

# WOOD CARVING



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**PROJECTS TO CARVE** Georgian-style panel • Ammonite • Squirrel • Plant holder  
**TECHNICAL** Chip carving borders • Using a No.9 gouge • 20 top spoon carving tips  
**FEATURES** C&G end of year show • Georgian history • Diary of a student carver





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# Happy New Year



PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER BENSON

Refining the shape of an otter



**L**et me start by wishing you all a Happy New Year. As is tradition, many people have no doubt made resolutions. Mine is to complete the workshop and sort out storage for my timber and oddments that

won't fit in the workshop. Now, those who know of our magazine schedule will realise I am writing this leader in October. But let me tell you, I am so far behind where I want to be with the workshop that I will not have it finished by the time New Year is here, so it is a safe bet on the resolution. I hate not having a functional workshop—it bugs me no end. I don't like my workshop being so small and my wanting to do so much in it and not being able to put everything I want in it so I can do the things I want.

That said, I am very grateful to have a workshop at all. So many people I know do not have workshops due to lack of space, so I will not complain any further about it. I must make

time to finish it off. I need a bit of money for some more cabinets to utilise the wall space better and once I have those I can free up some space where things are placed, but are not really accessible and are blocking other areas of the workshop. It is a giant mental jigsaw puzzle. I also need to fit an effective extraction system for power carving and sort out some directional light.

I find it amazing when talking to people how we all think we want a certain layout for our workspace, only to find that it doesn't work as intended and we move things and obtain things to make it work better, but still find a problem. I think that, no matter what size of workshop, how well it is equipped, what lighting, storage, heating, lighting and workbenches we have, we will always want to adjust it or need more things for it. I wonder how many of those needs are used that often? I bought some 'need' items only to use them once or twice. They are beautiful tools though and shine nicely as I walk by them. Note to self. New resolution, resist the lure of the shiny new things. I wonder how long that one will last?

I must admit, having made the extra resolution, I have been eyeing up a beautiful axe recently. I am trying to justify it to myself by saying I will make some traditionally made hand-carved bowls. I am going to make some anyway, but this particular axe I am looking at is a thing of beauty and is meant to be used. The downside is that I think if I bought it I would be afraid of damaging it so probably would not end up using it. Hmm! It is a dilemma.

Surely, I can't be the only one who finds myself in this sort of situation?

I will keep you informed of how I get on with the workshop and whether I resist the temptation of buying the axe. Let me know what goodies you get for Christmas and also what resolutions you make for the New Year.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year,  
Mark

To get in touch, please email me:  
markb@thegmcgroup.com



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# News & events...

Bringing you the latest news and event details from the woodcarving community

## BDWCA 2017 Festival of Bird Art



British Championship Runner-up: Stone Curlew stretching, by Maggie Port



Best Novice: Great Crested Grebe – 25% lifesize – by Marion Dawson



British Champion 2017: Owls Life, by Claire Williams



Interpretive: Northern Cardinal, by Yvonne Langford



Best Intermediate: Owl, by Trevor Steed

Once again another British Decoy & Wildfowl Carving Association Annual Show and Competition – the 2017 Festival of Bird Art, held, as always, on the second weekend of September in Bakewell, Derbyshire – has come and gone.

Numbers were slightly down on last year, a trend which we hope will not continue, but the quality of the carvings just seems to keep getting better and it was good to see some new carvers entering for the first time. Congratulations to all who entered, you all deserved a prize. Photographs of all the entries can be seen on the Bakewell Show page of our website – [www.bdwca.org.uk](http://www.bdwca.org.uk) – together with the winners from the previous three years.

This year, for the first time, an Interpretive carving took the top awards – Owls Life, by Claire Williams, won both the British Bird Carving Championship and the BDWCA Championship, and also took the award for the BDWCA Best Open Carving. The runner-up to the British Championship was a Stone Curlew Stretching, by Maggie Port, which also collected the awards for both Visitors' Choice and Competitors' Choice.

Interpretive carvings took a lot of the awards this year, with both the Best Intermediate – an Owl, by Trevor Steed – and Best Novice – a 25% lifesize Great Crested Grebe, by Marion Dawson, being interpretives.

A special mention must also go to Yvonne Langford. Yvonne, a non-carver at

the beginning of this year, accompanied her husband, Mark, on his first visit to the Ward World Championships in the US in April. She was so inspired by what she saw, and the carvers she met, that she started carving and entered her first bird, an Interpretive Northern Cardinal, in Novice Class – and it took gold.

It was, as always, a very enjoyable show, and we are already looking forward to next year and planning our entries. The amount of wood that was purchased from the trade stands certainly suggests there could be some interesting carvings.

**For further information on the BDWCA visit [www.bdwca.org.uk](http://www.bdwca.org.uk).**



# Great Yorkshire Show 2017

British Woodcarvers Association (BWA) Yorkshire Wooldale carvers, based in Holmfirth, was demonstrating at the Great Yorkshire Show in Harrogate. The show was, as usual, well attended and there was much interest from the public in the BWA stand.

The judge of this year's woodcarving competition was Trevor Spiers of Rural Crafts, who awarded first place to Michael Weston. The silver award went to Leith Taylor.

The Bill Hodgson trophy, voted for by the public, went to Bob Russum for his Fox and Hounds and was presented by Forestry Steward Will Richardson.

Michael Weston himself made a presentation to Honorary Show Director, Bill Cowling, of a Great Yorkshire Show sign he had carved.

Contact: [wooldalecarvers@gmail.com](mailto:wooldalecarvers@gmail.com)



Michael Weston being presented with his 1st place award



Michael Weston presenting Bill Cowling with his carving

PICTURES COURTESY OF YORKSHIRE WOOLDALE CARVERS

## Makers Central: Uniting creativity

On 5-6 May 2018, Makers Central will be launching its first exhibition at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham.

Makers Central is the brainchild of Nick Zammeti of NZ Woodturning. Nick entered the world of Makers when he became introduced to Woodturning in 2015, leading him to create his own YouTube channel. Nick has visited various Makers events across the world, which led him to the realisation that there was a gap in the market for a Makers event such as this in the UK.

The event aims to bring together thousands of makers from around the world, from crafters and inventors to hobbyists and artists to share their passion for all things creative. Makers Central is an event for the Maker Community. If you make or just share the passion for making and creating, come and join us for this spectacular event.

For further information and tickets visit: Web: [www.makerscentral.co.uk](http://www.makerscentral.co.uk)



## 2018 Events

- **Tri-City Woodcarvers Association**  
24th Artistry in Wood Juried Show & Sale  
**When:** 17-18 March, 2018  
**Where:** Tri-Tech Skills Centre, 5929 West Metaline Ave Kennewick, WA 99336  
**Email:** [psflutemaker@gmail.com](mailto:psflutemaker@gmail.com)
- **Yandle & Sons Woodworking Show**

**When:** 13-14 April, 2018  
**Where:** Hurst Works, Hurst, Martock, Somerset, TA12 6JU  
**Contact:** [www.yandles.co.uk](http://www.yandles.co.uk)

- **Tri-City Woodcarvers 21st annual Rendezvous**  
**When:** 8-9 June, 2018  
**Where:** Benton County Fairgrounds, Kennewick WA 99336  
**Contact:** Dean Herigstad (+1) 509-713-0108

If you have something you want your fellow carvers to know, send in your news stories, snippets and diary dates to Mark Baker at Woodcarving, 86 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1XN or to [markb@thegmcgroup.com](mailto:markb@thegmcgroup.com)



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# Ammonite

Andrew Thomas demonstrates how to carve an ammonite fossil



**T**he ammonite fossil is a beautiful form, a naturally-occurring example of the Fibonacci sequence – geometrically shaped, sitting perfectly on the eye, and thus lending itself wonderfully to the art of wood or stone carving. At first glance, this project appears intricate and complex to create but, in practice, it is fairly simple, using just a few techniques that are repeated around the spiral.

This project is aimed at both beginner

and intermediate levels of ability, as it is a great exercise in learning the principles of how to carve with the direction of the grain; swapping the cutting direction from one side to the other along a curved edge. It is also a very satisfying piece to produce, as each depth and detail repays a well-earned visual reward for the effort and energy put into it.

The outline of the form should be copied directly from the supplied design, but the details of the natural surface texture can be

abstracted or adapted to suit the reader's own ideas if they wish to. English walnut (*Juglans regia*) was used in the example for this project, but lime (*Tilia vulgaris*), basswood (*Tilia Americana*) or butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) would be preferable for beginners as these species are far more forgiving when carved close to the grain direction. Before you start working on the project, please read the complete step guide and study the stage and finished images to see how the project develops.



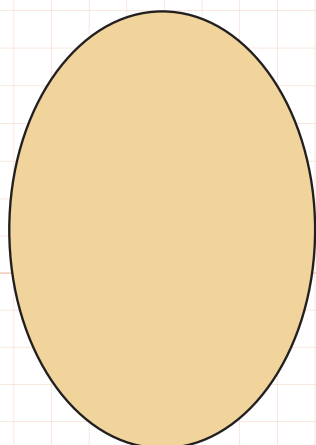
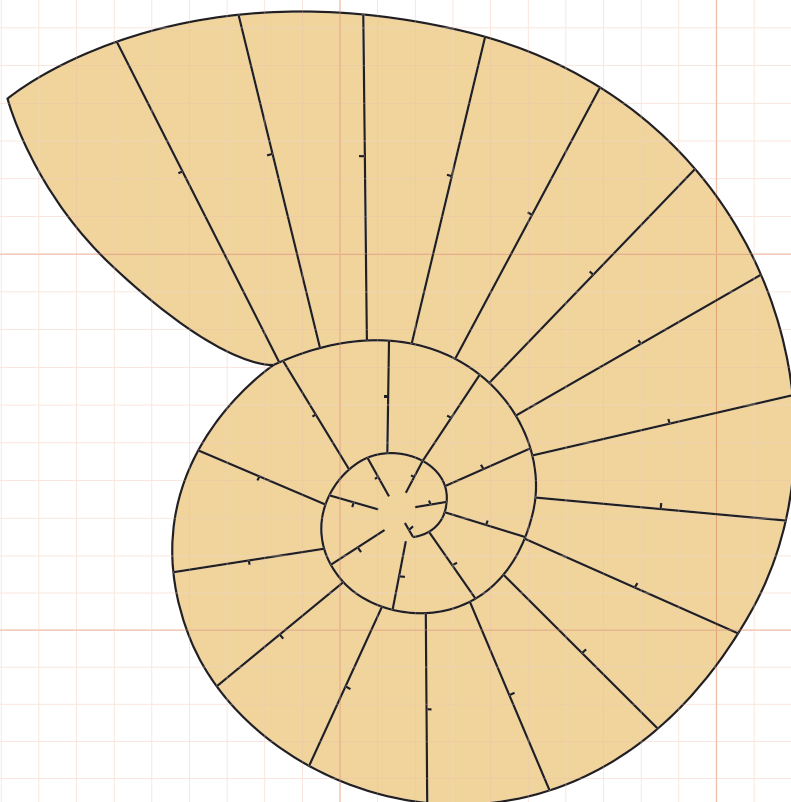
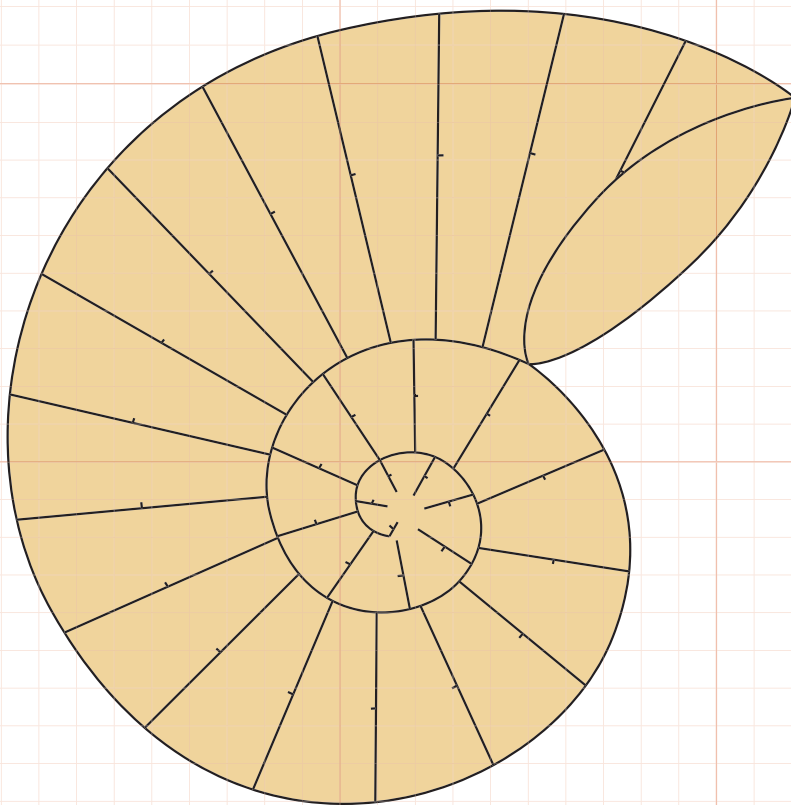
## Things you will need

### Tools:

- Tools – Swiss gouges
- No.2, 10mm
- No.2, 20mm
- No.5, 20mm
- No.7, 14mm
- No.8, 10mm
- No.8, 13mm
- No.9, 7mm
- No.9, 5mm
- No.11, 2mm
- No.11, 3mm
- No.12, 6mm
- No.15, 3mm
- Saw
- Bradawl

### Materials:

- Ammonite: English walnut (*Junglans regia*) – Dimensions: 200 x 180 x 50mm
- Base: Burr elm – Dimensions: 100 x 70 x 25mm
- Boiled linseed oil
- Medium brown wax





**1****2****3****4****5****6****7****8**

**1** Scan or photocopy the scale drawings provided, enlarging them to the correct size for your wood, and print them out on to card to use as templates. Transfer one side on to your block of wood, ensuring that the grain direction is running vertically through the block. Leave an area of 30mm depth at the base to attach to your faceplate. Cut this shape out, carefully following the line into the centre of the spiral. Secure it safely on to your vice. Measure and draw a centreline along the edge.

**2** The first cut to make is along the upper edge of the inner spiral line, carving with the grain, down to the centre position of the curve, as defined by the horizontal pencil line in the example. Then, start at the lowest position and carve up to the horizontal line. Use a no.2, 20mm gouge to do this until you have reached the approximate depth of 5mm. The area next to the spiral should then be gently curved from the middle of the mass down into the spiral.

**3** Continue around to the opposite side, working from the lowest position of the spiral, up to the centre position of the curve and then from the top position down to the centre of the curve, as defined by the vertical and horizontal pencil lines.

**4** Move around to the innermost section of the spiral and repeat the cuts from the upper and lowermost positions across to the horizontal line.

**5** We now turn our attention to the outer edge. Shape this in a gentle curve from the centreline that was made originally on the top edge, around to the middle of the mass, naturally joining up with the depth that you established when carving the inner spiral. Work with the grain, from the horizontal line upwards. At this stage you should notice that all the cuts on this opposite side are made in the exact opposite orientation to the inner edge, but still work with the grain direction.

**6** Before attempting to carve the lower section, the area at the base will need to be carved inwards slightly by following the line with a no.12, 6mm V-tool. At this stage there's no need to work too far in towards the centre as this will be cut with a saw later on.

**7** The no.2, 20mm, can now be used to shape the wood, carving down from both sides to the lowest position of the V-tool cut.

**8** Next, work into the inner spiral from the horizontal lines on both sides up to the vertical line.

#### **TOP TIP:**

As you work around the bandsawn spiral cut, you will find that the wood chips start getting stuck in the spiral and obscuring the view where you are aiming your gouge cuts. Simply slide a small piece of 100 grit sandpaper into the spiral and work this from side to side as you slide it around, clearing out the channel once again.



**9** Then in the opposite direction, from the horizontal lines down to the vertical line. These cuts can be made deeper into the spiral line than the original opposite side if you wish at this stage, but ensure that they are level as the carving develops in step 11.

**10** The final little area at the inner section of the spiral can now be carved, working again from the horizontal lines, both up and down to the vertical lines.

**11** Repeat steps 2-10 until you reach a good visual representation of the real-life ammonite shape. The thickness of the spiral can also be tapered in size as it flows towards the centre. As you continue to form the curvature of the surface to the inside of the spiral, you will notice that the areas where the horizontal lines are drawn become increasingly difficult to carve evenly. When you reach this stage, use a no.5, 20mm, cutting horizontally across the surface into the spiral, to blend the three directional cuts evenly together. The objective when shaping the mass into the inner spiral is to create the visual impression of the curved edge of the ammonite, but not to actually make one side join the other

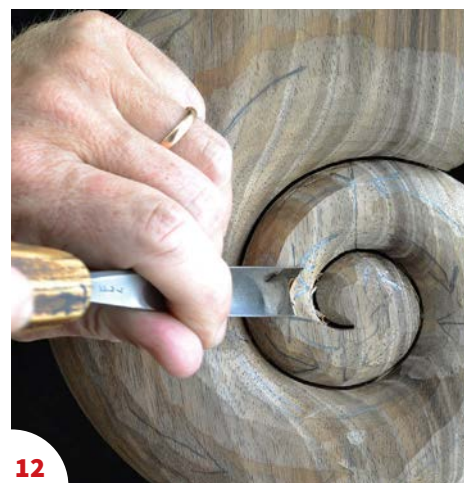
**12** When you work your way around the spiral to the tighter curved inner edges, you will need to swap the no.5, 20mm, for a no.7, 14mm, which is necessary to access this tighter curve.

**13** The contour around the lower edge will now need to be further developed, but will be finished properly when the piece is cut off the base when the rest of the carving and finishing is complete. Measure and mark 15mm outwards from both sides of the centreline on the base. Use a saw to undercut the form on both sides until you reach these marks.

**14** The lower edge can now be curved down into this lowest position. The base can also be pared back slightly to allow the no.2, 20mm, better access to shape this lower area of the form. Your carving should now look like this and can be sanded over with 100 grit to completely remove all tool marks and smooth the depths evenly together.

**15** This next area to be carved is from the design line on the edge of the rear side, over to the design line on the front side. Mark this line on to your wood using your front view template as a reference to help you.

**16** Use the no.5, 20mm gouge to remove this section and to create a slight hollow across this edge. If you wish, there is also the option to further increase the hollow right down inside the ammonite. If you have power-carving equipment, then use a large spherical or conical cutter to work down inside it. If not then use your gouges to cut in as deep as they allow you to go.







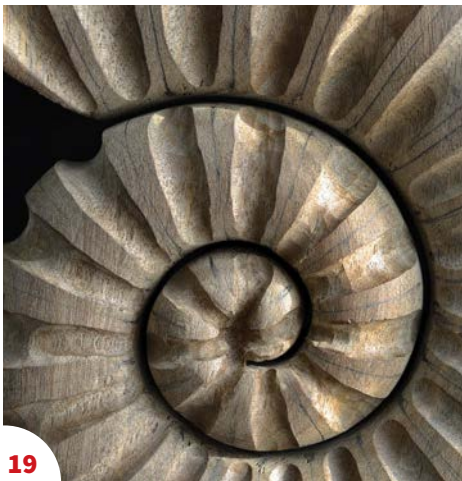
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18

**17** We now move on to the rib-like structure of the anatomical surface texturing, which is fun to do and really brings the piece to life. It requires a range of gouges, which get smaller and more curved as the detail progresses towards the centre of the spiral. Use your templates to help you draw these lines on to your form.

