There are

887 heads in all, the average size being about 4 metres high and weighing about 12 tonnes.

Although primitive in style and created by a tribal civilisation, they are not as ancient as they look. They were carved from about 1250 to around 1500 and are contemporary with the great Gothic cathedrals of medieval Europe. They were made by the Polynesian tribes that colonised the island and it is believed the statues represented their ancestors.

The heads, nearly all carved from volcanic tufa rock, are notable for their angular features with long noses, deep eye slits, heavy brows, sharp chins and long dog-like ears. There is evidence that they were polished smooth with pumice when first made, but the porous tufa rock has weathered to the rough surfaces we see today. Each one is different, so I have drawn up this design to incorporate the features typical of the style.

For new stone carvers, an Easter Island

Head makes a good introduction to sculptural figure carving as the bold and primitive features enable you to experience the basics of sculpture before moving on to more detailed figures. Displayed in your home or garden, it will hopefully look more realistic than the cast concrete versions you see in garden centres.

Using the pattern

You can enlarge the pattern to any size which suits you, usually depending on the size of stone you can obtain economically (see 'Buying your stone'). If you use a scanner or digital camera to copy it into a computer you can print the pattern out to the required size in parts on A4 sheets, taking care to ensure each part is at the same scale. Trace or paste the full-size pattern for the front and side profiles onto some stiff card, and cut round the edges to create templates. You can use the templates to transfer the pattern to the stone and check against while working.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Bisco has been carving for 30 years specialising in decorative carving in period styles, first in wood and more recently in stone. His book *Stone Carving for the Home & Garden* is available from GMC Publications (and also in French from Éditions Eyrolles).



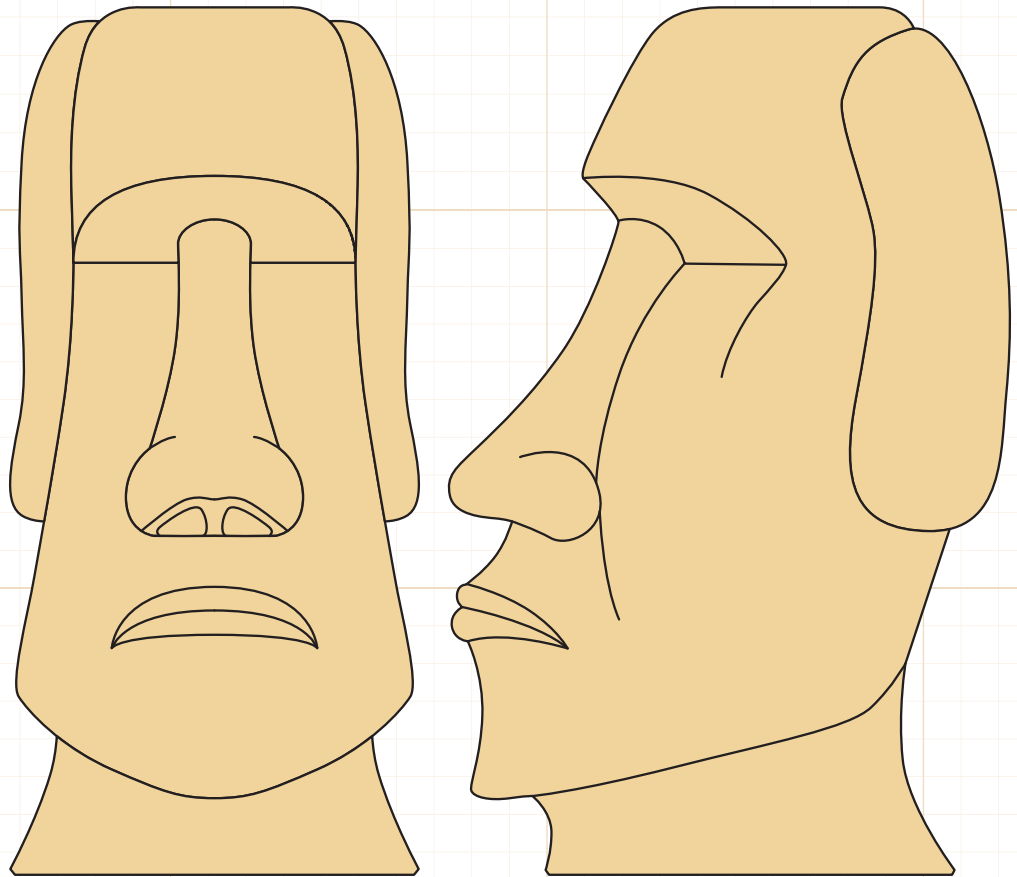
Things you will need...

Masonry tools

- 6mm chisel
- 13mm chisel
- 18mm chisel
- 6mm gouge
- 13mm gouge
- 18mm gouge
- Point tool
- Claw chisel
- 13mm bullnose chisel
- Rasp
- Mason's dummy mallet
- Stone/concrete saw

Material

Limestone – I used Bath stone
– at 150 x 220 x 320mm



Buying your stone

The best place to look for good quality carving stone is at the yard of an architectural stonemason. Look on the internet for your nearest supplier. Getting stone cut to size can be expensive, so it is generally best to make your project fit the stone available. See what offcuts the stonemason can offer you at discount prices and choose one that is close to the size you want then work to that size. You can also get rough rocks very cheaply from garden centres and work these to shape, but they tend to be a bit smaller (see *Woodcarving* 139).

If you live in the UK, try to buy Caen stone, a beautiful creamy limestone from Normandy; Portland stone, a slightly greyer limestone from Dorset; or one of the honey-coloured stones from the central limestone belt that runs across England from Bath to Stamford, often referred to as Cotswold stone. For this project I bought a cheap offcut of Bath stone with one rough side, in the centre of the picture, and 'dressed' it to a squared block. You can also use sandstone if this is more easily obtainable in your area, but be aware that it will blunt your tools more quickly. Also, sandstone dust is mostly silica, which can accumulate in your lungs over time, whereas limestone dust is mostly calcium which dissolves.



Buy offcuts from a stonemason or rough rocks from a garden centre to keep costs down



You can 'dress' your stone with a point tool and bolster to square off a rough face or cut it to size

Top tip

You can get a smooth finish on the broader areas of a stone carving by getting a broad woodworking chisel and grinding the cutting edge into a shallow curve. If your stone is fairly soft, you can push this along like a plane to smooth out all the tool marks and refine the shape.



Converting a wood chisel to a broad scraper

Carving stone safely

- Wear eye protection when carving stone – flying stone chips are sharp!
- Stone is very heavy. A cubic foot, or 300mm metric cube, of stone will weigh around 70 kilos, so take great care of your back and don't drop it on your feet. Use lifting gear for heavy pieces.
- Stonecarving creates a lot of dust, so work outdoors if possible. Wear a dust mask if working indoors and take particular care if working with sandstone as silica dust can accumulate in the lungs. Always wear a mask if using power tools.



1



2

1 Get a block of limestone of suitable size. Take care lifting it, use a stout bench and work outdoors if possible because of dust. Make a full-size copy of the drawing to fit your stone and a card template. Draw round the side template onto the stone, making sure both sides are lined up, then scribe the lines with the point of a chisel

2 Now, lay the block on its back. To protect the points of the nose and chin make relieving cuts with a stone/concrete saw before you start chiselling. Cut down to just below the nose and below the chin



3



4

3 Use a point tool, bolster, claw chisel and rasp to form the front profile right across from the guidelines on one side to the other. Try to get it flat from side-to-side so the middle is at the same level as the guidelines

4 Shape the back profile down as far as the bottom of the ears, but leave the neck untouched for now as it will help to keep the piece stable while carving the upper head



5



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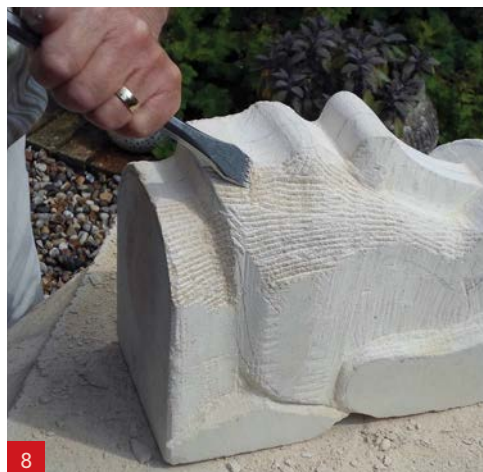
5 To form the side profiles, draw a centreline around the whole block, then use the front/back template to draw the shape on the back of the head. Next, cut the ears from the template so you can draw the outline of the face on the front of the block. Use the template as a guide, then measure from the centreline to check it's symmetrical. Draw on the nose and lips by measuring off the drawing

6 Use a claw chisel and bolster to remove the surplus stone from the sides, working level from the face line back as far as the ears. Remove the stone under the chin, back to the neck. Leave the ears and stone behind the neck untouched

Shaping the face



7



8

7 Outline the nose by drawing a line down each side of the face and cut back to the lines showing the width of the nose. Don't cut too sharply into the corners as you will need some room for manoeuvre in the final shaping. A bullnose chisel or a small gouge is best for carving a 'soft' corner

8 Now start rounding off the square edges each side of the lips, around the neck, the jawline and the cheeks. Start with the claw chisel, then work the surface back with an 18mm chisel

➔ **9** You can now carve the lips, the chin and the area around the mouth. The lips on Easter Island Heads have a noticeable pout and scowl. They curve back towards the cheeks, as well as downwards. Use 6mm and 13mm chisels to cut the join of the lips and form the convex shapes, then use 13mm and 18mm gouges to cut back the concave hollows above and below the lips

10 Now shape the nose and refine the front of the face. You will probably carve the nose too wide and flat at first, so keep going over and over it until it is narrower and slightly pointed. Hollow out the nostrils with a 13mm gouge

11 Continue to the top of the head and refine the domed forehead and the heavy brow. A stone rasp is a good tool for shaping broad convex areas. Easter Island Heads are generally flat on top, so I have kept to this style. There are no eyes as such – most of the heads just have a horizontal line where the cheeks meet the brow

12 You can now finish the cheeks and jawline back as far as the ears, using an 18mm chisel. Make sure the face is balanced on each side and work it to a smooth finish

Finishing the head

13 Form the long concave hollow of the ears, mostly using an 18mm gouge and shape the top of the ears into the top of the head

14 Round over the back of the head between the ears and start chiselling away the block of surplus stone we left behind the neck

15 All that is left now is to shape the neck to form a base for the carving, using mainly the 18mm gouge and the rasp. Create a chamfer around the bottom as the edges of the base will be liable to crumble if the angle is too acute

16 You can either leave the carving with a tooled finish or, as I have done, you can make it smooth using 120-grit abrasive – we know the Polynesians polished them smooth. Hose off all the dust and your Easter Island Head is ready to face the world ▶





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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iain Whittington is a retired army engineer who started woodworking as a lifelong hobby under his father's guidance in the family's garage where he picked up many new skills. Iain has shared some of his experiences by writing about woodworking, restoration and carving for various magazines.



Honing on a budget

Iain Whittington looks at helpful sharpening upgrades and modifications

When I was a lad and at school, I remember being let loose with the rest of the class on 'sharpening'. Armed with a double-sided carborundum stone, we set to and collectively ruined the edges on the assembled chisels. A week later we returned to the subject, now with the suitably blunted set of 'hand sharpened' chisels from the previous session, we were then introduced to the Eclipse Honing Guide and the resulting magic of sharp tools.



Honing guide



Tormek SVS-32 short tool jig



Classic Tormek grinder kit



Robert Sorby ProEdge

The Eclipse Honing Guide and its clones are both easy-to-use and inexpensive – about £5. Lie-Nielsen have a nice video on how to fettle the clones. Sadly, there is no similar bargain for the woodcarver.

The best actual woodcarver's jig is probably the Tormek SVS32 'short tool jig' – starting at roughly £20 – which knocks spots off its clones that are less than half the price, but very much less sophisticated. Unfortunately, you probably have to add the price of some sort of compatible mechanical sharpening device to be able to use the jig.

Mechanical sharpening machines have been around for a long time. All the regular power sources have been applied to them in turn, from water wheels, to steam engines, even a small hand-cranked whetstone aimed at the itinerant craftsman or amateur. The modern power source is the electric motor, popular in the mechanical workshop for the best part of a century. Unfortunately, these machines were developed primarily for the 'black' trades of metalworking and are not well suited to the sharpening of hand tools by

the untrained. For a woodcarver, the basic problems with a stock bench grinder are that the standard wheels are too coarse and they rotate too fast, with a resulting tendency for 'operator error' to ruin an edge by overheating, hence 'blueing' – which indicates a loss of the steel's temper.

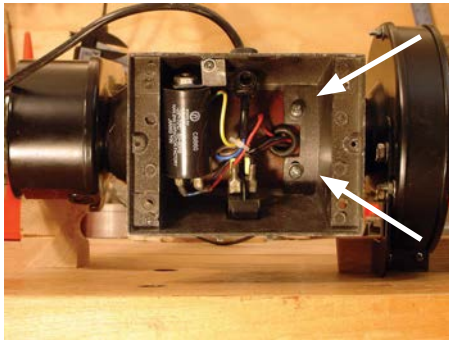
To fill the gap in the market, enterprising companies have developed and introduced lower speed sharpening machines specifically designed for woodworking tools, such as the Swedish Tormek whetstone system at £300-500 – now with its various imitators, down to the £100 mark.

The British Robert Sorby belt finisher system cost slightly over £250. This, and the Tormek, have found favour with woodworkers in UK. In addition, the patented German Koch system, costing upwards of £300 is the only system specifically developed for woodcarvers and is one that impressed me when I attended a woodcarving course in Austria. These systems have much in common – slower speed, 'idiot proof'

adjustments and high quality sales pitch – unfortunately, one thing that all these high end systems also have in common, is a premium price. If you are starting from scratch, the basic price of a good Tormek clone is hard to beat and all these premium systems are excellent general purpose machines, especially when 'bundled' with the jigs you need, or otherwise 'on offer'. Just remember to factor in the extra cost of any additional jigs you will need, that are not 'included' in the basic price.

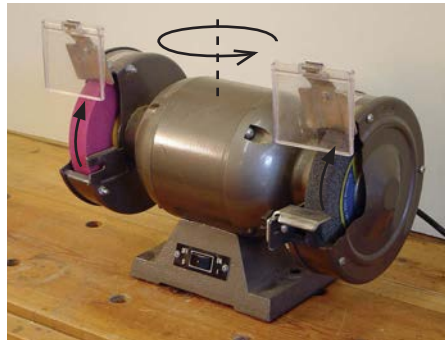
However, as a woodcarver, if you have already invested in an electric bench grinder, what are the options? I will deal with the options in order, based on which one you already have; the 'standard' twin wheel 150mm bench grinder; the twin ended wetstone adapted bench grinder – 200mm wetstone grinders stuck on one end of a 150mm bench grinder; the twin ended belt sander adapted bench grinder – 50mm belt sander stuck on one end of a 150mm bench grinder; and finally, none of the above.

