

WOOD CARVING

Howling wolf and moon

Mark Gough
carves a striking
image from
contrasting timbers



TECHNICAL ADVICE Sharpening sloyd knives • Understanding grain
PROJECTS TO CARVE Swan crest • Reverse spoons • Ammonite
• Dinosaur cookie cutters • Octopus • House sign • Wild boar netsuke

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Welcome



Here we are in the new year of 2022 and hoping that you all had a merry Christmas and festive season. I am sure that by now you have cleared out the last remnants of turkey and are enjoying all your thoughtful gifts from family and friends. If they happened to be woodcarving tools, then you are in the right place for us to help you put them to good use.

Another significant date is looming and that is the time for lovers on 14 February, Valentine's Day, which is a great occasion for talented woodcarvers to make their loved partner a gift that comes from the heart. We have a romantic swan pair plaque project. You may be aware that swans are considered to be the most romantic of creatures as they pair for life. They have a loving gesture called cresting, where they link their necks in a heart shape, which is the perfect subject for a lover's carving. We also feature a project to make reverse spoons that feature a heart shape, and both these projects will make perfect gifts to give to someone special on Valentine's Day.

We have plenty of projects for creature lovers too. The octopus literally leaps out of the frame at the viewer and the howling wolf and moon will make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up – hopefully you won't grow fangs and go on the rampage. Prehistoric

times provide a wealth of subject matter for carvers and our ammonite in boxwood project is a popular fossil shape that can be turned into a pendant or brooch for an attractive gift. A perfect gift for kids could be our dinosaur biscuit block project (pictured above), where they can combine their love of making and eating biscuits with their love of big prehistoric creatures that are stamped into them.

World travellers will enjoy our article where we visit Malaysia with Will Barsley, who introduces us to some of the country's most notable woodcarvers there, along with their amazing work and techniques. Nature lovers will appreciate the feature on Swedish carver Carsten Nilsson, who reflects on his historical and nature-inspired work that includes some beautifully ornate and painted mirror frames.

Repurposing items, and especially wood ones, is always a popular subject – Margaret Williams gets into double recycling mode and turns an old teak tabletop, that was originally a draining board, into a house sign with some precise letter carving.

As always, we love to see what you've been carving, so please email photos of your work to WCeditorial@thegmcgroup.com. Happy carving

Alan Goodsell



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Swan cresting

Steve Bisco features a pair of romantic birds in a charming oak cresting



Swans are the most beautiful of birds, and they have long been associated with love, romance, and even tragedy. They have a particular symbolism in Germanic folk tales, and in the tragic tale of Bavaria's 19th-century Swan King, Ludwig II (see below) which gave me the inspiration for this project.

Swans are considered romantic because they pair for life, but they add to this by the affectionate gesture of twining their heads and necks together in a heart shape. The symmetry of paired swans prompted this design for a 'cresting' – a type of long, pierced carving that is traditionally symmetrical and is high in the middle and lower at the ends. A cresting is traditionally placed above something like a picture frame, a headboard, a cabinet, a door, or just hung as a wall decoration. I have made this cresting from an oak board 840mm long to use the decorative qualities of polished oak, but you could make it in any wood or any size that suits you. The heart shape is pierced (cut out) and the shape of the swans is cut around the outside. The carving is quite shallow and the technique of 'foreshortening' (see box) is used to make the swans look more three-dimensional in the 25mm thickness of the board.

Carvings of birds can either be stylised or

natural. The natural style, where the features and feathers are carved to be as close to nature as possible, works best with three-dimensional wildlife sculptures. A carving like this one, with a symmetrical pair on a shallow flat board, works better if it is stylised. Stylisation is where the features are presented in an impressionistic way that clearly identifies the bird but focuses on the decorative possibilities rather than nature. This carving is immediately identifiable as two swans, but the feathers on the wings, body and neck are represented by different types of surface texture rather than an exact rendering of real feathers. The water that the swans are swimming in also has its own wave-like texture, and when polished the different textures pick up and reflect the light in different ways.

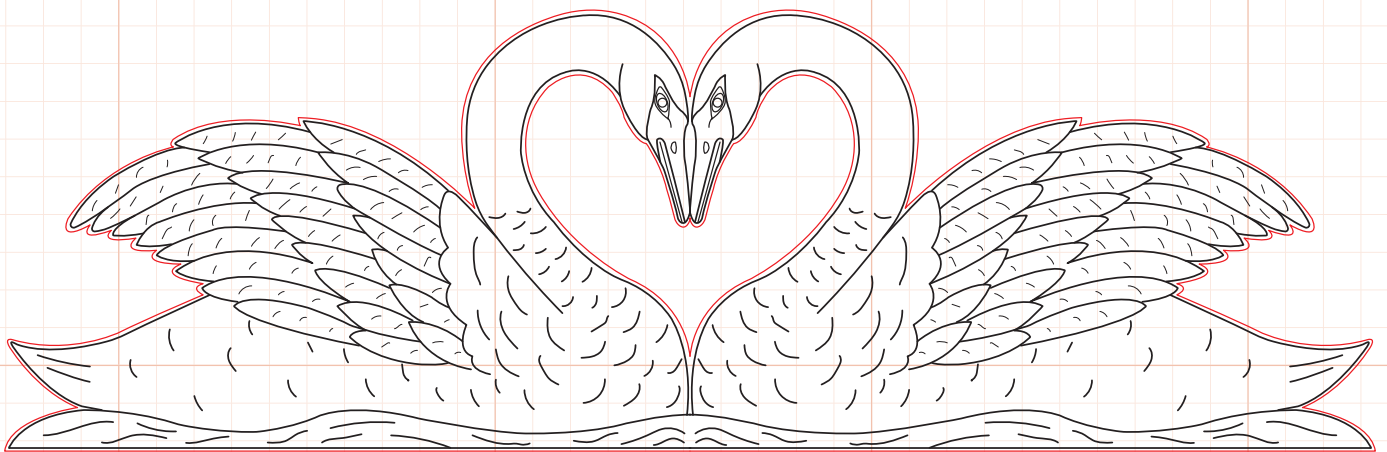
The Swan King of Bavaria

Swans were the heraldic emblem of the old German kingdom of Bavaria, and were particularly associated with its most famous king, Ludwig II (reigned 1864-86). Ludwig had a life-long fascination with swans and he became known as the Swan King. He grew up in fairy-tale castles surrounded by an abundance of swan images and carvings, and a real life Swan Lake at Hohenschwangau.

As a boy he had already developed a fascination with Wagner's 'Lohengrin', the Swan Knight who travelled in a boat pulled by a swan in his quest for the Holy Grail. His romantic obsession with the fantasy world of knights and swans earned him a second epithet of the Mad King. He built the fairy-tale castle of Neuschwanstein (literally New Swan Stone Castle) that is one of the iconic sights of Bavaria. His life of fantasy and melodrama came to a tragic climax with his untimely death in a lake in mysterious circumstances in 1886, but his story has lived on in many novels, plays and films.

FORESHORTENING

In this carving we are trying to give the impression of three-dimensional swans on a board only 25mm thick, so we use 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 disappears under the back edge, the eye sees the object as thicker and more rounded than it really is.



Things you will need

Materials

- Oak, 840 x 270 x 25mm
- Wax polish (Antiquax Original)

Gouges:

- No.2, 25mm
- No.3, 10mm
- No.3 fishtail, 18mm, 10mm

- No.5, 7mm
- No.6, 25mm
- No.7, 10mm
- No.9, 20mm, 3mm
- Veiner, 2mm
- V-tool, 6mm straight, 2mm straight

Chisels:

- Flat, 20mm, 10mm, 6.5mm
- Hooked skew chisel, 16mm

Other:

- Jigsaw, bandsaw
- Cabinet scrapers

Preparations

1 Get a piece of oak 840 x 270 x 25mm and make a copy of the drawing to fit. Trace the pattern on to the wood using carbon paper and mark the cutting lines in red so you don't get lost with the jigsaw.

2 Use a jigsaw to cut out the internal void inside the 'heart' of the swans' necks. Try to get a clean and accurate cut as the curve of the necks is important to the composition. Be aware that the jigsaw blade will flex a little at the bottom end in the turns, so make allowance for this.

3 Cut round the outer edge of the necks, wings and body. If you have a bandsaw you can use that for most or all of the outer edge to avoid the flexing problem, but otherwise continue with the jigsaw.

4 The slender necks run across the grain and are potentially liable to break if there is any weakness in the wood, so it is best to reinforce the back of the necks. Cut a couple of thin strips of oak, about 125 x 15 x 5mm, from the surplus wood, and chisel out a channel up the back of each neck to fit the strips exactly. The channels should start in the body area and run up the neck as far as the curve allows. Glue the reinforcing strips into the channels and, when set, plane them smooth.

5 For workholding, fix the carving to a backing board by screwing in from the back with shallow screws into the thickest parts of the body, wings and the swans' heads. Screw the board to your bench, sharpen your tools, and the carving can commence.

6 Use a V-tool to separate the key features – the heads, necks, wings, bodies and the waterline. This helps you to visualise the elements better and gives you a feel for the way the wood will behave.

Carving the necks and heads

7 The first thing we need to shape is the necks. Start by rounding over the sides from the back of the heads to where the two chests meet. We will 'foreshorten' (see box on previous page) the perspective later by undercutting from the back, but for now we need to round the necks to a centreline that is about halfway between front and back.



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8 Now we shape the beaks. These are thin and extend across the grain, so they must be handled with care. Carving toward the heads, reduce the thickness and open out a deep V between the two beaks.

9 Carve the join between the upper and lower beak. This is a very fine cross-grain cut that requires care to avoid crumbling the edges. A 16mm hooked skew chisel is the best tool to use.

10 Using the smaller gouges, carve the nostrils, the eyes, and the line that marks the edge of the black feathers of the head. Use a 2mm veiner to carve the pupil of the eye. Refine the shape of the heads.



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11 The surfaces of the neck and head need to be smooth, so you can use a concave cabinet scraper to remove facets and tool marks.

Carving the body

12 The swans' necks flow down into the front of their bodies, where their chests meet. Create a smooth, flowing curve and round over the front of each chest, with a sharp join between them. The rest of the body flows backwards between the wings and the waterline. Use broad, shallow gouges to create a soft curve to the surface then, at the back end, slope the surface into the tail and round over the top and bottom edges to foreshorten them into the underside.



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13 Give the body some light texturing to represent soft, downy feathers. Use a 10mm No.7 gouge to take short shallow scooping cuts, starting in the lower part of the neck and following over the chest area, across the inner ends of the wings, and along the body to the tail, following the natural flow of the feathers.

Carving the wings

14 Start the wings by curving over the top edge to give a foreshortened three-dimensional effect. Work the top two levels of feathers into the curve, then draw them back in afterwards.



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15 Use a V-tool to separate each of the long feathers. There are three groups from front to back, and seven or eight levels from top to bottom. Cut a deeper groove at every second or third level upwards so they can be formed into groups to break up the flatness of the board.

TOP TIPS

- When making a symmetrical carving, carve the pairs of features on the opposite sides together. For example, carve both heads, both necks, both sets of wings, etc., before moving on to the next pair of features. That way it is easier to make both sides look the same.
- On textured surfaces, abrasives are not really an option. Aim for a good, clean tooled finish, and on smooth surfaces like the necks use cabinet scrapers to remove irregularities without using abrasives.



16 Form each feather into a slightly convex profile so each one, with a few exceptions, slopes under the one above it and the one at the forward end of it. At the rear end, the feather ends slope towards the background.

17 We now make the long feathers 'softer' by adding some special texturing. Using a No.7, 10mm gouge or similar, and starting at the back end of each feather, push the gouge forwards then twist it upwards, then forward again to create a subtle S-groove. Repeating this along the feather creates an impression of individual small feathers. Finish with small cuts along the lower edge with the same gouge. The ripple effect takes away the hard edges of the main feathers.

18 We finish the wings by carving the feathers on the shoulder of the wing, which mark a transition from the larger flight feathers to the small soft down of the body. Mark out four vertical rows of 'scallop' edges using a No.6, 25mm gouge or similar, then use the No.7, 10mm gouge to carve grooves from the back edge of each scallop, sloping downwards to the front edge. Use the same gouge to nibble round the back edge as on the other feathers to give a textured, 'crinkly' effect.

Carving the waterline

19 Now there is only the waterline left to carve. First plane a chamfer of about 5mm width along the bottom edge, then slightly round over the top edge of the waterline where it meets the body. To represent the water, carve long flowing swirls in a wave-like motion with the No.7, 10mm gouge, rolling them over at the edges. Add ripples with a 2mm V-tool in and around the waves. Don't make the waves and ripples too regular or it won't look natural.

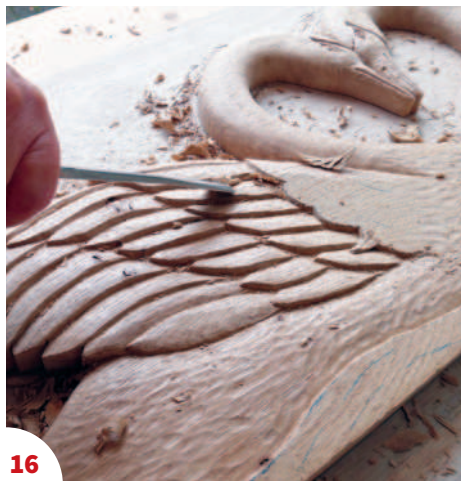
Undercutting

20 With the surface carving finished, we just have to undercut around all the edges to achieve the 'foreshortening' effect. Lay the carving face down on a soft surface, make sure your gouge is sharp and the swans' heads are supported. Cut a chamfer of at least 6mm width around the edges of the wings, body, necks and heads, and then round it over towards the front face. On the necks and heads, blend the front and back surfaces together so they look smooth and round from the front.

Finishing

21 My favourite finish for oak is a good wax polish like Antiquax Original. It is best to apply the polish with a brush on the textured surfaces, and remember to apply it to the back of the board as well to prevent warping. Give it two or three coats and, after it has had time to be absorbed into the wood, buff it up to a soft sheen with a dry cloth.

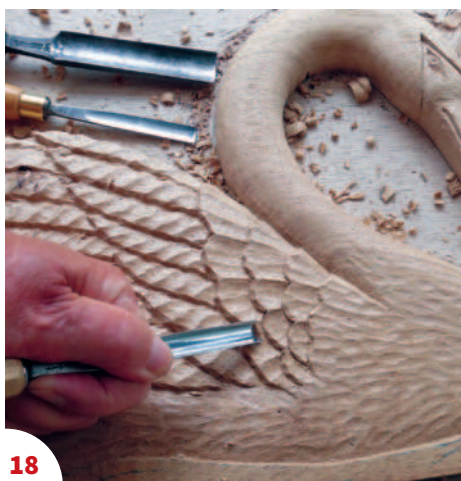
22 The swans can now glide serenely on a bed head, a cabinet, above a door, on a wall or wherever you choose to display them. ▶



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Reverse spoons

Dave Western is inspired by Swedish carvers of old to make these fun-to-carve implements



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE WESTERN

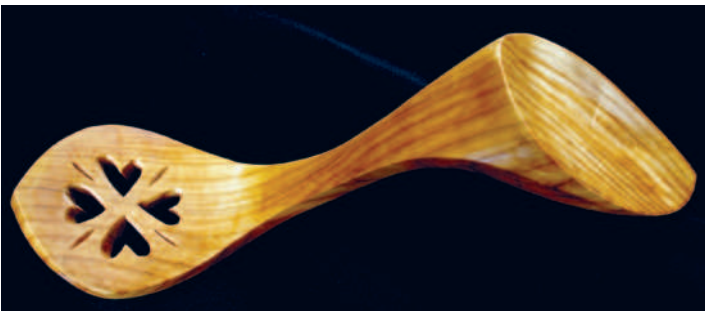
Quite possibly the most unique of all the romantic spoons carved in Europe during the golden age of lovespoons would have to be the Swedish 'avugstjed' (reverse) spoons, which were an occasional feature of raucous wedding revelry. Deliberately carved to be as difficult (or downright impossible) to use as possible, their purpose was to entertain the wedding

guests at the humorous expense of the bride and groom. Whether carved as a single upside-down bowl set at a 90° angle to the handle or as a double-bowled (or more) spoon with the bowls crazily placed in complete opposition to one another, the reverse spoon was meant to be as entertaining in use as it was useless.

When viewed through a modern lens where function is king, reverse spoons are the antithesis of everything currently taking place in the utilitarian spoon-carving world. Deliberately designing a product to be as non-functional as possible is not something today's spoon carvers ever consider. Don't, however, think for one second that these spoons lack technical demands or artistic foresight, because they were generally very carefully rendered and often exquisitely detailed. Despite their uselessness, there is often great beauty and ingenuity in them and to this day, they present a wonderfully whimsical challenge for carvers.



The spoons appeared in many guises. From simple, straight designs with an opposing bowl at each end, to elaborate curved versions carved from wood taken from intersecting branches, reverse spoons reflect the ingenuity and technical ability of the Swedish woodcarvers of that age. As with the wonderfully eclectic Welsh lovespoon, it seems that design and technical boundaries were pushed, pushed some more and then pushed yet more.



For this project, I am going to work through two very different designs. One is a straightforward spoon which features a curved handle terminating in opposing bowls at each end, and the other is a more complex back-to-back design. Both designs have been left only lightly adorned, so personal customisation is both possible and encouraged. You don't need a wedding for these spoons to be put to entertaining use... once Covid has been defeated and we are all able to get together again, these are great fun at family gatherings or for pub challenges. They are also good fun to carve just for carving's sake.