**18** Start with the first section at the top, using a no.8, 13mm gouge to cut a deep channel between each of the sections, stopping 5mm from the line at the outer edge, tapering down to 2-3mm at the position of the inner spiral. As you work around the form, the sections get smaller, so therefore you will need to swap down respectively to a no.8, 10mm, a no.9, 7mm and, finally, a no.9, 5mm. Do this on both sides.



19



20

**19** The centre of the spiral is finished to a concave hollow, which can be achieved by using either rotary burs or the no.9, 5mm gouge and abrasives.

**20** The flat area of each section can now be shaped to form the convex rib between each of the concave channels. Use a no.2, 10mm gouge, holding it upside down, to shape the edge naturally up to the line. Keep your attention on the direction of the grain, and if you experience any tearing as you cut, then simply work in the opposite direction.

#### TOP TIP:

When you are working towards the edges of the spiral, use a mallet to tap gently on the gouge, thus reducing the pressure of the cut and the chance of the tool edge over-running and cutting into the adjacent edge.



21



22

**21** When all of the sections have been carved evenly to the correct depth and shape, sand over the complete form again with 100 grit and then dust it off. Brush or pour hot water over the complete sculpture and leave it to dry, thus raising the grain and allowing the following grit to be worked more easily and effectively. Next, work through grits 150, 240 and 400, removing all of the scratches from each previous grit and repeating the hot-water process in between.

When sanding into awkward areas, it is very effective to use appropriately shaped pieces of wood to brace the sandpaper and access areas that your fingers can't reach properly



23



24

**22** The final details to apply to the form are the grooves along the edge of each of the convex sections. Draw these lines accurately from one side to the other.

**23** Use a no.11, 3mm veiner to cut a deep groove along the length of this line. Then swap to a no.11, 2mm veiner to deepen the initial gouge cut. Finally, use a no.15, 3mm or no.16, 3mm V-tool to sharpen the crease. Work through grits 180, 240 and 400 to smooth the edges of the gouge cuts evenly into the crease.

**24** Your carving should now look like this and can be carefully cut off the base.





**25** The lower edge can now be carved to blend into the concave/convex sections that you previously produced. First, make sure that your form is protected from any damage with some dense foam, and either secured in a vice or clamped firmly to your bench. Then use the same tools and techniques as outlined above to produce these details.

**26** At this stage, some thought must also be given to the position where the carving will be attached to the base, which should be in the very centre of one of these lower ribs. Leave a small space without the detail of the crease so that the attaching screw will not be seen. Use a bradawl to mark this position.

**27** The base for the carving is a very simple elliptical shape, with the edge curved up to the highest position in the centre where the ammonite will be mounted. A 35mm screw was used to mount the ammonite in position on the base, driven directly into the bradawl mark made in step 26.

**28** The example was finished with one thorough application of boiled linseed oil, which beautifully enriched the natural colour of the grain. This was left for a week or so to dry before applying several coats of medium brown wax polish. ▶



**25**



**26**



**27**



**28**





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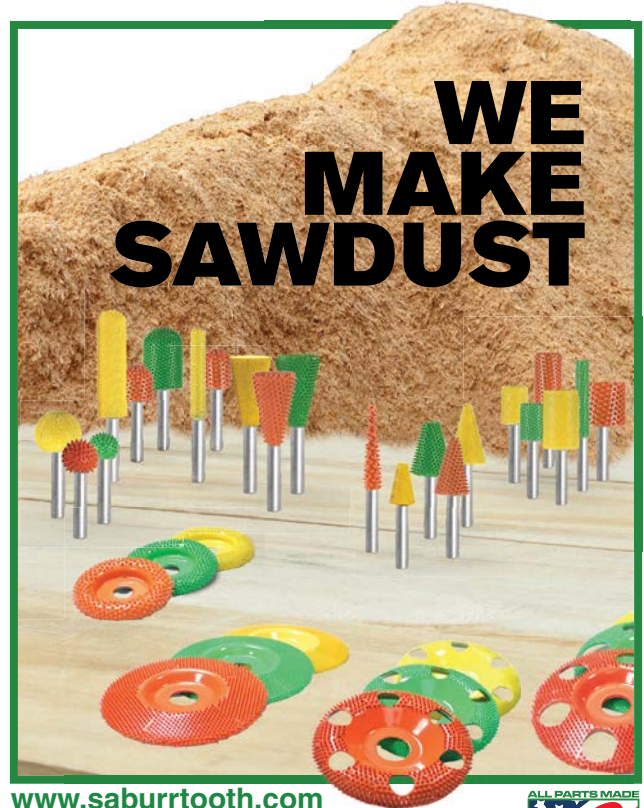
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Palladian-style Marble Hill House encapsulates the elegance of the neo-classical Georgian country house

# Georgian style

Steve Bisco looks at the period styles of the Georgian Age of Elegance

**T**he Georgian era (1714-1830) is so called because it covers the reigns of four successive King Georges, numbered I to IV. It is known as the Age of Enlightenment for the rapid advances in science, exploration and learning, but in the arts and architecture it is also recognised as the Age of Elegance.

Despite the almost constant wars with France and America, and the internal strife of the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, it was a period that produced in Britain the music of Handel, the architecture of Robert Adam, the furniture of Thomas Chippendale, the landscapes of Capability Brown, the pottery of Josiah Wedgwood and the romance of Jane Austen's novels, among many other examples. The Georgian neo-classical country house,

set in its green acres of parkland, is one of the glories of our heritage.

As you would expect in a period of 116 years, there were several different 'Georgian' styles, many of them overlapping or running concurrently. In 1714 when the first George came over from Hanover with his German court, expecting to be murdered in his bed by the British subjects he had inherited under the Act of Succession, the Baroque style with its rich and heavy decoration was in gradual decline. The intellectual and historically accurate Roman classical 'Palladian' style, championed by architect Colen Campbell and the Earl of Burlington, was in the ascendant with its 'orders' of columns, pilasters, pediments and friezes.

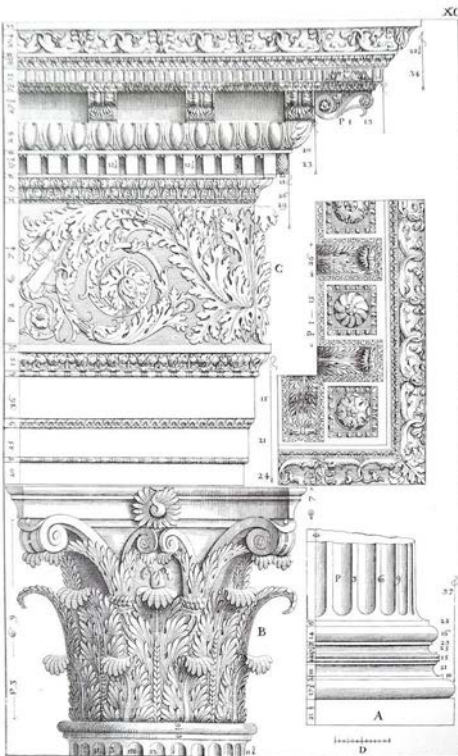


Corinthian columns, with their elaborate capitals, are a mainstay of classical architecture





The author's Grape & Acanthus Garland, from *Woodcarving* 146



Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture* inspired the Palladian style in Georgian Britain

By the 1740s, the 'French taste' – later to be called Rococo – was coming into fashion with its abundance of light, frivolous swirling scrolls and wild lack of symmetry. As a counter-reaction, by the end of the 18th century and into the early 19th, the masculine formality of the Greek Revival style had come to dominate with its more stripped-down classical detail, often used in the new 'reformed' churches.

Running alongside these 'classically-derived' styles was a bit of Chinoiserie (Chinese style), the 18th-century version of Gothick (with a 'K'), a bit of 'Hindoo' (as in Brighton Pavilion), and the simpler but very elegant 'Regency' style of domestic architecture with its verandas, bow windows, shallow roofs and wide eaves. Chippendale's *Director* – Thomas Chippendale's 'mail order catalogue' of furniture designs first

published in 1753 – contained designs in the Classical, Rococo, Gothick and Chinese styles all prevalent at the time.

But it is the 'Palladian' neo-classical style that dominated the Georgian era, named after Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). His architectural source book, *The Four Books of Architecture* (still available today from Dover Publications), contained drawings and measurements of ancient Roman classical architecture. It had been influential in the early 1600s, but when it was published in English in 1738 it profoundly influenced architecture and decoration in the British Isles throughout the Georgian era and beyond.

Running like a thread through all the classical styles, including Baroque and Rococo, was the acanthus swirl. How this unremarkable Mediterranean 'weed' came to be represented in ancient Greece and Rome as a swirling vine clasp capitals and corbels and curling along friezes and entablatures is a mystery as the actual plant bears little resemblance to the stylised form. But it was and still is the dominant feature of classical decoration, especially in woodcarving. On capitals and corbels it is portrayed as a leaf or leaves in something like the form of a real acanthus leaf, but in pierced panels, picture frames, friezes and on chimneypieces it is a series of long spiralling curls that look like they are being sucked into a vortex. A good acanthus swirl is full of 'movement', continuously curling up, down, sideways, in and out with never a straight line or an awkward angle to spoil the flow.

Georgian woodcarvings in every style were nearly always painted in white or pastel colours, and were frequently fully gilded or decorated with gilded highlights known as 'parcel', or partial, gilding. This gave Georgian rooms the lightness and elegance that is so familiar to stately home visitors. Interior designers still emulate it today, and estate agents say that the most sought-after dream home among those who can afford it is a Georgian rectory in an English parish. ■



The real acanthus plant bears only a slight resemblance to the classical acanthus swirl



The author's Georgian-style corbel with parcel-gilding in 23½ carat gold leaf, from *Woodcarving* 104



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# Georgian-style pierced panel

Steve Bisco carves a large Georgian-style pierced panel in Douglas fir



I have designed this project as a fairly large 'pierced' panel based around the classical acanthus swirl, with the addition of overlapping 'ribbons' that were a popular Georgian motif. Piercing – cutting out the background to leave the pattern standing out – plus typical Georgian decoration of white paint and gilded highlights gives it the lightness and elegance we need for a Georgian carving.

In the Georgian era woodcarvers routinely used pine to make large woodcarvings and picture frames. This may seem an odd choice of timber because pine is a softwood with a broad uneven grain and tends to be full of knots and resin pockets. It does not hold fine detail well so it was generally used for large designs with bold shapes rather than intricate detail (with the notable exception of Luke Lightfoot – see *Woodcarving* 151). The main reason for using it would have been that it was cheap and easily available in large boards,

and it is for the same reasons that I have used it for this panel.

The pine used by British carvers was usually Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) but I found this quite difficult to obtain despite it being a common tree, so when I was offered a large board of another member of the pine family, Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), at a cheap price I opted for that instead. Working in softwood imposes some additional demands on the woodcarver used to working in lime or oak, but by taking account of this in the design and with some adjustment to carving methods, a satisfactory result can be achieved.

Because of the larger scale of this carving, for the 'parcel' gilding I have opted for a cheap and easy shabby-chic antique effect using gilding wax instead of gold leaf. You could use imitation gold leaf for a brighter effect – real gold leaf would be very expensive on this scale – or you could also use a good gold lacquer.



## Things you will need

### Tools:

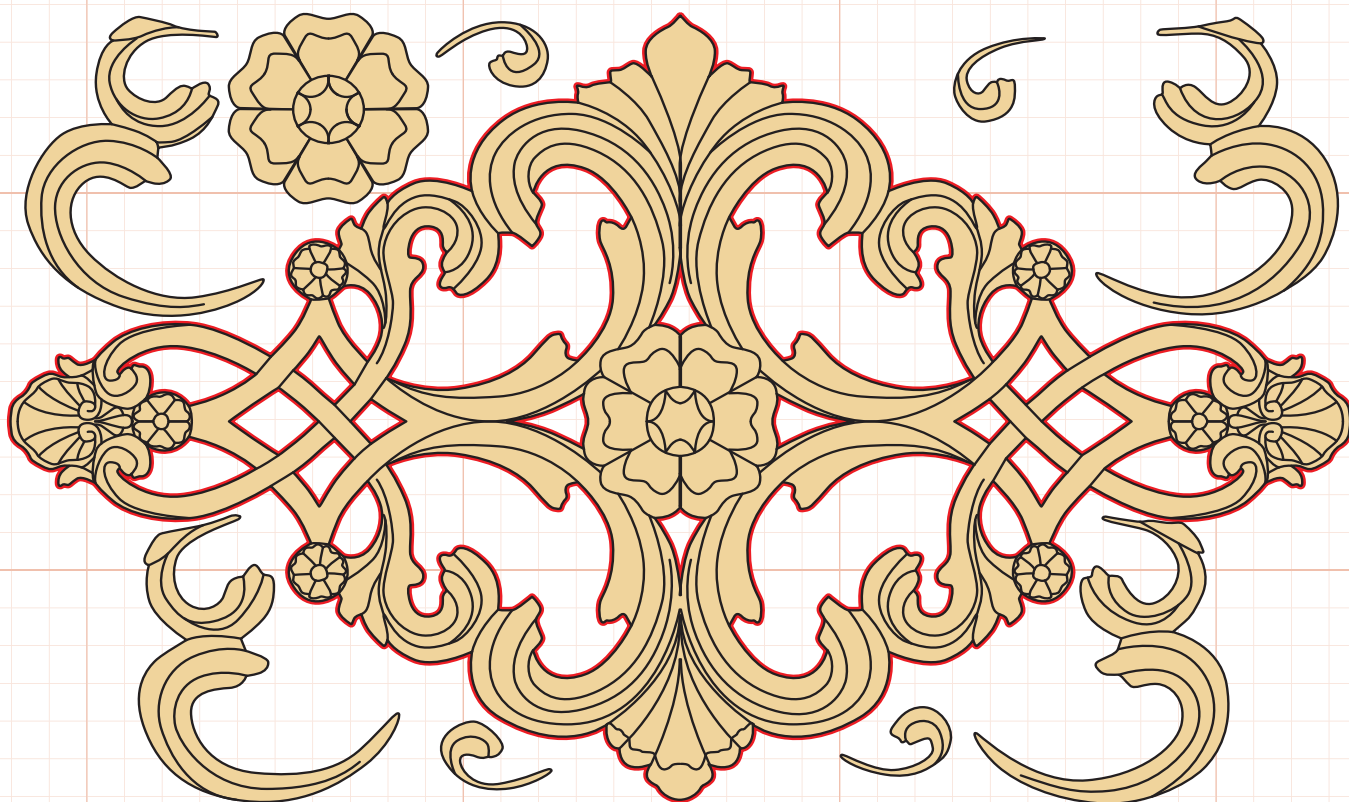
- No.3, 20mm fishtail gouge
- No.3, 10mm fishtail gouge
- No.4, 6mm fishtail gouge
- No.9, 20mm
- No.3, 10mm
- No.8, 8mm
- No.5, 7mm
- No.5, 5mm

- No.9, 16mm curved gouge
- No.5, 13mm curved gouge
- 8mm short bent gouge
- No.8, 8mm curved gouge
- 10mm skewed spoon gouges L&R
- No.39 V tool
- 16mm hooked skew chisel
- 10mm skew chisel

- 3, 6.5mm & 20mm flat chisel
- Padsaw
- Jigsaw,

### Materials:

- Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) 840 x 520 x 25mm
- White matt chalk paint
- Gilding wax

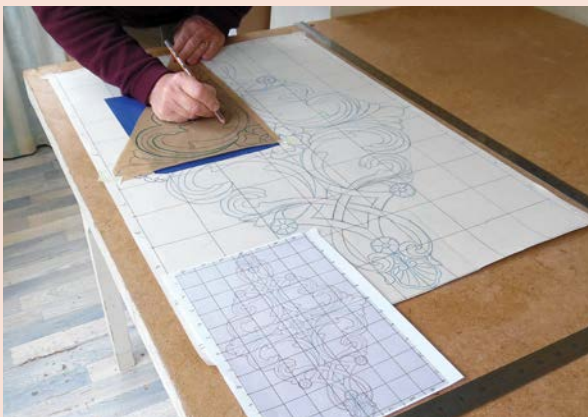


## SCALING-UP A DRAWING

You can make a full-size drawing from a small original with an enlarging photocopier or by printing it out in sections from a computer, but make sure all the sections are at the same scale.

It is often easier and more flexible to do it the old-fashioned way. Print out your small drawing on a single A4 sheet, and get a large sheet of paper – lining wallpaper is good – big enough for the full size of the carving. Mark out the large sheet into a convenient number of squares by drawing vertical and horizontal parallel lines, starting at the boundaries of the full-size carving, then draw the same number of squares on the small sheet, starting and finishing at the same points. Mark grid references along the sides of both sheets. Now draw exactly what you see on the small sheet into the corresponding squares on the large sheet.

As this pattern is symmetrical, apart from the top and bottom of the central 'fan', once you've drawn one quarter you can trace that into the other three quarters. Also trace the add-on sections, shown in the corners of the drawing, into the spare corners of the board with their thin stems aligned along the grain.



## DOUGLAS FIR

Douglas fir is a member of the pine family (*Pinaceae*) and is also called Oregon pine and Columbian pine. It is native to North America but is also grown in Britain, Australasia and parts of Europe. It is a very large conifer that produces good-quality timber, used extensively for making plywood and structural beams, and is generally available in straight-grained long broad planks. The wood varies in colour from white through to yellow and pink. It will split along the grain if cut carelessly, but generally works easily with hand tools, including saws and carving tools. It has a slight blunting effect on tools so they may need sharpening more often. The sawdust can be irritating to the skin and respiratory system so use dust extraction and/or a dust mask. Any extensive sawing or sanding is best done outside.



The Douglas fir is a tall and straight conifer



## Carving softwoods

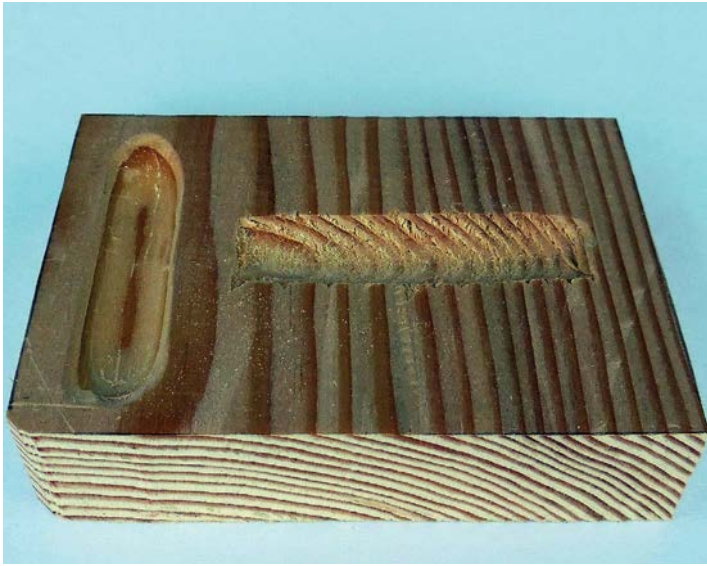
Softwoods are the most common timbers in general use. They are used extensively in the building trade, and they are the timbers we are all familiar with when we go to the home improvement store. But these days they are less-often used by woodcarvers. We generally prefer hardwoods such as lime (*Tilia* spp.) and oak (*Quercus robur*) which, although more expensive and not as widely available as timber (although plentiful as trees) allow us to carve to a finer finish. It is likely, therefore, that you won't have tried carving softwoods such as the pine family, so we need to consider the different

demands that softwoods put on the carver.

The terms 'hardwood' and 'softwood' can be misleading as they relate to the botanical group of trees rather than the actual hardness of the individual woods. In simple terms, all conifer trees are softwoods and all broad-leaved trees are hardwoods (therefore lime is a hardwood even though it is fairly soft).