Option 1: Rotate the basic grinder



Base plate cover removed

The 'standard equipment' for a budget 150mm bench grinder seems to be a 36 grit wheel paired with a 60 or 80 grit wheel – both rather too coarse for carving tools. In addition, these wheels are set-up to rotate towards the operator, for aggressive steel removal. It is relatively simple to change the direction of rotation on a standard bench grinder – so that it's turning away from the operator, thus making it more suitable for carving tools – in that just rotating the guards and running the grinder with the



Bench grinder spun on base

switch on the back achieves this – albeit in a slightly impractical way.

If you don't mind invalidating the warranty and CE certification – and potentially shelling out for a Portable Electrical Equipment (PAT) test – it's relatively simple to rotate the grinder on its base. You can do this by removing the base-plate cover, then the four screws holding the motor body, rotate it, then replace the screws and base.

I would strongly advise that you clearly mark the direction of rotation on the

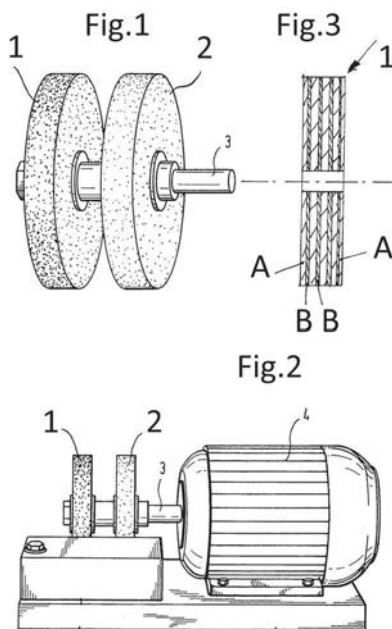


Tormek BGM100

motor housing and wheel guards during this procedure, to avoid any potential problems in the future. You can then replace the stock wheels with finer and/or wider wheels and add a decent toolrest, which, for just the Tormek SVS32 'short tool jig' can be simply based on a 12mm bar or, moving up the price range the Tormek 'XB-100 Base' and a support arm all mounted on a wooden spacer. You can actually purchase as a complete Tormek BGM100 bench grinder assembly if you have deep pockets.

Kurt Koch System – PATENT EP 0446871 A1 – abstract

The Kurt Koch patent relates to the combination of a 'thermo-reactive' buffing compound with a laminated – felt – wheel, see Fig.3 – that has been manufactured so that felt (A) is inter-layered with grinding grit (B), so that it is embedded in its structure. When the wheels rotate – away from the operator – buffing compound is applied, so that the friction caused from contact with a tool melts the carrier – releasing lubricant and grinding grit – which, combined with the wheel's embedded grit, sharpens the tool without risk of over-heating. The Koch green compound is 2,400 grit, the blue 3,500 grit with a correspondent difference between their colour-coded wheels that have a similar differentiation between 'fine' – wheel 1 – and grind 'coarse' wheel 2 – in Fig 1 and 2.



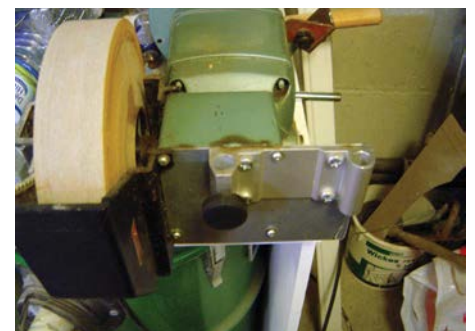
Resources
www.koch-gmbh.eu



Option 2: Upgrade the whetstone grinder

The best offering in the twin-ended wetstone grinder was from Axminster, which was equipped with a Tormek compatible toolrest. Others still exist in this category, but all have the problem that a relatively coarse 200mm wetstone – 80 grit compared with 220 grit on a Tormek – and a 60 or 80 grit 150mm wheel, which is also moving in the 'wrong' direction. However, if you already have one of these budget machines, it really needs a quality wetstone, which will cost £25-65.

Unless it's the Axminster variation with a toolrest, you can still easily add a Tormek style toolrest by removing the gearbox cover and replacing it with a larger metal plate, with the Tormek XB-100 base mounted on it. If you then want to make use of the shaft at the other end, unfortunately its rotation cannot be altered, as this form of machine cannot be rotated on its base. However, rotating the stone cover flange



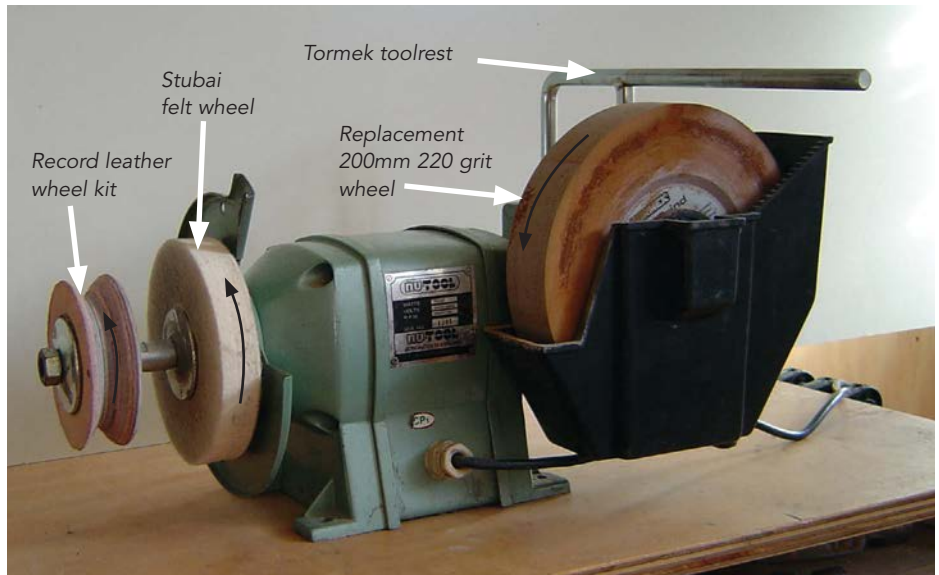
Tormek BGM100 on gear cover

➔ 180° and approaching the machine from the rear has a similar practical effect.

You can then fit a soft felt wheel for finishing carving tools and even mount a leather honing wheel outboard for stropping – Record ‘WG250/N profiled leather honing wheel’ – note, the guards are removed for the photo.



Felt wheel with Hone out-board



Reverse of converted Grinder

Option 3: Convert the linisher

With the twin ended belt sander/grinder, the first task is to reverse the direction of rotation, so it's set up with the shafts turning away from you – as in 'option 1'. Then you will need to remove the wheel guard and grind stone from one end and from the other end, the sanding belt assembly to replace them on the opposite ends – the wheel you should discard or put on eBay, as it will be replaced by a felt wheel. While the belt guard is dismantled, re-drill it so that it goes back onto the motor in the vertical, rather than the original 30° angle.

What is now needed is a Tormek compatible toolrest which, for just the SVS32 'short tool jig' can be based on a 12mm bar or for wider use, the Tormek XB-100 base mounted on a spacer. You

will also need at least one – and possibly more – of the Tormek, or compatible jigs to use with this toolrest. The Tormek SVS-32 short tool jig is essential for carving tools and a compatible square-edge jig is also useful for general sharpening.

Now to the Koch-like end of the machine – a non-abrasive hard felt wheel is placed onto the shaft vacated by the coarse grind wheel, followed by a LH Spindle Adapter onto which an undersized 125mm soft felt wheel is secured by a second LH Spindle Adapter, with a Record WG250/N profiled leather honing wheel to finish the lot. Before replacing the end wheel cover, a 15mm hole needs to be drilled in the end to enable the end of

the shaft extension to protrude.

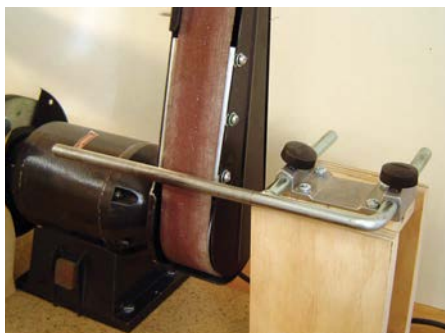
The two wheel covers are used to secure an extended wheel guard over the left-hand side. A shaft end-support is fabricated from an offcut of 15mm brass tube or copper pipe to take the excess strain off the bearing and to damp any out-of-balance vibration. The larger wheel guard was sourced from eBay and held between the two wheel covers by lengths of threaded rod. A simple ply toolrest was added with the top edge cut at 30° tangentially to the large felt wheel.

It's also worth looking at the various belts that go with the Sorby system to get an idea of different types and uses – although their belts are too long for a 'shed' linisher, at 50 x 686mm.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLARKE TOOLS



Linisher spun on base



Tormek XB-100 on a wooden spacer



SVS-32 Jig on linisher rest



Out-board extension for shaft support



Leather strop, soft felt and hard felt wheels



Using plywood toolrest

Option 4: A sledge

The simple way to use the Tormek SVS-32 short tool jig without any machine is to fabricate a sledge from offcuts, to house a length of 12mm bar. To maximise the efficiency of the design, I made my sledge so that when used one way it gave a 30° bevel and the other



12mm bar on wooden sledge

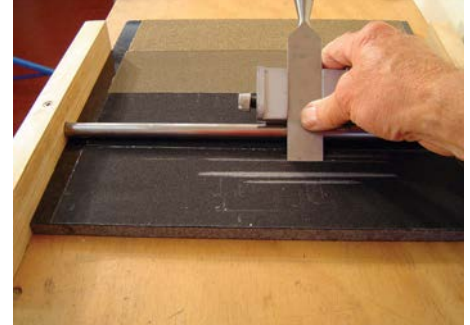
way a 25° bevel. Either way, you will also need a granite tile – any of the good tile merchants – with sheets of abrasive stuck to it in the best ‘scary-sharp’ tradition.

The jig can then be used to accurately slide the carving tool along the abrasive,



SVS-32 Jig on sledge bar

taking care to rotate it as you go – this is where the Tormek jig design really comes into its own as it will stay on the bar, while sliding and rotating while it is much more difficult to keep a ‘clone’ in contact with the bar. The Eclipse jig can also be used.



Honing guide on sledge bar

Conclusion

I have explained what you can do with an existing bench grinder to bring it up to a specification that can be useful for a woodcarver. However, you need to be certain that you understand the health and safety aspects and personal responsibility that you accept in following any of this article. You also need to take into account the cost of the various items I have used and the considerable investment in ‘no cost’ time. If you do not already have a grinder, or if you have wider requirements than just sharpening carving tools, you should look carefully at the potential of one of the purpose built machines as they can represent good value when you take into account the bonus of their ‘bundled’ goodies – they are also the only viable option if the intended use is wider than single/personal/non-commercial use.



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CE Marking on a product is a manufacturer’s declaration that the product complies with the essential requirements of the relevant European health, safety and environmental protection legislation, implemented through the so-called Product Directives. It indicates that the manufacturer takes responsibility for having ensured that an item has met all relevant safety standards for the intended use. By modifying a product, such as a bench grinder, in any way at all, you are invalidating the warranty and any consumer rights. You are also superseding the manufacturer’s CE ‘declaration of compliance’ by accepting personal responsibility for all health and safety aspects of the modified product. As a result, you should only undertake any of these possible modifications if you are competent to make the risk assessment, particularly if the subsequent use of the equipment is other than for your personal use,

on your own and in your own workshop. It should be noted in particular

that the 150mm grinding wheels supplied with these machines must be discarded. The suggested modifications will render the machines totally unsuited and unsafe for any further use with a grinding wheel. If you are in any doubt about your competence to undertake such modifications just stick to one of the many good alternatives available in the marketplace.

To conform with CE, all grinders come with detailed safety instructions in their user manuals, which it is assumed you have read. In addition the relevant HSE publication ‘Safety in the use of abrasive wheels’ HSG17-2000 is available for free download to assist your self assessment:

Resource www.hse.gov.uk



Shaft extensions

Shaft extensions are available from Creusen – at a price – for both RH and LH M12x1.75 threads, that are now commonly used on budget bench grinders. I found that the budget offerings were heavy and not well enough machined/balanced to double up on a shaft, although the Record WG250/N Profiled Leather Honing Wheel does come with a well made RH shaft extension. This proved ideal for the replacement wheels on the wetstone grinder, but the linisher

needs the wheels put onto the LH thread, of which the budget offerings, even when cut down to size, caused too much vibration. As a result, I resorted to purchasing some 20mm threaded inserts – made for the motor trade, so well balanced – along with suitable threaded rod. Using half the 25mm thread depth free for the spindle, a length of threaded rod was silver-soldered in place, although epoxy would probably do just as well.

Resource www.axminster.co.uk

RESOURCES

Item	Price range	Source	Comments
Honing guide	£6+	Widely available	Original No.36 up to £20
Tormek T3-T7 120W-200W	£300-500	Many machine shops	www.tormek.com
Tormek BGM100 bench grinder assembly	£60+		Includes Tormek US-105 £30+
Tormek SVS32 'short tool jig'	£20+		
Tormek XB-100 base	£17+		Excludes toolrest
Robert Sorby ProEdge 375W	£250+	Turning machine shops	www.robert-sorby.co.uk
Sorby belts 50 x 780mm	£3-10		
Koch system	£300+	Mail Order	www.koch-gmbh.eu
Tormek support arm	£40+	Tormek	Tormek US-105 £40+
Tormek SG-200 - 200 x 40 wetstone	£65		
Record WG250/N Profiled Leather Honing Wheel	£25+	Screwfix	www.recordpower.co.uk
Twin wheel 150mm bench grinder	250W £50+ 550W £70+	Sheds & eBay	
150mm Twin ended Wetstone/grinder	250W £30+	Sheds & eBay	
150mm Twin Ended Linisher/grinder	240W £60 370W £90	Sheds & eBay	Belt size 50 x 686mm www.clarketooling.co.uk
12mm bar	£3+	eBay	
LH Spindle Adapter parts	£5	www.tyagiracing.com	Threaded Insert (LH) M12x1.75 M12x1.75
Threaded rod	£3+	eBay	
Stubai 150mm Felt Wheels	£13+	Axminster Tools	www.stubai.com
Extended wheel guard	£16/pair	eBay	
Granite floor tile	£2+	eBay or tile shed	



Regrinding a gouge with a Tormek jig



Honing a gouge on the Record stropp wheel



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Collecting and carving driftwood

Graham Thompson shares his love of finding and converting unique carving material

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A career change in 1998 presented an opportunity for Graham Thompson to indulge his urge to do something with a collection of found materials and driftwood he had collected over many years. Consequently a stylised bird – inspired by the Great Northern Diver – provided the fillip for more animal based works. More recently Graham has been drawn to portraiture – usually of historical figures where the subject and material are connected. Graham lives and works in Yorkshire, England. www.gtgrahamthompson.moonfruit.com



I have driftwood to thank for getting me into woodcarving in the first place. For as long as I can remember I've been a beachcomber, constantly fascinated by items left on the tide-line. Rope, pebbles, glass and, of course, wood in all its variations had found its way into my garage over many years before I had the time to do something with my finds.

