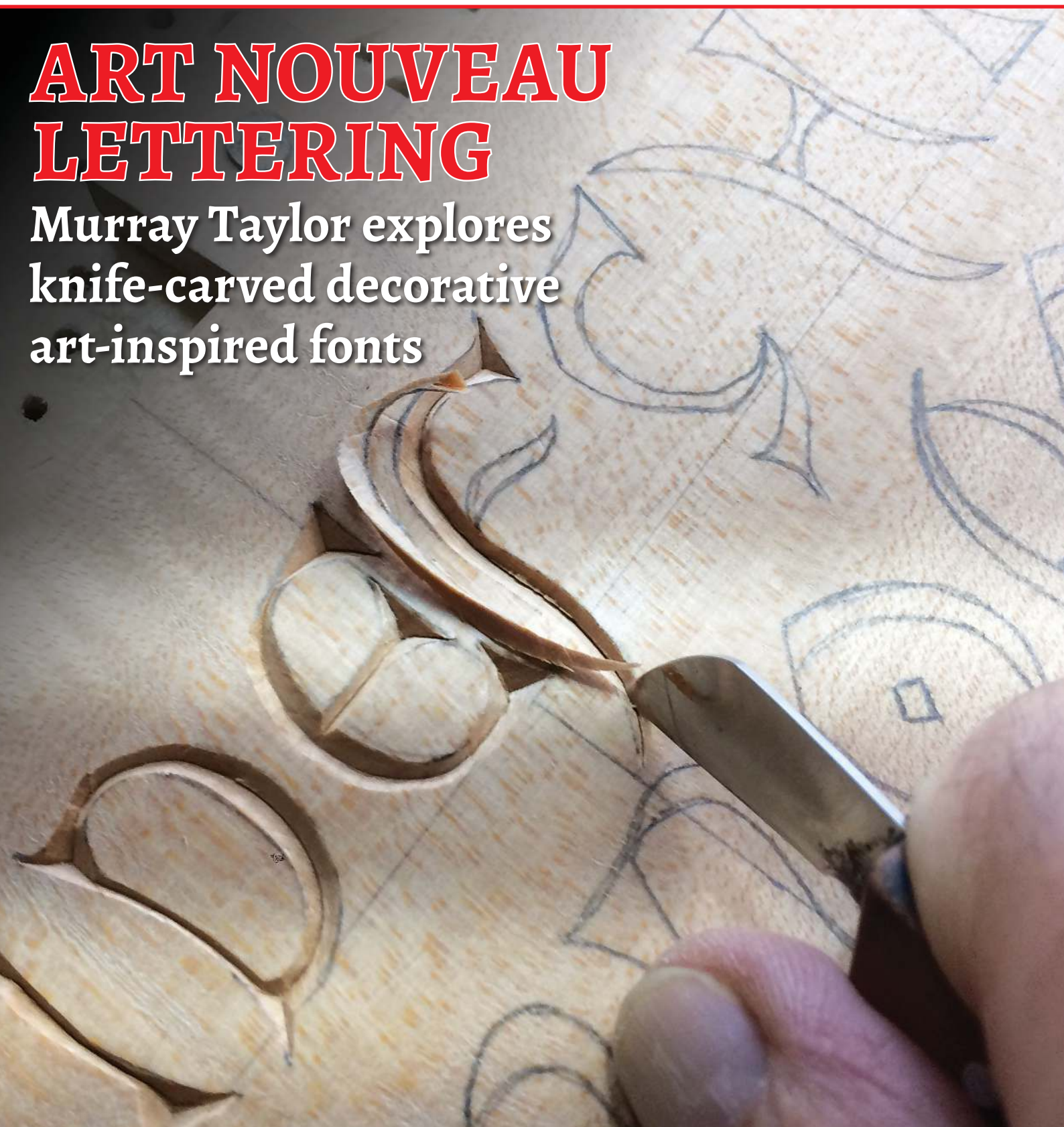


WOOD CARVING

ART NOUVEAU LETTERING

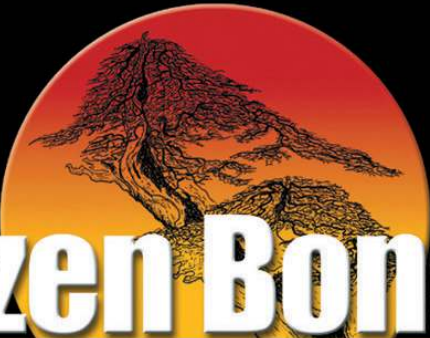
Murray Taylor explores
knife-carved decorative
art-inspired fonts



PROJECTS TO CARVE Easter Island statue • Wallcreeper • Relief-carved avocets
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Lonely carvers



PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER BENSON



My recent comments have resulted in a lot of calls, emails and letters from readers. Thank you for that. I have enjoyed reading them all and it is wonderful hearing what people are up to and

making. Do keep the correspondence coming.

One of the things I have gleaned – and trust me when I say there are many more which I will comment on in future issues – is that many people carve in physical isolation and this is mainly due to no clubs being nearby to attend. Now, having said that, the comments I heard about the lack of clubs nearby to attend and share with others meant that publications such as this one played a valuable role in being part of a community, even if isolated from it physically. I know clubs are not for everyone, but the majority of those who have talked to me over the years have said that belonging to a club is a great experience and if you have one nearby they have said go along and see if it suits.

Many carvers are members of online communities, but again, the majority of

those I have spoken to say it would be nice to belong to a club too. Having said that, some mentioned that, due to mobility issues, an online community was fine for them and provided opportunities to share and ask questions that would not be possible otherwise.

I have had a few people get quite irritable about a lack of club near them. My response is that if one doesn't exist, why not start one? Oops. I put my foot in it with that comment. One person huffed and puffed and said it was a lot of hard work setting up a club for possibly not a lot of return. Another said they did not think they could set one up due to not knowing where to start. Others raised eyebrows but said nothing. Why is it always someone else who has to do something?

The number of people who carve is huge and far bigger than people think due to the majority of carvers not belonging to a club. I have written on this before and over the years it seems the situation has remained pretty much the same, except for a couple of points worth mentioning. Data suggests there is a gradual diminution in the numbers of carvers who belong to a club and a very slow decline in the number of clubs available

for people to attend. Hmm. Does this sound familiar? I have no magic solution to this.

But if people want clubs there may be a need to for someone to find like-minded people and set one up.

The ball is in your court, so to speak. But remember, we are never truly alone. There are many routes available to share and talk with other like-minded people. It is just a case of working out what is best for you.

Celebrating British Craft Exhibition

On a totally different note, GMC in Association with Axminster Tools & Machinery is staging an exhibition called Celebrating British Craft. There will be demonstrations, exhibitions of work and feature items from the British Woodturner of the Year Competition. The event is open from 8-19 May 2019 and will be held at the Oxo Gallery in London. For further information go to: www.woodworkersinstitute.com

Have fun, Mark

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



Lettering & Decorative Woodcarving

A weekend course with
Gary Breeze



PHOTO: David Collins

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www.ibtc.co.uk | courses@ibtc.co.uk | 01502 569663

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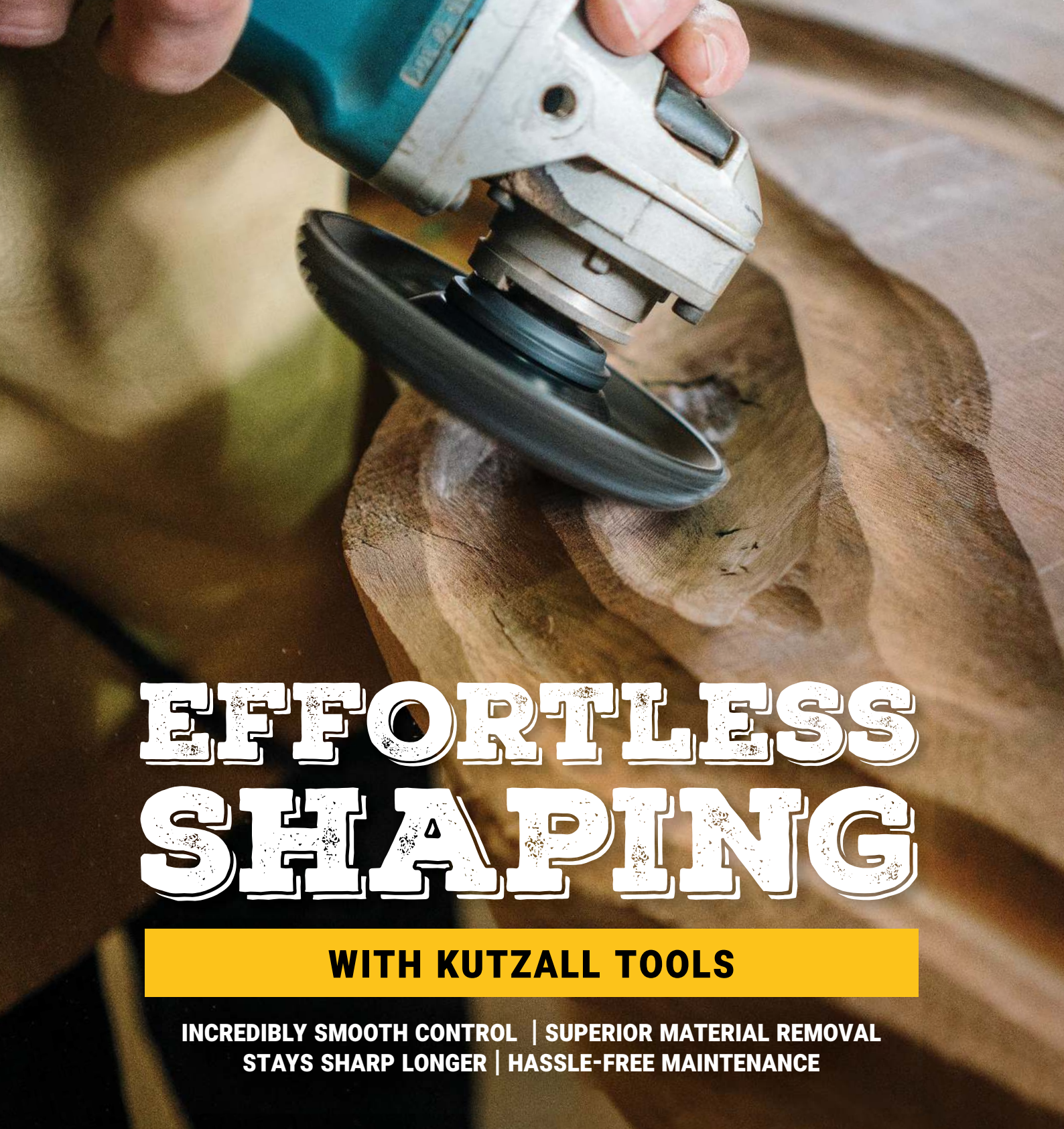
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Whittling a bunny

Terry Nokes carves a baby rabbit

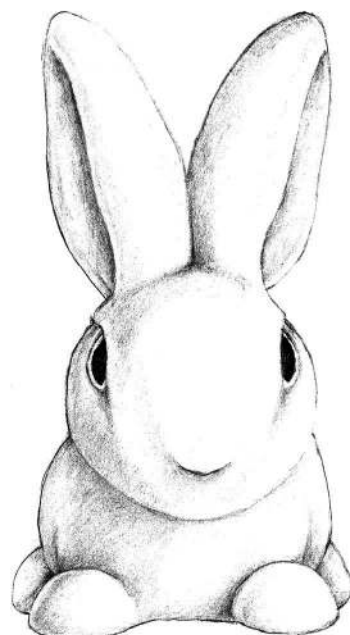
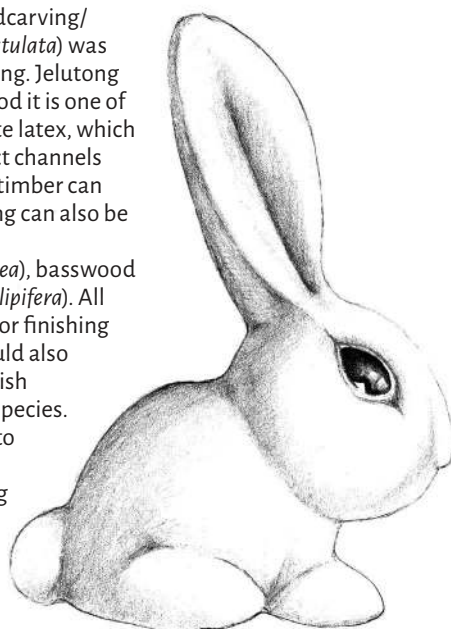


This rabbit project was inspired by our recent Easter, has minimal detail and can be achieved with just a single woodcarving/whittling knife. For this reason jelutong (*Dyera costulata*) was selected as it's one of the softest timbers for knife carving. Jelutong is fast-growing and native to Asia. Other than balsa wood it is one of the softest woods available. It's also the source for white latex, which was used in chewing gum until the 1960s. The latex duct channels can be present and look like elongated oval holes. This timber can be quite brittle so very sharp tools are essential. Jelutong can also be purchased in boards up to 100mm thick in the UK.

If you have no access to jelutong, try Lime (*Tilia Europaea*), basswood (*Tilia Americana*) or American tulipwood (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). All carve well, but being plain in appearance they're ideal for finishing with colourful stains/paints. A pyrography machine could also burn a desirable textured finish. For an oiled/waxed finish perhaps experiment with one of the many mahogany species.

Walnut (*Juglans* spp.) looks lovely but can be very hard to work by hand. Each will respond slightly differently to carving, so do experiment on waste wood before starting on the main project.

The artwork for this carving project was kindly supplied by my talented artist friend and work colleague Clive Hooley. Clive's original drawing was in pencil and this has proved to be a fun project.



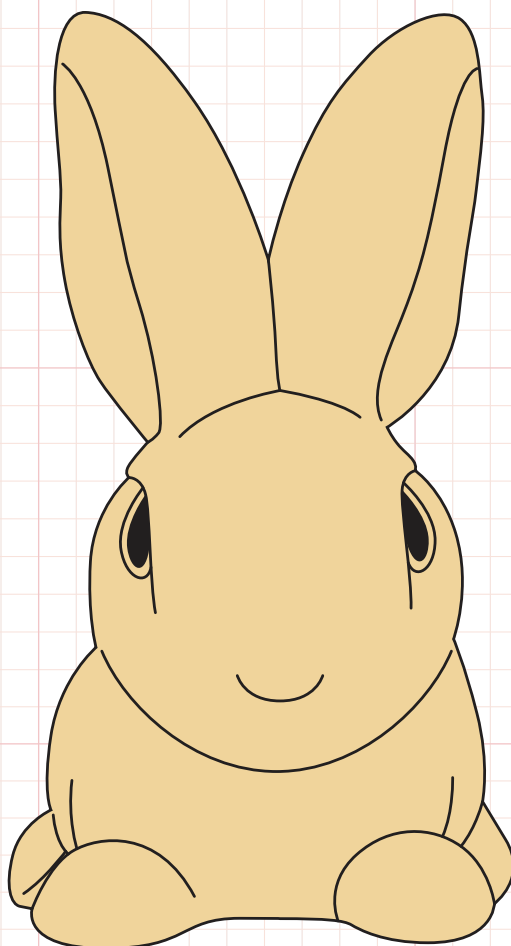
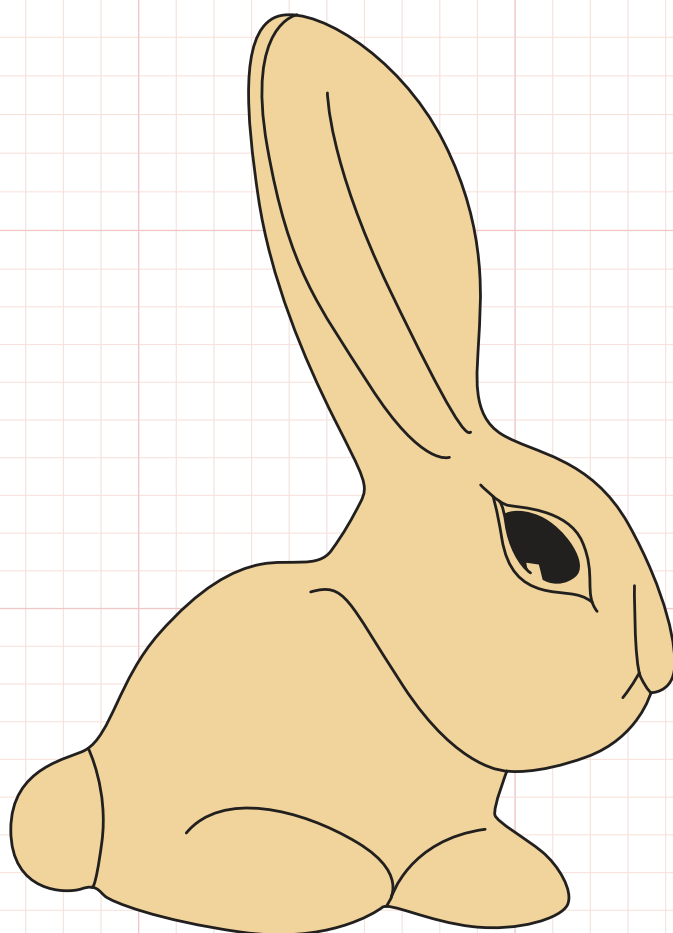
Things you will need

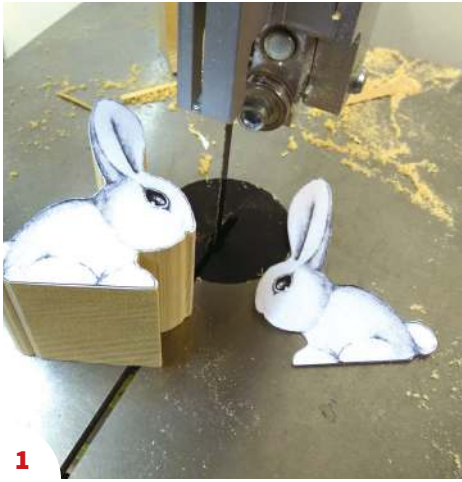
Tools:

- Dust mask
- Bandsaw
- Carving knife
- Safety gloves
- Thumb guard
- Pair of compasses

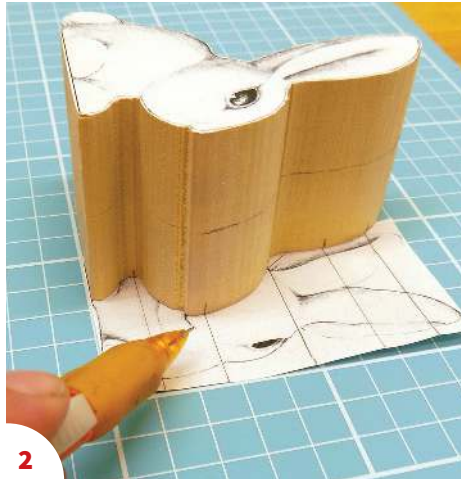
Materials:

- Jelutong (*Dyera costulata*)
90 x 60 x 50mm
- Glue stick
- Loop abrasives
- Hook-faced sanding block
- Brush
- Black acrylic paint
- Spirit stains – white, purple
and yellow
- Polyurethane satin spray

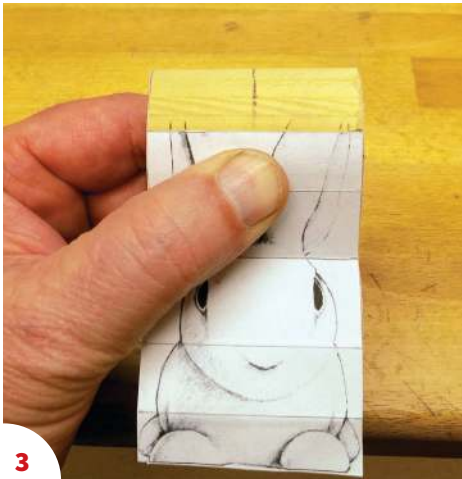




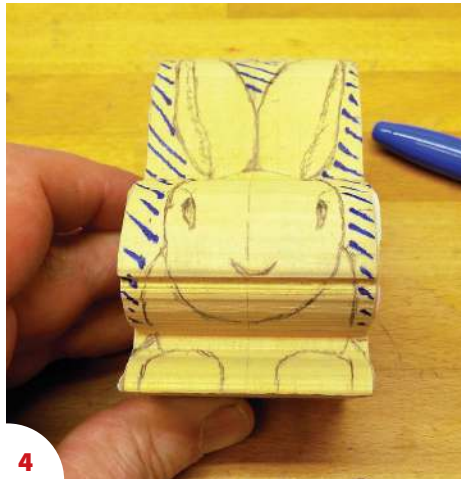
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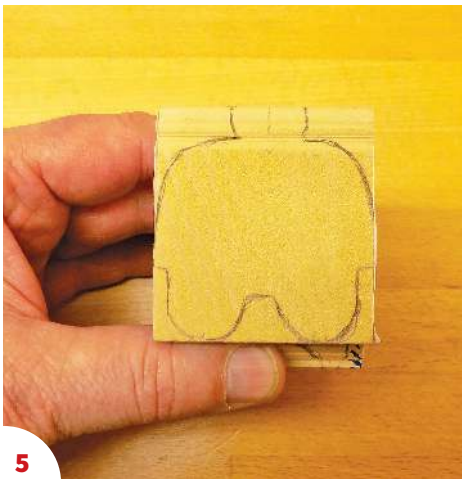
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Rough shaping

1 Align and glue/stick the template – change the size as required – so the grain direction is running vertically through the bunny. Then cut out the timber on a bandsaw. Some carvers leave 2mm or so waste around the project outline when cutting, but with knife carving, especially on harder woods, I normally cut right up to the line to remove as much waste as possible.

2 Using a pencil, draw a centreline around the whole carving. This line must be present and visible to the very end of your carving. Now draw in the front profile or, to be more accurate, draw horizontal lines over the paper template, then transfer these lines to the carving blank, making sure the blank is parallel with the template. A grid cutting board or graph paper can help as shown.

3 Now fold the template on these horizontal lines and align it with the blank. Transfer the image outline. The more horizontal lines you have, the more accurate the drawing will be.

4 Now the front profile has been transferred and the waste area is cross-hatched in blue.

5 Draw in the bottom outline. Remove the waste from the sides, keeping the carving square – do not round over until later. This is the push cut with both hands behind the blade. At times it is good practice to keep the knife quite still and move the workpiece through the cutting edge with your other hand.

My thumb on the back on the blade is to apply pressure through the cut or, more often than not, it's stationary like a fulcrum, a pivot point for a sweeping knife cut. You will find the harder the wood is, the further you move your pivot thumb towards the knife tip. Although chips will be smaller you will gain leverage.

