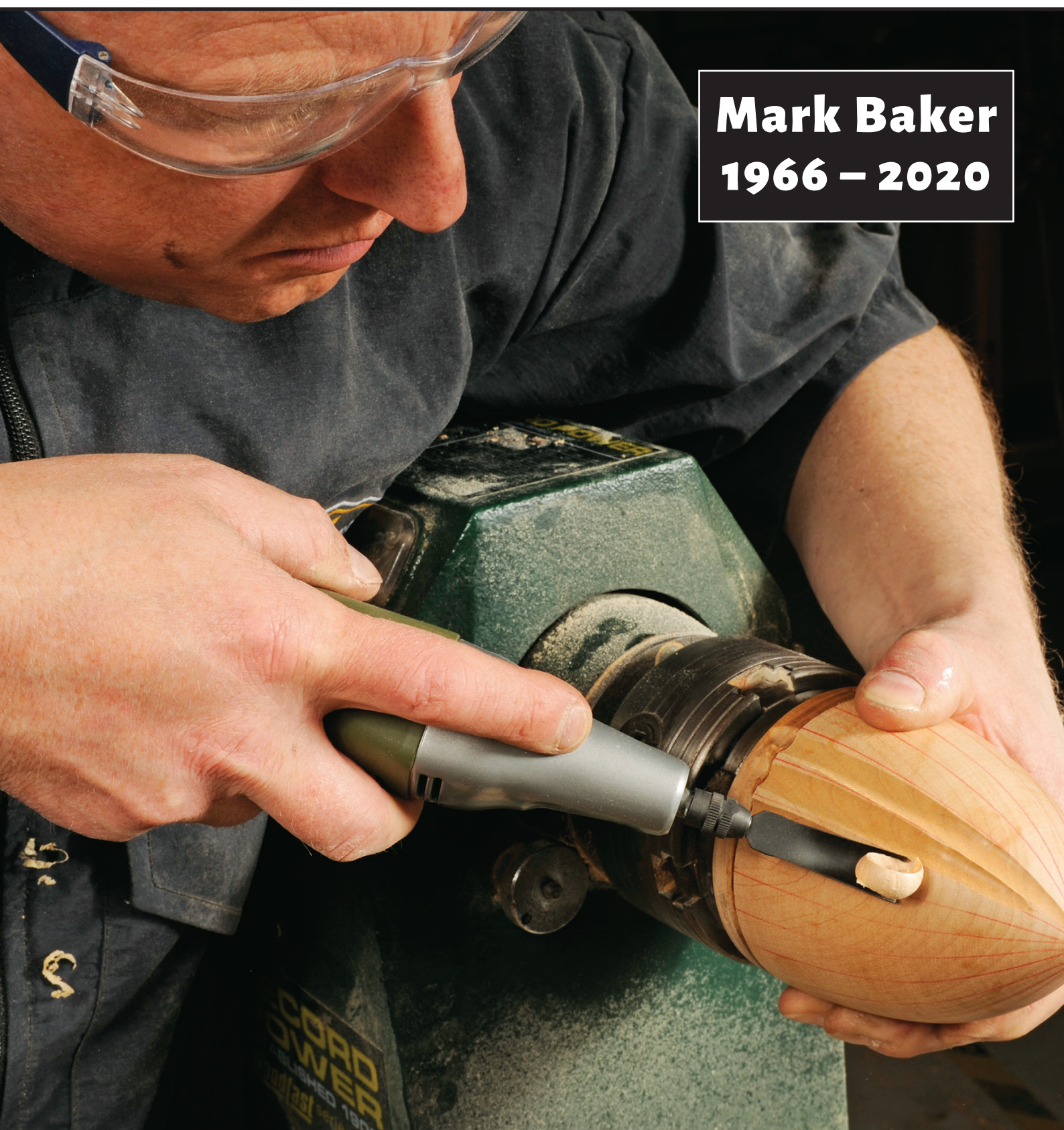


WOOD CARVING



Mark Baker
1966 – 2020

PROJECTS TO CARVE Christmas carvings • Netsuke • Sleeping dormouse
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End of an era



It is with great sadness we tell you that Mark Baker, having shared his terminal diagnosis with you in issue 174, has passed away.

Mark played a huge part in the history of GMC Publications during his 21 years as editor of *Woodcarving* and *Woodturning* magazines and group editor of all four woodworking titles. Throughout that time he also wrote and edited many of our woodworking books.

Mark's love of woodcarving and woodcarvers shone through and over the years he judged many competitions. His advice for carvers was: 'The big thing to remember is that carving should be fun. If we do not have fun when carving, we are missing the biggest point of what we do.'

He was greatly respected and loved by the woodworking community all over the world. Many of you have commented on Mark's genuine interest in readers, their work and what they wanted to see in the magazine. He encouraged many of you to share photos, join clubs and feel part of a woodcarving community.

We invite your memories and photos of Mark, which will be published in the next issue. In the meantime, a tribute to him and his work will feature in *Woodturning* issue 350, on sale November 5.

Our most sincere condolences go to his wife, daughters, family and many friends around the world.

***'To live in hearts
we leave behind
is not to die'***

Thomas Campbell



PROJECTS

4 Tulip tree pierced panel

Steve Bisco carves a magnolia design in tulipwood

16 Celebratory memento

Cedric Boyns makes a carving of intertwined hearts for a 40th wedding anniversary

30 Icelandic bedboard – part 2

Dave Western finishes his Nordic-style carving

36 Rudolph bottle opener

Mark Gough carves a fun project for your Christmas party

40 Seahorse letter opener

Beachcomber Paul Purnell picks up the perfect wave-washed log to make this delightful seahorse letter opener

51 Sleeping dormouse

Zoë Gertner carves this charming rodent snoozing in a nest of oak leaves

62 Swedish tomte

Peter Benson makes this fun Christmas carving you can complete in a couple of hours

66 Netsuke

Mitch Peacock carves his first miniature Japanese-style figure to remember a friend

70 Message board

Hone your knotwork skills with this useful and attractive design by Glenda Bennett



16



40



TECHNIQUES

10 Edge failure

Nic Westermann looks at how and why edges blunt and what can be done to mitigate this

22 So you want to start carving

Murray Taylor looks at starting out in woodcarving, different carving styles, the tools you will need, difficulties experienced due to various disabilities and carving without a workshop

FEATURES

26 Learning to carve

Woodcarving reader Tim McGinn shares his experiences and inspirations

34 Grinling Gibbons

Woodcarving reviews a new book on the life and work of the master carver

44 A sharp idea comes to fruition

We learn about the chisel sharpening jig designed by Michael Culwick

46 The chain gang

Chainsaw carver Bob King, based in Washington, US, shares his thoughts and inspirations in our Q&A

74 Sharpening: A woodworker's guide

We review the latest book from woodworker Randall A Maxey

80 Toshogu Shrine

This month we visit one of Japan's most important cultural sites

COMMUNITY

1 Welcome

We embrace the changing seasons

14 News & events

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

58 Next issue...

Can't wait to see what's in store for the next issue of *Woodcarving*? We reveal a sneak peek at what to expect

59 From the community

This month's news, letters and work from the forum

76 Subscription offer

Find out about our latest subscription offers

78 Meet the authors

Meet some of this month's writers

36



51



Tulip tree pierced panel

Steve Bisco carves a magnolia design in tulipwood



My inspiration for designs comes from many sources, and in this case a piece of wood I had in stock inspired the idea for a pierced panel featuring the flowers and leaves of the tree from which it came – the magnolia, or ‘tulip tree’.

Magnolias are among the most beautiful trees in the world, and it is their tulip-shaped flowers that gives them the alternative name of ‘tulip tree’. One member of the family which is native to the eastern US and Canada is known as the American tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and it provides us with a very useful timber known as ‘tulipwood’ (see box). It is used extensively for furniture and joinery manufacture and is quite easy to obtain from

hardwood suppliers. It carves very well and I used it in *Woodcarving 170* for a Georgian mirror frame, which left me with the other half of a good-sized board for this project.

The idea of using a detached branch to display the magnolia blossoms was inspired by various examples in Japanese art, which is based on naturalistic forms artfully arranged. The oblong shape of the original ‘plank’ is quickly lost as the pattern is pierced and cut around with a jigsaw. Most of the surplus wood is removed in this phase, leaving us with a form that is ready to carve.

When you are making a carving based around stems and branches you don’t want them to be too thick or the design will look

unnatural. You also don’t want the stems to break, so the answer is to build a structure that doesn’t depend on them for its strength. You can do this by arranging the flowers and leaves in such a way that ‘lines of support’ are transmitted through overlapping leaves and flowers rather than the stems.

To look natural in a pierced carving all the elements must be undercut and, in some cases, hollowed. Much of the undercutting is best done from the back by laying the carving face down on a soft surface. If you are used to limewood for foliage carvings, you will find that tulipwood can’t be carved quite as thinly, so you have to learn its limits, but for a project like this it is an excellent timber.

Things you will need**Materials:**

- Tulipwood (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)
540 x 270 x 32mm
- Acrylic sanding sealer

Tools:**Gouges:**

- No.3, 10mm
- No.3 fishtail, 18mm, 10mm
- No.4 fishtail, 6mm
- No.5, 13mm curved
- No.7, 10mm
- No.8, 8mm, 8mm curved
- No.9, 20mm, 3mm, 16mm curved

- Short bent, 8mm

- Skewed spoon, 10mm L&R

- Back-bent, 12mm

- V-tool, 6mm straight, 2mm straight

Chisels:

Flat, 20mm, 6.5mm, 3mm, 2mm

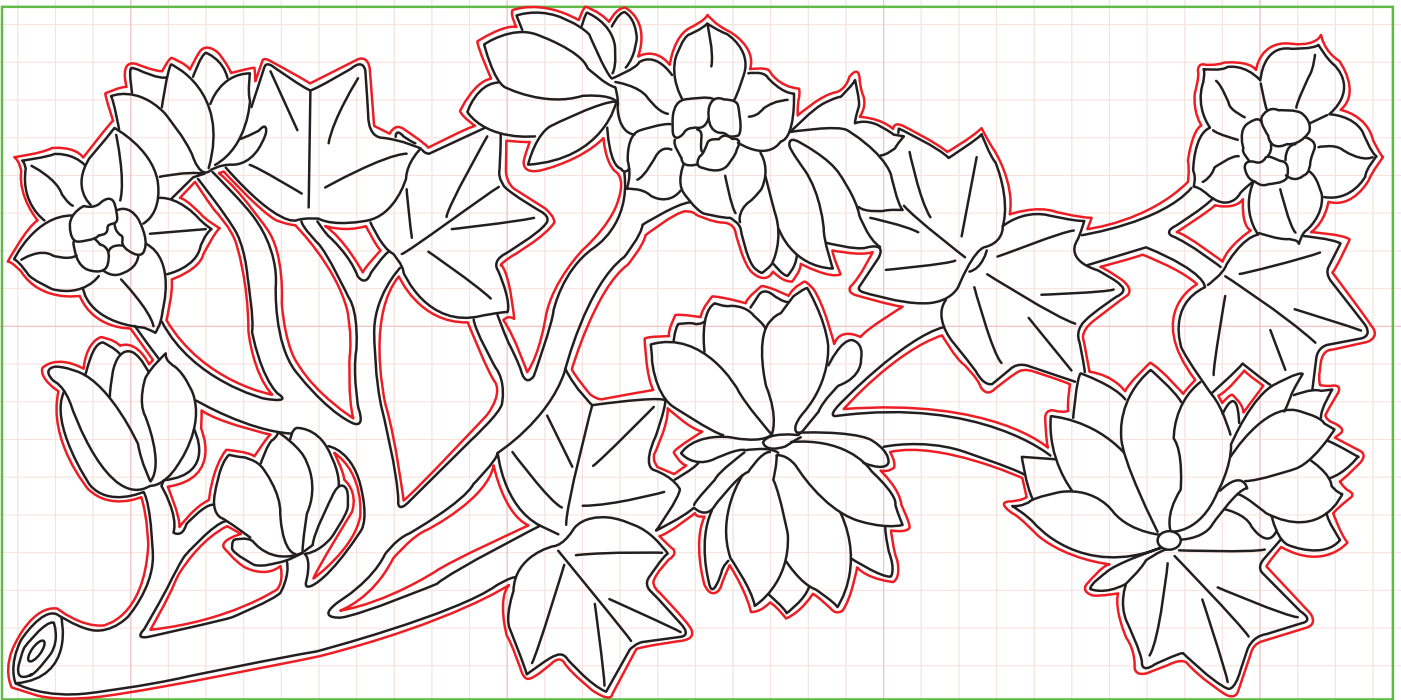
Bent, 5mm

Skew chisel, 10mm

Hooked skew chisel, 16mm

Other:

Jigsaw

**TULIPWOOD**

Tulipwood (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a member of the magnolia family native to the eastern US and Canada, also known as American whitewood, white poplar, and by several other names. It is a medium-weight, close-grained hardwood rated as easy to work with hand and machine tools and is used for furniture, joinery, carving and sculpture. It holds fine detail very well when carved. The wood is a pale creamy colour with a greenish tinge, but tends to become more green when exposed to light, so it is usually given a decorative finish. A more detailed description can be found in Terry Porter's *Wood: Identification & Use* (GMC Publications).

FORESHORTENING

This carving uses a board only 32mm thick to create the impression of rounded three-dimensional flowers using an optical illusion known as 'foreshortening'. By using a shallow curve at the edges of the upper surface, and then increasing it to a steep curve that curls around and under the back edges, the eye sees the resulting oval cross-section as a much thicker and more rounded object than it really is.

PREPARATIONS

1 Get a piece of tulipwood 540 x 270 x 32mm, and make a full-size copy of the drawing. You can create this by scanning or photographing the pattern and printing it out on three sheets of A4, or you can get it printed by a print shop. You will also need carbon paper to trace it on the wood.

2 Place the carbon paper on the wood, tape the drawing firmly in place, and trace the pattern. Keep the tape on one side while you check that all the pattern has been traced on, then remove the drawing and mark the cutting lines in red so you don't get lost with the jigsaw.

3 Use a jigsaw with a narrow blade (4-5mm) to cut out the internal voids. Have a few spare blades as they can snap when they overheat (I used three on this job). Drill access holes for the jigsaw blade. The blade may flex a little in the curves, so make allowance for this. You can hold the wood in a bench vice, or clamp it to overhang the bench.

4 For the outer edges, clamp the board so it overhangs the bench and work your way around the outside with the jigsaw. You could also use a bandsaw or scrollsaw, but the angles and the length make it easier with the jigsaw.

5 Secure the carving on your bench by screwing small blocks of wood in strategic places. This will also allow you to pick up and put back the carving to remove accumulations of shavings and undercut when necessary.

ROUGHING OUT

6 Start carving by roughing out the shape and level of the branches. Each branch should be roughly as deep as it is wide when finished, but their forward surfaces should rise and fall in relation to the levels of the leaves and flowers, so look at the finished photo to visualise this.

7 Rough out the distinctive shape of the leaves. They have four pointed lobes, but the central vein ends at one of the indentations instead of a point. They are mostly at the background level of the carving, but you must visualise how they will curl over the branches and under the flowers to put the rise and fall in the appropriate places.



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**TOP TIP**

Where elements are attached by short-grain sections of wood they will often split during carving. If this occurs, squirt some glue into the cracks, then take a thin shaving of the wood and glue it to the underside across the crack to hold the two sides together.

**8****9**

8 Rough out the cup-shaped flowers by rounding over the base and sides into a tulip shape, leaving the central petals at the full thickness of the board. Where there are intermediate tips showing between the forward petals, these represent the petals at the back of the flower, so chisel these down towards the background.

9 Some of the flowers have a more open tulip shape, flatter in form and with the petals spreading outwards.

**10****11**

10 There are three open flowers that face forwards. These must be roughed out into a hollow, with a central ring of smaller petals inside. Slope some of the petals towards the edge of the carving so the flower does not appear too flat to the board.

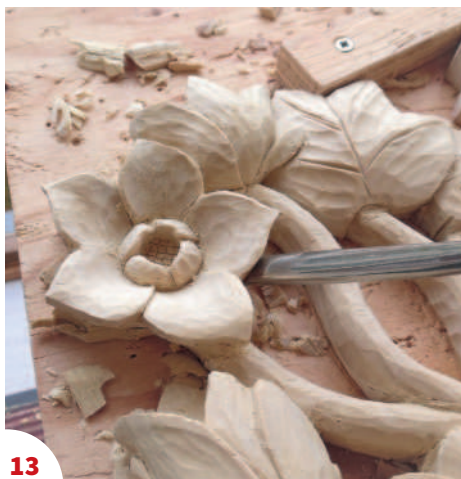
CARVING THE FLOWERS

11 With everything roughed out, we can start the detail carving with the two cup-shaped flowers near the stem end. Cut a sharp edge to the overlap of each petal with a hooked skew chisel, and shape the petals to curl around the sides and into the underside. Give the petals a delicate texture by making shallow cuts with a No.7, 10mm gouge or similar.

12 All the cup-shaped and more open flowers need to be hollowed under the tips of the petals to create an outer ring of petals about 2mm thick at the top, sides and back of the flower. The tulipwood will not quite tolerate the same level of hollowing as limewood so don't push it too far, but by partly hollowing the middle you can create a natural-looking flower.

**12**

13 In the top left there is another of the cup-shaped flowers, carved in the same way as before, and one of the forward-facing flowers. Carve this flower by separating the petals with a sharp overlap using the hooked skew chisel, then create a smooth but slightly tooled surface on the petals with a No.5, 13mm gouge. Shape the inner circle of small petals to fold inwards, then hollow out the centre. Use a flat chisel held vertically to create a cross-hatched pattern inside the hollow to represent a stamen. Finally, undercut the edges of the petals to give them a 2mm edge.



13



14

14 In the top centre there is a bunch of three flowers. One faces forwards, the other two face to opposite sides. The central one is undercut with the outer ones sprouting from underneath its sides.

15 In the lower centre a pair of flowers face upwards and downwards from the branch. These are a more open tulip shape and need more hollowing. Note how these flowers, and several others, have a pair of thin 'leaves' at their base, which represent the remnants of the bracts that encased the bud before the flower opened.



15

16 Moving to the bottom right corner, another pair of flowers face upwards and sideways. These both need careful hollowing, with the petals at the back attaching to the neighbouring leaves.

17 Finish the flower carving with the open flower in the top right. Angle it to the right and upwards, and undercut it carefully as the right side may be visible when hung up.

CARVING THE OTHER FEATURES

18 After the flowers, we can put the detail on the eight leaves. Put plenty of rise and fall into the convoluted surfaces, and use the hooked skew chisel to cut the veins. Note that the central vein flows from the stalk to the middle indentation – not to a point. Use a No.7, 10mm gouge to add the surface texture, running in line with the side veins. The leaf edges need to be undercut from underneath.



16



17

TOP TIP

When using a jigsaw or any power tool that generates wood dust, always wear a suitably rated dust mask. Breathing dust is always a bad thing and can lead to allergies and long-term illnesses of the nose, throat and lungs.



18

**19****TOP TIP**

Cut-proof carving gloves are an essential safety item when carving (I always wear them but usually take them off for the photos as they can interfere with the exposure). A slip with a sharp gouge can cause serious injury to your hands (and get blood all over the carving) without suitably rated gloves. I use Showa 542 gloves and while working on this carving they reduced a potentially catastrophic slip to just a minor nick.

**20**

19 Now carve the 'trunk' end of the branch. This is as round as the board is thick, and the end is carved with a traditional sloping hollow to make it look as if it has been cut from the tree. The branch also needs to be rounded on the underside and given subtle texturing with a No.7, 10mm gouge to create the impression of bark. This should rotate slightly in a spiral around the branches and twigs.

20 Continue with the texturing along the thinner sections of the branch and twigs. You will see at this stage which parts need the most undercutting to make them round.

**21**

21 The final undercutting is best tackled from behind. Screw some wooden blocks to the bench to restrain the carving, and lay the carving face down on some thick padding. Carve the surplus wood away very carefully as the structure is becoming ever more delicate as you near the end. Keep checking the effect from the front.

22 Give the finished carving a light sanding with 400 grit abrasive to remove any loose fibres without losing the texturing, then give it a coating of acrylic sanding sealer, front and back, to preserve the pale colour of the wood. Here is the finished carving in natural wood. You can leave it like this or apply a decorative finish if you want to. ▶

**22**

Edge failure

Nic Westermann looks at how and why edges blunt and what can be done to mitigate this



Two ways an edge can fail

There are two distinct ways by which tools can lose their edge. Most commonly an edge will gradually go blunt over time – wood is abrasive and will wear your edge down. This isn't really within the scope of the article – edges blunt as you use them and you need to sharpen them, that's carving.

But an edge that fails catastrophically, i.e. instantly on use, is something we should be able to address.

In simple terms, an edge fails because we are putting more force into it than the steel can resist.

As an example, I have an axe that I love to use, it is not made of very high grade steel, but the edge has always held up fine in use. Then one day I started to chop out a blank of rosewood (I know, don't ask) and

every cut I took put a tiny roll in the edge. This wasn't the tool's fault, and I would have been foolish to alter my beloved axe to suit such a bizarre scenario – putting a much coarser bevel angle on the axe would have meant it wouldn't have coped so well in the softer woods it is usually used on. The simple answer was to use an axe I didn't like as much but that was made of a slightly harder steel. This finished the job with no obvious damage.

Swapping to a different tool is an extreme example of mitigating edge damage, but another thing that may work is to take shallower, gentler cuts, especially around knots – these can really damage a blade if you aren't paying attention. In an earlier article I showed how a skewed cut will actually reduce the forces on an edge, so it is worth trying.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIC WESTERMANN

Heat treatment

Normalising

This is a process by which the grain size of the steel is reduced and is achieved by repeated cycles of heating and cooling the steel – this stage is often missed out on budget tools.

Hardening

A steel is hardened by heating it to the critical temperature (typically 800-850°C) then cooling it rapidly, often in oil. This is known as

quenching, and results in the maximum hardness of the steel.

Tempering

Steel after hardening is very hard but also brittle – heating it again slightly will soften it a little but increase its toughness markedly, making it much less likely to fracture. Typical tempering temperatures are in the range of 180-250°C. The hotter you get the steel the softer it becomes, hence the phrase losing your temper.

Skewed cut



A skewed cut and a gentle touch may allow you to get past tricky areas without damaging your edge

Another option is to use a softer wood or, if that is not possible, you may be able to soften the wood you are using by soaking it in water or even applying oil (although this may give you finishing issues later, so

use with caution). Both these steps will soften the wood and lubricate the cut.

None of these methods involve modifying the tool. If we decide we need to modify the tool we first need to understand how the edge is failing.



Modes of failure

If an edge is put under stress it will deform – this happens slightly on almost all cuts you take with a fine blade. When the deformation is within the elastic limits of the steel it returns to its original shape, like a stretched elastic band. However, if this deformation or flex is more than the steel can cope with it will fail in one of two ways. If the edge is too soft it will deform and not return – this we would call a rolled edge. It is often possible to tease back a rolled edge, just pulling the edge backwards over the corner of a hardwood block can work, not perfectly but it makes sharpening out the damage a lot easier.