Some 25 years ago, while exploring the shore of a fresh water loch in north west Scotland, I came across a piece of tree root that was roughly the size and shape of a leg of lamb, with the 'bone' end shattered and splintered but otherwise in beautiful condition. Having laid on this rocky beach for many years the upper side was weathered to a fine silver colour and the wood had been shaped as it grew in rocky ground. It was this piece that I went straight to when I resolved to do something creative – the shape

had lodged in my mental 'garage' for 10 years or more. On closer examination the piece definitely had a bird-in-flight appearance. As the 'body' end of the piece was to remain abstract the detail, if any, would have to be in the head and neck area – but which species? For me this was an epiphany moment which has, to this day, been my driving force for wood carving and sculpture – the bird's head was modelled on the great northern diver, thereby closing the loop between location, material and subject.

A perfect day

This really is a hobby with no downside – assuming you enjoy some physical exertion. Fresh air, exercise and carefree meanderings on a small part of the UK's 5,000 mile long coastline is – to me at any rate – absolute bliss. My perfect day out requires nothing more than a few miles of

beach and a rucksack for the 'treasure'. Even a day of inclement weather (particularly if you enjoy solitude) can be just as rewarding as you are more likely to have the beach to yourself.

Where to do it?

My collection (carved or in waiting) has been harvested from coastal locations as diverse as the Solent in the south of England, to the Isle of Harris in the Outer Hebrides. I have found any coastline that is exposed to the prevailing winds is the most likely to receive maritime gifts – generally west is best. That's not forgetting that driftwood can also come from fresh water, some of my favourite pieces have come from a particular lochan (small loch) in northwest Scotland and Derwentwater in the Lake District. That said, the sea



Awaiting inspiration

will always bring greater variety and from much greater distance – I spotted a 9m palm tree trunk on a remote Sutherland

beach at the foot of an inaccessible cliff – that was 20 years ago and it's probably still there!



An extreme retrieval – down a 200ft cliff!

What to look for

Keep an eye out for rocky beaches where there is a sizeable margin between the high tide mark and the start of vegetation. The rocky band is most likely to have well seasoned, but not rotten specimens: most decay starts with the infection of fungus from the soil so any wood landing on the rocky/pebbly band can stay relatively rot-free for some years even though it is regularly soaked by rain or spray. Over time, wood that is air dried and exposed to the elements takes on an attractive silver-grey hue, so anything from a bit of commercially produced softwood fence-post to more romantic and historic section of oak (*Quercus robur*) gunwhale can from a distance appear very similar, they're all worthy of investigation. Usually, it's the piece

that's irregular in shape and that, on closer inspection, is heavier than expected, indicating a hardwood species and possibly of exotic origin. That said, I have to this day a 'plank' of mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*) of high quality that, until I lifted one end, appeared to be a piece of scaffold board – some day I really must make good use of it!

This experience reminds us that when carving driftwood, as opposed to commercial blocks, everything is the other way around: driftwood usually suggests the subject whereas most carvers have the project in mind first – then they choose the material to suit.

Flotsam and jetsam

Any ship-based material that can be

described as wreckage is, technically, flotsam whereas if the same material was deliberately jettisoned, it is (you guessed it) jetsam. Assuming the material is wood of some sort then any flotsam or jetsam is of potential use to the carver – even if it's just for a base. Unfortunately, with the sad and continuing decline in numbers of timber-built vessels, most materials of this nature are destined to be fibreglass or some other form of plastic. Depressingly, none of these modern materials have any value that I can see – particularly to the carver. So let's turn to the major source of driftwood material: coastal and riparian vegetation. The oceans are constantly 'refreshed' with millions of tonnes of wood brought down to the coast by mighty rivers and by man-made means. Gone are the days of broken wood fish boxes littering the beaches, but there are still many other sources of human intervention materials.



Driftwood in waiting

Rough and smooth

By their very nature driftwood forays are random, but I've found that you can encourage success by getting to know the right areas and the best timing (such as after a storm, which will inevitably have thrown up some new objects). Over the years I have come to know of the existence of some really desirable pieces, but they're too big and too remote to ever have a chance of retrieval. I just enjoy visiting them every so often and treat them like old friends – some of them will still be around when I'm long gone. Each high tide leaves what is known as a wrack line or mark: the highest point indicated by a line of kelp, litter and occasionally, a little gem like my mahogany plank! Never forget that each beach is different even day-to-day. Failure is only sure if you stay at home.

Subjects

Invariably each piece suggests the subject. It might be a detail or maybe one end of the item or even the overall shape that dictates the most rewarding carving plan. Personally, I think that there is nothing more rewarding than a work where material, subject and provenance are all intimately connected. Carving doesn't get any more rewarding than creating a swimming salmon piece from a beautifully curved piece of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) root mounted on a beach-rounded plank of marine oak – all from the very same area.

The great mystery

Have you ever bought a commercially produced piece of wood and wondered where the tree grew, what age it was when it was felled and why? No, I thought not, and neither have I – the most you are likely to be told is that it's European – you don't ask for more information but you could. Paradoxically, with driftwood it's very unlikely that you can be sure even what the species is, let alone where it grew, etc. For me this is the best bit: I can imagine or even invent my own provenance for any particular piece: who owned the boat, when was it built and where, how far did it drift and for how long. Even basic information such as: is it from the trunk, branch or even root of a tree, was it planted or self-seeded. For me the greatest and most fascinating unknown is, how old is it – when was it growing and for how long? In the right conditions wood can be preserved for hundreds or even thousands of years. It's quite possible for tree roots to be held in airtight conditions buried in peat only to be washed out when water levels change ready for me (or you?) to discover and bring back to life in a new form. For me, the great mystery is the motivation – the driving force behind this peculiar hobby – without driftwood would I be a carver today? ▀



The base used for Salmon carving



Graham's Salmon carving



Squirrel in ancient Scots pine root

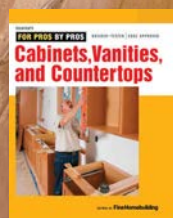
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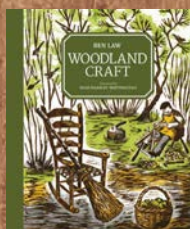
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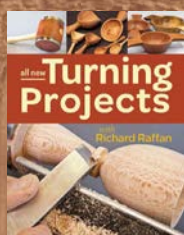
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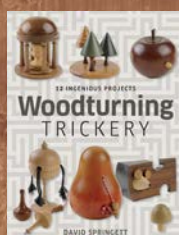
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Stefanie with her current project, Gut Check

Stefanie Rocknak in profile

Whether she's teaching craft or philosophy, this dynamo US scholar is a class apart, as Catherine Kielthy finds out when she sits in for a lesson

Philosopher, professor, carver: Stefanie Rocknak isn't one to take it easy. Perhaps we shouldn't have been too surprised, then, when she managed to squeeze in a tutorial for *Woodcarving* between taking lectures at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. Indeed her talents are as impressive as that of her acclaimed artwork, *The Triathlete*, comprising *The Swimmer*, *The Runner* and *The Biker*, which readers will recognise from our 'taster' feature last issue. And given the chance to find out more about the New Jersey-born professor's extracurricular activity as a professional sculptor, we made sure to take copious notes (after all, we didn't want to come bottom of the class).

What soon becomes clear is that Stefanie's capacity for

hard work runs in the family as does her love of wood and the process of creating pieces. "I was very fortunate to have grown up surrounded by people who enjoy making things," she explains. "My dad worked as a high school art teacher for a while, as well as a cabinet maker and as a carpenter, and my mom was constantly restoring furniture and making things such as sweaters and dolls. Also, one of my parents' good friends, Ted Hanks, was a well-known bird carver. If you have been to the [outdoor clothing and equipment store] L.L. Bean's mothership in Maine, you will probably have seen his wooden ducks flying out of the store's trout pond. So, at an early age, I saw what could be done in wood, beyond forts and toy guns. At the time, though, Ted's work seemed like magic."



Completed in 2007, *The Swimmer* was carved from a single piece of basswood and is slightly larger than life-size. Alongside *The Runner* and *The Biker*, it forms part of *The Triathlete*



A close-up of *Gut Check* with pencil markings evident on his face. The work is part of Stefanie's intention to explore a 'non-ideal physical type' and stands in contrast to the athleticism of *The Triathlete*

Early lessons

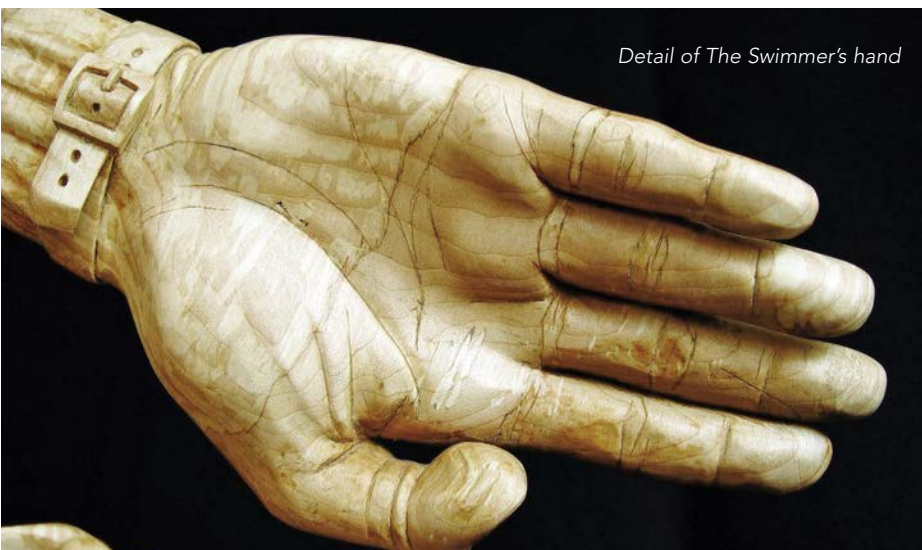
One of the earliest wooden sculptures she saw was by her older brother Russ, then seven. And her eldest brother Scott also sculpts. Rocknak's first carving, meanwhile, was a collaborative effort with her father when she was aged 10. "One of my favourite comic books was a tattered copy of the *Iliad*, from the old *Classics Illustrated* comic book series. So I decided to put an *Iliad*-like helmet on this piece, which was convenient because I recall being terrified at the thought of figuring out the correct shape of a head. The nose that I initially carved was very primitive, and my father helped me to shape it, as well as the mouth. I learned a tremendous amount about the basics of carving by working with him on this project."

With her creative interest clearly obvious

and her talent developing, the junior-school age Stefanie headed to Rome for a year to study painting only to return to the States with a different focus.

"I found that I was much more interested in sculpture. I spent hours drawing and studying the work of the greats, including Donatello, Bernini and Michelangelo. I've never 'formally' studied sculpture, that is, taken a sculpture class, but I have certainly studied sculpture. I returned to Europe 10 years later, as a Junior Fellow at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna, Austria. I spent most mornings working on my Ph.D. thesis, but in the afternoons, I toured the many wonderful museums in Vienna, where I gravitated towards the medieval wood sculpture. I was impressed by the

figures' playful, stylised hair, particularly when juxtaposed to their calculated and dignified expressions. In 2006, after presenting a paper on [US philosopher and logician Willard Van Orman] Quine at a philosophy conference in Kazimierz, Poland, I made a beeline for the medieval wing at the National Museum in Warsaw. I was floored by what I saw. The carved figures in this collection are, for the most part, very stylised, but not in some kind of contrived contemporary effort to be 'different', 'new' or 'shocking'. Rather, they are wrought with an almost tortured emotion. The suffering was so visceral, so genuine, and beautiful, that I literally gasped. I got so close to the work that by the time I left I had accrued my own personal entourage of security guards."



Detail of *The Swimmer's* hand

Royal appreciation

Stefanie has since gone on to exhibit her own work in galleries and museums across the US and Europe, garnering critical plaudits and winning many awards, including the 2011 \$10,000 Biennial Hammerschlag prize and, in 2012, the commission to create a permanent statue of US writer Edgar Allan Poe in Boston (see panel on page 43). Her more recent solo exhibitions have included last year's 'The Royal Family' at The New York Sculptors Guild Gallery in Brooklyn. This featured *The King*, a piece completed in February 2008, and *The Queen*, finished in August 2010. Both are slightly larger than life-size, with the former carved from two pieces of basswood (*Tilia americana*) and the latter carved in

laminated basswood. "Rocknak's larger-than-life sculptures are bound by the dark imagination of their creator, and preside over a fantastical meticulously sculpted dysfunctional family," said a spokesperson for the gallery at the time. "'The King' appears to be entirely consumed with himself as 'The Queen'

looks on with disappointment, if not contempt... The human figure, with all its imperfections, immediately speaks to us through naked ambition...".

That Stefanie was able to convey such emotion is little wonder given that she herself says: "I have been drawing and sculpting people for as long as I can

remember; the human form speaks to me like nothing else." Added to that are the hundreds of hours she often spends getting the details of a sculpture just right, be it the ripples of the water in *The Swimmer* or the elegant floral designs on the dress sleeves of *The Queen*.

Side view of The Queen with its intricate floral designs





The King, formed using two pieces of basswood, was finished in 2008



Bostonians have taken the life-sized bronze Poe to heart

Emotional reaction

The works reflect Stefanie's assertion that her sculpture is not an explicit argument. "For the most part, it's an emotional reaction to the world, similar to say, the horror we might feel when we see a car wreck. Although this kind of reaction can be construed as a kind of statement, it's really not something you can argue with, just as you generally don't, or shouldn't, argue with someone about her reaction to the car wreck, even if it's wildly inappropriate. Similarly, the person who has the reaction does not, generally speaking, need to explain it – you either get it or you don't. This is partly why I don't feel the need to write theoretical 'artist statements', that is, philosophical explanations of my work. My figures are my almost involuntary reaction to the 'car wreck'. You either get them or you don't.

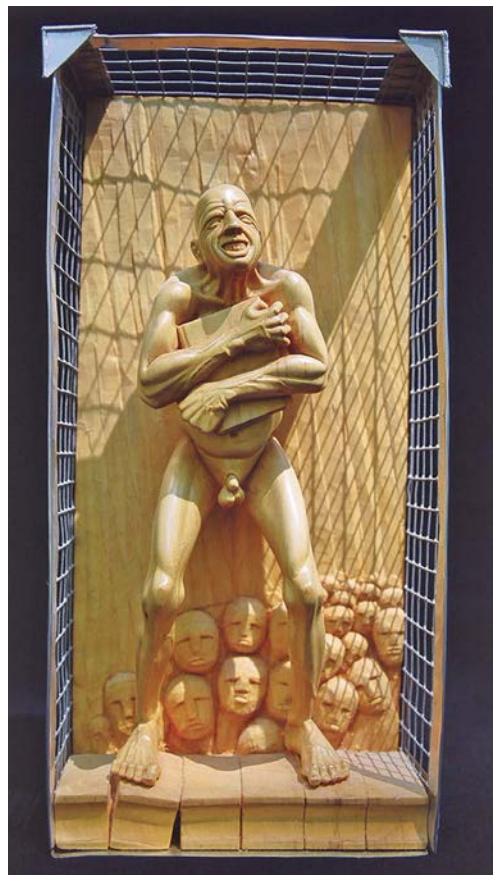
"On good days, I'd like to think that my sculptures are a kind of visual chorus, where the lead singer is life itself. I'm thinking of the London Bach Children's Choir in the Rolling Stones' song *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. Towards the end, when the choir moves back into the song, the turmoil and grit of [Mick] Jagger's voice is translated into a beautiful kind of dignity. It's almost primal; for me, it's like seeing those figures in Warsaw all over again. And again, you either get it or you don't: the Stones' song does not need an 'artist statement' to make its point."