6 This is the paring/pull cut towards your thumb. For protection, wear a leather thumb guard. The guard shown is homemade with some elastic ribbon on the back. You can buy variants of these. The blade length on this knife is 45mm and I tend to hold the handle quite deep in my hand to aid leverage. If cuts are continuously being made by squeezing your knife towards your thumb, fatigue and strains can arise.

Make a vertical stop cut at the deepest waste area – for example, where the base of the ear meets the head – then carve increasingly widening V-shape waste away from each side. Note at times, when permitting, how the grain can speed up the roughing-out process. With a slight tilt of the cutting blades, the unwanted waste can split away on this weakness.

7 With the sides now carved away, remove the waste in between the ears. Double check the pencil centreline is still centred in between the face. Re-draw if need be.

8 Next, draw or scribe a horizontal/parallel line halfway down the face on both sides. Again keep it square edged – remove waste to the centreline under the chin as shown in red.

9 With the front now squared off, continue this shaping around the back of the head. Make a stop cut around the neck collar to assist debris removal and repeat on other side. Ensure at all times you keep the head symmetrical.

10 The back of the head also has additional cuts around the base of the ears.

Note the small marks on the bottom of the carving. They are in a waste area and called latex channels – they go through the wood and come out the far side (note picture 11).

11 Now, as shown in the picture, draw a line from the ear base to the centreline under the chin. In the picture it looks straight, but in fact from the side it's crescent-shaped, about 10mm at its widest in the cheek area.

12 Note how the drawn face has a triangular shape. Next, remove the waste between the red side lines and the crescent-shaped line drawn in step 11. Marking out accurately helps no end and eliminates a lot of guess work.

13 The drawn shape in blue now needs to be removed on both sides to create a wedge towards the nose. Remember the forehead has a triangle shape. This is a tutorial, but with time and practice you'll find yourself not having to draw any of these guidance marks and instead start watching the new facet lines created.

To ensure symmetry, when you make a cut on one side of the rabbit, immediately replicate the cut on the other side. It's easy to get carried away on one side and then forget the steps needed for the other side. Just watch the facets created and keep the head carving as symmetrical as you can.

14 Now, from the blue line above the paws make a scoop cut. This cut isn't straight, it curves upwards to the neck line and then extends up around the body side. Now carve and smooth off around the whole neck, including any leftover sharp edges of the lower head if need be.

TOP TIP: When possible and it is good practice – try locking together in position both your blade and thumb at a set distance apart, and then again move the workpiece through its cutting edge with your other hand. Notice where your thumb/guard and the workpiece make contact. This is now the pivot point.

The ears, tail and nose

15 Next, study the templates and draw the inside part of the ears. Remove this waste with just a straight cut, don't hollow out just yet. Do not rush this, spend some time getting it right.

16 Using multiple light cuts, round off the ears, and then the back – keeping that original centreline.



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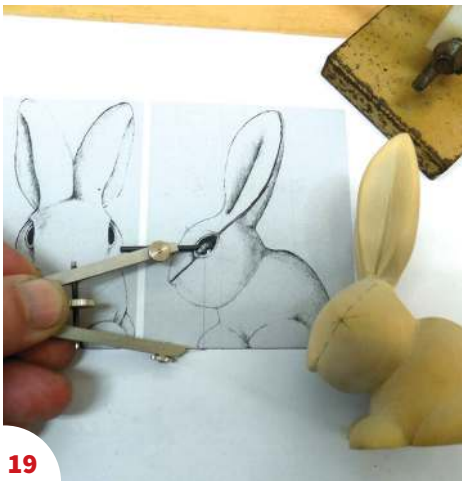
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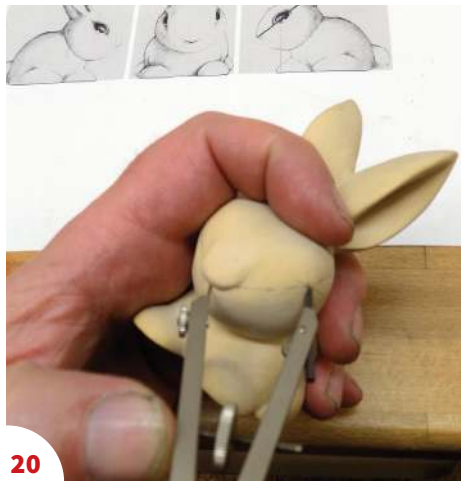
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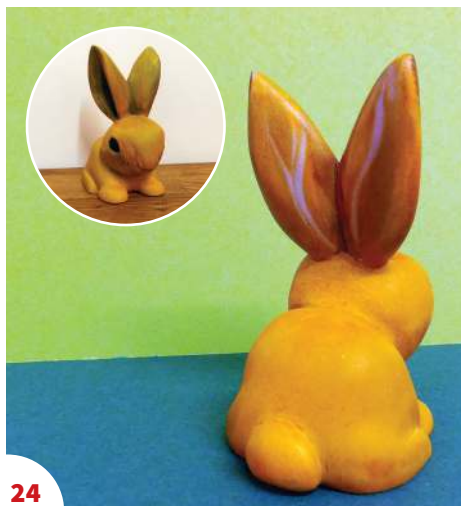
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17 Now hollow out the ears by creating a V-shape then remove waste around the paws and tail.

18 Finally shape the tail and nose, and thoroughly check all the carving is complete. Remove and blend in any high pointed ridges.

Now sand the piece down to 320/400 grit. This is just removing high spots only by hand sanding, and not reshaping the form. Always finish sanding with the grain. Be aware though – any wood dust generated is hazardous to the respiratory system so wear a suitably rated dust mask.

The eyes

19 Re-draw lightly in pencil the eye centreline that extends from the ear. Next, measure the eye height and transfer it to the carving with compasses or scribe where the two lines cross – this will be our eye centre height. Repeat this process on the other side.

20 Just out of interest, we can double-check our eye position accuracy. This only works if your head is carved symmetrically. From the original centreline under the nose, transfer the eye distance measurement from the first side to the other side as shown. This should land on, or be very close to, your other eye position.

21 Next step is to pencil in the eye shapes and carve them. The eyes are likely to be the main focal point when looking at the finished carving, so are important. Compasses are again used to ensure eyes are the same height, width and shape on each side.

Now roll the carving around in your hand – it's our final check to ensure the eyes look good before carving. First, angling your knife handle high, aim towards the very centre of the head and make a small stop cut with the knife tip, going around both eyes about 2-3mm deep.

There are four stages to dome over the eye. Follow the direction of each of the four little arrows (see inset picture) to carefully dome over the eye. You will find two arrow cuts are made with the push cut technique.

The other outstanding two arrow cuts are made with the pull cut technique.

22 The finished eye. You can gently sand this if you end up with facets that you do not want.

23 Use your own preferred finish of choice. On this occasion I experimented with coloured spirit stain, but water-based/acrylic stains will work well too.

To ensure an even base colour, a few layers of white stain were applied. While the dye was damp, and to ensure a soft-edge melding of colours, I applied small amounts of different mixes of colours to get a blended natural rabbit colour. The tendency of colours to blend with each other when they are damp is a great help here. While the colour is still wet, use a dry brush technique to reveal the white base coat for the fur effect.

24 The rabbit finished with satin polyurethane. ▶

News & events...

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

BDWCA NEWS



PHOTOGRAPH © PAM WILSON FOR THE BDWCA

Thames Valley group with their terns

Primarily an American art form, the decorative decoy came to Britain in the early 1980s, promoted by the late Bob Ridges. Many members of the British Decoy & Wildfowl Carvers Association (BDWCA) owe their introduction to carving to Bob, and the association has grown steadily since 1990.

The inclusion of the word 'decoy' in the association's name causes confusion in some people's minds, but nowadays in this country, and many others around the world, decoys are increasingly used to attract wild birds, enabling capture for weighing, ringing and checking the general health of a species.

Recently our Thames Valley Group, which

meets each month at the WWT London Wetland Centre, was asked to carve some simple common tern decoys. The common tern is on the conservation amber list and the Trust is hoping that the decoys, which will be placed out on the islands on the reserve, will encourage more common terns to breed there this year. The group produced 11 decoys which, by the time you read this, will be well established on their islands.

Members are sometimes asked by members of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to carve a specific species. Last year member Tom Fitzpatrick was contacted by a freelance photographer, Ryan Williams, who had

previously accompanied members of the BTO on ringing exercises, to carve a female cuckoo. The results – which he captured on camera – were fascinating. The very first bird in tried his luck with the decoy by offering a beakful of lichen! No success. He tried again with the offering of a large, hairy caterpillar – apparently they're partial to these. On his second rejection he apparently decided that enough was enough and attempted to mate with her. By the end of the two-week exercise the decoy had many scratches over her back and neck and had to be returned for a repaint.

Contact: www.bdwca.org.uk



PHOTOGRAPH © PAM WILSON FOR THE BDWCA

Eleven common tern decoys ready for the handover



PHOTOGRAPH © RYAN WILLIAMS FOR THE BDWCA

Cuckoo having his 'wicked way'

The UK's only wood and stone carving degrees

City & Guilds of London Art School is offering a new BA and MA degree in Historic Carving, commencing in 2019/20. Its BA (Hons) Historic Carving, with pathways in Woodcarving & Gilding or Architectural Stone and PGDip/MA Carving, were recently validated by Ravensbourne University London, and are now open for applications.

Based on the Art School's long-standing and respected historic carving diplomas and postgraduate diplomas, the new BA (Hons) and PGDip/MA degrees in Historic Carving are unique and the only carving courses available at this level in the UK.

Led by master carver and head of historic carving Tim Crawley, who has worked on some of the country's most important restoration projects, the courses benefit from the experience and expertise of a team of established practising professionals, renowned within the heritage sector.

'The achievement of both BA (Hons) and MA status is important in that it recognises the quality of our long-established programmes, and sets them within an international framework of academic achievement.

'The Diploma and PGDip programmes that these new courses replace have proved effective in preparing students for professional practice.

'The course content, with its emphasis very much on making and the acquisition and refinement of carving and related sculptural skills, remains unchanged for both courses, and we have further enhanced elements with

even more opportunities for live projects and professional experience in the curricula.'

A combination of expert tutors, bespoke facilities, live commissions and restoration projects ensures that graduates from the Art School's Historic Carving courses are sought after in the heritage sector and regularly forge successful careers in their chosen field.

City & Guilds of London Art School Historic Carving students benefit from strong industry links with public and private institutions, which provide unique opportunities to experience the design and commissioning processes associated with the restoration of historic buildings. Current and recent course and graduate projects include St George's Chapel, Windsor, Southwark Cathedral, Westminster Houses of Parliament, Corporation of London, Baroque City Palace, Berlin, and Stavanger Cathedral, Norway.

Graduates often find work in leading workshops for the architectural heritage professions and antiques trade and have also set up their own businesses. Alumni have carried out significant projects on historic buildings including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle, The Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral, Ely, Worcester, Lincoln and Gloucester Cathedrals, York Minster, and the Globe Theatre.

Work by former students can be seen in many major public commissions and they have gone on to work with world-renowned artists such as Anish Kapoor, Rachel Whiteread and Damien Hirst.

As well as the new carving courses, the Art School is offering newly validated MA Art & Material Histories. The new Historic Carving and Art Histories courses are now open for application.

Contact: www.cityandguildsartschool.ac.uk



2019 Events

• Celebrating British Crafts & British Woodturner of the Year Exhibition

When: 8-19 May 2019

Where: Oxo Tower Wharf Gallery, Bargehouse Street, Southbank, London, SE1 9PH

Web: www.woodworkersinstitute.com

• Woodworks@Daventry

When: 10-11 May 2019

Where: Daventry Leisure Centre, Lodge Road, Daventry, NN11 4FP

Web: www.tudor-rose-turners.co.uk

• Makers Central

When: 11-12 May 2019

Where: NEC, Marston Green, Birmingham, B40 1PW

Web: www.makerscentral.co.uk

• Weird & Wonderful Wood

When: 18-19 May 2019

Where: Haughley Park, Wetherden, Nr Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 3JY

Web: www.weirdandwonderfulwood.co.uk

• International Woodcarvers Congress

When: 8-16 June 2019

Where: Jackson County Fairgrounds, Maquoketa, IA 52060, US

Web: www.awcltd.org

• International Woodcarving Symposium Brienzen

When: 2-6 July 2019

Where: Verein, KUNA 3855, Brienzen, Switzerland

Web: www.symposium-brienzen.ch

• Yandles Woodworking show

When: 6-7 September 2019

Where: Hurst Works, Hurst, Martock,

Somerset, TA12 6JU

Web: www.yandles.co.uk

• National Bird Carving Championships: The Festival of Bird Art

When: 14-15 September 2019

Where: The Agricultural Business Centre, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1AH

Contact: www.bdwc.org.uk

• Central Coast Woodcarvers 42nd Annual show

When: 21-22 September 2019

Where: Cambria Vet's Hall, 1000 Main St., Cambria, CA93428

Contact: dmarshgcambria@charter.net

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

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sharing expertise

Fruit & flower vase

Steve Bisco turns and carves a Classical vase of fruit and flowers



Vases and baskets of fruit and flowers were regular features in the Classical styles of Ancient Greece and Rome. They also featured prominently in the Baroque and Neo-Classical styles of more recent centuries, sometimes carved 'in the round' as in this project, and sometimes in flattened form in crests and friezes (see *Woodcarving* 137). The number of carved examples is far exceeded by the 18th-century porcelain creations of Meissen, Sèvres and other fine makers, whose style I am aiming to emulate by carving the fruit and flowers in the delicate 'limewood foliage' style, though in a slightly more robust form as the free-standing vase is more likely to get knocked about in use than a wall-mounted carving.

A carving in the round necessarily has a more complex construction than a flat panel. If the object is truly round, as in this case, a woodturning lathe is usually the best tool for shaping the form to the point where it is ready for carving. The Classical vase itself is turned and then carved with fairly straightforward gadroons, so it doesn't

have to be in limewood. I used a poplar (*Populus* spp.) woodturning blank I had in stock, but any wood that can be turned and carved will do. The fruit and flowers need to be carved in a limewood 'dome', 150mm deep and 230mm diameter, which you will probably need to build up with two or more 'laminations' as indicated in the drawing, then turn it to shape on the lathe. The rim of the vase is recessed into the underside of the flower dome so the lowest flowers can overhang the rim – a process which is most easily done on the lathe.

Although woodturning and woodcarving may be regarded as separate hobbies, in a traditional carver's workshop the lathe would have been just another tool for shaping wood. Many hobby carvers also dabble in woodturning to a greater or lesser degree, so if you don't feel able to tackle the woodturning preparations yourself, make friends with a turner who can prepare the form to the point where you can carve the details. If not, create card templates from the drawing and shape the pieces by hand.

Things you will need

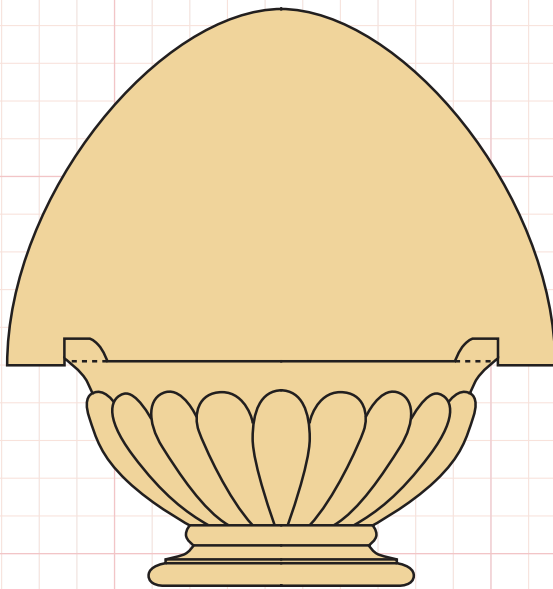
Tools:

- No.9, 3mm
- No.4, 6mm fishtail gouges
- No.3, 20 & 10mm fishtail gouges
- No.5, 13mm curved gouge
- No.5, 5 & 7mm
- 10mm skewed spoon gouges L&R
- 12mm back-bent gouge
- 5mm bent chisel
- 2 & 6mm straight V-tool,
- 2mm veiner
- 10mm straight skew chisel

- 16mm hooked skew chisel
- 3 & 20mm chisel
- Various rifflers
- Bandsaw

Materials:

- **Flowers:** Lime (*Tilia x europaea*) 230mm dia x 150mm high, or laminated in sections (see step 4).
- **Vase:** any suitable wood 180mm dia x 100mm high that can be turned and carved.
- **Finishing:** sanding-sealer, white chalk paint, clear wax polish

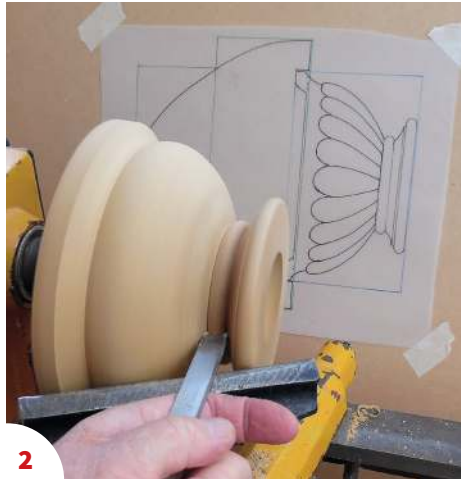


USING THE DRAWING

The drawing should be enlarged on to an A2 sheet so the limewood dome is 230mm in diameter and the height about 150mm. The measurements for the woodturning preparations can then be taken directly from the drawing. Because the flower pattern must be copied on to the curved surface of the dome, I have divided it into three sections, which must all be kept at the same scale as the profile. Each of these sections should be traced or printed on to sheets of transparent OHP film, which will be used as a guide to draw the pattern on to the dome.



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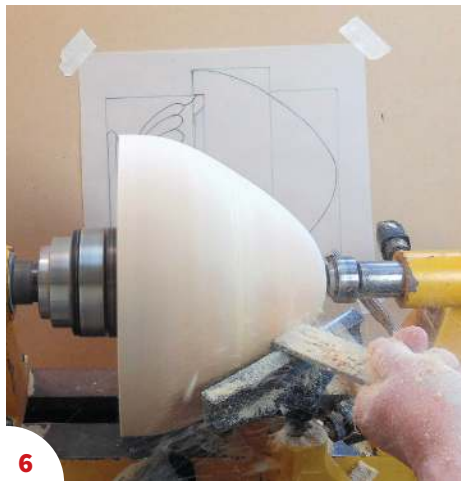
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PREPARATIONS

1 Make a full-size copy of the drawing. Get a suitable bowl blank 180mm dia x 100mm high for the vase. Cut some limewood into a circle 230mm dia x 150mm high, or laminate in sections (see step 4). Trace the flower patterns on to acetate sheets for use later.

TURNING THE BLOCKS TO SHAPE

2 Mount the vase blank on to the lathe and shape the underside and foot as shown on the drawing. Shape the bulbous section that will later be carved into gadroons. Turn a chuck recess in the base so you can remount that end on the chuck.

3 Cut a hollow in the top of the vase to a flat surface at a depth of 10mm below the rim. Shape the inner edge of the rim as shown on the drawing. Turn a chuck recess in the top end as well so you can remount it by either end.

4 To get the 150mm height for the dome profile, I laminated together two pieces of lime 75mm high, with diameters of 230mm and 178mm. Mount each section on the lathe and 'plane' the joining surfaces dead flat with a flat scraper. Give both surfaces a thorough coating of uPVC adhesive, centre up both blocks on the lathe, then wind the tailstock in tight so the glue is squeezed out around the edges. Leave it to set overnight.

5 Cut a recess in the underside of the flower block to fit exactly on to the vase rim, with the two flat surfaces of the base and the vase meeting exactly for gluing later. You can apply double-sided tape to one flat surface to check that it is connecting with the other. Cut a chuck recess in the base.

6 Reverse the flower block so the base is mounted on the chuck. Now shape the dome using the drawing as your guide. Don't use abrasives as the grit may blunt your carving tools later.

7 The vase and the flower dome are now turned to shape and are ready for the carving phase. Don't glue them together yet.

CARVING THE GADROONS

8 To mark the gadroons on the vase, measure the circumference of the widest part of the bulge by wrapping masking tape around it. Take off the masking tape, stick it to a long ruler, measure the total length (around 500mm) and divide it into 20 equal portions (around 25mm each). Stick it back on the vase, mark off the 20 divisions, then draw a straight line from each mark towards the centre of the base.

TOP TIPS: On a circular convoluted surface it can be difficult to keep track of grain direction, so draw arrows on your bench or backing board and keep checking them when carving.

- When working on the lower sides of a carving fixed to a backing board, you can tilt the backing board by placing some timber under one edge to make access easier.

GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES

When you are carving into a circular block be aware of:

1. The grain direction will keep changing from side grain to end grain as you rotate around the circumference, so you will need to allow for this when carving.
2. As you carve deeper towards the centre of the dome, the elements will all become closer together, so you need to make adjustments with size, position and overlaps.

9 Cut a dividing line between each gadroon with a V-tool. Draw a semi-circle at the top of each one and cut round it with a No.3, 10mm, then shape the cove under the rim of the vase into the V between the semi-circles.

10 Carve each gadroon into its smooth bulging shape. You can use rifflers to refine the shape, and abrasives to make each gadroon smooth and even. When the vase is finished, give it a coat of sanding-sealer.

ROUGHING OUT

11 Now you can start on the limewood flower dome by drawing the pattern on to the wood. Hold the transparency over the area and look through it to lay out the position of each element. Make adjustments where necessary to fit it all together, then draw in the detail design for each item. It helps to use different colour wax pencils for each type of flower.

12 For workholding you can fix some plywood to the base and screw that to the bench, or use a carving clamp if you have one. Prick round the outline of each element and chop out some of the gaps between them so you can see what's what.

13 Roughly shape the peaches first as they need to be cut back deeply to create their half-spherical shape. The leaves should curl around the peach and flip out to the outer edge.

14 The grapes and their leaves are also cut in quite deeply to form convincing bunches.

15 Rough out the flowers. The roses should be slightly domed with the outer petals layered towards the background. Vary the shape so they don't all look the same. The chrysanthemums dish inwards in the middle and their thin petals must overlap each other for support. The small primrose flowers can be fitted in among the larger elements. Arrange the flowers to break up the shape of the dome as much as possible.

CARVING THE DETAIL

16 The two bunches of grapes – one on each side – are a good place to start the detail carving. Carve each grape into an individual ovoid that appears detached from the background and its neighbours. In the larger gaps between them, shape the background surfaces into shallow domes to infer other grapes behind them. A 16mm hooked skew chisel is good for picking out the triangular gaps under and around the grapes.