If the steel is harder the mode of failure is fracture – we know this as a chipped edge. This is harder to fix as the chip can go back a long way from the edge, meaning that a lot of steel has to be removed when sharpening. Generally I would prefer a tool to roll rather than chip out for this reason. On the other hand, a blade that is very soft will not hold its edge for very long.

As much as possible we want a tool that will stay within its elastic limits, so with edge geometry and by being sensible with the forces exerted we aim to get a tool that will flex and return. Traditionally this is tested by pushing the edge of the tool down against a brass rod, but a plastic Biro is also hard enough to perform this test and should not damage your edge if you mess up. You should see a dimple appear and disappear as the edge flexes.

Ideally, if a blade is brought to failure point it will happen in a series of micro chips and rolls and the blade will look slightly crimped along its edge. This shows that the balance between hard and soft – the temper of the blade – is about optimum.

Modifications

It's all very well knowing how a blade fails, but what can we do about it? Well, a common fix is to increase the bevel angle – the blade will cut less efficiently but the extra steel behind the edge will reinforce it and reduce the flex that is causing the failure. This can be done by increasing the whole bevel angle, or just convexing the edge.

Without getting into the intricacies of home heat treatment, I would say a blade that is too soft – that is excessively rolling – can only really be addressed by increasing the edge angle.

However, a blade that is fracturing may be fixed at home in a different way. Generally a fracturing blade can be softened and made tougher by tempering (see below for more details).

If you can remove the handle of the tool then it is simplest to put the blade in the oven at home, setting it in a baking tray in a wrap of silver foil to help it heat evenly. Half an hour should be fine for a small tool, but larger tools such as an axe might need hours to come up to temperature evenly.

Its going to be a shot in the dark if you don't know the steel, but remember it's a one way-process – you can temper a blade softer but not harder, so go slowly in stages. Try at 190°C and increase by 20°C, testing until you get a blade that flexes as shown. Don't fix your chipped edge until you have got to this stage, just test on an unchipped section of your damaged blade. There is nothing more heartbreaking than re-chipping a freshly fettled edge.

You may find that, if the steel has not had a complete heat treatment cycle during manufacture, when you successively increase the tempering temperature it may still be prone to chipping, then flip straight into rolling with no happy middle ground. This is often due to the grain size being too large and it is hard to get an edge to hold in these circumstances. A simple analogy is how well boxwood can take a thread – the fine grains allows it to hold together much better than a wood that has grown very quickly, such as pine.

If this is the case there is little you can do but accept that the steel cannot resist much force and increase the bevel angle to reinforce the edge. I should say at this point that, although the

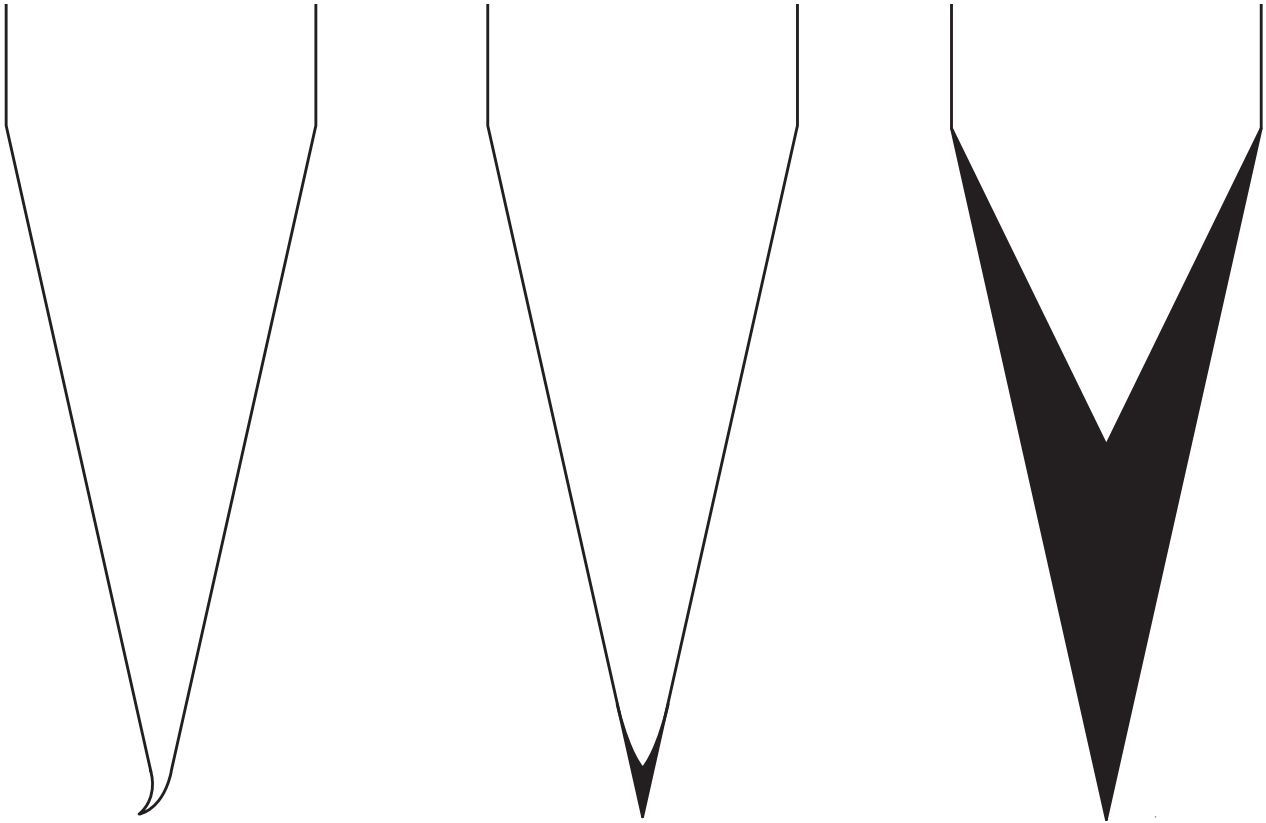


By pressing down firmly and rotating the edge into the Biro you should be able to see the edge deflect

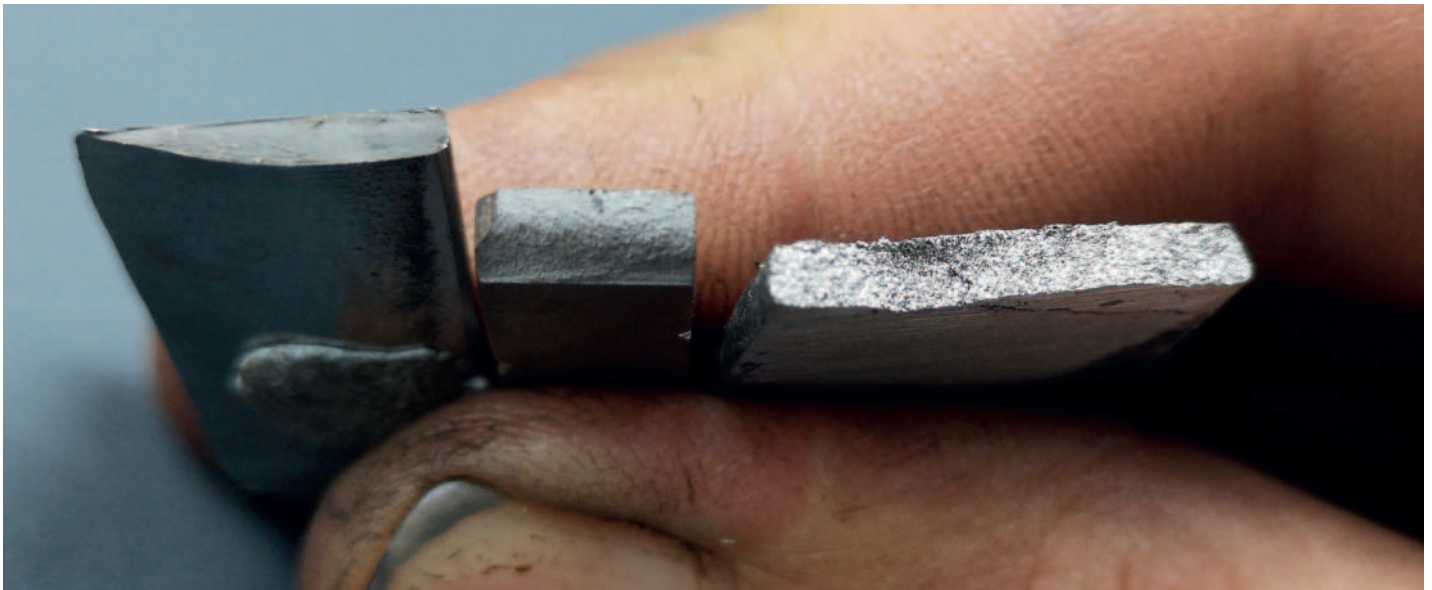


Rolling and chipping

Biro test is fun to do and, as I found, very hard to photograph, it is not the be all and end all. If you are happy with how a blade is cutting wood it makes sense to leave it well alone. However, if you are having difficulties with edge holding on a tool then this edge flex test is a very useful way to narrow down and mitigate the source of your frustrations.



An edge that is rolling (or chipping) can be reinforced by increasing the bevel angle, either by convexing the edge, or by working the whole bevel back. This involves removing much more steel



On the left is a blade with very fine grain, so fine you can't see it; in the middle a borderline but just acceptable grain size; and on the right steel that hasn't undergone any grain refinement

Conclusion

Examining how and thus why an edge fails should give you a better chance to fix the issue, either by modifying the way you use the tool or, if possible, by modifying the tool. If you are venturing

into modifying existing tools, or even making some from scratch this article should help you evaluate how things are progressing, good luck!



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Osprey with catch, by Mike Wood



News & events...

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

BDWCA NEWS

As I write this we would normally be getting ready to go to Rutland Water to exhibit in the Art Marquee of the Birdfair, but sadly this is not to be, so I've been thinking about past Birdfairs.

2008 was the year we moved, at short notice, to the double stand at the front of the Art Marquee, which we have occupied ever since. As we had previously only had a single stand we had to rally the troops to ensure we had a good display.

One of the carvings that drew a lot of attention was Mike Wood's Osprey which, during the course of the show, was visited by every member of the Rutland Water Osprey team. Sadly Mike, who wrote many bird carving articles for this magazine, passed away in April of this year. He and his talent will be greatly missed.

The weather can be unpredictable for the Birdfair, it was a sea of mud last year and in 2015, about an hour before the end of the show on the Sunday afternoon, it poured with rain, and people flocked into the Marquee to keep dry. One lady, who had visited quite a few times, re-appeared, and left as the proud owner of David Clews' Teal – sunning on rock.

We have a core team of members who usually man the Birdfair stand but try to encourage other members to come, even if they can only manage one day. In 2016 Alan Pickersgill, who had won Best Novice carver in 2015 with his Eurasian hobby, came on the Saturday. Normally carvers pack their work carefully but Alan walked on to the stand with the hobby under one arm and a long-eared owl under the other. Accordingly, when the hobby was sold – much to Alan's surprise as he had gone for a walk at the time so didn't know until he returned – we had to manufacture packaging from bubblewrap and black refuse sacks. Fortunately it remained on the stand until the end of the day so Alan got to meet his buyers, who subsequently sent him a photograph of it in situ in their home.

As I have been writing this there has been a lot of rain over the past few days, so maybe it would have been another muddy Birdfair, let's hope the sun shines on us all next year.

Contacts

For further information on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk. Membership includes three issues of our full-colour magazine, *Wingspan*. Or contact the membership secretary:- Mrs Janet Nash, 26 Shendish Edge, Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9SZ, Tel: 01442 247610. Alternatively, please email: pam.wilson@bdwca.org.uk



Eurasian hobby, by Alan Pickersgill



Eurasian hobby in its new home



Teal – sunning on rock, by David Clews

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

Celebratory memento

Cedric Boyns makes a carving of intertwined hearts for a 40th wedding anniversary



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CEDRIC BOYNS

A few years ago my daughter asked me to make a carving of two intertwined hearts to put on top of the cake at her wedding. This I did, and when just recently a 40th wedding anniversary was imminent I decided to modify the design of what I had previously completed to commemorate that event.

As an added bit of interest, the wood I used for both carvings was a

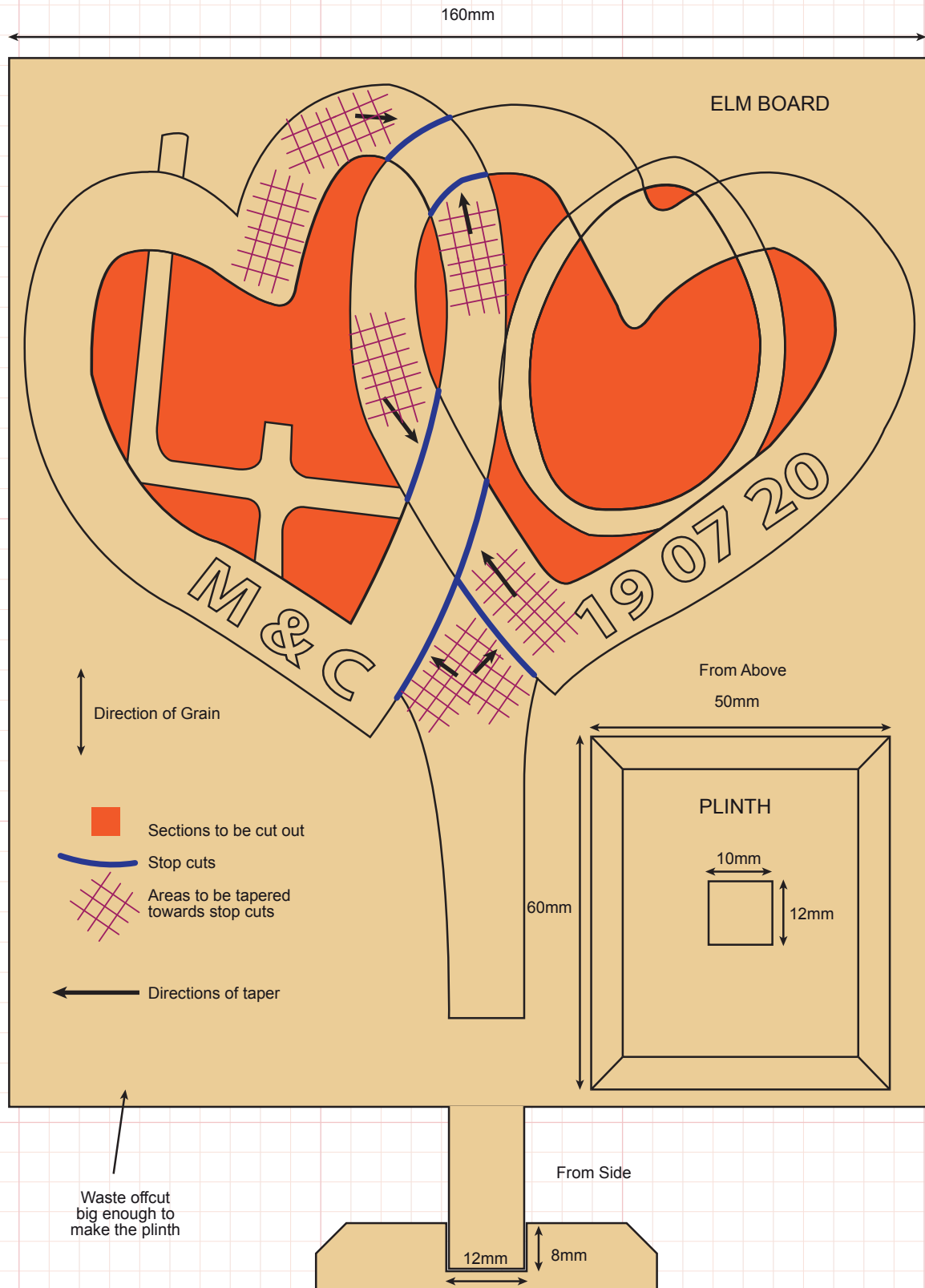
piece from a large, $\frac{3}{4}$ in (19mm) elm board that I bought to repair a chair seat for my father almost exactly 40 years ago. This, of course, was a time when Dutch Elm Disease was ravaging the species in this country and huge numbers of magnificent mature elm trees were being, or had already been, felled. I still have a few small pieces from that board and thought it appropriate to use one of them for this latest carving.

Things you will need**Materials:**

- Suitable PPE and work holding
- Copy of template
- Piece of elm board, 19mm thick and measuring 160mm x 180mm
- Finish: sanding sealer and clear wax polish
- Computer-generated lettering/numbers
- Spray contact adhesive and wood glue
- Label remover

Tools:

- Bandsaw and fretsaw
- Some gouges No.3 and No.5, 3, 6 and 10mm
- Range of straight No.1 chisels, 1.5-6mm
- Spokeshave and marking gauge
- Detail knife
- Pillar drill and selection of drills
- Abrasive, 100-400 grit
- Riffler – 'spoon and knife'



1 & 2 Make a copy of the template and cut it out. Pencil the design on the wood board, with the grain running top to bottom as illustrated. Cut around the outline using a bandsaw (or other suitable saw). Keep a large offcut to make the plinth.

3 & 4 Using a suitable method, remove the central waste material, taking care to stay on or just inside the pencil lines. As I do not have a scrollsaw, I used a range of different sized drills to remove much of the waste before tidying it up with a fretsaw. I made sure I had a flat piece of waste wood underneath to prevent breakout damage as I drilled through. Fill in the missing lines where the two hearts meet.

5 Use appropriate stop cuts where it joins the heart 'framework', and then reduce the thickness of the '40' part of the carving so that it sits roughly equidistant from either side. Round the edges with a suitable small gouge or carving knife. This should leave the impression that the '40' is embedded in the middle of the heart frameworks.

6, 7 & 8 Where the two hearts meet, in order to create the impression that they are intertwined, it is necessary to make appropriate stop cuts with a No.3, 10mm gouge in the side uprights of the hearts where they link together, and then pare away so that one appears to go under the other. This is shown by the blue lines in the photograph. How far away from the link that I took this tapering is shown by the 'blue hatching', but it is largely a matter of personal choice. Turn it over and do the same to the other side, ensuring continuity. Mark it clearly before you commit to any stop cuts to be sure they will be made in the correct places.

9 Make stop cuts along the bottoms of the hearts where they meet the supporting stalk with the same No.3 gouge as before, and pare away to make the hearts stand away from the stalk.



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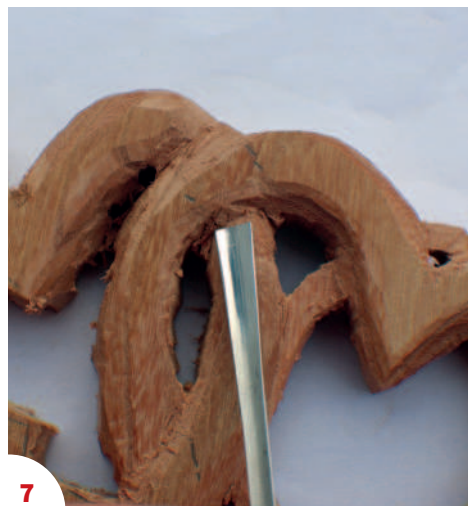
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**10****11**

10 & 11 Similarly round the edges of both hearts and clean away any saw or drill marks to produce a pleasing shape all round. Take note of the direction of the grain in different areas and try to work with the grain rather than against it. The lower areas where lettering is to be carved can be left unrounded at this stage as a larger flat surface will make that letter carving easier. The stalk can now be reduced to a length of 40mm (measured from the base of the lower heart), and a cross-sectional size of 12mm x 10mm. This can be achieved using suitable gouges.

**12****13**

12, 13 & 14 To achieve a decent final finish, complete the smoothing with a range of abrasives, using thin strips to access tight corners where necessary. A suitable riffler or needle file is also useful for this.

15 Make a plinth from the saved offcut with dimensions 50mm x 60mm x 12mm and put a bevel on the upper surface. Use whatever tools you have at your disposal for this. I used a carpenter's marking gauge and a spokeshave, but marking with a pencil and using a chisel or gouge would be equally effective.

16 After careful marking out, a mortise is then cut to a depth of about 7 or 8mm in the middle of the plinth to accommodate the stalk. I used a mortise chisel, but an appropriate No.1 carving chisel would also do the job. Do not attach the plinth yet.

**14****15**

Carving the lettering (& numbers)

17 I felt there were three options open to me:
 a) Don't put on any lettering, let the piece speak for itself. Perhaps just round down those lower areas like the rest of the carving.
 b) Cut the lettering in below the surface.
 c) My preferred option – cut the lettering in so that it stands proud of the surface.

The lettering used has to be transferred on to the piece. I chose to generate the lettering on my computer and opted for a simple, plain font which has quite chunky letters (Helvetica Neue 30pt) and made it bold so that would allow there to be a reasonable amount of wood left in place, and therefore less likely to be subject to damage. I stuck the lettering on with a contact adhesive.

**16****17**

18 & 19 For the letters with straight sides, I used appropriate No.1 straight chisels (make sure they are razor sharp) to make very shallow stop cuts around all the side faces of each letter, making sure not to undercut any of the wood you want to remain. I tend to angle the cuts the other way very slightly to start with. The final depth needs to be no more than 1.5-2mm, so it is a delicate process and can be done in several stages. The wood around each letter is then removed extremely carefully with an appropriate small gouge/chisel to leave the letters in place. I tend to break up the surface of the areas to be removed first with a series of shallow stop cuts and this reduces the chance of taking too much away at one time and causing damage. If you do have a mishap, superglue can usually rescue you, but this procedure cannot be rushed.



18



19

20, 21 & 22 For letters with curves, you may have a big enough selection of small gouges to match those curves, but I don't, and I used a No.5, 3mm gouge for most of the curves, frequently needing to use it at an angle to work around those curves. Where there was only a tiny amount of wood to remove on the inside of a letter or number I did this with a No.11, 0.5mm gouge, or even just pierced the area with a pointed object (point of a pair of dividers). The surrounding wood was removed as before and the areas around all the lettering and numbering tidied up using a blade riffler and suitable abrasives to produce a decent sanded finish.



20



21

23 Once this has been done the paper letters can be removed from the tops of the carved letters by peeling them off very carefully, or using a suitable label remover. (I use Baufix, periodically available from Lidl, but I am sure others are available). A final light rub over the letters with 400 grit abrasive will ensure there are no rough edges which might chip away and spoil the finish.



22



23

Note: Some reading this article may well question the wisdom of trying to produce such small prone lettering. With some woods it may be less wise, but with elm, which is noted for its twisted grain with fairly equal strength in all directions – hence its traditional use in Windsor chair and milking stool seats – I have found that it does seem to be successful provided that the procedure is not rushed. Indeed, I have used this format of lettering many times in projects with elm as well as several other woods including holly, pear, plum and beech.

