

WOOD CARVING

STEVE BISCO GUEST EDITOR

- Introduces the issue
- Carves a gilded dolphin dish
- Profiles carver Joanne Grogan



PROJECTS TO CARVE Seahorse • Daffodil panel • Herons in reeds
• Butterfly on a flower • Decorated rolling pin • Sleepy child figure
TECHNICAL ADVICE Carving with rasps • Sharpening a Macaroni tool

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Guest editor's letter

Steve Bisco



Student carvers at City & Guilds carving school

It is true that a large proportion of carvers are getting on in years, and the pessimistic view often expressed is that their skills will disappear with them when they pass on. But I disagree. I am optimistic that their place will keep on being filled by new carvers. Some will be young men and women making a career in carving, passing through the excellent courses at art and craft schools, like the City & Guilds of London Art School, and these will ensure a skilled core of professional carvers. But in addition to these, the majority will still be people who are looking for a rewarding hobby once the pressures of work and raising a family start to ease off, or even as an escape from those pressures. We should not be concerned that so many carvers are in older age groups as this is the time of life when people are more likely to take up hobbies. The pandemic lockdowns showed us that when people have more time on their hands they look for something creative and rewarding to fill that time.

It is to the hobby carver that *Woodcarving* magazine can be of most service. When I first started carving, many years ago, I needed guidance not only on how to carve, but also on what to carve. In short, I needed projects. Projects give practice, and practice makes perfect – or hopefully improvement at least. *Woodcarving* offers projects in abundance, and in a wide

range of carving genres and styles. Carving is a broad church, ranging through birds and wildlife, chip carving, sculpture, low relief panels, historic period styles, flowers and foliage, stone carving, folk and forest carving, knife carving, power carving, and those brave carvers who set about tree trunks with chain saws. The thing I like most about this magazine is that it tries to cover and encourage this wide spectrum. I specialise in decorative carving in period styles, but as a reader as well as a writer, I always enjoy reading the articles by my fellow contributors. Even though I may work in different styles and genres to them, I always learn something from seeing their methods and the way they approach their work.

The range of projects in this issue includes, among others, a seahorse carving by John Samworth, some daffodils in a pierced panel from Dave Western, a carved rolling pin from Kevin Alviti that prints flowers on your pastry, a beautiful butterfly from Cedric Boyns, and a Gilded Dolphin Dish from me. To show that woodcarving has a rosy future we have a profile of City & Guilds carving student Jo Grogan (pictured above), recent winner of the Grinling Gibbons Tercentenary Award for woodcarving, and William Barsley (himself a City & Guilds carving graduate) takes us on a tour visiting carvers around the world.

Happy Carving! Steve Bisco

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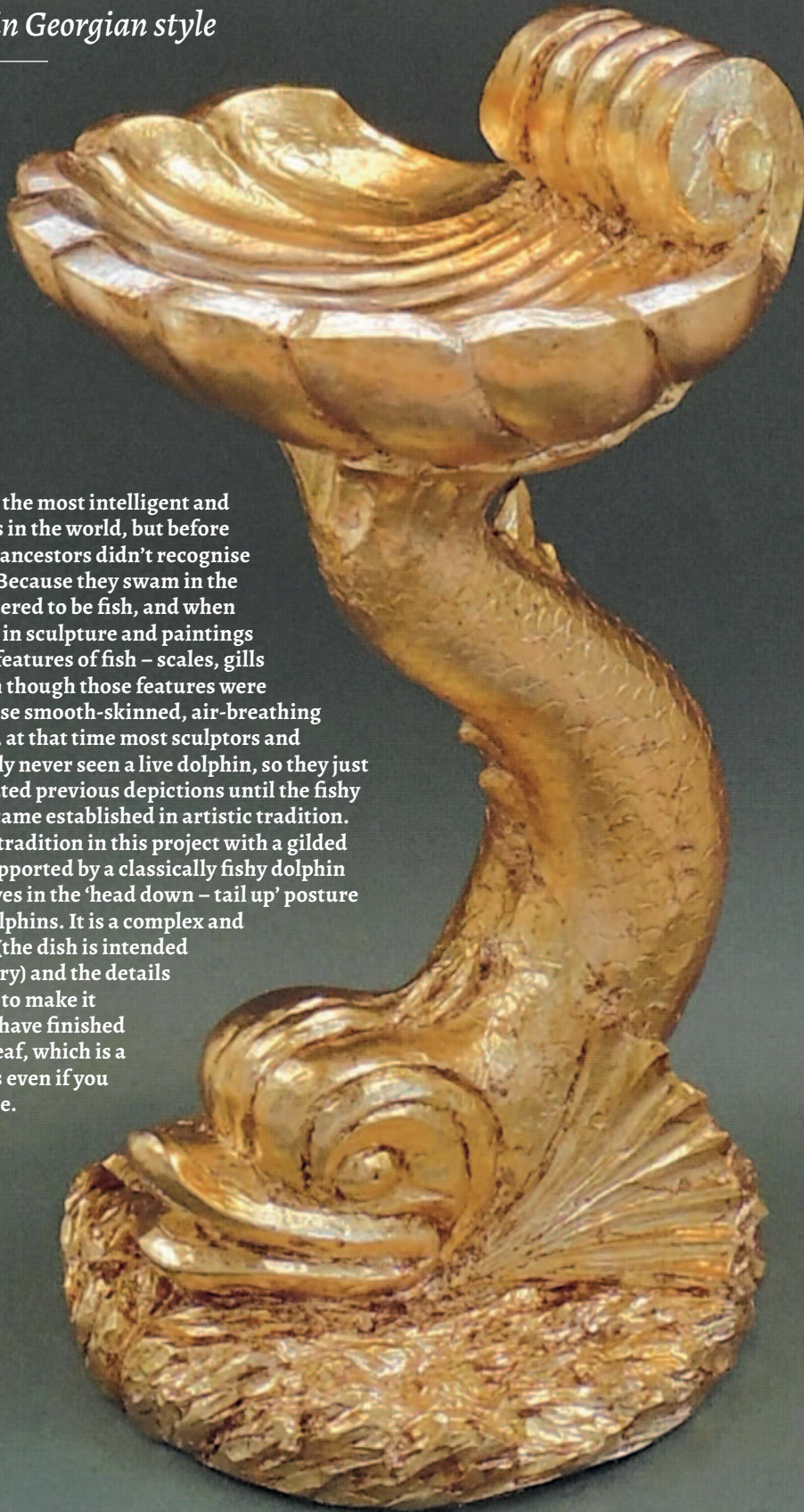