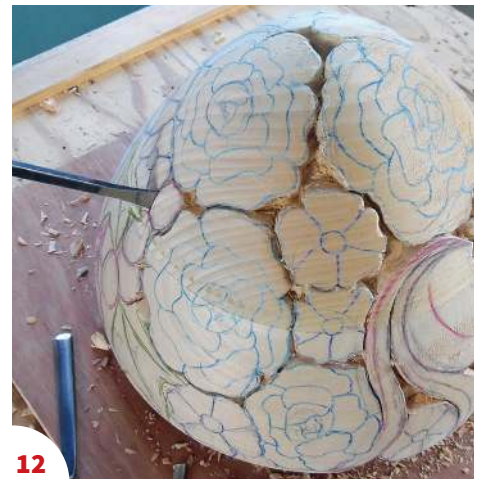
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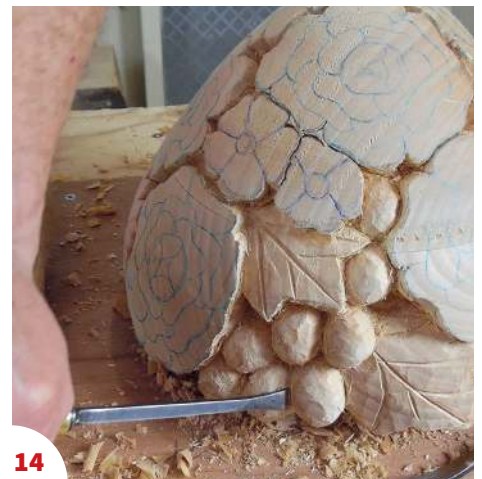
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21a



21b



21c



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17 The two peaches on opposite sides both show a three-dimensional rounded half of a peach, which must be carved smoothly with a broad, shallow gouge, and some long, narrow peach leaves that curl around them. Put plenty of curl into the leaves and carve narrow veins along them, then scoop between each of the outward veins with a shallow gouge.

18 There are eight roses in the display. Starting from the middle and working outwards, carve each petal as deeply as possible without breaking the one above it. Use skew gouges to carve a smooth curl on each petal, working with the grain direction. Give some petals a smooth finish and others a crinkly texture by carving grooves inwards with a narrow gouge.

19 There are two chrysanthemum flowers on opposite sides. Carve the narrow petals with sharp edges that overlap each other, cut a slight hollow down each one with a shallow gouge, then a central vein with a 2mm V-tool. Undercut the back edges just enough to make them look detached without losing vital support from behind.

20 The nine primroses are straightforward, but use skew gouges to get a smooth finish where grain direction is awkward. With all the flowers finished, slightly undercut all the elements to make them look detached. Where there are open areas between flowers, cut these deeply and mark the background areas with leaf veins and some cross-hatching in places to darken and disguise the blank areas.

We finish the carving by undercutting and shaping the lower edge where it overhangs the rim of the vase. Support it in the bench vice with lots of soft padding, shave away the inside of the leaf edges and round over the inside of the grapes. Sit it on the vase to check how it all looks from the front.

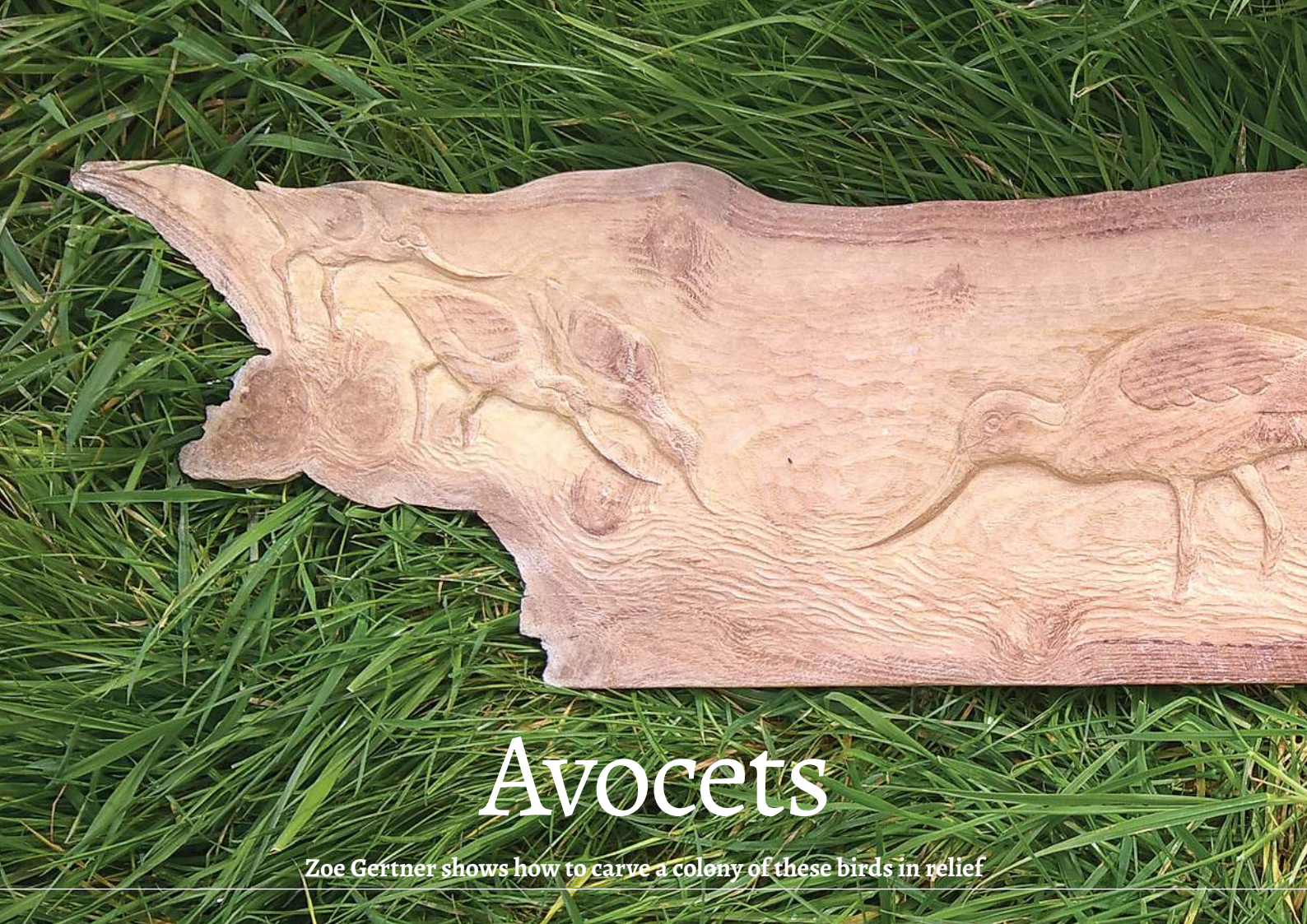
FINISHING

21a-c Give the peaches and grapes a thorough sanding to a smooth finish. Give the whole carving a coat of sanding-sealer, then a light sanding to tidy it up. Now glue the carving to the vase. Photos 22a-c show the finished carving in relation to the three sections of the pattern illustrated in the drawing.

PAINTING CARVINGS

Not everyone is comfortable with painting woodcarvings, but in decorative carving there are often sound reasons for doing so. In Georgian times nearly all woodcarving was painted and/or gilded, and timbers such as lime and pine are quite plain without a painted or gilded finish. But don't clog the detail with thick gloss paint, primers and undercoats. One or two thin coats of chalk paint over sanding-sealer, with a clear wax finish on top, will give a more delicate, Georgian-style finish to a decorative carving.

22 You can choose your own finish. I have given it two thin coats of white chalk paint and a coat of clear wax polish, to create a subtle Georgian 'porcelain' finish. ▶



Avocets

Zoe Gertner shows how to carve a colony of these birds in relief

Every so often I sort out my store of carving wood, which reminds me of what there is waiting to be carved and sometimes gives me ideas for new carvings. Looking through my stock of randomly shaped boards, my false acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) planks consist of some with bark still attached, plenty with burrs, knots and areas of wild grain pattern, and various flaws. Though they have great potential, these boards will be challenging to work. But some of the grain patterns could suggest flowing water, perhaps?

Leading on to water birds, perhaps? Distinctively shaped waders? Maybe avocets with their upcurving beaks, curlews, herons or egrets. The boards could be tricky to carve, but well worth the challenge in the end, and it's surprising how pleasing an eccentrically shaped relief carving can be.

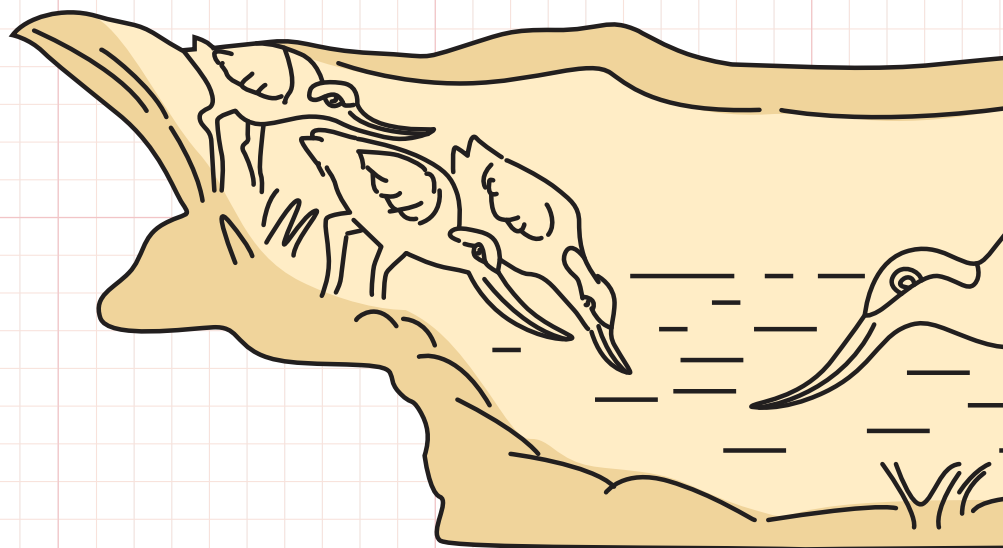
Things you will need

Tools:

- Mallet
- No.39, 3 & 6mm V-tool
- No.3, 3-19mm
- No.5, 10-13mm
- No.9, 6mm

Materials:

- Waney/natural-edged board approximately 660mm long x 230mm wide x 25mm thick
- Chalk stick
- Non-slip router mat
- Stiff brush
- Colourless wax polish



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZOE GERTNER

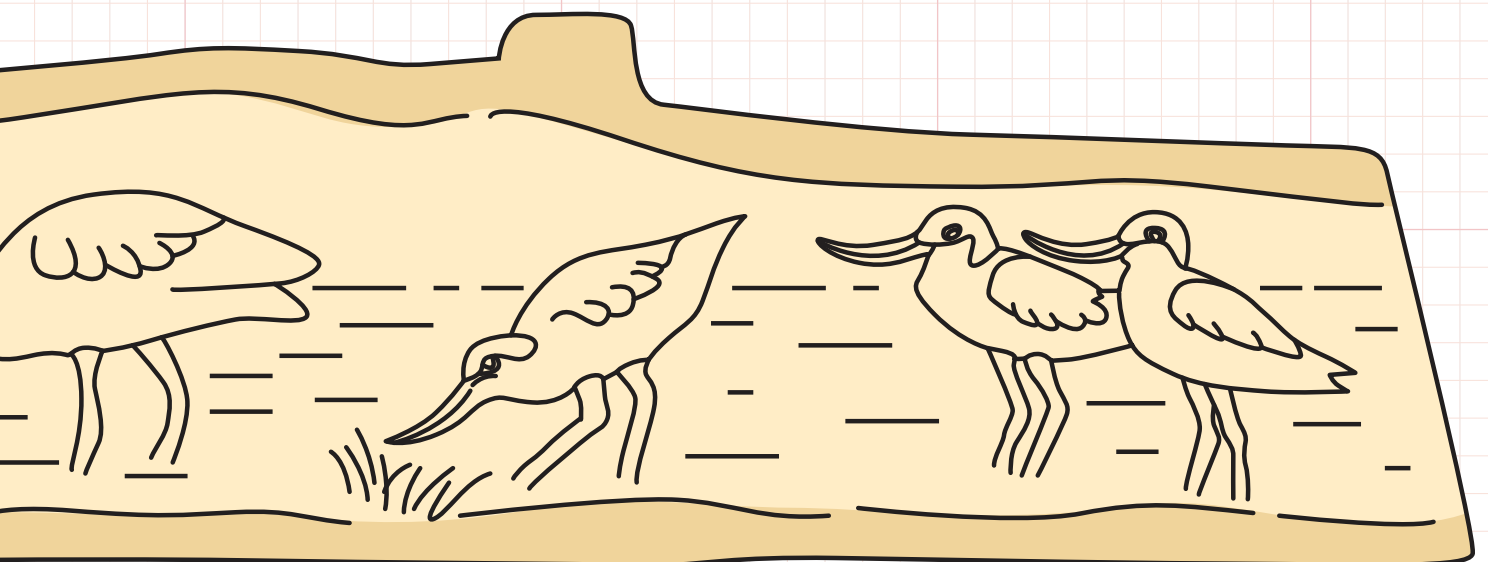
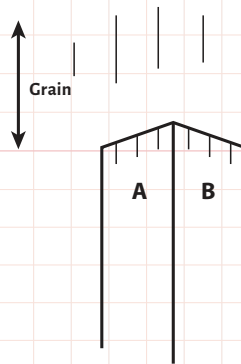


Diagram 1

USING A V-TOOL

A V-tool is best used with a mallet. Hold the tool well down the blade, supporting it from underneath with your thumb, and rest your hand and arm on the bench for stability.

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



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

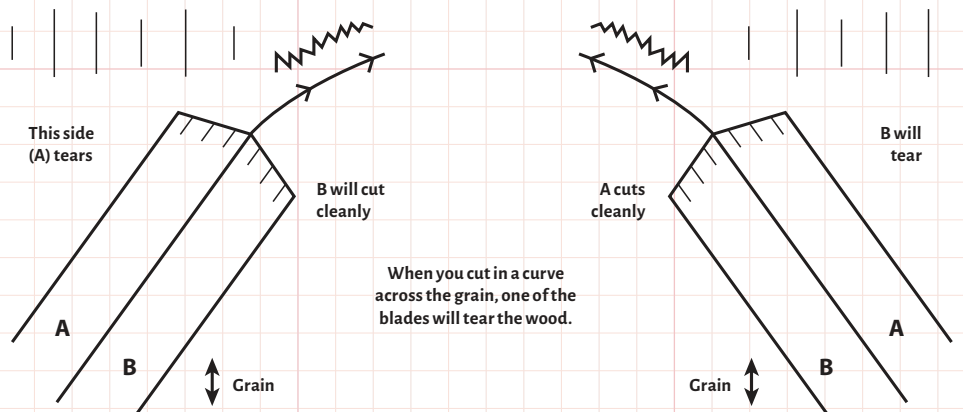
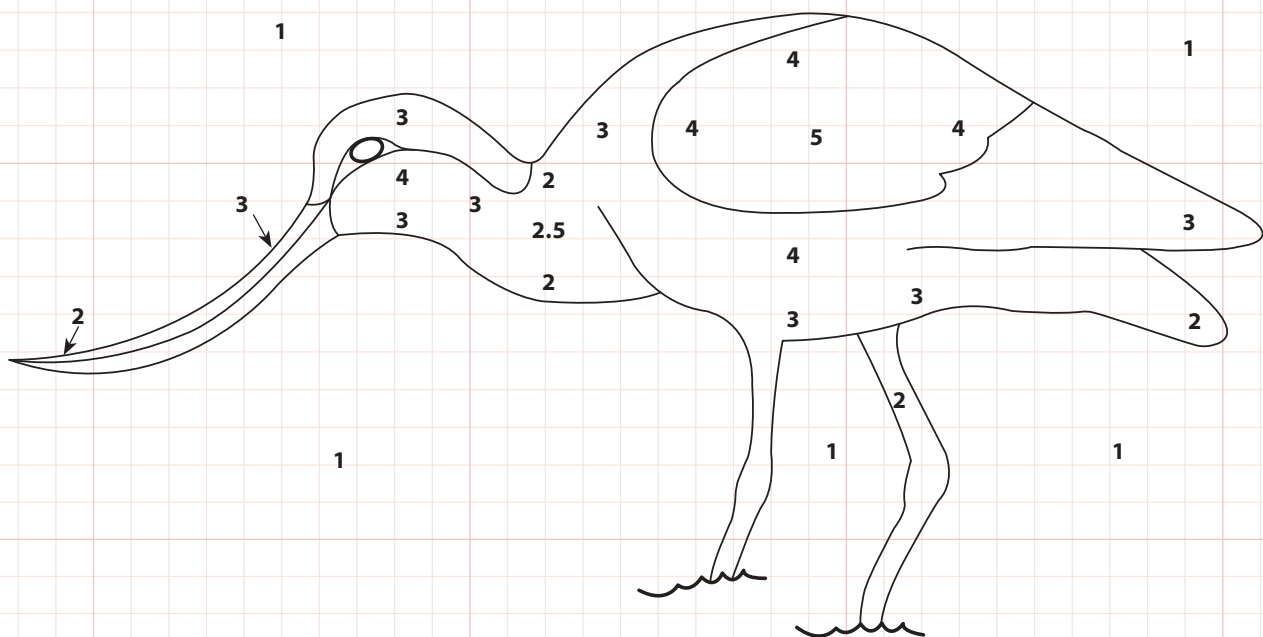


Diagram 2



The numbers indicate the depth of the relief carving. The areas marked number 1 are the deepest down from the top surface of the timber and the areas marked number 4 are the highest areas.





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1 Clean up your board ready to work on. I laid my board on a non-slip router mat so I could change the position quickly to enable easy changing of the cutting direction.

Having selected several different attitudes of avocets from my photos (which I took during a recent Bird Cruise on the River Exe, well known for its avocets), each was printed out on paper, cut out and glued on to light card as templates, then I arranged them on the board. Once in place they were drawn round to transfer the shapes on to the board.

2 Cut round the outlines of the birds using a V-tool with a mallet. Cut in the correct direction to obtain a clean edge on the bird, (diagram 1). You may have to change directions frequently, meeting up and parting from the line with your cuts depending upon the lie of the grain. To avoid mistakes when cutting, mark the grain direction first.

3 The V-cut is now deepened and widened using opposing cuts with a No.3 gouge of suitable width. Lean it against the edge of the outline at the same angle, so you continue the same angle down and outwards, away from the outlined bird. Turn the No.3 gouge so it corresponds with the curves of the outline, and for tighter curves, use a narrower one. For the first set of cuts you should always be cutting outwards from the outlines, never towards.

4 The second set of cuts is made by cutting downwards at an angle towards the first with the No.3 gouge, bevel down, from about 3mm away and meeting up at the same depth with the first set, thus enlarging the original V-cut.

5 To avoid splitting grain at the top of the head and wings, make alternate cuts from each side, finishing at the middle/top of the curve. Now repeat the sets of cuts around each bird, deepening and widening the original V-channel until it is about 6mm deep 6mm wide,

6 Next, remove the background using the No.3 or No.5 gouges. Start your cuts across the outer edge, finishing each within the enlarged V-channel. Extend your cuts outwards, still cutting towards the outline to produce a gentle slope to the bottom of the V until the channel is completely removed. In a confined area such as between the legs, divide the area to be removed and, in the same way, work towards the nearer channel from each side until these cuts meet up from each direction, then carefully remove the remaining raised area and flatten the whole area between the legs.

7 The direction in which you should cut will be dictated by the lie of grain.

Shaping the birds

8 Shaping can be started when you have removed the background adjacent to each bird (see diagram 2). The easiest way to work out the different levels is by using numbers. The lowest background is level 1 and successive levels are denoted by successive numbers with the highest level being the highest number, which in this case is number 5. The numbers also denote the carving sequence, starting with 1 and then finishing with 5.





9



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9 With No.3 gouges, reduce the lower end of the tail (no. 2 areas in diagram 2), and the beak, starting at the tip and tapering it from head to tip along its length. Then reduce both legs below the body, cutting the body line across the top of the furthest leg ready to set it behind.

10 Next, hollow the base of the neck adjoining the body. By making shallow cuts that meet each other from opposite directions, gradually hollow the area then round the upper part of the wing into it. Now round over the edges of the bird, lifting your gouge hand over the edge to meet up cleanly with the background.

11 Reduce the furthest leg so it is slightly lower than its foremost one. Using the wider No.3, gouge, round over the legs by lifting and rolling the gouge away from the centre of the leg, over the edge and along the length of them.

12 Now reduce the head so it is lower than the wing, blending the neck into head. If need be, further reduce the slope of the beak and begin to chamfer its upper and lower mandibles ready to make an apex along its length from the head to its tip.

13 Merge the upper surface of the shoulder into the hollow at the base of the neck, round over the upper edge of the body if you have not already done so, then mark the outline of the wing and tail using the No.9, 6mm or V-tool.

14 Now, using a No.3 gouge, remove the outer edge of the channel you cut around them, making them stand proud of the rest of the body.

15 Refine the beak by cutting more vertically downwards along its edges. As you make the chamfer be very careful to cut in the correct direction so that a sharp apex is retained along its length.

16 On the head, draw the eye and other details then, using the 3mm V-tool, cut round the eye, taking care to cut in the correct directions to produce a clean edge round it.



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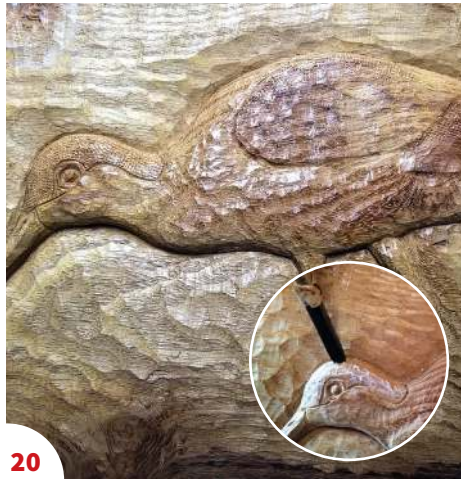
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17 With the No.3 3mm inverted and matching the curve of the eye, cut outwards and around it. Then, with the gouge bevel downwards, remove the adjacent surface of the head. Repeat the two sets of cuts until the eye stands proud, then with the gouge inverted, round over the edge until the middle of the eye is at its highest point.

18 With the 3mm V-tool mark in the rest of the detail on the head and round the neck, the beak and around the eye. The nostril is shown by making a small nick with the V-tool. If you have a steady hand and a very sharp V-tool, you may wish to cut a line along beak between the upper and lower mandibles. However, a sharply cut edge along its apex should show this clearly, too.

19 Above and below each knee reduce the width of the legs to make them more pronounced. Gradually reduce the lower end of the legs and merge them into the water in which the birds are standing.

20 Using a frosting/punch with a light hammer, the darker areas such as back of head and around the wings can be textured to contrast with the rest of the bird.