24 The stalk can now be glued on to the plinth with a suitable wood glue and, when dry, a finish of choice applied. I used a coat of sanding sealer followed by a couple of coats of wax polish, which brings out the beautiful rich brown colour of the old elm heartwood. The finished carving should look something like this. ▶



24

Keeping your *edge*



MASTERS OF WOOD

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3YR
GUARANTEE

So you want to start carving

Murray Taylor looks at starting out in woodcarving, different carving styles, the tools you will need, difficulties experienced due to various disabilities and carving without a workshop



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MURRAY TAYLOR

While giving a one-day carving demonstration at a well known national tool store just before lockdown, I was expecting the usual questions on carving techniques and sharpening, but found that the dominant questions fell into the following categories: 'How do I get started in woodcarving?'; 'Do I need a workshop?'; 'Am I too old to start?'; and 'Could my disability stop me carving?'

I was considering these questions when lockdown came upon us and one of the unexpected results of this difficult period was that

people had more time on their hands and I received a number of emails asking more or less the same questions as I had been asked at the demonstration. This has prompted me to give some ideas on starting up and overcoming problems you might have.

So, before you wonder what gives me the right to talk about age and disability, let me say at the outset that I am 78 years old and suffer with arthritis and compaction of the spine. I have a number of colleagues and students who suffer with various ailments and I have come up with several solutions to help them.

No workshop – no problem

You would think it would be wonderful to have a well-appointed workshop that benefits from natural north light at my carving station and is quite well equipped, but am I satisfied – well, not really. My tablesaw and bandsaw have to be on movable beds with locking castors, I have to move my large belt sander to get at my lathe etc, etc. The whole thing measures 4.6m x 2.45m internally (15ft x 8ft in old money), the allocated garden space that I am allowed having to bow to the will of the powers that be.

So now, while I try to extract my tongue from my cheek, we can take a look at alternatives that I have come up with and which solve the no workshop problem.

I realise that this article is about finding alternative solutions to carving places, but the carvers and woodworkers I know all like a peek at other people's workshops, so here are some shots of mine to possibly inspire you to set one up if you can, or adopt any of the ideas if you already have one.

The first thing to think about is the style of carving you want to undertake. In my experience from running a carving club, most beginners start with chip carving, low relief carving, or relatively simple pierced carving. On the other hand, some turn to whittling or fairly basic carving in the round. Whichever route you decide to take you will need three things: some wood to carve, tools to carve with and a place to carve.



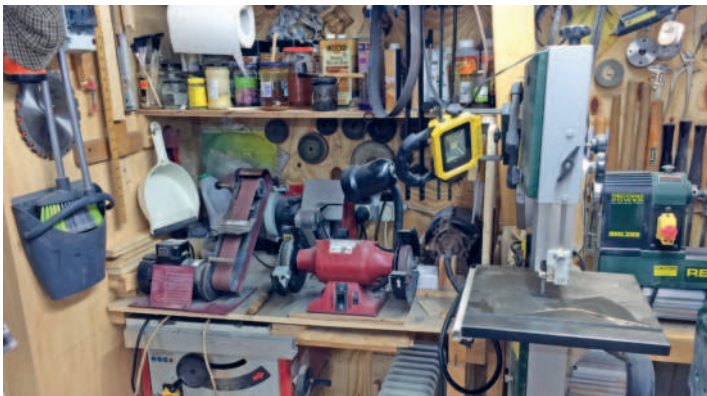
My carving station. Note the chisels and gouges held on stands with 'lazy Susan' bases for easy access



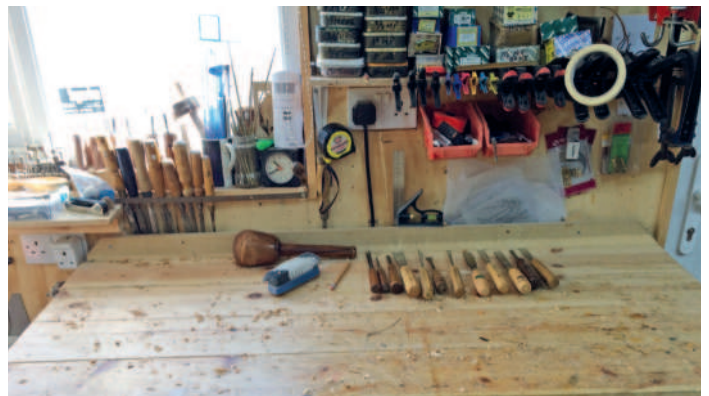
The general workshop bench



The bandsaw and sander on a moveable base with locking castors. I have to move this to get to the lathe



The tablesaw stowed under the sharpening area



A big carving bench, which is on locking castors for larger pieces of work such as lettering on oak porch lintels etc.

A place to carve

If you were going to start with chip carving, for instance, you could work with a board on your knee or perhaps on the kitchen table, or you might use a simple work box or perhaps a dedicated corner in a spare room. In order to give you some ideas, I am going to show a series of photographs – a picture gallery if you like – which I hope will stimulate the imagination of both new and more experienced carvers alike.

CARVER'S TIP: A bench hook is simply a wooden board with a piece of wood screwed underneath so that it does not slide on to the table, and a piece on top to stop the work sliding off.

SAFETY NOTE: A pin or nail through the top board into the lower board stops it moving when in use.



Simple bench hook with added side bar to stop work sliding. We usually start beginners with one of these in our carving club



A more advanced bench-top carving station. This consists of a lower board with a second one on top secured by a single wood screw in the centre to allow it to swivel. A series of holes, wedges and pegs hold the work and it can be swivelled for carving or to use the fretsaw peg



The swivel board in use



A fold-down work station set up on a kitchen table



The work station opened up to reveal a basic toolkit with some beginners' projects, three letter openers, and a love spoon



The carving block turned to allow the fretsaw to be used on the V-peg. You don't actually need a scrollsaw



The work station set up on a Workmate in a conservatory. Note the old Hobbies treadle fretsaw in the corner



Another version of a work station. This one is a completely closed carrying case. Note the bar underneath, which acts like a bench hook, and the slot for the fretsaw peg



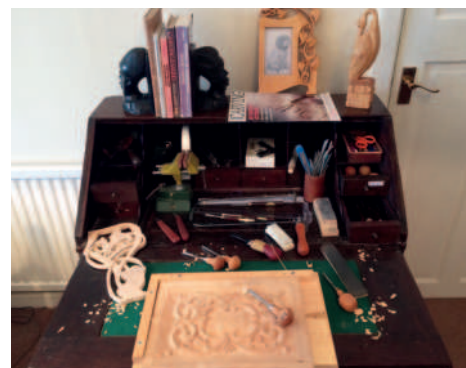
The work station in use at a carving club meeting



The fretsaw peg in use



Old brown furniture is almost being given away at auction rooms these days, so this was an idea I came up with for a student who lives in a small apartment. Here we have the closed bureau



The bureau opened up to reveal a small carving workshop. All the small drawers etc. are ideal for your tools, drawing instruments and sharpening equipment



One of our carving club members has to use a mobility scooter, so I made him a worktop to fit over the arm rests



This is an interesting bit of kit that I found recently. It is produced by the famous Swedish maker Sjöbergs. It can be clamped on to any table or desk and can either hold work in the vice or between the dogs



Another solution is a sit-on carving bench, this is a professional one by the Austrian company Stubai. I have seen many homemade versions of these benches, including some that fold up for storage and carrying

The tools

The first thing to understand is that you do not need a large toolkit to start carving – a small selection of chisels, gouges and knives will suffice to start. I would suggest you start off with the smaller versions, that is palm tools rather than their full-size counterparts. Palm tools are usually about 140-160mm long, whereas full-size tools are approximately 220-240mm in length.

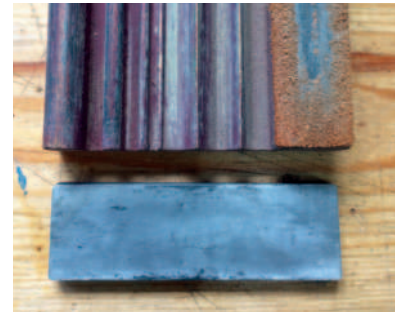
BEGINNER'S NOTE: Chisels have a flat profile on the cutting edge whereas gouges are curved.



A suggested starter kit. These tools are by Flexcut and are readily available. The blades just push into the handle and so can be stored in a small roll or toolbox. The knife is a general carving knife



An assortment of different makes of palm tools



A ceramic stone and strop, you will need these to keep a fine edge on your tools



A selection of modern, full-size tools



Old tools found at a car boot sale. They were made of very good steel and hold a wonderful edge



A possible storage solution

Conclusion

As I said at the beginning of the article, you will need three things to start carving – somewhere to carve, a toolkit and, of course, some wood. The most commonly used wood is lime (*Tilia vulgaris*), readily available from a number of suppliers, which can be found online. Some of them supply carving blanks which are very useful for the beginner.

You can learn a lot from the many carving books that are on the market, but I really do recommend that you join a local carving club where more experienced carvers will help you to progress. Although woodcarving was traditionally done standing up, there is no problem with sitting to work – I do for most of my carving. I hope some of the

ideas I have given you will be of use and help you to get started.

I am writing this article during the coronavirus lockdown, so I very much hope that we will be free to resume normal life when this is published in the September/October edition of the magazine. As always, carve in a comfortable position, don't carve when you are tired, strop regularly and practise, practise, practise.

Bibliography:

For beginners I really recommend *The Complete Book of Woodcarving* by Everett Ellenwood. ISBN 978-1-56523-292-1

Learning to carve

Woodcarving reader, Tim McGinn shares his experiences and inspirations

My introduction to woodcarving was an exhibition of a local woodcarving group's works in the window of an antique shop in Odiham, North Hampshire. The group was led by Brian Leemans who invited me to come along to one of their weekly sessions in a local village hall.

Brian, a former Head Forester at the Forestry Commission, had spent his lifetime in wood and woodcarving. He had been running the group for several years and they were all convivial company working on advanced pieces when I joined with two other novices.

Brian's skill and experience were soon very evident as we tackled our first woodcarving project – two dolphins using Flexcut knives and mahogany block shapes he had pre-cut. This was an excellent introduction to carving prudently and understanding the importance of the grain. The finished dolphins were then mounted on a pine base carved to represent a seascape.

This early experience gave me the impetus to improve my basic woodcarving skills so my next project was much more ambitious. My great-grandparents kept a pony and trap in a stable with two Victorian cast footman characters on the hips of the roof; always called Paddy and Barney. They had been passed down the family to me and remain favourite garden ornaments about 80cm tall.

RIGHT: Two Dolphins in Mahogany

FAR RIGHT: Mahogany Love Spoon. All starter woodcarvers try carving a love spoon – a traditional Celtic wedding gift. Mine was in a lattice form in mahogany



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM MCGINN AND PHILIP SPINKS



Paddy and Barney Footmen, Paddy in Cedar of Lebanon, Barney in Cedar of Lebanon



Paddy in Cedar of Lebanon



Barney in Cedar of Lebanon

In discussion with Brian he recommended I try Cedar of Lebanon to produce two similar characters about 25cm tall. Photographing the originals from the front, back and sides created images which I then overlaid with a squared grid. Replicating a similar grid on the wood blanks, I then sketched in the shape of the characters on each side and the top.

This gave me the outline profile to remove the surplus bulk and create figures closer to the target images. Removing excess timber with just a knife was difficult

and rather tedious so acquired my first woodcarving chisels and with a mallet carefully revealed the desired shapes. The biggest challenge was their round hats which I turned and added to their bases.

My father, John McGinn, was a leading Liverpool banker and talented amateur artist who created a terracotta head of me when I was twelve years old.

After reading Dick Onians' book, I was keen to understand how to carve the human head and used this as a basis to carve my own head in lime.

Early carvings

My first relief carving was a sailing ship in full mast using a profile shared by a carving classmate. Understanding depth and the power of light and shade made this an enjoyable and fulfilling work in Lime.

Relief carving is much different and also tricky to manage distance and perspective. My next project was to carve a relief of Seasons, our home built in an ancient Hundred Acre Oak woodland, planted and grown for the Royal Navy, in the North Downs.

Cath, my wife acquired a set of miniature bronze statues of the four seasons from Spain featuring ladies dressed to reflect the different weather conditions. This was an awkward challenge to scale up and carve the figures triple the size of the originals. Again I carved this in lime as I was becoming more familiar with its qualities and we have an excellent local source at WL West & Sons near Midhurst.



Tim McGinn in Terracotta aged 12 & Tim McGinn in Lime



Spring in Lime



Summer in Lime



Sailing Ship Relief



Autumn in Lime



Winter in Lime



Pig in Lime with Lavender

Watching Nigella Lawson on a television cooking programme Cath spotted a rather handsome and chunky pig in her kitchen. This was a large item to carve being 60cm long and 25cm wide using quarter sawn lime.

My family have been very supportive of my woodcarving activities and I have been privileged to be asked to carve house-signs for them. The clear definition of Trajan Roman typeface, which after all has survived countless centuries, is my favourite and using the carving chisels designed specifically by Chris Pye is a terrific aid to accuracy and clarity.

My youngest brother, Ambrose, has a delightful home in an old pub in Buckinghamshire. The existing sign was in bad shape and he asked me to carve a replacement which has stood the test of time well.

Symbolic carvings

Sir Winston Churchill is one of my favourite heroes and I was struck by the defiant stance of his statue in Parliament Square, Westminster London which I chose to carve in Jelutong. Like Balsa it is technically a hardwood with many properties similar to that wood such as the low density, straight grain and fine texture. These make it is easier to work with than English hardwoods and hence popular with model makers and within the patternmaking trade

Sir Winston's great wartime friendship with the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, is celebrated in a wonderful life-size bronze statue by Lawrence Holofcener. This statue is an important symbol of our deep friendship with friends in the United States. It is in Bond Street in London's West End where many visitors sit between them for an iconic selfie! Jelutong was my choice for this too so I could replicate the intricate details of the bench and finish it with a bronze patina.

A great friend of mine and fellow Freeman of the City of London and Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists, Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE MA CStJ FRSA FBCS Hon CDir FIOD, was appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London in 2015. To celebrate I offered to carve his Coat of Arms. It was an extremely challenging piece to carve from the artistic detail and the motto 'do well, do good' was a guiding maxim for my woodcarving!

A mature ash tree in our garden was leaning into the highway at a dangerous angle and needed to be felled leaving a stump about two metres tall. Why so tall? Because I wanted to utilise the stump to carve four symbols to represent the four seasons as our home is called Seasons.

The symbols chosen were Sun for Summer, Oak Leaves and Acorns for Autumn, Snowflake for Winter and a Daffodil for Spring; all reflecting attributes of our garden.

With the stump freshly felled a few weeks ago this was going to be green woodworking with a vengeance!



Old Butcher's Arms Carved in Oak

Woodside Cottage in Oak



Sir Winston Churchill



Coat of Arms Sir Kenneth Olisa OBE



Great Allies and Friends

First step was to mark up the stump with four circles to bear the symbols. I then removed the two layers of bark - the first layer is dead bark and the second layer is more like a hard but moist cheese!

This exposed the actual ash timber which glistened in the sunshine from its moisture content which we measured to be 56%; normal woodworking timber is a quarter of this level of moisture.

As I carved the timber it began to dry

out at the surface eventually reaching a much lower moisture content level of 25%. Whilst circular in shape the symbols needed to be in relief and convex to stand out from the trunk which all meant there needed to be a concave outside element to achieve the relief.

To finish off the exposed carving I treated the wood with coats of Osmo wax/oil and a matt exterior varnish to protect the images from the weather.

**Seasons Stump**

All this experience has made me more ambitious in my scope and as an example my current work in progress; a relief façade of the ancient Winchester Cathedral. This has been a real test as the final execution of the Victorian update to the frontage varies significantly from the architect's plans. Since it took them centuries to complete, time is on my side!

Recent developments

Sadly our local classes ceased in 2018 and most of my work is now in my home workshop; an adapted double garage. I have built a comfortable and practical environment for my woodworking re-using old kitchen cabinets and some bespoke shelving with magnetic strips.

Key resources include my Shopsmith – an amazing lathe-based multi-tool that uses a single digital motor to perform lathe, tablesaw, sanding, morticing, drill press include horizontal boring and disc sander.

My carving bench includes two invaluable vices: Scopas Chops, which is the perfect wood carver's vice made in beech with a heavy duty screw, metal side plates and brass rails with the jaws lined with cork and buff hide; and a Chinese pattern-maker's vice with swivelling jaws which can be used to clamp and hold any irregular shaped object for carving. Five years ago I joined the Southern Fellowship of Woodworkers which celebrated its Silver Anniversary in 2019. This has given me excellent exposure to other amateur and professional woodworkers and woodcarvers. At the same time it has given me the opportunity to share my business experience and help striving wood professionals to become more effective and profitable business people as well as accomplished craftsmen.

Other good friends, Clare and Jim Madden asked me to carve a plaque for the porch to their Arts and Crafts home in East Devon. Fáilte is Welcome in Gaelic reflecting Jim's Irish heritage. PAX ET BONUM is the Motto of St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Orders which include the Poor Clare Sisters. It's meaning is 'peace and goodness be with you'. ▶

**LEFT TO RIGHT: Spring Daffodil, Summer Sun, Autumn Oak Leaves and Acorns & Winter Snowflake****My workshop & carving workbench****Winchester Cathedral****Failte PAX ET BONUM**

Icelandic bedboard – part 2

Dave Western finishes off his Nordic-style carving

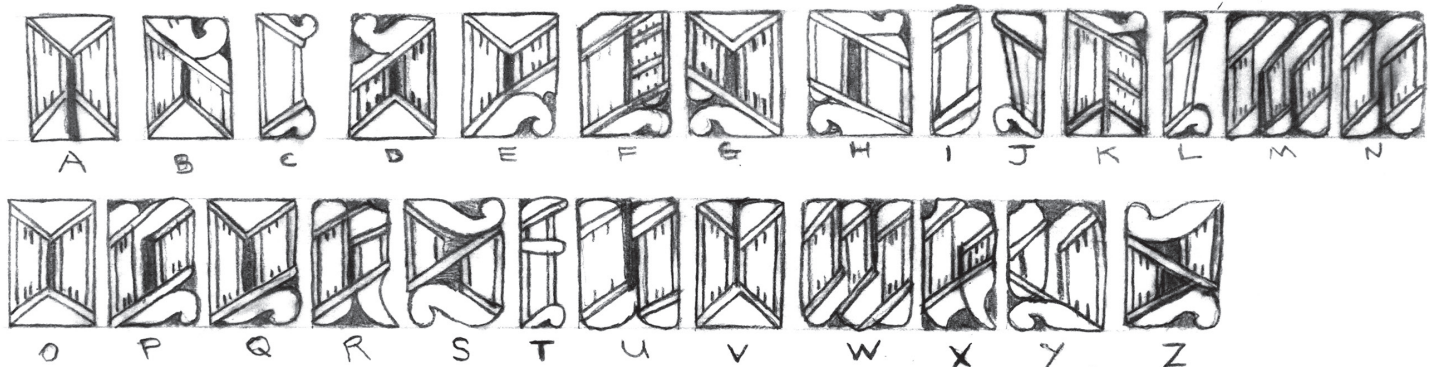
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE WESTERN



In the last issue of *Woodcarving* I made a typical Icelandic bedboard (called a rúmfjöl in Icelandic), of the type common from the late 1600s through to the late 1800s. These simple, straight boards of wood were used at night to hold bedding in place along the exposed edge of a built-in bed. During the day, the board would be proudly hung on the wall to display the beautiful carving on its front face. I'm told that the board would often also be used plain face up as a table and

would be placed across diners' laps as they sat on the bed to eat.

The skill and exuberance of the carving sent a message to all who saw it that the man of the house was a capable and talented worker and that the recipient of his work was highly thought of. While there was frequently a romantic aspect to the board's symbolism and design, the accompanying text, carved of a font called höfðaletur (translated as 'head letters'), was often more spiritual in tone.



The höfðaletur font is unique to Iceland and, although little is known of its origins, it is thought it developed from Gothic script. It is wonderfully suited to woodcarving and can be made as mysterious or literal as the carver wishes. Apparently, it is called head

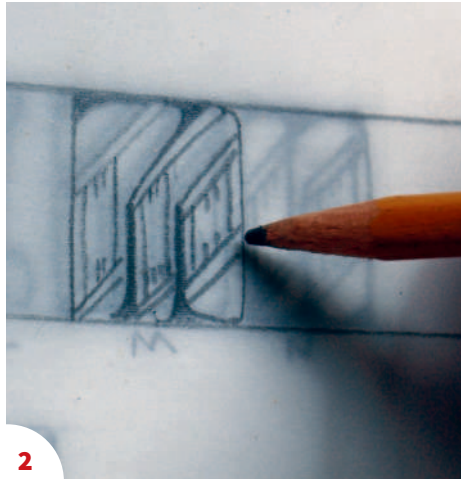
lettering because the heads of each letter are ornamented with decorative lining or shapes.

I have based the font used on this bedboard on one designed by Brynjúlfur Jónsson which was published around 1900. Because the Icelandic alphabet varies from English, I have left out the

letters unique to Icelandic and replaced them with English letters in as similar a style as I could manage. I have drawn the lettering freehand to more accurately capture the feel and liveliness of Jónsson's font and to ensure a less mechanical feel on the final product.



1



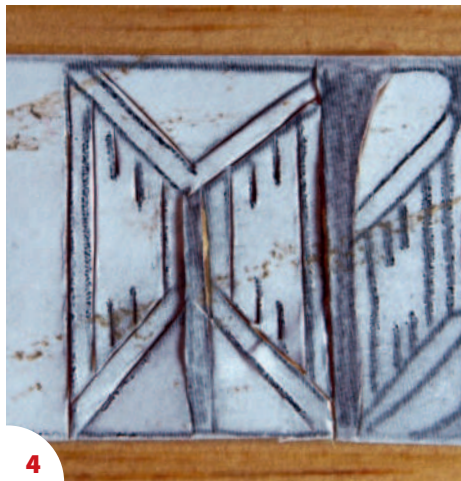
2

1 I first drew out some parallel lines on a piece of tracing paper to ensure the lettering would all be a consistent height, then lightly sketched the outline of each letter (using a photocopy of the original for guidance). Once satisfied the lettering was correctly proportioned and laid out, I proceeded to thicken the lines and detail each letter.

2 To guarantee the layout of text I wanted to carve would appear properly spaced and neatly arranged, I traced each required letter into place on a new sheet of paper. Again, I had drawn out evenly spaced parallel lines to ensure my font ran straight and was consistently sized.



3



4

3 With the required text correctly placed and several checks done to ensure spelling accuracy (a vital task as it is extremely easy to make a spelling or arrangement mistake when working with an unusual font like this), I made a photocopy that I then adhered directly to the workpiece using a run-of-the-mill glue stick. If you lack access to a copier or printer, you can glue your tracing paper version to the work, or freehand draw the lettering directly in place. Lightly draw out some properly spaced parallel lines to guide your paper template and ensure it stays straight when gluing.