Carving style

On a practical note, Stefanie explains how until a few years ago she carved mostly from green basswood logs.

For her last two pieces, however, she has used laminated blocks of kiln-dried basswood. "This means I can make bigger pieces," she explains, "and not be confined by the shape of a given log. To do this, I build the piece up by clamping and gluing large blocks together. To carve it down, I use a

variety of tools. For instance, I rough cut with an electric chainsaw. I don't do any actual sculpting with the saw; I just use it to quickly remove sections that I know I don't need. Next, I use hand tools until the whole figure is almost entirely roughed out. At that point, I'll use a power sander, although I will continue



The Academic (left) and The Philosopher, 12in-high companion carvings from lime (Tilia vulgaris)



Stefanie working on the hand of Gut Check

to intermittently use hand tools until the piece is finished. To bring out the grain, I do an extensive amount of hand sanding, all the way up to 2000 grit."

Given this dedication to her work, does she have a favourite piece? "I always tend to like the piece I am working on the best," she reveals. "Right now, I am finishing up the biggest piece I have ever made, 'Gut Check'. It's a running figure, from the waist up, and it was inspired by the Edgar Allan Poe sculpture. I wanted to create a figure that moved like the Poe piece, but was motivated by fear; the figure is running because it has to run, not because it wants to run. I also wanted to explore a non-ideal physical type."

As to the future, Stefanie might go back to thinking small for a while – at least for her carving. "As soon as I finish 'Gut Check', I am going to make three or four small pieces, probably high-relief faces. I might make coloured frames for them as well. 'Gut Check' has taken forever, so I need to change my pace up for a bit. This helps me to keep things fresh." Her previous smaller pieces have included 12in-high companion carvings *The Academic* and *The Philosopher*. In all other respects, Stefanie will continue to think very life-sized. On top of her existing commitments, this summer will see her teaching 'Introduction to Woodcarving' at Peters Valley School of Crafts, adding to previous craft classes on 'The Figure' at Tennessee Tech University and 'Philosophy of Drawing' at Hartwick. We'd quite happily trade places with any students – assuming, that is, we've made the grade this time round.

The Poe commission

Perhaps best known for literary classics *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Raven*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is one of Boston's best-known sons. Stefanie's 5ft 8in bronze sculpture of the writer stands in Edgar Allan Poe Square at the intersection of Boylston Street and Charles Street South, just two blocks north of where Poe was born. It was chosen after the city launched a competition to commemorate the author's life shortly after his bicentennial in 2009. Rocknak triumphed against 264 artists – drawn from 42 US states and 13 countries – who applied to create the life-size sculpture after a five-member committee, empowered by the Boston Art Commission, selected her design.

"This was my first major public art piece, and my first bronze," says Stefanie. "It was digitally enlarged from a wooden model that I carved in 2012, and was permanently installed in Poe Square in Boston in October 2014. This figure captures a complicated Poe: he was born in Boston, but he had a very contentious relationship with the Boston literary establishment. Poe

geographically associated these writers with the frog pond in the Boston Common; he thought that they croaked like frogs. And thus, my figure dismisses them (and the frog pond behind him) as he walks towards the house where he was born. The basswood model [19in tall] took about 10 weeks to make, but only because I was under a strict deadline. Normally, I take a lot longer to finish a piece, especially one that is as complicated as the Poe figure."

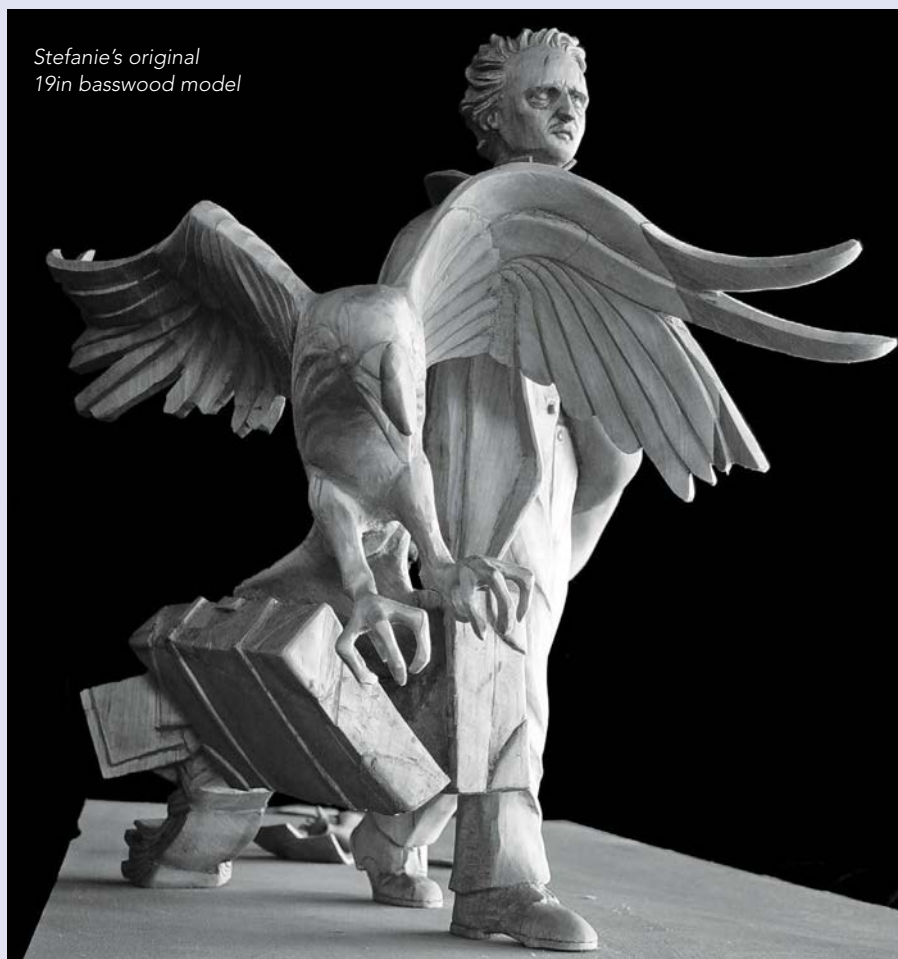
The statue was warmly received by modern Bostonians on its unveiling. "Poe is one of the most influential writers ever born in the City of Boston," said its then Mayor Thomas Menino at the time. "And I'm so pleased to see this wonderful tribute come to fruition. The statue is full of life and motion, and is sure to inspire residents and future writers alike for generations to come." ▶



Edgar Allan Poe

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Stefanie's original
19in basswood model



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Celtic relief

Zoe Gertner carves a celtic relief pattern



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zoe Gertner specialises in teaching woodcarving and sculpture, and is a fully qualified teacher and Adult Education tutor who studied anatomy and physiology as part of her university degree. Zoe is experienced in teaching and practising all aspects of woodcarving and wood sculpture and has been working professionally since 1980. At her workshop in Devon, she gives a variety of woodcarving courses and creates unique carvings by order. See her website here: www.zoegertner.co.uk



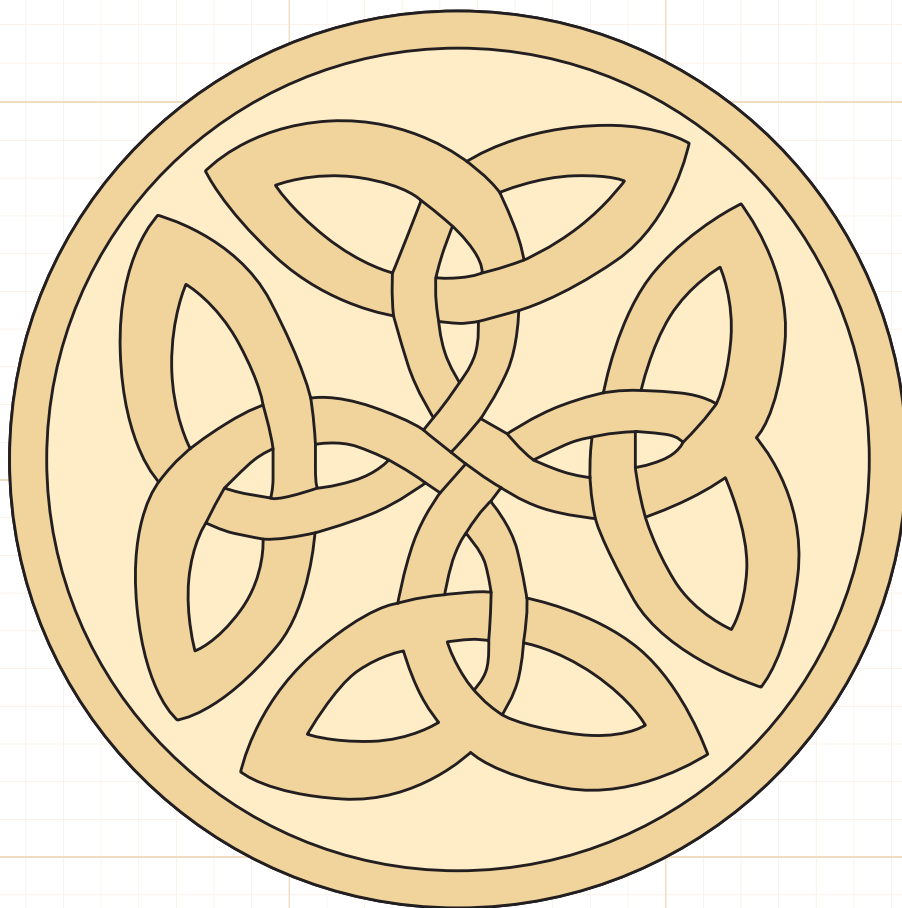
The Celts are well known for their art, ornamentation and jewellery. Instantly recognisable, there is a fascination with Celtic designs, their interweaving straps, knots and complicated looking undulations representing stories and religious symbolism. As well as decorating precious objects, such as jewellery, brooches and daggers. For the woodcarver it can easily be applied to boxes, furniture and mirror or photo frames.

The techniques shown to carve this simple pattern can be used for carving most Celtic designs with interwoven

straps, plaits or straps, however complicated a design you might choose to carve in the future.

Things you will need...

- Cardboard
- Scissors
- 6mm or 3mm 60° 'V'-tool
- Selection of widths
- No.3 gouges, including 6mm and 3mm
- No.2, 6mm skew chisel
- Punch and light hammer



Preparation

A turning blank of cedar (*Cedrus libani*), approximately 200mm diameter was used, but other suitable timbers could be sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), lime (*Tilia vulgaris*) or beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) or any fairly close grained timber at any size you wish, however, a lighter coloured timber will show carved detail more clearly than a darker one.

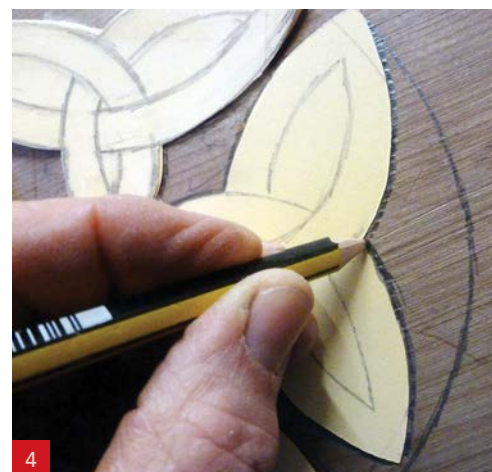
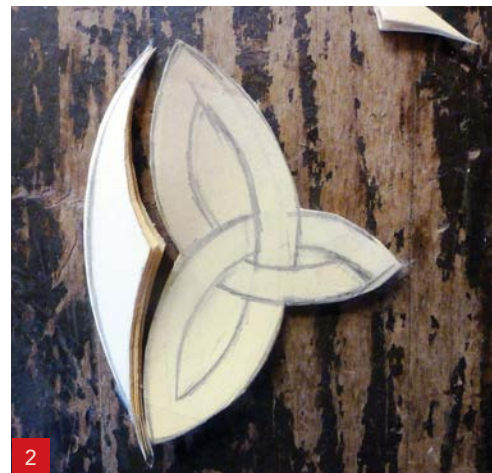
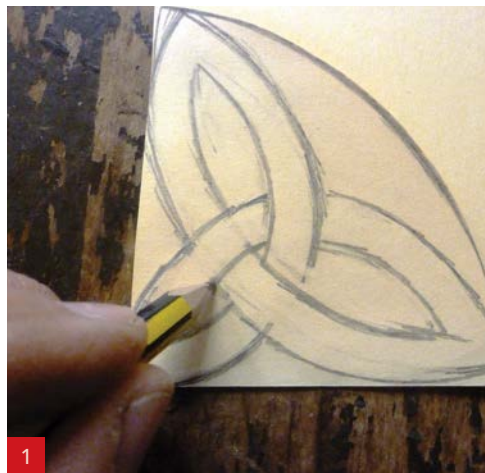
Starting carving

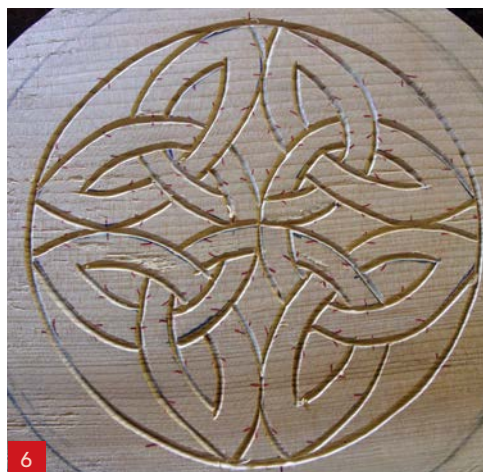
1 The first thing to do is to draw a simple pattern, showing how to carve the strapwork that is used in most Celtic patterns. Using thin card (a cereal packet is ideal), cut it to the shape of your turning blanks, folded in four and draw your design in one corner

2 Then, cut the outline out with scissors

3 Now unfold the card and place it centrally on the blank. Align the pattern with the grain running horizontally. Draw a border around the edge of the blank

4 Draw around the outline onto the surface of your timber, producing a symmetrical pattern in each quarter of the circle



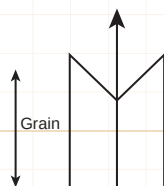


5 Redraw over any faint lines so that they are clear, ready to mark out the pattern with the 'V'-tool

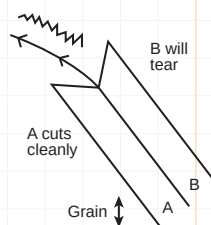
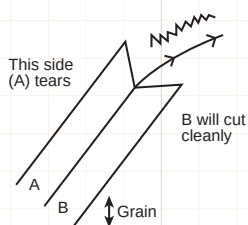
6 Using the 'V'-tool with a mallet, work in the direction shown by the red arrows around each of the straps and the border to cut a clean edge along each side of them. It is advisable to mark the correct direction in which to work with the 'V'-tool before you start – see diagrams 1 and 2

1. Using a V tool

In relief carving, the direction to cut depends upon your design, in relation to the grain direction. Always cut so that any tearing occurs on the background side of it.