21 The water: Using the No.9, 6mm, cut flowing, curved grooves around the lower ends of the legs; in addition, using a No.5 gouge, areas of short, closely-placed cuts with peaks formed between them would give a rippled effect. Any remaining unworked areas of background can be textured in this way to finish the carving. It may be helpful to draw the flow lines with chalk beforehand.

22 Complete the remaining birds and check all edges are cleanly cut. Carefully pare away any deep errant nicks, splinters or inadvertent cuts. Then use the finish of your choice – mine was a wax polish applied with an old toothbrush, rubbed in well and buffed up with a soft brush and lint-free duster.

23 Finished avocets. ▶



23

Top 10 tips for woodcarvers

Peter Benson shares some invaluable carving advice

These tips are what, in my opinion, are some of the most important points to consider if you wish to make woodcarving an enjoyable and rewarding hobby.

They are in no particular order of importance but are simply written down as they have come to mind. Others will, no doubt, have different ideas of their own and it is only by experience or listening to more experienced carvers that you will be able to make your own lists. Here goes...

Tip 1: Tool selection

Choose your tools carefully and don't be swayed by the price. Most quality tools will be around the same price and standard, so choice will probably be based on availability and personal preference. Avoid cheap tools as they will probably not hold a good edge and will not last. The best tools usually will have an unconditional lifetime guarantee. Most carvers work with comparatively few tools on any one carving, so only buy ones you feel comfortable using. Don't buy sets to start with as you will invariably end up with several tools that you will never use. Also, be aware that not all new tools come honed and ready for use – they may just be ground and will need some attention before you can carve with them. I would suggest that your first few tools should include the following sweeps. The individual sizes can vary according to your preference No.9, No.3, No.5, No.7, No.10 or 11, No.39 (V-tool). If you vary the width on these you should have enough to get started.





Tip 2: Maintain a sharp cutting edge

Learn how to keep your tools sharp – don't rely on others to do this for you. As most carvers will hone their tools around every half an hour of use to maintain the quality of cut necessary, it is important you are confident enough to do this as you carve. There are many methods of sharpening and honing tools and you will need to try as many as you can before deciding which method suits you. Some carvers like to do the honing with power and others by hand. All methods work and just need practice to get right. The inability to get a good edge is generally not the fault of the method used, it is more that you are not yet doing it right. Keep trying. A sharp tool should give you a clean cut with little effort, even in the hardest of woods, leaving a smooth, shiny finish with no tracking marks of any kind. A poor surface when you have made a cut is seldom anything to do with your ability as a carver, it is almost certainly due to a blunt tool. One of the simplest, easiest and cheapest way to hone all the tools in your toolbox is to use an offcut of MDF (medium density fibreboard). Wood yards will often give you a small offcut at no charge and all you need to do is make a groove in the surface with the tool you wish to hone and then drag the tool towards you with the bevel flat in the groove. The abrasive quality of the MDF is sufficient to produce a good edge. When it glazes over with time, you simply cut another groove. This is particularly useful for small tools and V-tools as you maintain the correct profile throughout.



Tip 4: Knife carving

If you have a limited budget and perhaps no designated space in which to carve, you might like to try knife carving. For less than the cost of two woodcarving gouges you can buy a suitable knife, a leather strop for honing and a pair of safety gloves. These gloves are now available from many sources and you need to look at the cut level in particular. Always go for cut level 5 if you can – this is the maximum. A leather apron is a must if you intend carving sitting down with your carving in your lap. One word of warning here – don't ever try to hone a knife on a rotary power machine running at speed. If the back of the knife catches the wheel the results can be disastrous.

There are many different knives advertised with fancy designs and handles – this doesn't mean that they are the best for you. Try any knife before you buy it if possible. It should feel right, make good, clean cuts with little effort and be easy to keep sharp. If you belong to a carving group, try knives belonging to other members and choose the one you like best. Remember that all the different blade patterns have different functions that may not be what you want. A simple slim, straight blade in a comfortable handle will probably be the best choice.



Tip 3: Work holding

If you are working on a carving that is too big to hold in the hand or that needs full-sized tools, you will need some sort of holding device. These can be very expensive if bought commercially but I would advise that part of your basic equipment should be some form of woodworker's vice and a bench. By screwing or gluing a piece of scrap wood to the underside of your carving you will have a simple holding device to start with. Once you gain more experience and have decided what sort of carving you prefer, you can purchase an appropriate clamp. If you want to carve reliefs you would be better off with a large bench hook or inclined platform.



Tip 5: Subject knowledge is key

Learn as much about the subject you wish to carve as you possibly can. Obviously, if you are carving abstracts this doesn't apply but you still need to have a clear understanding of what shapes and curves work together.

Remember, in a painting you can hide details of which you are not certain but this can be difficult in a carving. You need to have a sound knowledge of animal or human anatomy when using them as subjects, as well as movement patterns and balance. When carving faces you need a thorough appreciation of all the proportions before you even start or they will never look right.

You don't need all the finer detail before you start but you do need a good understanding of the overall shape. More research can be carried out as you go along and the detail added once you have got the form correct. It is important to understand that, unless the form is accurate, no amount of detail will improve the overall effect.



Tip 6: Relief carving template

When carving in relief, make a clear acetate tracing of your proposed design, making location marks on both the tracing and the wood in order to get it exactly in the right place when you need it. You then only need to draw a rough outline of your design in order to remove the background before establishing all the necessary angles. Many carvers will draw the whole design on to the wood and then remove everything once they start carving. Alternatively, they try to maintain all the lines, making the whole process fraught with difficulty and never really getting any depth to the finished piece, as all the detail will tend to be around

where the lines have been drawn. Once the background has been removed, concentrate on getting all the angles and perspective right before even thinking about adding any detail. In effect you will be allocating wood where it is needed, starting from the background and working forward towards the front, checking where everything will be using your acetate. This way you will use all the wood available and get the maximum effect of depth possible. Remember, with relief carving you are creating an illusion, not carving what is actually there. You will not have enough wood for the correct depth – it just has to look as though you have.



Tip 7: Maquettes

When carving animals or figures I would recommend that you make yourself a maquette (a small version of your intended carving) in clay, Plasticine or soft wood. This doesn't need to be highly detailed, just enough to appreciate the basic shape and form of the subject. It should give you an idea of what the finished piece will look like and can be sufficient for you to cut out a basic shape to start carving. This should be a working maquette that can be practised on and modified as you proceed with the carving itself. Never practise on your carving – always use either the maquette or a piece of waste wood. Remember that, if you use clay or Plasticine, you can always add more material if needed to get the shape right – you cannot do this with your carving.



Tip 8: Viewing work

Don't always look at your carving from the same viewpoint. Turn it around, upside down, look at it in a mirror, from a distance, from the back and so on. Your left brain will overlook all sorts of errors as long as it recognises what the subject is. It will switch off when it doesn't recognise the subject and your right brain will notice things that are not right. Don't be afraid to ask others for their opinion, even if they know nothing about woodcarving or the subject. They will invariably have something to offer (not always welcome but usually somewhere near right). You might find that, when looking at a subject for your research, the same method will apply. Looking at the component parts of a subject rather than the whole can give a great deal of information. Even asking why something is the shape it is rather than simply accepting it can be a help. For instance, why do predators have eyes facing forwards with protruding brows and prey have them on the sides of their heads? (How many times have you seen this wrong in carvings?)



Tip 9: No rush

Try not to take off too much wood at a time. If you have a need to remove waste quickly use a large tool and a mallet. A general rule of thumb is that you should always use the largest tool you can handle. If you have weak hands, use a small tool. You are doing this for pleasure so there should be no rush to get it finished. Just because you see your instructor or other carvers taking off wood at an alarming rate, it doesn't mean you can do the same. Experienced carvers develop very strong hands over time, even if it is not always noticeable.



Tip 10: Remove more wood

Finally, there is one solution to nearly all woodcarving problems. That is to take off more wood. You certainly won't be able to put back what you have already removed. Many carvers worry for ages about whether they have done something wrong or have taken off too much. There is no remedy for either of these so stop worrying. Your only problem is to identify where you need to take off more wood so concentrate on that. If one side of a figure looks too thin you will have to make the other side match. You can't improve the thin side. If one arm is shorter than the other, you only have one solution – shorten the other one. There are obviously other ways of putting right mistakes. You can always add hands, heads or feet if needed, as long as the subject is clothed, but these are specific problems that I won't deal with here.



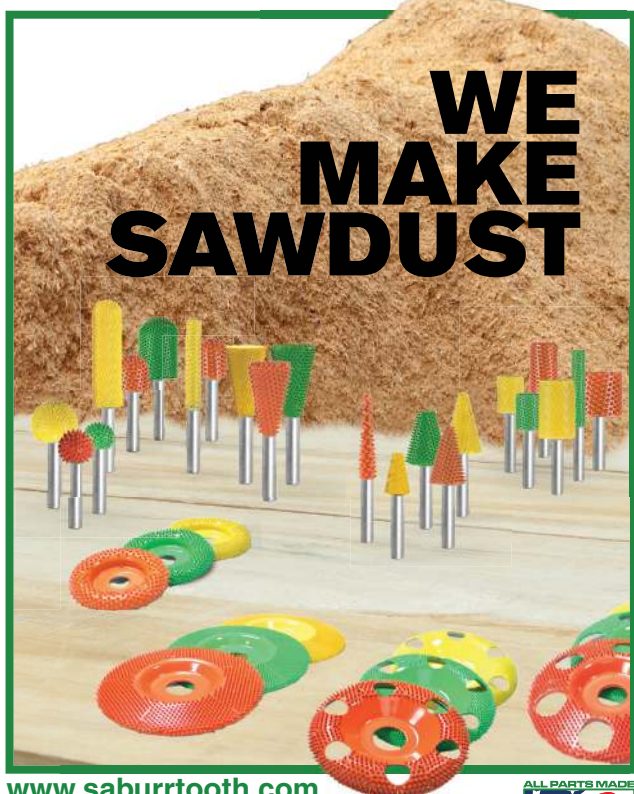
Summary

To sum up, safety at all times should be your priority. Keep both hands behind the cutting edge of your tools whenever you carve. If using palm gouges with the wood held in the hand, use a safety glove and don't carve directly towards the holding hand. Keeping the thumbs in contact with each other as you carve can generally prevent the tool from slipping. If you drop a tool don't try to catch it or put out your foot to stop it. Let it fall. A damaged tool is easier to repair than damage to your person. You might like to have a non-slip mat or tool holder on your bench to prevent tools from rolling off.

Most of all have fun. You will make mistakes, as we all do, but that is how you learn. ▶

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Brân Celtic Raven

Dave Western explores carving a stylised Celtic crow

Although I am a massive fan of Celtic knotwork and love to carve it whenever I can, I am equally fond of the elegant zoomorphic creatures that grace many types of Celtic art. Whether found on sturdy pot handles and dagger hilts or among the delicate line drawings of the *Book of Kells*, there can be no doubt that beasts both mythical and real have enthralled Celtic artists for centuries.

Over the years, these zoomorphic animals and humans have evolved, taking ever-changing forms. Initially, most would have their bodies rendered quite realistically and then would have their limbs woven into fantastic knot patterns which swept through the design.

In our modern era, many artists working in the Celtic form have used the elaborate knotwork more like a 'skeleton', allowing us to see into the animal while retaining a realistic outline of its form.



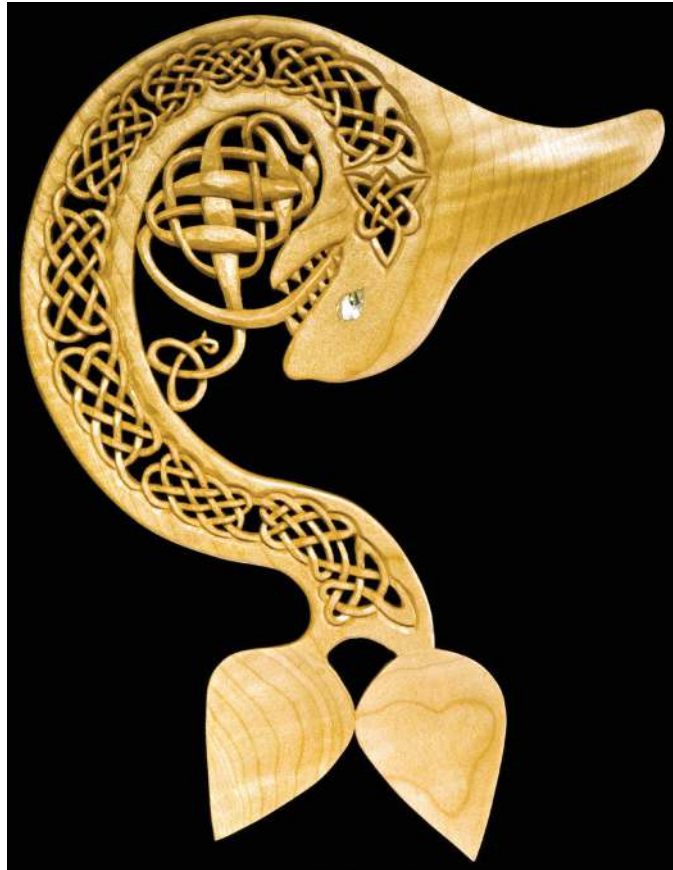
Complex Celtic knotwork



Celtic zoomorphic forms



RIGHT: Zoomorphic form combined with knotwork



Zoomorphic forms utilizing knotwork 'skeleton'

Designing Brân

For this project, I have taken things a step further. Abstracting the body of a raven, I have carried the design around a circle, breaking the form into two halves, which are united by uncarved central strips that follow a line similar to a yin-yang curve. In the upper left quadrant (as you view the header photo) you'll see the bird's beak gripping a shiny pearl, the design sweeps up and around to the left taking in the bird's gleaming eye (symbolised with a rounded three-point knot) and the pointed tuft of his head feathers (the sharp three-point knot at the very top of the design). Things then sweep around to the left and descend the design in the form of a large Celtic knot symbolic of the bird's chest and belly.

The knot is contained by a solid strip on the outer edge of the circle and by the two yin-yang strips in the centre. These strips represent the mid-point of the design, allowing opposite sides of a three-dimensional animal to be viewed at once in two dimensions. The design's right side begins in the bottom right quadrant, where the shoulder joint is symbolised with a four-point knot and stylised feathers indicate the bird's wing. Beside the wing, another large Celtic knot represents the bird's chest and belly, and a yin-yang strip mirroring the left side indicates the 'join'.

If that all seems a bit too artsy and precious, just think of it as an excellent exercise in Celtic knot carving and knife-work. Either works for me.

The disc I carved has a softly domed face so that the knotwork becomes a bit more vibrant when viewed from any angle other than face-on. Doming requires a fair bit of effort, so if you lack the tools, time or inclination, the design will still look great rendered on a completely flat board.



The drawing for this medallion

Cutting and creating the medallion

For this particular carving, I used a piece of silver birch (*Betula* spp.) which had colour tones I felt would allow the carving to really come out. I'd be wary of using really dark wood such as walnut, or using stains to darken a light wood as the delicate knotwork will easily get lost. I've found that lighter to medium amber-type woods tend to give the best effect with this type of carving. I also was careful to align the design so the wood grain ran down through the carving from top to bottom (again, oriented with the main photo). I roughly marked a pencil circle around the design and then cut out the piece using a bandsaw. I didn't worry too much about refining the circular cut at this point as it will be cleaned up later.

Next, I used a pencil to scribe a line about $\frac{1}{2}$ depth right around the outer edge of the piece and marked a rough X in the centre

of the work face. These pencil marks became my guide for the doming process, which I again undertook with a coarsely bladed bandsaw. If you lack a saw, just use an axe or large chisel to hog the bulk of material away.

With the crude cutting done, use a finishing chisel, a block plane or scrapers to refine the dome. Aim to keep the curving as uniform as possible as you travel around the circle. Although I generally avoid sanding carved work until the very end, I will often give the dome a good sanding down to 320 grit to ensure the work face is as perfect as possible before I begin cutting. When I'm satisfied there's no blemishes and scratches left, I use a common glue stick to fasten my photocopy to the piece. This allows me to avoid repetitive drawing on the work face, keeping things cleaner and the lines more accurate.



Copy the pattern and cut a piece of suitable wood just larger than the pattern



The medallion has a slightly domed face, so work this down in stages



Refine the dome to create a nice smooth surface



Once the dome is created affix the pattern

Refinement

At this point, I cut the circle to its final shape. Since I want to be as accurate as possible and give myself the smoothest finish possible, I use my scrollsaw with a nice fine blade. If you lack one of these, you can cut down with hand saws or just use a large chisel to nibble your way around the edge. Once I am satisfied that the circle is neat and clean, I begin marking out the drawing with shallow, vertical 1mm-deep cuts along the design lines. I use a small, straight knife for this operation and I take my time so that I get pulled off line should I hit sweeping grain underneath the paper.

Avoid vertical cuts along edges which border knotwork. In these areas, tilt the knife to allow a chip to be removed when you vertically cut the lines of the actual knot. In the close-up shot overleaf, you'll see the angle required to remove a chip cleanly. You'll also note the difference between the bottom border cut in the second picture, which has been done correctly, and the upper border cut, which shows the unsightly line left behind by an errant vertical cut.



Cut off the waste wood using the pattern as a guide



Use a knife to incise the pattern with shallow cuts



Create an angled cut where the edges meet border knotwork

Knotwork

Once your lines have all been marked and you are ready to start with the knotwork, there are a number of ways to proceed. In the three photos below I show a small section of carved work illustrating three possible ways to raise the knot pattern. The four-point knot has been fretted right through the board, enabling deep overlapping of the knotwork. Just above it, the area of six very small sections has been simply chip-carved to form a point through the middle of each knot. Finally, the four larger sections to the right have been carved with vertical sides along the knotwork and a flat bottom in the hollowed

out section. The flat bottom can also be textured with a punch to pattern if desired. For this project, I wanted to keep things as simple as possible, so I have opted to utilise a chip pattern that I have domed rather than keep strongly angled. This gives a softer look and allows me to deal with some of the really oddly shaped sections. To achieve the pillowy look I am after, I carve out a chip from either side with a straight knife. I then curve the wedge-shaped peak down with a small chisel to round it over and soften it out.



Three-cut chip-carved pattern



Pierced and rounded detail



The background is lowered to raise the main detail

Orderly cutting

A good order of business is to begin your knotwork at the outer edge and get everything cut and shaped before proceeding to the inner sections. Once the outer and inner sections have all been cleared, use a small chisel to separate each section of the knotwork. Resist the urge to dig much deeper than about $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch (1.5mm) until all the sections are cut away. When everything is done and you are happy that all the 'overs and unders' are as they should be, proceed to deepen the cuts to about 3mm.

When you are happy that all the knotwork has been sufficiently cleared and the overs and unders cleanly defined, go back with a

straight knife and redefine the vertical edges of the knotwork. Aim to get nice, crisp cuts that leave no chips or stringy bits behind. Then, carve a very gentle chamfer off the edges of the knot strands to clean them up and to soften the look and feel of the knot.

As more of the knotwork is completed, take the opportunity to go back over some of the lines you previously defined and open them up a little bit more. I like to take out a nice V-shaped chip of about 2mm depth and width, to give the line some presence without it being overwhelming and heavy.

As you get more toward the central area of the pattern, you may find you need a longer straight

knife to reach all the sections that require trimming. The raven's beak needs to be gently curved, a job which requires a longish blade that can be leaned to the appropriate angle without the handle contacting the work. For this part, I used a 38mm long blade rather than the 20mm blade I used for the rest of the detailing.

Because the turns are tight in some of the knotwork, you may find it easier to cut these sections with a small gouge rather than trying to negotiate your way around the curves with the straight knife. I have a couple of small gouges that I can match to whatever diameter curve I am working on. It is quick and saves a lot of clean up.



Create a chip-carved outer border along the winding central knotwork



While you have your knife, angle cut the main curved line incised earlier



Lower the background of the knotwork and create the interlacing knotwork with a chisel



Moving back to using a knife, define the cross-over intersections



Clean up the edges of the knotwork



Now angle-cut the incised curved lines



Use a knife to round over the detailed areas as required



Continue cutting the pattern and switch between a knife and gouge as required

Wing section

With the knotwork complete, move on to the wing section and mark out each feather with a vertical knife cut. Then make a vertical cut along the bottom of each row of feathers to a depth of approximately 3mm. Use a large chisel to cut an angled chip to the line at the bottom of the row. Start shallow and deepen to about 3mm when you are confident that all is in order. Once each

row has been marked out, use the straight knife to define the lines between each feather. Avoid the urge to remove too much material, as you want the feathers to appear tight together. Finally, round the bottom edges of each feather with your straight knife to refine things a bit. You can opt for a small rounding as I have done or you can go for a full semi-circular rounding if you are enthusiastic.



Incise feather boundaries with a knife



Use a number 1 straight gouge or chisel to create the angled layers

Finishing touches

Finally, go over the flat areas with some really fine 320 grit abrasive paper to clean up any pencil marks, scratches or thumb prints. You don't have to get too carried away – a quick once over should do nicely. Then use your straight knife to chamfer a small edge along the outer lip of the carving. This will make it nicer to handle and less likely to catch on anything. Finally, give it a light coat or two of oil if you want to bring up the grain and the colour a bit. I definitely don't

recommend surface finishes such as varnish, Varathane or lacquer for Celtic-style projects. They are too heavy and kill the crisp look of the knotwork. Stay with penetrating oil or just a wipe with some beeswax.

The disc I carved was approximately 200mm in diameter, which is a size that fits comfortably on a regular sheet of photocopy paper. At that size, it is small enough to be manageable but big enough that the knotwork doesn't get too onerous. ▶



Return to using a knife to refine the feather edges and shape



Take off the corners to soften the look



Once everything is cut, sand the piece with fine abrasive



Soften the edge of the medallion



Now the carving is completed apply a finish of your choice. Oil followed by a coat of beeswax works well

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Sharpening curved blades

Nic Westermann shares his simple two-point approach to sharpening curved spoon blades and scorps

In my previous introductory article on sharpening I explained how to cut a bowl or concave surface – the bevel of the blade must be a mirror image of the form it will cut. The bevel needs to be convex – only slightly convex, but convex nevertheless.

When you bend a strip of steel to make a spoon blade the outside will take on a concave from edge to spine. This is really unfortunate as it is the precise opposite of the desired convex bevel form, and does make manufacture of these blades problematic.