Conifers are trees that bear their seed in cones, are mostly evergreen, and mainly have thin needle-like leaves. They are grown commercially in vast plantations, mostly in the cooler latitudes of the northern

hemisphere, and are the principle timbers used in the construction industry. They are generally fast growing, but the main spurt of growth is in springtime, creating a very soft 'earlywood', with much slower growth later in the summer, creating a much tougher 'latewood'. This gives a marked difference in the annual rings and therefore the grain, which is bad news for carvers. Although a gouge will usually slip lengthways along the grain without much trouble, when you cut across the grain the hard latewood resists the chisel and crushes the soft earlywood, causing the grain to tear out.



Softwoods like this Douglas fir have a marked difference in grain between 'earlywood' and 'latewood'

To deal with this problem you need to adapt your choice of tools and working methods to suit the material. Multiple light cuts will minimise the tearout to some extent. Skew chisels and gouges, which have their cutting edge ground at an angle to the shaft, can be a great help when cutting across the grain as they slice through it at an angle, reducing the crushing effect of the latewood grain. Straight skew chisels usually have a

bevel on both sides of the cutting edge so they can be used in either direction, but skew gouges, whether straight or spooned, can only cut one way, so you need left and right versions of each. They make a useful addition to your toolkit for softwoods and hardwoods.

Softwoods generally saw and plane well, although knots can be a problem with some pines. Douglas fir gives a good clean edge from a fine jigsaw blade, making it a good



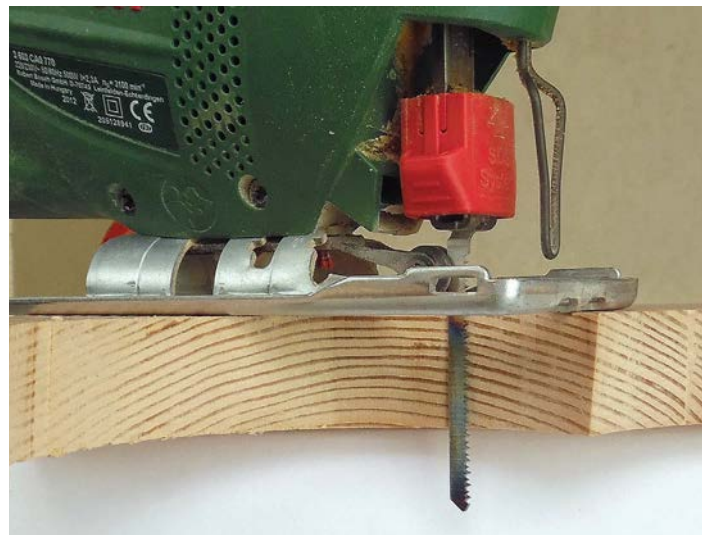
When cutting across the grain, the hard latewood crushes the soft earlywood causing tearout

timber for large pierced carvings. Scots pine was widely used for carving in Georgian times but can be rather knotty and resinous.

Softwoods rarely take fine detail well, so they work best with large, bold designs. You can improve detail carving by coating the wood with sander/sealer before carving the final details. This helps to bind the grain together and stiffen the soft earlywood to reduce tearout. ▶



Skew chisels and gouges can slice through the grain at an angle. Top to bottom: hooked skew chisel, straight skew chisel, right and left curved skew gouges



Douglas fir gives a good clean edge from a fine jigsaw blade



## PREPARATIONS

**1** Get some Douglas fir (*Psuedotsuga menziesii*) to make up a panel 840 x 520 x 25mm. You will almost certainly need to make this up from two or more boards. Make sure the joining edges are straight and clean, and glue them together with a good wood adhesive. Make sure the board is flat and use long cramps to compress the join.

**2** Make a full-sized copy of the drawing (see box) and trace the pattern on to the wood using carbon paper. Check you haven't missed any bits before detaching the tape, and mark your cutting lines in red so you don't get lost with the jigsaw.

**3** Clamp the board to overhang the bench and use a jigsaw with a 5mm blade for the tight turns. Cut out the internal voids, the add-on pieces in the corners of the board and then the outer edges of the pattern. Thin jigsaw blades can snap when they get hot so you may need some spares.

**4** Now glue on the add-on pieces to give extra thickness to the central rose and the outer acanthus swirls using a 'rubbed joint'. Give both surfaces a coating of a good wood adhesive, press the top piece down, 'rub' it back and forth a little to squeeze out the excess glue and air bubbles, and you will feel the joint suck together as you slide it into position.

## CARVING THE ACANTHUS SWIRLS

**5** Lay the carving on a backing board and fix strips of wood to hold it still while working. Start carving by sloping the large add-on acanthus swirls down towards the rose. With all the symmetrical elements, work all four pieces together so you get them all the same.

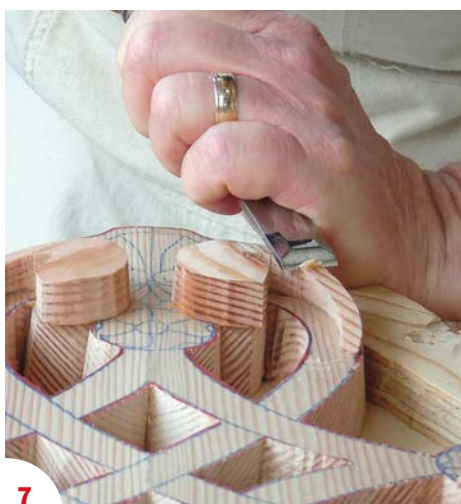
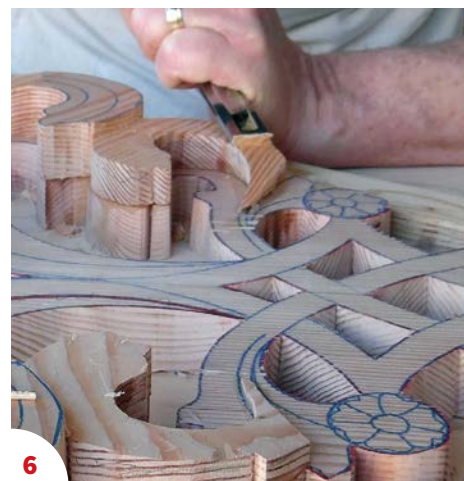
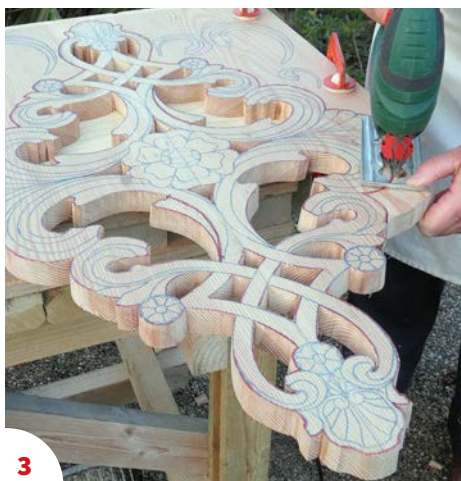
**TOP TIP:** Carving softwood needs sharper tools than hardwood because the soft grain crushes and tears easily, so hone your tools regularly.

**6** Repeat the process on the smaller acanthus next to them, reducing the thickness to 20mm above the main board surface at the highest point and sloping down into the stem.

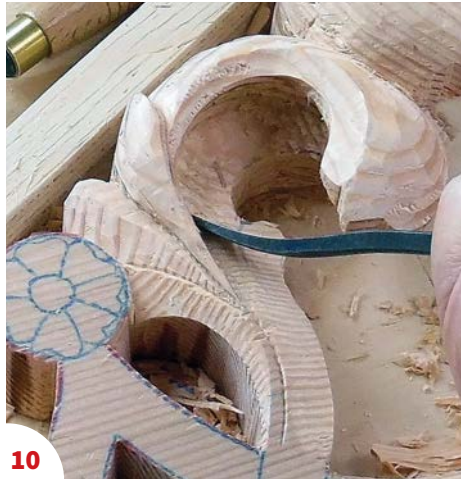
**7** The smallest acanthus swirls at the outer ends can be cut down to 15mm above the main board surface and sloped into the stems.

**8** Now it gets more difficult as we carve the inner surfaces of the large acanthus swirl. This involves undermining the inside of the swirl with curved and spoon gouges. Although this wood is a softwood it seems quite hard when you are cutting across end grain, and it is not easy to get a good finish.

**TOP TIP:** When laminating pieces of wood on to the main board align the grain in a direction that is easier to carve. Also, align the grain at right angles to the main board to add strength to cross-grain weaknesses.






**9**

**10**

**9** It gets a bit easier when you round over the outside of the swirl as the add-on piece has most of the grain aligned along the 'stem' of the swirl, but end grain will still make you sweat on the top curve.

**10** Complete all four of the large swirls and then move on to the adjacent smaller swirls. The process is the same, but there are three small leaves between the swirl and the round flower and all must flow into the ribbon-like stem. Hollowing the acanthus is made easier if you remove the surplus wood on the underside of the ends by turning the carving over.

**11** Finish the acanthus by repeating the same process on the small swirls at the outer ends of the carving. These are hollowed into the lower board so you will need to merge the ribbon stems into the swirls.


**11**

**12**

## **CARVING THE OTHER ELEMENTS**

**12** Mark the overlaps in the ribbons and carve their surfaces so they curve neatly over and under each other, with a 2mm 'step' at the crossing. Make sure they follow through smoothly in line and level. Put a small chamfer on the edges of the ribbon.

**13** Carving the round flowers at the ends of the ribbons is more delicate work with smaller tools, and grain direction can be a problem.

**14** Finish the outer ends by carving the scallop shell. Hollow the shell to a depth of about 6mm, and use a hooked skew chisel to cut vein lines. Again, grain direction is tricky, so try to hollow on the 'downstream' side of each ridge as much as you can.

**15** Now return to the centre to carve the 'fan' of leaves at the top. The pattern runs across the grain, so carve sideways from the centreline and use skew chisels for the cross-grain cuts. The fan slopes downwards between the acanthus leaves.

**16** The bottom 'fan' represents the fronds of the acanthus, which curl upwards at the end. Hollow it quite deeply, and round over the lower end.


**13**

**14**

**15**

**16**

## **DID YOU KNOW**

The large picture and mirror frames you see in Georgian grand houses, with their magnificent gilding and carved decoration, were mostly made in pine. Pine is strong and fairly light, making it useful for large frames. Because of the difficulty of carving the uneven grain to a fine finish, the finished surfaces were covered with gesso – a very fine gypsum powder mixed with rabbit-skin glue. This was built up in many layers to create a very smooth surface for gilding. By applying the real gold leaf on to a layer of wet size (water gilding) and rubbing it with a burnishing tool, a very high gloss could be achieved.



**17** Now it's time to tackle the big rose. First reduce the surface level to 15mm above the main board surface. Now hollow out between the outer petals and the central dome. Reduce the top of the dome 3mm below the height of the outer petals. Use a spoon gouge to hollow under the petals, going down 3mm below the main board surface.

**18** Shape the outer petals so they curl down towards the outer edge and into the underside. Carve the central dome with a smaller ring of petals curving inwards with a hollow centre.

## FINISHING TOUCHES

**19** With each element now carved, turn the carving over on to a padded surface so you can undercut from behind. Make sure each part is supported underneath as you work on it. Carve away the back edges, mainly with a skew chisel to reduce the pressure, so that the edge of the ribbon section appears to be about 13mm thick when viewed from the front, and the acanthus leaves and stems are rounded into the background.

**20** With the shaping finished, refine the details on the acanthus swirls to include several veins running in a curl back from the ends towards the stem. If you give it a coat of sander sealer first it will help to hold the grain together and stiffen the soft parts of the grain.

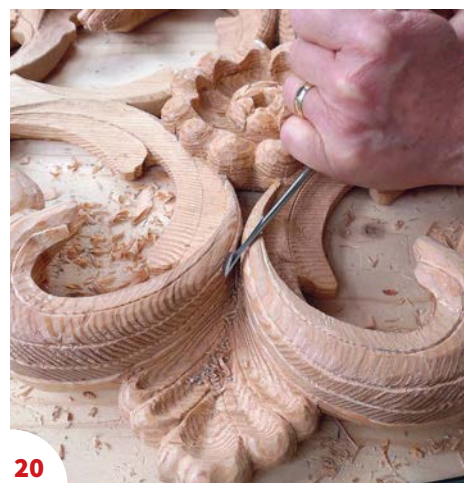
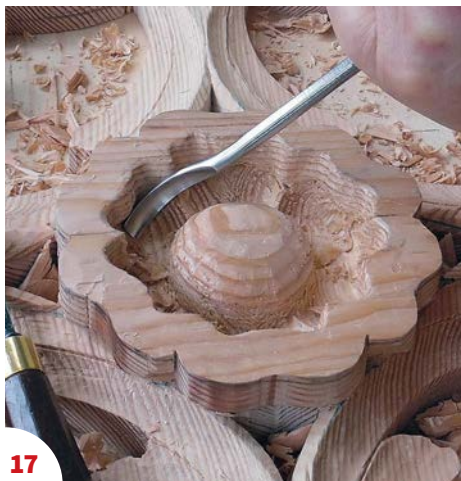
**21** Now give the whole carving a sanding with 120 grit abrasive and it should look like this.

## DECORATING

**22** Georgian carvings were nearly always painted, often with a thick undercoating of gesso to fill the rough grain of pine wood. I used three coats of white chalk paint. This gives a matt finish typically seen on Georgian carvings and plaster mouldings. Paint both sides of the carving to prevent warping.

**23** For the parcel gilding, I used the cheap and simple shabby chic option of gilding wax. You can apply it to the highlighted areas with the end of your finger, and a small stiff brush for narrow crevices. A small pot goes a long way. After the wax has hardened overnight you can buff it up with a cloth to a soft golden shine.

**24** The finished carving ready to be hung. ▶







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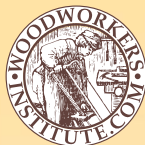
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# End-of-course showcase

Dick Onians reports on the City & Guilds Historic Wood and Stone Carving Department Finalists Show 2017

**I**n late June every year the City & Guilds of London Art School celebrates the students who are completing their courses with a show of their work. Most have taken a three-year Diploma course but some, who have relevant experience, perhaps on a fine art degree course or from working in a closely related trade such as carpentry and joinery or in masonry, take less time.

This year two of the three woodcarvers had trained as woodworkers, the other had done an art course.

I have included work by everyone to show the quality representative of all stages and disciplines covered.

Every student starts the third year of the course with a plan for a major final project. One annual project is to carve the coat of arms of the retiring Prime Warden of the Fishmongers' Livery Company. Many, but not all, of the Livery Companies are now charities, which, besides taking an interest in the standards of their profession, support educational institutions and students.

This year's coat of arms was carved in 150mm thick limewood (*Tilia vulgaris*). Although the heraldic description is fixed,

the actual composition and treatment are the responsibility of the student. The project, apart from a knowledge of heraldry, involved most of the disciplines taught on the course – drawing, clay modelling to work out how a two-dimensional image should appear in 3D, design, carving, gilding and lettering.

The two other woodcarvers had chosen projects which used their skills in joinery. The large 'tabernacle' frame was copied from one in the V&A Museum. Apart from its sheer size, it involved understanding the foreshortening of perspective, the tricky planning, assembly and jointing of the whole. Then the maker had to interpret and carve a multitude of small decorative details, apparently carved originally by different hands, which had to be balanced. This called on all his knowledge and skill.

The 'throne' was copied from photographs of a leather upholstered armchair. The sides, seat and back were practised in clay, carved separately and married together when

finally jointed. The tulip tree, a species of magnolia (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), the wood of which is called whitewood or yellow poplar in the US, carves easily. The greenish heartwood and white sapwood were disguised by staining. The whole piece is very heavy. The upholstery was convincingly represented and was much sat on during the show.

Over the years wood and stone-carving students have been invited to design and carve grotesques for the outside of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. This year two pieces were selected, one an abstract, wave-like form, the other suggested by enlarged photographs of viruses in the wake of the Ebola outbreak in Africa. These will join the work of previous students in a programme of replacement in Syreford stone of decayed Victorian versions of medieval work. The students choose their own contemporary themes which are then vetted by a panel from Windsor for their legibility from some distance below, their appropriateness and their durability.

Two of the stone-carving finalists had studied as postgraduates. One had been a mason in cathedral workshops in Britain. He won an award to study in Rome during his first summer holidays from the

Akira Inman – Medusa arch with marine subjects, limestone





→ school and spent his time there doing many drawings of sculptures. These inspired him to design and carve a large figurative relief in magnesium limestone. The other postgraduate took effectively three years. She produced less classical images, including a composition with two large pillows as well as a carving of a coat, 'Threads', inspired by a family member's experiences in war. Both these major projects and those of the ordinary Diploma students were accompanied, as were the carvings by the woodcarving students, by exercises which developed practical skills as well as observation and design.

The Mascaron is a head which is used

as an architectural feature, in this case as the keystone of an arch. The carver has composed it as of the head of a river god, complete with bulrushes and kingfisher.

The Medusa head as the keystone of an arch with marine associations is the portrait of a friend of the carver but is also the vehicle for hair consisting of serpents. The arch is decorated with sea plants and creatures.

The Telamon, a half-figure growing out of a plinth, is used singly or as one of a pair on opposite sides of a doorway. When assembled from the two blocks of stone it was carved from it was taller than the carver. This one was inspired by various examples on buildings.

All students learn to cut and design lettering, starting with an alphabet in Roman capitals. Having done that, they have great fun experimenting with different letter forms and layouts.

One of the staples of a carver of historic ornament is foliage in both medieval and renaissance and later styles. Figure-carving is not always chosen, but all the students learn modelling and casting the human figure and head as an addition to much life drawing, so when they leave they are equipped to carve a wide variety of themes and have a good repertoire in their portfolios – and in their heads and hands. ▀

**Morgan Arms. A commission for Fishmongers' Hall. Carved, painted and gilded lime wood by Laura Anderson . 840 x 600 x 150mm**



**John Sutcliffe – figurative relief – magnesium limestone. The result of study in museums in Rome – 96 x 56 x 20cm**







LEFT: Hayley Gibbs  
- Telamon - Lavoux  
limestone - 200 x 40 x  
50cms carved in two  
blocks and then joined



Kristy Flood – 'Throne' - tulip tree wood  
1200 x 1000 x 1500mm – carved, painted  
and stained



RIGHT: Mascaron head  
in Portland stone carved  
by Sam Elgar. Note the  
kingfisher with a fish in  
its beak



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# T-8



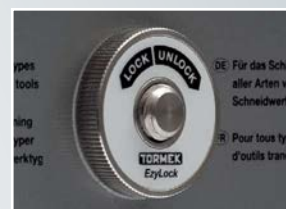
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# Stylised squirrel and acorn

Paul Purnell shows how to carve this fun-to-make stylised creature



**T**he red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) is native to Britain and easily identified by its russet-red fur. Since the introduction of American grey squirrels, its future has been uncertain. An estimation of red squirrels left in Britain is 140,000, with 120,000 of those living in Scotland. The diet of red squirrels includes

seeds, nuts, fungi, shoots and fruits of shrubs and trees, and birds' eggs. Their favourite appears to be pine cones.

The main threats to the survival of the reds are the ever-increasing number of grey squirrels, disease (*Squirrel poxvirus*) passed from the greys, and road traffic. They are also preyed on by birds of prey,

such as goshawks, and the pine marten. Only one in six reach their first birthday.

I chose to use a piece of meranti for the body (*Shorea* spp.). This is a mahogany substitute and a nice, rich reddish-brown colour when treated with a finish. For the acorn, I opted to use boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*). This is a great timber to carve and holds detail.