Things you will need

Tools for cutting out

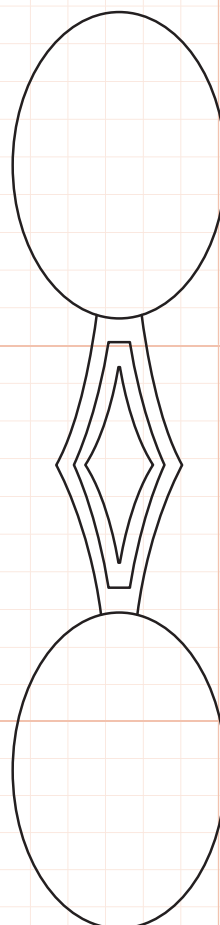
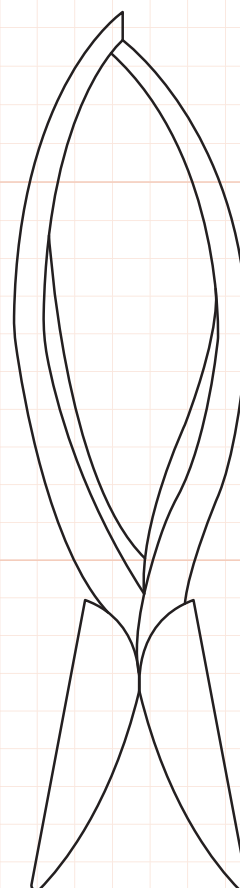
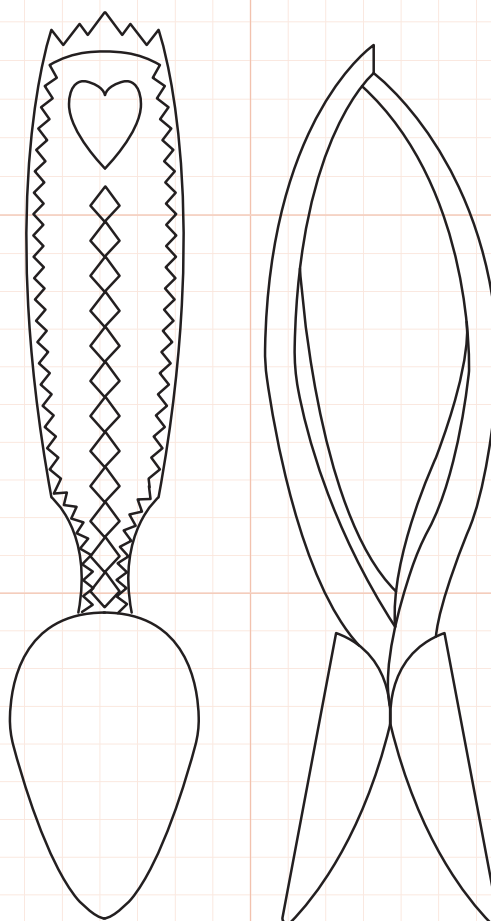
- Bandsaw
- Scrollsaw
- Jeweller's saw
- Axe and buck knife if no cutting tools available)
- 1½-in straight knife

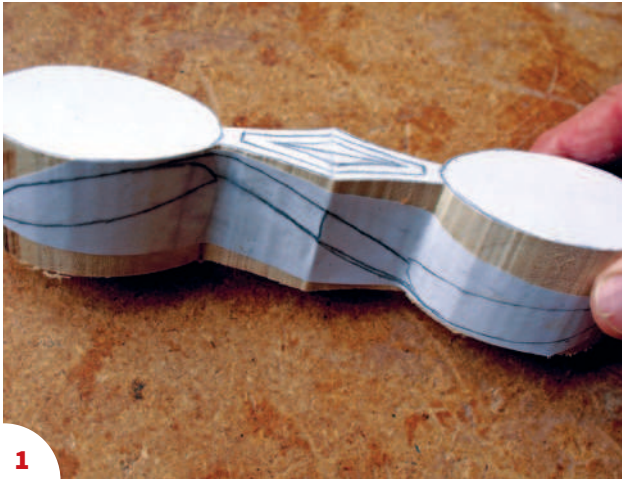
Tools for shaping

- 1in straight knife
- Small handsaw (Japanese dovetail or small gentleman's type)
- Scraper
- ½ round file
- Bent knife or No.5, 7, 9 sweep ½in gouges
- ¾in chisel or No.1 sweep

Other

- Cloth-backed abrasive (fine-150 grit)
- Variety of sandpaper (150-320 grits)
- Tung oil or salad bowl oil and brush
- Beeswax polish
- Flat needle file
- 320 grit sandpaper
- Penetrating oil
- Beeswax polish





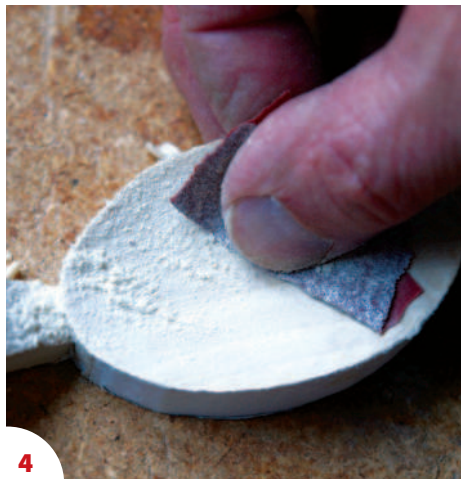
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1 Beginning with the simpler of the two designs, use a photocopy or carbon paper tracing to outline the pattern of the spoon on to your wood blank. I use a regular glue stick, but have resorted to a bit of carpenter's glue thinly spread when in a pinch. A bandsaw or scrollsaw is quickest and handiest for this operation, but it can also be cut by hand with a jeweller's saw or a knife if you'd rather go old school.

2 The bandsaw or scrollsaw is also the handiest tool for rough shaping the curve into the handle. Again, hand tools work just fine for this operation; it is just much more time consuming. Aim to keep the cuts consistent to keep both sides of the centre point as symmetrical to one another as possible. Also be aware that the junction between the handle and the bowl is a point of vulnerability, so sometimes leaving some extra material in that area is a good idea.

3 With the spoon rough shaped, begin carving the bowls. I use a hook/bent knife for this, but a selection of gouges works fine too. Remember not to put too much pressure on that handle/bowl junction by trying to take too much material out in one go. You are much better off taking three shallow cuts than one deep one. Take your time with the shaping and be conscious of that area where the grain changes direction at the bottom of the bowl. If you dig in and pull up a section, do not be tempted to chase it out or you risk cutting right through. Take very shallow cuts and if you do chip out a bit, consider just gently sanding it out later.

4 With the bowl carving complete, you can either leave the finish 'off the knife' or proceed to the next stage, where scraping and sanding can remove any bumps, lumps or chips. If you commit to sanding the bowl, take your time and travel only with the grain. Work your way through the grits from 150 to 320 and be conscious of not leaving any scratches behind as these will light up like a beacon if you oil or varnish your finished spoon.

5 Generally, the Swedes would finish their bowls with some lovely ornate kolrosing. This is simply freehand etching a design (usually floral or geometric) into the bowl by using the tip of a straight knife to incise a shallow line. In the old days these lines were packed with coal dust (hence the name kolrosing) or with coffee grounds and then the bowl was scraped to remove the excess and leave crisp, coloured lines behind. Because I frequently oil my spoons with Tung oil or salad bowl oil, I leave the lines unpacked as the oil seeps in and highlights them quite nicely without any extra effort.

6 Once the bowl has been carved, sanded and decorated, you can flip the spoon over and begin shaping the back of the bowl. I try not to cut too much off at a time and concentrate on keeping the surface as smooth and fair as possible. Also, be conscious of the joint area with the handle and leave as much material as possible while still shaping a beautiful and elegant junction. As with the inside of the bowl, you can leave it off the knife, but smoothing it and even applying some kolrosing adds another level of sophistication to the project.



7 Because you have two opposing bowls to work on, be aware of the direction they need to face before you get carried away with cutting. It's surprisingly easy to forget the alignment and make them both face the same direction... you'll still get a nice spoon, but the fun and novelty of the reverse bowls will be lost. And yes, it truly is that easy to do. This is one I did for this article that I had to make again when I lost my train of thought and found myself thoroughly off the rails.

8 Once the bowls are completed, all that remains is the detailing of the handle. I used a simple line pattern that is easily drawn on with a pencil, but you might decide to take it up a few levels with some chip carving or low relief designs. For this simple design, just use the tip of a straight knife to engrave a shallow V-shaped line. As with the bowl shaping, taking a shallow cut and expanding the V with consecutive cuts is a much safer and neater way to proceed than by crashing in with one deep cut. For a finish, you can choose to leave the spoon 'au naturel' or give it a light bath in pure Tung oil or a salad bowl-type finish to bring up the grain and colour tones.

9 For the more difficult back-to-back spoon, again begin by gluing the pattern to the side profile of your work piece. Make sure the front-face pattern can be kept in alignment with the side before you commit to cutting. Again, the cutting is probably most accurately and quickly done on a bandsaw or scrollsaw, but those with grit and perseverance can certainly do it with hand tools. Remember to select a piece of wood that is of sufficient width and thickness to accommodate both aspects of the pattern. The block I started with was 2in thick, 1½in wide and 8in long.

10 I cut out the side profile first. Getting the central area cut out cleanly and evenly was a bit of a challenge, but once done, I was able to glue the face pattern back on. With the curve cut, the pattern will no longer align as it did when the surfaces were all flat, so I cut the pattern to align both ends and then freehand pencilled in a bit near the stem.

11 Use the bandsaw/scrollsaw to rough shape the profile lines of the handle and bowls. Keep a steady hand to avoid rocking the workpiece while cutting. If you are freehand cutting, be sure to keep the blade at 90° to the face surface and be careful not to over or under cut.

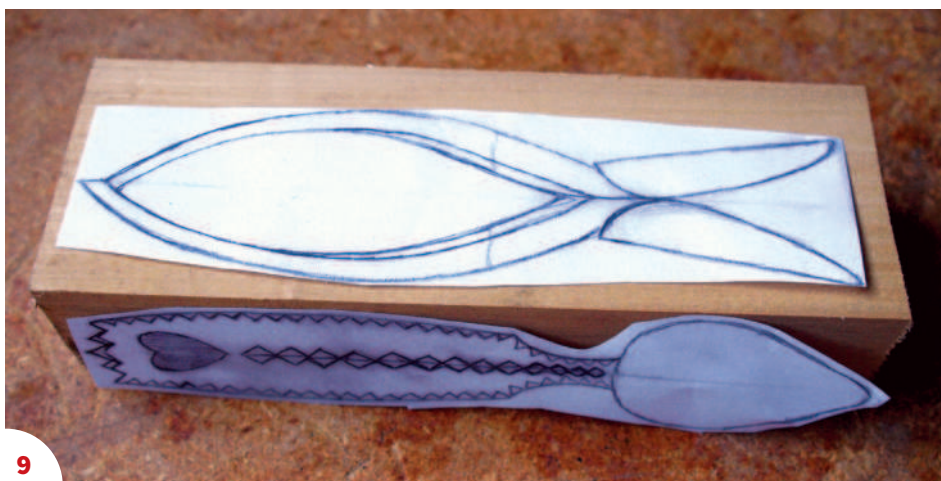
12A & 12B With all the rough shaping completed, take the opportunity to dress up the interior surfaces of the central cutout. For this task I used a rounded file and finished off with sandpaper for a good, smooth and very fair interior surface. If you are really handy with a file, you won't need to worry about sanding, but I confess I have never quite achieved that level of skill.



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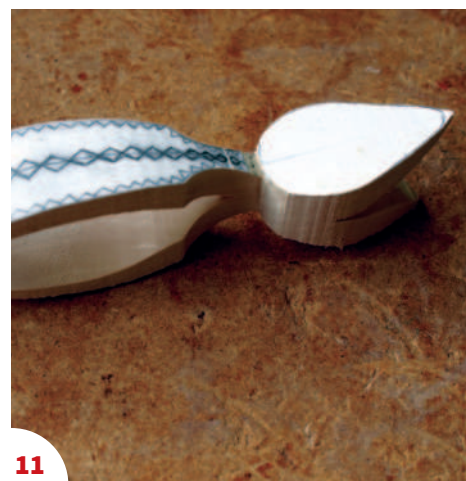
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12A



12B



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15A



15B



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17A



17B



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13 At this point you can begin shaping the bowls. I begin with the concave faces and give them a good, fair shape with a hook/bent knife or with an assortment of gouges. Be aware that once you have shaped the first bowl and turned the spoon over, you will be pushing down on finished edges, so consider placing a piece of foam or carpet scrap to cushion the work.

14 I like to use cloth-backed abrasive when I am aiming for a really smooth and fair curve in the bowl. Drawing the abrasive under the thumb allows me to concentrate the abrasive on high spots and to fair out any dips. Move positions frequently to avoid digging in and be careful to use only fine grits. If you have to cut across grain, you will leave scratches that can be hard to remove. Cut with the grain as much as possible.

15 Define the backs of the bowls by cutting in with a handsaw and then shaping with chisels. Depending how daring you are, you may want to cut deeper for more definition. If you cut through, you will likely break the spoons apart, so I suggest resisting the urge to really push things and maybe only cut about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way though from each side. With your cuts made, use chisels or No.1 gouges to clear stock away and begin shaping the bowls.

16 At the junction with the handle, carefully shape the bowl with a chisel to develop an elegant shape while maintaining as much structural integrity as possible. Take shallow and careful cuts as the grain changes direction and if there is any run-out in your piece it may be weaker here than it appears visually.

17 Take your time fairing out the tips of the bowls and aim for a nice symmetrical and smooth finish. As with the previous spoon, the bowl can be left off the knife, but looks much nicer when it has been thoroughly smoothed and faired. Make sure to sand as far into the area where the two bowls meet as possible to avoid a clunky and half-finished appearance in this important area.

18 With the bowls completed, undertake the chip carving along the handle by using a sharp, straight knife. Be careful not to press too hard and protect any finished surfaces which may come in contact with the work bench. The finished spoon may be left unfinished or can be treated with food-safe oil.

Reverse spoons are an entertaining challenge both to make and to use and I hope you will be inspired by this article to have a bash at creating your own inventive designs. ▶

Framed octopus

John Samworth offers an Introduction to the technique of high relief carving



Watching an octopus swimming is fascinating. I saw one at a local aquarium and could not help myself imagining it escaping the tank. With a picture frame representing the aquarium, could a high relief carving technique allow the octopus to project through the frame with one tentacle starting to escape on the right? I used 25mm lime for the carving and black walnut for the picture frame. Because I was working from a single image of the octopus, I had no reference for depth – this allowed my imagination to take over. An octopus has

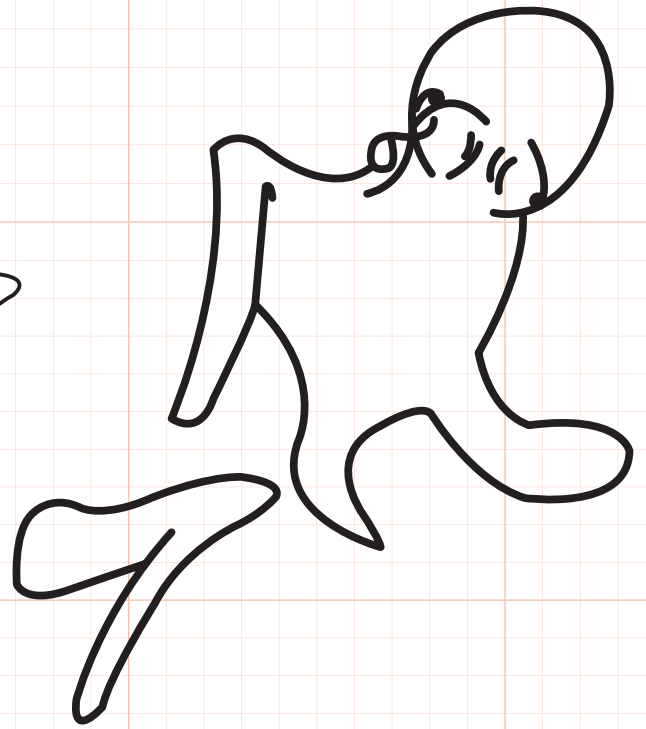
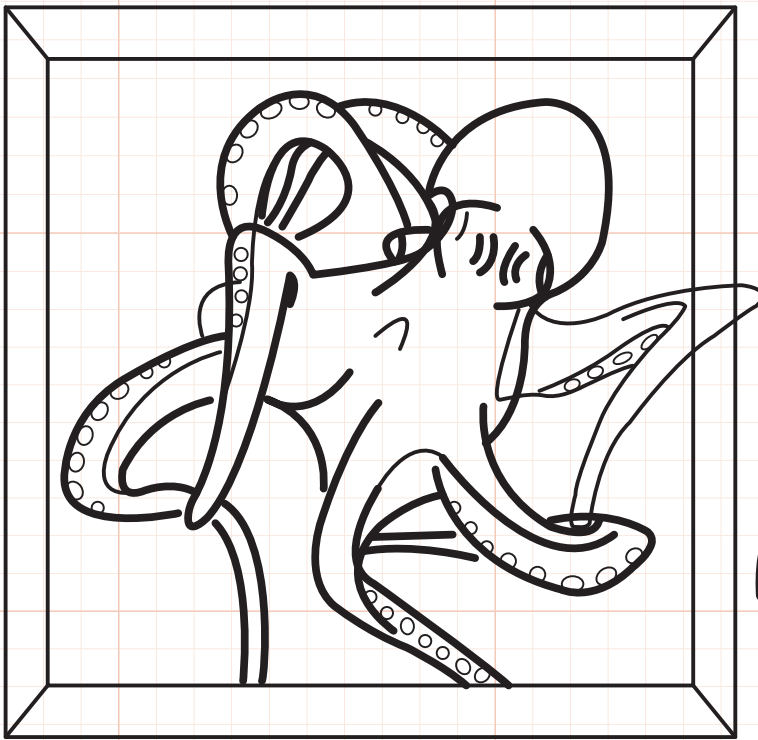
no skeleton so I could contort the tentacles into whatever position suited my picture.

1 Trace the plan on to your wood. Ensure the grain direction will match when the top is fixed to the back piece. Cut out the two top pieces leaving a little margin around the edge for adjustments. Glue the top body section over the bottom section and glue the loose leg on to a backing board (with a sacrificial paper layer); set the leg to one side. Later, this leg will be carved to wrap over the frame and the join to be hidden behind the main body.

TO TIP

I have used bold ink pen to show clearly in the photographs, but the ink will dissolve into the glue line and may be visible on the final finish. Keep your lines faint.

2 Begin by roughing out the top section of the body, giving careful thought as to which parts will be highest. I have marked where slight ridges will form to define each leg. By rounding over the sides, you will find



Things you will need

Materials

- Two pieces of lime 12.5 x 12.5cm by 25mm thick
- Walnut 25 x 25mm by 100cm long for the frame

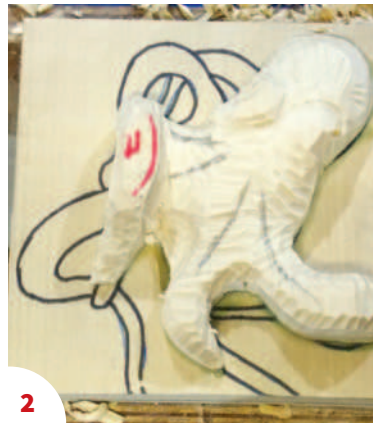
Tools

- Wood marking gauge
- Set square
- Jack plane
- Fret or coping saw
- Sharp knife
- No.11, 12mm gouge
- No.11, 6mm gouge

- Veiner No.11, 2mm gouge
- 12mm No. 3 gouge
- No.3, 6mm gouge
- No.3, 3mm gouge
- No.8, 6mm gouge
- No.2, 10mm skew gouge or hooked-skew chisel
- Parting or V-tool



1



2



3



4

the carving more comfortable and create easier access to the background.

3 Mark a depth line all the way around the background piece to the required depth. I chose a depth of 12mm. Accuracy here is important because the frame will sit on the background. Remove the waste from the background – I used a 12mm fluter. Leave a small amount of wood to be taken off with a flatter gouge to level the background in the final stages. If you prefer to mark out the design with a parting tool, that's fine. I find it quicker to work straight with a fluter, cutting away from the line, before following the line to clearer define the edges. There is no need to chase out the line exactly with vertical stab cuts. I try to avoid such cuts to prevent marking the background.

4 Where the grain is awkward, simply cut across the grain, using the top piece as a pivot. Because the top's edge was already rounded it will not be damaged this way.

5 Some of the background is entangled in the tentacles and removing it is extremely difficult. Leave these areas for now, as once the tentacles have been roughed out and lowered there will be better access to these areas and less wood to remove.

6 With the extra depth available using the high relief technique, it became apparent that the tentacles require heavy undercutting and in places cutting right through to create an arch. Here one tentacle will arch clear of another below, indicated by the pencil.

7 Rotate the carving in the vice to ease access. Using a 6mm fluter to remove the waste, work carefully from both sides and meet in the middle. If you work from only one side, and do not cut in line, the hole will break out into an area which should be kept.