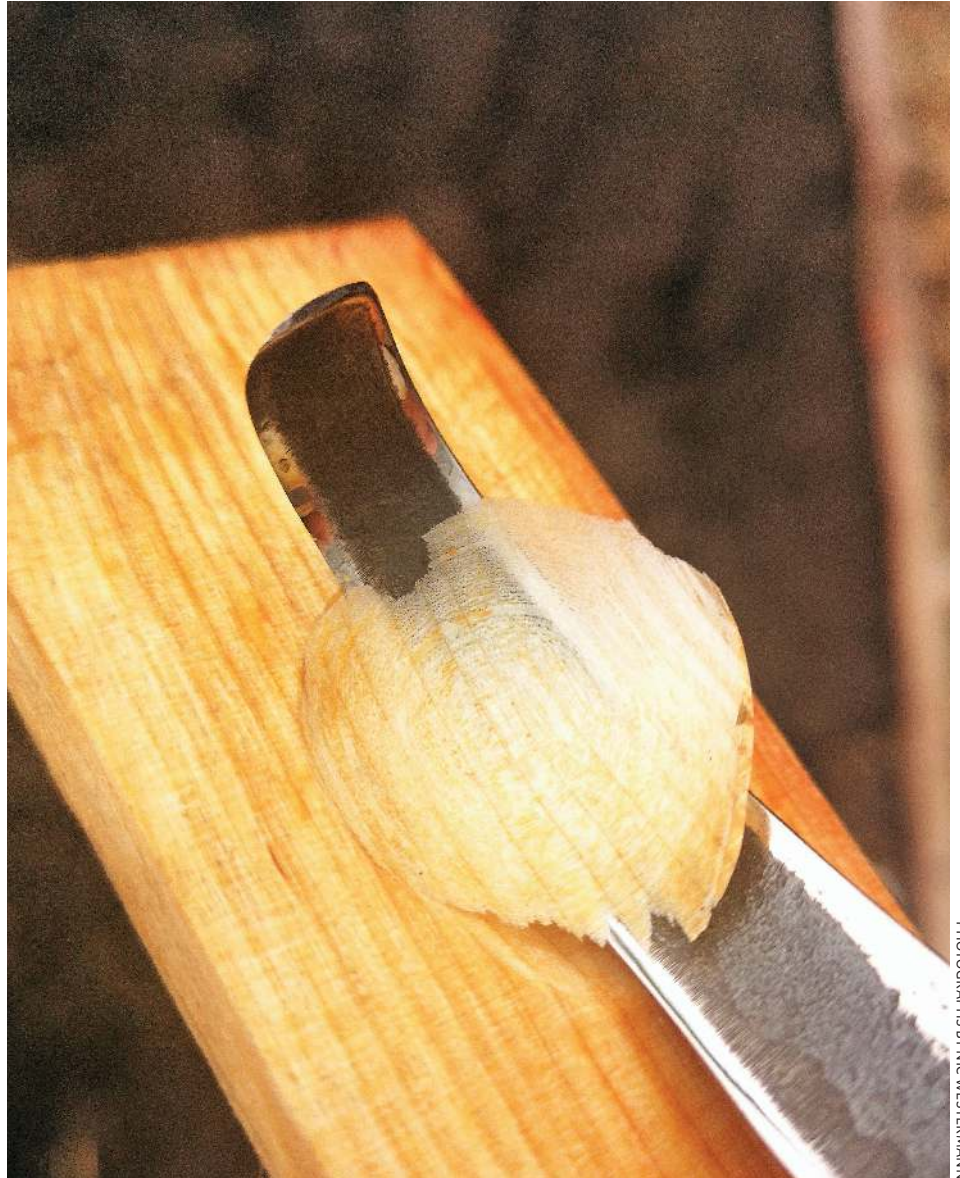
Edge geometry for efficient carving

The first rule of sharpening is to cut the bevels to the correct form and it is often the case that spoon knives do not have the optimum bevel form when purchased.

Fig 1 shows an example of a basic flat, bevelled blade. It will not cut well on a curved form as the edge will tend to dig in and then be forced out of the wood by the next point of contact, which is where the back of the bevel meets the blade body, causing chatter. There will be no contact at the spine of the blade so relieving this area is not necessary.

There is, however, a trade off- with the final form you choose. A blade that excels at deep forms will be more convex and will not provide much bevel support on shallow forms so will not be so controllable or efficient.

Conversely, a blade tuned for shallow forms will be much flatter in profile. It will tend to cut very aggressively but will chatter in deeper forms. The amount of convexing needed in this scenario is barely perceptible – often just trying to follow a flat bevel by hand will unintentionally put enough curve into the bevel. If you consciously try to convex the edge you can end up with a blade that is dramatically rounded over and this is very time consuming to fix.

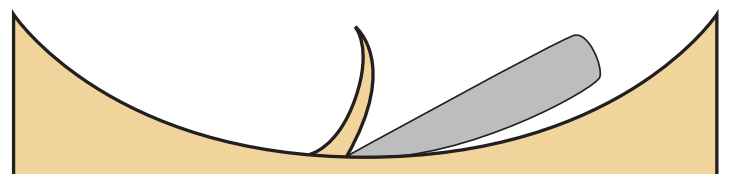


PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIC WESTERMANN

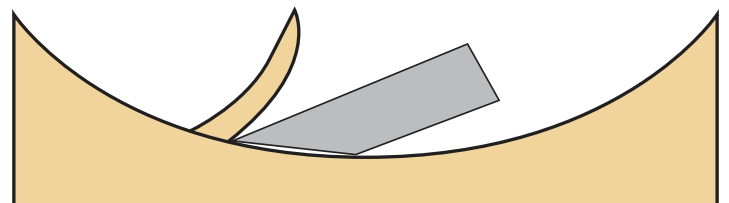


This blade was ground with a flat bevel. It was then bent to a curved form, causing the bevel to become concave, definitely not the optimum form. You may find that some bought blades resemble this

Fig 1



Improved blade profile cutting



Basic profile showing two bevel contact points and air gap between them

How much convex is required?

It is hard to know how much of a convex you need, so try this. Test your blade in a form you are likely to revisit. I know this is a bit chicken and egg – how do you hollow out a form with a blade that needs sharpening? All blades will hollow to some degree, as will gouges, burrs, even sandpaper at a pinch. So, once you have dug out your form use a marker pen to draw a series of lines on your blade from edge to spine and cut, just once – you should see the pen wiped off from the areas that need removing. When all the pen is wiped off your job is done. Note that the blade doesn't need to be that sharp at this stage – it is the points of contact we are looking at.

Admittedly making these changes is not easy. I would recommend starting with wet or dry on a block, in the 360-600 grit range. This is slow going but you will be unlikely to take too much off as opposed to powered grinding or sanding. You may prefer to have the hone on the bench and work the knife though.

Remember that you are aiming to remove steel from the back of the bevel to make the convex, not the edge – leave that alone or you will dramatically alter the effective cutting angle of the blade. If you like to push cut on the spine of your blade then it makes sense to round this slightly for comfort.

Hopefully not much will be needed in terms of shaping on the inside as this should be largely flat, but I would advise refining the surface and removing any grinding marks. I would suggest grits in the 800-1200 range for this.



Working away from the edge with the palm up. Lifting your hand will allow you to work from tang to tip in a single, smooth motion, or the other way

Refining the edge

Once the bevels are set, then to finish sharpening we need to follow the second rule – which is to refine the edge by working down through the grits.

If you have reshaped the outside bevel you will need to work down through the grits to blend everything in. Don't worry about getting a perfect, scratch-free finish over the entire surface, it is only the edge that really matters.

Even if you haven't had to recut the outside bevel the edge may well need some touching up, so try to refine this. Go slowly. While being careful not to round the edge at this stage, I

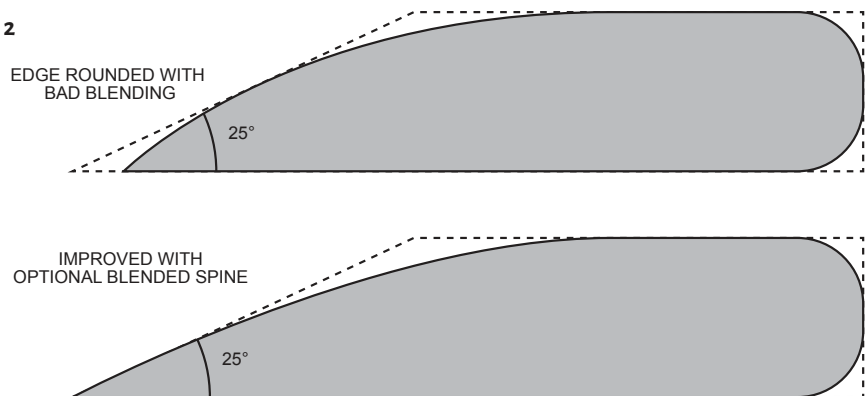


This blade profile suits this form well. There is contact along nearly the full width of the blade. Remember, you only have to do this once, if at all – some blades have very good geometry straight from the box



This flat ground blade is prone to chattering (making contact only on the edge and back of the bevel)

Fig 2



My preferred method as you can actually see the angle you are presenting the blade to the abrasive, and in this case it is focusing too much on the edge



Using wet or dry on a dowel to refine the inside. Work the paper away from the edge to avoid cutting into it

can't emphasise how important this is. As you will see later you will only have to do this once so take your time. I would finish the outside to 3000 grit.

As you will now be painfully aware the outside bevel curves in both directions, which makes sharpening very difficult. Conversely, the inside of a blade should be flat, and thus will only curve in one plane making it an easier option to sharpen. In a situation where one bevel is noticeably easier to sharpen than the other, I always recommend concentrating on the easier one and just removing the burr from

the other side – why make life more difficult than it needs to be? At this point we have a blade with the outside bevel virtually finished, and now all sharpening and resharpenings can be taken care of on the 'easy' inside.

Adjustment and stropping

On the spoon blades I designed and refined over the years I use a hollow inside bevel – this makes sharpening easier and quicker than a flat inside bevel, but the overall technique is the same.

Self-adhesive wet or dry paper on a wooden dowel is the easiest, but you can wrap or glue paper on. Make sure you are working away from the edge. You should raise a burr quite quickly – this can be felt on the outside bevel.

If you have a blade with a flat inside bevel colour it in with a marker

pen to show you where you are working – it is effectively a bevel the entire width of the blade, so it makes sense to know when you are hitting the edge. As ever, be careful not to round this bevel – aim to keep it dead flat.

Strop off the burr on the outside – the one in the image could actually be wiped off with my thumb. I just use a fine polishing compound rubbed into suede to polish this off. In a typical resharpening sequence there is no need to use anything else on the tricky outside bevel.



A shiny burr raised from working on the inside bevel. In my production work I use a sequence of 1200 grit, 3000 and then finish with either 7000 grit or a fine compound, rubbed directly on to a dowel



Shortcut

Finally, a shortcut. I often make test cuts before I have finished sharpening at the 1200 grit stage – the wood will show up any discrepancies in the edge very clearly. I then tend to mark the offending section of blade so I know which areas to concentrate on. This technique is also really useful if you have a ding in an otherwise sharp blade but can't track it down. Sure, there is an argument that to maintain a straight edge you should sharpen all of it evenly, but if you want to get back to carving quickly this tip can save a lot of time. ▶



It was hard to spot the edge damage on this blade but it showed up easily in soft timber



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Wallcreeper

Mike Wood shows how to create a delightful rock-dwelling bird



The wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) is a small blue-grey bird with striking crimson wing feathers, which are only revealed when it opens its wings. It is found in the mountains of Eurasia, southern Europe, the Himalayas and central China.

Its name derives from the Ancient Greek words for wall and runner (*teikhos and dromos*) and the Latin for wall (*murus*). As the name suggests, wallcreepers live on the sides of cliffs, hiding their nests from predators in rock crevices. They will also make their homes in man-made walls, having been found living in castles, cathedrals, bridges and tunnels.

They are elusive, shy birds, their plumage often making them hard to see against a cliff face. They lead solitary lives during the winter but form breeding pairs in the spring. The male and female then remain together until their young are ready to fly the nest.

Wallcreepers feed on insects and spiders, which they catch by moving across a cliff face in butterfly-like short flights and hops, using their long bills and forked tongues to extract their prey from rock crevices. They also forage along rivers and streams during rainy weather.

Global population numbers are stable and the wallcreeper's conservation status is currently listed as of Least Concern on the IUCN Red List.

Things you will need**Tools:**

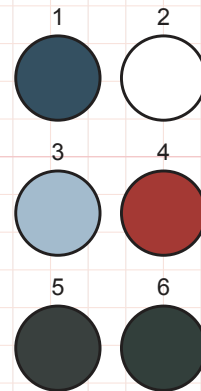
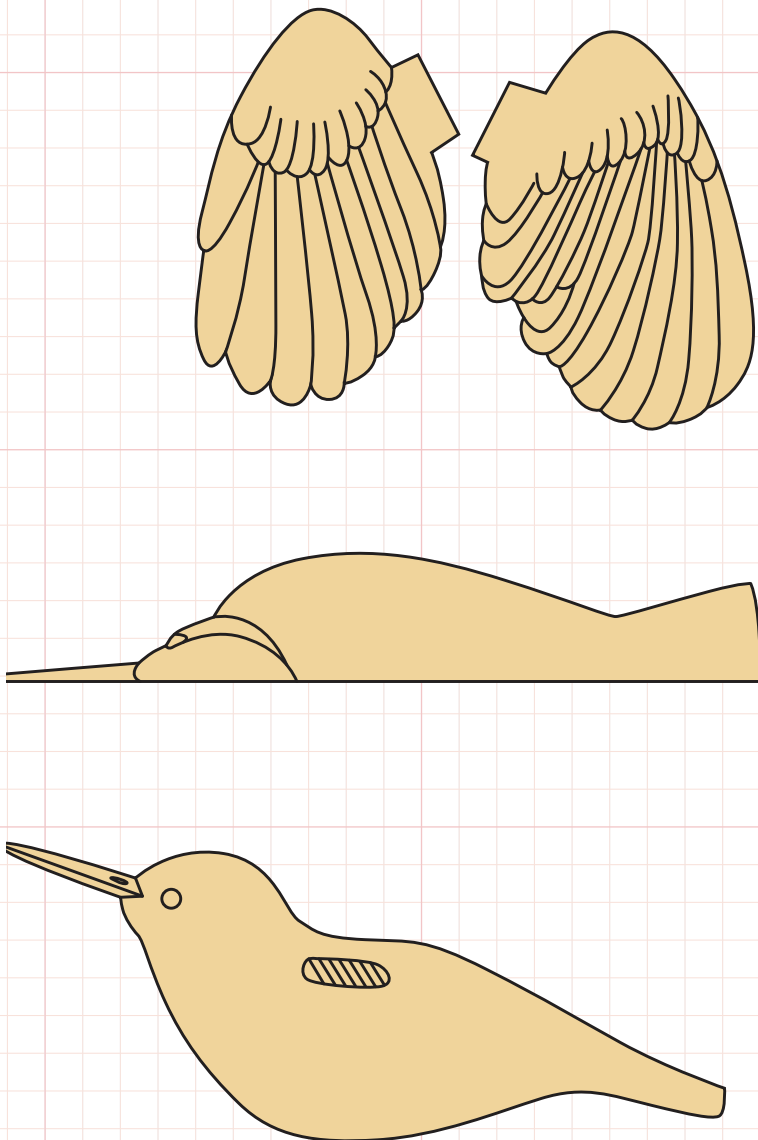
- Personal and respiratory protective equipment (PPE & RPE)
- Bandsaw, coping saw or fretsaw
- Carving knife
- Rotary power carving unit
- Coarse taper burr
- Medium flame or taper burr
- Bull-nose stone burr
- Round-nose burr

- Fine ruby taper burr
- Drill and drill bit for the feet
- Sanding drum
- Pyrography unit with scalpel nib

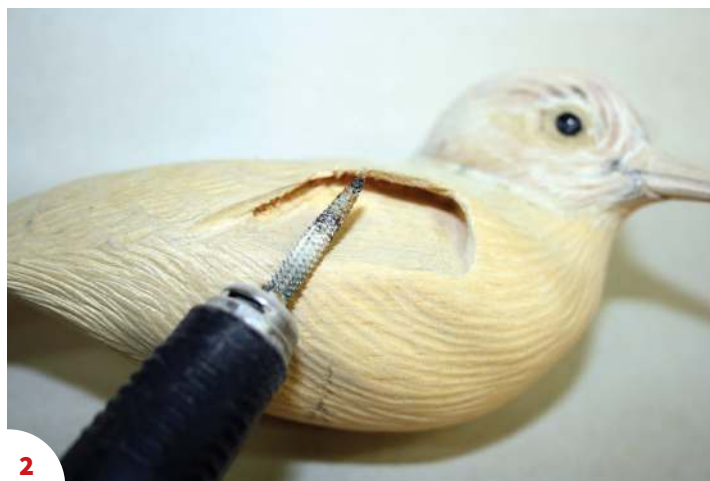
Materials:

- Wood used. Body and wings jelutong (*Dyera costulata*), head is lime (*Tilia x europaea*)
- Body: 150mm long, 60mm wide, 20mm deep

- Wings: 100mm long, 70mm wide, 20mm deep
- Head: 90mm long, 30mm wide, 30mm deep
- Eyes & feet
- PVA adhesive
- Plastic wood
- Paint brushes/airbrush
- Abrasives 120-240 grit
- Acrylic colours as per the colour palette



- 1 - Paynes Gray
- 2 - White Gesso
- 3 - Paynes Gray White Gesso mix
- 4 - Naphthol Crimson
- 5 - Black
- 6 - Black Paynes Gray mix



Body and wings

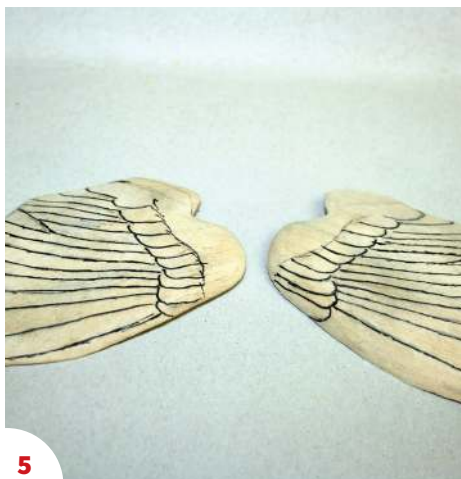
1 Start by using the templates supplied to mark your timber and then cut out the blanks. Then rough-shape them with either hand or power-carving tools blocking in all the main features. I use rotary power carving tools for carving birds. If you too use rotary power carving to shape your work, make sure you are wearing appropriate personal and respiratory protective equipment.

2-4 Having rough-shaped it, cut the eye socket and insert the eyes on a bed of plastic wood. Remove and shape any squeeze-out to create the outer edge of the eyes. Also, adjust the wing socket for a perfect fit for the wings and cut in the main feather forms and textures all over the body and head.

5-6 Now move on to the wings. Refine the shape and draw on all the feather forms and positions ready for carving. Using a high-speed grinder with an appropriately-shaped wheel, cut in all the wing feathers. Go carefully with this and make sure you check your reference material to get the right positions and sizes.

7 Once the detail on the wings is complete, insert them back into the main body to once again check for fit and appearance. Once correct refine the head-feather detail.

8 Now use a pyrography unit to put in the fine feather detail on the wings.





9-10 Once the wings have been dealt with, move on to burning in the fine feather detail on the body and head. Remember, the detail needs to be deep enough to show through the thin washes of gesso and colour which are applied later on.

11-12 Now you need to fit the wing. To do this, use a small amount of plastic wood and place it in the sockets and bed the wings in place. The squeeze-out can then be removed and shaped as appropriate to fill and blend in with the body as required. Allow these to set before moving on to the next stage.

APPLYING COLOUR

13-14 Now apply a light-grey undercoat of gesso. For this I mix a small amount of Payne's Grey with white gesso. You can apply this with a brush or airbrush.

15-16 Now paint all the dark areas with Payne's Grey which has a small amount of black added. On the back near the tail feathers you need to use a dry-brush technique to create the dark lowlights on the feather clusters. Once done, apply Naphthol red on top front wing section.

Once dry, use white gesso and a fine paintbrush to lighten all the edges of the feathers. You will need to use a dry-brush technique for some of this so you create the highlights required, but a more full covering of white is required in a few places.



17-18 Once the top is dealt with move to the underside. The front section of the wings need to be painted with Naphthol red and then the feathers edged with white gesso to create high and lowlights. Again, the dry-brush technique is ideal for this.

Once dry, drill holes for the feet. You can buy or make the feet. But before you fit them in place, note the hole in the centre of the chest area. This is where a small pin will be inserted to fix the wallcreeper on to the soon-to-be-made wall plinth/base. Once the holes are drilled, fix the feet in place with plastic wood and allow to dry.

19-20 Here is the finished bird.

The base section

21 These birds are renowned for living in walls and rocky crevices so a rocky base to fit the bird on is highly suitable. For the base I selected a crotch section of a tree/branch and cut it in half. I cleaned off any loose bark and then made sure the surface was dust-free. I then sanded the back of the base section nice and smooth. Once clean, textured paste can be applied to create the humps and bumps representing a rocky stone-effect surface.

You can buy texturing paste or you can use PVA adhesive mixed with sand or fine/coarse grit to create the surface and density of texture required.

Experiment with the texturing pastes and mixtures you are using on waste material before you commit to texturing your base section. You will learn all the pros and cons of the process before committing yourself on the live project.

22 So, create the texture you require on the front of the plinth and let it dry. Depending on how you have created the textured surface you may or may not need to apply colour to create the visual colouring you require. The application of colour after the textured surface is dry allows you a lot of freedom to create very specific colouring effects, but of course you must decide which route to go. Once the texture is dry, drill a hole or fit a hanging plate to the back. Then, fix the bird in your chosen position.

23-24 The finished base and bird. ▶



17



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From the community

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



Captain Nemo's walking stick,
by Steve Underwood

Spot on

Great flying wood chips Mark. You and your staff have hit a New Year home run with the Jan/Feb 2019 issue of Woodcarving.

Your editorial was spot on. The points on sharpening your tools and fear of failure are certainly at the top of the list, but one of the greatest challenges is finding someone whose opinion is really valid, someone who knows good carving from also-runs and is not shy to tell you so.

Steve Bischo's article on fuming a misericord was superb – great historical background lead in and the graphics were top-notch also. Good on ya Steve.

Mark Gough did an excellent presentation and layout of the Carving Vice. I've seen this type of instruction before but never in such clarity and detail. Kudos to you Mark.

Dave Western's article on Birth Spoon

Evolution was amazingI never knew. Very informative, thanks Dave.

Also brilliant articles on Wooden Spoon Design and Lettering (next stage). Who needs to buy a book? It's all here in *Woodcarving* magazine. Great job Don and Murray.

Duane's show and tell on the Shelf Mouse was flawless – it doesn't get any easier to follow than that.

One last thing, I was at the IWC in Iowa this last year and it was humbling. Some of the best carvings I've seen in a long while. These folks put on a heck of a show. I was thrilled and honoured to win first place in my category, Canes & Walking Sticks for Dragon Spawn.