Gilded dolphin dish

Steve Bisco carves and gilds a classical dolphin and shell dish in Georgian style

Dolphins are among the most intelligent and best-loved mammals in the world, but before the 19th century our ancestors didn't recognise them as mammals. Because they swam in the sea they were considered to be fish, and when they were portrayed in sculpture and paintings they were given the features of fish – scales, gills and spiky fins – even though those features were clearly absent on these smooth-skinned, air-breathing creatures. To be fair, at that time most sculptors and painters had probably never seen a live dolphin, so they just copied and exaggerated previous depictions until the fishy classical dolphin became established in artistic tradition.

I have kept to this tradition in this project with a gilded scallop-shell dish supported by a classically fishy dolphin frolicking in the waves in the 'head down – tail up' posture typically used for dolphins. It is a complex and fairly small carving (the dish is intended to hold small jewellery) and the details are fine and delicate to make it jewel-like in itself. I have finished it in imitation gold leaf, which is a fairly simple process even if you haven't done it before.



Things you will need

Tools

Gouges:

- No.3, 10mm, 5mm bent
- No.3 fishtail, 18mm, 10mm
- No.4 fishtail, 6mm
- No.5, 7mm, 3mm, 13mm curved
- No.7, 10mm
- No.8, 8mm, 8mm curved
- No.9, 3mm, 16mm curved
- Back-bent, 12mm
- Veiner – 2mm
- V-tool – 6mm straight, 2mm straight, 4mm curved

Chisels:

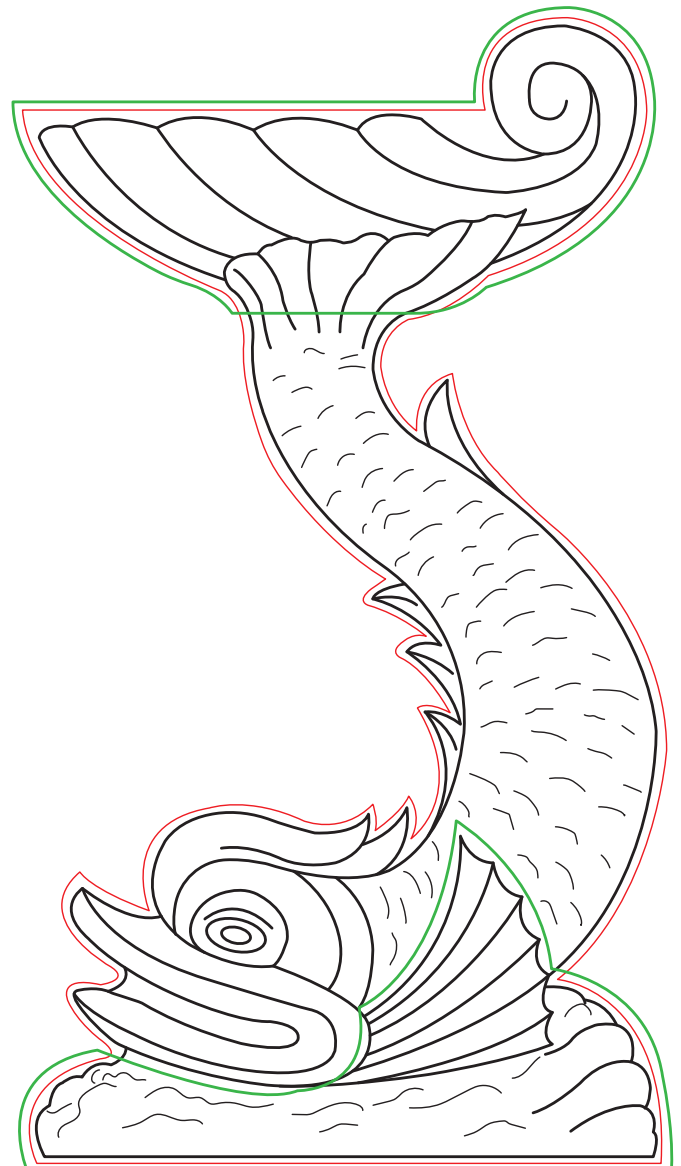
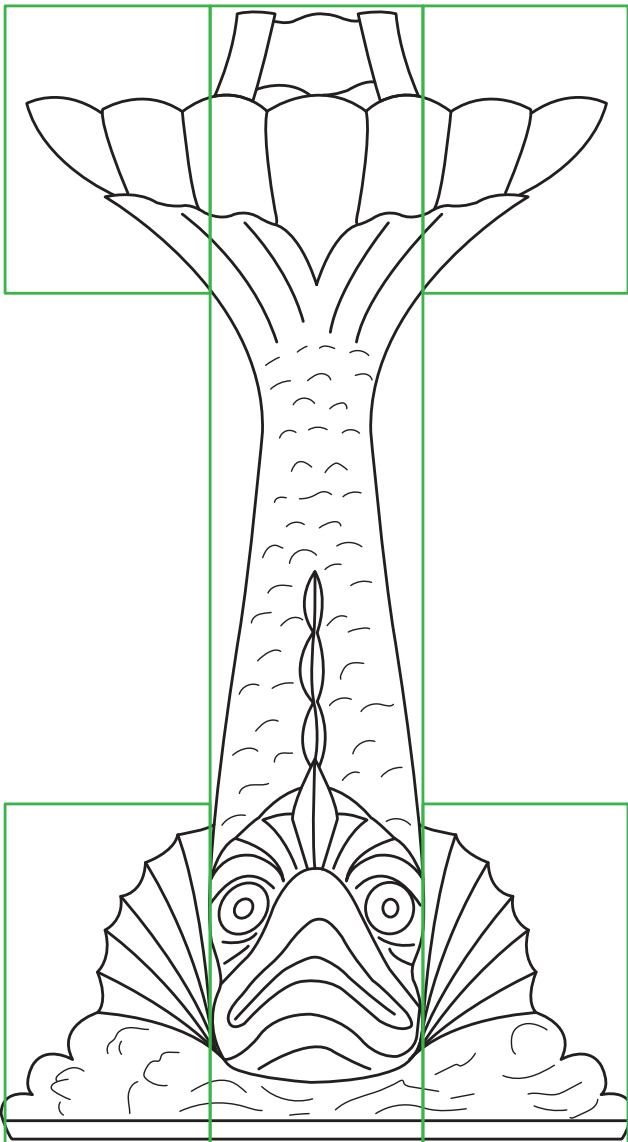
- Flat – 20mm, 6.5mm
- Hooked skew chisel – 16mm