4 Begin the lettering process by gently scribing all lines with a small and very sharp straight knife. I usually go around the entire letter very lightly on the first pass to ensure my knife doesn't wander and that I cover all the lines that need marking.



5



6

5 On subsequent passes, I dig the knife in a bit deeper and more aggressively, aiming for a cut of approximately 1.5-2mm deep ($\frac{1}{16}$ in). When all the lines have been neatly scribed, the paper can be removed if desired or left in place to protect the face of the piece.

6 If you decide to remove the paper at this point, there are a number of ways to approach the task. Sometimes the paper will come off of its own volition, sometimes it can be peeled away using the fingers and sometimes it has to be scraped away using a scraper or chisel. A word of warning when using a tool to scrape the surface: because there are so many narrow cross-grain areas, it is easy to scrape too aggressively and chip out some of these sections. Proceed only with the lightest of touch and take care to work slowly and cautiously. I generally avoid the urge to just sand the paper off as it leaves the area below a bit less bright than the surrounding wood.



7



7 An alternative method for bringing up the lettering is to begin by clearing all areas around the letter and any areas which require wide cuts, such as the middle of the letter A or between the 'legs' of the letters M and N etc. With a font that can be as potentially confusing to work with as this one can be, sometimes it is best to separate the letters before working on the internal details.

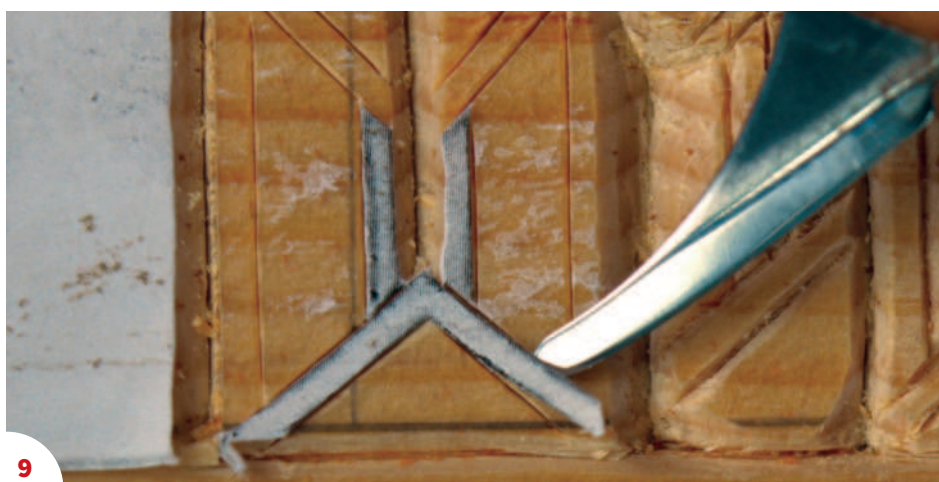


8 Whichever method you use to start defining the lettering, it is critical the straight knife be kept razor sharp. I recommend frequent trips to the stropping belt, especially if using a softer timber such as the pine used in this demonstration board. Softer woods have the advantage of being easier to carve, but with the amount of cross grain and close lining that occurs in each letter, a dull knife will tear rather than crisply slice the grain. When this happens, the letters will look ragged and will be difficult to discern properly. Ensure your knife is as sharp as you can make it before you begin and take a brief moment every 15 minutes or so to give it a quick pass on the strop.



8

9 This picture clearly shows the difference in cuts left by a razor-sharp knife and the same knife that has dulled a bit. The scribing lines are all neat and crisp, as are a couple of the cuts along the outer edge of the letter. But in the space between the letter and its neighbour – especially around the curved section at its ‘head’ – it can be easily noticed that the grain has started to pull and leave pitted areas that appear poorly worked. Although the actual carving required for this project is pretty basic, if it isn’t clean and tidy, the final outcome will be deeply disappointing.



9

10 Because of all the diagonal decorative lines found on this font, it is sometimes easy to cut in the wrong direction and tear up the grain. Constant vigilance is required to ensure that the grain is followed on either side of the cut. A good, fine, sharp knife tip is very helpful at this point in the process.



10

11 With the bulk of the lining and shaping done, it’s time to go back over everything one more time and clean up any ragged cuts and missed sections. To illustrate the difference between a sanded and scraped surface, note how the three letters to the left of the picture appear a bit ‘whitish’ and dull, while the scraped letters to the right retain more colour, and are much brighter in appearance.



11



**12**

12 I approached the numerals slightly differently to the lettering. I wanted them to appear in low relief as the font does, but needed them to be a touch more defined and easily read. To that end, I made use of a wider and slightly deeper cut around the outer edge of the numbers. I resisted the urge to make it too much bigger than that around the lettering so the numbers wouldn't appear larger or out of line with the flow of the text.

13 Due to the number of curves found on the letters, it was crucial the knife be even sharper than it was during the lettering. I made certain it was very well stopped before committing to some of the long, sweeping passes that were required along the sides of the zeros and along the mid sections of the twos.

**13****14**

14 With all the carving completed, the face carefully scraped and any ragged or uneven areas cleaned up, a finish of penetrating oil can be applied. The penetrating oil brings up the colour of the piece, but it also soaks into the cross-grain cuts, further defining the carving and bringing the individual letters to life. It may require two or three coats to properly fill the end-grain areas, so be sure to wipe off all excess finish as per manufacturers' instructions to avoid any 'pooling' or sticky areas.

15 The board can be gifted and hung in a place of honour or, as I will likely do, you can add yet more text and decoration to it. Once you start one of these, it is easy to see why so many Icelandic carvers got so carried away. ▶

**15**

Grinling Gibbons

Woodcarving reviews a new book on the life and work of the master carver



THE ORIGINS AND GENIUS OF GRINLING GIBBONS

THE MAN DESCRIBED by Horace Walpole as an 'original genius', Grinling Gibbons was born in Rotterdam on 4 April 1648. His father James 'Gibbens' was a citizen draper from London and his mother was Elizabeth Gorlings. Her great-grandfather was Sir Simon Hansacre of Worcestershire, whose daughter and heiress (Eleanor) married Richard Dynely. The Dynelys' daughter, Elizabeth, married Francis Grinling; and it is their daughter Elizabeth, her surname now appearing as Gorlings, who became Grinling Gibbons' mother.

James and Elizabeth were married in 1637 in Rotterdam and lived there for at least ten years after Grinling's birth. Their firstborn child, Elizabeth, was baptised in 1644 at the Dutch Reformed Church in Rotterdam. Francis Gorlings, the father of Mrs Gibbens, is thought to have been an English merchant who had dealings in tobacco in Rotterdam and had died there in 1640. Gibbons' paternal grandfather was involved in the Merchant Tailors' Company in 1588, and his father with the Drapers' Company in 1638. James and Elizabeth Gibbons were therefore part of a small group of English merchants with obvious roots in England and links with drapers and tailors. The young Grinling Gibbons therefore had his formative years in Rotterdam but very few records exist of his time there. What is clear is that his parents sought out a good sculptor's studio for him to enter, although their reason for this is not known.

For a short while, it appears that Gibbons worked in the workshop of Artus Quellin I (1609–68), a Flemish sculptor

OPPOSITE
The King David
relief at Fairfax
House.

As a carver you have doubtless been inspired, whether directly or indirectly, by the work of Grinling Gibbons. But how much do you really know about Britain's greatest master carver? This new book from Paul Rabbitts documents the life and work of the man known as 'the Michelangelo of wood'.

Beginning with an introduction that sets Gibbons in historical context, the book describes how he rose from being a journeyman carver to working on high-profile commissions for royal palaces, stately homes and cathedrals. The first chapter covers Gibbons' early life in Rotterdam, where he was born to English parents, before moving to England in the 1660s. Further chapters concern his work by royal appointment, for colleges in Oxford and Cambridge, and for the above-mentioned buildings.

The book is illustrated with engravings and beautiful photographs of Gibbons' greatest carvings, with some wonderful close-ups of details. These bring the works to life and illustrate Gibbons' ability to 'breathe life into still material'.

There's a list of places to visit to see Gibbons' work



Traveller Celia Fiennes visited both the libraries at Oxford and Cambridge and noted at Queen's 'good Carvings' but at Trinity, she noted, 'the Library farre exceeds that at Oxford ... the finest Carving in wood and flowers birds leaves figures of all sorts as I ever saw'. She does, however, go on to state that the fine reredos in the chapel at Trinity College, Oxford, which she visited in 1694, was 'very fine carving of thin white wood just like at Windsor, it being in the same hand'. The reredos frame, with its acanthus frieze, is typical of Gibbons but appears to have been carried out by Jonathan Maine, according to letters at Corpus Christi and the Bodleian Library. The accounts for the chapel in Oxford do not remain, designed in 1691 by Wren in conjunction with the Dean. It was consecrated in April 1694. While the work at Trinity College, Oxford, is worthy of Gibbons, we only have the word of Celia Fiennes. However, every scroll and cherub here speaks of Gibbons at his best and is reminiscent of his work at Hampton Court.

OPPOSITE
The intricate
carvings in the
chapel of Trinity
College, Oxford.

Trinity College
Chapel, Oxford.



in the flesh. While getting out might be difficult at the moment, you can put together a future carving tour, or visit the websites listed to view the works virtually.

This meticulously researched and fascinating book is a must-read for any carver.

Grinling Gibbons: Master Carver is published by Shire Publications and is available now for £8.99.

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Rudolph bottle opener

Mark Gough carves a fun project for your Christmas party



I wanted to do a fun project for the Christmas holidays and came up with this quirky bottle opener carving, finished with acrylic paint and sealed with lacquer. The actual bottle opener is fitted underneath the mouth – there are various types available online, so whichever you choose you will have to adapt the plans accordingly. I decided to mount it on a rustic frame with a cap catcher on the base made from recycled pallet wood. But again, adapt it to your preference and use whatever you have in stock.

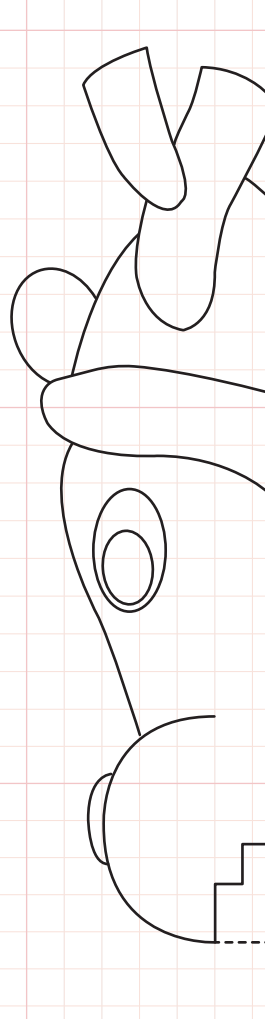
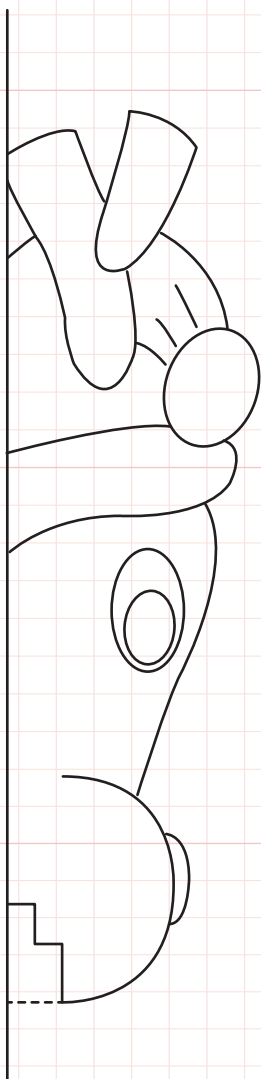
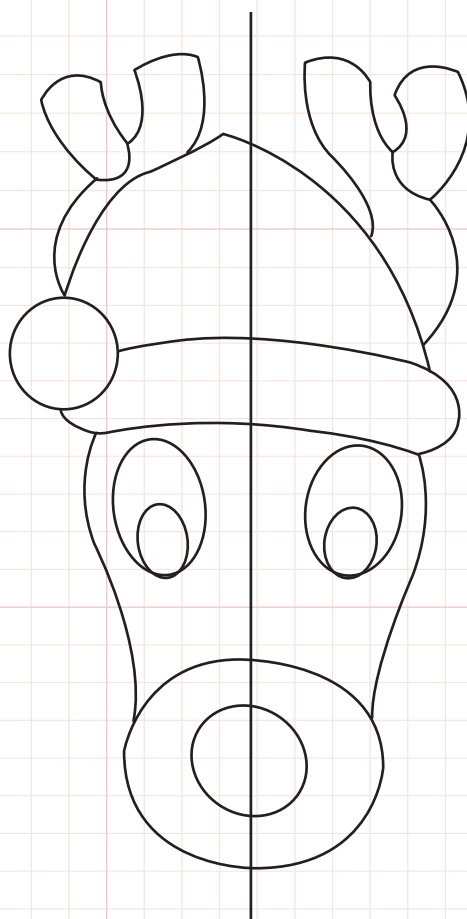
Things you will need

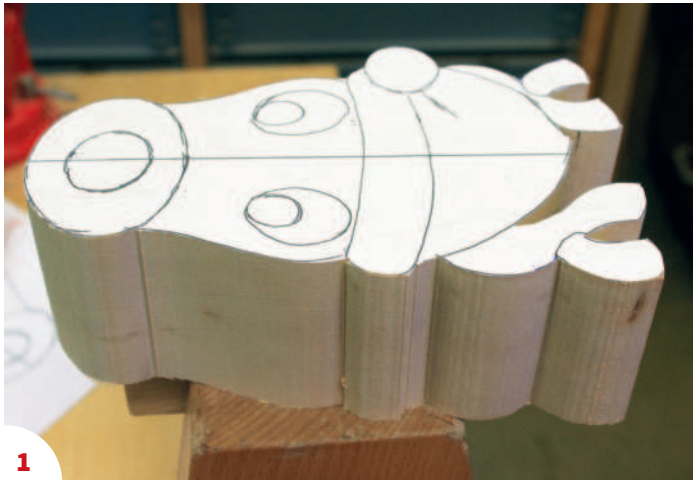
Materials:

- Lime (*Tilia x Europaea*) 9in x 6in x 2½in (229 x 152 x 64mm)
- Paper glue
- Sandpaper 80, 120 & 180 grit
- Acrylic gesso and paint
- Acrylic lacquer
- Bottle opener fixture and mounting screws

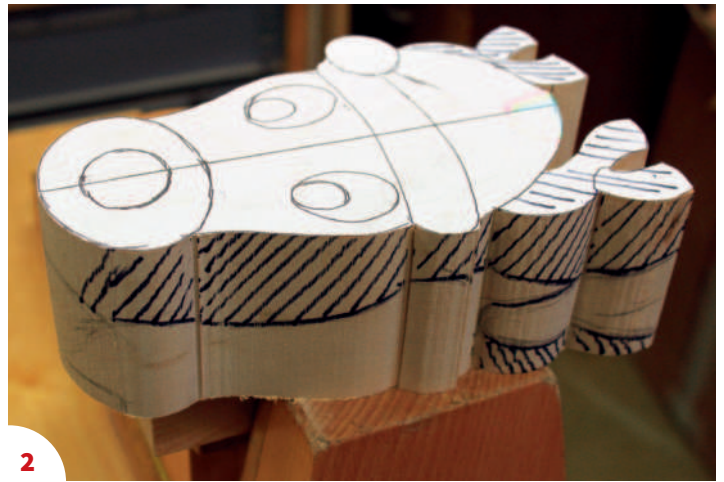
Tools:

- Marking-out materials
- Flexible hand saw
- 12mm 16mm fishtail gouges
- Coarse rasp
- Carving knife
- Veiner or V-gouge
- Bandsaw
- PPE, RPE equipment
- Carving glove





1



2

1 Start with a blank of lime in the above dimensions then draw out the plan image on a piece of paper, cut it out and glue it to the surface. Cut round the outline with the bandsaw, fix a clamping block to the back then mount the workpiece in your carving vice.

2 Refer again to the plans and mark out the waste area on each side and around the front of the antlers. The highest point of the carving will be the pompom and front of the hat on the left side where it folds over.

3 Use a small hand saw to cut away the bulk of the waste from the front of each antler. A flexible saw is probably the best option here as the lines are not straight. Make small cuts as close to the line as possible.

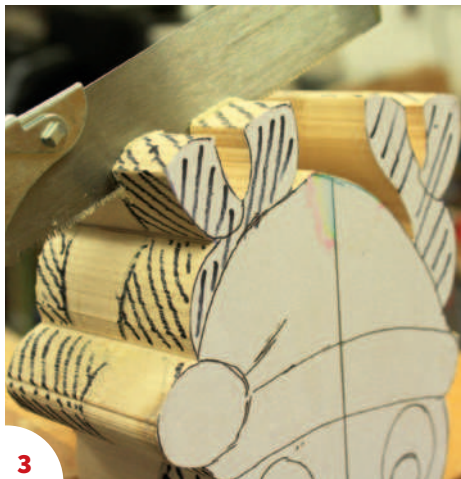
4 Select a suitable gouge and start to carve away the bulk of the waste, starting from the centre and working out towards the marked profile line. Do not round over at this point, just get the profile shape correct. Be aware that each side is different around the rim of the hat and pompom. Clean the surface up with a coarse rasp so you can pencil in the details.

5 Start to carve out the basic shape of the face and round over the sides and mouth areas – a shallow 12mm fishtail gouge works well.

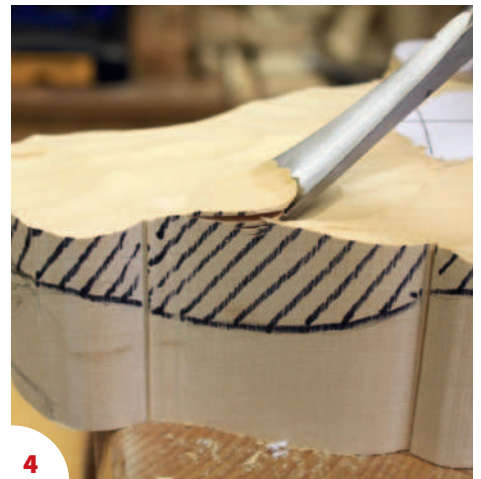
6 Use a coarse rasp again to level out the tool marks and complete the rounding over of the face and mouth. These parts are pretty symmetrical so compare each side as you work.

7 Turn your attention to the top section and carve out the shape of the hat and pompom, rounding over each side to contour into the sides of the head. Smooth out the tool marks as before and mark in the detail lines of the hat.

8 Using a sharp knife, cut round the outline of the hat rim and undercut the pompom.



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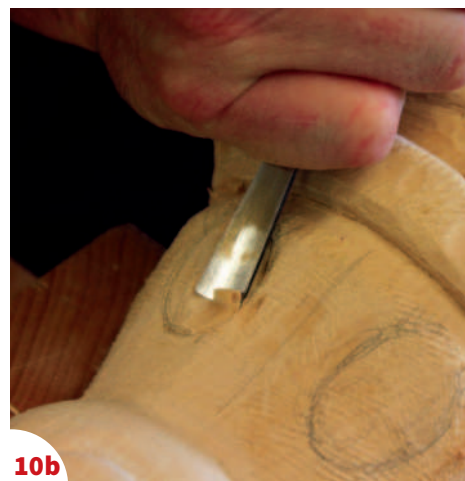
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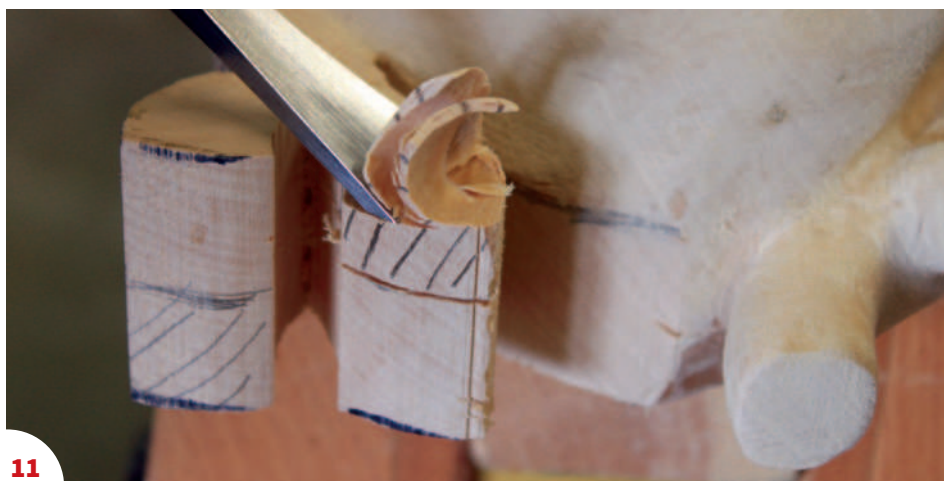
9



10a



10b



11

9 Cut in the top of the head up to the knife mark with a small shallow gouge to reveal the hat rim. Do the same to the lower part of the hat to reveal the top edge of the hat rim.

10 Mark in the facial detail. Start by revealing the nose and round over the edge all around, then score a line around the shape of the eyes and carve out a shallow oval with a slightly domed surface. Cut in the outline with a V-tool then smooth over the edges of each oval.

11 Carefully mark out each antler and cut away the waste, double-checking the symmetry before you make any cuts. Once you have the antlers shaped, smooth them over with strips of sandpaper.



12

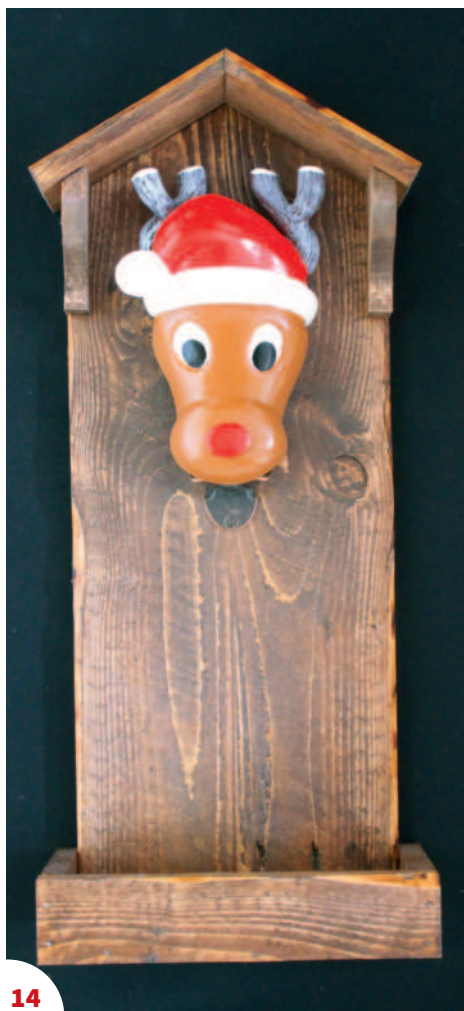
12 Depending on what type of bottle opener fitting you have, mark out and cut the recess from the back of the mouth area. Make sure there is enough room for it to be functional – you may have to open a bottle of beer here to check, but it's got to be done.