Have a very busy and pleasant spring. I look forward to my next issue of *Woodcarving*,

*Thank you,
Steve Underwood*

Well held

Good day to you Mark. My name is Mike and I am now retired. I have been in the furniture manufacture and construction industry all my working life, serving an apprenticeship as a cabinetmaker many years ago. Once qualified, I took a different career path and went into sales and development. To cut a long story short, after retirement I looked at hobbies and decided on baking, and also thought to try my hand at woodcarving. At about the same time I discovered the company Axminster. Wow. The standard of tools and general craft items I found there were amazing and I purchased one or two items.

In your most recent magazine article you asked about where we do our carving and how we hold our pieces.

I am very lucky to have a large garage and a solid workbench and one of my oldest favourites is the double-height Black & Decker workmate. It's more

than 40 years old now and has served me well. However, it's a bit too old now and difficult to hold my smaller working pieces, so I recently invested in the little work vice photographed. The vice, a Proxxon Precision, is a godsend, especially when carving the smaller and more intricate pieces. I purchased it from Axminster. It is just so versatile and easy to use and has helped me tremendously. Now, I have not been doing this long, from mid-January really, but I was so impressed with one item in Your Jan/ Feb magazine that I decided to have a go. The mouse is my first project for more than 20 years and as of now is still not quite finished. It needs a touch of refinement. That was the walnut shelf mouse. Amazingly, I had a piece of Burmese teak that I have saved for 40 years – a small offcut from way back when which I hoped to use for a special occasion and it has been great.

I find your magazine articles fascinating and cannot recommend them enough. There is simply something for everyone so a massive thank you to you all involved with the magazine – much admiration for a job well done. It is a great magazine. Out of the blue I was given a year's subscription as a Christmas gift from my long-suffering wife, who I think appreciates her time alone.

Best regards, Mike Heaton





Work area

Hello Mark,
I thought I'd respond to your editorial about readers' workspaces. I carve in what used to be our tiny kitchen before we extended the house. I started off with a very cheap flatpack workbench but that's been greatly reinforced now and its top made bigger by the addition of the top of our old dining table. The whole thing is bolted to the wall.

My primary workholder is a large mechanic's vice which is fitted with magnetic rubber jaws when needed and is capable of swivelling about its base as well as side to side, thus giving a full range of approach to any workpiece which will be clamped in the vice via a wooden block glued +/- screwed to its base. This I find is my best ever workholding system having tried a few options. It will easily withstand heavy mallet work as well as finer stuff.

The room is just off the living room so I'm not completely isolated when working – in fact, I can even see the TV if I keep the door open. And, of course, as it's part of the house I don't have to worry about cold and damp attacking me or my tools. I stand on a false timber floor to give the correct height and sometimes augment this with a piece of cow matting, which is a high-density foam rubber used in concrete cow cubicles and this improves foot comfort. You may be able to see another vice at left end of bench – this holds an electric drill with a Powerstop but can also be used when I want to clamp long objects in both vices.

Best wishes, Peter Smith



Inuit art

Dear Mark,
I was lucky enough to visit Greenland last summer and was fascinated to watch the Inuit craftsmen producing their carved figures and animals from mainly reindeer/caribou antler and musk ox horn, but also soap stone. (They no longer use whale or walrus ivory so much as tourists won't buy it, and of course there isn't much wood available up there.) They do most of the work using rotary carving units.

When I came home I was moved to have a go as I had a piece of reindeer antler that I had picked up in the Arctic on a previous visit. I also thought that their style of carving would be equally impressive in wood, so I set about creating some figures in lime using gouges and knives.

I have been woodcarving and woodturning for nearly 10 years, taking both up when I retired as a schoolteacher, and have been taking *Woodcarving* magazine on a regular basis over this time. I do not recall seeing Greenlandic Inuit art/sculpture featured.

Carving the smaller figures in wood is a fairly simple project and perhaps could be an ideal task for those just starting out. The larger shaman figures are a bit more taxing, but I found them all great fun to do.

I hope you find this interesting.

Kind regards, Cedric Boyns



Mike Heaton's walnut shelf mouse

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 and click on the forum button.

Saw-Whet owl

<https://bit.ly/2IGq96t>



Dwight posted: Saw-Whet owl

Jack-in-the-green commented: Hello Dwight and welcome to the forum.

You have carved a great-looking owl and I love the life-like appearance you have created.

We don't have Saw-Whet owls in this country but I was honoured tonight, walking the dogs, to see a Barn owl really close up – my best sighting yet.

Your work looks great so keep us posted with your future carvings.

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



Master Carver

Anthony Bailey meets Paul Ferguson, master woodcarver

I'm sometimes glad I use a satnav – finding Paul's workshop hidden away behind a row of typical Victorian terraced houses would have been a bit more difficult otherwise. It's a large, old, light-industrial building which boasts plenty of natural north window light, so essential for cross-illumination when giving carvings depth and form. It houses a big, noisy industrial heater to keep the place warm and, of course, a brew-up and there were pleasantries about the journey up to Leighton Buzzard before we got chatting seriously about Paul's life and work.

Some questions we need answers to

So Paul, how did you get started as a woodcarver? Where did it all begin for you?

I started as an art student – five years at Luton School of Art for a pre-diploma before I moved on to study graphics at Kingston School of Art in Surrey. I wasn't

sure what to do after my education, so I did the typical student thing and went travelling and returned home broke.

Then I found a job ad that required art school training, which of course I had – it involved dry-stripping picture frames. The company employed carvers and gilders. After three weeks the boss asked me to help out trying some carving. My first piece was repeat-pattern carving – nobody there could believe I had never tried it before. I spent the next five years as an apprentice carver in the company.

I realised carving as career was an opportunity so I eventually moved out on my own, starting my own business in 1978.

So what was the first 'proper' piece of carving you created?

I was sick to death of picture frames, so I tried other things, starting stone cold, as it were. I put a three-line ad in the *Financial Times* in the hope of drumming up business (this was long before the internet, of course) and received all sorts of responses. As



NOTABLE HONOURS

Paul Ferguson MBE, ACR and past President, and Honorary Secretary of the Master Carvers Association. Honoured in 2018 with an MBE for services to carving, gilding and conservation. He is also chairman of the national working group on carving under the auspices of the CITB (Construction Industry Training Board), a Freeman of the City of London and a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Turners.

an apprentice I had learned English and continental cuts and skills, having worked closely with gilders, so I had that knowledge I could apply to carving commissions.

I haven't really answered your question but suffice it to say my body of work still partly consists of picture frame work to this day, but I have done a lot more besides in the way of sculptures and other carved work during my 40-odd years' career.



ABOVE: My design and carving of a picture frame for one of my own paintings



RIGHT: A three-drawer chest for a private client in Anglo-Indian style, also illustrating my making skills



What are the influences on your work?

I am definitely influenced by traditional styles, particularly 17th-19th century for both making and restoring. I enjoy rococo because of its free form.

I'm excited by wacky projects, creating unexpected pieces that are visually stimulating.

A high point

What has been your biggest mistake woodcarving-wise?

I wouldn't call it a mistake, but the biggest challenge with unexpected consequences would be the Banbury clock. The tender was to restore carved sections but it turned out to be a much, much bigger undertaking than anyone could have imagined.

I went to visit, but the client, the local council, had no idea of the construction of this Victorian Gothic clocktower head work. There was lots of height work to the project requiring complete scaffolding around it, but while taking the clock apart we found the internal structure of the spire tapered alarmingly with the large, four-faced oak clock casing attached to the spire. Structural engineers had to create a support system before the clock could be safely dismantled.

The entire massive wooden casing was removed to my old workshop, which was higher than the current one otherwise it wouldn't have fitted in. I had a team of people working for me at

that time as the project was so big.

We managed to restore the 1850s original timber, which had weathered quite seriously, by consolidating with injected slow-set resin and a compatible finish on top. Various carving work was also carried out to bring it back to its intended condition. The whole project took between three and four months to finally complete.

How would you like your carving work to develop?

I am trying to do more personal projects. I don't need to work full-time on commissioned work, so I can find the time to work on my own ideas. Currently I'm making a frame as a home project, using pine as would have been used originally, prior to applying gesso and gilding – I'm trying to make something never seen before. I'm also going back to painting more and more as I love that medium.

What has been your oddest woodcarving experience?

A Chinese sculpture required a replacement hand, so I based the new hand on my own, including the kink of a former broken finger which I have. The sculpture was sent to a polisher who decided to straighten out the finger against my wishes.

Another oddity would be a perpetual motion machine that required carved figures that moved using air pressure.

The late fashion designer Alexander McQueen was a previous client and one project was featured in the V&A's retrospective of the designer. The piece was based on the proportions of his favourite fashion model.

I've made anything from rings to dodos. Lots of Gibbonesque work, rocking horses but featuring elephants and dragons instead of horses. I've restored animals for the London Transport museum.

I've also created some pieces for the



Cutty Sark in 1992 and again, after the fire in 2007. These carvings were recently redone by another carver. You name it, I've probably carved it.

A very high point

So what is your most memorable carving experience?

It has to be the Windsor castle fire restoration, which was the pinnacle of my career really. The Carlton House Trophies are considered works of art and the restoration contracts were separate from the main contract. I won two of those contracts. Six panels – on each door one of which was completely destroyed by the fire, except one single leaf. The head of the royal collection at the time was planning to write a book on the trophies and had fortuitously taken photos that were good enough to blow up full-size as templates. I was then able to work directly from them to create exact replacements. They were made of lime.

It proved to be the most taxing and prestigious project I have ever undertaken. I met the royal family at the party afterwards when all the restoration works were completed. Princess Margaret visited the workshop and insisted the major panel should be signed by me. This went completely against protocol but it was approved by the restoration committee. It is the only one of 68 panels to be signed.

What is the best bit of carving advice you have ever received?

'Get it right first time'. The only difference between a talented amateur and a professional is that the professional will be quick enough to earn a living.

Have you ever given up on a project?

Short answer – no.

You've had a long and varied career. How has carving changed, what differences are there?

No difference in method but in opportunities. There are very few carving shops with apprentices. It is very much one-man bands but quite a lot of them around.

Do you have a favourite tool you like to use?

No favourite tools as such, but I am particular about the feel of the handles. I always have different handles to identify the tools while spread out on the bench. It makes it much easier to pick up the right one up quickly.

I would say that every carver marks their tools with their own mark. Never touch other people's tools. They are much too personal in the way they are prepared and used. Many of mine have been handed down from other carvers.

What are your likes and dislikes in the world of carving?

I'm not enthralled by machine carving but an Arbortech can save an awful lot of time

The Carlton House Trophy panel signed by me, just one small leaf from the left side having been rescued from the fire





The mannequin carved for Alexander McQueen

in bulk removal of material such as when I have been making rockers, when a lot of basic preparation is needed before shaping.

How do you like to work?

I now enjoy solitary working, although I have previously worked as head of team. I have my own routines and ways of working.

Have you got a top tip for fellow carvers?

Don't carve with blunt tools – but then I would say that wouldn't I?

Memory lane

Just before I left the workshop, Paul showed me a photo from the 1980s of a carved totem board with the words 'Woodworking Crafts'. Well, we still have that original carved board here in the office – back in those days I was a subscriber to the original black-and-white printed magazine, which featured Paul's incised carved 'masthead' title. Little did I know that, many years later, I was to be the launch editor of the current *Woodworking Crafts* magazine.

Paul Ferguson, thank you for taking the time to share a lifetime of carving and knowledge with us. It has been fascinating.

To find out more visit:
www.paulferguson.co.uk



The reconstruction of the Banbury Town Hall clock encasement in the workshop and reinstalled



Next issue...

On sale 27 June



Steve Bisco provides a step-by-step guide to carving an Art Nouveau peacock panel

Peter Benson explores the subject of where inspiration comes from

Mike Wood shows how to carve a black woodpecker

Murray Taylor looks at knife-carving handwriting

Dave Western explores creating a seaweed-inspired carving

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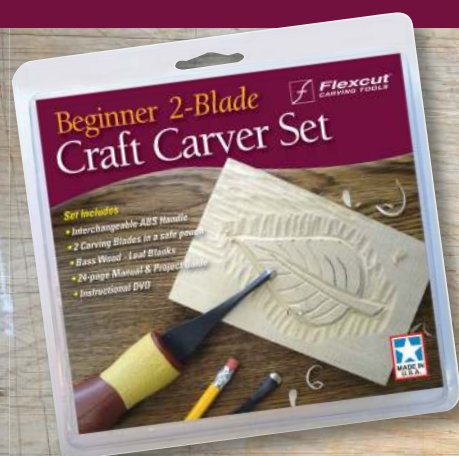
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The Art Nouveau alphabet

Murray Taylor explores knife-carving Art Nouveau-style fonts

Art Nouveau developed between 1890 and 1910 as a reaction to the academic art of the 19th century. It was inspired by natural, flowing forms found in nature, especially the curved lines in plants and flowers. Art Nouveau is a complete artistic style embracing fine and decorative arts. It includes painting, jewellery, furniture, textiles, ceramics and architecture.

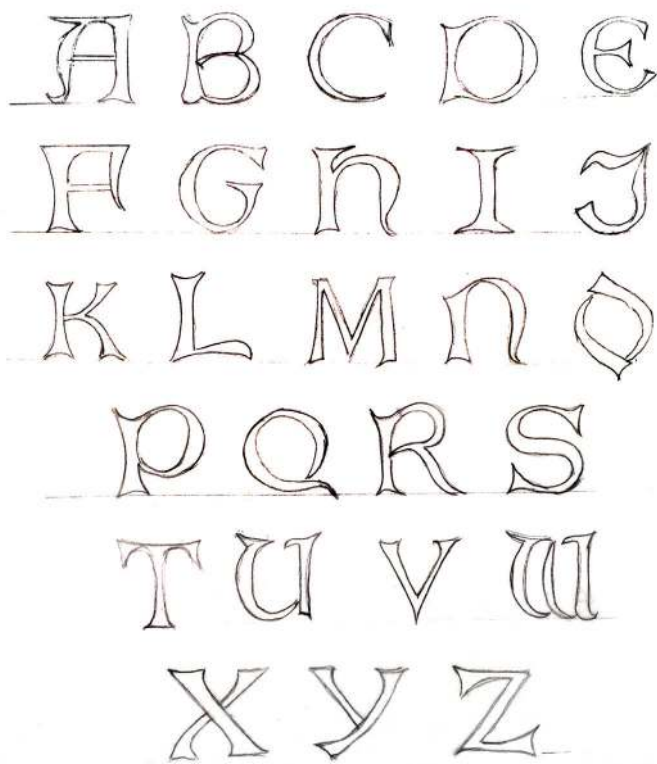
From the 1860s onwards, after Japan became more accessible to the western world, the work of Japanese artists influenced artists in the west and so the New Art – for that is what it means – began to develop into the form that we now know.

Fonts

There are numerous fonts in the Art Nouveau style, ranging from a fairly undecorated form to highly decorative.

Let's first of all take a look at a basic Art Nouveau style of lettering that is relatively easy to carve.

You will see that in this font the letters are formed by a series of three or four-cut chips that flow gently into one another. The order of cutting in this font differs somewhat from others in that certain letters are formed in a continuous movement. Let us look at the letter 'A'.



A basic hand-drawn Art Nouveau font

The two upright sections both connect at the top in a flowing movement and this needs to be considered when carving it. If you look at the photograph of the progressive series of cuts needed to form this letter, you will see that, although the top horizontal section appears to be straight at first, things have changed by the time the letter is finished and the two upright sections flow into the top, which now appears curved.

With the letter 'E' you will notice that the triangular areas at the ends of the curved body are deeper than the rest of the letter. For this reason I have removed them as three-cut triangles and then joined them up to form the semi-circular letter. Finally, the central arm is removed and the whole letter tidied up. Practise carving this font with a flowing style and the order of cutting will soon become apparent.



Progressive steps in carving the letter 'A'



Progressive steps in carving the letter 'E'

CARVER'S NOTE: Note the use of the offcuts to hold the work piece while carving.



The entire alphabet set out on a sample board



Carving the sampler using a continental-style knife. You could, of course, use a standard chip-carving knife



The completed sampler

Free Flow font

Because Art Nouveau designs are very flowing, I have developed a font which I call Free Flow. It is very useful for aquatic subjects or situations where you want to alter the letters to enhance the artistic interpretation of your piece of work.

This font is very easy to carve. It consists mainly of two and three-cut flowing chips with a few four-cuts on the letters I, N, U and W. You don't have to stick to the drawn font, you can alter or adapt letters to suit your piece of work.

In the carving of the poem the lettering moves sympathetically with the flowing water and is not carved precisely as it is meant to

blend in with a bubbling river. The 'stones and boulders' in the poem are represented by the agate slices set into the wood.

As usual I am not giving precise instructions for projects, but rather showing you things that might inspire you to think about projects of your own.

In the next piece I have taken the Free Flow font one step further to make a plaque depicting *The Fisherman's Prayer*.

In the *The Fisherman's Prayer* plaque you will see that I have adapted letters to suit the 'feeling' of the piece. The initial letter 'T' tails

off to become a fishing line, the 'H' of the word 'catch' becomes a gill cover and the word 'of' becomes the eye and gill cover of the lower fish. The impression of the fish is formed by the flowing movement of the lettering and completed with a few chip-carved lines to give an impression of the tail and scales.

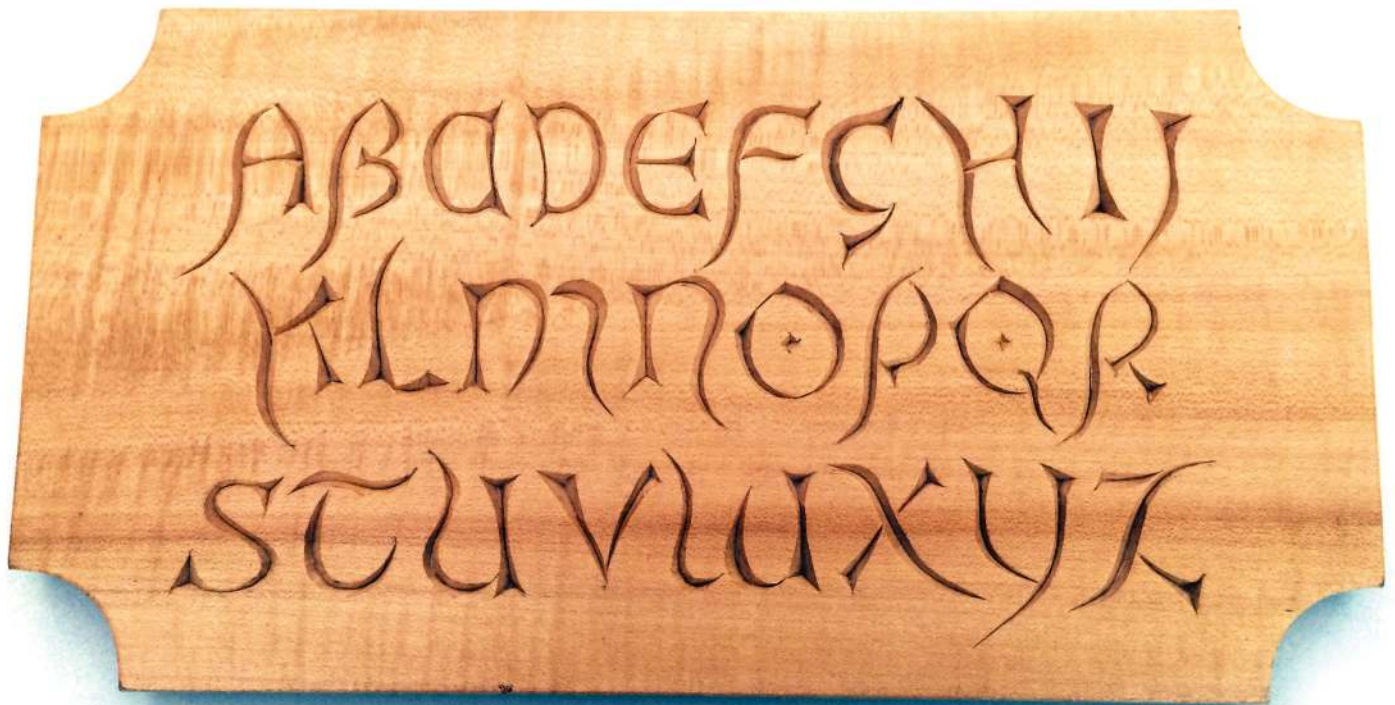
As you can see from these two examples the Free Flow font can be adopted in many ways to suit a variety of subjects – you can play with it to fill available spaces or as a decorative form in its own right.



A hand-drawn version of the Free Form font



Carving the Free Form font



A sampler of the Free Form font



A poem by Ernestine Northover, approximately 600 x 400mm



Fisherman's prayer drawn on the wood



The completed plaque, finished with a coloured liquid wax. 500 x 300mm

Pierced lettering

In this font I have altered the letters to make them suitable for pierced work. In their original form certain parts of the letters are vulnerable and likely to be damaged. Once again this is just

an exercise, but you could use the idea as the basis for many projects.

The last font in this article is a very decorative form which can be used in many ways.



An adapted Art Nouveau font



The Art Nouveau plaque marked out



The Art Nouveau plaque pierced out



The plaque with the letters rounded off and finished with sanding sealer and coloured wax

Alphabet



These decorative letters can be used as an appliqué, a piercing, or as a chip carving for example. The following pictures should give you lots of ideas.



The letter 'E' on a coaster



The letter 'K' as a coaster

The decoration around the letters could be changed to suit the subject or to reflect the interests of the recipient if it was a gift. The Art Nouveau form lends itself to many interpretations, limited only by your imagination.

A decorative Art Nouveau font



Carving the letter A



The completed letter A



A pierced variation on the letter A

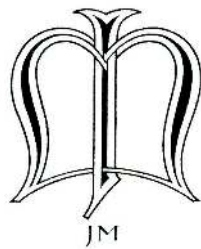
Monograms and ciphers

In my work as a jeweller I often had to devise monograms and ciphers for engraving on to signet rings, brush backs, escutcheons and the like.

It is an interesting subject in its own right, so let me start by trying to explain the difference between the two. Broadly speaking, monograms consist of two or more letters combined in one form, while ciphers are made up of interlaced or linked letters.

In the first monogram the 'J' forms the centre of the 'M', in the second the 'D' forms part of the 'F'. In the next the 'M' and 'F' share an upright and finally the loop of the 'P' forms the centre of the 'E'. If you now look at the ciphers you will see that the letters are complete in themselves and are artistically intertwined.

The word 'cipher' has come to be associated with codes and secret transmissions and so all these personalised designs are described as monograms in modern parlance.



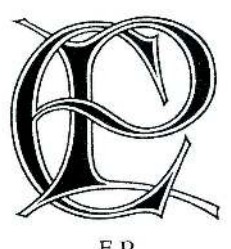
A selection of monograms



FD



MF



EP



JK



LF



ED



FN

A selection of ciphers

Monogram

The top one is my initials, MT, which I use on my carvings. The next two, ST and KP, are formed by combining the letters, whereas the next three, YF, AK and AL, are formed by parts of the letters being shared.