Other:

- Bandsaw/scrollsaw/jigsaw

Materials

- Lime, overall 230 x 130 x 130mm
- (Lamination option 485 x 130 x 43mm)
- PVA wood adhesive
- Sanding-sealer, gold lacquer, gilding size, imitation gold leaf, French polish



◀ Lamination

Limewood is the best wood to use for a complex carving like this. You could carve it in one piece from a solid block 230 x 130 x 130mm, but this would mean carving away a lot of bulk get to the slender tail of the dolphin. An easier and more economical way is to cut out the side profile from a piece of lime that is at least the thickness of the dolphin's body (43mm) and build up the wider sections at the top and bottom by lamination. This is illustrated by the green lines in the drawing.

Workholding

Every carving has its own particular challenges, and with this one it is workholding. It is wide at both ends and narrow in the middle, with a bend in the tail that is potentially fragile, so you have to be creative with workholding methods to ensure the work is secure and adequately supported at all times. I used three methods: screwing it upright and upside-down to a backing board when working on the base and under the dish; supporting it at both ends between two shelf brackets when working on the body, and holding it in an MDF collar to hollow the dish. You may find methods that suit you better, but for your own safety make sure the carving is firmly held.

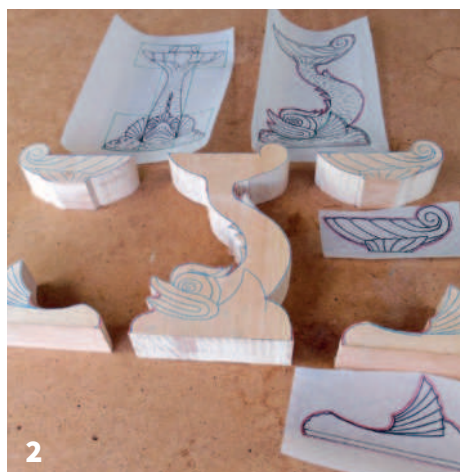
Carving for gilding

Gilding has been used on carvings since ancient times to give a rich, decorative finish that brings the carving to life. It does this by reflecting light off the convoluted surfaces in the same way as the facets on a jewel. When you are making a carving that will be gilded, you have to consider how each area will reflect light. A smooth surface will give a warm glow, but an

area carved with many facets will sparkle like a diamond. A combination of smooth and faceted surfaces generally gives the best effect, but be aware that every imperfection in the carving will also show up in the reflected light, so make sure you have the facets where you want them and not where you don't.

Preparations

- 1** Make a full-size copy of the drawing so the overall height is 230mm. Trace copies of the laminated sections marked in green on the drawing. Trace the patterns on to a piece of limewood 485 x 130 x 43mm.
- 2** The two sides of each laminated section must be reversed and aligned along the grain to give extra security to the outer edges when carved. Cut out the parts with a bandsaw, scrollsaw or jigsaw.
- 3** Glue the laminated sections on to the central piece. Give all the joining surfaces a generous coat of adhesive, then compress the pieces together. Make sure the base pieces are all level and flat underneath. I used a quick-setting laminating adhesive, but ordinary PVA will suffice.
- 4** Draw a circle 125mm in diameter under the base and on top of the dish, and mark the centre of each one. Cut around the outside of each circle with a jigsaw or coping saw to create the edge of the circular base and dish. On top of the dish you will need to add a piece of plywood 18mm thick with a segment cut out to create a flat surface for the jigsaw level with the top of the scroll.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE BISCO

Useful tips & advice

- Back-bent gouges (as in photo 12) are useful to have in your toolkit for when you need to carve a convex shape on a concave curve that is difficult to access in relation to the grain direction because of obstructions behind it.
- Carving across end grain, such as on the shell dish and the dolphin's head, can be surprisingly tough even with limewood, so use very sharp tools and try to slide them sideways a bit as you push. This creates a slicing cut which cuts through the tough fibres more easily and cleanly than simply pushing the gouge head on.