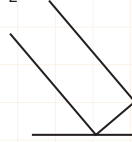


The V tool has two cutting blades, A and B, which cut clearly when you cut in line along the grain.

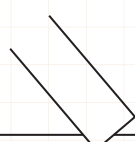


When you cut in a curve across the grain, one of the blades will tear the wood.

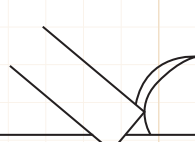
2



Hold the tool fairly steeply, give it a tap with the mallet to make it bite into the wood.

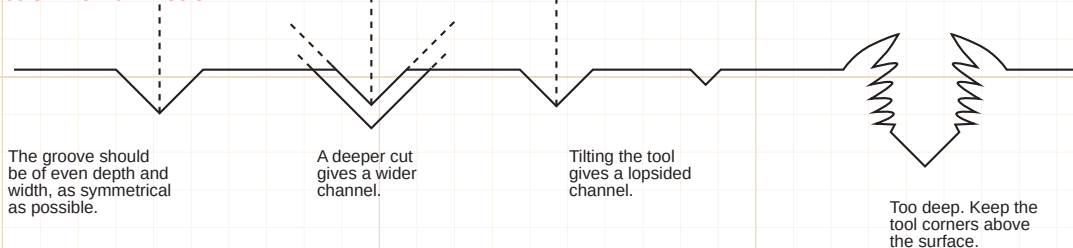


Drop your hand a little and continue tapping. If you drop too much, it may scoot off, so raise it fractionally.



If the chip impedes your view, break it off, but do not lift the tool from its groove until you change the direction of cut.

2. How to cut with a V tool



The groove should be of even depth and width, as symmetrical as possible.

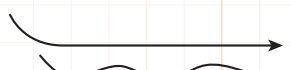
A deeper cut gives a wider channel.

Tilting the tool gives a lopsided channel.

Too deep. Keep the tool corners above the surface.



Raising and dropping your hand too much will give an uneven channel



Cut along steadily, not up and down

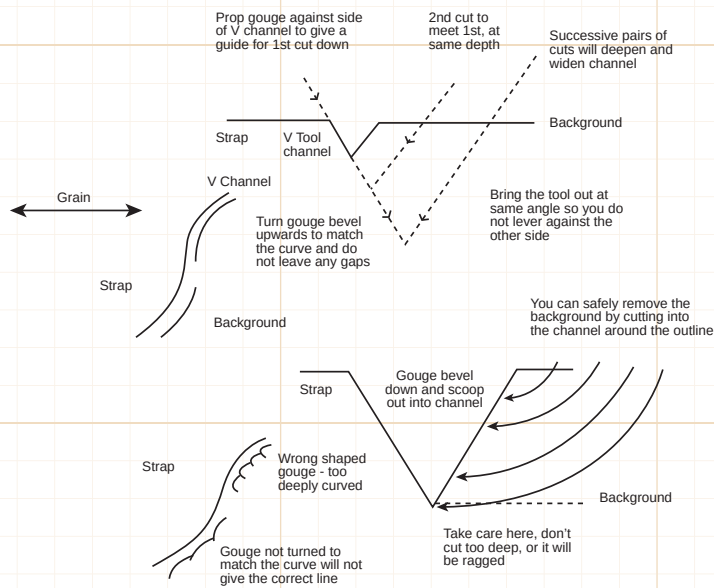
➔ **7** Next, reduce the background areas. Before starting to remove this, number them as '1', or shade them with chalk or pencil so you do not remove a strap by mistake. Using the No.3 gouge and turning it, match the curves, cut along the outlines of each strap by aligning the cutting edge against the angled side of the 'v' cut previously made with the 'V'-tool



8 Using the No.3 gouge with its bevel down, make opposing cuts to deepen and widen the 'v' channel around the edges of the straps – see diagrams 3 and 4

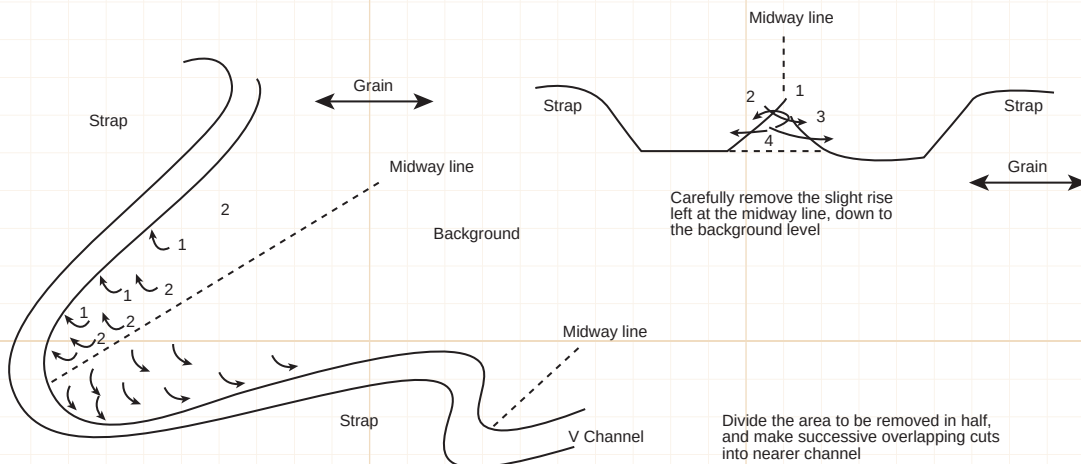


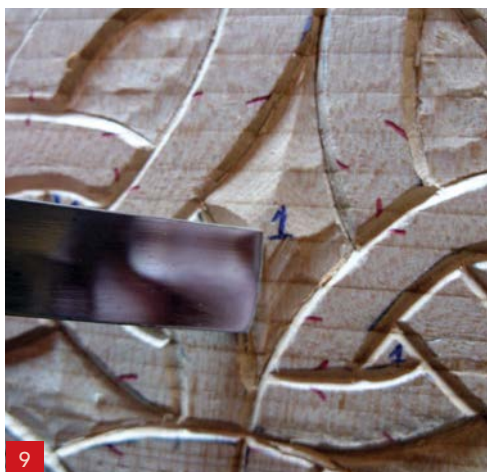
3. Deepening the V Channel around the outline



PHOTOGRAPH BY DEREK RI ACK. COURTESY OF RDWCA

4. Removing the background in a refined area





9



10

9 From each side, extend your cuts back to the middle of the area to be removed, then pare away the little ridge remaining in the middle. Smooth off the surface of the background between the straps

Interweaving the straps

To interweave the straps, they must cross each other, that is, one strap must either pass over or under the other

10 Before you start carving the interweaving straps, it is helpful to mark their underlying sections (shown in red) to avoid making mistakes



11

11 Turn the No.3 gouge so it corresponds with the curve of the edges of the upper strap and make a stopcut across the underlying strap, each side of the upper one. Then with the tool bevel down, carefully pare the area (marked red) adjacent to the upper strap, removing the red coloured area and making an imperceptible slope each side. Repeat this for the rest of the underlying straps

12 Cut clean all meeting edges and remove any deep or errant cuts. The tiny triangular areas of the background can be pared clean using a No.2 skew chisel



12

13 To make a nice contrast and show the straps clearly, texture the background using a punch with light hammer blows

14 Finish the carving with several coats of wax polish and buff with a lint free duster ▶



13



14

Top tips

1. At any stage of a carving it is inadvisable to sand, because the resultant abrasive dust that remains over your carving after you have sanded will blunt your tools' edges. The cuts from really sharp tools should suffice for finishing and it's good practice to re-sharpen your tools before making your final cuts with them.
2. When texturing the background with a punch, it is very easy to split the fibres of a soft timber if you hit the punch head too heavily with the hammer. It is a good idea to practise beforehand using the punch on the back of the carving to find out how much force will be necessary

What you want to know about...



Use a wooden guide to get constant angles

Sharpening

Peter Benson begins his Q&A series looking at keeping your tools sharp

During September last, the Essex Region of the British Woodcarvers Association were asked to organise the woodcarving competition and exhibition for the European Woodworking Show, at Cressing Temple Barns in Essex. This was the third time we had done this and the committee were looking for something a little different for the public to enjoy.

In the days of rapidly developing technology and 'genius bars' in many electronic outlets it was thought to do something similar and I was asked if I would be the 'genius'. While flattered, I could imagine the flack I would get from fellow carvers if I was referred to as anything approaching genius status, but did settle for being the resident 'geek', which seemed more appropriate. While there are many out there who are more

highly qualified than I to give advice, I was at least handy and prepared to offer opinions at the drop of a hat.

As I didn't relish the thought of sitting there twiddling my thumbs all day long for the two days, I suggested that I would do two hourly sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon of each day and see how it went. This was the final plan and I arrived on the first morning and settled in my corner close to the one demonstrator and the table with tactile carvings displayed for people to handle. I had arrived early to give myself a chance to settle in and to look at all the carvings on display. That was my first mistake as, no sooner had I sat down than I had a queue forming – this heralded the doom of the two hourly sessions. I was inundated all day long with visitors asking questions and seeking advice. If we had any doubts about the

success of the 'Geek Corner' these were dispelled in the first half an hour. As a point of interest, the display of tactile carvings was equally popular and I would recommend something similar for any exhibition that readers might be considering. It is great to see the work of other carvers, but carvings that can be handled or are unfinished have an attraction of their own and shouldn't be undervalued.

As a result of this experience I thought I would do a short series of articles covering the main problems and questions that I was asked to comment on. It may also be an opportunity for those of you who didn't get to the show to ask questions of your own that I may be able to help with if you have been unable to get help yourselves. If you let the Editor have your question, he can forward it to me.

Keeping tools sharp



Bevel ground flat



Bevel honed



Honing on strop keeping whole bevel in contact all the time



Rounded edge to bevel

The problem that I was asked about more than anything else was the perennial one of how to get and keep tools sharp. This has been covered by me and pretty well every carver who has written for this publication and I certainly am not going to go through the whole process yet again because, if the problem still exists we obviously haven't helped everyone who has read our offerings. I think many novice and experienced carvers are confused by the technicalities of the sharpening process and the wealth of different types of equipment available.

There are a few simple points that I think can help everyone. First, the most important point in keeping a tool sharp and working effectively is to never let it get blunt. A lot of time can be spent on getting a good flat bevel on the tool and this can be achieved with an oil or water stone, diamond plate, abrasive sheet or slow turning wheel – all of these do a perfectly good job. This bevel then needs to be honed to get rid of any burr that may exist. After all this effort, it makes sense to avoid going through the whole process in the near future.

What happens to a cutting edge in use is that it can either get rounded off slightly at the edge or the edge can degrade through levering with the tool,

rather than cutting through the wood. This causes small particles to break off. Continuing with this process will quickly result in a toolbox full of blunt tools. Rounding off can be avoided by careful and regular honing.

I recommend honing gouges and knives about every 20 minutes of use. Most carvers only use around six tools at a session so, if you stop after about two hours and hone all your tools you should be able to maintain a high quality of cut on your work. Again this can be done with a leather or webbing strop, a felt or rag wheel or similar. Stropping, or honing the tool can take as little as 10–20 seconds, whether you are doing this by hand or with power – not a lot of time out of your carving session.

It is most important that the bevel of all tools is perfectly flat for around 3mm from the cutting edge. It is, therefore, very important that the bevel is kept flat on the honing surface throughout the process. Any lifting of the tool handle will result in rounding off the edge. If you are using a rotary strop it is a good idea to cut yourself a block of wood at the desired angle to stick onto the tool rest. As long as you keep the tool flat on this block you will always achieve the same angle. What angle this bevel may be will generally depend on the height of the

carver and the bench he, or she, is working on. Although there are generally accepted correct angles for tool bevels, in my opinion, it is far more important for the bevel to be flat behind the cutting edge than at any specific angle. After all, the average carver probably hasn't got the facility to measure bevel angles accurately. What is really important is that the stropping angle should always be the same.

What all this really boils down to is that you need to get the tool sharp in the first place and then keep it that way. The first takes a lot of time and practice and the second is really about caring for your tools. Probably the first thing you need to do is make sure that the tools are kept in a tool roll or case so that the edges are protected. If they are just thrown into a box, rubbing against each other, you will never keep them sharp.

More and more carvers seem to be using knives nowadays and I had a large number of queries about these and I will deal with those in the next article. ▶

Contact details:

If you'd like your questions answered by Peter, send them in to Mark Baker at markb@thegmcgroup.com.



The Line, Loop and Circle – part 2

Things you will need...