### Things you will need

#### Tools:

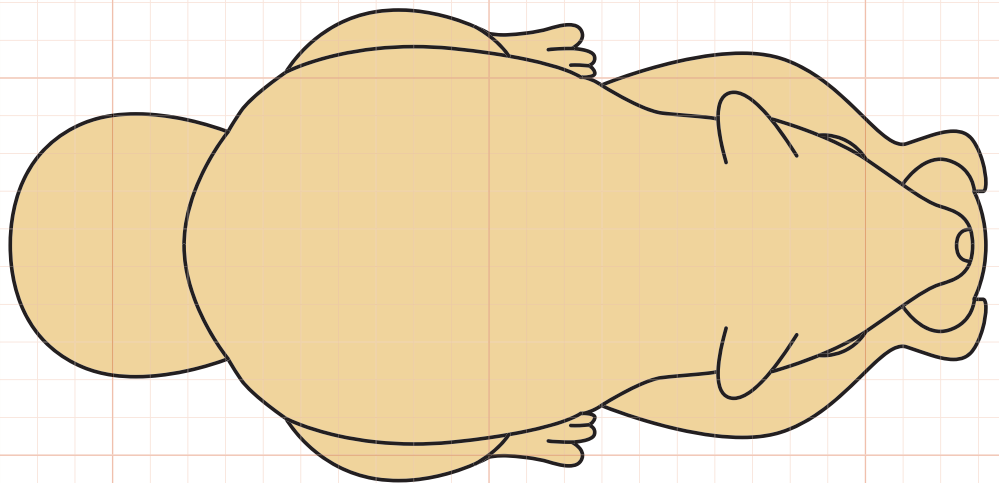
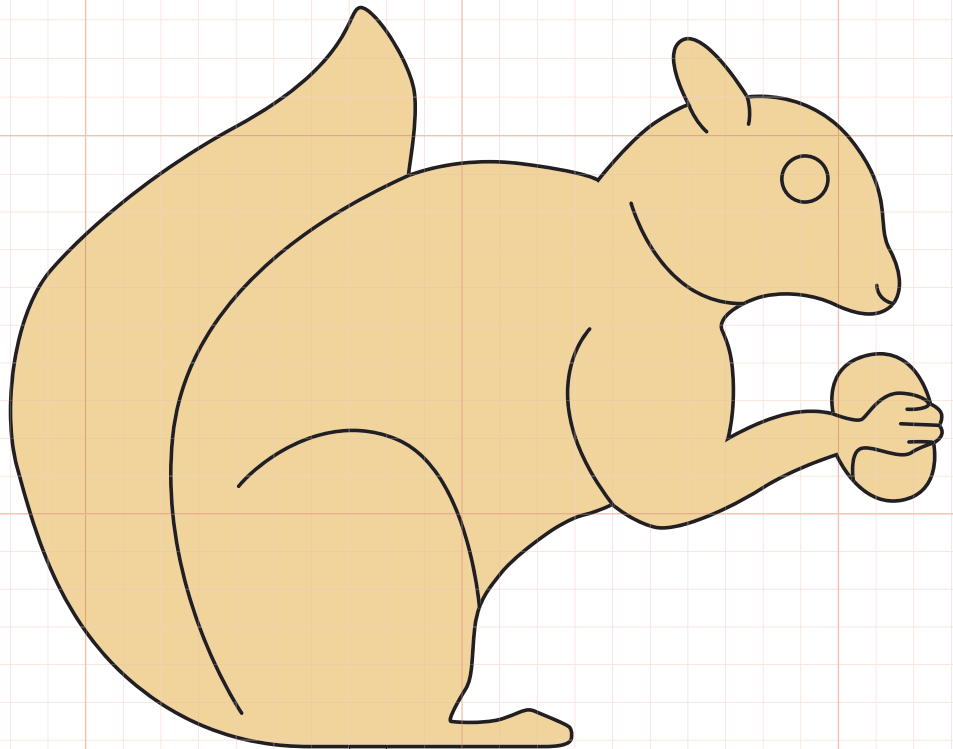
- Bandsaw
- Rotary carving tool
- Coarse and medium burrs
- Selection of diamond burrs
- Fine ruby carver
- Cushioned sanding drum
- Split-mandrel sander
- Sandpaper, 120 through to 400 grit
- Carving knife or scalpel

#### Materials:

- Epoxy putty
- Epoxy glue
- 5mm black eyes

#### Wood

- For squirrel: 125mm long, 105mm high and 60mm width
- For acorn: 23 x 15 x 15mm

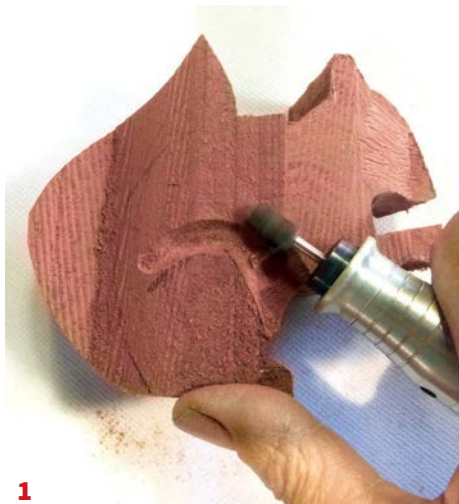


**1** Cut out templates from the drawings. Use them to bandsaw the blank. Have the grain running from front to back. Draw a centreline. Use a bull-nose coarse burr to rough out the side profile. Do not round over at this stage. Rough in the front and rear leg positions.

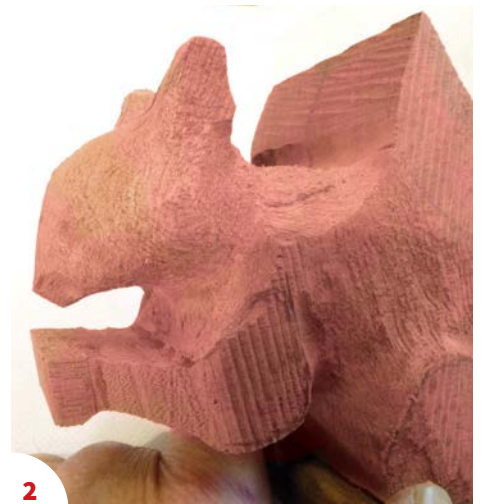
**2** Shape the head with the same burr. Separate the ears – they slant outwards.

#### DID YOU KNOW

Young squirrels are called kittens. They are blind for the first three to four weeks of life and are born without hair or teeth.



**1**

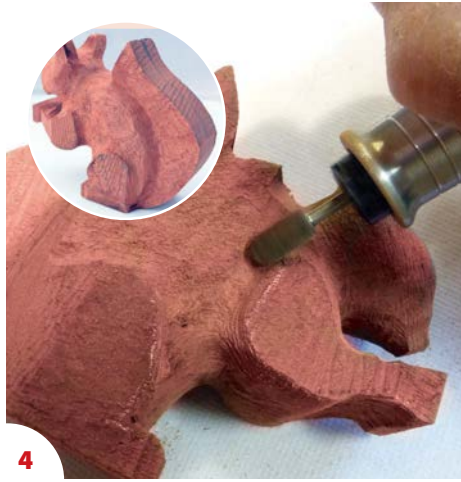


**2**





3



4

**3** Reduce the width of the neck behind the ears up to the tip of the tail by using the coarse burr.

**4** Continue to define the front legs. Draw in the width of the tail and define with the coarse burr. Round over the body either side of the tail and further define the hind legs.

**5** Round over the tail and reduce the width of the tip.

**6** Use a coarse burr to slightly undercut the tail where it meets the top of the body and the tip of the tail. Now, using a medium burr, smooth out the body area just cut.

**7** Start refining the shape of the front and rear legs.



5



6

**8** Roughly sand with 120 grit sandpaper. A cushioned-drum sander works well. If any of the marks are too deep, remove with a medium burr. Now, redraw the centreline.

**9** Use a burr to add definition to the face – outline the cheeks and the nose and flatten the area around the eyes above the cheeks. Draw reference lines 5mm apart on each side of the centreline on the top of the head to assist with the symmetry of your carving. Once you are happy with the shape of the head, sand with 240 grit paper.

**10** Draw the ear positions and carve with a burr. A carving knife is useful for cutting a clean outline. I intended carving these ears much bigger to reflect the tufts, but the cross grain was too fragile. You can hollow out the ears now or, due to fragility, wait until you have almost finished carving the body. Sand with the split-mandrel sander and 240 grit paper.

**11** Locate the eye positions with the help of two pins. Check their position from above as well as the front. Use a flame-shaped fluted cutter to carve the eye socket. The eyes used are 5mm black ones and obtained from craft stores. You could, of course, carve your own. Start by carving the socket under size and use a 3mm ball-ended cutter to enlarge gradually until you achieve an exact fit. The eyes will be fitted with epoxy putty; if the fit is not accurate, the putty will show through.



7



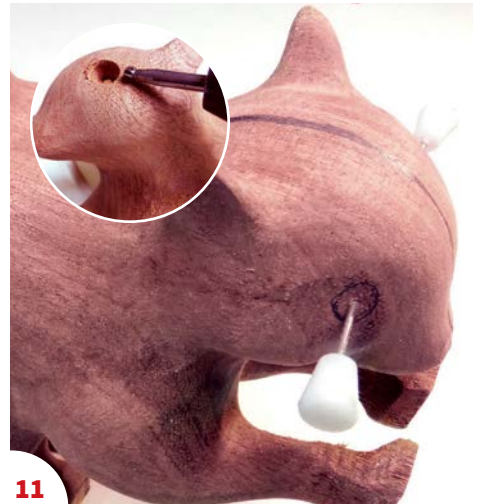
8



9



10



11



**12** Place a stop-cut on each side of the nose with the carving knife down to the rearmost edge. Take out a pip of wood to relieve the nose. Use a diamond burr to round over the hard edges of the snout into the nose. Use the split-mandrel sander with 240 grit to smooth the nose and under the chin.

**13** Draw the shape of the mouth as shown. Run a knife around in the vertical position to place a stop cut, then make a shallow cut to remove a small wedge of wood. Because of the arm position, it's a bit fiddly, but as long as there is an impression of the mouth, it will suffice as the acorn will cover most of it.

**14** Carve the forearm, wrist and hand to the finished size with a medium burr. Use the mandrel sander with 240 grit paper. Shape the facets of the fingers so they appear to wrap around the acorn. Draw on the four fingers of each hand. Sand the chest with 240 grit sandpaper.

**15** Use a fluted ball to shape the hind legs. Carve between them so they stand proud of the body. Sand with 120 grit.

**16** With a diamond flame, carve the hind feet to size and shape. Leave sufficient wood across the front for the toes. Draw on the position of the five toes of the back feet – the outer two are smaller. Separate the toes by taking a V section between them with a scalpel or carving knife. You could use a small V-gouge. Use a flamed ruby burr to round over. Sand with a sanding mandrel loaded with 240 grit abrasive, or by hand.

**17** Carefully cut the claws with a knife or scalpel. Use the ruby burr to round over. If you shape the end of the toes from underneath, it will give a more rounded profile from the front. Return to the front feet and carve the toes using the same process as you did with the rear. The only exceptions are the upper and lower toes, tucked behind the middle ones and partially hidden. This will give a better cup-shape appearance for holding the acorn. Cut the claws with a scalpel. Clean up the inside edge of the front toes with a ruby burr and sand with 240 grit. If you haven't already done so, hollow out the ears with a 3mm fluted ball. The body is now finished. Go over the entire piece again with 240, 320 and 400 grit paper. I prefer to hand sand at this final stage of sanding.

**18** Now you need to carve the acorn. I chose a small piece of boxwood, but most dense, close-grained timbers will work well. I opted for boxwood because it holds fine detail and it provides a nice colour contrast against the red/brown meranti.

**19** Oil both the squirrel and acorn with your choice of finishing oil. I have used a satin finish. When fully dry, fix the eyes with epoxy putty. Glue the acorn in place with epoxy glue and the finished carving will look something like this. ▶



12



13



14



15



16



17



18



19





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Josh Gage's Best of Show winner,  
Cape May Warblers



# International Woodcarvers Congress 2017

Mark Baker showcases some of the work and moments from the 51st International Woodcarvers Congress

**T**his year saw the 51st annual International Woodcarvers Congress, sponsored by the Affiliated Wood Carvers, take place at Jackson County Fairgrounds in Maquoketa, Iowa. The organisers believe it is the longest-running competitively judged woodcarving show in the US.

The event comprises a week of seminars/teaching classes which vary in length from one to five-day courses, according to the class type being undertaken. All are run by respected tutors/carvers in their chosen field.

Seminar instructors for 2017 included: Jim Thalacker, Janet Denton Cordell, Steve Brown, John Engler, Leah Goddard, Dylan Goodson, Josh Guge, Vic Hood, Chris Howard, Adina Denton Huckins, Denny Neubauer, Linda Langenberg Curtis, Michele Parsons, Bruce Shostak, Sandy Smith, Mary & Jimmie Earl McKinzie and Greg Wirtz.

In addition to the courses there is a competition featuring more than 100 categories. This is judged by a team of three judges who are rotated yearly to provide a different flavour and viewpoint.

The many categories include: relief or in-the-round; large and small carvings; impressionistic; life-like; caricature; animal; human figure; human head; bird; aquatic; mythical or religious; hand, power and chip carved or created using a chainsaw. In addition, all entries are also broken down into age groups.

The categories also cover items which are all the entrant's own work, made from a rough-out or are instructor assisted.

The list above is by no means exhaustive, but it does show that this is an inclusive competition which gives



Knife carving tutorial

as wide a scope as possible for people to find a category that suits them.

The completion pieces are on display to the event attendees and open to view by the public for three days too.

One of the special features of the congress is the critique sessions by two judges. These sessions exist to help people understand what judges are looking for in competition entries

and also for them to ask questions to help them understand how to improve, seek pointers on what to do and what not to do and how to present work.

Dates for next year's International Woodcarvers Congress are: 9-17 June 2018.

For further information about the Affiliated Wood Carvers and The International Woodcarvers Congress go to: [www.awcltd.org](http://www.awcltd.org)







ABOVE: A friend to Lucien, by Rick Harney. Best of Show 2nd runner-up



LEFT: Fish carving class

RIGHT: Bill Bonstein's award-winning Ezra





Gold Fishy by Don Lund, winner  
of the Judges' Choice award



Julio Martinez was awarded  
the Maurice Vander Walle  
Memorial award for his  
piece entitled Field Mouse







Labor of Love by Sue Orth was given the Flexcut Creativity award



Best of group winner, Watching the Storm – instructor-assisted category by Whitey Hershberger



Special award-winner Otter Bowl by John C Sharp



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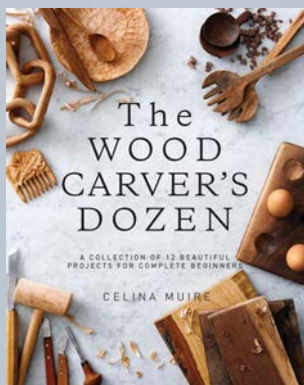


# Chain Plant Holder

In this abridged extract from *The Wood Carver's Dozen*, Celina Muire shows how to create a chain

**C**arving a chain is a serious challenge, and while this practical project can serve as a small shelf, its true purpose is to impress your houseguests with your savvy woodworking skills.

*'This carving was made from American sycamore, which is light in colour with dark red "freckles". This hardwood has grain and texture similar to maple'*



## Book offer

### *The Wood Carver's Dozen*

Celina Muire provides simple step-by-step tutorials to guide you through the creation of 12 unique and charming hand-carved projects, suitable for people of any level of expertise.

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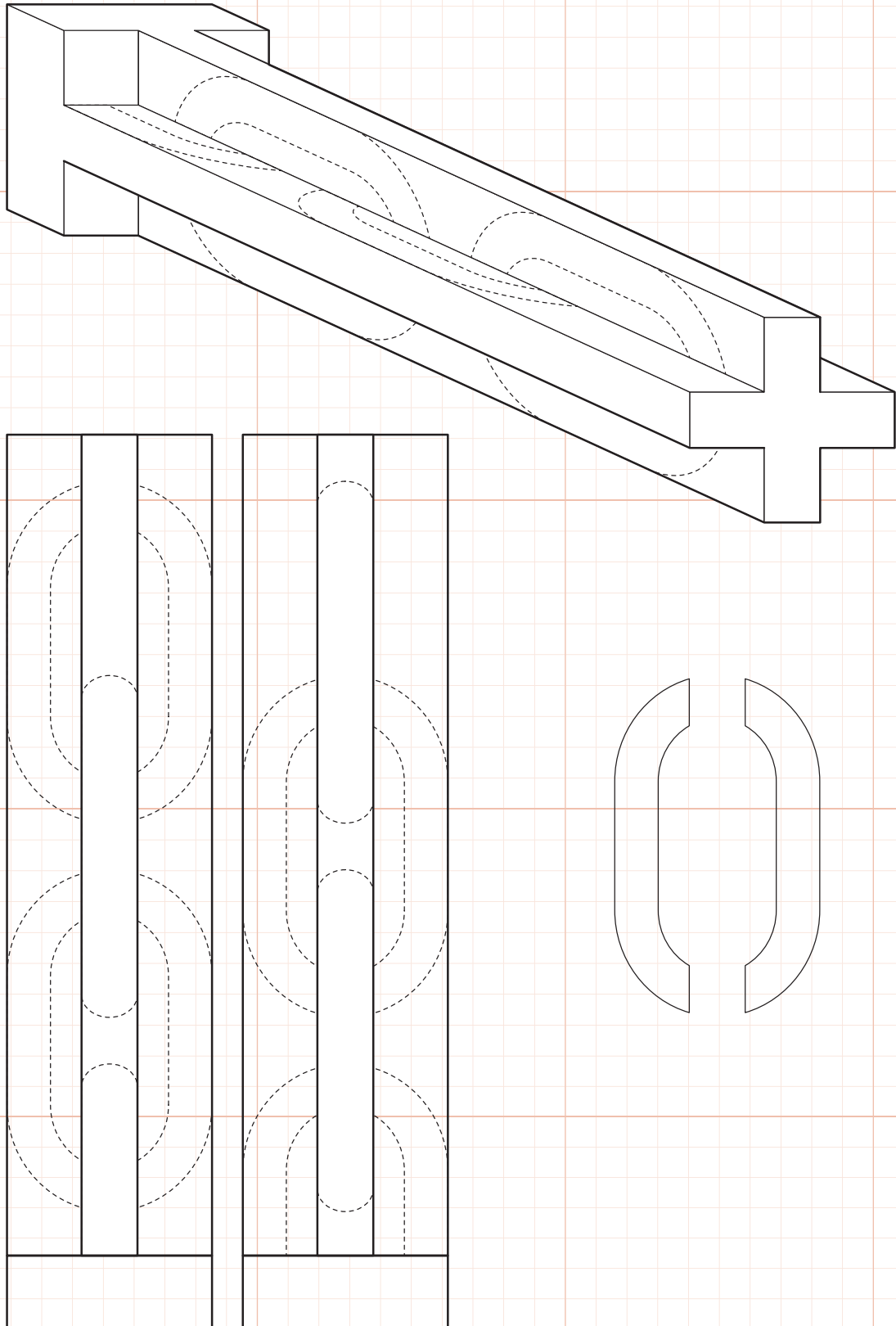
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**Things you will need**

- Softwood or hardwood: 30 x 7.5cm and 7.5cm thick; American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) was used here
- Pencil
- Clamps
- Mallet
- No.8, 18mm
- No.9, 5mm palm gouge,
- No.1s, 16mm double-bevel skew chisel

- Basic chip carving knife and/or no.6 chip carving knife
- Drill and 6mm and 5mm drill bits
- Bandsaw or handsaw
- Sandpaper: coarse (60-100 grit), medium (120-150 grit) and fine (220 grit)
- Polyurethane, stain or finishing oil: mineral oil was used here
- Lint-free cloth for finishing oil, or foam brush or paintbrush for polyurethane or stain







## Preparing the wood

**1** Use a pencil to mark a 2.5cm (1in) wide strip running along the centre of each face of the wood. Carry these lines across the end grain of the wood, so that each end of the block is divided into nine squares, forming a 2.5cm (1in) wide cross in the middle. Measure 2.5cm (1in) up from the bottom and draw a line around the block. This will form the shelf.