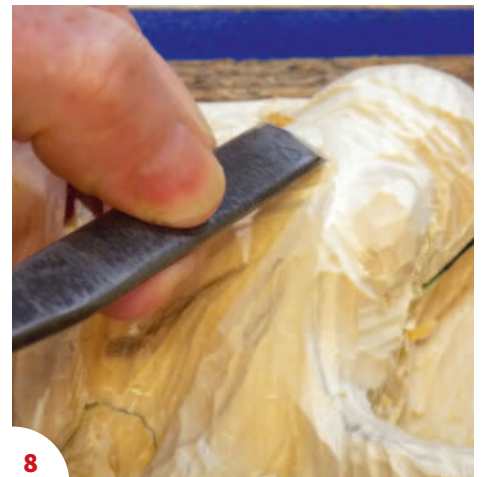
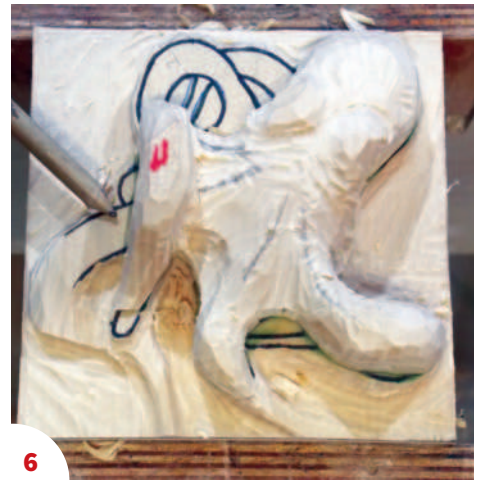
8 Using an inverted flat sweep gouge, begin to form the eye mounds. On the octopus the eyes are on the lower portion of the head, hemispherical and looking outwards in opposite directions. Work both eyes together; what you carve on one repeat on the opposite eye before moving on. This will help keep both the eyes symmetrical.

9 The bottom, right tentacle will also require heavy undercutting. Once done, begin to tidy up the work.

10 Continue tidying up the work, clean the background, define the outline of the tentacles and enlarge the undercut areas where one tentacle arches over another. I found the hooked skew chisel very useful; the narrow shaft and skewed edge are good for accessing corners and slicing awkward grain. Pay special attention to the vicinity around the eyes. Views always focus on eyes; this area must be crisp and clean.

11 Where tentacles are deep in the background, carve them as close to the background (only 1-2mm high) as appropriate. This allows better access to level the background. Because access is still poor, use a flat or shallow sweep chisel to scrape the background level.

12 Now the shape is clear and well defined, start to add detail. No need to over-do this. Choose one or two tentacles on to which to carve some suction cups, using a veiner or parting tool to create a small ridge a little wider than a suction cup. Next, use a No.8 or 9, 6mm gouge to mark out the shape of a cup vertically, then cut in at a slight angle to meet the cut and lift out the waste.





13



14

13 Repeat the process in both directions as you proceed along the ridge, typically three to five cups in a row, strategically placed for ease of access and in a prominent location for maximum visual impact. Cut too many and the carving risks becoming cluttered and fussy, access to carve the detail becomes highly restricted and the quality of the carving will suffer.

14 Eyes are simply a small slit cut with a 2mm veiner about 6mm in length. The centre of the slit is hollowed out to cast a deeper shadow. The eyes themselves face outwards for panoramic vision, not forward as with typical predator vision.



15



16

15 To carve the loose tentacle, glue the small piece to a backing board with a sacrificial piece of paper. Mark the grain direction for ease, mark the high points and the low points. The top left edge will be carved to disappear behind the octopus' main body, while the bottom left edge will nudge up to another tentacle and the high edge on the right will overlap the picture frame.

16 Carve the edges down to about 2mm in thickness and round over the right edge. This tentacle folds forward on itself and reveals more suction cups. Repeat the steps for sections 12 and 13 to carve a few suction cups. Note the clear-cut edge created as the tentacle folds back on itself.



17



18

17 Gently prise the carving from the backing and use a knife to tidy up the edges and sand off the glue and paper backing. If knife grips are unfamiliar to you, refer to *Woodcarving* 173-175 & 178 for techniques and tips.

18 Once the top has been carved, enlarge the undercut to hide the joint where the tentacle runs behind the body. Once located satisfactorily, mark the back of the tentacle where it meets the edge of the background.

19 Because the frame will overlap the edge of the background, measure this distance with your chosen frame, for mine it is 5mm. Draw a second line 5mm (for my frame) inside this line and sketch out the profile of the picture frame. Remove this waste wood—I used a knife. Keep assembling the carving with the frame to ensure a snug fit.



19



20

20 The frame is made from black walnut, which contrasts well and frames the lime wood. The frame is glued on to the carving before the loose tentacle is glued into place. The finish is Tung oil, left to cure for three days before applying a top coat of bees' wax. Hang on the wall and enjoy. ▶

Carving on the move

Peter Benson finds time to get in a little knife carving with this charming mouse

By the time you read this, hopefully we will all be getting out and about again post-lockdowns.

Everyone I know has done everything possible to obey the rules about travel and isolation during the pandemic and, as a result, has avoided any serious consequences. Unfortunately, with no clubs or classes, we haven't been able to enjoy the company of others while following what is a very enjoyable pastime. At the time of writing there was still a bit of the summer to come, and it looks like we all may get a chance to sit out in the garden, or maybe on the beach to enjoy, hopefully, some welcome sunshine. By the time of reading, hopefully spring won't be too far away.

Social activities may still take a while to get back to normal, but we should be able to welcome friends and families to our homes and gardens. This could be an opportunity to sit down and do a bit of knife carving, perhaps even with the addition of a selection of small tools.

I have a 'travel' selection of tools that will easily fit into a pocket and can be used anywhere I decide I would like to carve. It is simply a small, leather tool roll with six mini gouges and a folding knife. If you only intend to use these in the garden you can use whatever knife you prefer, but should you wish to carry the tools in public places you would be wise to only carry a folding knife as all fixed-blade knives are illegal unless you have a very good reason. You may have difficulty explaining should you encounter a less than sympathetic policeman!

I have been fortunate to have Ashley Iles produce a range of mini carving tools with my name on them and, from this range, I have selected the six that I use the most and put them into a small leather roll as a travel kit. This will fit comfortably into a pocket and, together with a folding Ross Oar carving knife, I am all set to carve anywhere. There is a wide range of folding knives that would be suitable for carving and a quick look on the internet will get what you want, I am sure.

Obviously, you can use whatever tools you have available and that meet your needs. The ones I use are listed here but may change depending on what I am actually intending to carve.

Things you will need

Tools

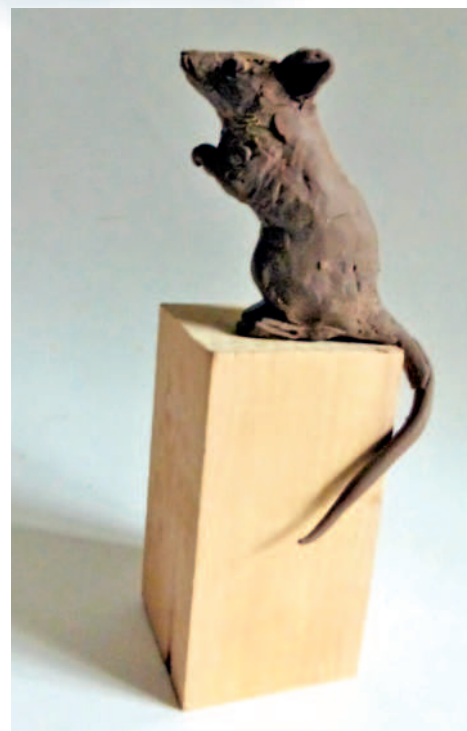
- No.4, 3mm fishtail
- No.20, 4.5mm gouge
- No.39, 1mm V-tool
- No.18, 1.5mm gouge
- No.5, 7.5mm fishtail
- No.3, 9mm fishtail



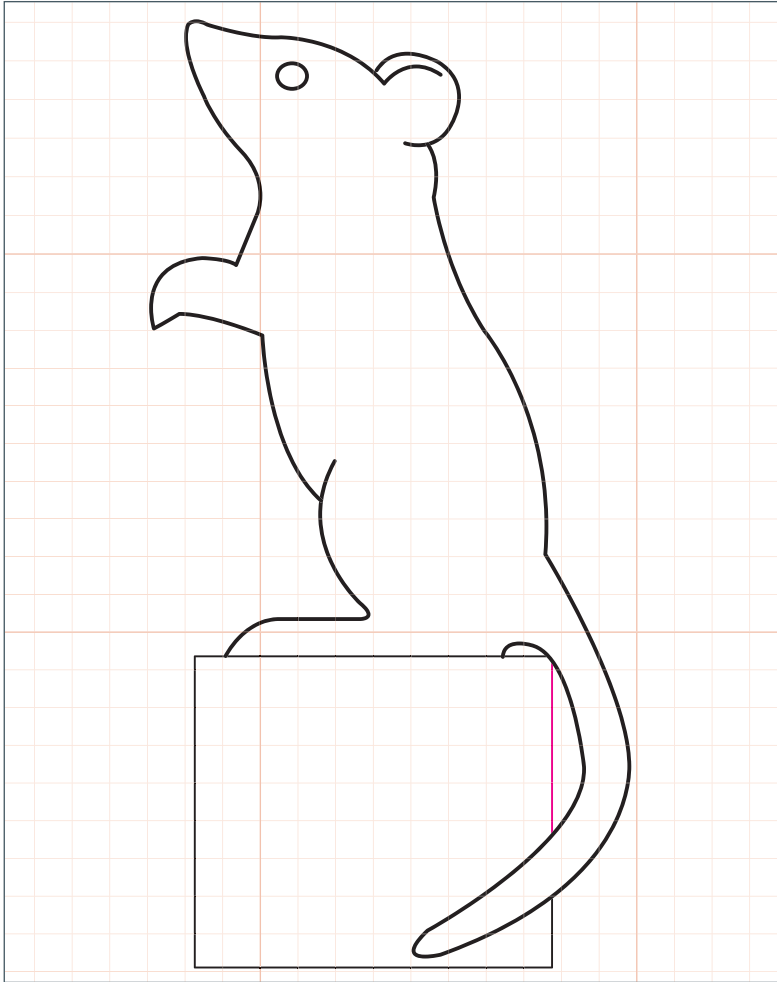
The project

What follows is a small project that you might like to try and can be completed with the tools mentioned. It is a little field mouse around 3in high, which is about life size, and I have used a piece of butternut that I came across during a recent search in my wood store. As I am not an expert artist and cannot accurately draw what I want to carve – I usually make a maquette from clay, plasticine or softwood in order to get my design right. This doesn't have to be absolutely accurate as it can be adjusted as you progress with the carving. All that is needed is an approximate shape of what you envisage, in order to produce a pattern.

As I have drawn a pattern for you, a maquette is not really necessary for this piece, although it would give you a clearer idea of the shape you want to achieve. You will probably benefit from getting some pictures from books or the internet to help with the anatomy of the mouse and your understanding of how it moves.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER BENSON

**1****2****3**

1 Once you have drawn the pattern on to the wood you can cut it out with a bandsaw or coping saw. Just be careful if you intend to turn the head as you will need to allow extra wood for the ears (they need to be at right angles to the centreline, wherever that ends up). If you don't do this the head will end up with a twist on it and will never look right.

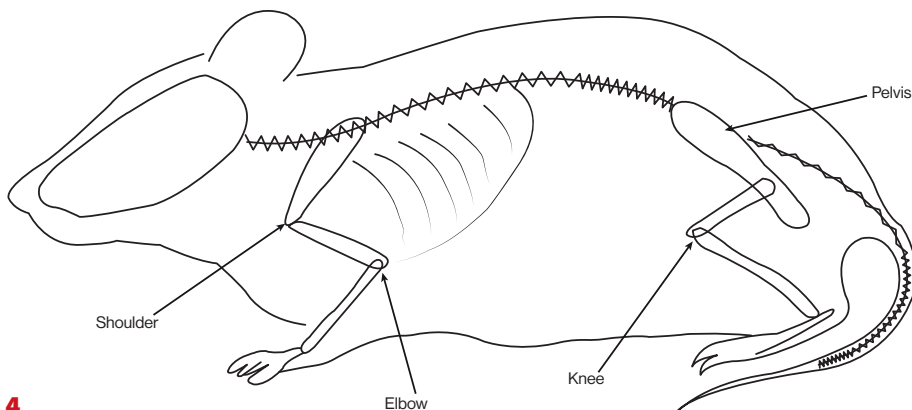
Roughing out the shape

2 Now you can get down to the carving process, either with gouges or, as in my case, a knife. All we need to do at this stage is remove all the 'squareness' that has come from the bandsaw and set the head at the chosen angle, making sure that the ears can be carved in the right places. The whole piece will be quite a lot fatter than the finished mouse, but this will be taken care of as we progress.

3 You should now have a shape that is recognisable as a mouse – any obvious errors can be sorted out at this point before you get down to the actual detail of the subject.

Refining the basic form

4 Before you can get down to the correct anatomy of the mouse it can be helpful to get an indication of the skeleton of the animal. Even a sketch as shown can give an indication of the correct proportions of the four limbs.

**4**

5 Using the sketch of the skeleton, draw lines on the block to show each limb and so you can check that the legs on the left-hand side correspond exactly with those on the right. You can either measure these or make a small wire pattern of each leg on the left and then use it to draw out the right ones.

6A, 6B, 6C You should be using some photographic representation of the subject in order to get the detail correct. Good pictures of the mouse, from different angles and positions, will be fine but don't use drawings as these may well be inaccurate.

7 Start to refine the carving, gradually slimming it down to the correct shape. You may want to redraw the leg lines as you go along as they will almost certainly get carved off in the slimming process.

Adding the finer detail

8 Once you are happy with the shape you can start to detail the head, tail and feet. One word of warning here – mice have only four toes visible on the front feet. The fifth is only very small, like a dog's dew claw, and can be ignored on a small carving. When carving the tail, remember that it has vertebrae all along its length so any bending or curving must be smooth and gradual. The eyes are round and bulging, so if you don't want to carve them you could use small, round beads, but watch the size.

Finishing

9 While deciding what to do about the feet and overall texturing, bear in mind that you can only do what is possible with the tools you have. I have textured this mouse with a 1mm V-tool, but if you haven't anything like this, I would leave the mouse smooth and only suggest the toes with the smallest tool you have. Depending on how smooth the finish is from the tools, you may like to leave it as it is or you can sand it if you want a finer finish. Although I have textured the mouse, I have sanded the base to give a contrast. All that remains now is to paint the eyes if you wish and give the whole piece a couple of coats of finishing oil and, when dry, polish with a neutral wax polish.

It's all in the eyes

10 There are several ways you can deal with the eyes on a carving like this. You can leave them as they are, or insert glass eyes or small beads (this becomes difficult if the eyes are not perfectly round, in which case you can paint them to get a realistic effect). With the mouse, the eyes are round so you have a choice. They are very nearly black all over so are easy to paint. One method is to add a drop of black gloss paint from a pin and allow to spread over the surface. Don't add with a brush or touch the drop on the eye or you won't get a smooth, shiny effect. Allow to dry then clean any paint that might have spread. Alternatively, you can use acrylic paint and, when dry, add a small drop of clear nail varnish and allow it to spread over the surface. Once you are happy with this, you are done. ▶



5

6A



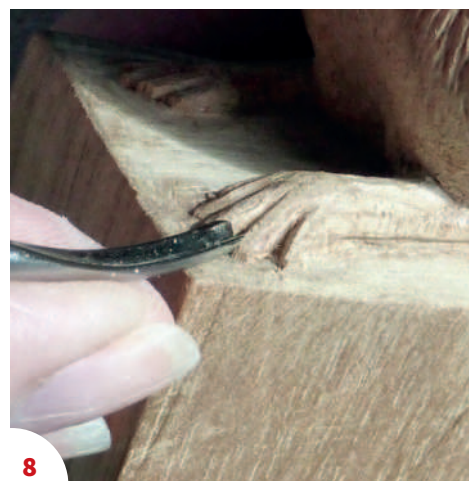
6B



6C



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10

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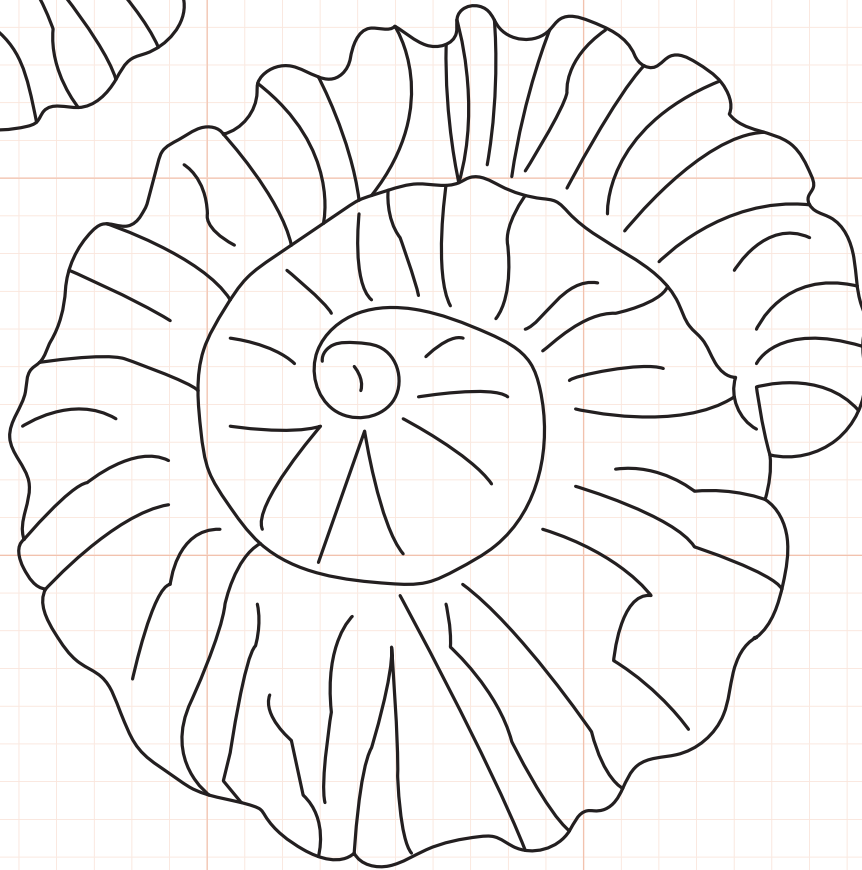
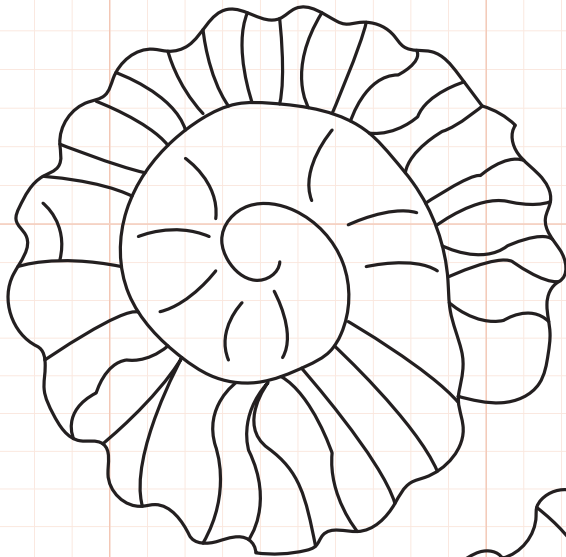
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Ammonite in boxwood

Zoë Gertner takes inspiration from
a fascinating extinct sea creature

Fascinating creatures once known as 'snakestones', fossilised ammonites are easily identified due to their resemblance to a curled-round snake or serpent. Living in shallow water 66 million years ago, these now-extinct marine animals were able to bob up and down in the water by means of the air chambers or septa within their coiled external shells, much in the manner of a submarine, while seeking food, plankton and vegetation, on the sea bed. They range from smaller than 20mm to much greater – in Germany in 1895 the largest recorded had a diameter of 1.95m. So an ammonite is ideal for carving any size you wish, the techniques being the same using appropriate sized tools. And they make a good pendant, brooch or perhaps a garden sculpture, pictured below.