Forming the shape

5 Start forming the shape by roughing out the underside of the dish. To hold it firm upside down, use the plywood segment mentioned above, and fix the work to a backing board by screwing through the board into the middle of the dish, making sure you don't mark what will be the inside surface of the bowl.

6 Refix the work the right way up by screwing through the backing board into the centre of the base. Draw a centreline from top to bottom on the front and back. Mark out the fins and rough out their shape. Also rough out the shape of the wave area on the base, and around the back of the fins.



7 Rough out the shape of the head. Leave the eyes untouched for now, but round over the domed forehead and the sides of the head. Shape the 'beak' and mouth, taking care with the short grain at the front of the beak.

8 To shape the body and tail, set up the carving on two shelf brackets screwed firmly into the base and dish. Put the plywood spacer on top of the dish to allow for the scroll end. Support the body with blocks to prevent the short-grain curve in the tail from breaking. Form the shape of the body and tail.

Detail carving

9 Start the detail carving with the underside of the dish. Carefully mark out the flow of the shell segments and rough out the scroll at the back. Shape each segment into a smooth curve, flowing from front to back under the tail fins.

10 There are two tail fins which divide at the top of the tail and flow out and backwards on each side with their points near the back of the dish. They must appear to support the dish. Carve shallow flutes flowing into the top of the tail, and shallow scallop edges.

11 Refine the shape of the body and get the surface as smooth as you can. Carve the small fins, three on the front and one on the back, into little spikes. These are quite fiddly and the grain direction dictates how you can carve them.



12 With the carving secured by the base again, reshape the top of the head to form a central ridge which flicks up at the neck end in two fins, and lower the areas each side of the ridge. Carve the dome of the forehead and shape the back of the head behind the eyes into the curve of the neck.

13 Carve the dolphin's mouth, with the distinct upward-curling 'beak' and the pronounced lips curling backwards below the eyes. The mouth is open at the front, but remember that the grain runs vertically here, so be careful with the overhanging short grain.

14 Carve the eyes, which are inset into concentric rings representing eyelids and brows. Rotate a 2mm veiner to 'drill' the pupil.

15 The side fins are key features of the carving. Draw on six flutes splaying backwards and outwards from behind the mouth. Carve the flutes with a No.8, 8mm gouge at the wider end, then narrowing to a No.9, 3mm and finish with a 2mm veiner at the mouth end. Repeat the flutes down the back of the fins to create a scalloped edge.

16 Carve the base into the form of waves, rolling backwards from a bow wave at the front and spreading outwards like the wake of a boat to give an impression of the dolphin gambolling in the waves. Curl the waves over with a No.7, 10mm gouge, add wavelets with a No.8, 8mm gouge, and finally add lots of tiny ripples with a 2mm V-tool. Wrap the waves under the rim of the base.

17 We finish the body by carving the traditional fishy scales. These are simply pricked in with the end of deep gouges (Nos.7 to 9). Try to create a natural pattern by alternating the scales in each layer, getting smaller as the body gets narrower, and make them follow the turns in the body and tail.

Carving the dish

18 To scoop out the dish and carve the inside, I made a 'collar' by using two pieces of MDF with semi-circles cut in them which, when screwed together overhanging the bench, encircle the underside of the dish. Use a curved gouge to hollow out the end grain that forms most of the inside of the dish. This is hard work, so if you have a rotary burr tool that may be an easier option.

19 Use curved gouges to carve the flutes inside the dish to match the pattern on the underside. Shape the scallop edges around the outside and complete the scroll that rolls over from the back.





20a



20b



20c



21



22



23



24

Finishing

20 Photos 20a-c show the finished carving from the front, back, and side. Give it a coat of sander-sealer, and use fine abrasives to smooth the surfaces that should be smooth, but don't dull the details that should be sharp.

21 Prepare the carving for gilding by giving it a coat of a good-quality gold lacquer as an undercoat for the gold leaf. Put it on thinly so you don't clog the details.

22 Get a pack of imitation gold leaf and some gilding size (available quite cheaply from most art stores). Apply some gilding size thinly with a brush to a section of the carving. Leave it for about 5-10 minutes until it is dry but slightly tacky to the touch. Take a sheet of gold leaf and cut it into pieces about 25 x 50mm with clean scissors. Fold a small piece of paper and use it to pick up a piece of leaf, then slowly and carefully place it on the sized area. Press it down gently with a soft brush, then brush away any loose pieces of leaf. Go over any gaps with more leaf.

23 Imitation gold leaf needs a sealer to stop it tarnishing. I use French polish (shellac) to 'antique' it and seal it at the same time. Apply the French polish thinly by brush and avoid going over the same bit twice. Work quickly as it dries very fast.

24 Here is the finished carving, looking suitably Georgian with its 'antique' gilded finish. ●

Steve Bisco gets the lowdown from Jo Grogan, winner of the Grinling Gibbons 300 Woodcarving Award with her stunning piece, Lace Losbter

"This piece draws inspiration from my background in fashion and from Gillborn's love story. My aim was to create a piece of wearable art. I found that a bubble was a simple form which has been referenced by both fashion designers and Gillborn's art. I also wanted to play with the texture and surface and incorporate a pleated pattern to the fabric, reinforcing the core point work by Gillborn and a bubble-like swirling pattern which my own bubble line evokes through a pleated fabric and printed. The piece is reminiscent of a bubble that captured the movement from one world to another, capturing the possibilities of our world during this time. The final result speaks my message of being bold. The final work speaks my message of being bold. The final work speaks my message of being bold."