You could play around with various fonts or design one of your own to form a monogram that you can use to sign your carvings.

There are no rules to designing a monogram. Just play around with different fonts until you find something that is pleasing to you and suits your carving style. Remember the basic rules – keep your tools sharp, work in a comfortable position, don't carve when you're tired and practise, practise, practise. ▀

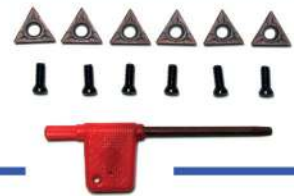


A selection of monograms

NEXT MONTH In his next article Murray will show you two more fonts, a novelty font and some further lettering techniques.

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Easter Island Moai

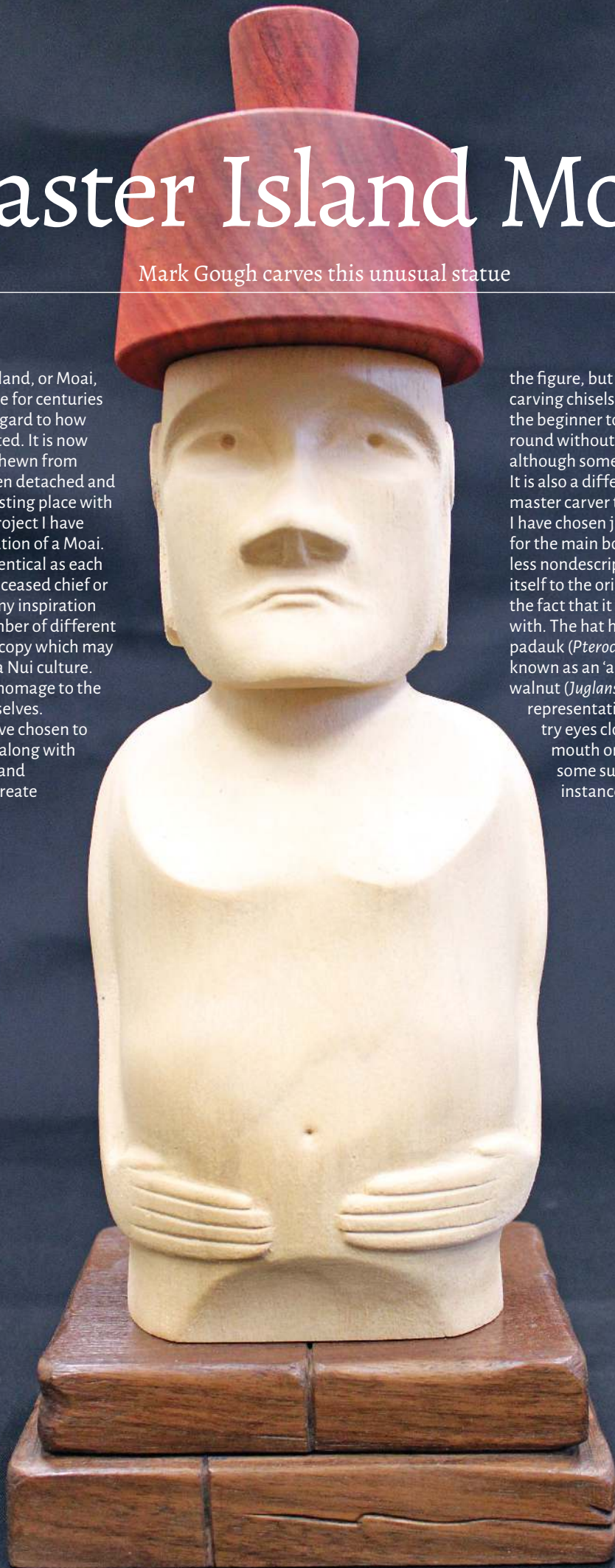
Mark Gough carves this unusual statue

The statues of Easter Island, or Moai, have fascinated people for centuries – in particular with regard to how they were created and erected. It is now understood that they were hewn from quarries of volcanic rock then detached and transported to their final resting place with ropes and rollers. For this project I have chosen to do my representation of a Moai.

None of the statues are identical as each one is said to represent a deceased chief or person of importance and my inspiration has been drawn from a number of different ones, rather than making a copy which may be disrespectful to the Rapa Nui culture. This is also a way of paying homage to the original craftspeople themselves.

To make it interesting I have chosen to use rasps, files and rifflers, along with a few selected rotary burrs and some other types of file to create

the figure, but you can, of course, use carving chisels. It is an excellent project for the beginner to experience carving in the round without the outlay on lots of gouges, although some rasps can be quite expensive. It is also a different discipline allowing the master carver to let loose and be creative. I have chosen jelutong (*Dyera costulata*) for the main body because of the more or less nondescript grain pattern which lends itself to the original stone texture – and the fact that it is a very easy wood to work with. The hat has been fashioned from padauk (*Pterocarpus soyauxii*) and the plinth, known as an 'ahu', from American black walnut (*Juglans nigra*). Try to add your own representation of the figure – for example, try eyes closed or a thicker or thinner mouth or flared nostrils. You could add some surface decoration to the hat for instance. Experiment and have fun.



Things you will need

Tools:

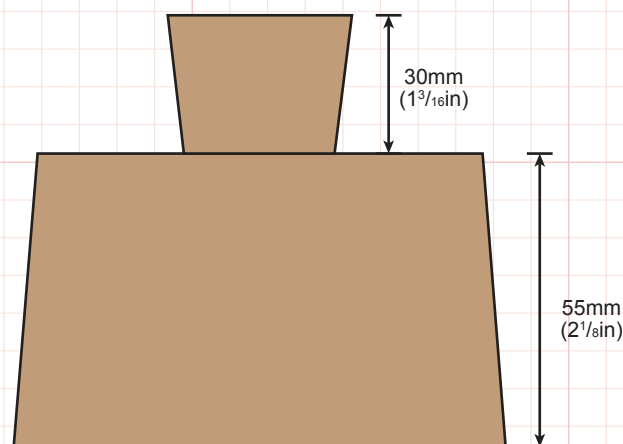
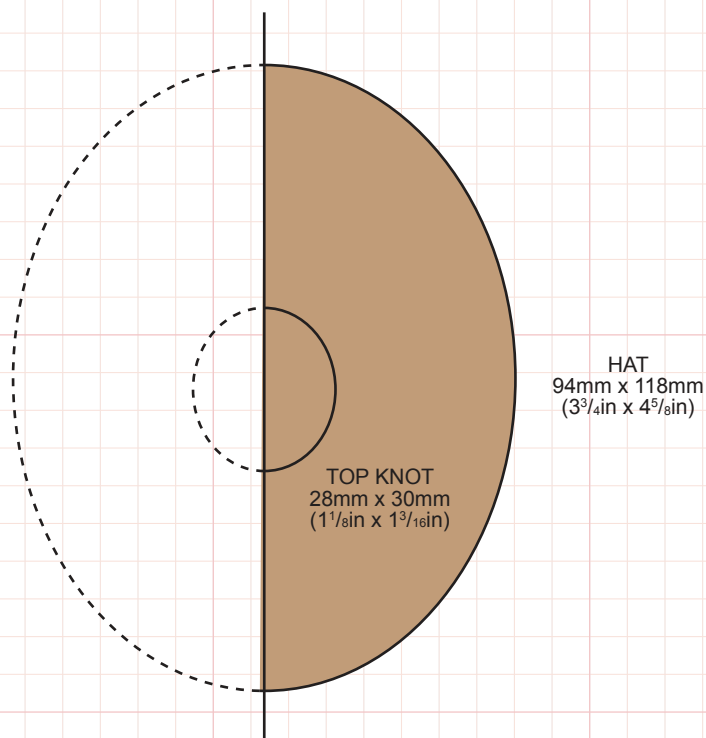
- Personal and respiratory protective equipment (PPE & RPE)
- Bandsaw
- Knife
- V-tool
- Japanese saw rasp
- Half round, flat & round rasp
- Selection of coarse & fine rifflers
- Selection of needle files
- Tungsten carbide coated files
- Japanese finger files
- Handsaw
- Rotary carving unit tool
- Bullnose, flame & spherical rotary burrs

Materials:

- Body: Jelutong 140mm x 120mm x 325mm
- Hat: Padauk 100mm x 160mm x 50mm
- Plinth: American black walnut (150mm x 125mm x 50mm)
- 40-240 grit abrasive cloth or paper
- Steel wool
- Dead flat acrylic varnish
- Dark paste wax
- Epoxy adhesive

SELECTION OF TOOLS

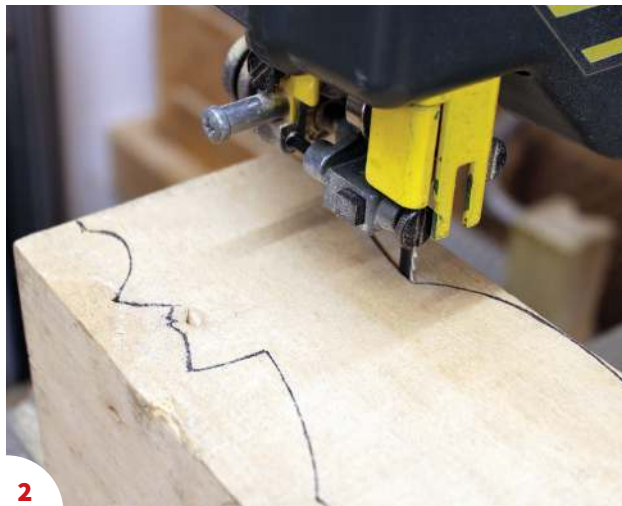
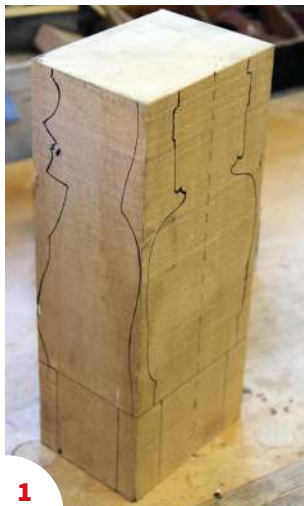
Here are some of the rasps and files used on this project. From left to right: Japanese saw rasp, hand-stitched half-round and flat rasp, machine-cut round rasp, mini round files, Permagrit files, coarse and fine rifflers, needle files and Japanese finger files.

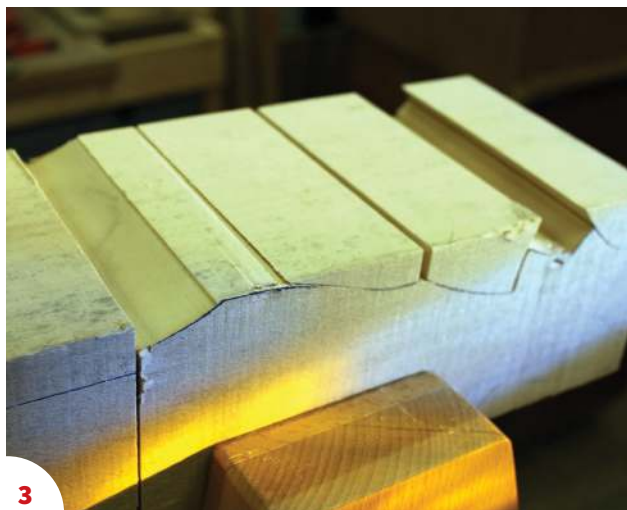
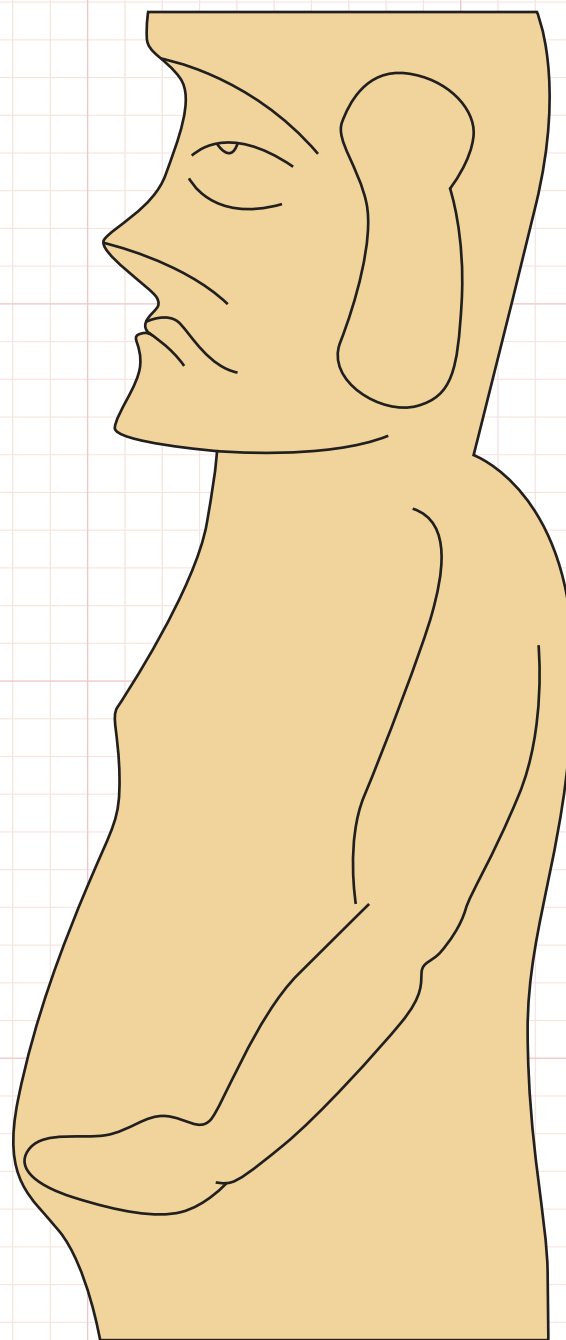
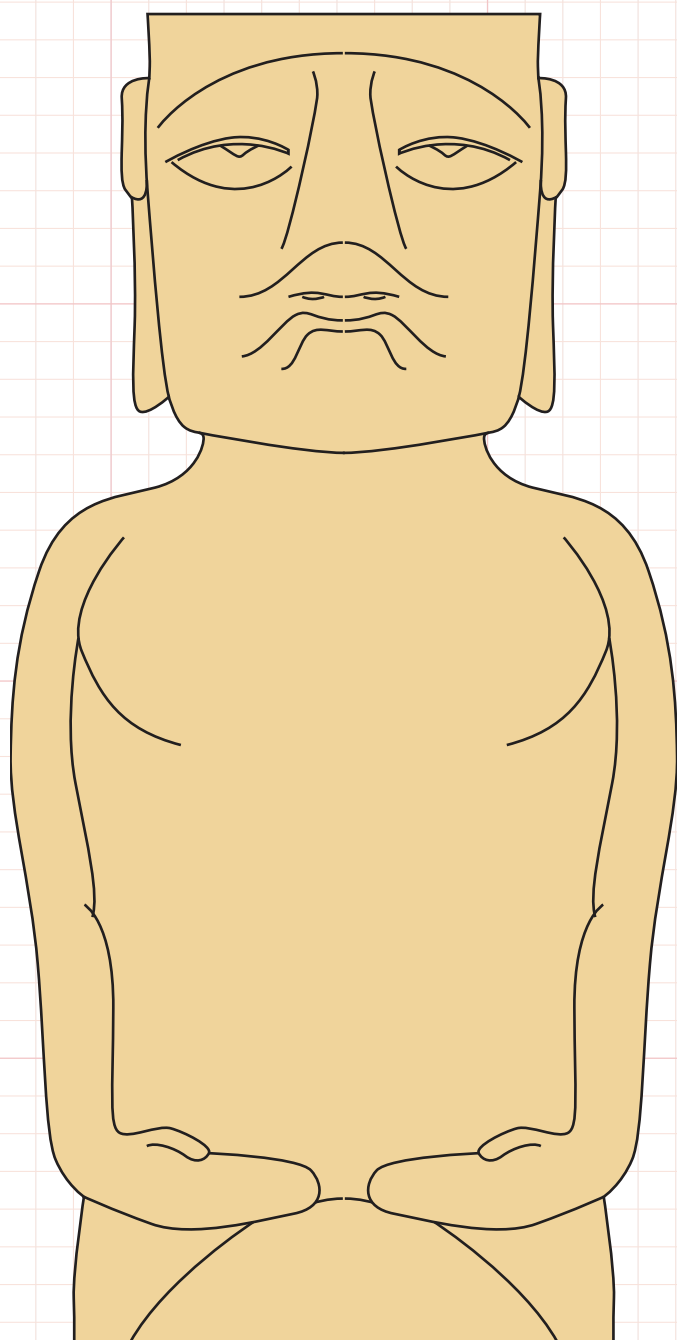


Cutting out

1 Using the pattern provided mark the profile on one side, then draw in the outline on the back of the blank. If you are using a coping saw or bandsaw with a thin narrow blade to cut the pattern out, mark both profile and outline on opposite sides to guide you. Allow 50mm to 75mm excess on the bottom of the blank for clamping.

2 When cutting with a bandsaw, try to make as few cuts as possible. Go slow and keep your hands and arms out of the line of blade. You may have to make relieving cuts to cut tight, curved areas. If you do not have a bandsaw or coping saw, carve away the waste areas and use your template as a guide.





3 Stick the larger pieces back on to the blank with double-sided tape for support when cutting the outline.

4 Make sure the face side is flat then cut the outline out on the bandsaw. Steps 2, 3 and 4 can be done with a coping saw or by cutting down to the lines with a handsaw and chiselling the waste away. If you use this method clean both profiles up with a half-round rasp before moving on to the next step. Cut back the bottom section for clamping.



5 Draw in the shape of the ears and top of the head, then cut a groove on the outside of the line with a bullnose rotary burr.

Warning When using rotary carving units with burrs and other cutters always wear suitable eye/face protection and suitably rated dust masks. There is a risk of chips of timber flying towards you and dust is a hazard so it is advisable when power carving to have dust extraction too. Also, make sure you work securely and keep your fingers and body parts out of the line of the burr should it skid.

6 Now, mark vertical centrelines back and front, then start to round off the back of the head and shoulders with a Japanese saw rasp and half-round rasp or similar suitable tool.

7 Use a round rasp to shape the back of the neck. Sand out the tool marks with 40 grit sandpaper and repeat this periodically throughout the process.

8 Draw in the jawline underneath the chin. Once marked, round off the front of the head, face and front shoulders using the half-round and saw rasps.

9 Use a coarse, flat riffler to cut in around the ears. Then draw in the brow line and face detail. Using a bullnose burr and riffler file remove the waste to reveal the features. You may also wish to use other shaping tools for this step.

10 The eyes can be shaped shut or open, whichever you prefer. To open the eyes out use a spherical burr.

11 Use a leaf-shaped riffler to clean up the ear detail.

12 Draw in the mouth lines and underside of the nostrils. These should taper up a bit from the centre to the edge each side. Use a flat rasp to shape the underside of the nose.

13 Use a small flame burr to shape the mouth, then refine the lips with a V-tool and needle files.





14



15

14 Use a saw rasp to round over the bulk of the body front and back.

15 Draw in the arms and cut round the outside of the lines with a bullnose rasp, then cut back the body with a half-round rasp.

16 Refine the body shape with rasp and rifflers, then cut in the hand shape with a leaf-shaped riffler and reveal the fingers with a V-tool. Open out the grooves with needle files and sand the edges. Use a knife to clean up.

17 Cut in the ear detail with a V-tool.



16



17



18

The hat & plinth

18 Use the pattern provide to cut the oval out, then draw a line on the top face 5mm in from the edge. Taper the side down to this mark all round. Do the same with the top knot but taper in the opposite direction from top to bottom. Sand all three parts down with 120 grit paper and clean up all the detail with finer grades if necessary. The next part might seem counterintuitive but to achieve a stone-like texture go over everything except the finer detail with 80 grit paper, working in one direction as much as possible, then finish with three coats of dead flat acrylic varnish.

19 Mark a centreline round the edges of the blank, then mark a line on the top face 5-10mm in from the edge – vary the dimension on each side slightly. Cut back the top section along these lines with a handsaw. Deepen the sawcut slightly round the centreline then round off all the edges with a half-round rasp.

20 Cut in a few joints and add some dints and cracks to give a weathered stone texture.

21 Sand the top with 40 grit paper then go straight to 240 grit to smooth it over, leaving deep scores in the surface. Sand the rest of the plinth with 120 grit paper, seal with one coat of dead flat varnish and finish with a couple of coats of dark paste wax.

22-24 Stick the parts together with epoxy adhesive. The hat should sit slightly forward of centre on the head. ►



19



20



21



22



23



24



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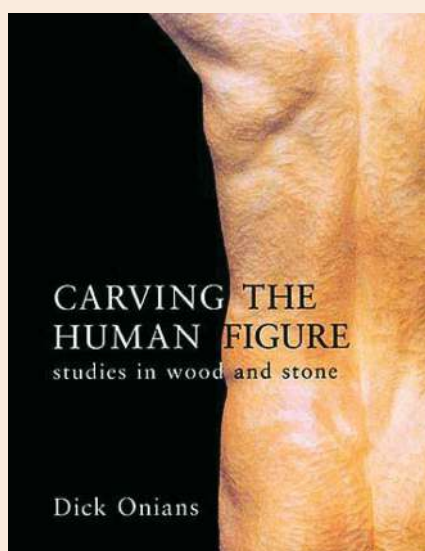
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Stylizing the figure

Dick Onians offers some pointers on how to go about experimenting with figures in this extract from his book

Once you have learned how the figure is shaped in nature, you are in a good position to experiment with simplifying it, developing it so that it expresses more closely the feelings that you have about it, without being tied to literal accuracy. For many artists the essence of art is to present ideas as economically as possible (Fig1). If you portray every aspect of the figure, the viewer cannot identify your main interest in making it. Indeed, the surface detail may so dominate that the underlying forms are hidden – which may be a valid purpose, but is hardly sculpture. This chapter considers the reasons for stylizing the figure, what to look out for, and various approaches to designing such a figure.