Things you will need

Tools

- No.5, ½in & ¼in gouge
- No.39, ⅛in V-tool
- No.9, 10 or 11, ⅛in gouge
- No.3, ⅜in, 1¼in & ⅛in gouge
- No.11, ⅛in & ⅛in gouges
- Small fine-toothed saw
- Wax polish and redundant toothbrush and lint-free cloth

Preparation

1 The nice thing about this ammonite carving is that – unusually – since the carving is mainly on end grain, you can use a wood of any species, close or coarse-grained and of any size from a cross section of a small garden shrub branch or a large tree trunk. Preferring a smaller carving, I used a short length of a branch of boxwood about 3in long with a diameter of approximately 1in, though in the past, for my larger versions I have used ash, cedar, oak and sycamore, to name a few alternatives. As mine is a small carving, to hold it safely and securely while working, I wrapped it longways with a small piece of non-slip mat and fastened it in my woodcarver's chops – a larger one can be held in a normal woodworking vice or even by its own weight resting on a non-slip mat on your workbench.

Starting the carving

2 Using the No.5, ½in gouge, round over the edge around the circumference, lifting your gouge hand as you cut. Start by making a set of short, angled cuts across the outer edge of the wood, cutting towards its centre from all round. Having completed the circuit, make a second set of cuts towards the centre starting from a little way back from the first, overlap these and by lifting your gouge hand as you approach the edge you can round it over. Be sure to keep the corners of the gouge above the surface of the wood as you lift your hand. The timing of this is a matter of practice – if you lift too soon your gouge will dig in, if too late, it will shoot off the end as if sharpening a pencil and the edge will not be rounded over.



3 Continue with the No.5, ½in gouge and make a hollow in the middle of the end of your wood. Working towards the centre with shallow cuts from all round, begin by lowering your gouge hand as you cut so that you scoop shallow chips upwards and away, i.e. with the grain, to start hollowing the middle. If your wood is brittle or very dry it is advisable to wear eye protection against the flying chips.

4 Without digging the corner of the gouge into the surface, tilt the gouge and, in a slightly upwards circular path, pare the outer edge of the hollow with shallow cuts. Deepen the hollow as before and repeat, paring its outer edge until none of the original sawn surface remains and it marries up with the previously rounded surface of the outer edge of the wood.

5 Draw the spiral, including the opening edge of its orifice.

6 So that you are cutting with the grain, start at the centre and cut along the line of the spiral using the ½in V-tool. On reaching the orifice stop cutting outwards – if you continue downwards and over its edge you may split it. Instead, finish the line by cutting it from the opposite direction, from the outer edge, to meet up with the previously cut V-groove where you stopped, at the start of the inner edge of the orifice.

7 Using the No.5, ¼in gouge as described in Step 4, tilt its corner and cut along one side of the V-channel along the length of the spiral and remove its edge.

8 Make the corresponding cuts along the opposite side of the V-groove and the angle of the V-cut will widen. Repeat the series of V-cuts deeper within that angle followed by widening as described before until the spiral becomes almost rounded along its length.

9 With the No.3 or 5, ¼in gouge inverted, tilt it against the spiral and push the tool forwards, at the same time twisting the cutting edge over the surface from each side and towards the top of the spiral, thus rounding it overall, like a sausage, along its length.

Starting the texturing

10 With the V-tool, mark the opening edge of the orifice and then use the No.3, ¼in gouge, cutting upwards, to reduce the side of the incoming spiral so it lies rounded and slightly lower than the side of the orifice. Draw a centreline along the length of the spiral and mark each of the chambers or septa across its width, each line being directed towards the end of the spiral in the middle. Using the No.10 or 11, ½in gouge and starting from the outer edge of the wood, cut grooves upwards and over the convexity as far as the centreline only. Continue thus along the length of the spiral. As the width of the spiral decreases you may find a narrower deep gouge or a small V-tool with a hook useful.

11 Repeat cutting the grooves along the inner side of the spiral, cutting upwards and with the grain over the convexity towards the centreline so that both inner and outer grooves join along the spiral at its highest convexity.



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Starting the other side

12 Using a fine-toothed saw and starting the cut at approximately the same distance below the start of the grooves from where you initially made them, cut round the circumference of your wood to a depth of approximately a third of its diameter. As a depth guide, use a strip of masking tape along the saw blade so that you do not inadvertently detach the carving.

13 With the No.3, 1/2in gouge held with its bevel beneath, round over the uppermost sawn edge into the saw cut. As you cut, remember to lift your gouge hand as you round it under.

14 Invert the gouge and tidy the surface as far underneath the circumference as you can access, smoothing and rounding the underside of the ammonite.

15 With the No.11, 1/8 gouge, extend each of the existing grooves underneath and into the saw cut as far as possible so the grooves are continuous over the rounded underside of the ammonite.

16 Resuming the saw cut with the fine-toothed saw from all round, detach the ammonite completely from the length of your wood.

17 Fasten the ammonite securely and, repeating Steps 3-9, hollow its newly sawn surface using the No.5, 1/4in gouge, and form the spiral corresponding with that on the other side. It may be helpful to wrap the carving in a small piece of non-slip mat or a damp cloth and rest it within a small sandbag while gripping it between the jaws of the vice or chops.

18 Line up the outer edge grooves, marking them so they continue over and along the spiral this side, and draw the centreline along its length. Continue along the length of the spiral, cutting them towards the centreline from each side with the No.11, 1/8 gouge as described.

19 At the outer edge use short cuts, taking care to cut away from the convexity in the correct direction to avoid splitting the wood.

The orifice

20 Smooth the surface of the orifice using the No.3, 1/4in or 1/2in gouge and draw its inner edge. Then using the No.39, 1/16in V-tool, cut around it, starting from the top of the incoming spiral from each side and joining the two cuts at the middle of the inside edge of the orifice.

21 With the No.3, 1/4in gouge, cut across the bottom of the orifice, inverting the gouge so it corresponds with the curve of the lower-lying incoming spiral. Then, using the No.3, 1/2in gouge inside the orifice, hollow the middle area within the V-cuts. Repeat the process if you wish to deepen it further.

Finishing

Remove all pencil marks with an eraser and check for any sharp splinters or errant cuts remaining between the coils of the spiral. Although there are many ways to finish a carving, I applied wax polish to my boxwood ammonite using a redundant toothbrush, then buffed it to a shine with a lint-free duster. ▶



15



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21

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The background of the entire advertisement is a light-colored wood grain. On the right side, there is a vertical, curved wooden element featuring intricate carvings of flowers and swirling vines. The text is overlaid on the left side of this image.

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Carve your own Grinling Gibbons portrait

Graham Thompson invites you to join an exclusive club

I got into portraiture some years ago and grew to enjoy the process of likeness creation, in-the-round and low (bas) relief. I suppose it was inevitable that Grinling Gibbons would spring to mind as a natural and highly relevant subject. Surely someone has completed such a work. I searched for any carved portraits of Gibbons and was astonished to receive just a single match. I even contacted David Esterly, a renowned world authority on Gibbons and his work; he knew of none other than the tiny medallion in the Modena panel – confirming my findings.

Even after 300 years, Gibbons' reputation endures as the most accomplished of all woodcarvers. Born in Rotterdam, from English and Dutch stock, he arrived in England as an unknown carver of wood. He brought with him not just his skills but also – and probably more importantly – his preferred medium... linden, or limewood as we came to know it. Using lime, Gibbons was able to create decorative carving with unheard-of lightness and delicacy and was soon rewarded with royal patronage. Over time, Gibbons was destined to build an unrivalled reputation for lighter-than-air swags and overmantles of foliage, game and seafood. Strangely, though, he only managed one solitary self-portrait: a tiny medallion, hanging from a chain near the centre of what became known as the Modena Panel. We will never know for sure, but could it be that he was unsure of his talent



Grinling Gibbons' portrait



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRAHAM THOMPSON, WIKICOMMONS

for portraiture? Certainly his few other (all non-wood) portraits were not particularly well received by contemporary critics.

So fellow carvers, here is your opportunity to be the first in three centuries (well actually second – I did one some years ago) to carve an image of the great man.

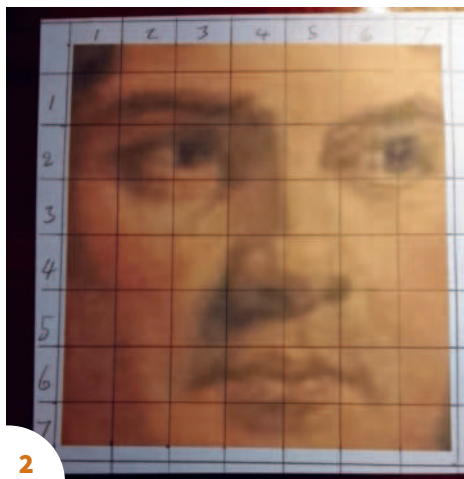
The project

This time I will talk you through and demonstrate the various stages for you to carve your own, low relief, portrait. I suggest that we make the process as simple as possible by using a zoomed-in picture of Gibbons' face thereby reducing the piece to eliminate the hair (wig) and any distracting background (see Churchill image). So we can simply



Churchill relief carving

concentrate our efforts on the facial features, I also suggest that we work towards a simple compression technique. Meaning that the face is effectively 'squashed' in a relatively uniform manner and the whole image is revealed in no more than the top 15mm of material.

**1****2****Before you start**

Take some time to carefully look at the face, using other images also, and make some notes such as:

Overall: head turned slightly to the left

Face: roundish, well-fed, prosperous

Eyes: bright, widish, looking further left

Eye brows: left slightly higher, medium set

Lips: fullish, deep filtrum

Nose: wide nostrils, straight with inward bridge, septum narrows at right angle with filtrum

Also: see if you can spot the few places where eventually (but not yet!) you will have to make a vertical stabbing cut – one of them is the outer side of the left nostril.

Material & tools

Naturally, if you would like to be true to Gibbons' memory, then it has to be lime, but any lightish hardwood will do. I particularly like sycamore, it's harder than lime but tends to keep its whiteness better. The light colour helps to show the essential shadows that you will create, without which there is no image. Pick a piece that is at least 25mm thick and any size which at least matches your desired ambition (my piece started at approximately 180mm x 200mm) which allowed for some border trimming to create a pleasing 'framing'. A small number of fairly shallow and narrow gouges (plus a V) will complete most of the features. If your tools are sharp, you probably won't even need a mallet. A selection of scrapers and small files would be my choice to achieve a polished but not overworked appearance.

**3****4****To work**

1 & 2 Select the (public domain) image from Wiki Commons and adjust the print size to match your material. Print the image and mark out a conveniently sized grid on the paper. Then mark the same grid on the wood and number the rows and columns on both media. Mark the main high points with initials, e.g. N for nose tip, TL for top lip, CB cheekbone etc. High points are simply a guide to areas where surrounding material will need to be removed. You can do the following actions in any order but I have recorded them here in the sequence that I tend to follow. As you work you will notice that even at this early stage each area is slightly different to the next as the face is turned to one side. So for example, the side slope of the nose is steeper on his left than right – see also the difference in nostrils.

3 & 4 Scoop out (maximum 5mm) the eye orbits and each side of nose, always remembering to cut away diagonally from the line (nose eyebrow etc.). Be sure to leave the column and row headings intact, they will be needed now and later. It's time to redraw the grid using a ruler and fine point pencil. It takes a little practice to draw a straight line on an undulating surface, but I find that an accurate grid repays you with perfect positioning. You may find yourself thinking, can the outer corner of the left eye really be located so far over to the right? But check again and it's probably correct – either way, you learn something every time. Start to give the lower end of the nose some definition by removing a shallow wedge between nostrils and upper lip. Redraw the grid.



5 Noting the high point (centre of upper lip), carve to left and right creating a basic mouth shape. Then draw the mouth line and cut with a V-tool to complete a vague but recognisable human face.

Hopefully you will feel rewarded for just a small amount of effort and will be keen to carry on with a repeating process of refinement. Return to the eyes and add some form to the overall shapes. Check and mark the low points, which are inevitably the inner and outer edges of the eyeballs – with lids covering. Carve out two (per eye) depressions while avoiding undercutting the nose. It's from this point that you should now be able to judge how much material to remove. If in doubt, go less rather than more and leave it for the next time round – or even the one after that.

Tips

- Keep looking in the mirror to remind yourself how things work.
- Use your own image as a basis for comparison with the subject.
- Most parts of the face are mobile so keep the subject's pose and expression constantly in mind as you carve.
- The nose is half in and half on the face.
- Nature doesn't do straight lines.



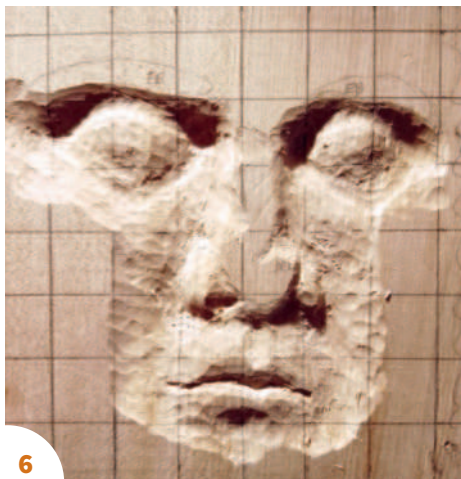
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Refining the features

6 – 8 Returning to the nose, add some depth to the sides and start to form the slope from tip to bridge and also the tip to nostril. Inevitably, you will now have to consider how the nose fits in and on the face. Involving the nose to cheek angle which, as we said before, differs from left to right.

Before returning to the mouth area, consider the chin and how it merges with the bottom lip and the cheeks.

Using carefully made measurements, draw in the eye openings then carve the opening followed by the pupil and iris.



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A few dos and don'ts

- Always cut away from the waste side of a line.
- No vertical cuts until you are entirely happy with the line.
- With low relief less is more, i.e. just enough is plenty.
- Leave undercutting till last.
- Finishing touches – look for tiny features that may not be evident in the image they can help to really make the piece more 'real'.



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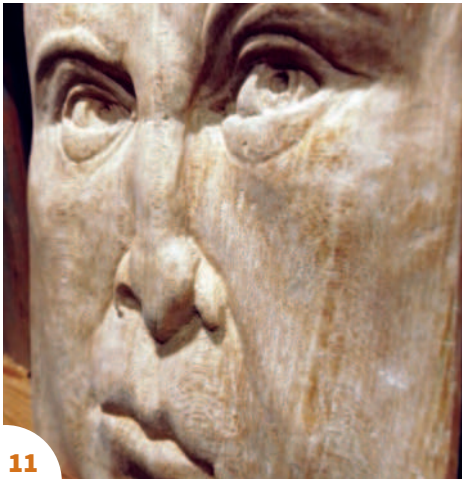


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9-12 To complete the work, repeat the sequence as many times as is necessary. Hopefully you will know when to stop tinkering, but I suggest that once you achieve a result, leave it for a while and return with a refreshed view. These final stages will probably absorb as much as 90% of the overall timescale and you may have to re-carve most of the details. This, though, is the beauty of relief carving, as long as you avoid vertical cuts you can re-do most things as many times as you like. I had trouble with the eyes and wasn't happy until the fourth attempt, which you can see here (imagine what the first three attempts looked like!). Hopefully you can obtain a better printed image than I could and will be able to take more accurate measurements and locations.



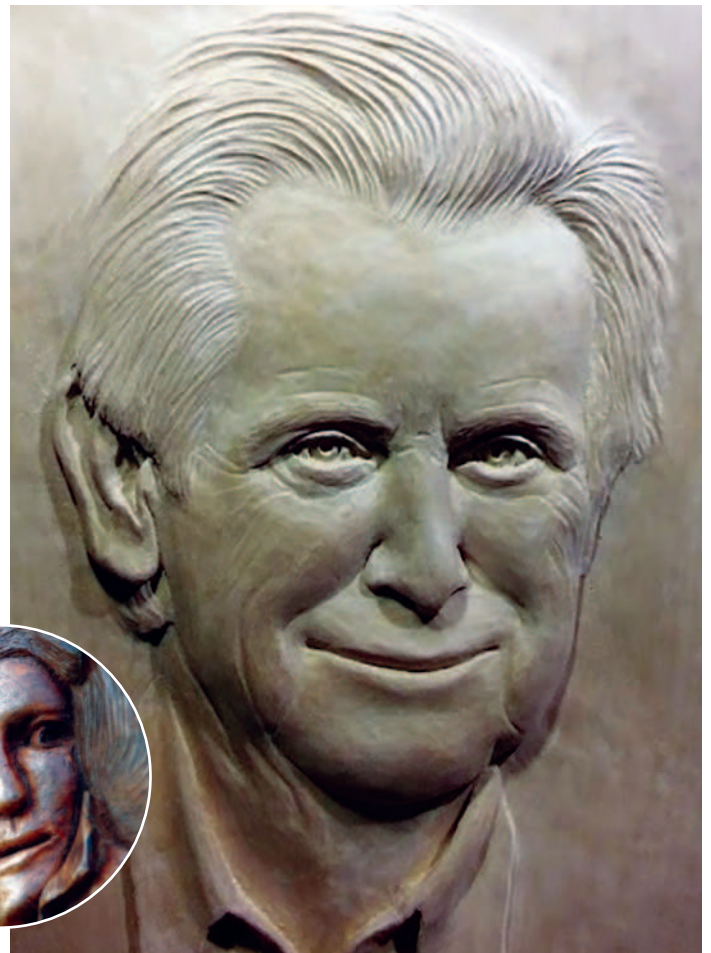
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A lesson re-learned

The process as described here, i.e. the grid system, is based on the presumption that you, like me, are not gifted at freehand portraiture, especially from a small number of 400-year-old paintings and drawings. The main reason I had to do so much rework was that I failed to act on my own advice, which is to always get the best possible image of your subject. As with this photograph of my friend, it should be sharp and undistorted, so when you come to mark the key points such as the inner and outer corners of the eyes your marks will be millimetre accurate on the wood. Hopefully you will also notice how much the face varies from side to side. And how much the angle of view affects the left/right variables. Compare the eyes, the nose, the mouth – in fact every feature, to see how perspective affects everything. ▶



Left and right: Photo and finished carving of a friend

Inset: Grace Darling carving – eye detail, from a side perspective

Dinosaur biscuit block

Kev Alviti miniaturises his son's favourite creatures for a sweet project



PHOTOGRAPH BY KEV ALVITI

Dinosaurs currently feature quite heavily in my life, I guess that's what comes of having a five-year-old and I have a feeling they're going to feature for a while yet. We've never pushed any type of toy or theme on to our children, but let's face it – dinosaurs are cool.

My little lad, Alistair, has lately been spending a lot of time in the workshop with me, enjoying learning to carve simple little dino designs. He draws them out in wood then spends his time carving them out using a V-tool and carving mallet, stood atop a beer crate, while I carve or make some of my projects alongside him. I have to pinch myself that he is happy to spend

so much time doing this and he concentrates so hard – normally the strength in his little hands gives out before his concentration will.

He made me a list of his six 'most favourite dinosaurs' the other day, each with a little drawing that he wanted to carve. I thought it would be fun and interesting to take this list and carve it into something useful for him. I hoped to make something he'd love and enjoy, but that would also become a keepsake.

All my children love baking and we often spend hours together kneading bread dough, mixing up cakes or making biscuits. This hobby that we all share presents some good opportunities when it comes to handmade and carved items. I thought a block with the different imprints of dinosaurs might be a fun

project to carve, but even more fun to use.

I could have made this project as double-sided flat pieces of wood, as having it as a block does mean it is slightly harder to store in a drawer or cupboard. But as a block it also means that it's a complete set that is unlikely to get lost over time and hopefully will mean he can hold on to it and pass it on to his own children one day.