Priscilla in *Wardrobe Piece Theatre*, The Great Gatsby
David Emery and a bubble-like
line evoke my own love story.

in Vogue

*Grading
Gillborn
300
AWARD*



One of the perks of being guest editor is that you can choose a carver you would like to be featured in the magazine and ask them questions about their life and career. I had no hesitation in choosing Jo Grogan – a woodcarving student at the City & Guilds of London Art School and winner of the prestigious Grinling Gibbons Tercentenary Award for Woodcarving.

The awards (see *Woodcarving 183*) were given as part of the 2021 Grinling Gibbons Tercentenary celebrations 'with a focus on inspiring and supporting emerging professional carvers to develop their valuable skills and craftsmanship'. The judges unanimously selected Jo's lace lobster sculpture for the top woodcarving prize, in which Jo included a reference to Gibbons' famous lace cravat. The feature

that particularly drew my eye was the lobster's long thin antennae that were perfectly positioned with exactly the right amount of curve to make the sculpture look extraordinarily alive. This showed an artistic flare for design as well as technical skill in carving. Reading that Joanne had only recently made a career change from the fashion industry to become a professional woodcarver, I felt we should find out more about what inspired her choice and what her hopes are for the future.





Tell us how you came to be a carver.

As a child I found comfort and joy in being creative, so I knew fairly early on in life that I wanted to do something art-related. I think it can be quite challenging as you then enter adulthood and have to decide which path to take. I wasn't really aware of the options available so I did a foundation course at Liverpool John Moores in 1998, and from there I kind of fell into fashion and spent the best part of the past 20 years working as a fashion designer. But for some time I felt that my values and sense of purpose were no longer aligned with my passions. I care a lot about the environment and exploited communities and I wanted to look at ways in which I could use my creativity to be a force for good. I wanted to be in a position where I could use my hands to physically craft things that would hopefully last beyond my years of life.

Luckily for me, I come from a family rich in traditional hand skills, so I grew up always having a keen interest in architecture and ornament.

In 2019 I decided to look into traditional hand skills as I knew that was the direction I wanted to take. I went to a QEST talk at the V&A museum about British Craftsmanship and it blew me away. The panel consisted of four craftspeople, among them a stonecarver and a woodcarver, both women and both trained at City & Guilds Art School in London. I was in total awe of their talent and it really encouraged me to see two women who were of a similar age to myself dedicating their lives to their crafts and producing breathtakingly beautiful pieces of art. With that, I visited C&G and instantly knew it was the place for me. Before starting my degree last year I decided to participate in a short woodcarving course at West Dean College to try out a bit of carving – I figured if I was going to give up my career for this craft I had better check that I both liked it and wasn't completely

awful at it. We had a wonderful teacher, Alex Jones, whose charisma, enthusiasm, and guidance helped me to decide that this was indeed what I wanted, so I made the life-changing decision and started my three-year degree studying Historic Woodcarving and Gilding at C&G last September.

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

Because I only started carving a year ago I don't have lots of pieces, but they all have a special place in my heart for different reasons. One of my favourites is my Gothic stiff-leaf in oak – it was my second carving project and it was originally taken from a medieval period misericord from Lincoln Cathedral. I wasn't very keen on it when I first saw it, it was my first experience with oak and I was dreading how hard the wood might be, having only worked previously in lime. I was also a bit intimidated by the awkward highs and lows, some of which were in tight spaces and very difficult to manoeuvre, I knew that it was going to really test me. It took me a good week or so to just rough it out. When I came to setting levels I started to feel a bit exasperated with it as it just looked so ugly. As our term came to an end for the Christmas break I popped it in my bag to take home and told myself that I probably wouldn't even touch it. Because of Covid I ended up spending Christmas in my own flat instead of with family, so I decided to take out the leaf and give it a go. I worked solidly on it for about a week and slowly but surely it began to emerge and take shape. The end piece is far from a glorious example of carving prowess, but it taught me one of the most valuable lessons I have learned so far – not to get in my own way, to keep my self-doubt in check, to release myself from unrealistic expectations and not to give up.



Tell us about the piece you created for the Grinling Gibbons Centuries in the Making exhibition and your involvement in that. Have you been nominated for/won any other awards or competitions?

I heard about the Grinling Gibbons competition via an email from uni at the beginning of the year. I initially dismissed it as I believed that there would be no point in me participating because I am so early in my training. I decided to read the brief nonetheless and it instantly got my attention. The main direction was the following quote by Horace Walpole: 'Art which arrives even unto deception.' I discovered Gibbons' Lace Cravat last year during a lecture at uni. I was immediately smitten and had stored it in my brain as an item I wanted to explore further. I decided to do some research into the relationship between carving and fashion. I then decided to look at some of Gibbons' most iconic motifs. I have always had a fondness for his depictions of marine life, in particular his carvings of crustaceans such as crabs and lobsters. The lobster was of particular interest to me as it also has quite a well-documented history of featuring in both the worlds of art and fashion, from Salvador Dali to Philip Treacy. The piece that inspired me the most was a lobster hat created by Erik Halley, which was worn by Isabella Blow. From here I started to connect the dots, I knew that I wanted to create a piece of wearable art, I wanted to include a lobster and I wanted my piece to have a lace textural element, tying together all the layers of my research. This is where my concept for the lace lobster headpiece was born.

I put together a presentation of all of my research and I developed a clay maquette to support my design, and from there I was selected to go through to the next round of the competition with 10 other carvers where we then had to make our piece.