**2** Clamp the wood to the table. Use a no.8 gouge and mallet to take out the corners along the length of the wood as far as the marked shelf line. The chips should be long and thin.

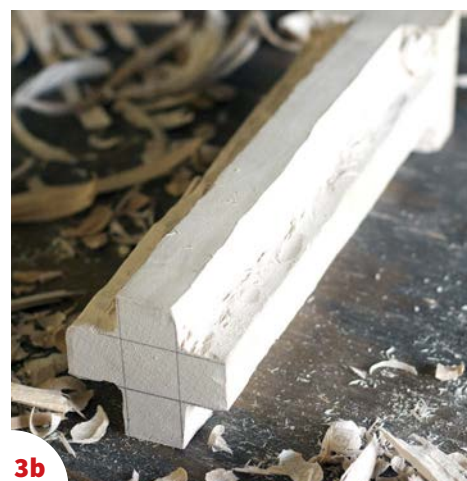
**3** Line up a chisel on one of the marked lines running along the face of the wood and use the mallet to apply force to the blade. This will give you a straighter cut into the wood. Continue using a combination of the gouge and chisel to 'cut out' the cross shape. Remember to leave the shelf area intact.

**4** Use the templates to sketch the chain links on to the cross of wood. The wood will now be a roughly-cut 3D cross (with a shelf at one end) instead of a flat surface, so directly transferring a drawing of the complete chain would be tricky. You should therefore use the templates merely as a guide for how to sketch the outline of each link on to the wood. You can cut out the half-link template and place it on to the wood in the required positions to trace, or sketch out the links freehand in a similar fashion. Make sure that you draw the 'edge view' of the links on the outside edges of the cross, and the 'side view' of the links in the cutout corners. Each link is roughly 10cm (4in) long and 7.5cm (3in) wide. Note that the curved ends of the links should not be touching, so leave at least 2cm (¾in) between them. You should be able to fit three full links, plus a half-link, just below the shelf.

**5** Use a bandsaw or handsaw to cut out wedges of wood at the curved ends of the links. The overall shape of the links should now be much clearer.



3a



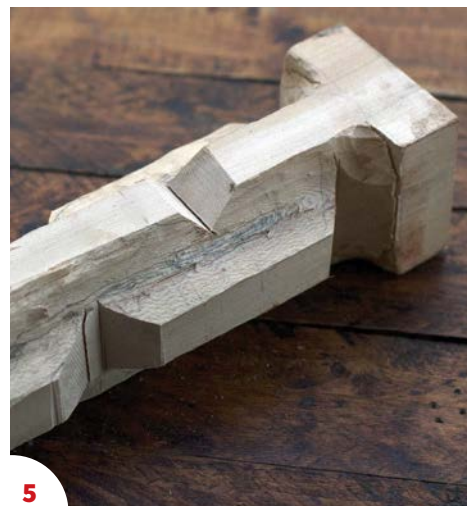
3b



4a

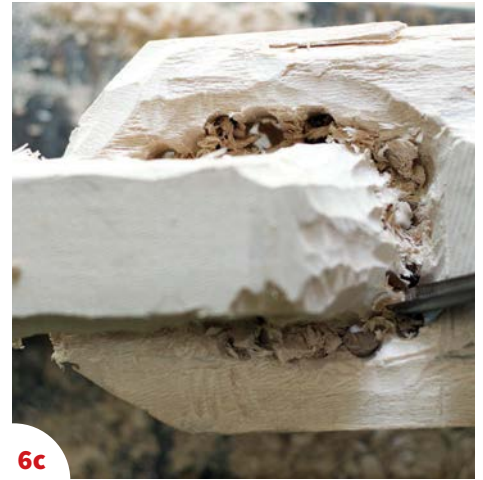


4b



5



**6a****6b****6c****6d****7**

### Carving the links

**6** Use the shelf area to clamp the wood to the table. Reposition and reclamp the wood as necessary as you carve around each link. Working on one link at a time, use a 6mm bit to drill a few holes where the link needs to be separated from its neighbours. The holes serve as guides for where you need to carve away the wood. Use a no.9 palm gouge to remove the rest of the wood, working all the way around the link until the wood has been separated before moving on to the next link.

**7** Continue using the palm gouge to separate all the links. Starting out with thick links is advantageous when you have to carve tight areas—you can always make the links thinner, but you cannot add more wood once it has been carved away.

**8****9**

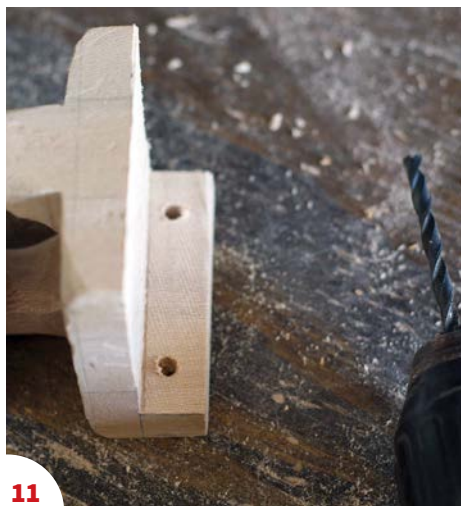
**8** Use a chip carving knife to clean up the inner and outer areas of the links. All major signs of the palm gouge should disappear.

### Sanding

**9** Starting with 60 grit sandpaper, sand all of the links. Round out the corners and edges of each link. Continue sanding, moving up through the grits; I used 80, 150 and 220 grit.

### Making the shelf

**10** Choose which side will form the back of the shelf that affixes to the wall. Measure 13mm (½in) from the end of the block and mark a line around the front and both sides of the shelf. Measure 13mm (½in) from the back of the shelf and mark this point across the end grain and two sides of the shelf.

**10****11**

**11** Use a bandsaw or handsaw to cut out the marked area to leave an L-shaped shelf. Use a 5mm bit to drill two holes to serve as nail holes for hanging the chain on a wall.

### Finishing

Finish sanding the entire chain and shelf with 220 grit sandpaper. Remove all dust and apply the finish of your choice. I used mineral oil. ■





The clear shape of the cut using a No.9 gouge

# Deep-fluted gouge

Peter Benson explores the No.9 gouge and its uses

**T**he No.9 gouge is the highest numbered basic gouge having the smallest radius curve. Remember that all the gouges will scribe a circle if twisted end on in a piece of wood and the No.9 is therefore the deepest of these. You may be a bit confused by the fact that there are also No.10 and No.11 sweeps. These, technically, are not gouges, they are No.9s with extended sides, the No.11 longer than the No.10. Anything smaller than, I believe, 6mm is referred to as a veiner and anything larger is a fluter. I have been unable to find a definitive size where these change but that is my understanding. I would be happy to know if this is right or not.

## Shape of cut

In effect what all this means is that you can cut a semi-circular channel at different depths without damaging the sides of the trough that is formed. For the purposes of this article I will deal with all three sweeps as the basic pattern



These tools, from the left, are a No.9, a No.10 and a No.11 (note the subtle difference in the sweep). The one on the right is a special with longer extensions to the sides to cut even deeper into the wood

of the cut is the same and the uses are similar.

In my opinion these are the most versatile of all woodcarving tools as they can be used in so many ways with differing results.

Whether you choose a 10 in preference to the other two or an 11 or 9 is simply

a matter of personal choice. Most new carvers seem to choose a No.9 as there is no doubt that it is easier to sharpen and hone than the other two but it is usually not long before a veiner of some size or other finds its way into the toolbox.



## Cutting holes

If you are carving in the round a no.9 is great for making holes and getting into deep cavities. It can be twisted and poked into the most inaccessible spaces with abandon and without the damage that a tool of lesser curve is bound to cause. I must admit that I use my no.9s more than any other tool at all stages of my carving. They can take out small amounts of wood with shallow cuts or substantial amounts if used with more gusto.



A no.9 makes great holes if you don't wish to use a drill

## Delicacy and strength

Where these tools really come into their own is in relief carving. All three sweeps are invaluable for going round the outside of the lines to establish a channel or stop cut before actually cutting to the line. Numbers 10 or 11 will give progressively deeper channels. This is so much better than going along the lines with a chisel or gouge as it avoids the damage and splitting that so often result from this practice.

Even when there is a lot of waste to remove, these are the tools for the job. So often a flat or shallow gouge is used to try to create a flat background when you can more easily get between the elements of your relief, working in all directions, without the risk of hacking off a necessary piece of detail with the stray corner of a shallower tool. Admittedly the surface will inevitably have a rippled finish, but this is easier to remedy than a surface with tears in it. Numbers 10 and 11 will do exactly the same thing but you can go even deeper if you wish. Also, by turning these tools on to the side you have a total change in how they work – near the bottom of the sweep you have a shallow gouge while you have almost a flat chisel when you get nearer to the corners of the cutting edge. By twisting the tools one way or the other you have, in effect, several tools in one. All number nine gouges can be very effective when used upside down as well.

## Honing

As with all the tools that I have mentioned the most important thing to remember is that they must remain honed to keep them sharp. You need to get into the habit of giving each tool that you use a light honing every half an hour or so of use. This is not always easy with tools that have a deep sweep to the cutting edge and many carvers work these tools too long, making honing a problem. In my opinion, the best way to deal with the three tools covered



A no. 9 removing only a little wood creating a shallow cut



A no.9 used for roughing out shallow cuts will leave a rippled effect that can be smoothed out later. No damage is done to the surrounding surface



The same tool producing a very deep roughing out cut



An ideal tool for working around eyes

in this article is to hone on a rotating rag wheel – it is easy and fast. If you don't have this or don't wish to use power, then cut a groove with each tool into the surface of a piece of MDF and drag the tool backwards through this groove. You don't need any compound as the MDF is very abrasive in itself. That said, you can use some if you want to. When the groove becomes glazed or shiny, simply cut another groove. This method will work for every tool in your toolbox.

## Carving tools

To sum up, of all the tools that I have covered, which you add to your toolbox is very much a matter of personal choice and what sort of carving you wish to carry out. I have found that most novices tend to choose the flatter, smaller gouges when, probably, they would find things much easier if they chose deeper gouges, whether small or large. This way they can remove a lot of waste when they feel fresh and, once they feel tired, they can reduce the amount removed without having to change tools.

I think every toolbox should contain a fairly large no.6 for roughing out, A no.3

or 4 about 12-15 mm, a no.9 around 6mm, a no.10 or 11 3-5mm and a 60° V tool around 6mm. If you want a sixth tool I would choose a fishtail, probably a 6mm no.3 and change the earlier 12-15mm tool to a no.4 or 5. This selection would cover most simple projects and you could always add extra tools as you find you need them.

I hope this series has been of some help, but remember that any sentiments expressed are very much my personal point of view and may well be disagreed with by other carvers. Talk to as many carvers as you can – take on board what you feel is useful and reject what you don't want.

Carving is a continuous learning process and anyone who tells you that a particular way of doing something is right and another wrong probably has never really thought about what he or she is doing or why it is being done that way. We are all, thankfully, very different and approach things in different ways with varying success.

Don't be afraid to experiment or make mistakes – just remember to work safely. That is how we learn.

Enjoy your carving. ▮



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# 20 top tips for carving lovespoons

Dave Westerns shares his must-know tips for carving better lovespoons



**A**s with other carving disciplines, lovespoon carving can be as simple or as difficult as you want it to be. It's important to keep in mind that, traditionally, a lovespoon was a visual statement of passion and ability, so the goal of the maker was always to put the best foot forward. No matter whether your design will be straightforward and basic, or packed with complex nuances, you'll want to make the best job of it. While the following list is by no means comprehensive, it does contain a number of tips that will help you through the various stages of lovespoon carving and will help you avoid some common pitfalls and areas of difficulty.

I have broken the tips into 'sections', with each focusing on a particular aspect of the lovespoon carving process as it progresses from design through to finishing. There are tips here for all levels of carving ability, and it is my hope that, no matter your proficiency, you'll find a few that are helpful and which save you both time and aggravation.

## Design

**1** Although it is possible to sketch out a lovespoon directly on the workpiece or to carve 'on the fly', you'll inevitably find that taking time to consider what you want to achieve is time well spent. Think about how big you want the spoon to be, the style you'd like it to be, what you want it to 'say', then sketch out some ideas and work out the bugs with cheap pencils and paper before committing to expensive pieces of wood.







**2** While sketching, make certain you address weak spots and areas of technical difficulty before proceeding further. Endeavor to support your carving as much as possible and avoid frail areas that can be easily broken. Because lovespoons are often handled, you will need to keep delicate areas such as leaves and vines well protected. It might be possible to carve extremely fragile details, but there is no guarantee they will survive being handled by rougher hands. Try to anticipate areas which might be at risk of breakage ahead of time.

**3** Ask yourself if you can carve your design with the tools you have to hand and with the skills you possess. You are better to undertake a more modest design if you are limited in your tool range or if you aren't quite ready for more advanced carving techniques. By all means accept a challenge, but be careful not to take on something that will demoralise or potentially defeat you. Lovespoon carving should be a pleasure, not a war.

## Wood



**4** I'm often asked whether it is better to use wet wood or dry for lovespoon carving and my answer is always a resounding: 'It depends.' Carving wet wood allows you to make use of timbers which become notoriously tough as they dry. It enables you to carve quickly, to use a more limited range of tools and to more easily leave a 'from the tool' finish. However, with the larger size of lovespoon designs (especially those using the broader panel style of handle) the potential for wood movement and checking becomes a major issue. My personal compromise is to use dry wood for broader and more complex carvings and wet wood when I am using difficult timbers and carving more straightforward designs. Overall, my recommendation would be to stick with drier and more stable wood, especially if your carving will be broader and if it will have solid areas mixed with fretted areas.

**5** (Right) Give careful consideration to the type of wood you wish to use for your carving. Softwoods are easily and quickly carved, while hardwoods generally take better detail and are more resilient. The amount of figure in the wood can also have a profound effect. More figure usually makes for harder carving (due to the wood's tendency to have 'roey' or clashing grain) but results in a more vivid piece when the finish is applied. Quieter, more homogenous grain (such as that found in lime wood) makes for easier and more predictable carving but is visually less dramatic.





## Roughing Out



**6** Beginner lovespoon carvers will inevitably carve their initial spoons from flat, thin timber. As they gain experience, however, they may be inclined to carve curved neck stems and to contour the handle. Leaving the back flat while carving the curves, domes and concavities on to the front face is probably the safest course of action when you begin complex shaping of the handle/stem area. Maintaining a flat back allows the piece to be easily clamped, keeps it stable while carving and retains structural strength for as long as possible.



**7** If the front of the spoon has been contoured in any way, it will be important that it is well supported when working on the back face. I like to use some old carpet underlay (which is soft but not unduly thick) to protect the carved face as it lies on the workbench. I also make use of a variety of shims in different thicknesses to form a cradle the spoon can fit in. This prevents areas from going unsupported and becoming a hazard for pressure breakages.

## Shaping



**8** If you are undertaking a fretted design, but lack access to a scroll, jewelers, or coping saw, a drill can help remove a large volume of wood quickly and easily. Use a variety of drill sizes to clear as much stock as possible before cleaning the fretted area with a straight knife.



**9** Adding contoured surfaces to your carving introduces some visual drama and a certain level of sophistication not found on straight spoons. Follow the grain as much as possible to retain as much structural strength as possible. A swan-neck stem will add physical and visual depth to your carving, but requires the carving be undertaken with thicker stock.

## The bowl

**10** The bowl is probably the most overlooked feature of a lovespoon, yet its bearing on the outcome of a design cannot be overstated. An elegant, slender bowl with fair dimensions and a uniform lip brings refinement to the lovespoon. Thick, chunky bowls with broad lips are generally the sign of a machine-made spoon or of a carver who lacks either the patience or the confidence to finish the bowl properly.







**11** The deepest part of the spoon bowl invariably causes grief as the grain changes direction abruptly and can tear up easily. Resist the urge to keep chasing it as this leads to deeper and deeper cutting and you run the risk of breaking through the back of the bowl. Make increasingly shallow cuts instead, and if you are unable to achieve a smooth surface, switch to a curved scraper or abrasive papers to finish. Burnishing the bowl may also help deal with small inconsistencies.

**12** When carving the back surface of the bowl, use chamfered sections to maintain a fair and uniform sweep to the compound curves. Begin with a single large chamfer and then subdivide it twice. Subdivide the new sections into progressively narrower sections, which give the bowl a 'rounder' shape. When it becomes impossible to subdivide any further, use a broad knife or straight chisel to clean away the remaining facets and leave a smooth, rounded surface.

## Carving tricks



**14** Avoid the urge to cut deeply on your first pass around the design, especially if you have knotwork or designs which require rigorous regimentation. If you keep your cuts shallow and make a mistake, you stand a better chance of having enough material remaining to bail you out of trouble.



**13** I like to glue a photocopied image of the design directly to my workpiece to save time and maintain accuracy. I also keep several extra copies on hand to help as the spoon is carved and the original plan is lost. If you are carving curves or deep areas in busy parts of the design, it can be handy to cut a small section from an extra photocopy and re-glue it to the section you are working on, which is a system much quicker and more accurate than hand drawing.



**15** When cutting a repetitious pattern such as flower petals or the chip-carved spirals, follow the pattern away from yourself and avoid bringing it toward you. This way, you will always be cutting toward solid wood and not toward wood which has been structurally weakened. This pays great dividends if you have a knife or chisel slip and you don't have to worry about knocking thin edges off.



**Avoiding breakage**

**16** Leave any connections between fragile sections until the last possible moment before separating. The longer weak areas are exposed, the greater the likelihood they will get broken. If you planned ahead, most fragile areas should have some type of support, but occasionally it is fun to live on the edge and push the limits a bit. Just be aware that fragility and elegance come with plenty of danger.



**17** Be careful not to stress fragile areas when you hold or clamp the spoon. It is very easy to lose track of how much force is being generated by a poorly placed grip, especially as the carving progresses and the options of where to hold or clamp diminish. Keeping a small tube of good-quality cyanoacrylate glue on hand can be a project saver if something does snap.

**Finishing**

**18** As the spoon nears completion, there will inevitably be those little sections that remain a bit rough or fuzzy. Although the temptation may be to reach straight for the abrasive paper, many times a small, shaped scraper or needle file will do a better, cleaner job. Scrapers and files are the forgotten tools of the woodcarver, but they are useful, highly efficient tools which can save you a good deal of time and money.



**19** I often make use of fine cloth-backed abrasive to help me smooth awkward curves or stubborn figured woods. Pulled under the thumb, these abrasives will fair a faceted curve in moments or will take down roey grain that is resisting knife cutting. Avoid using anything coarser than 150 grit and always endeavor to sand with the grain as sanding cross-grain will leave scratches that are a nightmare to remove.