Tools:

Swiss:

- No.8, 20mm
- No.3, 20mm
- No.2, 20mm
- No.1, 20mm or bevelled edge woodworking chisel
- No.2, 10mm
- No.5, 20mm
- No.12, 6mm

Knife

Saw

Steel rule

50mm acrylic ball

2.5mm HSS drill bit

Stainless steel dowel pin:

20 x 2.5mm

Wood:

- English walnut (*Juglans nigra*)
– 350 x 270 x 75mm

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

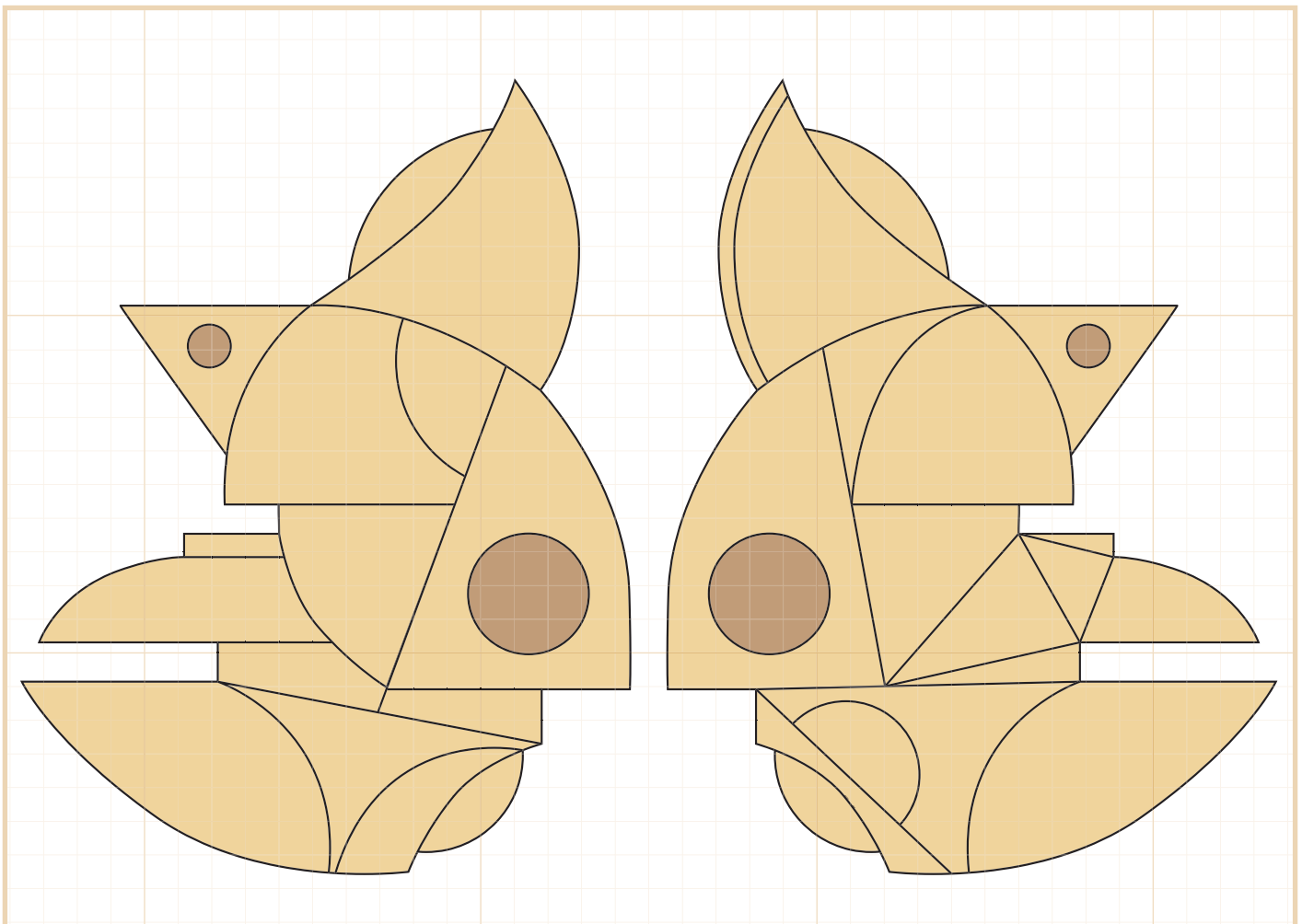
Andrew Thomas has been a professional sculptor since 1993 and rapidly gained international recognition for his 3D art, which has won him numerous awards and gold medals. His work is held in many fine art galleries across the UK and in private collections worldwide. Andrew delivers weekly woodcarving lessons for private students at both beginner and intermediate levels. See www.3dsculptor.com



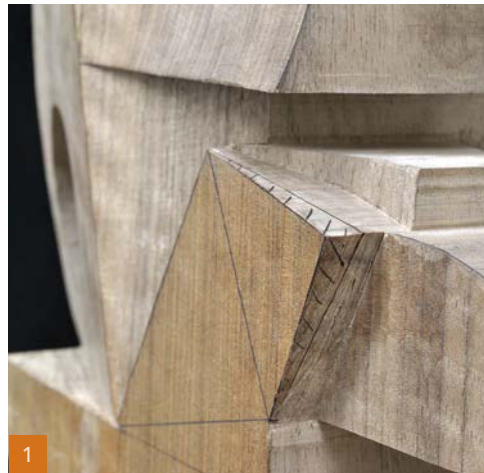
Andrew Thomas finishes his The Line, Loop and Circle sculpture

In the last issue of *Woodcarving* I described the techniques of how to carve the upper sections of The Line, Loop and Circle abstract sculpture. We continue now with part two of the project; forming the lower sections, tidying the edges, attaching the acrylic ball and finishing with oil and wax.

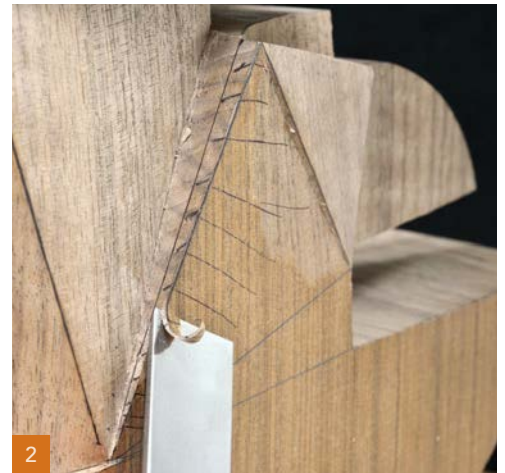
Before you start working on the project, read through the complete step guide and study the stages and finished images to see how the carving develops.



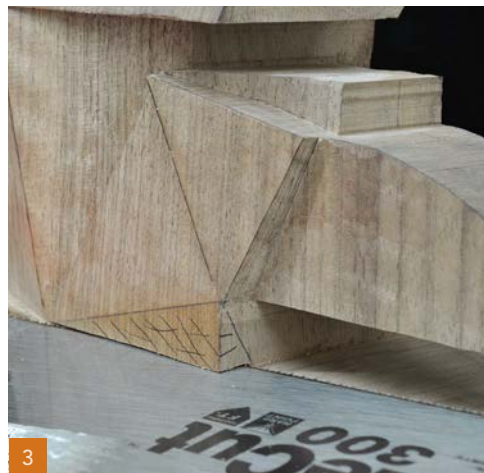
➔ **1** Continuing from the last issue, this small triangular section with the hatching is the next to be formed. The triangle tapers from the surface of the design line on the left, down to a depth of 8mm on the right. Measure and draw this onto your wood, then pare the wood down flush along these lines until it is absolutely flat



2 Next to be carved is a triangular shape, adjacent to the one just formed. This tapers from the surface of its lower design line, down to the depth of 5mm at the top corner. Draw this line along the upper edge. Cut along the right adjoining line, and pare to the required depth



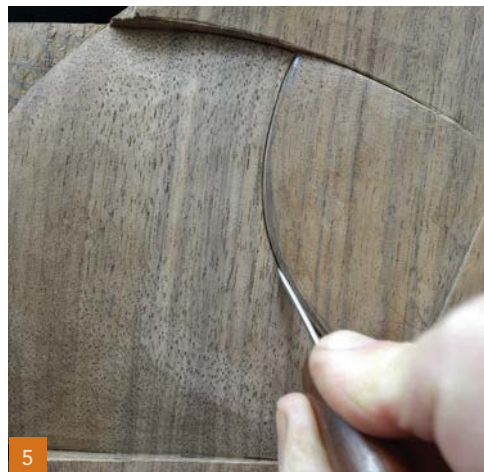
3 The last triangular section to form in this area is directly below the one just carved. It angles away from the section above it and tapers from the surface at the left corner, down to approximately 10mm at the right corner. Use the saw to cut along this tapered line



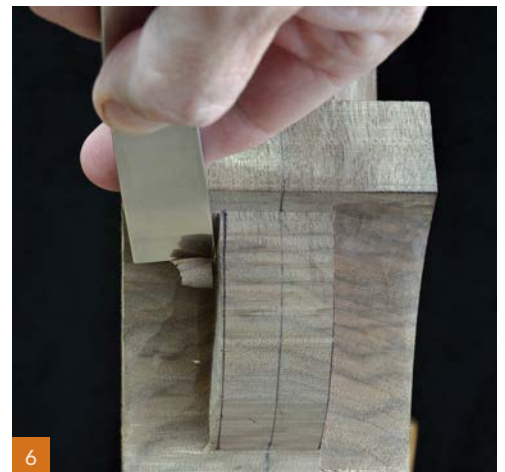
4 Carve the wood flush into the saw cut and then a knife or chisel to sharpen the inner edge.



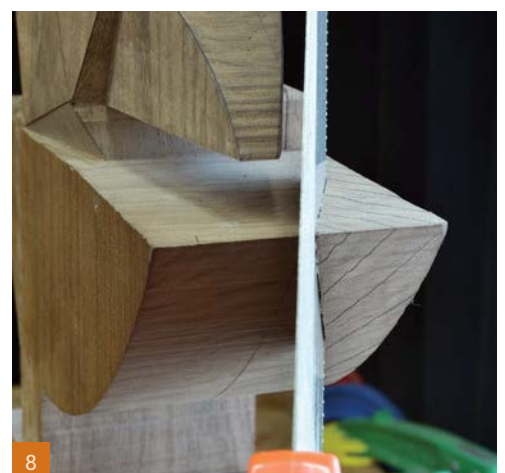
5 Now to the opposite side – the section made in part one, step 12. Use a knife to slice around the design line and then pare the surrounding areas into the cut. Repeat until you reach a depth of approximately 3–4mm



6 This next area to carve on the rear edge is much the same as part one, step 4. Measure and draw two lines to divide this edge into equal thirds. Use a No.8, to carve away the bulk of the waste down to the line on the edge and sides. Use either a No.1, or bevelled edge chisel, to slice along the outer edge of the straight lines. Use a No.2 to pare away the waste wood along the line of the No.1 cut and repeat these steps to reach the level between the top and bottom. Now, use a knife, to cut the concave part of the straight line continue until you reach the design lines on the sides creating a square, sharp angle



7–8 Now swap to the front edge of the sculpture. This section can either emerge from the body of the form exactly in the centre at the tip, or slightly to one side. This example is centred. Draw a straight line from the tip of the wood, back to where it meets the section above it. Do the same on the underside then saw off the waste





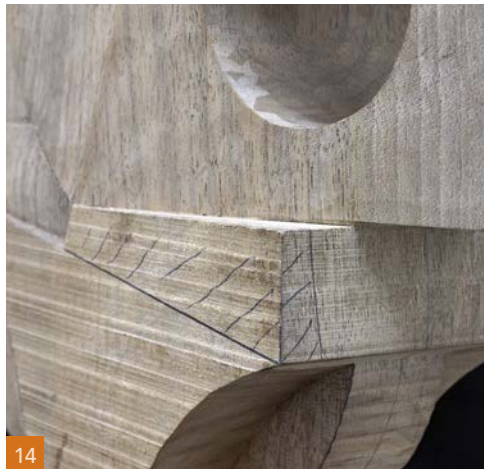
9 The surface of the wood must now be carefully skimmed back to the straight line that you drew in step 7 and to the design line on the side of the block. It must also be delicately curved from these areas, underneath to the centreline, to produce a gentle flowing contour. Do this with the No.2, 20mm

10 The position where this section meets the design line on the side of the block now needs to be slightly separated from the surface by a few millimetres and curved underneath. Use the No.12, 6mm V-tool to 'sketch' around the separating design line and the No.2, 20mm to pare the wood back into the V-tool cut and curve the side down underneath to the centreline. Use the knife to sharpen up the inner adjoining edge



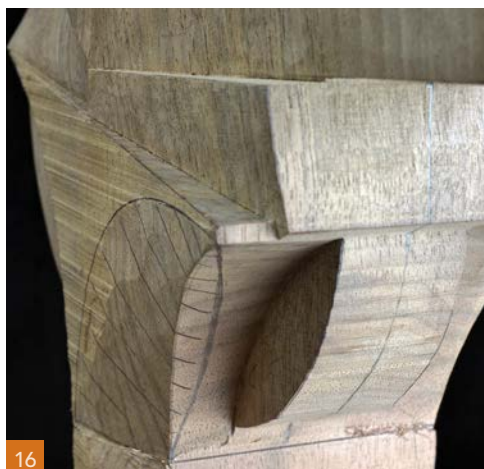
11 Repeat steps 7-10 on the opposite side

12 This little section to the above right of the large section that has just been carved is next to be shaped. This angles inwards on the top left side, has a slight curve as it flows horizontally towards the right side and undercuts the other sections to the right side and underneath it



13 Use the knife or No.1 chisel to cut the straight lines and the knife to slice around the curved shape in the right corner. Use the No.2, 10mm to pare the surface back into the knife cuts. Repeat the process until you reach a depth of approximately 3mm on the right inner corner

14 Next, move to the other small section to the right of the one that has just been carved. This tapers from the surface at the left side, down to approximately 10mm at the right side. It also tapers from 6mm at the top edge, down to the 10mm at the bottom edge. Mark these lines accurately onto your wood



15 Use the knife or No.1 chisel to cut the straight lines and the No.2, 20mm to pare the surface back into the straight line cuts. The surface should be flush with a neat inner angle along the bottom edge

16 This next section, which is directly below the one that has just been formed, is the final one on this side of the sculpture and is fairly simple in its form. Draw a curved line on the rear edge of your block, which terminates approximately 12mm in from the side of the wood

➔ **17** Use a No.3, 20mm gouge, working away from the design line toward the rear edge, to create a gentle concave hollow across the surface of the wood, down to the depth of the line drawn on the rear edge

18 This side is now completed and should look like this. Make any adjustments if necessary

19 Moving now to the opposite side of the rear edge. This next section tapers from the flush surface at the lowest position, down to 18mm depth at the highest position. Measure in approximately 18mm from the side and mark this position on the rear edge of your wood. Use the saw to cut down to this mark

20 Use the No.2, 20mm to pare the wood away along the design line, down to the depth of the saw cut. Use the knife or the No.1 chisel to neatly sharpen up the inner edge. Use the edge of the steel rule to ensure that the surface is flush and make adjustments if necessary

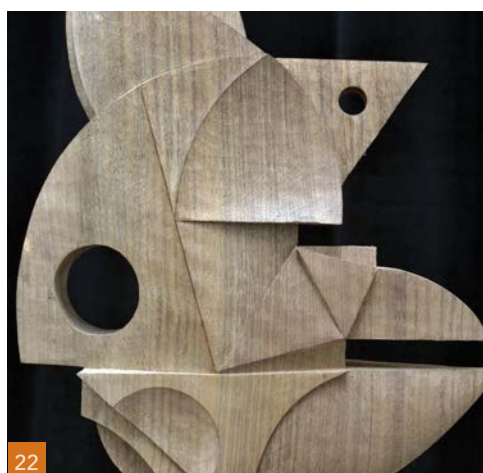
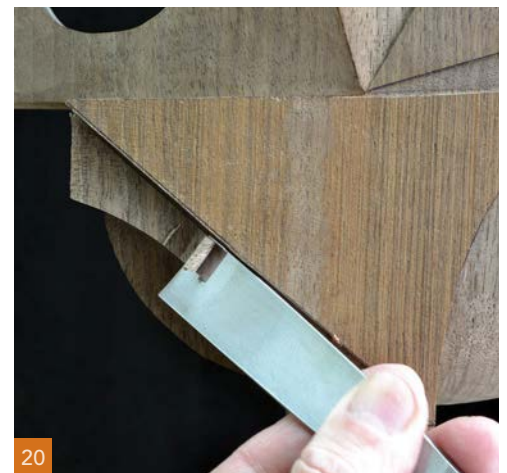
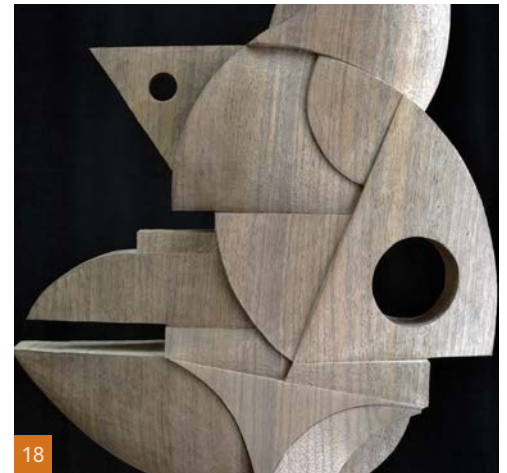
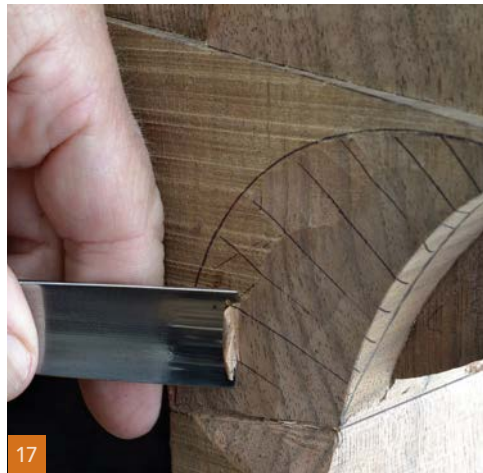
21 The final section to carve on this side of the sculpture is directly to the right of the section that has just been formed. This has to be accomplished very accurately to ensure that semi-circle is perfect in its shape and has an even concave hollow. Using the No.5, 20mm gouge, place the cutting edge of the blade precisely at the very inner edge of the design line and carve towards the rear edge of the wood. Work your way around the semi-circle as evenly as possible and repeat the process until you reach the depth of approximately 8mm in the centre of the semi-circle on the rear edge