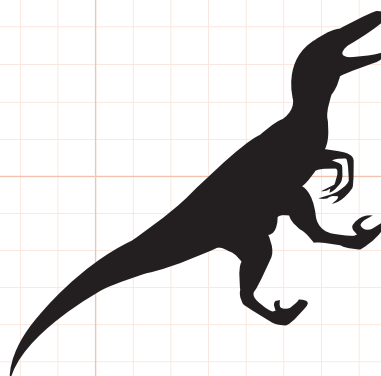
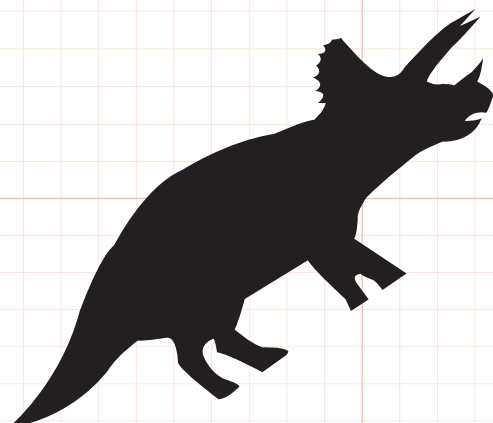
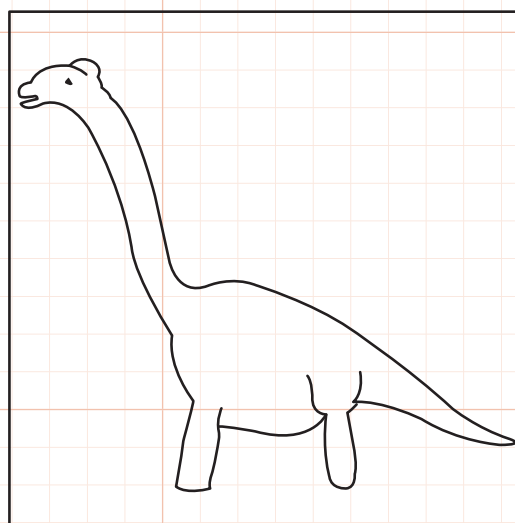
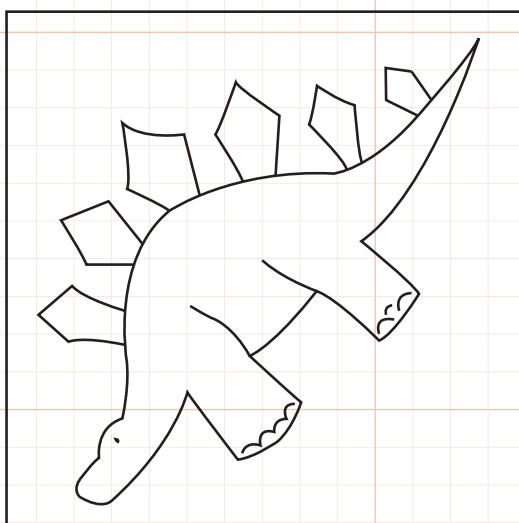
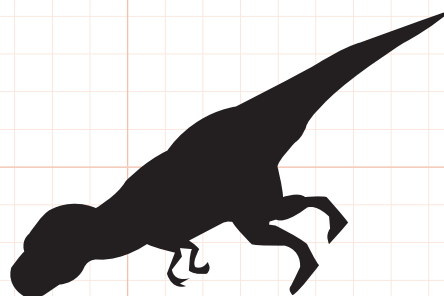
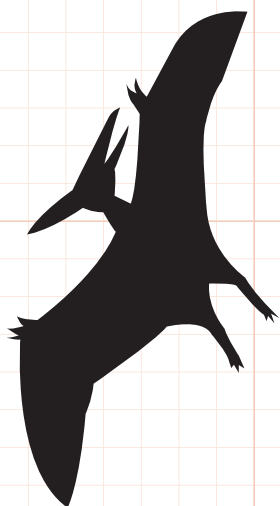
I used some lime for this project as I had a piece the right thickness. A harder wood like beech might have been better. As it's not something that will get used all the time, I'm fairly sure it will last for many, many years. A piece that is knot-free is essential and as there will be some end-grain carving, make sure it has no splits or shakes in it. If using a different wood also make sure it is food safe.

Things you will need**Materials**

- 75mm x 75mm block of food-safe hardwood (I used lime but beech would also be ideal)

Tools

- Mitre saw (optional)
- Bandsaw (optional)
- Sander
- Bench vice
- Carving mallet
- No.1, 3mm gouge
- 35mm allongee chisel
- No.3, 3mm gouge,
- No.3, 6mm fantail gouge
- No.6, 3.5mm gouge
- No.6, 9mm bent gouge
- No.6, 9mm gouge
- No.6, 13mm gouge
- No.8, 3mm gouge
- 13mm V-tool, 60°
- Rotary tool with 80 grit circular bit
- Stiff brush for applying wax



1 Select your timber for the project and dimension to size. I used my mitre saw to cross cut the timber, but due to the size of the piece felt more comfortable (and safer) using the bandsaw when it came to ripping it down. Try to make sure it is as square as possible, a 75mm x 75mm cube.

2 Once you have made sure the block is square, sand all sides smooth. I sanded up to 180 grit using a random orbital sander. I would have been better off with a bench-mounted sander – if my workshop was bigger it would certainly be an upgrade I'd consider.

3 Mark a border around the outside of the cube on every face. Mark it about 6mm in but it doesn't need to be too precise, so just use your finger as a gauge with the pencil.

4 Having a good way to secure your workpiece is essential. I often make jigs and clamps but found that if I used my bench vice it clamped the work nice and tight across the whole face. Make sure it can't move, otherwise when you come to reduce the middle it might cause problems.

5 Each face needs to have the middle between the borders reduced by 3mm. I did this with a palm router armed with a 6mm straight cutting bit. I cut it out freehand, just steadily going up to the line, but a simple jig could be made to prevent any mistakes, utilising a template and a collar for the router base.

6 Don't worry about cutting close up to the lines as we'll tidy it up with a chisel in the next steps. The router is just there to remove the bulk of the waste. This can also be done simply with a mallet and chisel, taking care near the edges.

7 Come up to the lines with a chisel and take out any waste. Be careful here as it's very easy to damage the side of the block if you try to remove too much at once. Again, experience has taught me this, so you don't have to learn the hard way. I used a very sharp, wide chisel to also tidy the bottom and remove any marks left by the router.

8 Add some detail around the edges. When I planned these, I had thought that the dough would be rolled out across the top, but it didn't work so well in a test and seems to work much better as a stamp (especially for children to use) – this will give you an edge to cut to. Using a gouge like a No.6, 6mm, make scalloped cuts all around the outside, just joining up at the end of each finished cut.



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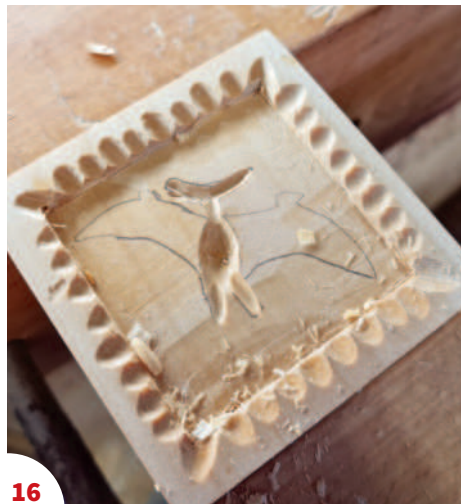
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9 The two sides of the block with end grain pose a bit of a harder carving challenge. I used a bent gouge and made the cuts from the bottom upwards to save it tearing and splitting if the cut was made the other way.

10 Tidy the carving as you go. Keep the base as clean as possible. I used one of my letter writing 35mm allongee chisels (straight but double bevelled) to remove any marks on the bottom.

11 Design your prints. Try to keep them simple as they're to be pressed out of dough and they might lose fine detail as they cook. I went for dinosaurs, but farmyard animals would also work really well, as would cars and trucks etc. I also learnt that it's very hard for me to draw a T Rex that doesn't look like he's been guiltily rummaging through the fridge late at night...

12 Transfer your pictures to your block. Having them a little 'podgy' does mean they'll make more of an imprint in the dough. I could sometimes easily draw these on to the wood, for a few of them I cut out a template to draw round.

13 Start carving the deepest bits first, using as big a chisel as you can. Remember to carve the inverse of whatever you've drawn. The deepest carved bits will be the highest imprint on the dough. Work in from either side so you are always working with the grain.

14 Start to add detail. Here I'm adding the flat plates to the stegosaurus using a small, fan-tailed chisel, No.3 gouge, 4mm, and just making a flat impression about 1mm deep for each plate, cutting the outline first then working up to that to remove the waste.

15 When you have one carved out it can be worth testing it on a piece of dough. I used some of the children's playdough, at the same time as another carving project, to see what it would look like. Unfortunately, the dye in the playdough can be hard to remove so this might not be ideal.

16 Carve the other dinosaurs on the other sides that aren't end grain. Keeping the designs simple will make them more effective as a print for the dough. I'm also aware that a pterodactyl isn't a dinosaur, but we're going to let that slide for the purposes of this project...

17 The end-grain carvings take a little more work, just because of the nature of working in the end grain. Make sure chisel strokes work with, rather than against, the grain to get smooth cuts. Ultra-sharp chisels are needed here so it might be worth getting the strop out before you start. Use chisels such as a No.9 to get deeper details on things like the legs.

18 For the end-grain carvings, I did resort to using a rotary tool to smooth them out a bit (carving purists look away). This just meant it was smoother, which is much better for when it comes into contact with dough and foodstuffs.

19 Apply a food-safe finish. I used Uulki wood oil & wax, which is a food-safe blend of carnauba wax and coconut oil and works well with items that might be in contact with food. A toothbrush is ideal to get into the detailed areas. Build up a few layers of this finish over a few days if possible.

20 Once you have built up a few layers of finish and it's dry it's time to use it. Pick a biscuit recipe that doesn't rise in the oven, otherwise all your hard work will be for nothing! If this is to be given as a gift, make sure the recipient knows it is hand-wash only and it is best to reapply the finish periodically.



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MISTAKES & PLANNING

When I'm working out these projects, not everything goes to plan the first time. This was especially the case with this one. The first block I cut I wanted to make the impressions as deep as the biscuits – the trouble with this was that it left the borders far too weak and likely to break.

I started again with a shallower version, carved a few dinosaurs and then slipped with a chisel tidying up one routed side, taking the edge clean off. Back to the drawing board as they say, but an important lesson learned. I should have cleaned up all sides first. And I should have taken more care with my flat chisels not to push so hard. ▶

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Mirror mirror

Swedish carver Carsten Nilsson tells us about his historical and nature-inspired work

Carsten Nilsson began his carving career by learning the traditional techniques of the 17th century. He now incorporates this knowledge into his own designs, makes carvings to commission for modern furniture pieces and carries out restoration work on antiques. He is known for his decorative and colourful hand-carved mirror frames. Much of his work is inspired by nature, as well as incorporating traditional motifs such as acanthus leaves and elements of folk design. He lives in Hammenhög, a village in southern Sweden.







Tell us how you came to be a carver.

I initially trained as a furniture maker and carpenter, but felt that I wanted to work more with my hands so then went to a school to learn woodcarving. I'm the first in my family to be a woodcarver.

How did you learn about traditional 17th-century carving techniques?

I went to a school called Hantverkscentrum, which is located in Tibro in western Sweden. It is the only educational facility in Sweden that focuses on woodcarving. There I got to learn the classic woodcarving techniques and styles from scratch. Today I don't do so much of the classic carving, except when I restore old ornaments. However, I greatly enjoyed learning about traditional woodcarving, which I can now mix into my own patterns.

Do you use traditional or modern tools?

I use traditional woodcarving tools and I use many different ones when I carve. I have about 200 woodcarving tools, but maybe I use 40 regularly.

What are your favourite pieces of your own carvings? What do they mean to you?

I have no direct favourites, but I like the contrast between the soft, pretty flowers and the hard and slightly angular gears on one of my mirror frames (see previous spread). If I have to choose

one image, it will be my thistle that I use in many of my mirror frames. It's formed of a 'ball' with many small, hand-carved spikes.

Do you do restorations as well as making your own designs?

I do restore wooden ornaments but for the most part I make my own patterns, which I like best. I also work with carpenters and designers on woodcarvings where I carve pieces according to their drawings.

Describe your design process: what are your considerations when you set out to carve a piece?

When I start to design a mirror frame, the size and proportions are always the most important factors. Then I look for a line, a theme that I want on my frame. After that I make a first sketch, which is very simple. Then I start drawing the details and there it is also very important that everything fits together well so that the mirror frame is strong, but at the same time I want it to be airy and fragile.

What are some of the influences and inspirations behind your carving style?

My inspiration basically comes from the classic 17th-century carving styles, but I find inspiration from nature, animals and my own imagination. I am also inspired by my latest carvings and often feel that next time I will change and develop even more.



What are your favourite types of wood and why?

I nearly always carve in linden wood, which is a soft and easily carved wood. I do use other types of wood as well, but linden is my favourite.

What sort of finishes do you prefer and why?

I prefer to paint my mirror frames as I think my carvings come out better that way. I use a linseed oil paint with a little secret finishing, so in total the frames are painted in about six to seven layers. Carpentry pieces should not be painted, so I usually use some oil or wax.

What sort of projects are in store for the future?

Right now I'm working on a lot of mirror frames and looking ahead, I hope that my mirror frames can be more advanced and larger. I want to continue working as I do today and hope to be able to send my mirror frames to different homes around the world.

What do you do when you're not carving?

When I'm not carving, I like to walk by the sea or in the woods. I run or go to the gym a few days a week. Together with my wife Linda and my children Malte and Tage we live on a farm and there is always something that needs to be done and fixed.





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Grain issues

Steve Bisco discusses the importance of grain in woodcarving

The term 'it goes against the grain' is ingrained in the English language to mean having to do something that you feel is wrong, and its origin lies in woodworking. One of the fundamental things that all woodworkers have to learn is to work with the grain of the wood and avoid working against it. In this brief overview we will look at the impact that grain has on woodcarving.

What is grain?

Trees are made up of a lot of thin but tough fibres that grow longitudinally up through the trunk and branches. These fibres are attached to the fibres alongside them by a substance called lignin. As the tree grows it creates more fibres each year outside the previous fibres, and these grow more quickly in the Spring (creating softer 'earlywood') than they do later in the year (creating harder 'latewood'). It is this uneven fibrous structure that forms the grain (**photo 1**). In this pine block the annual growth rings are clearly visible in the end-grain, and the fibres extend lengthwise.

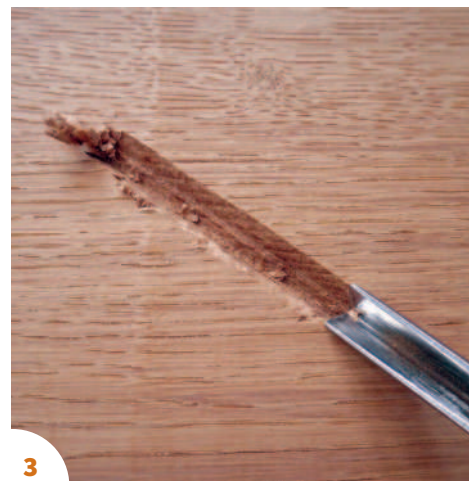
Working with grain direction

New carvers are taught from day one that they must work with the grain, but this fundamental truth is more complex in practice than it sounds. Carvings rarely follow straight lines, so the line of the gouge and the line of the grain are constantly in conflict as you follow a curving and swirling pattern. Carving patterns tend to go up and down vertically as well as horizontally, and the grain also has its own ideas on whether it will follow a horizontal line or slope up or downwards in the board (**photo 2**). Carving with the grain therefore means the angle and direction of cut has to be adjusted constantly to deal with the grain direction at that exact point rather than in the board as a whole.

The golden rule with any wood is that you should try to cut 'downhill' to the grain direction so you are leaving the cut ends of fibres behind you and not digging into them in front of you. **Photo 3** illustrates this clearly with a diagonal cut from a V-tool in oak that is producing a clean edge on the upper right side, where it is cutting with the grain, and a fractured edge on the lower left side where it is going against the grain.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE BISCO





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Coarse and fine grain

The grain of wood varies greatly between different species, and even between different pieces from the same tree. Softwoods like the pine family tend to have a marked difference between earlywood and latewood, giving a very coarse grain that is difficult to carve smoothly. Oak has a much closer grain, but its brittle nature makes it more friable when you have to carve across or towards the grain. Lime is the most forgiving wood of all as it has a very close and fine grain with no noticeable difference between earlywood and latewood. It will allow a sharp gouge to cut through it in virtually any direction, as shown in **photo 4**. Grain direction changes constantly in a swirling pattern, and is very challenging in the coarse grain of pine (**photo 5**). Lime is the favoured wood for acanthus swirls as you can carve it easily in any direction (**photo 6**).

END GRAIN

When carving steeply or vertically across end grain you are cutting through the full thickness of the fibres, and this can be very tough even in limewood. In dry woods such as oak and mahogany it can also cause breakout of the fibre ends, giving a rough surface. It helps if you use a very sharp, flat chisel and slide it sideways as you push down, taking off thin shavings each time (**photo 7**). This slices through the fibres more easily than a direct push into the wood, and gives a smoother finish.

The perils of short grain

Wood fibres have great lateral strength along their length (**photo 8**), but their attachment to the fibres alongside them is much weaker and a thin section cut or carved across the grain will easily break under pressure (**photo 9**). Even on a low-relief carving on a flat panel, a narrow section running across the grain will tend to break out because the grain is too short to maintain its attachment to the panel. Carving thin cross-grain sections has to be done with great care, using sharp tools and thin slicing cuts.

As far as possible you should try to 'design out' short-grain weaknesses by adding extra points of contact to support cross-grain sections in the pattern. But sometimes weaknesses are unavoidable, so you have to add hidden support within the wood and repair breakages. **Photo 10** shows some long-grain supports being inserted at the back of the carving where two narrow swans' necks create a short-grain section as they curve around.

If a short-grain section breaks, or is likely to break, you can insert a dowel inside the wood to provide long-grain strength when you glue it together (**photo 11**). You can also glue slithers of wood across the back of a pierced carving to hold together a weak attachment on a short-grain section (**photo 12**). ▮



Carving a Malay design
with Zarir Abdullah

Carving Countries

William Barsley visits
the carvers of Malaysia

In this new series, William Barsley looks back on the journey that inspired his career change from an office job to a professional woodcarver. This article focuses on his journey cycling the length of Peninsular Malaysia, in search of renowned woodcarvers who are keeping alive the traditional art of Malay carving.



Cycling along white sands bordered by palm trees

MALAYSIA

Situated just below Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia is the part of Malaysia that occupies the southern half of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It is a long and narrow stretch of land, with Singapore located at its southerly tip. Its land area is virtually the same as England's, but its population is much lower, at around 26 million. It is famous for its beautiful beaches, central mountain range, and the bustling capital city Kuala Lumpur. As a junction point between the Indian ocean and China sea, Peninsular Malaysia is an important trade route.

Malaysia has a long history of woodcarving, but one that differs noticeably from what I saw in Bali, due largely to the difference in religious majority. Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country, and this has a strong influence on the artwork produced there. The symmetry and balance of design found in Islamic art are mirrored in the country's woodcarving style, and the 'spirit' of the wood is very important. The spread of Islam after the 14th century had a particularly significant impact on the motifs and designs that are used in Malaysia to this day. Naturalistic forms became more abstract in line with Islamic teachings, and their symmetry and balance reflected ideas around how the world should be structured.