**20** After a couple of coats of oil, I generally wet sand the final coat using 600-1000 grit wet/dry sanding paper. Be careful to sand lightly as the goal is simply to smooth any raised grain and get rid of any surface blemishes such as dust etc. Sanding with too much force can take you through your oil finish and into raw wood, leaving the surface patchy. The goal is a nice satin sheen and a silky-smooth feel to the touch. ▀



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# THE DIARY

## of a student woodcarver

William Barsley talks about his preparations for the final year of his course, plus a special visit to the Art School by mastercarvers and conservators from Tokyo University of the Arts



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**T**he last year of any course is an exciting time in a student's life, often culminating in a final project that really tests the skills and lessons that have (hopefully) been learned over the previous two years. On the Historic Carving Diploma, we are given the opportunity to spend up to nine months on a single piece or series of carvings that we have either copied directly, tailored to suit our interests, or designed ourselves. This final year of the course is assessed and counts towards our final diploma, with moderation by external examiners who are also experts in carving. Where the first two years were guided by the course syllabus, the final year is largely based on our own creativity and ability to put into practice the skills we've acquired in drawing, modelling, carving, gilding and historical research. See Dick Onians' article in this magazine for a brilliant write-up of last year's degree show.

By the time this article is published, I will be fully into the swing of my own final year. Right now, however, I am putting the finishing touches to my project designs and

clay models. It was quite a difficult decision choosing what to carve. I had a huge list of things that I would love to carve one day, but deciding which to focus on for the final year project proved quite the challenge.

### THE ROLY-POLY BIRD

For the final year project, students are often encouraged to take on commissions in order to gain valuable experience in dealing with clients and working to a set timescale. It just so happened that, through the work I've been doing for the Royal College of Arms, I was contacted by the grandson of Roald Dahl to ask if I could carve his new family crest. Honoured to be asked, I happily accepted and decided to take on the commission as one of my final year carvings.

The family crest is the Roly-Poly Bird that appears throughout a few of the Roald Dahl books, such as *The Twits* and *The Enormous Crocodile*. It is described in the books as an African bird of paradise, and is a colourful character that often flies in just in time to save the day.

Masa Suzuki  
the Art School  
Carving Fellow







### ORNAMENTAL MIRROR

This piece is what I like to call my 'passion' project, and is something I've wanted to carve for years. Growing up in the Kent countryside, I've always been inspired by the surrounding landscape, with old woodlands and apple orchards right on our doorstep. The project is still in the design stage at this moment, but my dream is to capture the essence of Kent in a large circular mirror, carved in high relief and most likely in sweet chestnut or European walnut.

### Lettering project

Alongside the two main projects, we also undertake an exciting final year lettering piece. Whereas in the first two years of the course we focused upon traditional capital and lowercase lettering, helping us to get to grips with the rules of letter carving, in the third year we are free to explore our own interests in letter forms, whether this be through scroll work, ornamental letters or pierced lettering etc. A really exciting prospect and one I can't wait to explore.

### JAPANESE MASTERCARVERS AND CONSERVATORS

During the end of my second year, the Art School invited three mastercarvers and conservators from the Tokyo University of Arts to visit and give demonstrations and lectures about their work. The visit from the Master Carvers and Conservators of Tokyo University of the Arts was funded by the Daiwa Anglo Japanese Foundation; the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and the Toshiba Foundation.

Professor Yabuuchi Satoshi, head of the Sculpture Conservation Research Lab at Tokyo University of Arts, is an exceptional carver with a huge wealth of knowledge on historic carving methods in Japan. Dr Kojima Hisanori and Lee Pin-yi also gave great demonstrations of traditional carving, gilding and conservation methods and, over the course of the week, Kojima showed us the unique process of carving a Buddha statue. The skill and precision of his cuts was incredible to witness and, as I found during my carving travels in Asia (www.

**RIGHT:** Clay model of the Roly-Poly Bird – new crest design of Roald Dahl's family, almost finished and ready to carve



**LEFT:** The Roly-Poly Bird Crest, designed by the Royal College of Arms

**BELOW:** Dr Kojima Hisanori demonstrating the technique of hollowing out the carving



carvingcountries.com), the common method of carving while seated on the floor was fascinating to see.

As we were amazed by the sharpness of his chisels, Kojima kindly gave us an invaluable lesson in sharpening our tools on Japanese water stones – quite different to the oil stones most of us currently use.

It was an inspiring week learning from such highly skilled craftspeople, and a great way to open our eyes to carving traditions in other countries. It was an honour to have them visit us at the Art School.

Next time, I describe the start of my final year and talk about some of the challenges I might face when embarking on a full-time career as a professional carver. ▶





Dr Kojima Hisanori's incredible Buddha carving expanded to see the sections

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Japanese carvers often hollow out their sculptures once they have finished carving them. It is highly skilled technique whereby they split the carving along the grain of the wood, ensuring it can fit together again. The primary reason for this is to stop the wood from splitting over time.



Dr Kojima Hisanori's Buddha carving



Lee Pin Yi's work with mineral pigments



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# Going deeper into chip carving

Murray Taylor takes you through four types of chip carving cuts and on to carving borders

In this article I would like to take you in depth through the carving of two, three, four and six-cut chips, designing and drawing border patterns, their setting out and use in projects. Learning these are fundamental to being able to create a wide array of geometric patterns. I know that everyone wants to get on and carve attractive and useful pieces but I cannot stress enough the need to keep your tools sharp and practice. Use wood from your scrap box that would otherwise be of little use, and spend as much time as you can perfecting the cuts. If a chip comes out cleanly one in three times, keep going – it will become two out of three and then three out of three. It's a great feeling to know you have reached a proficient level of chip carving.

When you practice the two-cut chips let your wrist flow with the curve just like drawing and be careful with the four-cut chips – they can be a little trickier.

By now I hope you have gathered the tools and drawing instruments you require in a suitable box. You will find that a cantilever fishing tackle box is a very convenient answer to the problem.

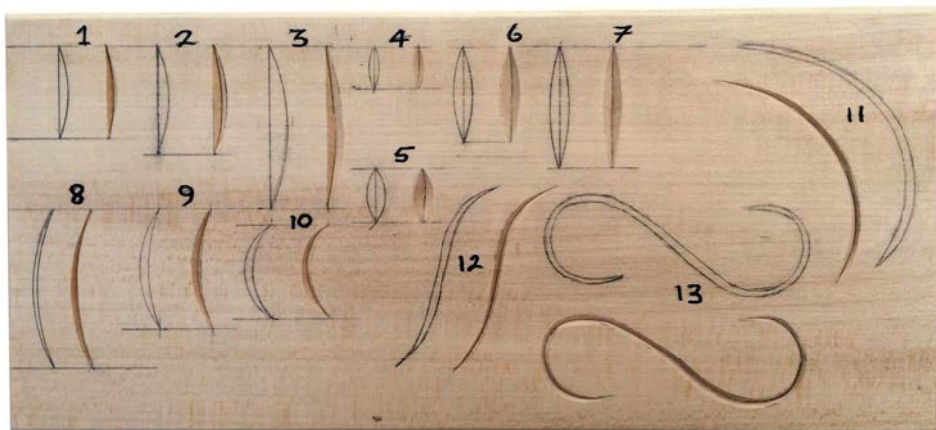
Try to read books on chip carving. I particularly recommend all titles by Wayne Barton. They are easily found online under his name on popular book-selling sites.

## A FEW CHIP CARVING TIPS:

- If the chips are not popping out easily, your knife angle is probably wrong or you are not going deep enough.
- Make sure you are carving in a position that is comfortable for you.
- Good lighting is a must.
- Don't carve when you are tired – that's when mistakes happen.



## The two-cut chip

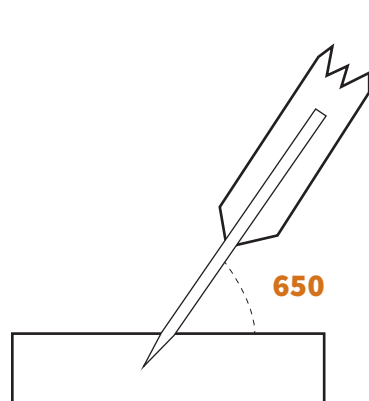


Sample board of two-cut chips

As most of the original books on chip carving were from Germany, Switzerland and Austria – although chip carving was done in other countries too – it is not surprising, therefore, that we come across the nomenclature of chip carving in German.

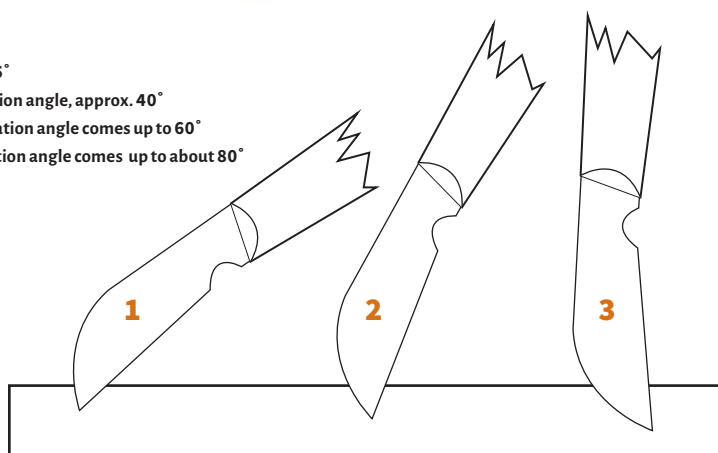
The first thing we are going to look at is the 'zweischnitt', or two-cut chip, it is used in borders, rosettes, panels and free-form designs.

The two-cut chip, as the name implies, is a chip removed from the wood using only two cuts with the knife, but it can vary considerably in its style and complexity.



Front view

FRONT VIEW: Blade enters at 65°  
SIDE VIEW: 1) normal presentation angle, approx. 40°  
2) for gentle curves, the presentation angle comes up to 60°  
3) for acute curves, the presentation angle comes up to about 80°



Side view



Cutting a shallow curve



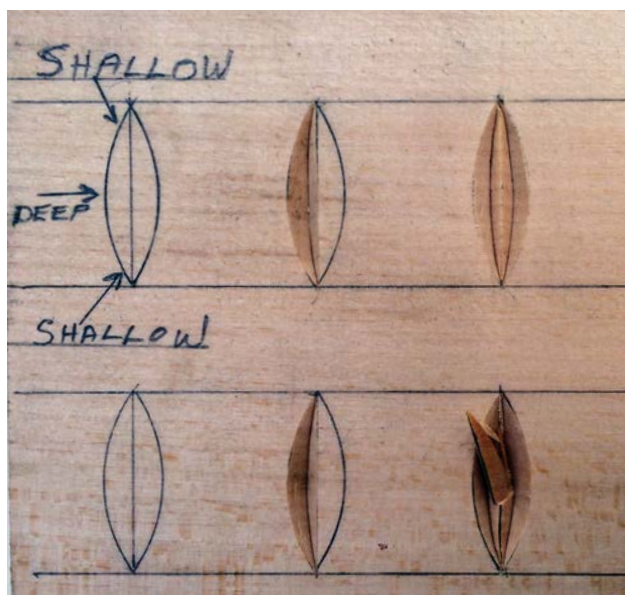
Cutting a sharp curve

As you can see from the sample board, the two-cut chip can be as simple as a D-shaped geometrical design involving one straight and one curved cut and lead on to many complex cuts used in free-form work.

One of the first problems encountered in chip carving is the cutting of tight curves. As you know, the blade enters the wood at an angle of 65°, but the angle at which we present the knife to the wood changes as we encounter the tighter curves. I think that a simple diagram may be easier to understand than a long explanation.

As you can see from the side view of the knife, the presentation angle alters as the curve gets tighter. This means that less of the surface area of the blade is in contact with the wood and, consequently, there is less drag as the blade follows the curve.

When you are cutting D-shaped chips it is better to make the straight cut first and try to get the curved cut to join up neatly at the corners. This is done by starting with a shallow cut, deepening towards the middle and then shallowing out again towards the end of the cut. It is very important to understand this principle as it becomes more important when you cut adjacent D-shapes. If your cut is too deep at the beginning and end of the cut you will lose the central ridge.



TOP ROW: Cutting adjacent D-shaped chips

BOTTOM ROW: The curved cut is too deep and the ridge is lost



A simple spoon decorated with two-cut chips



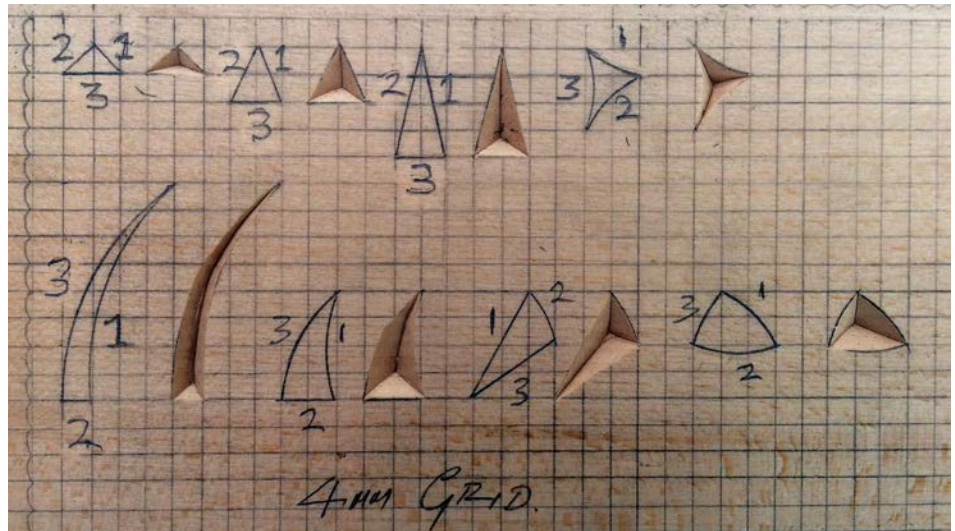
## The three-cut chip

Now we move on to the 'dreischnitt' or three-cut chip. This can be a simple triangle or any other three-sided shape as shown on the sample board. The three-cut chips on the sample board are laid out on a 4mm grid (to give you an idea of chip sizes). You will need to practice these chips until they come out cleanly and neatly each time. Please remember not to try to prise them out, you will damage the knife. When drawing the curved sides of some chips it is not always possible to use a compass, so a collection of various drawing aids may come in useful.

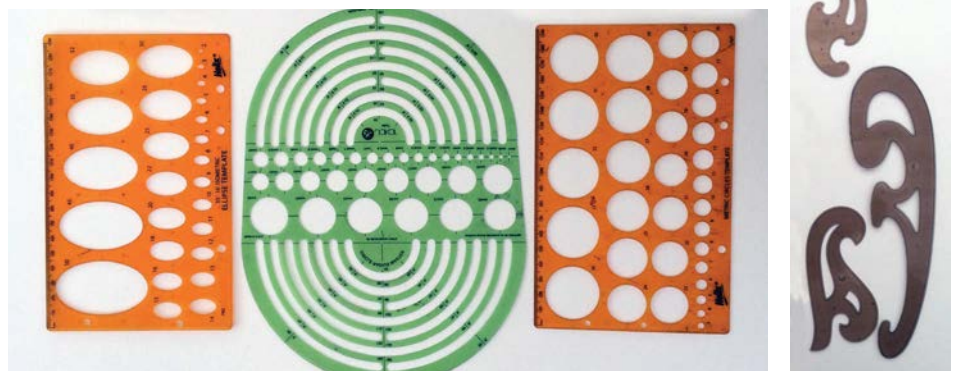
**TOP TIP:** When you need to draw small curves a collection of different-sized washers is a useful addition to your tool box.



A selection of washers of assorted sizes



The sides of the chips cut can be straight, convex, concave or any combination of the three. The numbers indicate the order in which you make the cuts



A selection of drawing aids, French curves, circular and oval stencils

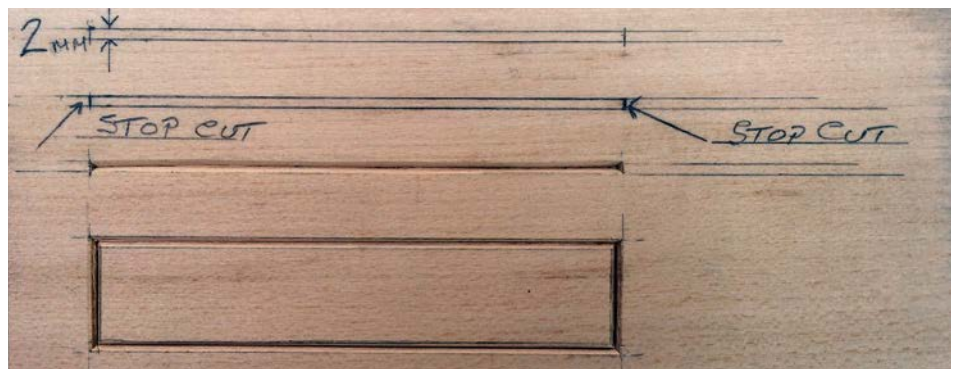
## The four-cut chip

The 'vierschnitt', or four-cut chip, starts with a straight line used in borders and panels. It appears to be very simple, consisting of two stop cuts and two longitudinal cuts. It does, however, seem to cause a lot of problems for beginners.

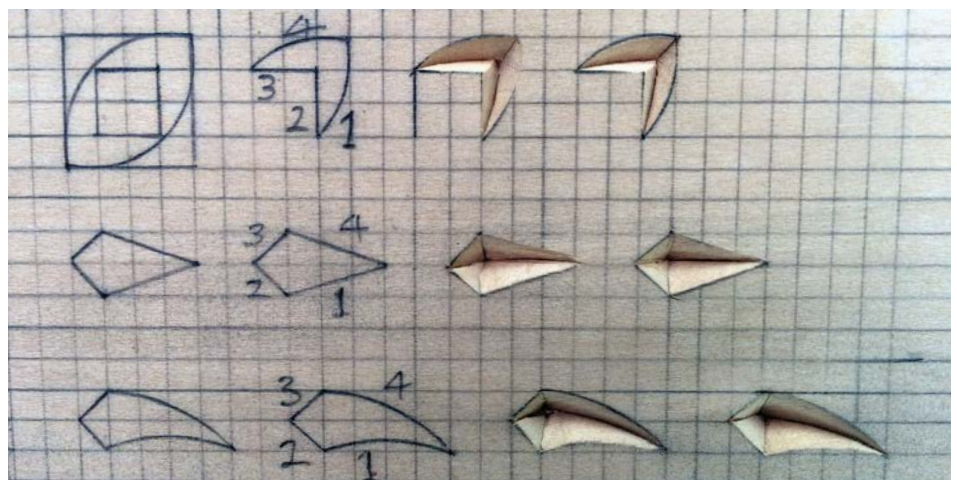
The secret of cutting the long straight lines is to look at where the knife is going, not where it has been. It does take a lot of practice but it is worth it in the end.

There is a school of thought that says it is easier to use a craft knife and a steel rule to cut straight lines. I do not subscribe to this method and mention it only for safety reasons. If you do try this method it is essential that you wear a slash-proof glove on the hand holding the steel rule as the knife can slip and cause nasty injuries.

The four-cut chips can be a little tricky at first so it is important to visualise the shape of the chip you are trying to remove and the position of the knife point in relation to the shape of the chip. Remember to make the cuts shallower where the lines meet so that you don't over-cut and leave ugly scars within the chip. I know I have said this before, but the only secret to success is to keep your knife sharp and practice.