13 Finish off the recess to a neat fit and check that the carving sits flat to the surface on which it is to be attached.

14 Finish off the carving by sanding everything smooth then priming the surface with acrylic gesso. Once the paint has been applied, seal with acrylic lacquer, mount it on to the surface of your choice and enjoy. ▶



13



14

DID YOU KNOW?

Rudolph's red nose has been the subject of debate over the years. Some of the reasons suggested as to its cause include: the stress and exertion of pulling a heavy, gift-laden sled; a fly infestation of his nasal passages; an evolutionary advantage allowing him to lead the way through a foggy Christmas eve; or just being very cold. Whichever it is, he's always the favourite for sure.

Seahorse letter opener

Beachcomber Paul Purnell picks up the perfect wave-washed log to make this delightful seahorse letter opener

With its horse-like head, eyes of a chameleon, a kangaroo-like pouch (males) and the prehensile tail of a monkey, it is little wonder that the hippocampus, or seahorse, has been depicted in art, sculpture and literary works since the 6th century BC.

Hippocampus comes from the Ancient Greek word *hippos*, meaning 'horse', and *kampos* meaning 'sea monster'.

The seahorse is a fish, the only one with a neck, and the only species on earth in which the male gives birth to the fry.

There are more than 50 species, ranging in size from the pygmy at 2cm to the pot-bellied seahorse from Australia at 35cm.

One of the rarest seahorses is the Cape seahorse, also known as the Knysna seahorse, found off the coast of South Africa.

There are two species around the British coastline: the spiny seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) and the short-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*).

Things you will need

Tools:

- Bandsaw
- Rotary carving tool
- Coarse-toothed burr
- Ruby flame-shaped burr
- Diamond bud-shaped burr
- Diamond cylinder 3mm
- 2mm drill bit
- Cushioned-drum sander
- Split-mandrel sander
- Carving knife

Materials:

- Magnolia log (*Magnolia grandiflora*) with sufficient wood for a workable piece measuring 200mm x 50mm x 40mm
- 4mm red glass eyes
- Sandpaper, 120 to 400 grit
- Epoxy putty
- Finishing oil

**1****2**

1 This is a stylised carving of a generic seahorse. Nevertheless, gather plenty of reference material to help with the shape and position of the seahorse's features. Prepare front and side-view templates from the diagram. Prepare the log to obtain a working piece of wood 200mm long, 50mm deep and 40mm wide. Carefully flatten two opposite sides of the log on the bandsaw. These sides are for the side template, therefore must be at least 50mm across. For the first cut, place some wedges beneath the log to stop it rolling. Transfer the side template on to one side and use the bandsaw to cut the blank.

2 The side-view blank. The flaw in the middle will be exploited in the finished shape.

3 Draw on the profile of the front/back view using the template as a guide.

4 Use a coarse-toothed burr to carve this profile.

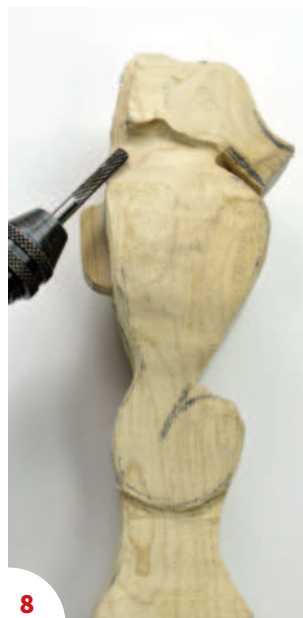
**3****4****5**

5 Use the same burr to refine the side view.

6 Locate the dorsal fin and carve with the coarse burr.

7 Reduce the width of the head and nose using the coarse burr.

8 Use a 3mm carbide burr to outline the cheeks and the pectoral fin on each side of the head. The gills of a seahorse sit behind the cheeks.

**6****7****8**

DID YOU KNOW

- Seahorses have neither teeth nor stomach and have to suck their prey, which they digest as it travels along a tube from one end to the other. Consequently, they need to eat a staggering 3000 pieces of food per day.
- The insatiable appetite for using seahorses in Chinese medicine as a cure for asthma, high cholesterol, arteriosclerosis and impotence is the biggest threat to the survival of the species.
- In addition to being able to change colour, the seahorse can grow fleshy filaments, called cirri, adding to their ability to blend in with their habitat.

9 Use a carbide cone to separate the underside of the snout from the chest, round over the head and refine the pectoral fins.

10 Using the coarse burr, start to round over the body.

11 With a ball-shaped carbide burr, outline the three spines on the top of the head: the nose spine sits in front of the eye; the eye spine sits behind the eye and the coronet is at the rear. The first trunk ridge sits just below the pectoral fins. With the same cutter, define the indentation between this ridge and the next.

12 Continue to carve the indentations between the ridges of the trunk and back of tail.

13 Use a ruby flame to carve the coiled part of the tail.

14 With a carving knife, cut behind the pectoral fins and shape the dorsal fin.

15 Use 120 grit paper on a split-mandrel sander to smooth the indentations.

16 Use your reference material to help you carve the head features. Start with the V-shaped notch where the snout joins the head. Use a ruby flame.



9



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AMAZING FACT

Seahorses are among the most successful hunters in the sea and can reach a 90% success rate (three times that of many other fish). Their method is called pivot-feeding. This involves them creeping up on their unsuspecting prey, snapping their heads around and slurping the treat into their mouths.



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17 Shape the tip of the snout – note the concave profile.

18 Use a pair of pins to locate the eye positions. Check from the front and above. Drill a 2mm pilot hole at their centres.

19 Shape the blade with the coarse burr. It is approximately 15mm wide at the top.

20 Sand the blade with a cushioned-drum sander with 120 and 240 grit paper. Finish sanding by hand with a block for a crisper finish.

21 Return to the eye. Use a diamond bud to enlarge the eye socket to accommodate the 4mm eyes. Ensure a snug fit. They will be fitted with epoxy putty and if the socket is too large the putty will show through.

TIP

When drilling the eye sockets for a carving that will be left unpainted, drill a hole through to connect both eyes. A tight fit of the eye is desirable and as you have little leeway an eye can become stuck when test fitting. This method will enable you to push it out from the other side if that happens.


19

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22 Use a 2mm diamond cylinder to add the waves to the three fins.

23 Give the whole piece its final sand by hand with 320 and 400 grit paper. Wipe clean and apply four coats of your choice of finishing oil.

24 Fit the glass eyes with epoxy putty and this is your finished letter opener.

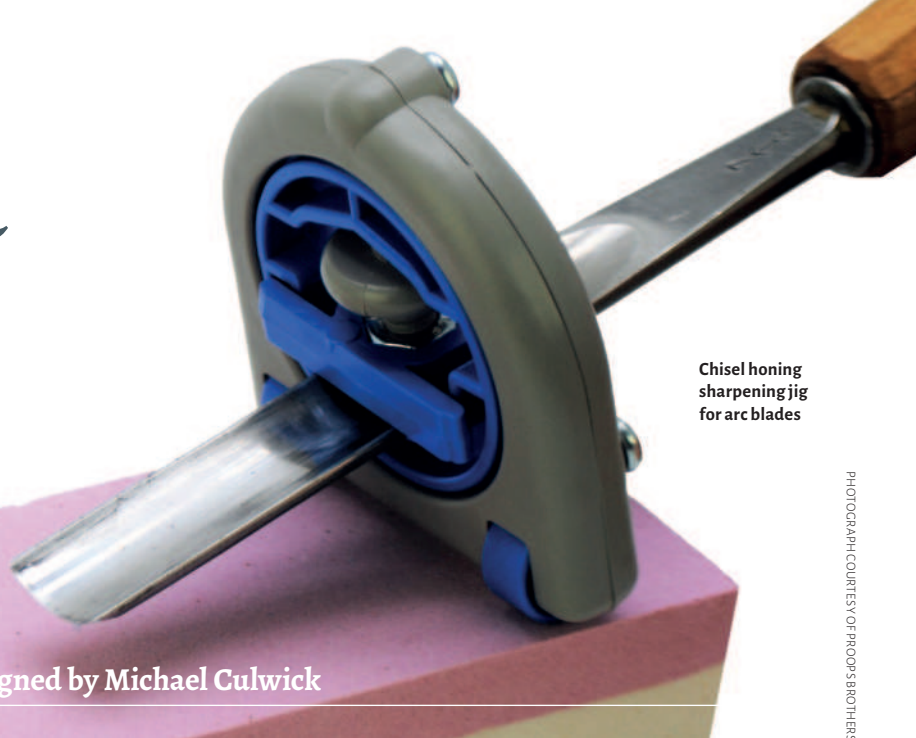
25 The back view showing the fin and ribbing. ▶


23

24

25

A sharp idea comes to fruition



Chisel honing sharpening jig for arc blades

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PROOPS BROTHERS

We learn about the chisel sharpening jig designed by Michael Culwick

When 85-year-old woodcarver Michael Culwick, from Queensland, Australia, got fed up with the difficulties of sharpening gouges on an oilstone, he decided to step up to the plate and attempt to design his own solution.

After months of trial and error he had created a sharpening jig he believed was special enough to benefit other carvers, so he set about looking for a company that would join in his vision. Proops Brothers, based in Leicester in the UK, saw the potential in his plans, manufactured the jig and has now added it to its portfolio.

The company describes Michael's design as a 'brilliant, compact jig to help sharpen curved shaped gouges'. It continues: 'The keen woodcarver from Down Under designed, developed and prototyped a jig that clamps a gouge in a rotating centre bearing so that it can be presented to the oilstone, allowing the curved edge of the gouge to be sharpened with accuracy and consistency. The small wheels also allow the jig to run easily along an oilstone.'

Proops Brothers sister company Linic Plastics

used its facilities to machine the moulds and manufacture the parts to produce this jig, which comes with a base plate to make setting the correct angle easy.

Richard Smout, designer at Linic Plastics, says: 'We are often approached by inventors who think they have come up with a world-first, but Michael's design caught our attention. It was well thought through, he had tried and tested it and it fitted well in our product range.'

Proops adds that the new design is compact, effective and affordable, with the jig and base plate retailing for £9.95.

Michael was the obvious choice to review the jig, so here are his thoughts on the machine.

'I have been woodcarving since my retirement and have noticed how difficult it is to sharpen gouges on an oilstone. To present gouges at the same angle every time is not easy, so I have witnessed frustration by carvers I see and meet.'

'I decided to try to make something that was simple to manufacture but sharpened gouges with very little effort. After many months of trial and error I came up with the following.'

'I purchased some steel ball races and made an insert – it worked perfectly. I thought this sharpener was too good to just sit on my workbench, so I decided to contact some potential manufacturers in this field.'

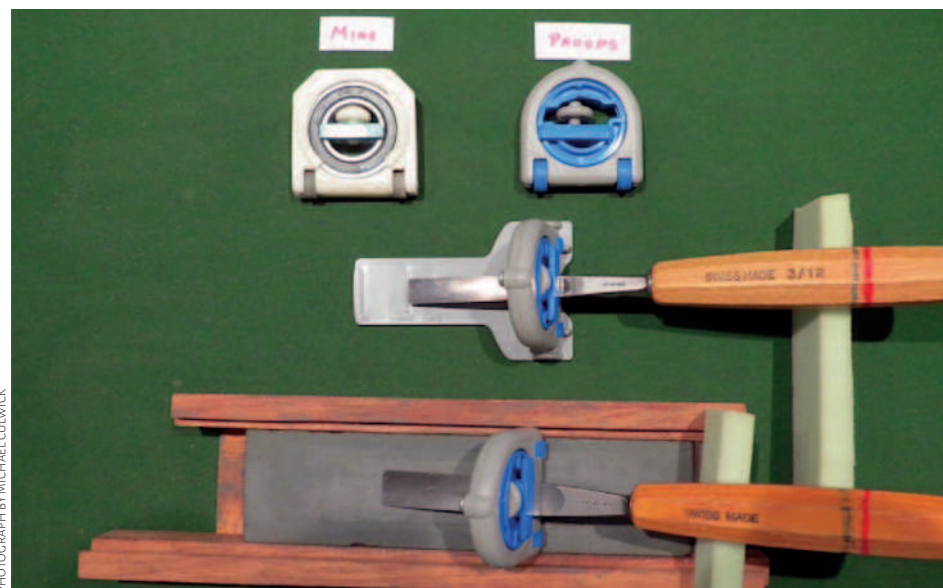
'Proops Brothers was interested and, after many emails, drawings and photos and sending my ball race prototype, it produced this little beauty.'

'The only alteration is the replacement of my steel ball race with a special plastic insert to keep the price and weight down. I had also designed a stand for it. When the sharpener is mounted on the stand and the gouge is inserted into the sharpener and pushed to a line on the stand this means the angle is set at 20°. Take the sharpener off the stand with gouge still inserted and place on an oilstone and you are ready to go. It allows for back and forth movement and rotating at the same time. Other degrees are also obtainable. It all sounds very complicated but it is dead simple really.'

'I am very pleased with the way Proops has handled the manufacture of this item and I have the utmost respect for the company.'

'Proops is totally responsible for this item, sales, manufacture and delivery etc. My job is finished and hopefully I can sit on my twig for a bit longer, soaking up the sun.'

More information: www.proopsbrothers.com



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL CULWICK

Prototype and finished product



Grey and blue sharpening jig

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PROOPS BROTHERS

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The chain gang

Chainsaw carver Bob King, based in Washington, US, shares his thoughts and inspirations in our Q&A

How did you learn to carve?

I was fascinated by the chainsaw carvers at our local fair. I watched them and had this curiosity to see if I could do it. That night while at work at the Boeing plant, I got talking about it with a group of guys. I mentioned I would like to try it. One of the men just happened to be clearing a piece of property and offered me some wood. That weekend I went out and picked up the wood. To be honest, I was really afraid to cut into the log, out of fear and self-doubt. After he had asked me several times if I had carved anything, I expressed my fear of failure. The guy said: 'If you mess it up I have more wood.' This gave me the confidence to finally get going. To cut a long story short, I taught myself through trial and error, or what I often call the school of hard knocks.

What was the first project you completed?

When I was at the fair I had taken a picture of a bear they were carving and my goal was to make one like it. It was a sitting bear holding a honey pot. After three days of carving, I took it to Boeing to show the guys I had finally carved something, and to be honest I was pretty proud how well it had turned out. A group of the workers came over and one said: 'Can you make me one?' I remember thinking: 'Carving this bear was the most fun I have had in a long time, and people want to give me money to do it?!' I immediately got started on my next carving.

How did your hobby turn into a business?

It started at Boeing, where one of my fellow workers offered to buy a bear. I started carving one or two pieces a month. I was working full time and had three young kids, so it was difficult to fit it in as much as I would have liked. A couple years into carving, Boeing had a big layoff and I was let go. I went back to school and became a Microsoft-certified systems engineer. I went on one interview, and on the way home I started thinking about how awful it would be being stuck inside all day doing that job. By the time I arrived home I was convinced I wanted to at least try to make a living from carving. When I told my wife this, she was not exactly on board with the idea. I was pretty determined that I could make it work though. My wife got on board and we became a team.

What inspires you?

When a client or show isn't requesting something in particular, I always go to scenes from real life. I love to tell a story when I carve. For example, my daughter Tiffany always wanted chicken when she was growing up. So, I carved her on a swing holding a baby chick, with a hen sitting nearby and a puppy looking at the chick. I called it Tiffany's Dream. Another was a carving called All Dogs go to Heaven, depicting my son, Kevin, kneeling at a fresh grave praying, and up above on a cloud is a dog playing with an angel. The real story was a bit different – it was a pet rat that had died, but I didn't think too many people could relate to a rat, so I made it a rat terrier dog.

Sometimes it is just a matter of what is going on in my life at the time. One of my favourite carvings was after I went to Italy and spent a week looking at all the religious sculptures there. My wife and I were talking on the plane home about



ABOVE & LEFT:
Pine angel,
Boulder, Colorado

OPPOSITE:
Black labrador
commissioned in
Bob's home state
of Washington in
western red cedar



Eight-foot tall grizzly in western red cedar, Edgewood, Washington



Raptor sculpted from deodora cedar at a symposium in Rancagua, Chile

how you could depict a religious scene with a more modern vibe, so that is what I carved: a beautiful angel reaching out to the heavens on one side and the grim reaper on the other with all the souls of the unsaved. On the side was an hourglass representing time running out to make a decision on which way you were going to spend eternity.

What features of an animal, bird or figure are you most likely to concentrate on to bring the sculpture to life?

People are drawn to the five senses, so eyes, nose, hands, mouth and ears – all of these features get extra attention.

How do you go about infusing that life into your work?

Hmm, I suppose I just try to concentrate on detail in those areas. I try to emulate what that 'life' would look like and put a little love into it...

What is your favourite project you have worked on?

I love to work with unique shapes of wood. They make it easy to see what is in the log. One of my favourite sculptures to carve was a Viking warrior in Denmark. I was one of the last to get to choose a log to carve. My British friend Simon O'Rourke and I saw a pile of extra wood off to the side. I asked Niels Pedersen, the show organiser, if we could choose wood from there, and he replied it was the wood that wasn't good enough, but we were welcome to take a look.

I found this odd-shaped log, and was stoked. I could just see this coming in it, and could hardly wait to get it cut out so everyone else could see it as well. As soon as the horn was blown to start, it started pouring down rain. I never even felt it, I was busy releasing the Viking. It was probably the most fired up about a carving I have ever been. I took first place, people's choice and carvers' choice and Simon took second with our wood from the scrap pile. The carving was

a Viking in a victory stance, mouth open, one arm up with sword in hand, the other hand was holding a severed head.

You enter a lot of competitions. Tell us about them.

Competitions push me to do things outside my comfort zone. There is an adrenaline rush you get when you are being timed. You are constantly thinking about your next two to three cuts and your mind is very focused. I think the reason I have been successful in competitions is that I am not afraid of failure. I found more excitement in pushing myself to do things I didn't know I could do than in staying safe and carving what I know. At my age now, I really enjoy symposiums most. Everyone there is working together to create art, not working against each other to win.

What was the first competition you entered?

A long-time carver, Steve Backus, invited me to carve at a hand-carvers' show. I carved a crocodile, but to be honest I don't remember if I placed or not. What stands out was selling it and the fun it was carving with others. I had only carved a few things when I went to this event, and winning was not even something I was thinking about – I was more interested in learning.

In 2010 I got a star – in the shape of a chainsaw sprocket – in the Carvers' Walk of Fame in Mulda, Germany, home of the chainsaw carving World Cup, for winning more competitions than anyone else in the world. I have been lucky enough to be invited to compete and participate in symposiums all over the United States and in many other countries, such as Germany, Holland, Denmark, Switzerland, Canada, Chile, Australia, England, Wales and Scotland.

How do you prepare for a competition?

I have been lucky enough to have a saw sponsor for many years. So, first thing I do is contact my sponsor to arrange



Grim reaper in western red cedar, Ocean Shores, Washington



Swainson's hawk, part of a multi-sculpture eucalyptus stump in Coachella, California

getting equipment to where I am carving. I like to know the approximate size of the logs we will be using so I can plan my design, as well as the judging criteria and rules.

My wife makes all the travel arrangements. One of the biggest challenges is fitting all the special equipment into my luggage, but luckily my wife has learned to pack light so I can use her check bag as well. The difficult thing about travelling is you don't have to experience carving the different types of wood. Sometimes it can be very hard, have rot or pitch pockets, or knots, such as a big knot where you were planning a face. So, you have to be prepared to have different options in case the first option won't work.

What type of chainsaws and bars do you like to use?

I am currently sponsored by Makita USA. It bought out Dolmar, one of the best and oldest saw companies in the world. It also sponsors all my power tools. One of the things that sold me on the company is its battery equipment: when trying to carve fast, one of the biggest hazards is all the cords strung around underfoot. The battery equipment has been a game-changer in the competitions.

I am also sponsored by Cannon Bar Works, one of the most reliable bars made in the world. You can get them from an 8in length, and the shorter they are, the more control you have. The tips of the bars come in dime, quarter and toonie size – a toonie is a Canadian coin about the size of a 50 cent piece.

When choosing a bar for carving it is for several reasons. First, the smaller the tip the finer details that can be done, and the less kickback you get from the saw. Second, the narrower the bar the tighter the spots you can get into. So, eight inches is for doing flat or surface work, but if you carve larger pieces, you need the longer reach to get into the tight places.

You also have the option to run either .043 or .050 gauge bars. This refers to the slot that the chain runs in. This

allows for a thinner chain for even more light detail options.

What other tools do you use?

There are carvers out there who use nothing but a saw, but I like to use whatever it takes to get the look I want, and don't like to be limited on the tools I will use. That being said, my advice to new carvers is to use the chainsaw for everything you possibly can. The more you can do with the saw, the faster you will be.

There are a couple of tools that are worth mentioning, the ones carvers dream of having. First are the Eder power gouge and the Harrycane. These are tools that are attached to your chainsaw. You change out the standard sprocket that comes with the saw for a rim-style sprocket. A pulley drive slips over the new sprocket splines and it runs a belt that makes the gouge cutters go around. These tools are unbelievable wood movers, they give great texture and chips come off clean, requiring very little, if any, sanding.

Another version of this sort of gouging system is made by Manpa, another of my sponsors. The Manpa Multitool fits on an angle grinder and works like the power gouges but on a smaller scale. Manpa also makes a great finger sander attachment for an angle grinder, allowing you to sand in hard-to-reach places. We have an online store where we carry most of our favourite products – sawnuts.com.

What sort of sanding tools and finishes do you prefer?

My favourite sanding tools would be your basic 4½in variable speed angle grinder with a flexible rubber backing or a soft cushioned flexible backing for contours, and the Manpa belt sander for tight spots. For a quick clean-up of fur on animals the go-to is a 6in diameter radial bristle brush on a drill, and for buffing highlights a 3in, 60 grit buffing wheel.

The best bits you can buy are made by Saburrtooth.



It just started making some super aggressive blue and purple ones – they make shaping and contours so much easier. Check them out on our site. They work best on a variable speed die grinder, or you can get smaller $\frac{1}{8}$ in arbor ones for your Dremel.

Tell us about your workshop.

Quite a few years ago we bought a beautiful commercial property just off the freeway in Sumner, Washington. We had plans to open a store there, but have never done it. We fear it would take up too much time when we would rather be travelling. So we fenced off the back half and that is where I mainly carve and we just rent out the building. We always laugh and say when we grow up we will have a store, but honestly, I love the way things are now and I am so backed up on commissions that I don't think we will ever open it up.

Which woods do you most like working with?

I am very lucky to have access to one of the best woods in the world, western red cedar. It has natural oils in it that bugs don't like, it is soft so the saw moves through it beautifully and it is a nice colour naturally. I also enjoy redwood, catalpa and European oak.