The journey

After an exhilarating few weeks exploring Balinese carving, I was eager to see how Malaysia would compare in terms of technique, style, and tools. A short flight from Denpasar landed us in Singapore where I met the curator of the Asian Civilizations Museum, an incredible treasure trove of significant artifacts. He taught me a lot about Malaysian woodcarving and, being a cycle tourist himself, also gave some handy tips for cycling in Peninsula Malaysia. It was to be our longest stretch of cycle touring of the trip and we were excited to get going, but we first had to reassemble our bikes and navigate out of the busy roads of Singapore.

Our target was the Akademi Nik Rashiddin (ANR), located in the northern state of Kelantan. ANR is an incredibly special place for Malaysian woodcarving as it was home to the late Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein, one of the most famous and influential woodcarvers in the country. ANR is now a non-profit organisation helping to keep traditional carving skills alive.

It took us 10 days to cycle from Singapore up to ANR and we thoroughly enjoyed absorbing the eclectic sights, sounds, and smells that are experienced much more deeply when travelling at the speed of pedal power. We decided to stick to the east coast,

which meant stronger winds but fewer hills – a tough choice! We were also attracted by the quieter nature of the east coast. We quickly realised it wasn't only humans using the coastal road; gigantic lizards and inquisitive monkeys would often meander their way across our path. As we pushed north, the landscape gradually changed from thick palm tree plantations to dense jungle, but white sandy beaches were never too far away and provided a welcome pit stop. Besides exploring quiet fishing villages and finding delicious food, we also took time to visit some of the local museums showcasing carved artifacts from Malaysia's history.

Notable woodcarvers

Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein

Tucked away in the quiet coastal village of Kandis, just a short walk from the beach and surrounded by fertile fields and coconut trees, is the Academy Nik Rashiddin (ANR), home of the late Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein (1955 – 2002). ANR is fighting to preserve Malaysia's woodcarving heritage: a struggle faced by many around the world as the forces of modernisation diminish the knowledge and skill of ancient crafts practised by our ancestors.

ANR is run by Rosnawait Othman, the widow of Nik Rashiddin, who kindly took time to show me around and share stories from her husband's woodcarving career. Nik Rashiddin was an incredibly skilled woodcarver and dedicated much of his life to researching the history of Malay woodcarving; a monumental task given that Malaysia has seen a range of powers in control over the last millennia, each leaving their own mark on its culture. Nik Rashiddin travelled throughout southern Thailand and Indonesia looking for motifs and patterns that would give clues as to the history of carving in northern Malaysia. The Langkasuka motif is one such example



Akademi Nik Rashiddin, note the Langasuka motif on the left



Zarir Abdullah carving



Woodcarving by Zarir Abdullah

discovered by Nik Rashiddin and can be seen in the ANR logo. It is said that it shows a link to the ancient kingdom of Langkasuka.

Knowing one's roots and history was of huge importance to Nik Rashiddin, who believed that knowledge, not just skill, was crucial. 'With a sense of history, and a pride in our past, we will have a deeper love of life, a love for our lineage – what more our origins' (*Spirit of Wood* 2003).

It was actually while visiting ANR and learning about the emphasis Nik Rashiddin placed on knowing your country's carving heritage that I began researching woodcarving courses in the UK and discovered the City and Guilds of London Art Schools' three-year degree in Historic Woodcarving and Gilding. I applied there and then and have never looked back. The course would go on to teach me about the history and styles found within the UK and give me a grounding in my own roots. I have a lot to be grateful to Nik Rashiddin for!

Norhaiza Noordin

After visiting the ANR I was kindly invited to meet Norhaiza Noordin, who was a student of Nik Rashiddin's and is undoubtedly now one of the most renowned woodcarvers in Malaysia. He is said to be one of the few remaining experts in Malay carving. His work is in demand not only in Malaysia but internationally too. When I visited his home and workshop, he was carving a new set of doors for the parliamentary building in Kuala Lumpur and had not long since finished a large piece for the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies in the UK. 'I strive to emulate the same feeling the ancient woodcarver would have felt.' (Norhaiza Noordin).

Zarir Abdullah

While at the ANR, I met a fantastic woodcarver called Zarir Abdullah. He was taught by a famous local carver called Wan Su Othman, who amazingly was still teaching carving at 105! Zarir's enthusiasm for carving was infectious and his skill evident.

Desa Ukiran Kayu Woodcarving Academy

This woodcarving academy is funded by the government and offers free tuition for students looking to learn woodcarving. Besides being a training centre, there are also exhibits of Malay carving and architecture, showcasing the finest works and design achievements. It was inspiring to visit the academy and meet with some of the students who showed me how their designs and motifs had hidden meanings within them.



Woodcarving at Desa Ukiran Kayu. MIDDLE ROW: Students' work at Desa Ukiran Kayu



Woodcarvings at Desa Ukiran Kayu



Keris daggers on display at ANR



Keris Tajong, carved in bone by Nik Rashiddin Nik Hussein

Tools and traditions

Chisels

The carving chisels I came across in Malaysia were similar to those in Bali in that many of them didn't have wooden handles but were simply strips of shaped metal. While at the ANR I learnt that many resourceful carvers making small intricate pieces would often simply use the spokes from bicycle wheels, as this metal is usually very tough and already thin.

At the ANR I saw many traditional chisels and sharpening stones, but what stood out was a section of stingray skin that was used in very fine finishing to sand the wood.

The spirit of the wood (semangat)

One aspect of great importance to the traditional Malay carver is that of 'semangat', roughly translated as 'spirit', 'soul' or 'life force' (*Spirit of Wood*, 2003). Semangat is said to be within all living and inanimate objects and is held in great esteem by the Malay carver who looks to maintain and preserve it. This has a big impact on the type of wood chosen (some woods are said to have more semangat), where the wood is sourced from (some locations are more favourable than others), how the wood is stored, and even which days are better for carving (it is said to be bad luck to carve on rainy days; I would be out of business if I practised this at home in UK).

The keris

Much of Malaysia's early carvings have been lost through the ages and along with them records of motifs and designs, but one that has survived is the tradition of the keris, a ceremonial dagger. Many believe that the keris holds supernatural powers and, to this day, it remains a symbol of power and status, which could explain how so many have survived the test of time. Making

such an item is deemed to be the pinnacle piece for a carver to produce. Hours would be spent designing the keris so that it was completely unique and perfectly matched the owner's character.

'Through it we can chart the cultural, philosophical and socio-religious evolution of Malay woodcarving as well as Malay civilisation.' (Akademi Nik Rashiddin)

To learn more about woodcarving in Malaysia, I would highly recommend reading *Spirit of Wood: The Art of Malay Woodcarving*, by Farish A Noor (2003).

Next time, William heads to Thailand, a country famous for its woodcarving – and it's delicious food. William visits the astonishing carved temple of the Sanctuary of Truth, meets a Scotsman carving for Buddhist temples, and is blow away by



Busy roads leaving Singapore

Next issue 186 on sale 10th March 2022

Exciting changes to Woodcarving magazine, introduced by our first Guest Editor, Steve Bisco



Cedric Boyns creates a butterfly on a flower



**Dave Western
celebrates St David's Day
with his daffodil panel**



**Carve Mark Gough's
nestling swan
and cygnets**

Howling wolf & moon

Mark Gough carves a striking image
from contrasting timbers



The idea for this project came from an image on a T-shirt, which just goes to show inspiration can be found anywhere. I wanted to demonstrate the contrast between the wolf and the moon with different types of wood and was lucky enough to be offered a spalted beech blank, which was perfect for the moon. The darker American black walnut was used for the

wolf, I think it works well. To get the correct pose for the carving I searched through many photographs and took ideas from several examples to make up the finished sketch. The bottom section of the blank used as a clamping block was sanded down and kept as a base. It seemed a shame to discard it, but it would look just as good mounted on

a contrasting wooden base or even a different material such as slate. I would normally introduce the use of power carving equipment, such as a rotary power unit and carbide burrs, but decided to use hand tools all through this project. Not everyone has access to such equipment and hand tools produce less dust, which is appreciated if you work in a small workshop.

Things you will need**Equipment**

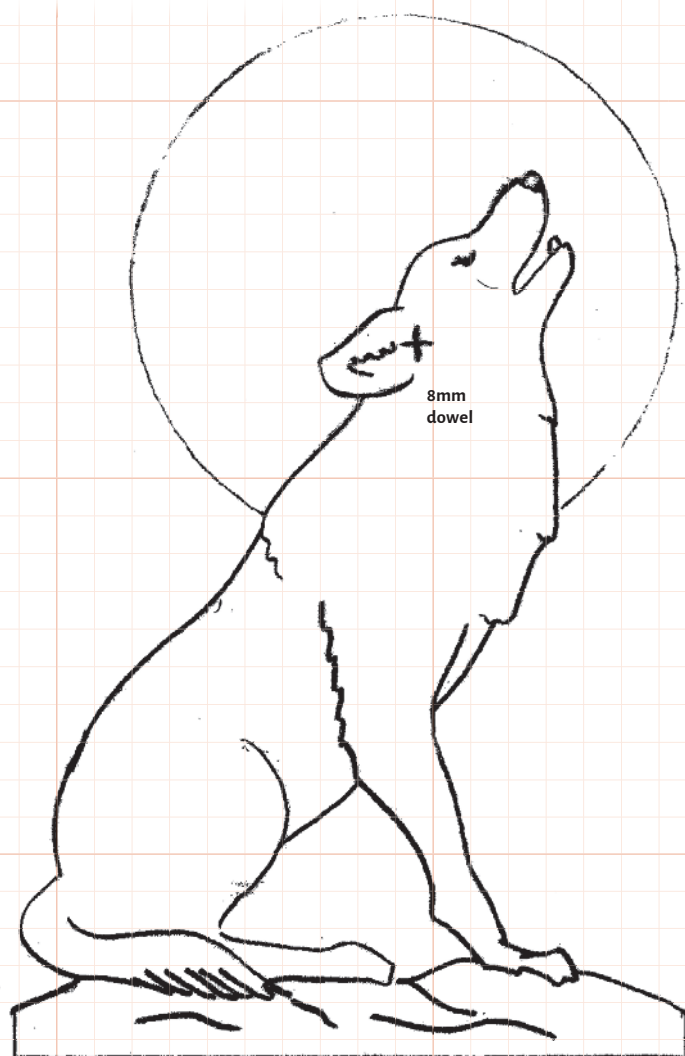
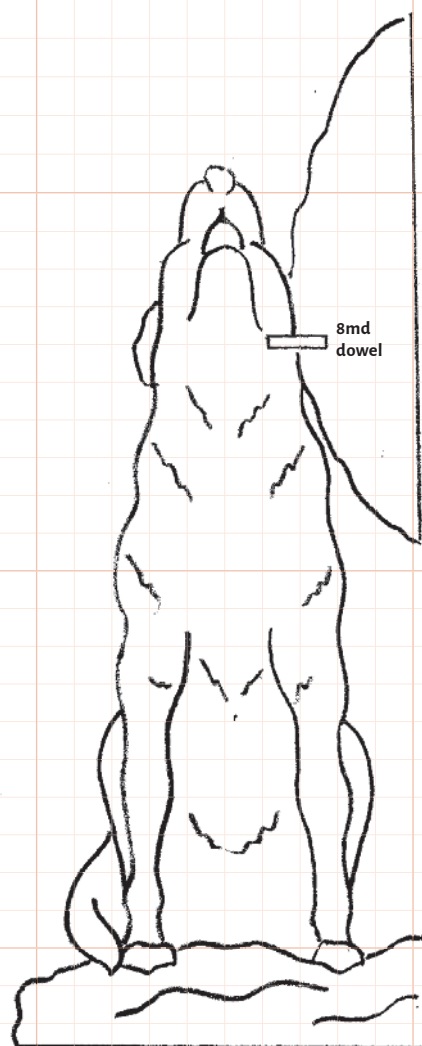
- Bandsaw
- Disc sander
- Drill press
- PPE & RPE

Tools

- Marking out equipment
- Hand saw
- 8mm drill
- 6, 12 & 20mm shallow fishtail gouge
- 6mm deep flute gouge
- Needle rasps
- Hand rasps
- Deep-fluted palm gouge
- 6 & 18mm flat chisel
- V-gouge

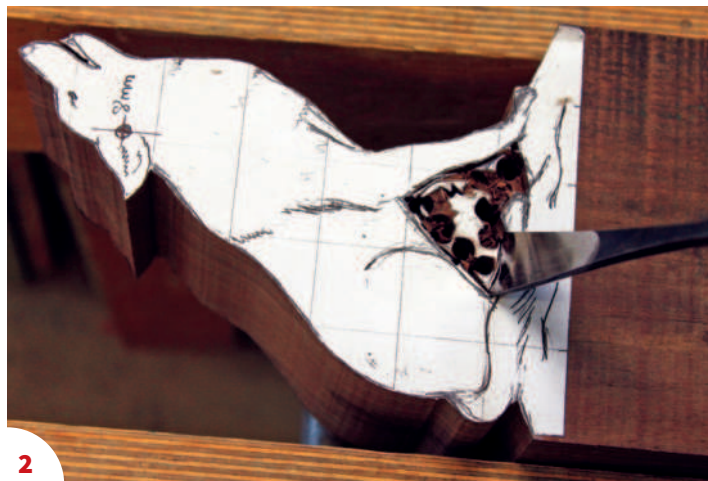
Materials

- American black walnut, 7 x 5 x 3½in (128 x 177 x 88mm)
- Spalted beech, 4 x 4 x 1½in (100 x 100 x 38mm)
- 8mm dowel
- Sandpaper 80, 120, 180 grit
- Danish oil
- Rapid-setting epoxy adhesive





1



2

1 Using the plans, cut the profile out with a bandsaw and drill an 8mm hole for the dowel peg on the rear side. If you have used a large enough blank, keep the bottom section for a clamping block, otherwise you will need to attach a suitable piece of scrap wood or fix it directly to a carver's vice.

2 Drill a few small holes into the waste area behind the legs and cut out with a suitable shallow gouge that best fits the outline. It's not necessary to go right through as the space will be revealed in the next step. Aim for straight sides all the way down.

3 Mark in the front view outline and waste sections then cut away the sides with a hand saw. Note: only cut down to the top of the tail where it wraps round on the front side. The internal space behind the legs should now be visible, if not finish chiselling out the waste all the way through.

4 You can now start to rough out the shape with a shallow 20mm gouge. Work from both sides systematically, carving in the direction of the grain where possible. If the grain is running in the opposite direction, make cuts diagonally across it.

5 When you have removed the bulk of the waste, turn your attention to the front and mark in the rear leg and tail, then carve the body shape with the same shallow gouge. Undercut the ears slightly on the lower edge and do the same on the other side.

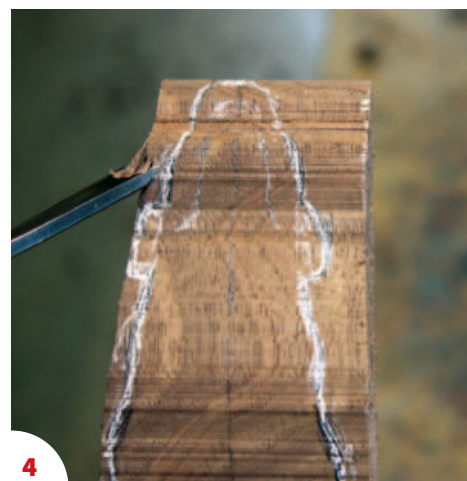
6 Mark out and remove the waste to reveal the tail on the back side of the carving. Note how it curls slightly down and sweeps round to the side. You can also shape the rear of the leg at this stage.

7 Mark in the line from the rear of the front leg to the shoulder and carve out the area behind the line to a depth of approximately 2mm. This line will be softened when the body is rounded over. Repeat this on the opposite side.

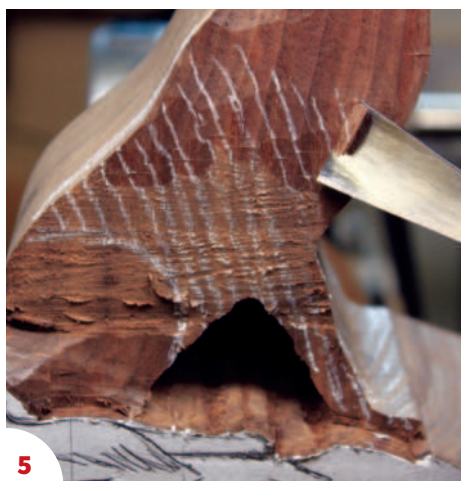
8 Using a 6mm deep flute gouge, carve out the area between the front legs. Leave the legs oversized so that they can be refined later.



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9 Using the same 20mm shallow gouge, again round over the front chest and neck, working back to the ears and chin. Carve towards the centreline from both sides, working diagonally across the grain to avoid digging in.

10 With the same technique as in Step 9, round over the back working up towards the ears. Note how the leg and shoulder line from Step 7 has been softened. Round over the top of the head and nose.



11



12

11 Shape the tail to sweep around the back leg and round over the edges so that from the base of the tail it drops slightly then curls up as it sweeps round the leg then drops to the ground. This gives it a fluid appearance.

12 Mark in the inside edges of the ears and remove the waste between them. A small hand needle rasp will be useful to take out the last bits and round them over.

13 Now you have the basic shape carved out, smooth the whole thing down with hand rasps and 80 grit sandpaper, not aiming for any finish but just to get an even surface to mark in the detail. Use a white marker as before and mark in the contours of the body and finer details of the ears and muzzle. Note again the sweeping lines of the tail.



13



14

14 Select a suitable gouge – here I have used a small, deep-fluted palm gouge – and carve out the inside of the ear. Most of the detail is hidden by fur, so if you can find any photographs for reference it will help. It is not necessary to repeat this procedure on the other ear as it will not be visible when the full carving has been assembled.

15 The legs are thinned out and shaped with a small, shallow gouge. You may find that you will be cutting against the grain so use a freshly sharpened tool for the best results. The use of a small rasp helps in the narrow corners.

16 The base is carved out to look like a rocky surface. A flat chisel will give a random faceted impression. There is no set pattern here, just use your imagination – you can even texture it to resemble coarse grass or woodland.



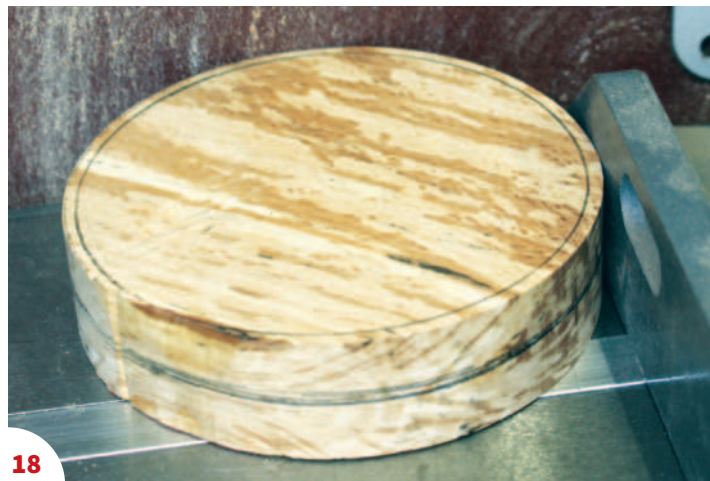
15



16



17



18

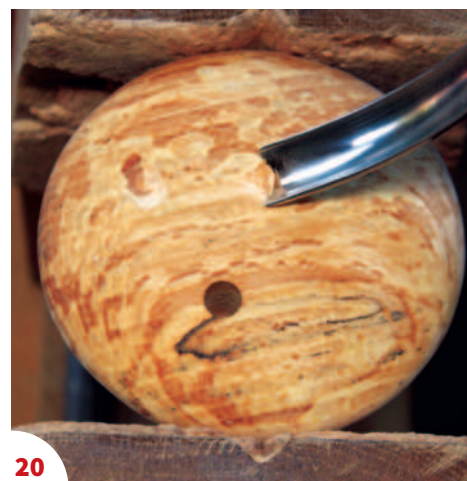
MARKING ON DARK WOODS

Pencil marks are difficult to see on some of the darker woods a good alternative is to use a white Chinagraph pencil, which is a soft, waxy, all-surface marker. Unwanted marks can be removed with white spirit.