Straight lines formed using four-cut chips



A selection of four-cut chips drawn on a 4mm grid, for you to copy the shapes. The numbers indicate the order in which you make the cuts



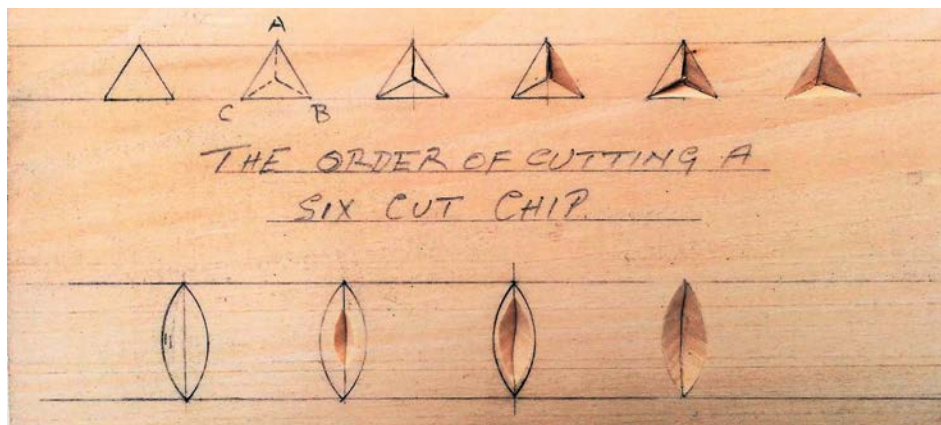
## The six-cut chip

Now we move on to the 'sechsschnitt', or six-cut chip. This is not a new shape but rather a method of cutting out a larger three-cut chip.

The chip is divided as shown and a cut is made from the centre to each corner at A, B and C, then from A to B, B to C and C to A.

**TOP TIP:** If a petal-shaped chip is too large to get out easily you can do it in stages.

Cutting a six-cut chip and the cut sequence for cutting a large petal



## Basic borders

It is now time to put what we have learnt so far into practice – the drawing and laying out of decorative borders.

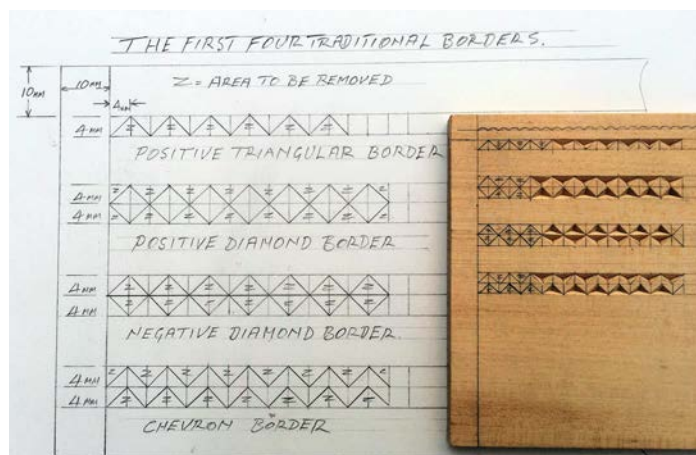
The first four borders are very traditional and are shown in the drawing, which I have made larger for clarity. After you have practised these basic patterns you can move on to the variations shown in the drawing and hopefully start to think up some variations of your own.

**JUST A THOUGHT:** By now you should have made a lot of practice cuts, so please remember to strop your knife regularly.

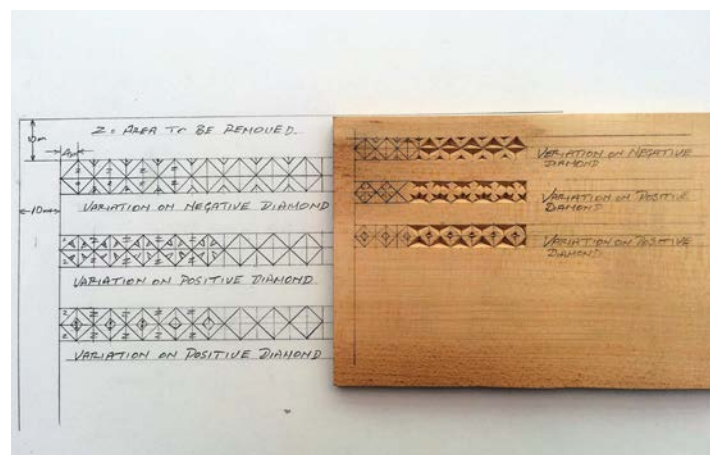
Now we can move on to borders using curves. This is where

your collection of washers will come in useful. The horizontal parallel lines are drawn 4mm apart but you will notice that I have not given a measurement for the divisions between the elements of the designs, it is usually between 3-4cm but it will depend upon what you are using to draw your curves.

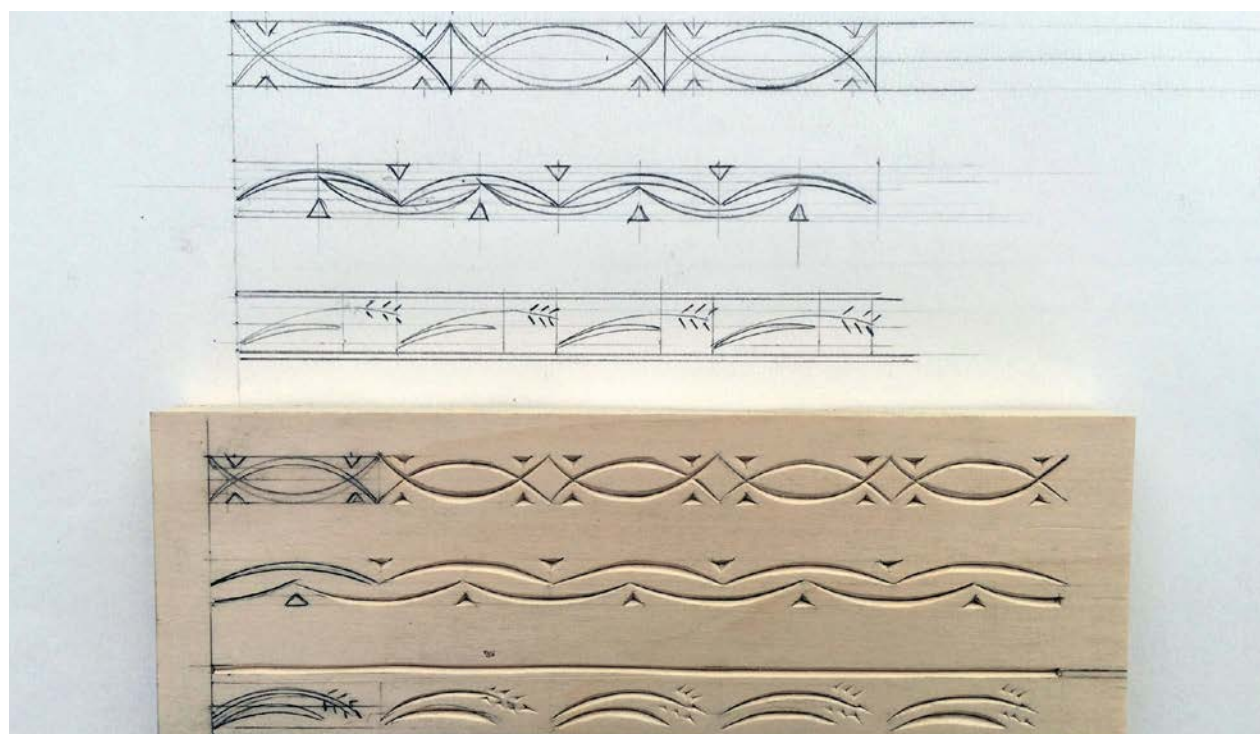
There is no limit to the various borders you can design – they can be geometrical or inspired by nature; they should, if possible, be related to the subject they are bordering. A petal motif around a flower design or a rope design around an anchor motif, for example.



The first four border patterns drawn to a larger scale for clarity, but carved on a 4mm grid. The scalloped line along the top shows the use of the 4mm template



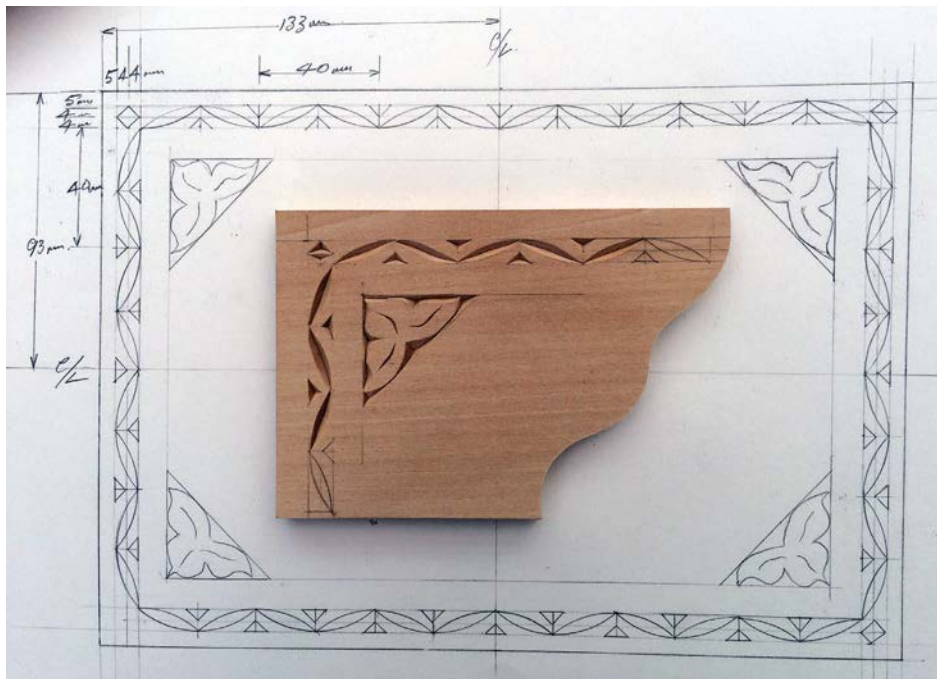
A large-scale drawing of three variations, with an example of them carved on a 5mm grid



Three borders using curved cuts. Note the use of the stab knife in the third design



## Laying out a border



In order to lay out a complete border for, say, a box lid, it is always better to make a preliminary drawing to plan it out and thus avoid the possibility of making a mistake.

Start by marking out the horizontal and vertical centrelines and work from them out towards the edges. You will need to take account of the size of individual elements of the design, allowing for an uncarved area around the outer edge.

It is easier to have a design made up of elements of known dimensions and multiply it to make up a border rather than to determine a border size and try to fill it.

It can be seen from the drawing that there are 3 x 40mm elements on the left of the centreline plus 2 x 4mm lines and a 5mm uncarved surround, which means:

$$(3 \times 40) 120 + (2 \times 4) 8 + 5 = 133\text{mm.}$$

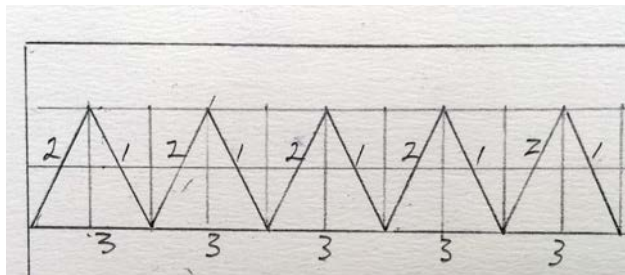
From the horizontal centreline, it will be:  $(2 \times 40) 80 + (2 \times 4) 8 + 5 = 93\text{mm.}$

You do not have to follow these dimensions, it is only the principle that I am trying to explain.

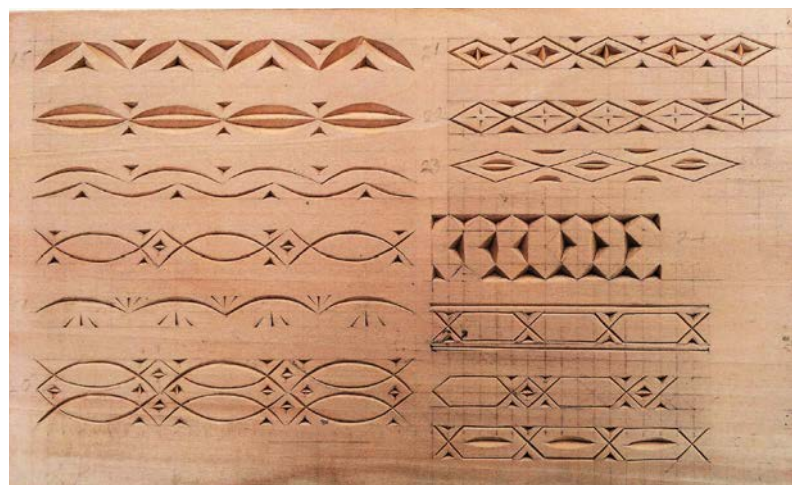
As you will become more proficient at removing chips, you will find it easier to cut a series of lines running in one direction and then move your piece of work to cut in a different direction. This will not only speed up your work, it will also improve the accuracy of your cuts and eventually you can stop drawing in the diagonal lines, as the blade of your knife will follow easily from corner to corner. ▀

ABOVE: Laying out a symmetrical border for a box top

LEFT: Make all the no.1 cuts then the no.2 and finally run along the line of no.3s



Two drinks coasters, an example of setting out from the centre.



A further selection of border ideas.



Three spoon designs using two and three-cut chips

## Next month

In the next article we will look at the setting out and carving of rosettes.



# Next issue...

On sale 22 February

## Step-by-step guide to carving a walrus



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW THOMAS

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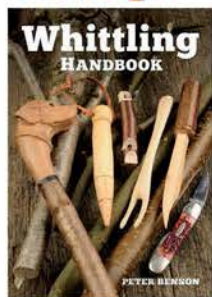
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# From the community

Here is a personal selection of letters and websites that caught the Editor's attention this month

## Drawings



The Tree of Life, which hides 17 animals, is approximately 400mm in diameter and 100mm thick at the centre, and is made from Live oak (*Quercus virginiana*), which is one of the densest woods in North America – not a real pleasure to carve

Mark,  
I thought I'd drop you a line and thank you and the team for the outstanding job that you do and to sing the praises of your most outstanding magazine. I've been an ardent reader for many years and though I no longer subscribe to *Woodcarving* magazine, I pick it up at the local bookstore. Kinda nice to get out once in a while.

I'm a self-taught woodcarver and for many years struggled to find that 'style' that suits me best. Relief carving seems to fit the bill. Most of my work is done with traditional carving tools – I rarely use power tools. I like my carvings to tell a story and working with the flow of the grain (the character) of the wood, a few example photos attached. Which brings me to the reason for writing to you.

The last paragraph of Dick Onians' interview in the Sept/Oct 2017 issue 158 says it all and sets the tone for the many issues that have followed, 'your creative process begins with a drawing. 'YOUR' drawing!' Photos and pictures and computer graphics are great for basic ideas and reference but drawing out what you want the carving to look like makes it personal.

Keep up the good work Mark. May you and your magazine have many, many more years together.

Steve Underwood, North Carolina, USA



The cane is Black Tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*) and the stand is Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

## V-tools

Mark

Last issue's V-tool article by Peter Benson. is so true! As to why I write, in the past few months I purchased a set (12) of Robert Sorby tools from someone. From what I was told I am the fourth owner. Long story, at least two of the other owners worked on the V-tool. Being nice, it would not cut butter. It needed lots of work so I returned it to Robert Sorby care of Clive Brooks and they made it like new. I have sent them a thank-you email but feel others should know about this also.

Great magazine.

Thanks, Ronnie Boston

## FROM THE FORUM

Here we share with you pieces that readers have posted on our *Woodcarving* forum. If you are interested in the possibility of your piece appearing here, or would simply like feedback and advice on your work, visit [www.woodworkersinstitute.com](http://www.woodworkersinstitute.com) and click on the forum button.



[www.woodworkersinstitute.com/forum/little-owl\\_topic21579.html](http://www.woodworkersinstitute.com/forum/little-owl_topic21579.html)

### Jack-In-The-Green-1 posted:

I have seen lots of these characterful owls around home this year, so felt compelled to carve one.

It has taken me ages to carve in all the feather detail, so I'm pleased it's finished – but perhaps a little sad, now that the carving journey is over for this piece.

I am sure this is a universal story that most carvers can appreciate – so much time is spent trying to bring a piece of wood to life, you become rather attached to it. But when it's done, it's done, so it's time to move on to the next blank piece of wood

Your views and comments are most welcomed and appreciated.

Kind regards, David

### CHJ commented:

The fine detail on this piece is in danger of making one ignore the perfection of the proportions and natural stance that the piece captures.

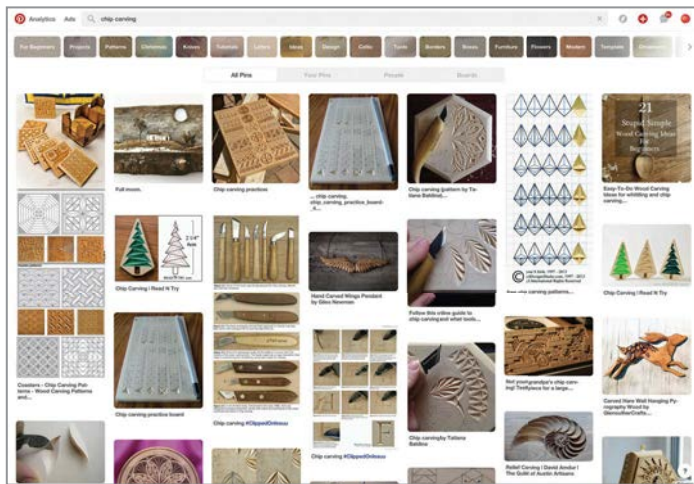
I applaud your artistic skill and admire your patience.

### JJF commented:

Magnifique!!!

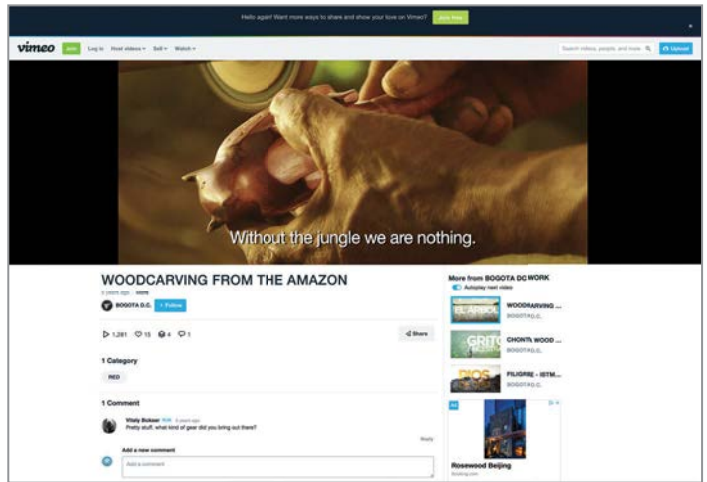
If you have something you want your fellow carvers to know, send in your letters and stories to Mark Baker at *Woodcarving*, 86 High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1XN or email [markb@thegmcgroup.com](mailto:markb@thegmcgroup.com)



**ON THE WEB****Pinterest****Chip carving**

This is a very interesting board of mainly chip-carved patterns and work but it also shows other decorative work too. Chip carving is an ancient form of decoration and, while based on a basic premise of using a few types of cuts to create a given effect, the creation of the effective grids/patterns and accuracy of working are key. The sheer variety and complexity of design options means that one can create anything, from the beautiful stylised decoration to more complex as required.