The deadline was fairly tight, more so because of my inexperience

at carving. I tend to work quite slowly and I had to juggle my uni coursework and my part-time job, so initially I was really concerned that I just wouldn't be able to do it. Luckily for me, I had great support from Nick Roberson, who was our support mentor for the Gibbons competition, and from my tutor at C&G Tom Ball, who told me to go for it. I had also been assigned a Master Carver mentor and had the opportunity to visit Charlie Oldham in his studio in Somerset, which was a wonderful experience.

I ended up carving the entire piece in a three-week period in July, working 12-16 hours every day. I got to the point where my hands couldn't hold my knife and fork! It wasn't all smooth running, I made some mistakes, I had a couple of breakages, and because I had carved it in separate pieces I had some trouble trying to assemble it, but I got there in the end.

Now I had the lobster but I wanted to think about how it would be displayed and create a further sense of contemplation to the full piece. I was fortunate enough to have participated in a skull modelling workshop at C&G run by Marcus Cornish in the weeks before the exhibition, so I created a skull from clay and fired it and that became the stand for my lobster headpiece. The skull was propped up by two books – David Esterly's *The Lost Carving* and Peter Thuring's *The Painter in Wood*, as I bought this book at Petworth House after visiting the carved room for the first time, which upon entrance made me cry. I also draped a lace collar made by my nan, Lily, over the books to show the beauty of hand skills in all their forms and how one can often lend itself to another.

I was totally overwhelmed when I attended the opening of the exhibition in Bonhams – it was great to meet all the other carvers and also some Master Carvers who I admire, such as Tony Webb and Paul Ferguson. I was blown away when I found out that I had come first place in the Woodcarving category.



Jo carving her Gibbons piece with the help of her nephew Joseph

Name some of the influences and inspirations behind your carving style (people/art forms/time periods etc).

I find inspiration almost anywhere. I will always have a keen interest in jewellery and print, and I'm particularly inspired by the work of Silvia Furmanovich, who uses the art of marquetry and combines it with fine jewellery, creating stunning, handcrafted pieces. One of my favourite artistic periods is the Arts & Crafts movement. I find that my values are somewhat aligned to that period because of the promotion of the honesty and integrity of the materials and pieces that were created, I really admire the work that William Morris did, not only from an artistic stance but also for his political beliefs in making society better and more equal for all. I also really admire Christopher Dresser, as he seemed to turn his hand to many different disciplines and produced pieces that were truly visionary.

I've always found myself really drawn to Japanese and Chinese art, there is a level of refinement and craftsmanship that I find astonishing. I find lots of global cultures fascinating. I think sometimes we can be a bit Eurocentric in our tastes growing up in the west, and it sadly took me to get a bit older to fully explore the art produced by other nations, in particular Polynesian, Persian, Mesopotamian and the art forms from many indigenous ancient communities. It never fails to amaze me to see what human hands created thousands of years ago.

What sort of projects are in store for the future? (What are you working on/where do you see your work headed?)

I'm currently working on a very exciting project but I'm afraid it is top secret so my lips are sealed. I think it is really important that I finish my training at C&G. I still have a huge amount to learn, so I'm looking forward to starting my second year and growing my skills further. They are a wonderful team of talented

professionals, so I feel very fortunate that I get to learn from some of the best. In terms of direction for my work, I'm still figuring that out, I think it will naturally evolve as I learn and experiment more. It's wonderful to look at the past and have such a rich abundance of material to use for inspiration, but I also think it is important for me to look at where I can take the craft, how I might be able to push it forward. I feel that woodcarving can sometimes be overlooked and I want to make my work feel relevant and accessible. At some point I would love to get involved with community groups and projects and share the skills I have. I believe that art in all its forms helps to connect people and gives makers an enormous sense of fulfillment but it isn't always accessible to a lot of people, the world of elite arts and crafts can feel totally unattainable and intimidating to some, especially those from low-income backgrounds. I want to help break down some of those boundaries and show people from all walks of life that we all have a natural and instinctive ability to create and there is a place for everyone.

How do you find being a woman in a male-dominated art?

I have always worked in predominantly female businesses and the coin has totally flipped. I think it is important to remind myself that not that long ago most women weren't allowed to work in fields like this and that in some countries that is still the case to this day. I work with some great men and I feel grateful that things are shifting in a better direction but as always, there is still work to be done. My dream would be to start a female carving association for both wood and stone carvers, not because I believe in things being segregated but more as a support network where women can connect and know that they aren't alone. ●
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Seahorse