17 Give the whole piece a thorough sanding with 80 grit paper, then mark any areas that need refining and add the final detail, such as the eyes and nostrils. Sand down though the grits to 240, ready for finishing. At this stage, decide how you will mount the carving and cut off the clamping block if necessary.



19



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18 Using a bandsaw or coping saw, cut a circle out from your chosen blank and sand the edges smooth with a bench sander. Mark the centreline around the perimeter with a pencil. Select the most suitable aspect against the wolf carving then mark and drill an 8mm hole to accept the dowel. Only drill halfway through, this will be sufficient to hold the pieces together.

19 Hold the disc firmly in a vice and round the edge over on both sides, work back towards the centre. Sand down to a 240 grit finish.

20 Select two or three different sized gouges and carve in the craters by cutting and twisting the tool round to remove a circular chip. It is only necessary to carve the detail in on the front face. Be random and even overlap the cuts to make it look realistic.

21 Glue the two parts together with rapid-setting epoxy adhesive, wipe any excess off immediately before it sets hard. Give it a final check over then apply several coats of your chosen finish, here Danish oil has been used. ▶

BARKING AT THE MOON

Contrary to superstition, wolves do not howl or bark at the moon, they howl to communicate to each other and project the sound upwards to reach further out and, being nocturnal, the image of a wolf howling at the moon has embedded itself in human culture. ▶



21



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Sleeping wild boar

Robert Jubb makes this cute netsuke carving



The overriding philosophy of netsuke carving is that the time it takes is irrelevant; the objective is to make the carving as good as you can. This requires lots of patience. If you become frustrated with a particular problem, simply put the carving down and leave it for a while, days if necessary. I always work on several carvings at the same time, so if I

have a problem with one I can put it down and start work on another piece while I think about how to solve the issue.

The Wild Boar is much admired in Japan for its bravery, as it is completely fearless and charges straight at its opponents. To see one sleeping peacefully therefore seems quite a contradiction.

Things you will need**Materials**

- Limewood block

Tools*Gouges and chisels:*

- $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge
- $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V-tool
- $\frac{3}{4}$ in (1mm) Dockyard U-gouge
- $\frac{1}{4}$ in (3mm) No.5 gouge
- $\frac{5}{16}$ in (2mm) Dockyard U-gouge
- $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) No.1 flat chisel

Cutters:

- $\frac{3}{16}$ in (1mm) circular cutter for use in a multi-tool

Miscellaneous*Indian ink:*

- Ink with small jar and a clean paint brush

Fine-tipped pen:

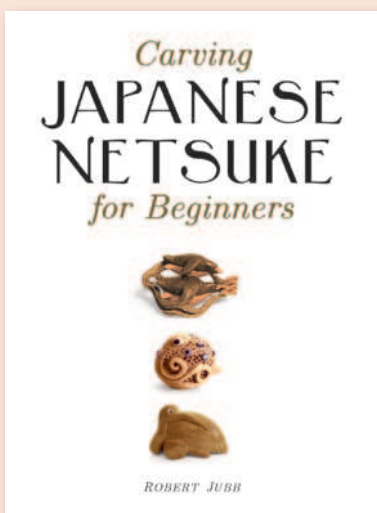
- Fine line drawing pen

Abrasives:

- Sandpaper grits from about 100 to 400
- Micro-Mesh paper, 1800 to 12000 grit
- Micro-Mesh stick with 4 grits on the same stick

Finishes:

- Clear polish such as clear shoe polish, Liberon clear or Renaissance wax



Carving Japanese Netsuke for Beginners
by Robert Jubb, GMC Publications,
RRP £16.99, available online and
from all good bookshops.

**1****2****Initial steps**

The first step is to deal with the stone on the side of the boar. Cross-hatch the wood above the rock, as shown in the photograph (**Photo 1**). Then remove it using a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge. The second photograph shows how the outline of the stone is revealed after the wood around it has been removed (**Photo 2**).



Sketching outlines

Draw on the end view, the curve of the body and the snout, and a very preliminary side view of the front legs (**Photo 3**). The back leg on the opposite side from the stone also has to be drawn in. The top of the body can then be rounded off using the same $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge. Leave the front legs for the moment as more definition is required.

Adding features

The following photographs show the main part of the body rounded off and sanded to achieve a smooth finish. The smoothness means that it is easier to draw on the main features of the carving. Draw the features as they appear on both sides of the boar as well as the front view (**Photo 4**).

Leaves

Using the $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge, carve the leaves over the boar's back (**Photo 5**). Press the gouge vertically into the wood along the drawn lines, then carve back to these lines with a near-horizontal cut using the same tool. The leaves should now be slightly raised above the boar's back. The final task at this stage is to carve the rest of the boar's back down to the level adjacent to the leaves.

Eyes and ears

Outline the ears with a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V-tool. Then, using a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (1mm) Dockyard gouge, carve the hollow inside each ear. A $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) No.5 gouge will fit the curve of the closed eyelid; press the blade into the eyelid line to outline it. Using a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (2mm) Dockyard gouge, carve a semicircle above and below the eyes, and shape the eyelids so that they are both slightly rounded.

Legs and feet

I decided to redraw the front legs slightly differently to those in the original drawing. The trotter end of the leg is now drawn as if folded under the upper leg. The view from underneath shows the corresponding positions of the front and back feet (**Photo 6**).

To carve the front and back legs you will need a variety of tools: a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge, a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) flat chisel, a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V and a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (1mm) U-gouge. Starting with the front legs, press a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) gouge into the wood to follow the curve of the upper leg and press a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) flat in to shape the knee. Clear away the wood above these cuts, removing the drawing of the tusks in the process. Press a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) flat into the lower part of the leg and move it along in stages to get the curve, then do the same for the trotters. Cut away the bottom of the foot towards the back end of the boar (**Photo 7**).



3A



3B



4A



4B



4C



5



6



7



8



9



10A



10B



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14

Turn the netsuke over and press a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge into the inside of the foot, then clear it out (**Photo 8**). With the same tool, cut out the trotter on the outside of the foot; this should be underneath the upper part of the leg. With a single straight cut using a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V-tool, separate each half of the trotter. Round off the edge of the legs and feet with shallow cuts. Repeat the process for the other feet (**Photo 9**).

Tusks

Redraw the tusks and outline the mouth ready for carving (**Photo 10**). The tusks need to be carved with care to ensure that no small bits break off. Carefully press in a $\frac{5}{16}$ in (2mm) Dockyard gouge to mark out the socket where the tusk comes out of the mouth. Next, use a $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) No.5 gouge to outline the bottom and top of the tusks and to clear away the wood each side of the tusk. Repeat the process if necessary to give sufficient depth to the tusks (**Photo 11**).

Snout

To carve the snout use a $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) No.5 gouge, being careful not to cut into the tusks. When you are satisfied that the snout is the right shape from the front, draw in the mouth and make a series of cuts with a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V-tool to completely outline it (**Photo 12**). To put the nostrils in the snout use a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (1mm) diameter burr cutter in a multi-tool. Gently push this in to leave a concave shape at the bottom of each nostril (**Photo 13**).

The stone

Start with the stone lines next to the body (**Photo 14**). Press a $\frac{3}{16}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge and a $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) No.1 chisel in on the marked out lines and carve above them to leave around $\frac{5}{16}$ in (2mm) next to the body. Repeat this for each successive layer of stone, working your way to the outside and leaving each layer about $\frac{3}{16}$ in (1mm) thick. For the stone near the rear end, press the chisels in to make vertical cuts, then cut in at angles to the back and front of these cuts to get the effect that you require (**Photo 15**).



15



Adding holes

Use a $\frac{3}{4}$ in (1mm) diameter burr cutter held firmly in the multi-tool to drill the cord holes underneath. These holes should be drilled in the underside of the body towards the rear (**Photo 16**). Clean the carving off ready for the next stage.

Last stages

The next series of photographs show the almost completed netsuke. All that is left to do is to carve the hair and separate the carving from the central block (**Photos 17, 18 & 19**).

Hair

In pencil, lightly draw the direction of the hair over the boar's back. Then, take the sharpest $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) V-tool you have and make several very shallow cuts close together. Carve in the direction of the pencil lines and slowly cover the back. You may find the area in between the leaves tricky as the cuts will be very short; the only answer is to keep going slowly and carefully. Having a good light source makes these fine details easier to see, so sit in daylight to do this, if possible, or use very good artificial light. It is also important not to rush this stage, as this is the part of the carving that will make or break it (**Photo 20**).

To finish the hair you will need to separate the boar from the central block. So cut it off, shape the rear end with a $\frac{3}{4}$ in (5mm) No.5 gouge, sand it down and carve the tail. You can then finish drawing and carving the hair all over the boar.

Applying dye

The last stage is to dye the carving with black ink and to sand off the high spots. The aim is to make the hair stand out further and to contrast with the underlying wood. So, water down some black Indian ink and mix it in a small jar. Next, apply clean water using a fine watercolour brush to the surfaces to be dyed. (We are not adding dye to the leaves, the stone, the snout, the trotters, the eyes, the tops of the ears, either tusk, the bottom lip, or the area for the signature underneath, so there is no need to wet them.) After about ten minutes, carefully paint on the dye, avoiding the afore-mentioned areas, then leave it to dry overnight. When the piece is dry, use a fine-line drawing pen to ink in the outline of the eyelids, the joins in the stones, the cleft in the hooves, and anything else that needs more definition (**Photos 21**).



16



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The following day, sand the netsuke very lightly using 1600 grit Micro-Mesh to take off most of the dye on the high spots. If the dye does not come off easily, use a very sharp scraper to remove it. When you are satisfied that enough of the limewood shows through, sign your work with a pyrography pen, and wax the whole thing with clear wax. Leave the wax to soak in, then polish it with a soft rag.



Crossbills by Steve Toher, winner of the Songbirds Trophy



Siskin by David Askew, 2nd in Advanced Songbirds



Grey Wagtail standing on mossy stump by Stephen Rose, Silver at Novice level



Long-Tailed Tits by Tom Hindmarch, Silver at Novice level



BDWCA NEWS & EVENTS

There are 15 categories that can be competed in at our Annual Show in September, the Festival of Bird Art, and Songbirds is consistently the most popular one. At our show in 2021 almost 25% of the carvings entered were songbirds.

Songbirds is a decorative category and the main criteria is that a live bird is the standard for the judging, and detailed carving, texturing and painting are expected. While a lot of songbirds are small, this can mean that they are not necessarily the easiest to carve and paint, and they will also usually need the inclusion of some form of habitat to complete the overall effect. The base, and habitat, are all part of the carving when considered for judging.

The carving that won the trophy for Best Songbird was a pair of Crossbills by Steve Toher who won the British Championship in 2019 with his Song Thrush and regularly wins at Advanced level. David Askew took the second place at that level with his Siskin.

There were four winners in the Songbirds category at Intermediate level. Two won Gold (1st) and two Bronze (3rd). The Gold winners were an Adult Kingfisher by Paul Tully and a Dipper by Chris Smyth.

At Novice level there were five winners, none were awarded Gold, but two won Silver (2nd) and three Bronze (3rd). The Silver winners were a Grey Wagtail standing on a mossy stump by Stephen Rose and Long-Tailed Tits by Tom Hindmarch.

Pictures of all the carvings entered in this year's Show are on the Bakewell Show page of our website – www.bdwca.org.uk – along with pictures from the previous few years.



Adult Kingfisher by Paul Tully,
Gold at Intermediate level



Dipper by Chris Smyth,
Gold at Intermediate level

Contacts

For further information on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk. Membership includes three issues of the 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

From the community

A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community



**Congratulations to the winner
of the BeaverCraft Tools leather apron,
Ed Crundwell from York**



Petal panels

Just got my latest copy of *Woodcarving* – thanks!

Here are carvings I've done recently, in cherry, Swiss pear and walnut. As you can see, I'm enjoying carving little floral panels.

Regards, Lucy Fox



Owl relief carving

I discovered woodcarving some years ago as some people, but I am always amazed by the projects you publish in *Woodcarving*.

I look forward to each new magazine all the time, the projects are so nice. I would like to do them all and I would like to thank all the team for this.

Well, you said you like to see how we've been carving, so attached is one of my first projects. It's in oak and it took me more than 35 hours to do it. It is not perfect but I love the way it ages. It's a big achievement for me and I hope to be able to do more and more and more carving!

Thanks again and look forward to seeing your next publication.

Valérie Courdier, Westbury/Wiltshire UK



Cream of the crop

I've been reading your magazines for a few years now. I am a self-taught woodcarver but learnt how to sculpt three-dimensional forms from my time spent in automotive design as a clay sculptor making full-size clay models of cars. I now do woodcarving as a hobby and sell commission pieces. Here is my latest commission piece, a Guernsey cow. I've also attached a couple of images of some of my older pieces.

Oliver Richardson



Table-top house sign

A recent commission prompted Margaret Williams to take a fresh look at an unused table top and carve out a sign fit to adorn the finest of homes



Not so long ago I received a commission for a house sign. The property was called Church Farm and, at the time, it had a paper sign fastened to the gate, so my version needed to be much more weather-resistant and permanent!

For the task, I recalled an old teak draining board, from which my partner had made a round top for an Edwardian cast-iron table, which sat in our garden. We no

longer used the table, so I promptly stole the top and proceeded to make the sign. I do not possess lots of different sweeps among my chisel selection, so I chase out lettering. This method is what I hope to show you.

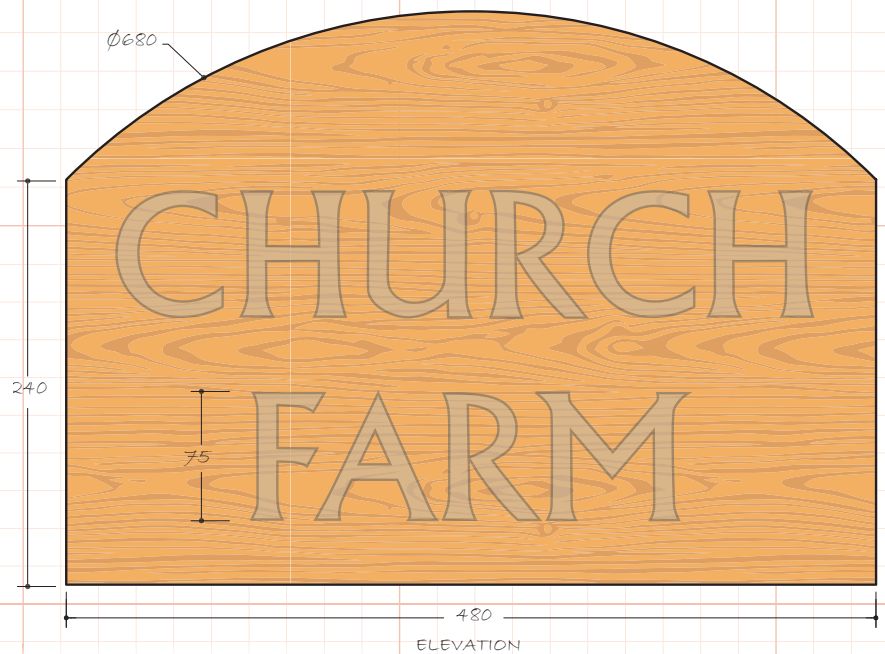
Holding the work

I have problems using my left hand, so most of my work is led with my right

hand. For this reason I like to use a Workmate to hold my carvings; I can then easily access the work from all sides as I can no longer swap hands for most of my detailed work. The Workmate I use for letter-carving is a very old one, which is taller than the modern ones. It is important to work at a comfortable height, so if you are doing a similar flat carving, think about blocking it up to bring it to a convenient height.

Things you will need**Tools:**

- Skew chisel at 7mm wide x 3mm thick
- 6mm straight chisel
- 25mm straight chisel
- Bull-nosed straight chisel
- No.4, 5mm fishtail chisel
- No.3, 10mm fishtail chisel, faces honed to a mirror finish
- Belt sander

**Design**

I designed the sign on computer so that I could show the client what the font and shape would look like. Using a computer in this way is useful as I can print out an accurate representation of the final sign to scale. It also makes sure that the lettering 'sits well'. Sometimes the letters may be too spaced out, especially with letters such as an 'F' next to an 'A'. This can be remedied by adjusting the kerning between the letters. Kerning is adjusting the spacing between letters.

**1****The process**

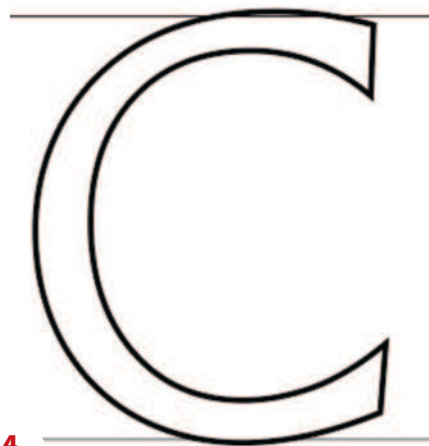
1 The table top was in two semi-circular halves, so I used one for the project. At this stage it was very weathered and had a moulding around the rim. I did not touch the underside, as the client and I agreed it should show its draining board origins.

**2****3**

2 It measured 680mm in diameter, but I wanted a sign with straight sides and a curved top, so I cut 100mm off either side.

3 The next step was to sand the table top in order to give a flat surface to carve. For this I used a belt sander, which is quick and easy to use. I always ensure I have on a mask, gloves, boilersuit and goggles for this job as it creates a lot of fine dust that is usually toxic to breathe, especially when using hardwoods such as teak. I decided to leave the moulding on the curved surface as it did not detract from the look of the piece.

4 Having my computer-generated design printed off, I used tracing paper to transfer the design to the timber. In this case, I had an A4 printer, so I manipulated the image in order to print the design on to three sheets. I also included lines above and below the lettering. This was important as the curved letters actually projected slightly above and below the lines. If this had not been accounted for, the lettering could seem slightly wrong to the eye.



4

5 The outlines of the letters were drawn on the reverse of the tracing paper, which was then positioned on to the timber. I held it in place with masking tape attached to the upper edge of the paper and to the timber. This meant that I could 'hinge' the paper off the carving yet still bring it back on to the surface to renew the pencil marking if necessary.



5

6 The letters were then traced on to the timber. I ensured that I also marked on the horizontal lines. I like to start with straight letters so that I get a feel for how the wood is going to behave. In this case, it was the verticals of the first 'H'.



6

7 My initial step was to mark in the centre of the verticals. I used a transparent square to ensure I had accurately marked the centre and also ensured that I was at 90° to the horizontal lines.



7

8 Once I was sure the pencil mark was accurate, I began to stab in the centreline. For this I used the straight 25mm chisel. I left enough space at the top and bottom to allow for the serif at the end of the letter and ensured that I held the chisel vertically. A sharp, but not too heavy, tap with a carving mallet marked in the vertical centreline. This process was repeated along the length of the vertical. Ideally, one would use a chisel that covers the full length of the vertical, but I find that making multiple stabs of equal depth does not affect the end result.