22 This side is now completed and should look like this. Make any adjustments if necessary

Sanding

23 The finished front edge before sanding

24 The finished rear edge before sanding





25



26



27



28

25 Before attempting to sand and finish the sculpture, it is essential that all of the straight and curved edges, where the knife and No.1 chisel were used to carve the various sections, are cleaned of any residual tool marks and uneven surfaces. This has to be accomplished meticulously to ensure that the flowing curves and flat straight lines are maintained. First, use the razor sharp knife to make a shallow cut into the inner corners of these edges. Then, use either the No.2, 20mm or 10mm gouge to slice along these edges, connecting with the knife cuts, leaving them perfectly clean, square, flat and ready for sanding

26 When sanding the aim is to produce a beautiful finish on every section of the piece, but also retain the sharp lines. This can be achieved on the flat areas by using flat sticks of various widths, which brace the sandpaper and can be pushed down flush with the surface as you sand. The convex and concave areas are slightly easier as our fingers can naturally form the necessary shape for these contours. Start with grit 100, and work over the complete surface of the sculpture, following the line of the grain wherever possible. When sure that it is perfectly smooth; clean the saw dust off all surfaces, and brush or pour hot water over the complete sculpture and leave it to dry. Next, work through grits 150, 240 and 400, removing all scratches from each previous grit and repeat the hot water process in between. Your sculpture can be cut off the faceplate base

27 The example used for this project was finished with one light application of boiled linseed oil applied with a cloth, which beautifully enriched the natural colour of the grain. This was left for a week or so before applying several coats of dark wax polish, which sealed the grain and gave it a wonderful sheen

28 The acrylic ball is 50mm round, which can be purchased from many online websites. Measure the distance along the straight edge above the small piercing and mark the centre position. Use a 2.5mm HSS drill bit to make a hole to the depth of approximately 10mm. Use the same drill bit to drill into the acrylic ball to the same depth. Use a 20mm long x 2.5mm wide stainless steel dowel pin to attach the ball to the sculpture

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Plans for carving a barn owl

Bob Jubb shares his ideas for carving a barn owl

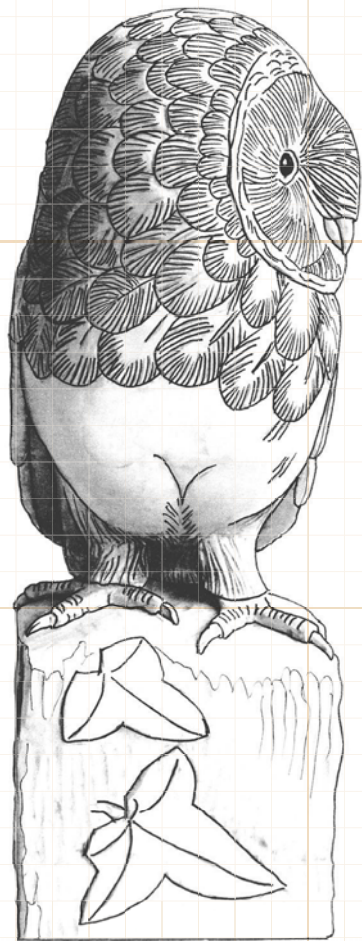
The barn owl is the silent hunter, with wing feathers which have developed to make no noise when flying, so that its prey cannot hear it. As well as excellent eyesight, it has extremely good hearing and can locate its prey in near total darkness, except when it is raining when it cannot hear so well. As a boy I used to watch barn owls flying over long grass, and suddenly drop down to catch a mouse or vole and I thought what fantastic hunters they were. I decided to carve a barn owl to remind me of these childhood memories.

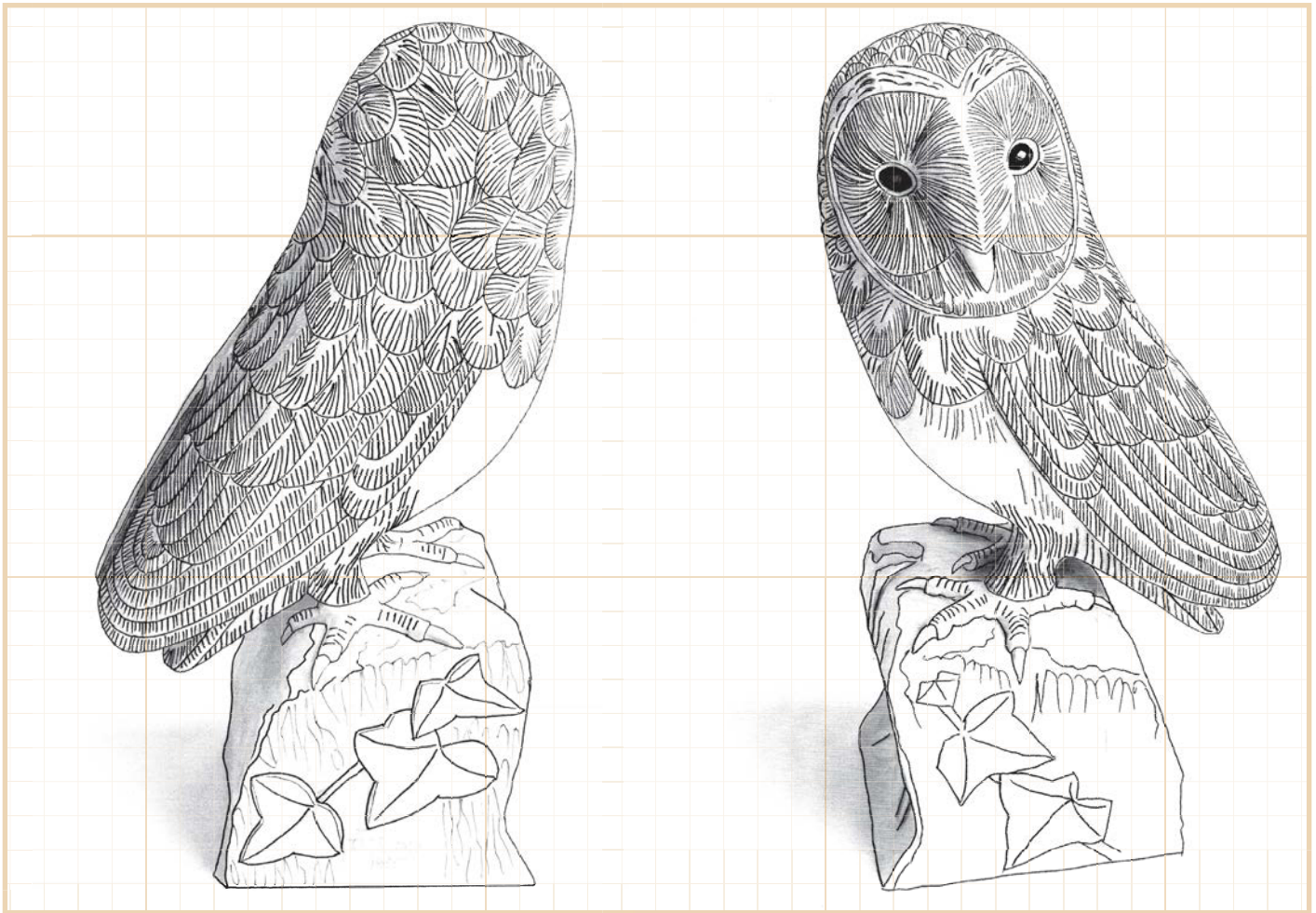
Carving tips

I particularly chose lime (Tilia vilgaris) to carve this barn owl as the wood is similar colour to the owl. I drew it out perched on a tree stump with some ivy on it. I inlaid the eyes with African blackwood (Dalbergia melanoxylon) – but buffalo horn could also be used – and waxed the whole carving with Liberon Antique wax to make it slightly darker, to show up the feathering. Without this the owl looked very white and bland, with the feathering not easy to see. The feathering was done with a 1.5mm 'V'-tool.

This carving is 140mm across the front, 245mm high and 90mm from front to back, but you can scale the drawings to whatever size you wish.







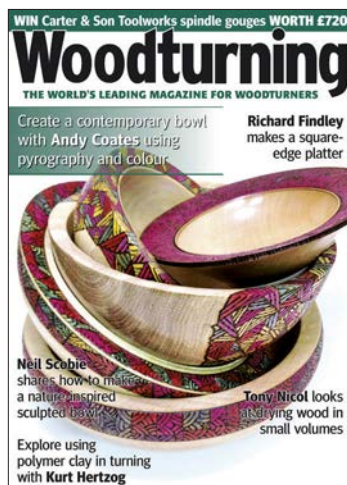
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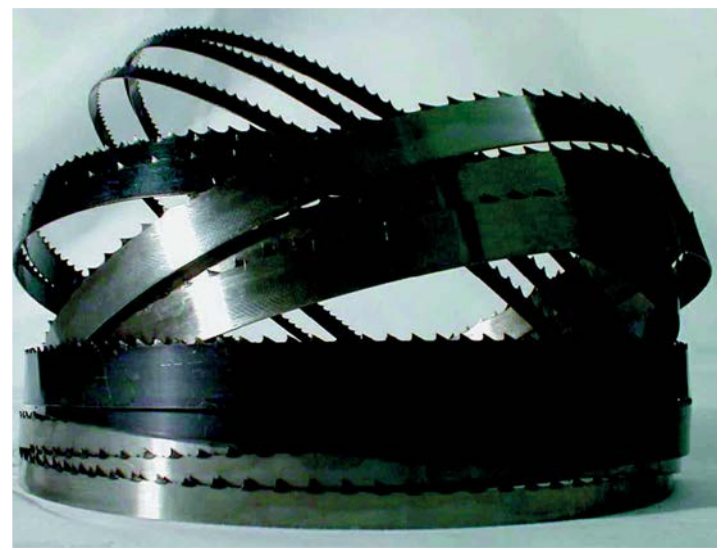
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Higgledy-piggledy houses

In an extract taken from *Whittling Handbook*, Peter Benson makes a fun little house sculpture



Things you will need...

- Knife and strop
- Safety glove
- Marker pen
- Small-bladed detail knife
- 1/8in (3mm) No.3 palm gouge or similar
- 1/4in (6mm) No.3 palm gouge or similar
- 1/8in (3mm) No.9 palm gouge if needed
- Finishing oil

This last project varies from the rest in that there is no definite end product – you can do whatever you like. The reason I have included it is that many carvers prefer to carve to patterns or designs provided by somebody else. This project develops as you go along and anything you can manage to include is perfectly acceptable. Many carvers I know who have attempted this make up their own stories to fit what they are carving, and a general theme develops as they go along. What I have carved is just an example of what you might like to do. You can follow it if you wish, or just use it to get you going and select bits of it for your design.

Mine is essentially a small house with a workshop above it and a garage and outhouse below, but don't be afraid to let your mind wander as far as you like to put something together.



Variations – You may like to apply a little colour to add a bit of character to your carving. Here are some examples that I have coloured, using acrylics diluted with about 20 parts water to 1 part paint.



1



2

1 You can use any odd-shaped piece of wood from your workshop. The more random the shape, the better. My piece started out flat on one side, but this is not necessary.

2 Starting at the top, carve a pair of diagonals.

3 Carve to give the basic shape of the sides of a roof.

4 Add some vertical cuts to form the four walls of the building.

5 Don't be too fussy at this stage, as your ideas will develop as you go along.



3



4



5

➔ **6** Draw your next house below the first, allowing a bit of space to accommodate the steps and so on.

7 Cut the angles of the roof on both sides as far back as you feel comfortable with.

8 Draw some thickness to the roof and cut back carefully, making sure that you don't break it off.

9 Set back the wall below the roof by about $\frac{1}{16}$ – $\frac{1}{8}$ in (2–3mm).

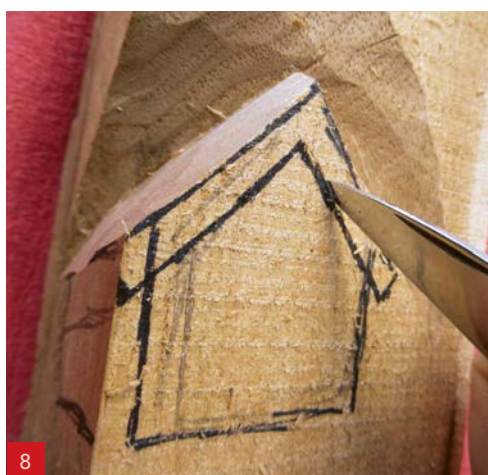
10 Now you can start to mark out your first set of stairs, from the first building to the second. Be aware that you can only cut steps on a slope, so you will need to cut whatever slope you can fit on the available wood first.

11 Cut the stairs, adjusting as you go along to fit them into the space available. Turn them round onto a flat landing area below the house.

"Be aware that you can only cut steps on a slope, so you will need to cut whatever slope you can fit on the available wood first"

12 You can fill in the area between the houses with rocks, like this. Put in a line of windows to suggest internal stairs.

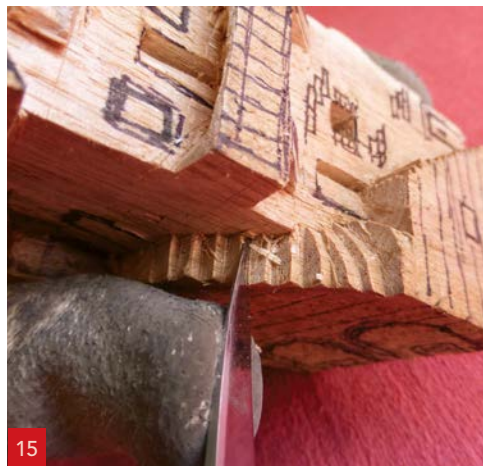
13 The spare wood you have beside the lower house (A) can be turned into steps and a fence (B).