When you're planning a chainsaw sculpture for a client, how do you prepare?

The first questions are what do they want and where is it going to be located, so I know which way to have it looking, and what is the budget, which dictates how much detail will be going into it. A growling, mouth-open bear is going to cost more than a closed-mouth one because of the detailed dental work required. The next consideration is perspective – how and where will it be viewed? All this helps with the final composition.

Do you draw on wood before making initial cuts?

I cannot draw, so I do this very little, but if it is a human sculpture I will draw simple measurements of head heights to make sure I have body proportions right. Normally these will just be simple lines, nothing that anyone looking would know what they meant.

What can you tell us about the blocking out stage?

If you can block out fast and accurately, you can carve much faster. Some carvers are afraid of making big dedicated cuts, but if you do it will make you much faster. For me it is easy to visualise what is not part of the carving and simply remove the wood that's blocking your view of what matters. Others will slowly chip it away.

What is the most challenging project you have worked on?

Funny this question came up now. I am currently in Coachella, California, working on the biggest, most difficult carving ever, in temperatures up to 116°F. Right now we have resorted to carving at night with a floodlight. The client wants 24 animals carved into the hardest, most challenging 40ft tall eucalyptus tree. The tree is much loved by the community and the pressure is on to make it a masterpiece. To make matters worse, I am working from a boom and trying to keep the heavy offcuts out of the street and the building it sits next to. I could use a prayer.

What role does social media play in your work?

My wife, Cindy, handles most of that. It is very important for attracting big commissions. It gets your work out there and lets potential clients see what you are capable of.

Have the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown affected your work?

Oddly enough, it has not affected the number of

commissions we get at all. I did take three months off to quarantine because I have a daughter with lung issues and was afraid I might bring something home to her. I was able to go to a symposium in Chile in February and went into quarantine soon after getting home. We are looking forward to seeing our carving family next year. We really miss our time with them.

What do you do when you're not working or woodcarving?

When I took the three months off because of quarantine, I loved delving into my other passions and creating a few more. I have two grandsons, Grayson and Griffin, who I treasure spending time with and creating memories. I love vintage cars – my most recent is a 1937 Pontiac that I am restoring. I built a couple of beehives and recently harvested my first honey, and I enjoy brewing my own beer, a hobby that is now taking up a stall in my garage. Sadly, with everyone quarantined, I don't have enough people to consume it currently. A couple of years ago I bought a welder and have been having fun doing mixed media with the wood and the metal. I also enjoy travelling with my wife, meeting people and just relaxing.

chainsawking.com | chainsaw-art.com



Part of a three-headed dragon for the World Cup competition in Mulda, Germany, made from German oak



Great horned owl in eucalyptus stump, Coachella, California



Doe in western red cedar, commission in Seattle, Washington

Sleeping dormouse

Zoë Gertner carves this charming rodent snoozing in a nest of oak leaves



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZOË GERTNER

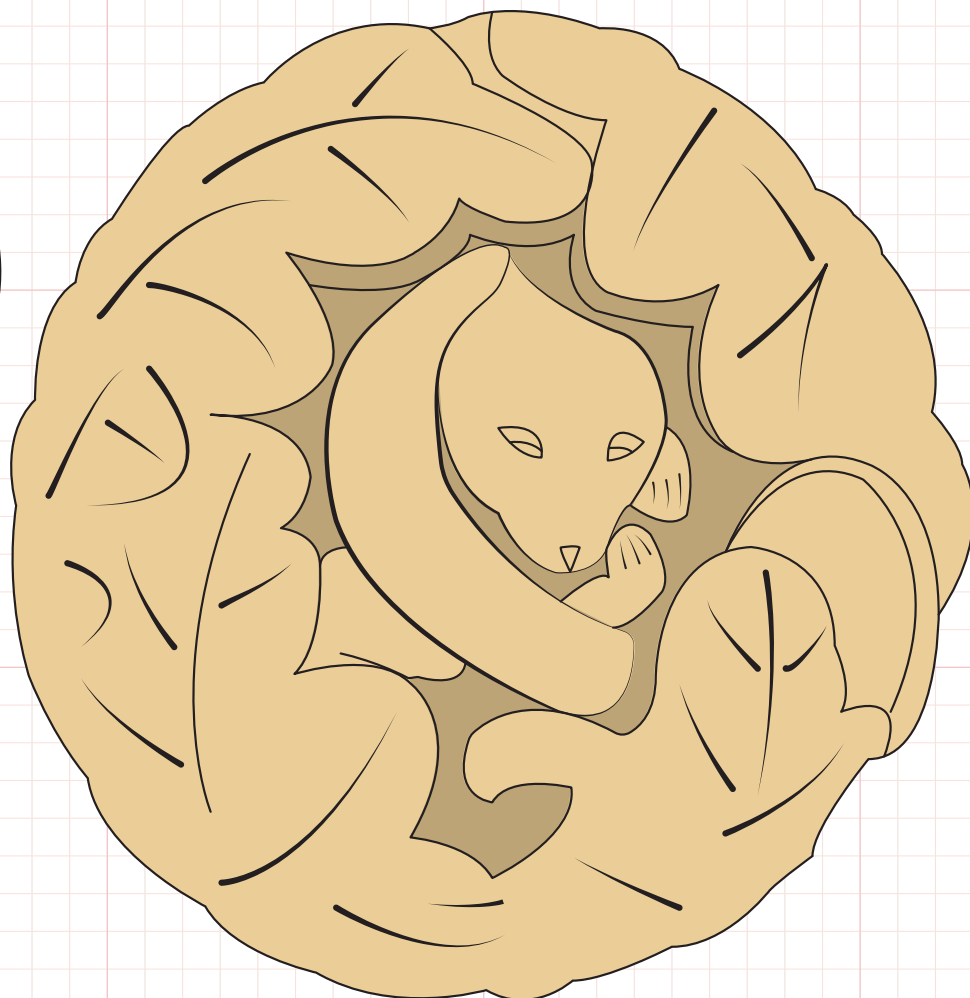
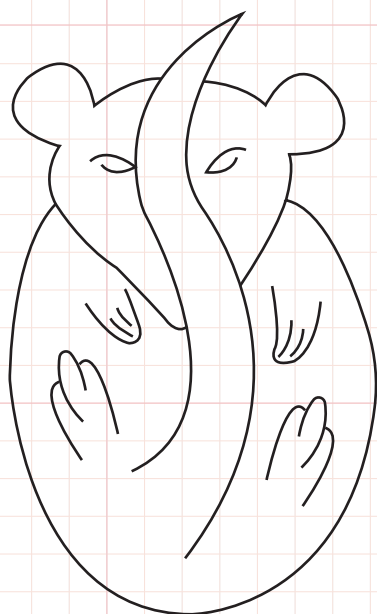
In the past the shy little dormouse was familiar to country folk, and in Victorian times was sometimes kept as a pet – children’s author Beatrix Potter had one. Sadly, dormice are much less common these days but are being reintroduced with some success in certain mixed deciduous woods where there are oak, beech, hazel and hawthorn trees. Distinguished by a long fluffy tail, which it curls over its body, a dormouse will hibernate from October until

late spring, sleeping peacefully in a winter nest made from the leaf litter lying around or beneath the trees. A dormouse spends about three quarters of its life asleep and, being both nocturnal and arboreal, is rarely seen by a passerby. Although I arranged oak leaves around my nest, if you prefer to have other types of leaves for your sleeping dormouse’s nest you can carve them in the same way as shown.



Things you will need

- No.9, ½in or ⅝in gouge
- No.5, ½in gouge
- No.39, ¼in V-tool
- No.39, ⅝in V-tool
- ⅛in veiner
- Selection of widths of No.3 gouges, ranging from ⅛in to ⅝in
- Surform/microplane/spokeshave
- Nail punch and light hammer
- Leaves picked to use as templates
- Finish of your choice/wax polish applied with redundant toothbrush, soft brush/lint-free duster



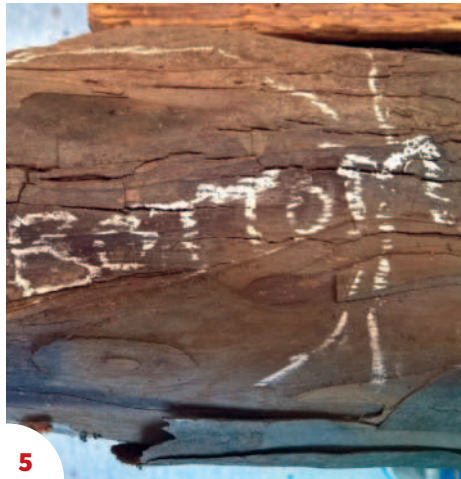
PREPARATION

For the project I used a small, round yew wood turning blank, approximately 3in diameter x 2in height. Any wood with a tight grain, such as cherry, box, sycamore or lime, would also be suitable and a lighter colour will show the detail more clearly than a darker one. If you cannot obtain a suitable small turning blank, you could use a small-diameter log of your chosen wood and prepare it as shown below.

1 Preparation from a log

Using a length of a suitable species of log, about 3in diameter, draw the rounded outline of the nest with chalk at (not on) the end of the log. Holding it by its length firmly in the vice, saw off the two angled corners from across its outer end with a handsaw. Leave the remaining length of the log so you can hold it securely in the vice as you work.



**2****3****4****5****6****7****8****9**

2 Draw a centreline and, with a No.9, 1/2in gouge and mallet, round over the outer end of the log. Remember to lift your gouge hand to make rounded cuts, work towards the centreline and start removing the flat, sawn-off surfaces.

3 Continue by making curving cuts around the sides and top, gradually lengthening and overlapping the rows of cuts so that they blend into the surface of the log from all round, including underneath. Continue thus until no flat surfaces produced by the saw cuts remain.

4 With a No.5, 1/2in gouge, then a surform, microplane or spokeshave, work over the shape until it is smooth enough to draw on, and flatten an area for the underneath of the carving.

5 Use chalk to mark the outline of the nest on the underneath of the piece, then draw a line around the circumference of the log, which will be a guide for the saw cut that will eventually detach your carving piece from the log.

6 Holding the excess length of the log securely in the vice, make a series of saw cuts approximately one third its thickness around the chalk line marking the circumference of the log. Make sure you do not cut too deeply and inadvertently detach your carving piece too soon.

7 With the mallet and No.9, 1/2in gouge round over the sawn edge of the carving piece downwards and into the saw cut you made around the circumference of the log.

8 When the horns or corners of the gouge become impeded in the gap, change to a flatter gouge, such as a No.5 or No.3, 1/2in, and carry out further cuts by tilting it downwards into the saw cut, and continue refining the rounded shape until the flatter gouge becomes impeded.

9 Finally, cut off your carving piece with the handsaw and, holding it wrapped in a piece of non-slip mat in the vice, make shallow cuts over the end surface with a No.3, 1/2in gouge, following with the surform, microplane or spokeshave until it is smooth and rounded and can be drawn upon, and it feels comfortable when held in your hands. If need be, flatten the bottom again so it can stand steadily and you are then ready to start the carving.

Preparation using a turning blank

1 I used a turning blank of yew wood about 3in diameter and 2in high and wrapped it in a piece of non-slip matting, holding it securely in a woodwork vice while carving.

2 With its grain aligned horizontally, draw a vertical halfway line across the blank as a guide for the correct direction in which to cut. From each side of that vertical line cut outwards and across the edge of the blank at a sharp angle using the No.9, ½in gouge. Take care not to cut too deeply and embed the corners (horns) of the gouge or you may split the wood, or worse, damage the tool's cutting edge.

3 Now lengthen your cuts, lifting your gouge hand over the edge to round it over as you work across it. The 'lifting your gouge hand to round over' technique is a matter of timing and practice – lift too soon and the gouge will dig in; lift too late and it will shoot off away from the edge; insufficient lift gives too flat a cut, like sharpening a pencil end; and just right will cut nice, rounded curves across and over the edges.

4 Extend these cuts around the sides, lengthening them until reaching halfway (where you drew that vertical line), then turn the blank and repeat the process on the opposite edge.

5 Draw a centreline along the blank and, using the No.5, ½in gouge, continue with shallow, curving cuts towards it from each side. Gradually work your cuts downwards and outwards from the highest area at the middle of the blank, being careful not to cut in too deeply as you work. Repeat these cuts on the other side to leave a small area of the original surface at the middle, the highest point.

6 Next remove any deep gouge cuts, working over the whole surface with shallow cuts using a wide No.3 gouge, then if need be, round under the edge of its base.

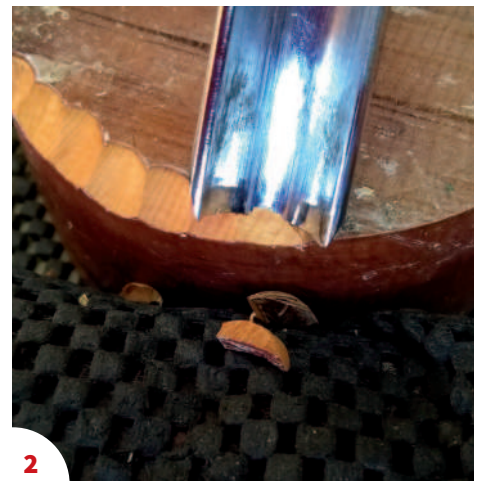
7 Using the surform, microplane or spokeshave smooth the blank, always working outwards from the highest area towards the centreline, until it is nicely rounded and none of the original surface remains. As long as your wood is smooth it will not matter if its shape is a little irregular. You are now ready to begin the carving.

Starting the carving

8 Using pencil, draw the outline of the dormouse and its bushy tail curled over the sleeping creature on the smooth, rounded upper surface of your wood. If you are confident about drawing you could make your own by referring to photographs and illustrations, alternatively, trace my drawing and copy it to your wood in the usual way using transfer paper.



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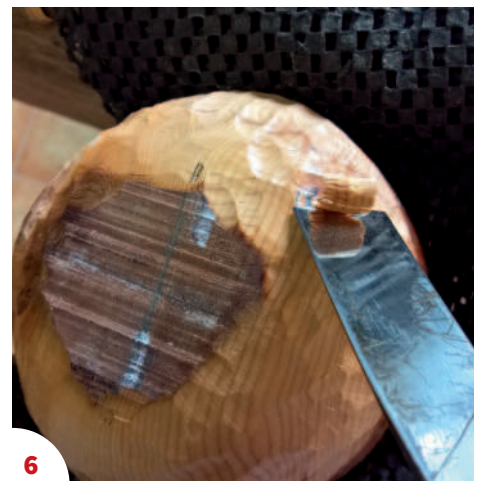
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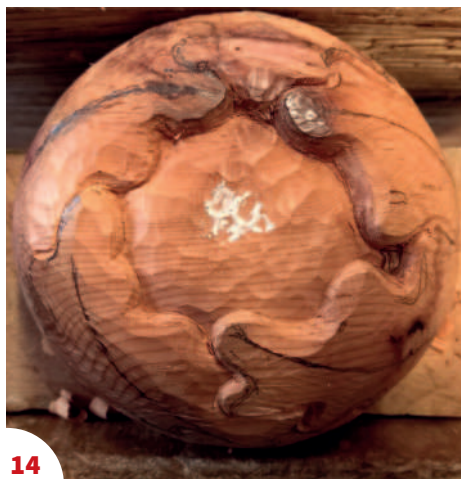
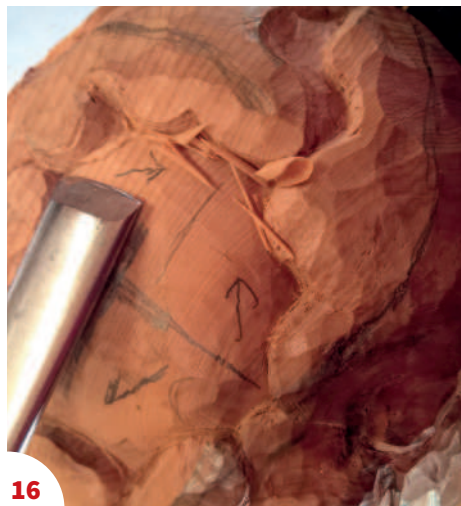
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**9****10****11****12****13****14****15****16**

9 I laid some oak leaves so they overlapped each other around the outline of the dormouse and secured them with small pieces of masking tape before drawing round their outlines. For added interest you could use various other leaves available.

10 Use the $\frac{1}{4}$ in or $\frac{3}{8}$ in V-tool to cut round the outlines of the overlapping leaves lying around the dormouse. Take care to cut in the correct directions. At this stage it is better not to mark out the rest of the leaves covering the nest in case later on you may want to add 'extras', such as acorns, nuts, blackberries or different species of leaves.

11 The V-channel outlining the leaves is deepened and widened using the method of 'opposing cuts'. For the first set of cuts, use the appropriate width No.3 gouge, set it into the V-cut so it rests against the angled edge of the leaf and cut downwards towards the dormouse. Turn the gouge so it sits correctly in the V-channel and matches the convex or concave curves of the leaf lobes.

12 The opposing cuts are made using the gouge with its bevel down. Start the cuts on the surface of the dormouse about 6mm from the V-channel outlining the leaf edges. Cut downwards around the leaf edges and remove the outer (dormouse) sides of the V-channels. Where the curve of a leaf lobe lies along the grain, alternate these cuts from the surface of the dormouse towards each side of the lobe and finish at its top, i.e. along the grain. As you cut towards the outlines of the lobes, swing the cutting edge of the gouge slightly sideways so the full width is used. Where a leaf edge overlaps that of its neighbour, reduce the adjacent area of the underlying leaf so that it lies on top.

13 Repeat these steps, deepening the spaces between the lobes, then begin rounding the surface of the dormouse down into these spaces. Reduce the leaf edges over the dormouse so they mirror the rounded ball shape beneath them.

14 Mark the highest area of the convexity then, with the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in or $\frac{3}{8}$ in gouge, deepen the indented areas between the lobes of the leaves resting on the rounded surface.

The leaves and nest

15 Relief carve the rest of the leaves around the nest until its surface is covered. Any gaps can be filled with different types of leaves, nuts and berries. I included some acorns, marking them out with the V-tool, deepening the V-channels with No.3 gouges as described. Using the inverted No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, I shaped and rounded them, both lengthwise and across. Using a slicing action with the No.3, $\frac{3}{8}$ in gouge inverted, I pared the acorns smooth and reduced the tips of the nuts so they were beneath the edge of the adjacent leaf. The line of the cup was drawn across ready to carve the nut sitting within it.

16 Use a slicing action with the No.3, 1in gouge inverted to pare the surface of the dormouse smooth, slicing down from the



17 Using the corners of the gouge, continue paring down into the spaces between the lobes of the leaves from all round, taking care not to score the surface with the corners of the cutting edge as you cut. If necessary, reduce the height of the dormouse until it is lower than the curled-over leaves around it, and re-draw it on the fresh surface, ready to carve its detail.

18 Tidy the edges of each leaf so they are cleanly cut, paring their upper surfaces smooth with an inverted No.3 gouge of the appropriate width and reducing the thickness of them if need be. On each leaf cut a central groove, the main vein, along its length, and shape either side of this rounded or hollowed, as you wish. Cut shallow hollows within the lobes until the whole surface of each leaf has, overall, a gently undulating surface.

19 Next, the leaf surfaces are scraped smooth ready for the veins to be marked. A redundant No.3 gouge, honed on a sharpening stone and with the resultant burr along its edge not removed, makes an excellent small scraper. Be sure to work in the correct direction – with the grain – and you should produce a good shiny and smooth surface.

Finishing the acorns

20 Mark the line of the edge of the cup across the acorn, ready to set the nut within. Where the grain of the wood lies across the shape a $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool can be used; but where the grain lies lengthwise, roll the cutting edge of an appropriate width No.3 gouge across its width along the edge of the cup from one side to the other. Cut in towards the edge of the cup and reduce the adjacent surface of the acorn to fit it into the cup. Smooth off both cup and nut and adjust the shape of the acorn as necessary.

21 The acorn cup was textured using a nail punch with a light hammer to show a contrast between it and the acorn nut. Alternatively you could cut criss-crossing lines over the rounded cup by rolling the cutting edge of a gouge diagonally over it from one side to the other.

Finishing the dormouse

22 If you have not already done so, smooth the rounded surface within the nest and draw the sleeping dormouse, its bushy tail, face and feet.

23 Using the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, cut the outline of the tail lying over the rounded surface. With a No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, relieve it by making sets of opposing cuts as described above, turning the gouge as required to match its shape, then reduce the adjacent surfaces of the mouse along both edges. If need be re-draw and adjust the rounded shape of the dormouse, deepening it again below the edges of the leaves lying around the nest. When the tail is sufficiently deep along its length, round over its edges both sides. Reduce the base of the tail so that it appears to emerge from beneath the mouse, and if necessary reduce the thickness of the lobes of the leaves curling over around the edge of the nest.



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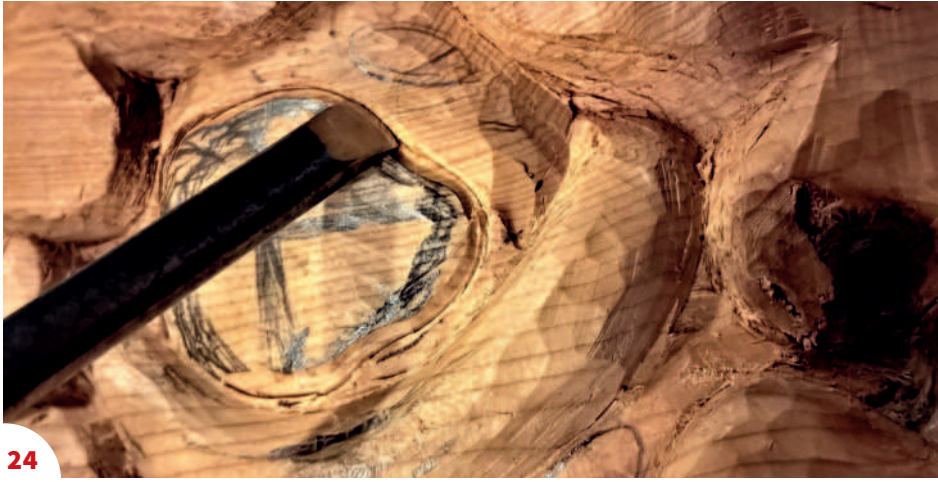
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**24**

24 The rounded surface ready for the head and feet should now lie lower than the tail, with the head and feet drawn upon the surface. Cut around the outline of the head, ears and nose with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, then use No.3, $\frac{1}{8}$ in and $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouges with opposing cuts as described previously. When making the first set of cuts outwards around the head remember to invert the No.3 gouge to correspond with the curves.

**25****26**

25 Round over the surface of the head into a triangular shaped form so that the nose lies downwards towards the base of the tail, and reduce the adjacent surface of the rounded body again. Make a shallow indent for each eye and draw the closed lids within the indents. Mark them in using the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, then taper the nose more sharply and draw the inverted feet on the body (a dormouse is unique in that it has double-jointed hind ankles).