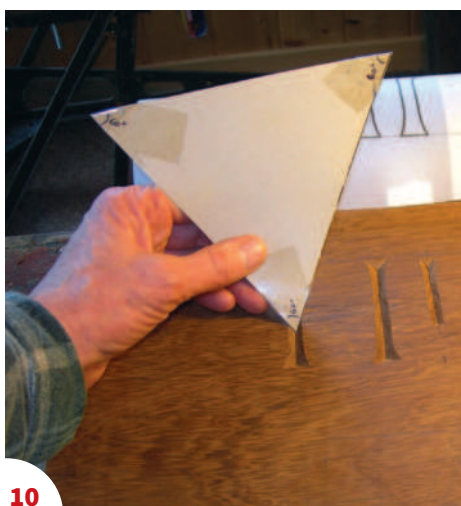
8

9 The next step was to begin chasing in the letter. I used a skew chisel at 7mm wide by 3mm thick for this. The initial chasing was gentle and I made sure I was following the stabbed vertical on both sides of the V. Again I ensured that I did not go as far as the horizontal lines. I then chased each side of the V progressively deeper, changing sides to ensure that I kept the angle of the V to 60°. If the wood started to tear, I changed direction of cut.



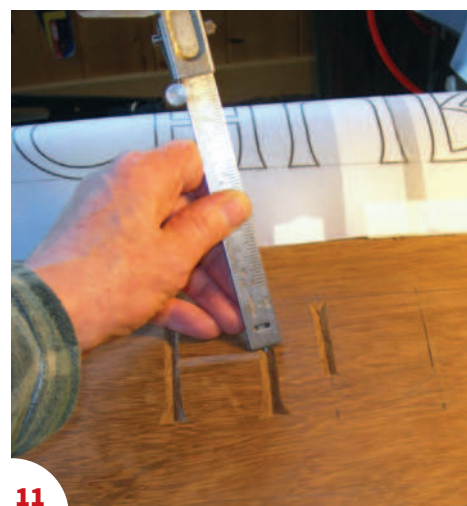
9

10 I checked I was making the V at approximately 60° using a cardboard gauge. I found that a depth of 3mm to the bottom of the V is right for this size of lettering...



10

11 ... so I used adjustable Vernier callipers set at 3mm to check the depth of the cut.



11



12



13

12 To make the serif, I used the No.3, 10mm fishtail chisel. First I made a stop-cut so that the timber would not splinter out. Next, I stabbed in from the base of the V up to the corner, ensuring the chisel was angled from deep at the centre to the surface at the corner. I did this for both sides of the serif and then gently cut the 'triangle' out to make the serif.

13 To cut horizontals, I followed a similar process to cutting the verticals, but ensured that if the horizontal was not going to enter into a vertical, I first cut end-stops. This prevented the timber from splintering as the horizontal was cut. The letter 'F' shows the process where the right-hand side of the horizontal does not enter into a vertical.



14



15

14 At that point the horizontal on the 'H' was narrower than the verticals, so when it was cut in at 60°, it ended up shallower than the verticals.

15 Cutting curves requires concentration and care. I first marked in the centreline and then carefully stabbed it in using the 25mm straight chisel held at a slight angle along the curve, but still vertical – so that the point dug in more deeply.

16 I cut in end-stops to prevent any splintering of the timber and used the bull-nosed chisel to cut in the V...



16



17

17 ... carefully angling it at 60°.

18 It is not neat at this early stage, but as the letter was worked gradually from both sides of the V it became tidier. The angle and depth were regularly checked.

19 Angled parts of letters, such as the leg of the 'R', needed to be cut carefully. Often the leg is slightly curved.



18



19

TEAK

- The word 'teak' comes from the Southern Indian word 'tekka'. Other names for teak include tekku, sagwan and kyun.
- Teak is a large, deciduous tree which can reach 45m (150 ft) high. It is native to Southern and Southeast Asia and naturalised in Africa and the Caribbean.
- It produces a strong and durable timber, slightly oily to the touch and with a coarse grain. It also rapidly blunts tools!



20



21

20 Care does have to be taken where the leg meets the curve of the letter.

21 In addition, as in this case where there is no serif, the lower end of the leg must be curved gently from the bottom of the V to the surface.

22 Letters such as 'A' and 'M', with sharply angled apices that come to a point, need special attention if they are not to split out. The letter 'A' gives a good overview of my method. I stabbed in the centrelines first, but stopped at the top of the inner marking of the 'A'.



22



23

23 I then stabbed in a stop-cut cut from the right-hand centre line to the apex – taking care to angle it towards the surface at the apex – and another at 90° to it.

24 Next, I chased out the V on the right-hand side up to the top of the inner apex, taking care to chase out the outer side of the V first. The left-hand side was treated similarly, but was left short. The aim was to support the inner apex by leaving wood uncut until the last moment. This is because cutting and chasing out stresses the timber and can cause the inner apex to fracture. The stop-cuts also help to prevent this from happening. Finally, the left-hand side was carefully chased out, again the outer side of the V first. The horizontal could then be cut as for the 'H' and again, being narrower, will also be half as deep as the verticals.



24



25

25 Once all the letters had been cut, they needed tidying up. You may have noticed on the pictures so far that some of the serifs were not quite horizontal and the curves a little ragged. I used the knife, bull-nosed gouge and fishtail gouges to remedy this and also ensured that for each letter the bottom of the v was clean cut. I then lightly sanded the surface to remove any pencil marks. In this case, as the sign is going outdoors, I gave it a good coat of teak oil.

26 You would never know that behind the resulting sign is an old teak draining board. ▶



26

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Sharpening clinic – A turn for the better?

Nic Westermann discusses sloyd bevels



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NIC WESTERMANN

From top down: Flat plane blade; resharpened turning sloyd; fresh turning sloyd; flat over hollow sloyd; resharpened flat bevelled sloyd

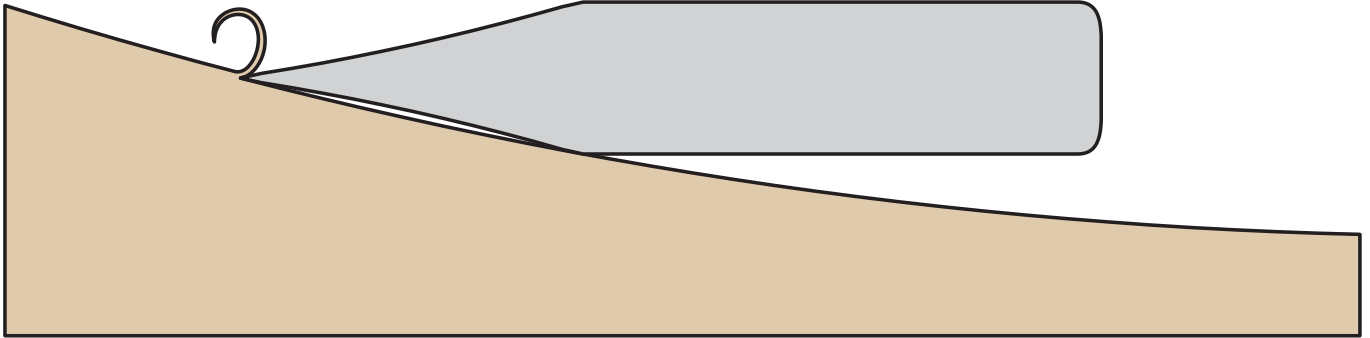
I was told once, in hushed tones how at a sloyd gathering in Sweden a highly respected carver informed a disciple that the bevels on his knife weren't flat. This was a truly crushing proclamation – in those hallowed circles flat bevels were the only acceptable option. There are, of course, other views on bevels, and they tend to be more pragmatic. While flat bevels are useful for many cuts, they will inhibit others – there is no absolute right or wrong, different disciplines of carving will naturally gravitate to the grinds that suit the forms and the cuts needed to make them.

For years now I have been putting up diagrams of knives with flat bevels binding in a concave or hollowing cut. This is the Achilles heel of a long, flat bevel, and in this article, I wanted to share the tests I have done to see how marked this effect is in practice. Can a bevel be so

long and flat that it becomes more of a hindrance than an asset?

In theory, when a flat bevelled blade cuts a concave, the wood fouling on the back of the bevel will push the edge into the wood meaning that there is no way it can cut the curve cleanly. Rather, it will dip in and out of the cut, causing the characteristic chatter marks that we all want to avoid. This often happens at changes in density of the wood – it was noticeable that in the test cuts I made, the chatter marks aligned with the growth rings.

However, indisputably you can make a smooth hollowing cut with a flat bevelled blade, and this is largely due to the wood compressing and allowing a tiny bit of clearance, allowing shallow hollows to be cut. I think we subconsciously aid this by applying downwards force to the back of the bevel in difficult cuts such as these.



A blade with a flat over hollow bevel turning in a very shallow cut, on a radius this large it should still cut cleanly

I would also suggest that virtually no bevel is truly flat – however hard we try when sharpening by hand or stropping we will always slightly round a bevel, either over its entire width or, in the case of stropping on a soft surface, by forming a micro bevel. Both of these deviations from a flat bevel will help a blade to turn in a cut, but this is at the expense of bevel support when making a planing cut. It's always going to be a balance.

My experiment this month was to look at a few of these different bevel forms and see how tight a curve they could cut before the dreaded chatter occurred.

First, I was going to compare two common bevel forms found on larger sloyd-style knives, 'flat' and 'flat over a hollow' (FoH) – this being a blade which has been hollow ground

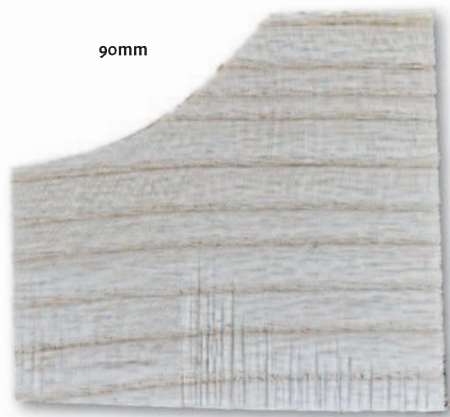
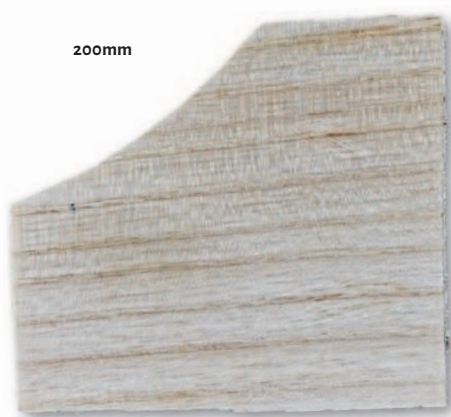
then the edge refined by sharpening on a flat abrasive. With the centre of the bevel removed it is much less likely to rock when sharpening, leading to a flatter bevel form.

In theory they should cut identically, as both should be presenting flat bevels at the edge. However, in practice, repeated sharpening of a plain, flat bevelled blade will often round the bevel, making for better turning. As already stated, in green woodworking a flat bevel is often seen as vitally important on a sloyd knife, partly as the forms are usually less complex and often more faceted than other forms of carving, meaning that turning is not that important an ability – especially for the roughing cuts which sloyd blades are often used for. Also, green wood is naturally

more compressible, allowing these geometrically impossible cuts to be made.

For this test I used a carefully sharpened FoH blade – this should be closer to flat than any other blade tested here. For the flat bevelled blade, I used an old, much-loved, and often resharpened blade. I marked up areas of both blades where the bevels were the same width at 5mm and made test cuts in some thin, but dry, ash. I made cuts at roughly 45° across the corner, then hollowed out this cut until chattering occurred.

It was quite obvious that, despite my best efforts over the years, I have not kept the bevels on my knife as flat as I thought. The FoH blade, in contrast, excelled at cutting straight and really did not want to deviate from this at all.



Left: FoH blade this was very difficult to turn, diameter of cut 200mm Right: Older flat bevelled blade, this turned quite smoothly considering the length of the bevel – 90mm

Next, I wanted to look at some smaller blades. Years ago I used to make some blades for Bill Prickett, and ended up using a very narrow stock – simple geometry dictated that this gave a short bevel length, which made for an agile blade that would turn but still provide some bevel support. However, the thin blade was not very strong and this wasn't a knife suitable for heavy use. I should say at this point that the profile or outline of the blades I made for Bill were completely different – I am, in this article, talking about cross-sectional edge geometry only.

My new take replicating this bevel length is to use two grinds, as shown, which allows for a thicker spine, especially at the tang, providing rigidity but also the all-important narrow bevel. The blade also tapers along the spine from the tang to the tip, meaning the bevel get shorter towards the tip. This, allied with the forged round tang, makes for a blade that is deceptively strong considering the extremely fine tip section. I have been making these for a couple of years – they are called, perhaps unsurprisingly, turning sloyd.

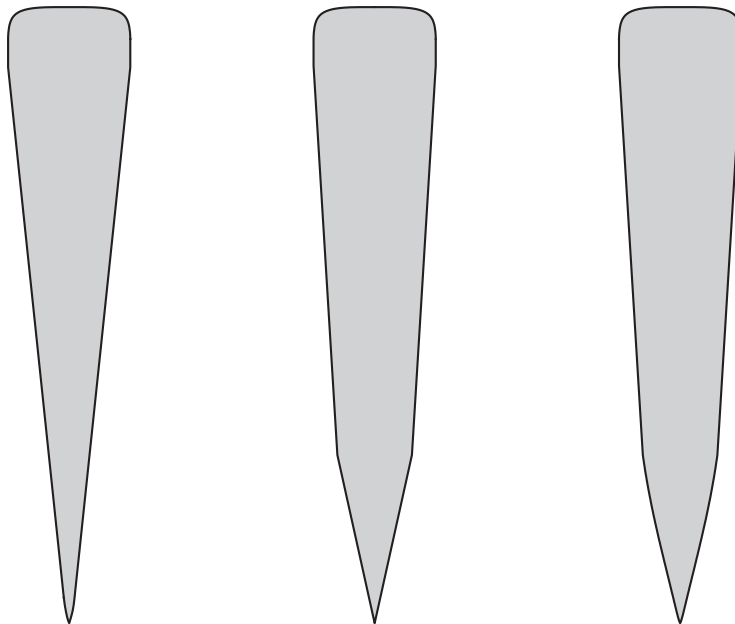
Another grind that I wanted to test uses a very long, shallow bevel but with a micro bevel to beef up the edge strength, which will allow some clearance for turning in the cut. I ground this blade specially for the article. It's a grind often used in flat plane carving – which I find odd, as theory suggests the micro bevel would mean the blade would not tend to cut flat planes very well as it would have to be tipped slightly to engage the edge, leading to a

lack of bevel support. I didn't expect to like this grind but tried (and failed) to keep an open mind as I put it through the test.

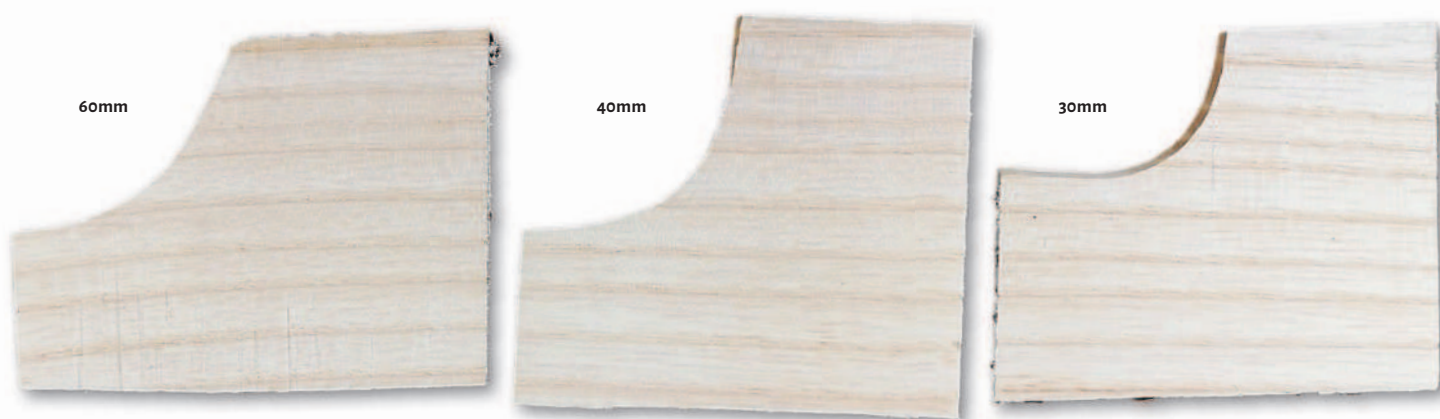
I mentioned that repeated sharpening of the flat bevelled sloyd blades can give rise to a curved bevel – this isn't really so much of an issue in the turning sloyd as this should make it cut deeper hollows. So, to test this I pitted a new turning sloyd with a dead flat bevel straight off the grinder against a blade that

had been resharpened a few times and was obviously less flat.

I again took test cuts in 3mm ash. I tried not to skew or slice as I wanted the bevel at 90 degrees to the cut. Also, this allowed me to keep to areas where the bevel length of the two versions of the turning sloyds was the same, at 2.5 mm- this was near the widest section of the bevel, so it showed a worst case scenario for these blades.



Cross sections of the 3 smaller blades tested, close to the tang, notice the subtle difference between the freshly ground turning sloyd and the slightly rounded bevels on the resharpened blades



Left: The flat plane blade did not cut smoothly, or especially well, maybe my sharpening was suspect. Diameter of cut 60mm Centre: The flat bevel blade cut smoothly and was the sharpest of the three – 40mm Right: The resharpened blade turned even better – 30mm

These results were very close to what I was expecting, which was a relief – it would have been rather embarrassing if all the images I have been putting up had proved to be spurious. With the larger sloyd blades I was surprised to see just how little a FoH blade wants to turn, although a bit of stropping on soft leather would easily address this by adding the slight micro-bevel that I had tried so hard to avoid on my venerable flat bevelled sloyd.

With the smaller blades, I wasn't impressed with the flat plane grind – it didn't turn well and didn't plane a flat surface very nicely either. However, this may be down to my inexperience in sharpening this bevel form. The comparison between the two turning sloyds was interesting, when I looked very closely at the cut the resharpened blade was turning in the binding point, which was not actually the back of the bevel but the spine. This could have been avoided if I had

chosen a narrower section of the blade to make my cut, but it would have meant redoing the other tests. In practice though, with any of these knives if you want to take the tightest possible radius cut then it makes sense to do it with the tip of the blade – the bevels are narrower and the curve of the edge at the tip will also help with this.

It isn't, however, helpful to skew a blade as this will effectively present a longer bevel, which is the precise opposite of what is needed. Slicing cuts – drawing the edge along the cut – are very helpful. In a tight cut, where the blade edge is compressed into the wood and wants to dig in – which signals the start of the chattering cycle – a slicing action can help to stop this occurring. This action, allied with shallow cuts while applying gentle weight to the back of the bevel and keeping to the tip, will help you to make the smoothest, tightest cuts whatever blade you are using. 🍯



Turningsloyd detail



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Kek Lok Si Temple

We take a closer look at the largest Buddhist temple complex in Malaysia

Kek Lok Si, or The Temple of Supreme Bliss, is a large Buddhist temple complex, situated on a hill in Penang, Malaysia. Construction began in 1891, with some of the complex partially carved into the rock face, and the site consists of a series of monasteries, prayer halls, pavilions, temples, pagodas and gardens. The richly decorated temples include millions of images of the Buddha, in the form of wood and stone carvings, sculptures and painted murals. The main seven-storey pagoda was added in 1930, and includes Chinese, Thai and Burmese designs. It also contains 10,000 alabaster and bronze statues of the Buddha. In 2002 a 30m tall bronze statue of Guanyin, the goddess of mercy, was installed above the pagoda, accompanied by 100 smaller statues of the goddess. The complex also features 12 animal statues, representing the signs of the Chinese zodiac.

Sadly, a fire in October 2021 caused extensive damage to the temple complex, and rebuilding work is currently underway. You can see more of the treasures of Kek Lok Si at: kekloksitemple.com



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