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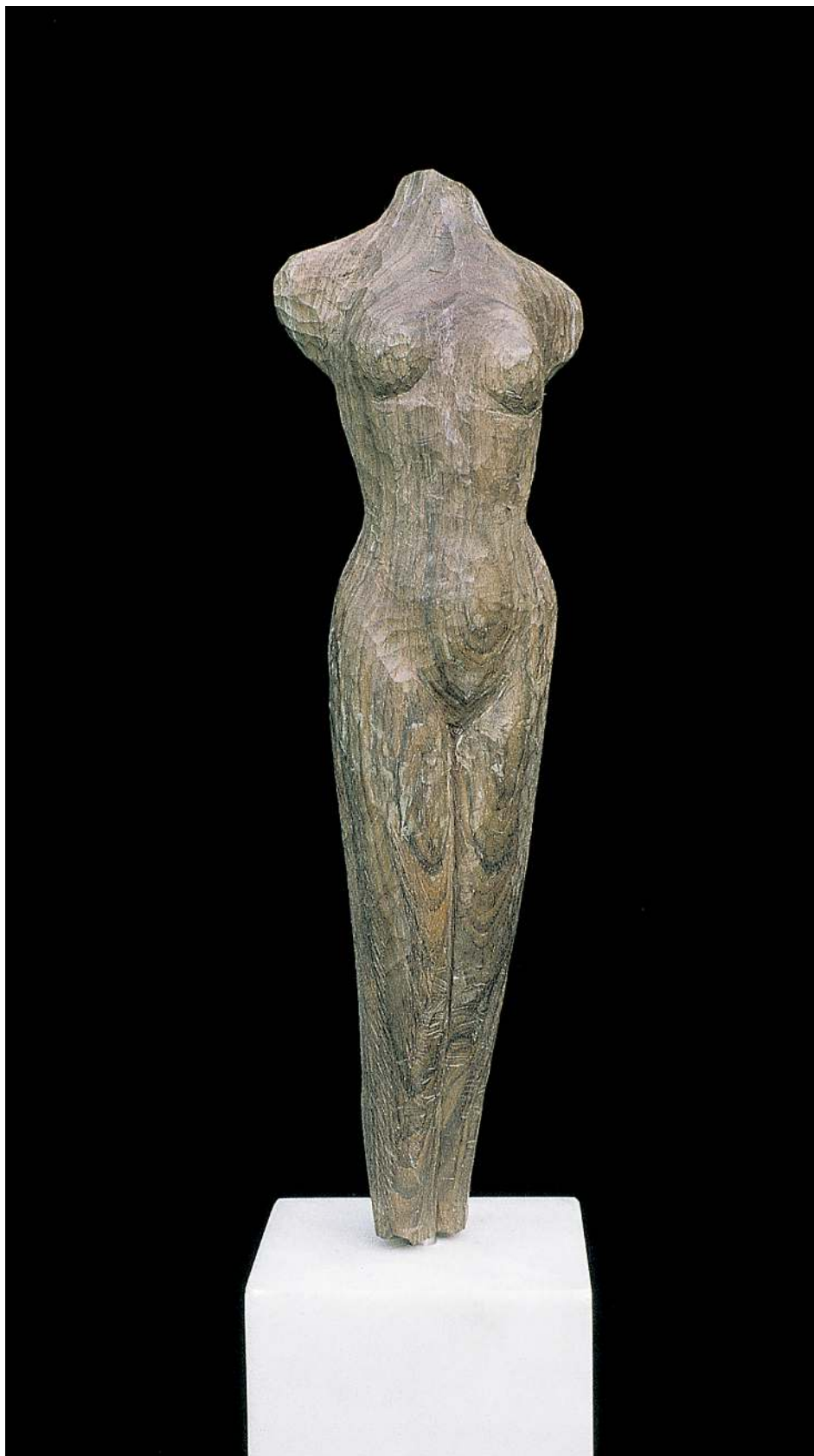


Fig1 Torso in English walnut (*Juglans regia*) by Tina Shafran. The whole is very carefully planned and understated; it is still unfinished, as she is determined to get it exactly right. The back of the sculpture is hollowed



Fig 2 African carving (wood unknown), c.1975, showing exaggerated features and intuitive use of rhythm



Fig 3 Female figure in English walnut by Eva Andrusier. The main concern of the carver was to give the figure lift and movement while keeping the forms compact. This design would be feasible in stone



Fig 4 Matchstick figure in the form of a letter P, in cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), by Dick Onians. Note how the angular lines stress the shapes

Stylization and how we see

Stylization of any plant, animal or human figure is not necessarily deliberate. The culture in which one lives may have conditioned one to see these forms in a simplified way, and even taught how to exploit them as patterns as a matter of course (Fig 2). Conversely, because a child has not been conditioned, its drawings pick out what is essential. Everything is simplified: often the head and body are round, arms and legs are sticks, eyes and other facial features are exaggeratedly either large or small. The child concentrates on those parts that are important to it. Perhaps the words that children use limit their ability to see. The finer details of anatomy are not normally learnt until later. Similarly, the drawings of early man usually show matchstick figures and animals; it is sufficient that the symbols are recognizable. However, even in the work of artists whom we, in our sophisticated way, call 'primitive', we find a deliberate or unconscious development of shapes to make elegant or pleasing patterns.

In earlier times, accurate representational sculptors such as Michelangelo and Bernini were exciting because they were themselves excited by their striving for accuracy. They were improving on what had gone before. In the West we have been conditioned by centuries of the classical tradition to see the world very literally. Since the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of the camera and, more recently, with advanced mould-making techniques, artists have been trying to break away from what was becoming a stale tradition. But the legacy still holds sway in some quarters, where there is what many regard as an excessive concentration on actual detail. Every wrinkle, every hair, every muscle has to be reproduced. Too often our eye dwells on the surface detail

and may not even notice slipshod modelling of the underlying forms. Even if the modelling is accurate, we may find the whole effect a sterile demonstration of technique. We may gasp at the sculptor's co-ordination of hand and eye, but we learn nothing about the subject that looking at the real thing does not teach us.

The best representational artists give us only the illusion that they have put in every detail and that the modelling is strictly accurate, whereas in reality they have exaggerated the modelling to provide strong shadows so that the whole can be read from afar. The details, too, are not so thorough as we are made to believe. Most people see what they expect to see, and a good sculptor takes advantage of this fact – although he does not use it cynically or through incompetence to disguise poor work, as I am afraid some others do. These

latter may indeed benefit from the fact that our imaginations not only complete an imperfect image or a badly made sculpture, but even endue it with a perfection which the actual object could never otherwise have.

Many figure sculptors have moved even further, to make more impressionistic or expressive forms (Fig 3). They single out what appears significant in the chosen pose, not because they cannot make an accurate representation but because they do not wish to be distracted by what in that instance seems irrelevant (Fig 4). (Perhaps this is not quite true today, when life study is apparently neglected in our art schools; even when life drawing is taught, it is encouraged to be what is called 'gestural' – that is, more impressionistic than closely observed.)

Stylization in western art now is nearly



Fig 5 Adam in lime (*Tilia x europaea*) by Dick Onians, before he had been to life drawing classes. Note the wrong proportions, 'rubber' arm and exaggerated fingers and eye sockets. They do not necessarily make it a bad sculpture but they do show inexperience



Fig 6 Family in spalted field maple (*Acer campestre*) by Dick Onians. This is a maquette for a large public wood sculpture, hence its rough state. The forms are recognizable, but simple and strong

always deliberate. Beginners in carving who have little or no experience of studying the human figure may stylize because they know that there is little chance of their doing an accurate representation (Fig 5). However, if their stylization does succeed it is only because they have an innate sense of design in three dimensions, or have studied design. Too often we cannot rise above the conditioning of our tradition and the result falls between two stools, being neither accurate representation nor effective stylization. People who have never seen art in the classical tradition have a better chance of success; their ignorance may unconsciously lead to attractive stylization. The way most likely to guarantee success is to have a thorough knowledge of the human figure. Then the carver knows what he or she is taking liberties with.

Stylization in public sculpture

Today there seems to be a growing interest in having large wood sculptures in public places. This may be because wood is cheaper and more available than stone. Also, the public is readier to accept that works of art do not have to be made to last for centuries. Perhaps, too, the public bodies commissioning such work realize that for the usually small sums of money they are prepared to spend they cannot expect the durability of stone or metal. Pieces of wood sculpture which are exposed to the weather as well as the physical attentions of passers-by need to be robust, so inevitably the forms must be simplified. Stone and metal sculptures, of course, must also be designed to endure. The stylized human figure lends itself to this, and is acceptable where more abstract work would encounter intransigent prejudice (Fig 6).

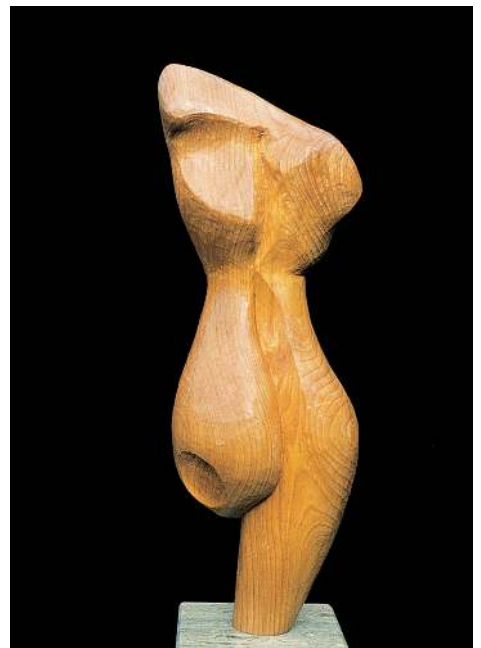
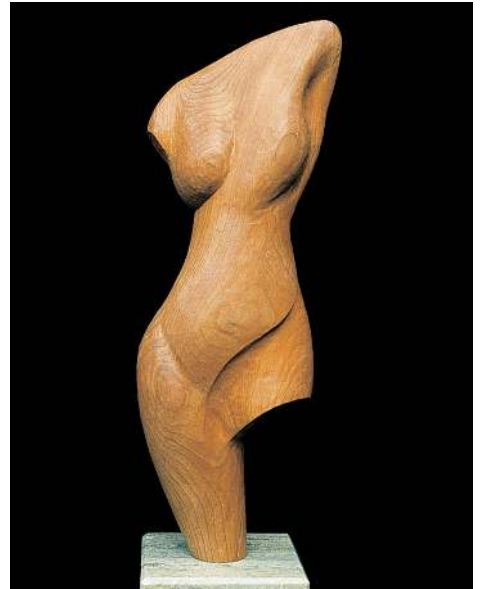
Approaches to stylizing the figure

One fruitful approach to stylization is to make a sculpture that is accurate or only slightly simplified, and then see how those shapes that seem to contain the essence of the figure or the pose could be developed while simplifying or omitting what seems irrelevant. You may want to elongate the figure, or make it more squat. You may emphasize the roundness of forms, or you may try breaking the whole into rectangles or other angular geometrical solids; or you may simply develop lines and masses into rhythms that express some strong personal feeling about the pose (Figs 7–9). What you will notice is that the carving takes on some of the properties of a caricature or a diagram. An exciting procedure is to do a series of carvings, progressively simplifying the forms until you think that you have captured the very essence (Figs 10–12). You may end with something that is completely abstract and that would be unrecognizable to anyone who had not seen the sequence. With care, every carving will be a good piece with its own appeal. This is a recipe that any carver starting from an animal, plant or other real object can profitably follow.

Another approach is to fit the shapes of the human body to the shape of the piece of wood by removing as little of the material as possible (Fig 13). This understatement is very effective and can have the magic of 'primitive' work, which is powerful because it appears to express the heart of its message with minimum effort. In fact, what is more likely is that the primitive maker was restricted by having to work in a difficult material with simple tools, and having conveyed his idea he did not feel the need to elaborate on it. To achieve the same feeling with the sophisticated equipment at our disposal is very difficult. However, the chainsaw and angle grinder, having large cutting edges, lend themselves to simplification. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, when artists such as Picasso and Epstein became excited by African and other sculpture previously ignored or derided as barbaric, various artists have successfully become 'primitive' (Fig 14). It is worth noticing that even when their forms retain a strong memory of the original square block, these sculptures can be read clearly in the round.

A particularly fertile source for stylization is the mask (Figs 15–21). Because masks have commonly been used in theatrical performances and religious rites, they have had to be able to make their point when seen from a distance: they therefore need to be exaggerated or simplified. As eyes and mouth are the most obviously expressive parts of the head, they are invariably the most emphasized. They can be made into strong forms with a definite pattern, or they can be understated but still become noticeable because all other features have been effaced. A welter of fine details would obscure the effect and be hard to read from a distance.

In a still figure it is probable that the features of the face, hands and feet will be indicated, even if only scratched on the surface; indeed, the features may



Figs 7–9 Torso in false camellia (*Stewartia pseudocamellia*) by Sally Rose: front, side and back views. Sally has used the natural forms as a basis for an exciting design. The eye is easily carried around as the forms are consistent all over the figure

stylization. But when the intention is to capture a moving pose, the facial details, fingers and toes, navel and genitals can be omitted.

A draped figure already offers opportunities for most of these to be lost. However, some indication of details may be needed to remove ambiguity. Sometimes, too, an otherwise blank shape

may need some detail added to maintain interest. For the same reason a line may be cut into long, flowing drapery, with the added advantage that it can be used to carry the viewer's eyes from one part of the composition to another, and add some sort of rigidity without which the form may look floppy.



Fig 10 Hurdler in Indian bean (*Catalpa bignonioides*) by Dick Onians. The details of fingers, toes and face have been omitted but the muscles are more or less accurate. The sculpture is mounted on stone with a screw which travels up through the base and through the lower arm up to the elbow, where the short grain of the arm is supported by the wood of the thigh



Fig 11 Hurdler in jelutong (*Dyera costulata*) by Dick Onians. The shapes of feet, hands and head have been simplified still further



Fig 12 Hurdler in recycled Cuban mahogany (*Swietenia mahogani*) by Dick Onians. The composition has been abstracted so that only the movement is retained. Both this and the jelutong version are mounted in the same way as the catalpa one



Fig 13 Face emerging from a burred log of mulberry (*Morus nigra*), by Kathleen Chapman. Minimal wood has been removed

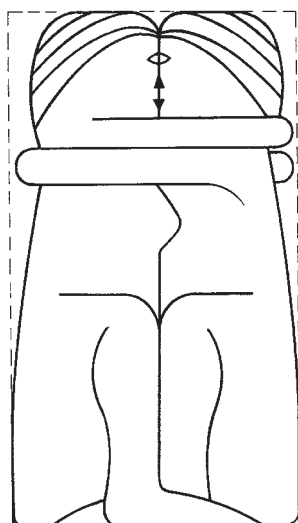
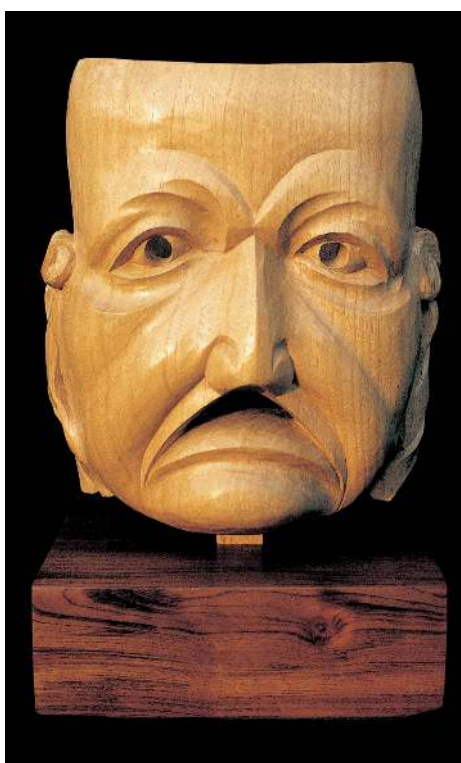


Fig 14 Drawing inspired by a sculpture by Constantin Brancusi in his Kiss series of stone carvings. The message is clear enough without any more shaping. This looks a very economical form of expression, but has been carefully planned. The modelling is very shallow



Figs 15–17 Combined masks of Tragedy and Comedy in West Indian satinwood (*Fagara flava*) by Dick Onians: side view showing how the masks are linked. This is fairly naturalistic, but even here the eyes and mouth are exaggerated



Figs 18 and 19 Back-to-back masks of Tragedy and Comedy in sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) by Dick Onians. In this more stylized carving, note how the eyebrows and lines of the face have been made to form patterns. The two masks are again linked with ribbons



Fig 20 Tragi-comedy in plane (*Platanus* spp.) by Dick Onians, showing a further stylization verging on the abstract. The two masks flow one into the other



Fig 21 Tragedy side of another combined head in sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), following the same sort of development as the previous one

Respecting the limitations of the material

The techniques used in carving the stylized human figure are exactly the same as those needed for a representational one. However, if a matchstick-like figure is intended, it may be more necessary than with a representational figure to use the gentler pressure of a riffler, rather than a chisel.

Wood allows a wider variety of poses than stone, but its limits must always be respected. A compact composition (see Fig 3) or one elongated along the grain is the most suitable. Any design that involves short grain running through load-bearing parts – usually arms or legs – invites trouble. As stylization often involves turning a figure into a matchstick

person, this danger is common (Fig 24).

Wood with branches may be used to avoid this, but carries its own problems because of complicated changes of grain. You may not like adding pieces of wood with a different grain direction, as the joint is usually distracting. However, if it suits you, you can disguise this by painting (as was frequently done historically) or by careful staining. A practical solution for thin, short-grained elements is to break the piece carefully and insert a dowel; or, in the case of a thin, short-grained leg or arm that touches the ground, drill up through the base and as far as possible through the weak part and insert a dowel or screw (see Figs 10–12). Both

methods demand great care and skill. It should also be remembered that a dowel, particularly a metal one, might smash the wood around it if the carving is later damaged. I prefer to use bamboo, as it will either bend or snap without harming the surrounding wood. Bamboo kebab sticks make excellent small dowels.

When designing a stylized figure, it is much more rewarding to use your own ideas. Quite apart from the risk of prosecution if you pass off as your own something which is copied from or recognizably inspired by someone else's work, there is never the same satisfaction as there is in knowing that it is yours from start to finish. ▀



Fig 22 Holly Woman in holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) by Dick Onians. Shapes are exaggerated; note particularly the stylization of the face. This is fairly naturalistic, but even here the eyes and mouth are exaggerated and made into a deliberate pattern. The carving of the body has been affected by included bark and other problems with the wood



Fig 23 Odalisque in almond (*Prunus dulcis*) by Dick Onians. The spindly forms are supported where they are short-grained. The left arm is straight along the grain for strength



Fig 24 Gymnasts in lime by Sylvia Worthington. This lively piece contains so much short grain that it was essential to break it so it could be reinforced with dowels



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Anthony Bailey puts Saburrtooth round hand rasps to the test

I've seen and used rotary-toothed power carving wheels such as those made by Saburrtooth but, until now, had not tried the equivalent as a round, hand-held rasp. Saburrtooth offers four round hand rasps and they are colour coded to show the grit coarseness. Orange is extra coarse, green is coarse, red is medium and yellow is fine grit. The grits – as they are called – are a field of evenly sized, tiny, pointed carbide teeth evenly aligned on a tubular shaft. Each comprises a 16mm shaft, about 355mm long with about 240mm of coating and a moulded rubber handle.

To be honest, looking at the teeth, I was expecting it to give a really quite rough, untutored finished but I was very pleasantly surprised. True, I picked the finest of four grades, but another of our independent testers who tried a coarser version was equally impressed with the quality of finish.

On test

Currently I have a fine, hand-stitched rasp and a good-quality, coarse, machine-stitched version. The Saburrtooth gives a finish coarser than the first but is quicker than and superior to the other one. It wipes out the tearing of the coarse rasp very quickly and, used on its own, and even though it is labelled as fine grit, it has a fast rate of attack, creating curved surfaces quickly.

Verdict

It is excellent for rapid uniform shaping in carving and turning. Not a cheap tool but, once you try it, you realise just how good it really is. The only two downsides for me are that the fore end can be uncomfortable



if gripped – it's worth taping it – and the rate at which the grits clog. This softens the attack rate but it is easily cleaned by wirebrushing for more aggressive working.

Second opinion, by Ben Bissett

I've been making banjos for a couple of years as a hobby and a few rasps are essential tools when it comes to neck-making and shaping. When I first set eyes on the Saburrtooth rasp, I had the red-coloured one, which is a medium grit one to try.

I was a little sceptical – the teeth looked aggressive. Seeing that the project I was working on at the time was a small, lightweight travel banjo and I had opted for a much softer wood than usual I feared it may be overkill.

Setting it to work I took a deep breath and, to my surprise, it performed in completely the opposite way to how I had imagined. The draw was smooth and there was little to no splintering. It made short work of shaping the neck and brought me to a point where I could use other tools to refine the shape in record time.

Overall, the rasp is of a sturdy construction and feels right in the hand. The handle fits well in the hand and is comfortable to use. As far as performance rating of the rasp is concerned I think it is excellent.

Price \$129 US

Contact: Saburrtooth for UK stockists list, availability and pricing.

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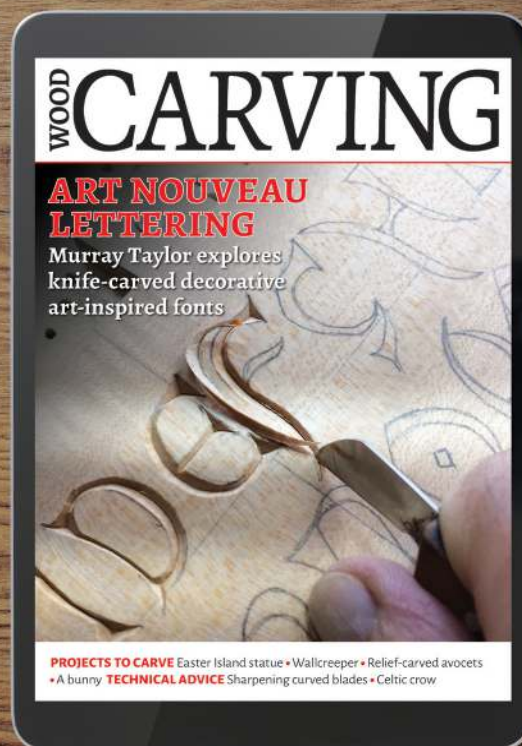
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The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa

We take a closer look at Bernini's masterpiece



PHOTOGRAPH BY COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) is widely regarded as the greatest sculptor of the 17th century and is credited with creating the Baroque style of sculpture. He also worked as an architect and city planner, designing churches, chapels and public squares.

The Baroque style of sculpture gave greater prominence to groups of human figures, carved in the round and designed to be viewed from multiple angles. The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa is considered to be one of the finest examples of this genre.

The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa was created between 1645–52 and forms the centrepiece of the Cornaro Chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. The sculpture depicts the moment that Saint Teresa of Avila, a 16th-century mystic and church reformer, had a vision of an angel driving a golden spear through her heart. Teresa is shown lying on a cloud; both figures are covered in drapery with golden rays descending on them. They are lit from above by natural daylight. On the side walls there are theatre boxes

populated with carved figures of male members of the Cornaro family (the chapel was commissioned by Cardinal Federico Cornaro). These figures are witnesses to the miraculous event, adding to the theatrical drama of the scene.

Teresa, the angel and the Cornaro figures are all carved out of white marble, while the surrounding wall panels and theatre boxes are made of coloured marbles. The chapel's vault is decorated with frescoes of a cherub-filled sky and a dove representing the light of the Holy Ghost.



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