26 Cut round the outlines of the feet with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool and, as above, relieve them using the No.3, $\frac{1}{8}$ in with opposing cuts. Round over the edges and make small nicks for the toes with the tip of the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool.

27 Using a $\frac{1}{8}$ in veiner or the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool and working over and around the head, body and tail, make short, close cuts over the surfaces to show the hair, so producing a contrast with the smoother leaf surfaces.

Finishing the leaves

28 With the No.3, $\frac{1}{8}$ in or a No.5, $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge, undercut between the lobes of the oak leaves around the edge of the nest, creating shadows and giving depth. Invert the gouge, placing it underneath the edge, and scoop out from beneath to make a small cave. Then, if necessary, further round over the edges of the leaves so they curl down over the dormouse. Repeat the process on the remaining leaves lying around the nest.

**27****28**

29 Check that the surfaces of the leaves are smooth, re-scraping them if need be. Having smoothed them, mark in the veins with a V-tool, tapering their ends towards the outer edges of the leaf. Depending upon the positioning of the leaf in relation to the grain direction, to taper the veins you will either have to start the V-cut from the main vein and reduce its depth outwards towards the outer edge of the leaf, alternatively start the cut lightly from the edge of the leaf and gradually deepen it, which will widen it as you near the main vein. It may be helpful to practise some of these cuts on scrap wood beforehand.

Finishing the carving

Check that there are no flat areas remaining on any of the leaves and that all meeting edges are cut cleanly, and remove any errant digs, deep cuts or jagged edges. Apply the finish of your choice – I used a colourless wax polish applied with a redundant toothbrush to work it into the crevices, then buffed it to a gentle sheen using a old, soft-bristled shoebrush. ▶

**29**

Issue 178 on sale 17th December

Steve Bisco creates a stunning Art Nouveau panel



Dave Western's love spoon design is adaptable to four skill levels



Carve a crop of box mushrooms with Zoë Gertner

Peter Benson advises on carving from a photo

In remembrance of Mark Baker



As members of the woodcarving community say goodbye to Mark, we share some of the letters describing what he meant to them. Please email us yours for the next issue

An inspiration

Mark was an inspiration in woodworking and a fine example to us all of his understanding of the finer aspects of carpentry.

It was my pleasure to speak with him earlier in the year and although I knew he was ill, as a cancer sufferer myself, I had hoped the treatment would be more effective.

May he now be at peace with God.

Tim McGinn

Down to earth

As I read through each issue I could hear your voice in the wonderful articles you commissioned and edited. You always included something for every ability. You particularly made us beginners very welcome and gave us something to aspire to.

I loved how you wrote your introduction, it was so personal, current and down to earth it made me feel I was walking into a carving club. I simply cannot imagine the magazine without your voice.

Marie McEwen

A good and kind person

Even though I live on the other side of the world (Melbourne, Australia), I got such a shock to read that you had a terminal illness. It's a cliché I know, but my thoughts are sincerely with your family. I was given clearance from a cancer in May this year but I still remember the shock and accompanying thoughts when initially diagnosed. I have always felt that you were a good and kind person from the way you wrote. I know that every time I buy the magazine I will remember you.

Kindest regards, Bernie Kelly



Words from woodcarvers and authors



Professional woodcarver Andrew Thomas said: 'I don't think I've ever known anyone work so hard, with such vigour, in their area of expertise and interest over their career as Mark did. He was always so switched on with his innovative ideas to ensure all the various areas of woodworking were kept alive, fresh and diverse, inspiring and encouraging both individual readers and clubs across the world, and always made himself accessible to anyone that wanted to correspond with him. He only ever showed me kindness and trust in all the many years that we collaborated with *Woodcarving* magazine. It's so very sad to lose such a great guy. I will miss him and his vitality, enthusiasm and passion for the arts that are dear to my heart. My sincerest condolences to his family and friends. Rest in peace now mate, and thank you, for everything you have done.'

With best wishes, Andrew

Without our friendship and your influence there is no way I would be writing articles or contemplating a fourth book. You can never know how much knowing and working with you has meant to both Em and I over more years than we care to remember. Love Pete and Em Benson.

Pete Benson

I had the great pleasure of knowing Mark for 14 years, ever since I sent in my first article in 2006. Expecting it to be rejected, I was surprised to get a phone call from Mark to accept it and give me guidance and encouragement to do more. I followed his guidance, and more articles, more guidance, and more encouragement followed. That was how Mark worked - he was not only devoted to the magazines but also to the hobbies of woodcarving and woodturning and all those involved in them. He made sure that

Woodcarving included all types of carving styles and methods so there was something for every reader. He put a lot of effort into encouraging woodcarving clubs, and to say he would 'go the extra mile' would be understating it as he would travel far and wide on both sides of the Atlantic to visit clubs and exhibitions. Having now done 70 articles for *Woodcarving*, Mark's phone calls became a regular feature of my life and, as he happened to live just a few miles from me, he would drop in for a visit. I also had the pleasure in 2019 of working alongside him at the Celebrating British Crafts Exhibition in London.



He was a very approachable and kind man, and will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Steve Bisco

Mark, you have done an amazingly good job for many years in producing GMC's woodworking magazines. They are such a high standard and have always been a good read and a source of inspiration. Also, a personal thank you for helping to get my book, *Carving Japanese Netsuke for Beginners*, published, and knowing that it has gone worldwide, I am very proud of it, and very much enjoyed the process.

Bob Jubb

Mark, thank you for your enthusiasm, your commitment and your humanist and positive thoughts. It was a real pleasure to work with you. My only regret is that we never had the chance to meet during these years.

Johan Roudy

I was so saddened to learn that Mark Baker has passed away. Mark was the highly respected woodworking editor for GMC (Guild of Master Craftsmen) for nearly 25 years. His achievements included writing numerous woodworking books, mainly on woodturning, which was his passion.

I believe talented Mark has greatly influenced the crafts of both woodcarving and woodturning in the UK, and personally I feel so privileged to have worked with Mark for the last couple of years. Our thoughts are with his family.

Terry Nokes

Up at night

Mark and I 'met' several years back when I wrote a series of articles for him focusing on the various styles of European lovespoon carving. Over the ensuing years, Mark would occasionally phone out of the blue to inquire what I was going to be writing about next. Invariably, he would miscalculate the eight-hour time difference between us, jolting me awake and cornering me into pretending I was hard at work on the next article even as we spoke. Then, while we discussed events in the woodwork world, I would frantically try to think of ideas I thought might impress him.

Mark was always wonderfully enthusiastic about woodcarving and, no matter how off-the-wall the idea, seldom ever outright refused to consider an article proposal I presented him. It was always a great pleasure to chat with him about carving, the magazine business and our respective countries of abode while we worked our way through potential ideas for articles.

He was always particularly interested in the sophisticated woodcarving of the NW Coast First Nations people of Canada and the US and once asked me if I could carve something in that style. I never managed to get to it until very recently when I made myself a D-style adze and decorated it with a First Nations-style beaver. I don't think Mark ever got to see it finished. Yesterday, I hauled the D adze out and gave Mark a bit of a Viking send off.... only without Vikings. Me and the beaver D adze bashed out a couple of spoon blanks that one day will get turned into lovely spoons. And that will make another nice legacy for Mark.

Mark really was a lovely man who is owed a great debt of gratitude by the woodcarving community. I very much miss his calls, his advice, his suggestions and his banter.

Dave Western

Right from the start, when I cheekily invited myself to sit at Mark's table for lunch at a woodworking show, he was inviting and encouraging. That turned into a fruitful friendship with Mark for my wife Jean and I. He offered enthusiasm about what we were doing, and encouragement to take on different projects, including writing for several of GMC's titles. His encouragement was always targeted, rather than generic, and he wasn't afraid to challenge either – always in a positive way. Through this we expanded our making horizons, and will forever be grateful for the valued friendship he provided. Perhaps the best measure of a person is how they are remembered, and I am sure Mark will be remembered fondly by lots of us for many years to come.

Chris Grace

I was very sad to hear the news that Mark had passed away, even though he had told me himself it was inevitable in his last telephone call to me at the beginning of lockdown. Over the years I have been writing the BDWCA page for *Woodcarving* magazine we had various telephone conversations, often comparing visits we had made to carving events across the world, although sadly we



Dave Western's D-style adze



never met in person. Every now and then he would suggest I wrote a profile but I refused because I felt I was still too much of a novice, but he didn't give up. He told me a lot of people knew my name and would be interested so, finally, at the end of last year I agreed. He

then encouraged me to write another article, which I did, and has given me the confidence to continue to expand my carving journey and write about it when the time is right. I will miss those telephone conversations.

Pam Wilson

Swedish tomte

Peter Benson makes this fun Christmas carving you can complete in a couple of hours



If you have a family that loves the carvings you do, around Christmas time you are likely to get all sorts of requests for seasonal pieces. Often this can mean that, to satisfy the demand, you will have to start carving sometime around September. With this in mind, I have decided that the piece for this year needs to be done quickly to reduce the amount of time you are confined to your workshop or man cave. It is based on the Swedish tomte, a small Christmas spirit, which is mostly hat and beard.

I have given this project to some of my beginner students and they have completed it in a two-hour class, in some cases even painting it as well.

The size and shape can be almost anything you like and can be cut from any odd piece of wood that you may have in your collection.

You can be as free as you like with the hat, which makes up the majority of the carving, and the beard can be painted or oiled once it has been textured. In the following stages I have used two examples with slightly different hats – I have found that carving several at once can often add to the fun and variation. Also, a collection of figures of different sizes looks good on the mantelpiece.

I have used jelutong as it is easy to carve and will hold detail, but you can use anything you have available.

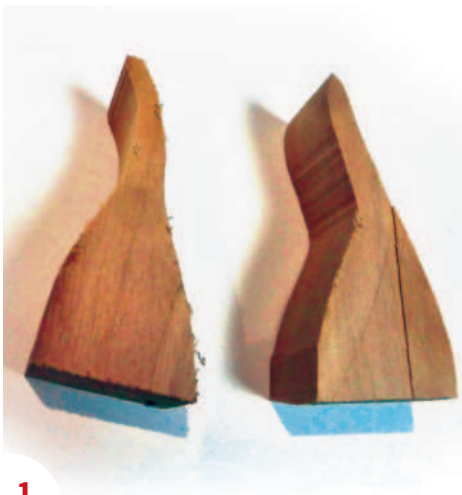
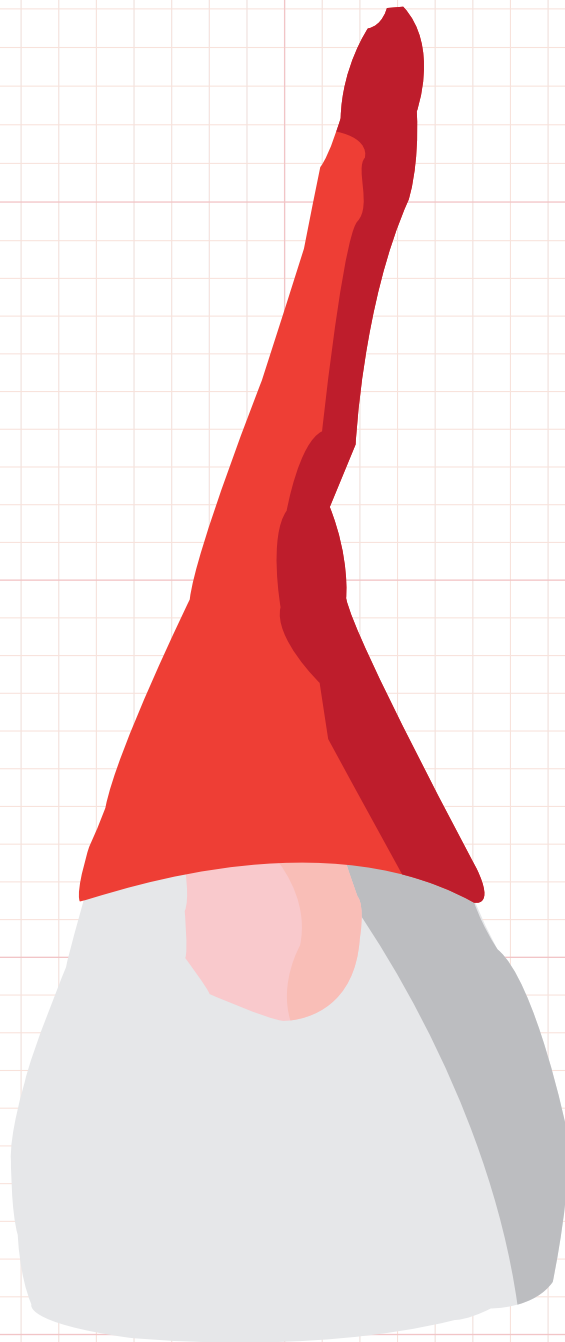
Things you will need

Materials:

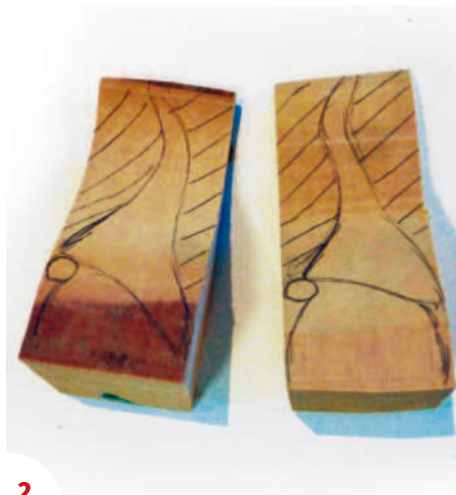
- Any wood will do but Jelutong is the softest. I use whatever off cuts I have in the workshop
- Acrylic paints
- Finishing oil
- Satin varnish
- Sparkle if required

Tools:

- Bandsaw or coping saw
- Knife
- Safety glove
- Small V-tool



1



2

1 In this case I have cut out the basic shapes in one plane using a bandsaw, but you can start with a block if you wish – it just takes longer.

2 Draw the other face of your carving ready to remove the waste.



3 As with all carvings of this type, I recommend that you complete the hat before you go any further. It works much better fitting the head into the hat than trying to do them both at the same time (picture 3a). Cut the hat to shape, taking care not to break off the narrow part as this is rather vulnerable. When cutting round the bottom edge don't cut in at a right angle as the edge can easily break away – see picture 3b. If you angle your knife and cut a V all round you will prevent any breaking and can sharpen up the edge when completed – picture 3c. Don't forget to leave an area for the nose.



3a



3b

4 Round off the area underneath the hat to form the nose and whiskers. The size and shape are very much a matter of personal choice but make sure you have a smooth, rounded shape for both. Don't sharpen up the underside yet as any damage, as shown in picture 4 can be sorted out later.

5 Using a small V-tool, add the texture to the beard but avoid cutting in straight lines – see picture 5. Very short, curved cuts similar to a shallow S-shape give the most natural effect when carving hair or fur. Don't try to be too precise when doing this as it adds to the effect if cuts overlap. You will need to cut downwards and upwards from the centre of the curve to avoid tearing the grain. Just be careful that you don't cut into the rim of the hat when cutting upwards. You might like to draw the lines of the beard to be sure you get the direction right, but make sure you cut away all of the pencil lines or they will show in the finish. Carving without drawn lines gives more freedom but can take some practice.



3c



4

6 Once you are happy with your texturing, you can cut the underside of the hat to get a good, clean edge. If you have done any damage to the edge when cutting the beard you can now tidy this up.

Finishing

7 The carving is now complete and you can get on with the finishing. I generally paint the hats with bright red acrylic watercolour and the beards white, finishing with satin varnish, but you can use oil all, or parts, as you wish. Variations are shown in the main picture. Danish oil will dry the quickest but you can use linseed or olive oil if it is available. I have no doubt that cooking oil would do but I haven't tried it. If you add a little raw sienna oil paint to the oil you will get a richer colour.

These are intended to stand on a shelf or mantelpiece but can just as easily be used as tree hangers. If you wish to do this I suggest you make the top of the hat a little bigger to take a small screw eye. Alternatively, you can coat the end of the hat with cyanoacrylate glue to strengthen it as the bird carvers do with beaks. The joy of carvings such as these is that you can play around with the design as much as you like and give them characters of your own – your imagination can run wild. ■



5



6



7

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Netsuke

Mitch Peacock carves his first miniature Japanese-style figure to remember a friend

When a friend recently passed away, his mother, also a good friend, asked if I could make her a memento which she could carry around with her. Specifically, could I make it using wood from a crossbow that he had made many years ago.

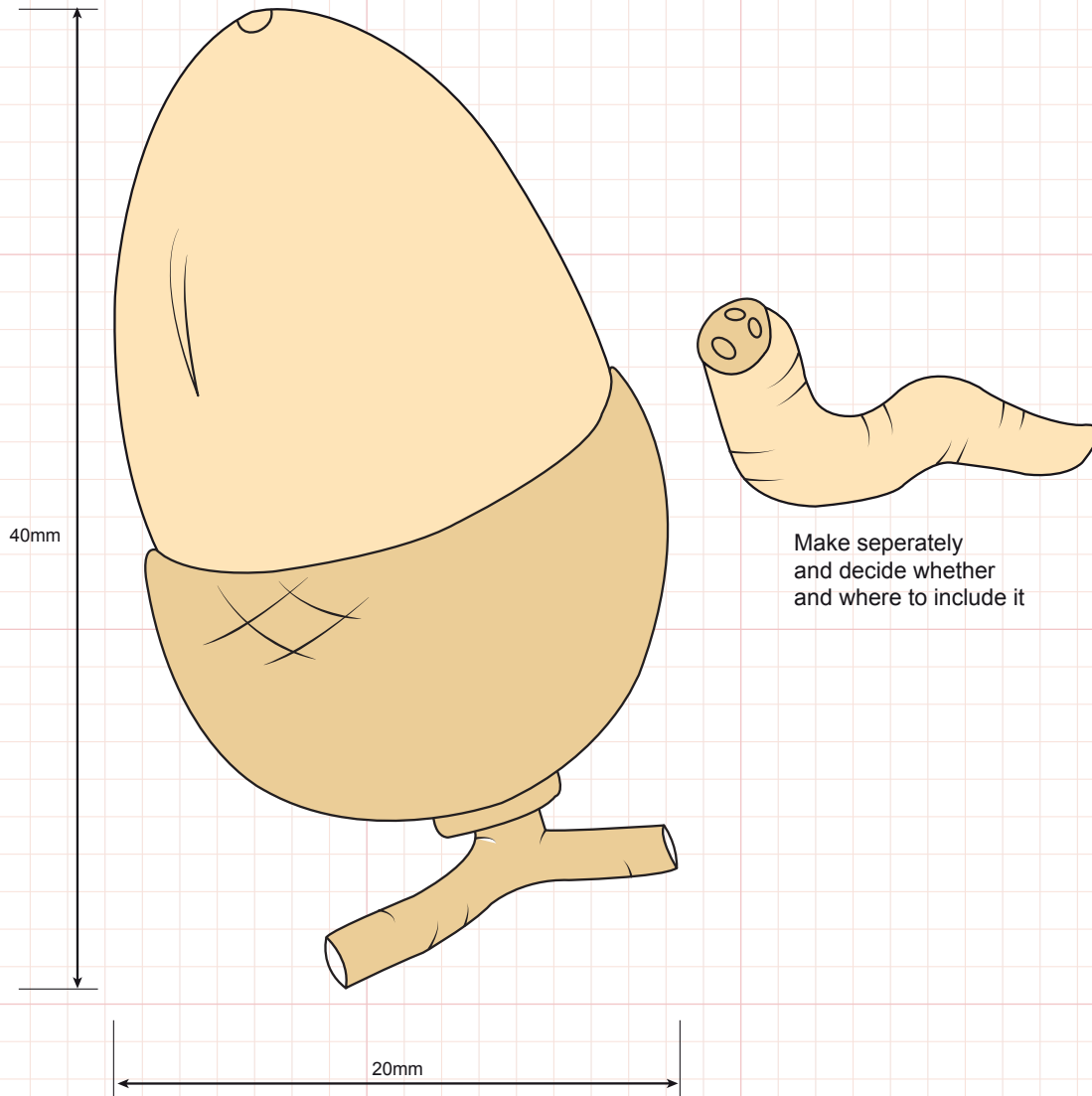
Things you will need**Materials:**

- Acorn: Mahogany
- Grub: Holly
- Stalk: Hardwood twig from unknown garden shrub
- Finish: Acrylic sanding sealer and lacquer (Chestnut Products)

Tools:

- Workbench with vice
- Hand screw clamp
- Carver's mallet (Kirschen)
- Skew chisel ½in (workshop made)
- Carving chisels: No.1 ⅝in, No.5 ⅝in (both by Ashley Iles)

- Chip carving knives (No.3356 and No.3358 both by Kirschen)
- Abrasive paper (various fine grits 3M)
- 3mm round burr in generic rotary tool (for boring cord holes and knot cavity)

**1**

1 Paul always had a great love of oak trees, and that would be my inspiration. I have always found carving anything, especially from nature, to be a real challenge. My first experience was at school, where my attempt at a life-size kestrel ended up looking more like Professor Yaffle from Bagpuss. Some forty years on, I'm not sure I would make a particularly better effort, but hopefully a simple acorn would be easier.

INITIAL SHAPING

2 The end of the crossbow stock yielded three mahogany carving blanks – that's how confident I was of nailing it at the first attempt. Although quite easy to carve, mahogany would not be my first choice for such a small carving, and one requiring a textured surface and small details.





3 To aid clamping during the main shaping operations, I cut a tenon on one end that could be clamped in the face vice. This allowed good access to roughly round the blank.



4 I reduced the diameter at what would be the junction of nut and cupule (cup), and proceeded to round most of the latter. I made it too large to begin with, only later to realise that my memory was playing tricks with me. A good tip is to acquire an acorn prior to starting, rather than part-way through as I did.

5 The nut was rough shaped next, using shear cuts with a knife. The improvised work holding performed really well, and controlled cuts could be taken with ease. This was particularly helpful as I was nursing a bad thumb and couldn't work with the piece in my hands as I often do.



6 I set out a lot of carving tools when I began, but only used a few. Indeed I'm sure I could have shaped the carving entirely with my small-bladed, skew-edged, chip carving knife. Good lighting, spectacles, and a magnifying glass, proved more important than the range of cutting tools.

PERFECTING THE SHAPE

A visit to Sheffield Park Gardens gave me the opportunity to collect a few acorns, from which to model the final shape.



7 Nut and cup were adjusted to better match nature's work, and the clamping spur finally sawn off, leaving room for the tip.





9a



9b



10



11a



11b



12



13



8 I don't think I ever paid too much attention to the tip of an acorn nut, and no doubt they vary considerably, but those I collected all had a recess with a protruding tip. This was one of the most difficult parts to carve, not helped by my being short-sighted. Circular cuts gradually excavated the depression, leaving a central stub which was finally sharpened to a blunt cone.