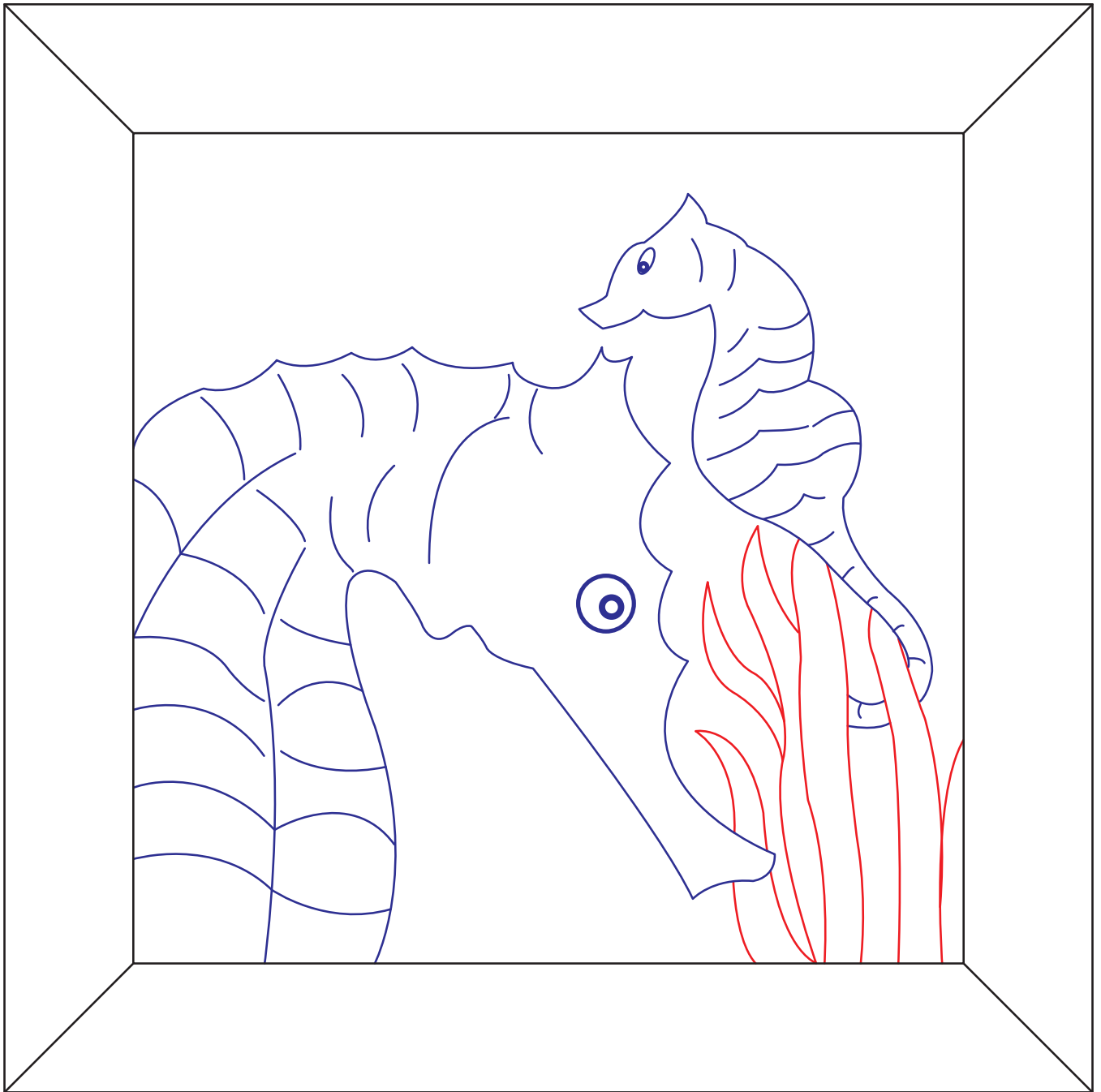
John Samworth completes his trio of marine creatures with these elegant seahorses



Seahorses are small marine fish, closely related to pipefish, but poor swimmers. They anchor themselves using their tails while they feed. Because of their lack of a stomach, they feed constantly. With only 46 species known, they still cover much of the world's oceans, from the tropics to colder waters. They live in shallow water swimming, barely, among sea grasses or coral beds. While fossil records have revealed seahorses inhabiting the waters over three million years ago, with earliest ancestors' fossils, a type of pipefish, being about 13 million years old. This

suggests that seahorses are relative newcomers when compared with starfish, whose fossils date back 450 million years.

For my final article on the marine creature theme, I shall demonstrate the carving of a seahorse. This project will incorporate two distinct styles of relief carving. The large seahorse is carved in deep relief and will project out of the picture frame, while the small seahorse will be carved in shallow relief to suggest added depth to the carving.



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 & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- Wood marking gauge
- Set square
- Jack plane
- Fret or coping saw
- No.11, 12mm gouge
- No.11, 6mm gouge
- Veiner, No.11, 3mm gouge
- No.3, 12mm gouge
- No.3, 6mm gouge
- No.3, 3mm gouge
- No.9, 10mm gouge
- No.2, 10mm skew gouge
- Parting or V-tool

1 Initial preparation is to cut the back piece of wood to 12.5 x 12.5cm square and plane smooth the front face to take the glue joint. Trace the small seahorse now before attaching the front piece. Plane smooth a second piece of wood, ensure the grains will lie in the same direction, trace and cut out with a fretsaw the large seahorse. Glue together leaving a small 1-2mm overlap to take the frame. Glue flush if not using a frame.

2 Start by removing waste wood from the top side of the large seahorse as marked. Note the rounded cross section, the change in height for the snout and that there is a ridge running the length of the snout.

3 To remove the waste, use whatever gouge suits you best, either an inverted No.3, 12mm flat gouge or No.11, 12mm fluter. I have left the side of the head untouched at this stage, however it will be carved later. I will not leave any unnatural flat surfaces on the seahorse. Leave sufficient wood to carve the eye.

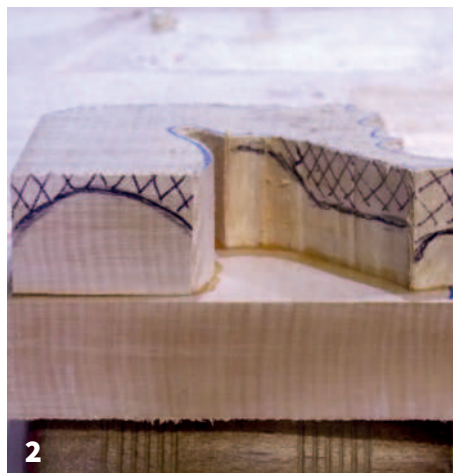
4 Using a No. 9, 10mm, carve the eye as a pea shape. Lightly rotate the gouge upon its axis around the eye, then chip out a small groove around the eye before inverting the gouge and shaving off the top and sides.