<https://tinyurl.com/ycvnl7hx>

**Vimeo****Woodcarving from the Amazon**

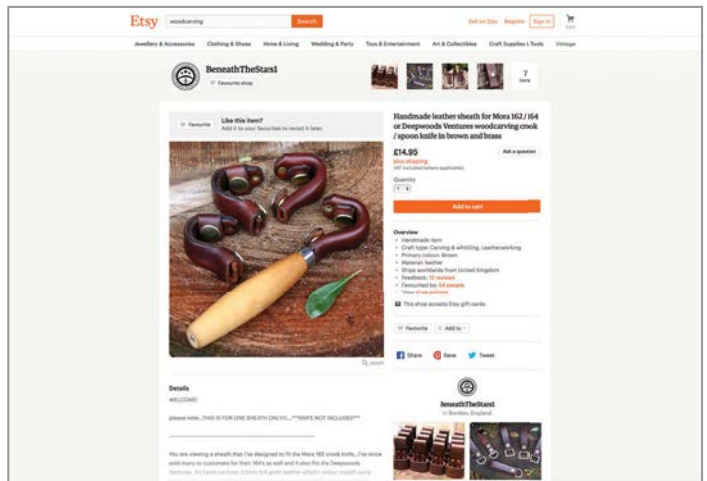
This clip shows one of the members of the Ticuna people talking about their tradition of carving and the importance of handing on cultural traditions. While the clip is not that long, it offers an interesting window into some of these people's beliefs and thoughts about carving and their care about their traditions and their environment.

[vimeo.com/album/1508758/video/36315386](https://vimeo.com/album/1508758/video/36315386)

**Website****J Christopher White**

The work of J Christopher White is a true delight to see. It is no wonder he is an award-winning carver. The carvings he has placed on the website are a true testament to his skill in capturing the spirit of the things he has carved. He carves birds, animals, fish and humans. Not only does he work in wood, he also has bronze castings of his carved work too. On the site he shares some of the key stages of some of the work he has produced too. It is always interesting to see what people make and be able to gain an insight into how they work and what influences them. This site certainly allows the viewer to gain a better understanding of Mr White and his carvings and is well worth a visit.

[www.parablesinwood.com](http://www.parablesinwood.com)

**Etsy****Leather sheaths**

I know this link does not show a piece of carving per se, but it does show some wonderful leather sheaths for fitting on to the Mora 162/164 or Deepwoods Ventures woodcarving/spoon knives. I know all too well how we go to great time and effort to keep tools sharp, so it makes sense that we should protect the cutting edge as best we can. The leather sheaths will help with this when the knives are not in use and stored away.

[tinyurl.com/yd3wruzK](https://tinyurl.com/yd3wruzK)

If you are interested in the possibility of your piece appearing here, or would simply like feedback and advice on your work, visit [www.woodworkersinstitute.com](http://www.woodworkersinstitute.com) and click on the forum button.



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# Our contributors



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**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. [davidwesternlovespoons.com](http://davidwesternlovespoons.com)



**Dick Onians** has been a professional sculptor since 1968. He is a Fellow of the Royal British Sculptors Society and an award-winning teacher of carving. He is also the author of two books about carving as well as many articles. [dick.onians@talk21.com](mailto:dick.onians@talk21.com)



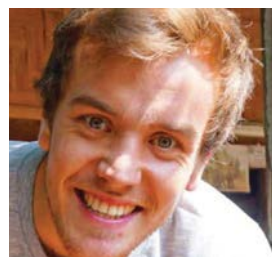
**Murray Taylor** was a jeweller and silversmith before retiring 15 years ago and devoting time to wood carving. Murray has made three DVDs related to woodcarving, one of which is on chip carving, and he is involved in teaching and promoting chip carving. [murraytaylor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:murraytaylor@hotmail.co.uk)



**Peter Benson** has travelled the world teaching and judging woodcarving of all standards for the past 20 years. He has written two books on the subject. [bencarve@btinternet.com](mailto:bencarve@btinternet.com)



**Steve Bisco** has been carving for 30 years, specialising in decorative carving in period styles, first in wood and recently in stone. His book, *Stone Carving for the Home & Garden*, is available from GMC Publications. [steve@thebiscos.com](mailto:steve@thebiscos.com)



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# The carver's toolbag

Bringing you all the latest tools, machinery and products to meet your carving needs

All prices are correct at the time of going to press but are subject to change without notice. Photographs courtesy of the manufacturers/retailers, unless otherwise stated

## King Arthur Merlin2 on test



Merlin2 universal carving set

**K**ing Arthur's Tools is well known for its power carving products and shaping and sanding tools for power carvers. It has produced chainsaw-type discs as well as tungsten carbide toothed discs to fit on 115-125mm angle grinders for many years, and devilishly effective they are too at sculpting large works. However, some work often does not often need such large cutters and this is where King Arthur's Tools' Merlin2 fits into the mix nicely. It is a scaled-down angle grinder with a long neck that is designed to take 50mm diameter accessories.

The Merlin2 universal carving set tested here comprises: a material carry bag; a Merlin2 variable-speed, miniature long-neck angle grinder (a fixed speed option is available); a 50mm saw chain cutter; a Merlin2 carbide disc; a fibreglass cutting disc; and three flap wheel-type sanding disks. There is also a safety manual, which one should read on all items bought before using them. This, of course, has important safety and maintenance

information that one needs to know and quickly helps one get started and work safely.

King Arthur's Tools says: 'It's a great set for miniature work, such as carving spoons and small bowls, or for details on faces and feathers. But we don't recommend using this set for carving huge free-form bowls, sculptures, totem poles or the like. We have other tools you'll love for those massive projects. It's terrific for carving, shaping and sanding in difficult, hard-to-reach places.'

### INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

On opening the package and picking up the miniature long-neck grinder it felt solid, appeared to be well balanced, built well and it fit my hand nicely. The on/off switch and the variable speed dial are on the underside of the body and have a couple of raised plastic shields that prevent fingers from inadvertently switching the machine on or off and also separate the on/off button from the variable speed dial, again preventing

accidental touching of the wrong part.

At the lower end of the metal long-neck section, there is a spindle lock button which is used, when the unit is unplugged, to allow the changing of accessories. The cutting head end has a strong adjustable guard/shield which is moveable to help you work with both the shaping and cutting discs and sanding accessories effectively and safely and provide protection to keep fingers away from the sanding/cutting accessories being used.

The accessories are all held in place via a machined washer/centrator device that is secured via a hexagonal machined screw. As an aside, there is an optional extra of a hexagonal thread connector (HTC), which allows numerous other optional extra accessories to be used too to further expand the versatility of the unit.

### CHAINSAW-TYPE CUTTER

Taking note of all of the safety and usage advice, I started by using the chainsaw-type



cutter. This cutter is one that rapidly removes timber. Using the variable speed control unit allowed me to quickly find the optimum speed to suit the wood being cut. This cutter is extremely quick at rough-shaping wood but, because of its design, it is not capable of fine detail. The learning curve to get the best from this tool was the steepest of any of the other accessories used. Light multiple cuts are the way to go – not only do they afford more control, it often works out quicker than trying to make heavy cuts, which this unit is not meant for. Surprisingly, delicate cuts can be made with this, but the surface quality is not always very clean. That said, it is not a cutter that will forgive mistakes in the presentation angle to the work. A kickback is possible if you get things wrong.

### **COARSE MERLIN2 CARBIDE DISC**

This disc has carbide points aligned neatly on the angled face and edge and is labelled as coarse. I noted on the website that also available are other shapes of disc with various options as to how the carbide is arranged, from very coarse down to fine grit grade. I found the disc supplied in the set very easy to use with a minimal learning curve. It is not as quick at removing waste wood as the chainsaw-type

cutter, but affords far finer control and is capable of initial shaping, refining and some detail cutting too. The surface left after the cut is very consistent, with micro-striations such as those left from coarse abrasives.

### **THE OTHER ACCESSORIES**

The sanding discs are very easy to use and can be used to gently texture work, sand sculpt areas, refine surfaces and so on. The fibreglass cutter came in handy when adjusting some carry units recently. It sliced fine and left clean cuts.

While many woodworkers would not use this cutting disc much, there are many other opportunities for DIYers and craftspeople to use this cutter so it fits well within the set, making the tool much more versatile generally.

### **CONCLUSION**

I had used the previous version of the Merlin some years back and can say that Merlin2 is a far superior tool. I could not fault the quality of it in any way and found that it handles and works very well. The variable speed adjustment is a dream to use and changing the accessories is easy.

Like any new tool or product, it takes a bit of time to get use to the nuances of the tool

and of each of the different accessories that can be fitted to it, but having read the instruction sheets and learned the dos and don'ts, one is well-armed with the information required.

I loved the carbide disc and found it did everything I asked of it easily, as did the sanding discs and fibreglass cutter. Don't think I just tried wood. I used the sanding discs and carbide cutter on resins, acrylics, horn and similar materials too – all cut well without problems.

The wide range of cutting, shaping, sanding and refining accessories that can be fitted to the Merlin2 make this a very versatile tool that is definitely worth exploring.

### **PRICES**

**Merlin2 variable-speed universal woodcarving set – £251.66**

There are numerous optional extra accessories to augment the Merlin2, starting from £4.50

**For US enquiries and stockist information contact:**

King Arthur's Tools  
www.katools.com

**For UK enquiries contact:**

The Toolpost  
www.toolpost.co.uk

### **Abortech ball gouge**

The Abortech ball gouge is a unique tool designed for power carving. The manufacturers say: 'It gives you the ability to make smooth hollows and concave recesses in spoons or small bowls and safely undertake freehand shaping and carving, enabling you to create a dimpled, chisel-like texture when moved across a wooden surface.'

'With perfectly engineered balance, the ball gouge provides exceptional control and prevents dig-ins and grabbing, offering greater control over the depth and final appearance of a project.'

'This ball gouge has a cutting ring on a 30mm spherical ball with a 90mm arm that attaches to any standard 100mm or 115mm angle grinder. The cutting action produces fine shavings rather than dust. A key for adjusting the cutter is included.'

'The cutting ring is self-sharpening when in use. As one side of the ring cuts, the opposite side of the ring is polished. You can achieve a freshly sharpened edge by simply loosening and rotating the ring. The previously used edge then undergoes self-sharpening, more than doubling the life of the cutting ring.'

**Price: £83.40**

**Contact: Brimarc**

**Web: www.brimarc.com**



### **Kutzall Rotorsaws**

Kutzall Rotorsaws are shaping cutters that are available in the extreme version (black in the picture below) which is extra coarse, or in the original in coarse or fine grits, coloured silver or gold respectively. Kutzall comments: 'The extreme burrs have aggressive, razor-sharp, tungsten-carbide teeth to hog material away with unparalleled efficiency, while also resisting loading. The 1/2in shaft burrs are used in flex shaft tools, small rotary grinders, or other machinery using 1/2in collets or adjustable chucks.'

**The Rotorsaw features are:**

- 19mm head with 1/2in shaft
- Similar to thick saw blades.
- Can be easily controlled when cutting in multiple directions.
- Hollow-out or produce grooves, reliefs, or undercuts

**Price \$14.40**

**Contact: Kutzall**

**UK enquiries contact: Tomaco**

**Web: <https://kutzall.com>**

**UK: [www.tomaco.co.uk](http://www.tomaco.co.uk)**





#### Conversion chart

|                       |
|-----------------------|
| 2mm (5/64in)          |
| 3mm (1/8in)           |
| 4mm (5/32in)          |
| 6mm (1/4in)           |
| 7mm (9/32in)          |
| 8mm (5/16in)          |
| 9mm (11/32in)         |
| 10mm (3/8in)          |
| 11mm (7/16in)         |
| 12mm (1/2in)          |
| 13mm (1 1/2in)        |
| 14mm (9/16in)         |
| 15mm (9/16in)         |
| 16mm (5/8in)          |
| 17mm (11/16in)        |
| 18mm (23/32in)        |
| 19mm (3/4in)          |
| 20mm (3/4in)          |
| 21mm (13/16in)        |
| 22mm (7/8in)          |
| 23mm (29/32in)        |
| 24mm (15/16in)        |
| 25mm (1in)            |
| 30mm (1 1/8in)        |
| 32mm (1 1/4in)        |
| 35mm (1 3/8in)        |
| 38mm (1 1/2in)        |
| 40mm (1 5/8in)        |
| 45mm (1 3/4in)        |
| 50mm (2in)            |
| 55mm (2 1/8-2 1/4in)  |
| 60mm (2 3/8in)        |
| 63mm (2 1/2in)        |
| 65mm (2 5/8in)        |
| 70mm (2 3/4in)        |
| 75mm (3in)            |
| 80mm (3 1/8in)        |
| 85mm (3 1/4in)        |
| 90mm (3 1/2in)        |
| 93mm (3 3/4in)        |
| 95mm (3 3/4in)        |
| 100mm (4in)           |
| 105mm (4 1/8in)       |
| 110mm (4 1/4-4 3/4in) |
| 115mm (4 1/2in)       |
| 120mm (4 3/4in)       |
| 125mm (5in)           |
| 130mm (5 1/8in)       |
| 135mm (5 1/4in)       |
| 140mm (5 1/2in)       |
| 145mm (5 3/4in)       |
| 150mm (6in)           |
| 155mm (6 1/8in)       |
| 160mm (6 1/4in)       |
| 165mm (6 1/2in)       |
| 170mm (6 3/4in)       |
| 178mm (6 7/8in)       |
| 180mm (7in)           |
| 185mm (7 1/8in)       |
| 190mm (7 1/2in)       |
| 195mm (7 3/4in)       |
| 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)         |



### Narex hook knives

Narex has introduced four new hook knives. The blade hardness is 61HRC and each has a stained and varnished beech handle.

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- Double edge
- Small right hand

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**Contact: Tomaco**

**Web: [www.tomaco.co.uk](http://www.tomaco.co.uk)**

### Chestnut Products abrasives

These abrasive sheets are made in Switzerland and measure 70 x 125mm. They use an aluminium oxide abrasive, blue-fired to remove impurities for a longer-lasting and clean sanding action. The knitted fabric backing allows the dust generated to simply pass through, giving a longer working time without having to de-clog the abrasive.

The sheets are very flexible and fold and bend easily to mould themselves to the shape of the piece being worked on. The backing is also compatible with hook-and-loop style fixings.

Available in packs of five sheets of 80, 120, 180, 240, 320 and 400 grit, mixed packs or boxes of 50 sheets (single grit).

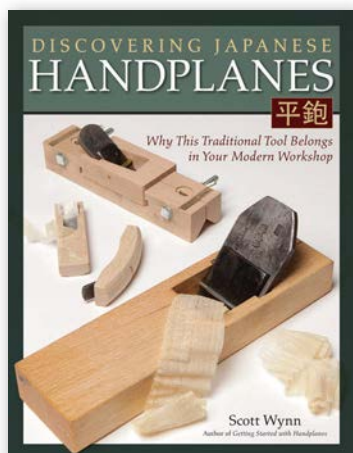


**Price: from £3.00**

**Contact: Chestnut Products**

**Web: [chestnutproducts.co.uk](http://chestnutproducts.co.uk)**

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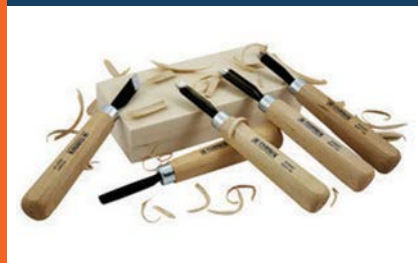
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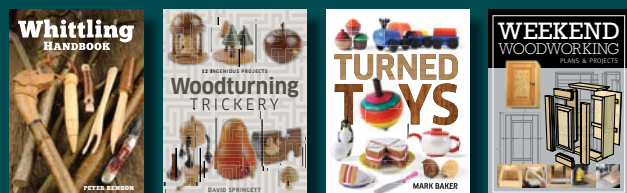
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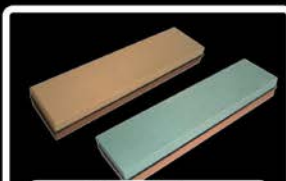




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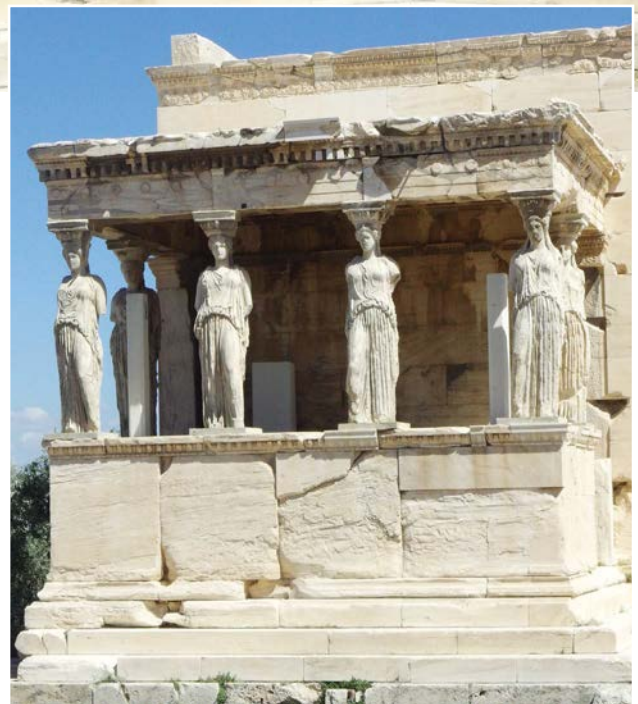


# Erechtheion temple

We visit an ancient Athenian temple



**T**he Erechtheion temple stands on the north side of the Acropolis in Athens. The temple was dedicated to Athena (the patron deity of the city) and Poseidon, the god of the sea. It was built between 421 and 406 BC and is made entirely from marble with friezes made from black limestone. Its sculptor was Phidias, one of the most renowned artists of the ancient world, who also built the Parthenon. The original building had elaborately carved doorways and windows, and its columns were ornately decorated with paint, gilding and glass beads. The building is known for its early examples of egg-and-dart, and guilloché ornamental moldings. The Porch of the Caryatids (shown here) is on the south side of the temple; it features the figures of six women as supporting columns. The figures in situ today are replicas, five of the original caryatids are in the Acropolis Museum and one is in the British Museum. Although it looks decorative, the Porch of the Caryatids was built for a functional purpose, which was to conceal a 15ft beam that was inserted to support the building after its original design was drastically reduced in size.



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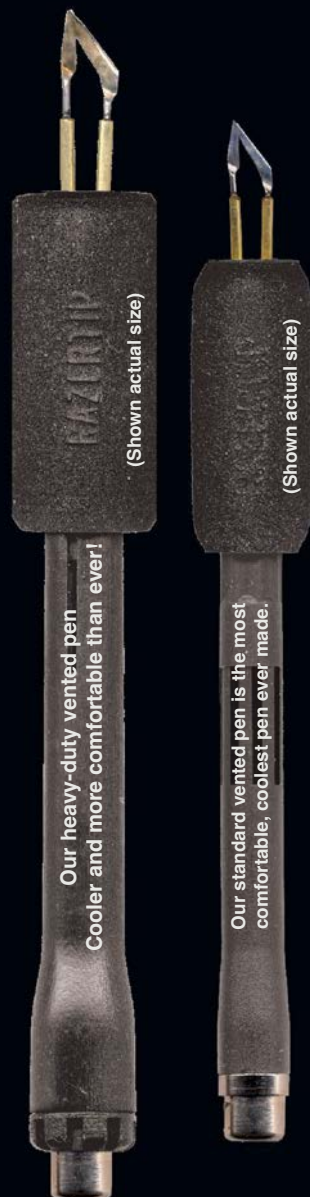


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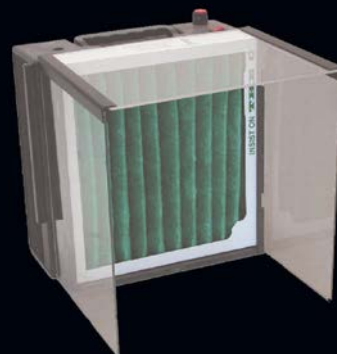
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