9 The surface of the cup has a dense patterning, which I thought would be lost within the grain of the mahogany, so I chose to carve a more stylised version with facets that would be more visible. Using a cut-to-cut method with the knife, I defined roughly similar diamond shapes around the cup. The lower half of each diamond was pared down, giving an overlapping effect to the rows.

10 As carefully as I had shaped the nut, it still showed facets from the knife work. Small strips of abrasive paper, worked over constantly changing areas, quickly erased these.

FINISHING TOUCHES

11 To allow for a cord to be attached to the netsuke, I used a ball die grinder to bore two holes, one larger than the other, and then connected them internally. A hole was also bored into the top of the cup, to accept a stalk carved from a junction of a dried twig.

12 After the stalk was glued on, I felt the acorn still needed an extra detail. A little grub was fretsawn from some holly, and shaped with the knife and abrasive strips. A humorous touch is not uncommon in netsuke I have seen, and I know my friend will enjoy this.

13 Sanding sealer was applied to the whole piece, before lightly sanding back and applying a lacquer finish, after which I test fitted a cord. A loop of cord was fed into the smaller hole and fished out of the larger one with a hook turned on the end of a wire. The loop was cut and the two ends knotted together. The knot, which was too large to fit through the small hole, was then pulled back into the nut.

Creating this simple netsuke has given me an even greater appreciation of the craftsmanship behind the more beautiful and detailed ones that survive from centuries ago. Could I have used a lathe for this essentially round object? For the initial roughing out it might have been slightly faster, but nature doesn't produce perfectly rounded acorns, or much else for that matter, and so I believe a more realistic carving is shaped by hand and eye.

NETSUKE

Netsuke are small sculpted objects, traditionally used as a toggle to attach items suspended from a kimono sash (obi). Many materials are used, although carved wood and ivory are most common. Their designs are based on such things as objects from nature, religion, and mythology, among other things. Netsuke were fashionable for the male merchant class during the Edo period, and are now widely collected.

Message board

Hone your knotwork skills with this useful and attractive design by Glenda Bennett



The border on this message board introduces a style of knotwork that, instead of being open-weave, is closely intertwined so no spaces are visible between the bands. It is still possible to trace the path of each band that makes up each eternal knot, but it requires just a little more concentration. Concentration is also the key to successful carving in this project in order to maintain the correct weaves of the bands but, once you master the technique, the effect is very pleasing.

The message board itself is a blackboard for good old-fashioned chalk, which can be cleaned and rewritten, but alternative surfaces could be used such as a cork board, used with pushpins, or a whiteboard that can be used with dry-wipe marker pens.

The wording at the top of the board can easily be changed for something that has a personal meaning; it doesn't necessarily have to be a place, as I have chosen. A single word works best, however, so that the letters can be joined and cut out as one. If nothing inspires, you could do worse than choosing just the word 'messages'.

After much deliberation, I chose Glastonbury as my header. Glastonbury in Somerset, England, is a mystical and enigmatic place, and the Tor that rises from the surrounding plains has brought about many myths and legends.

The early Celts regarded high ground as a sacred place, and revered it as such. The Celts saw their gods as the personification of the natural forces around which their lives revolved.

The Tor itself was believed to be magically hollow, with a secret entrance to the Isle of Avalon hidden in its side. Avalon was the realm of King Arthur who, in the sixth century, defended the Celts against the Anglo-Saxon invasions, following the withdrawal of the Romans.

Endless myths and legends have grown up around King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and many places lay claim to being the site of his court, including Cornwall and Wales. The truth is that, as a great king, he would have had many strongholds up and down the country, Glastonbury Tor being but one, albeit a significant one. His famous magician, Merlin, was credited with laying out a huge 10-mile wide zodiac around the Tor, using features in the landscape.

The Tor is also reputed to be the burial place of the Holy Grail: after the crucifixion, Saint Joseph of Arimathea is said to have brought the chalice used in the Last Supper to Glastonbury, and buried it on the Tor at Chalice Well.

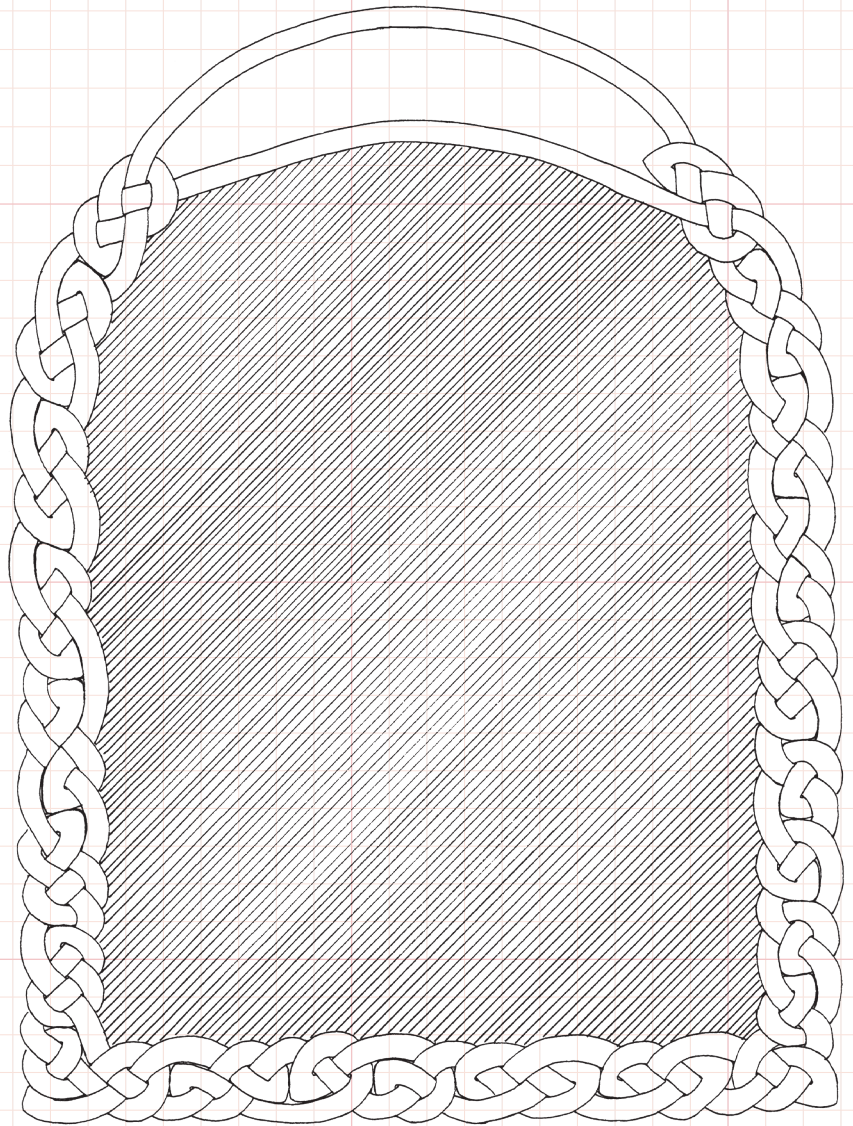
Whatever one chooses to believe, there is no doubting the importance of Glastonbury in folklore, and in the continuing fascination with its mystical associations.

Things you will need**Materials:**

- Photocopy of templates pictured, enlarged to 188%
- Piece of timber measuring 400 x 290 x 12mm (lime)
- Piece of MDF measuring 400 x 290 x 4mm
- Repositionable spray adhesive
- Carbon paper
- Wood glue
- Varnish
- Primer
- Blackboard paint

Tools:

- Scrollsaw or fretsaw
- Drill
- Router (if available)
- Selection of chisels and gouges
- Chip knife or craft knife



MESSAGES

SHOPPING

CLASSTORY

1 Stick the photocopied template to the face of the timber, using spray adhesive. Cut around the outside with a scrollsaw or fretsaw.

2 Drill a pilot hole in the central waste area to allow the blade to pass through. Cut out the internal waste, carefully following the curves of the design.

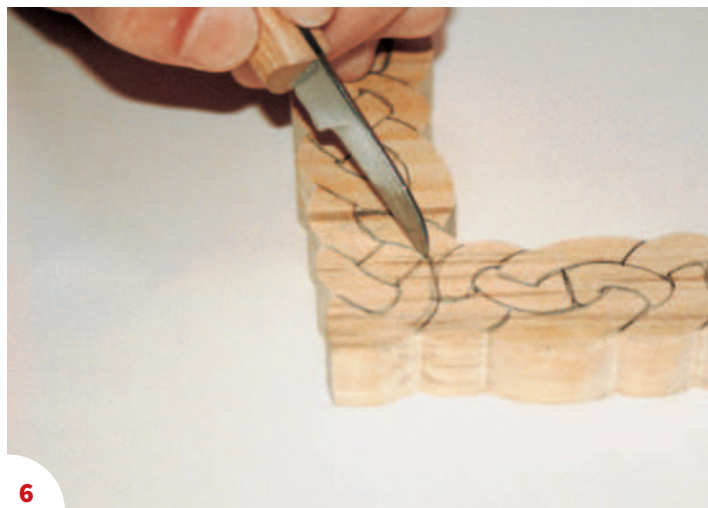
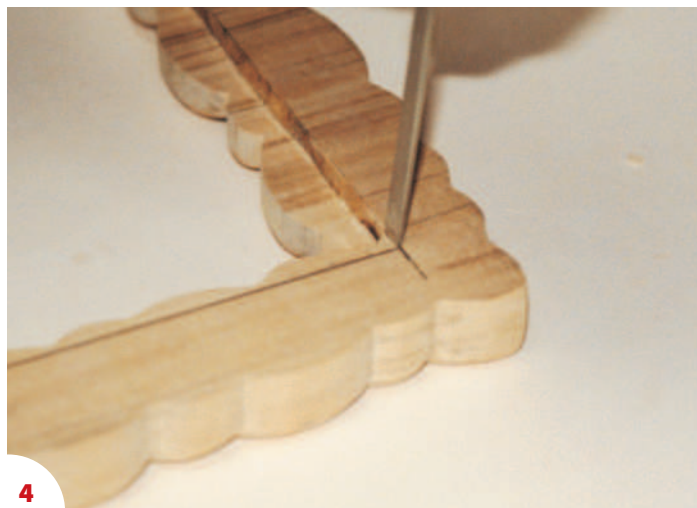
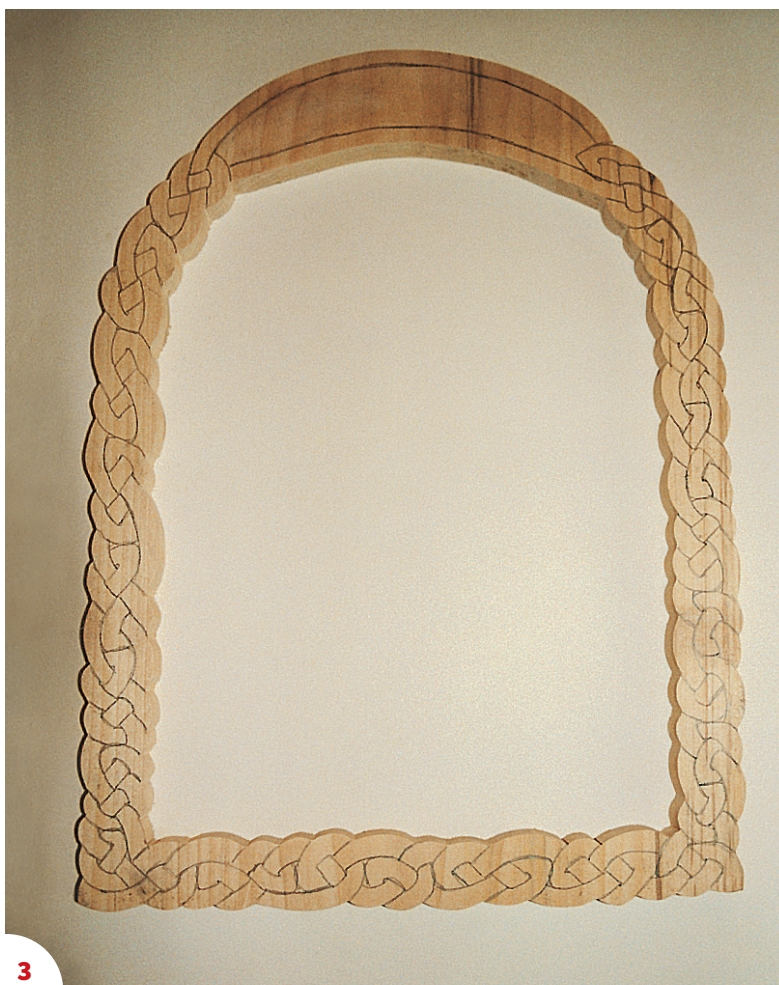
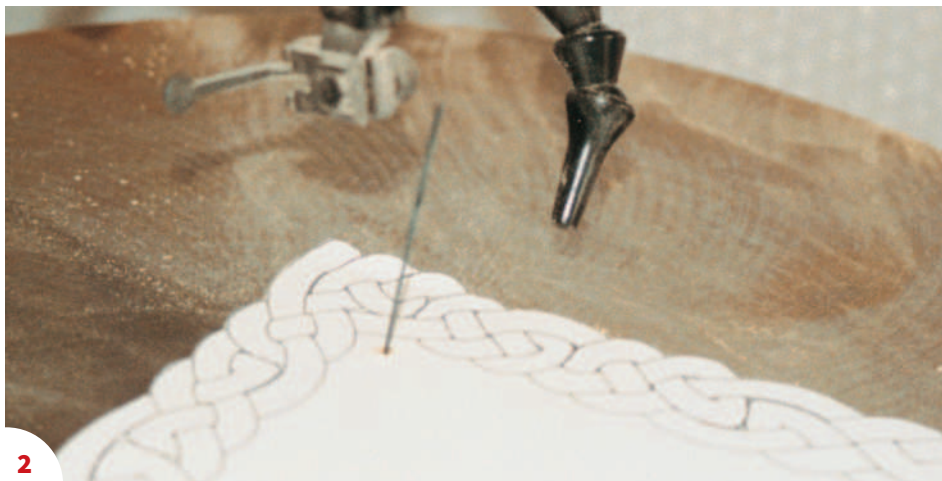
3 Transfer the design on to the face of the framework, using tracing paper.

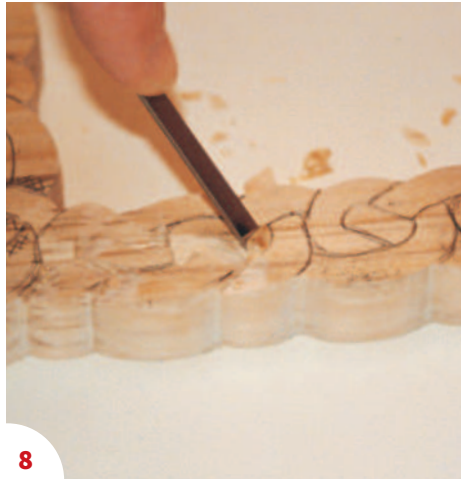
4 On the reverse, mark a straight line 5mm away from the cutout section. Use this as a guide to make a 4mm-deep rebate.

If you want to make pierced lettering rather than raised lettering, make the rebated area reach within 5mm of the top of the frame, following the arched shape. You can then cut letters out so that the black of the backing board shows through (see step 12). If possible, use a router to cut the rebate – otherwise use a chisel and square off the bottom corners with a small chisel.

5 Cut out a piece of the 4mm-thick MDF to fit in the routed area. The easiest way to get an accurate fit is to lay a sheet of tracing paper on the board, trace the routed shape, then use it as a template. When cut out it will be used to make the chalk board, but it can be put to one side for now.

6 Score along the lines of the design on the face of the frame, using a sharp chip knife or craft knife.



**7****8****9****11****12****16****17**

7 If you think you may have difficulty identifying the thread of the weave during carving, try shading with a pen or pencil the areas that have to be reduced.

8 Lower the bands where they weave behind, and make a deep V between bands that pass alongside each other.

9 Use an inverted curved gouge or a knife to round the long edges of each band, forming a rope-like shape. This will help separate the bands and define the knotwork.

10 Where a band turns sharply back on itself, use the point of a knife to cut the tiny triangle at the bend.

11 When the entire knotwork frame has been carved, reduce the area at the top, between the two bands, to a depth of 4mm.

12 Using a scrap of 4mm plywood or MDF, cut out your chosen lettering template. Drill small pilot holes where necessary to make the internal cuts.

If you prefer to have the letters cut out, as described in step 4, do that at this stage. Bear in mind that the throat of your scrollsaw needs to be large enough to accommodate the length of the board.

13 Protect the frame with a clear varnish. This is particularly important if it is to be sited in a kitchen.

14 After priming the MDF backboard and lettering, apply at least two coats of blackboard paint to both.

15 To assemble the message board, glue the backboard and lettering in place.

16 As an optional extra, you can make a chalk holder for the board. To do this, take a piece of matching scrap timber measuring 40mm high x 50mm wide x 18mm deep. Cut it to an L shape, leaving the back 4mm deep and the bottom leg approximately 8mm deep. Make a concave groove along the top of the leg as shown.

17 Cut a 4mm rebate into the back of the frame, at the bottom where shown, for the chalk holder to sit in, and then glue it in place. Varnish the chalk holder to match the frame.

18 To ensure that the message board doesn't move about when in use, fasten it to the wall using adhesive foam pads. ▶

Sharpening: A Woodworker's Guide

We review the latest book from woodworker Randall A Maxey

One of the most important aspects to successful woodworking of any kind is having sharp tools. This new book from US-based woodworker Randall A Maxey will help ensure your tools are always in tip-top condition. It's a comprehensive guide that covers sharpening by hand, machine sharpening, traditional sharpening techniques and the latest innovations in sharpening technology.

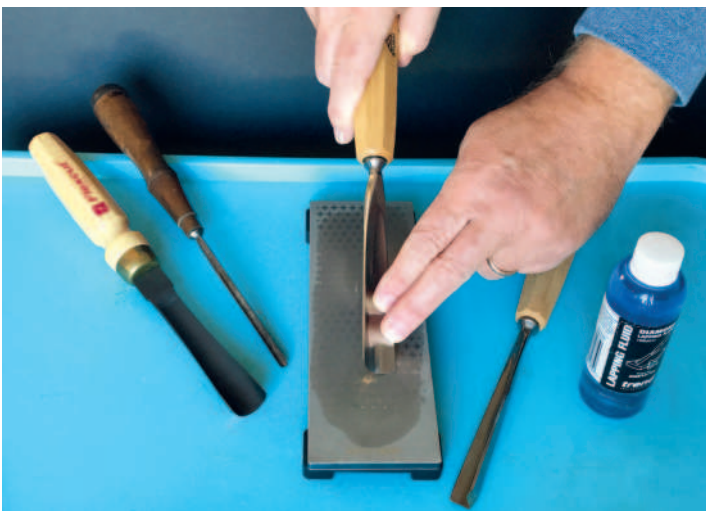
It begins with the basic principles of sharpening, explaining bevel angles (illustrated with easy-to-follow diagrams) and giving an overview of all the different tools and supplies, with guidance on using abrasives, oil stones, waterstones, diamond stones, strops, honing guides and powered sharpeners.

The 'Sharpening in Practice' section is broken down by tool type, demonstrating how to sharpen chisels, hand planes, router bits, planer/thicknesser blades, drill bits, and carving, garden and kitchen tools. Such a comprehensive list makes this book useful beyond the workshop and you're bound to find something around the house that needs sharpening! All of the techniques are illustrated with clear photographs.

The book is aimed at a broad audience of woodworkers of all kinds but it will also make a useful addition to any carver's bookshelf.



Sharpening : A Woodworker's Guide By Randall A Maxey is available now, published by GMC Publications



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Our contributors



Cedric Boyns joined a carving evening class in 2010 which started him off. He also joined a local woodturning club and he enjoys combining the two skills in his projects. Travelling abroad in recent years has provided much for his carving work. He has no formal training in art or design, but feels he has learnt a great deal by 'giving it a go'.



Dave Western is a professional lovespoon carver and the author of two books on the subject. He carves to commission and also teaches carving classes. His books, *The Fine Art of Carving Lovespoons* and *History of Lovespoons*, are both available through GMC Publications. davidwesternlovespoons.com



Mark Gough is a self-taught woodworker, woodcarver and stickmaker who runs a small business making commissioned sticks and other design projects. Previous jobs include timber building, construction and signwriting & narrowboat art. www.stickcraft.info mark@stickcraft.info Facebook woodstickcraft



Mitch Peacock is a self-taught woodworker from East Sussex, England, with a passion for mainly unplugged woodworking. Mitch now mainly creates small character pieces of furniture, and has a woodworking YouTube channel inspiring others to try the craft. WomadeOD.co.uk youtube.com/c/WomadeOD



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



Nic Westermann is a blacksmith and specialises in tool-making. He is highly regarded in the green woodworking and carving communities. He researches, designs and manufactures jigs and other kit to help make sharpening things easier. nic.westermann@btconnect.com



Peter Benson has travelled the world teaching and judging woodcarving at all standards for the past 20 years. He has written two books on the subject. bencarve@btinternet.com



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



Zoë Gertner has been a professional woodcarver and sculptor since 1980. She is experienced in the teaching and practice of all aspects of woodcarving and sculpture, including relief carving, lettering, signboards, ecclesiastical, restoration, fairground and carousel work. www.zoegertner.co.uk

Editor Mark Baker
E: markb@thegmcgroup.com
Editorial Assistant Karen Scott
E: karencs@thegmcgroup.com
Designer Oliver Prentice
Chief Photographer Anthony Bailey
Sales gmcadvertising@thegmcgroup.com
Production Controller Scott Teagle
E: repro@thegmcgroup.com
Publisher Jonathan Grogan
Production Manager Jim Bulley
Subscriptions: pubs@thegmcgroup.com
Marketing Anne Guillot

Printer Precision Colour Printing
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T: 020 7429 4000
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Toshogu Shrine

This month we visit one of Japan's most important cultural sites



The city of Nikko is one of Japan's most popular destinations, inspiring the saying 'Never say "kekko" (beautiful) until you've seen Nikko'. One of the city's main attractions is the lavishly decorated Toshogu Shrine, a complex of more than a dozen buildings covered with intricate wood carvings and generous amounts of gold leaf. The Shrine is the mausoleum of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), who founded the Tokugawa shogunate that ruled Japan for 250 years. Ieyasu's grandson, Iemitsu, expanded the original simple shrine into the vast complex that can be seen today. The carvings include both Shinto and Buddhist images as it

was common for the two religions to mix together at the time. One of Toshogu's most famous carvings depicts the Three Wise Monkeys (a popular image in Japanese culture), which appears on one of the storehouses. Other highlights include the 'imagined elephants', carved by an artist who had never actually seen an elephant; the Crying Dragon painting; the ornate Yomeimon Gate; the Sleeping Cat carving; and a five-storey pagoda at the entrance to the shrine. Five of the buildings in the complex are listed as National Treasures of Japan and the area is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A renovation project began in 2007 and is due to be completed in 2024.

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