PROJECT Higgledy-piggledy houses



14



15

14 You will need to link the lower house with whatever you add below it, so add more steps.

15 As before, cut a slope first, then notch it to create individual steps.

16 To form the tiles on the roofs, first cut a series of slopes from which the tiles can be cut.

17 Mark out the individual tiles and cut them with a small, sharp knife, taking care not to split the wood. Any minor blemishes can be made into broken tiles to add character.



16



17

18 When carving the doors and windows, show them slightly ajar: this makes them clearer and adds character.

19 Blank spaces can be filled with any detail you like to add. These archways are meant to suggest garages with vehicles in – I hope!

20 All that remains is to insert any small details that you feel would add to the carving. I usually give the whole thing a coat of oil to make for cleaner final cuts; butternut has a tendency to splinter a bit while carving. The whole piece can be oiled again when complete. ▶



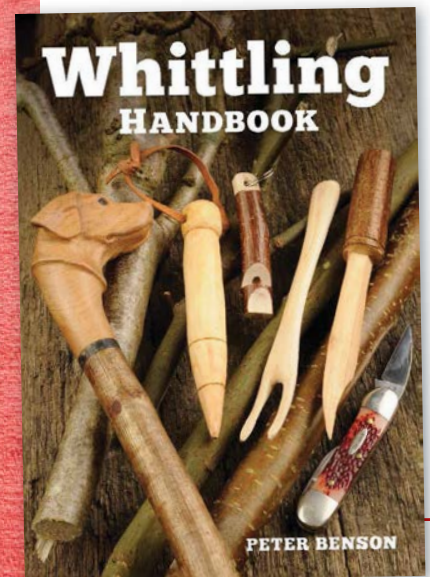
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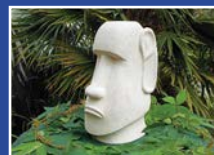
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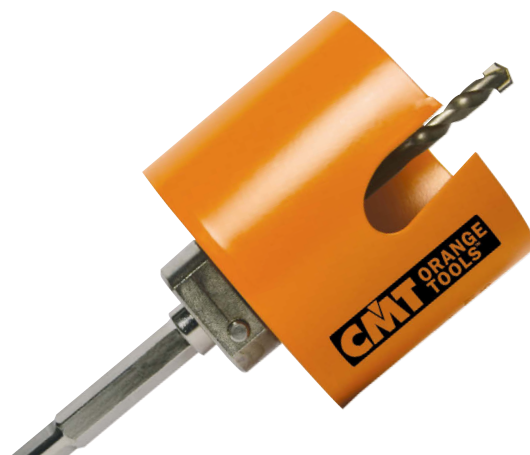
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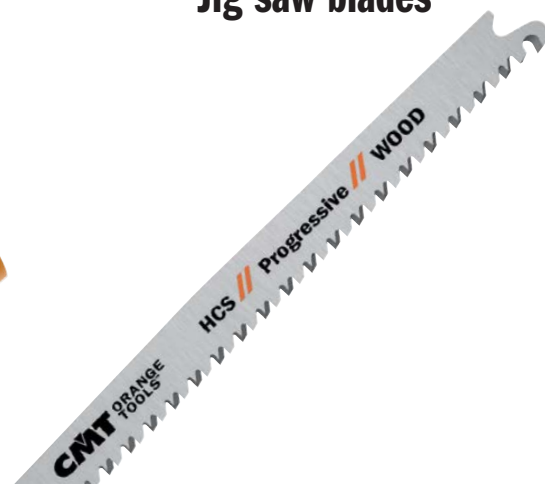
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All prices are correct at the time of going to press. Photographs courtesy of the manufacturers/retailers, unless otherwise stated

Beebe carving knives

The hand forged and polished blades are extremely sharp and hold their edge well. The 5½in pau ferro hardwood handles are shaped to be comfortable and to provide the feel that is so necessary for good knife control. These knives are available individually or in a set of three (No.2, No.4 and No.5). Blade lengths range from 1½in for the No.5 knife to 1¾in for the No.3.

Contact: Lee Valley

Tel: 1 613 596 0350

Web: www.leevalley.com

From \$36.50



ProDesign Apron

The ToolPost's ProDesign Apron is made of pre-washed heavy-duty cotton cloth, in natural (oatmeal) colour. Heavier than the fabrics conventionally used in aprons, this tough cloth will withstand heavy wear and frequent washing while offering an enhanced degree of physical protection in the event of workshop mishap. Providing extra coverage, the aprons are long to afford maximum protection to the lower limbs. Available in sizes: S (small); M (medium); L (large).

£17.50

Contact: The Tool Post

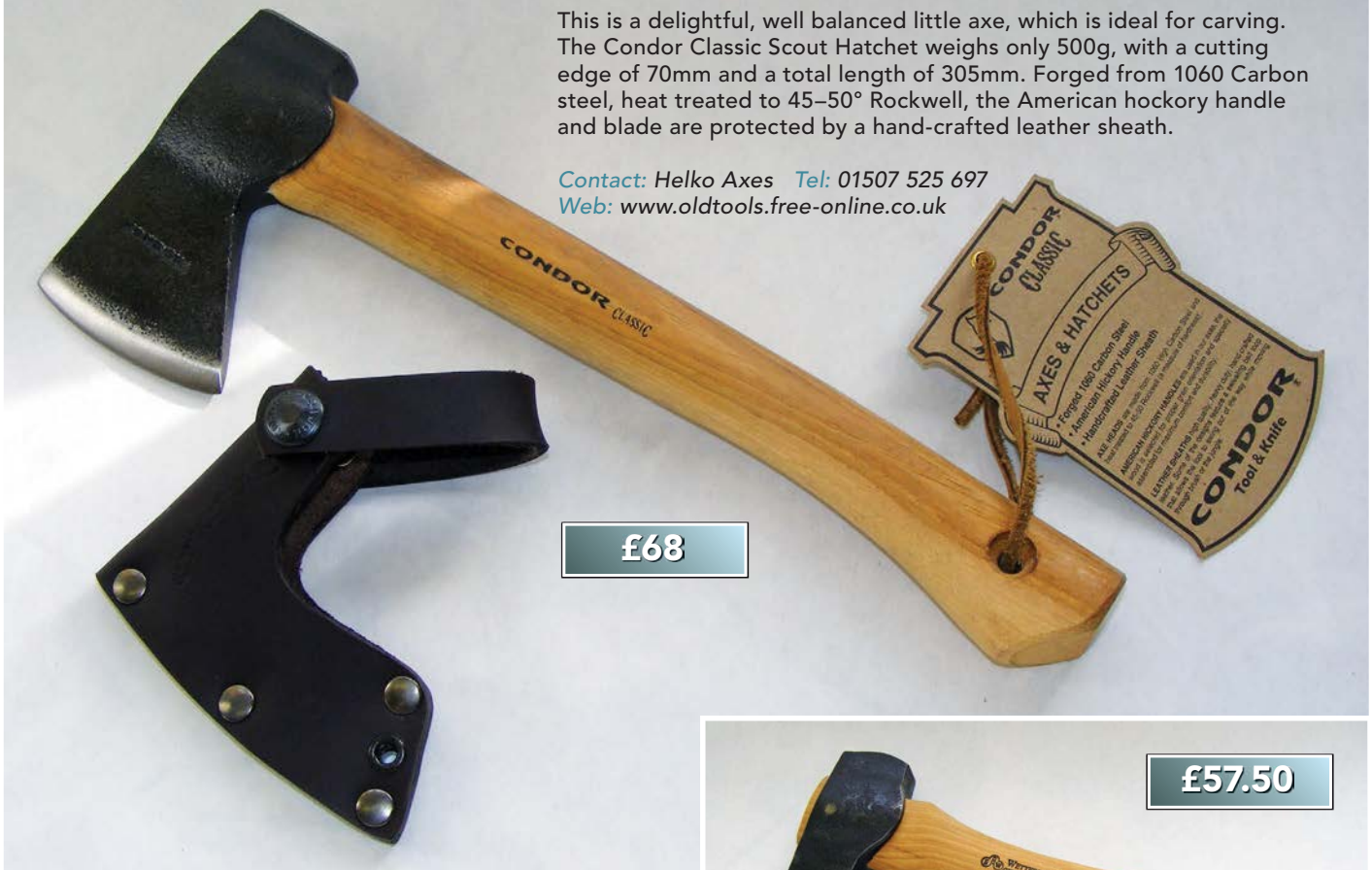
Tel: 01235 511 101

Web: www.toolpost.co.uk

Condor Classic Scout Hatchet

This is a delightful, well balanced little axe, which is ideal for carving. The Condor Classic Scout Hatchet weighs only 500g, with a cutting edge of 70mm and a total length of 305mm. Forged from 1060 Carbon steel, heat treated to 45–50° Rockwell, the American hockory handle and blade are protected by a hand-crafted leather sheath.

Contact: Helko Axes Tel: 01507 525 697
Web: www.oldtools.free-online.co.uk



£68

Wetterlings Small 'Buddy' Hatchet

This is the smallest of all the Wetterlings Axes. It is suitable for woodcarving or to use instead of a large knife. The shape of the head also makes it useful for splitting smaller chunks of firewood. Its compact and lightweight design makes it easy to carry on your belt, in your backpack or toolbox. The Buddy is delivered with a hickory handle and a leather sheath. The Buddy weighs 700g, has a cutting edge of 70mm and is 260mm in length.

Contact: Helko Axes Tel: 01507 525 697
Web: www.oldtools.free-online.co.uk



£57.50



£225 plus p+p

Bushcraft Knife

The Woodland Survival Crafts knife is made by Roger Harrington of Bison Bushcraft, but exclusively sold through Woodland Survival Crafts. The blade is 85mm long and 3mm thick. Woodland Survival Crafts claim that the primary strengths of this knife are the shape with full length blade (no block of metal before the edge), allowing very fine feather sticks or wooden flowers to easily be made. The shortness of the blade and the position of the point makes it very easy to gouge out wood from a block. They say it is a great universal knife, doing most heavy jobs well but also most fine outdoor jobs too.

Contact: Woodland Survival Crafts
Tel: 01530 411861
Web: www.woodlandcraftsurvivalcrafts.com

Saral WAX FREE Transfer Paper

Woodworking Craft Supplies claim that the Saral WAX FREE Transfer Paper is the superior way to transfer a pattern, template or freehand design to any surface. These might include wood, fabrics, paper, metal, canvas, ceramics, stained glass and more. The acid-free coatings allow the user to make crisp, clean tracing no matter the colour of the surface because Saral WAX FREE Transfer Paper comes in five colours; graphite, white, blue, yellow and red.



Contact: Woodworking Craft Supplies Tel: 01633 400847
Web: www.woodworkcraftsupplies.co.uk

Woodpecker Electro-mechanical Hammer

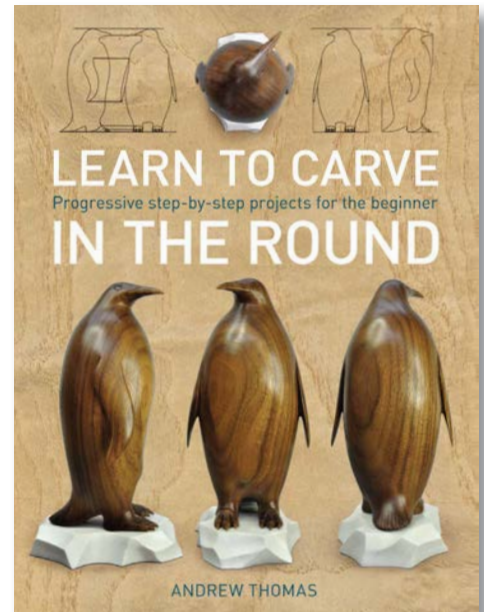


The Woodpecker electrical hammer is made in Italy and available in the UK from The Stoneyard. It is for the working of marble, stone and wood. The controllable percussion strength is adjusted by the pressure exerted on the hammer, this allows very fine and delicate work. The Woodpecker accepts 12.5mm heads as standard and has included an adaptor for 7.5mm. Adaptors for 10.2 are also available on request. One of the great advantages of this tool is that you do not need a compressor, it is very quiet and the vibration is less. Stand and support available.

Contact: The Stoneyard
Tel: 01823 476369
Web: www.stonetoolshop.co.uk

BOOK REVIEW & OFFER

Learn How to Carve in the Round



This inspirational and informative book is designed to take the reader on a journey to develop their understanding of form, design, artistic creativity and technical knowledge in woodcarving. Seven innovative projects, which gradually increase in difficulty, introduce and build on important techniques for the reader to learn, practise and adopt. By working through the projects, the reader will become independent, enabling them to plan, design and accomplish their own ideas of form in three dimension.

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The Sanctuary of Truth



The vision of Thai millionaire Lek Viriyaphant, every inch of Pattaya's gigantic wooden structure is covered with carved sculptures

Located on the stunning seashore at the northern end of the Gulf of Thailand, the Sanctuary of Truth in Pattaya is constructed – or, more correctly, being constructed – entirely of wood and is adorned from top to bottom, inside and out, with intricate carvings that represent Heaven, Earth, Father, Mother, Moon, Sun and Stars. It was the vision of Thai businessman Lek Viriyaphant, who researched the project extensively and spent a large part of his fortune on this and other heritage projects, including the Ancient City near Bangkok. In the process he revived and preserved ancient building techniques and architecture that were in danger

of being lost as the older generation of carvers passed on. The Sanctuary, for instance, has some 250 craftspeople working on the site's wooden hand carvings at any given time. And it looks like they'll be there for some time yet as the temple-like complex, which was started in 1981, isn't due for completion until 2050 according to some reports.

Constructed in four wings dedicated to Thai, Khmer, Chinese and Indian religious iconography, the structure's highest point is 105m and the plot covers two rai (approx. 0.79 of an acre). It has been described as 'an artistic consolidation of centuries of Hindu and Buddhist myths under one unifying roof'. The Sanctuary's official website, meanwhile, says: "The decoration with wooden carved sculptures is to use art and culture as the reflection of an ancient vision of earth, ancient knowledge and Eastern philosophy."

Atop the sanctuary's four main spires are carved representations of the elements that will, according to Eastern philosophy, lead us to the ideal. Each shows a celestial body with a different object or person. First is the lotus flower, meaning the establishment of religion; the second, a celestial body holding a child and leading an elderly person, signifies life bestowed upon human beings; the third is holding a book that represents the continuation of immortal philosophy; while the fourth has a pigeon



perched on his hand, symbolising peace. On top of the tallest, central spire, meanwhile, is Kalki mounting a horse, the symbol of Phra Sri Ariya Mettrai.

Although much of the exterior appears complete, some parts are already undergoing renovation work after being battered by the elements. Most of the new carving work, however, is on the interior which now has a large altar in the centre of the rotunda.

Sadly, Lek Viriyaphant passed away in 2000, so he will never see the sanctuary completed. But the work goes on according to his meticulous plan and, although the site is incomplete, the Sanctuary is open to visitors who want to view the work in progress. To find out more, go to www.sanctuaryoftruth.com.



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