Shaping the head

5 Shape the head (cornet section) by removing wood behind the eye and at the top of the neck. I used a No.3, 10mm gouge. These sections are different for each seahorse, so nobody can say your interpretation is inaccurate. Mark out the pattern on to the main body. Here I have alternated between convex and concave curves. It is far simpler to keep to just one curve.

6 Using a deep sweep No.9, 10mm gouge or a fluter, remove the central areas along the neck and back to shape the body, leaving the lines to mark the high ridges. At the top of the neck and along the back, follow the curve of the body halfway down towards the background.

7 On the main body, mark concave areas to be removed forming a shallow and smooth dip. Invert a flat No.3, 6mm gouge and round over the edges of the convex shapes to create a smooth, undulating surface.





8 Start on the background. Chase around the small seahorse and separate the seaweed strands with a parting tool and remove about 1mm of wood from the background.



9 Here we can see the chased-out seahorse and weed, the lowered background and the top edge of the large seahorse. Mark a centreline along the seahorse's neck about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the depth. Below this line the carving will be undercut, creating a realistic body shape and interesting shadows.

10 Normally I would not undercut this early, but I need to remove some wood to gain access to a tight area between the two seahorses and the seaweed. Once a small amount of wood was removed, I could access this area to remove the background with a small No.3, 3mm gouge.

11 For the seaweed, I want the strands to be long, smooth lines just gently rippling. Ribbon-like. Start from one side and consistently work toward the other. Here I have gone from left to right because that was demanded by the grain. But working right to left gives greater access. Slope the cross-section to each strand of seaweed, this will result in deeper edges and stronger shadows between each strand.



Useful tips & advice

Working from cut wood towards uncut wood means that any gouge slips do not damage finished carving work.



12 Round over the seahorses' edges and give some shape to the surface, lowering the snout, dorsal fin and tail area. Where the tail wraps around the seaweed, carve as though it is a Celtic knot, where one edge appears to disappear behind the next.



13 Finish the carving with some small 'nick' cuts to suggest shape, fin and eye on the small seahorse. Undercut the large horse and lightly sand with a 180 grit paper. I do not usually sand, however this carving contains a number of hollowed areas on the body which benefited from the light sand to remove odd wisps of wood.

The frame is made from black walnut, which contrasts well and frames the limewood. The finish is tung oil, left to cure for three days before applying a top coat of beeswax. Hang on the wall, next to the starfish and octopus, and enjoy. ●

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A feather in my cap

Nic Westermann tackles the challenging sharpening of a Macaroni tool

Be careful what you wish for – I had put the call out for challenging tools to sharpen and this month I nearly had to admit defeat with the couple that Robert posted to me. Actually, one did beat me, and when my bruised ego has recovered, I'll take another look, try and sort it out, then devote an article to what went wrong – and hopefully what went right on the second go.

We are left for this article with what initially seemed like the more difficult of the pair: a tiny Henry Taylor Macaroni tool – beautifully made but with a fine sprinkling of rust. It really was small at 2.3mm wide and 3.3mm deep.



Macaroni

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NIC WESTERMANN

The formula

In this series I have tried to follow the same formula: straight test cuts with the tool as it came to me across the same end-grain test block, sharpen, then a new series of cuts hopefully showcasing the sharper edge. It seemed that this was unfair though – how could a tool shaped like a flat bottomed 'U' cut cleanly? The cutting edge was narrower than the shoulders, binding was inevitable.

And when it did bind, I could feel this delicate tool flexing in a really disconcerting way as I forced it through the too-narrow slot it had cut. This was obviously not right and in situations like this I 'phone a friend' – Peter Benson, and he was, as ever, able to help. He explained that straight cuts are not commonly done with a Macaroni, they are used to great affect for texturing and undercutting, hair in particular, something I have never tried. Peter described the tool as two 90° V-tools, which gave me, I hope, a better understanding of it. To this end I made a few curved test cuts in a what Peter described as a 'lazy S'. They didn't go well. At the point of transitioning between left and right V-tools, I was still getting a flat-bottomed cut with the same tear-out. My other lifeline, YouTube, was unfortunately little help.

I never make tools that I don't use as, if you can't truly understand how they work, how can you design them to cut

effectively? I did hope, though, that I could sharpen an existing design without a full understanding of what it was used for.

I made some test cuts in a hollow cut into the wood, this cut was better, but you can see from the shavings that the cuts were not that clean.



Initial cuts into a hollow, tear-out still evident

◀ Cleaning and refining

First, as ever, I worked on the inside of the tool. The light surface rust needed removing, and I like to clean up and refine at least 10mm inside the tool. Once this is done, it should make resharpening the tool easy – all sharpening would be done from the outside with only the resultant burr needing to be removed from the inside. It was tempting to skip this stage, but an edge is the result of two well-cut bevels and pitting on the inside would result in blunt spots in the edge, regardless of how well-polished and ground the more visible outside bevel was.

It took a bit of thought, but I made up a simple tool to polish up the three inside faces using a strip of bandsaw blade with the teeth ground down to fit the slight curve to the tool. It was the thinnest strip I had in the workshop and still only just fitted inside. With some careful cutting I was able to fix a piece of self adhesive abrasive paper to the bottom and one side of the tool, and I was able to work down through the grits and finished at 10,000 grit, which is essentially a polish. After this I left the old paper on and it could be used to remove the burr from sharpening the outside face.



Sharpening tool in use, note they cut one wing at a time so two passes are needed on each grit



Cleaned up inside bevels

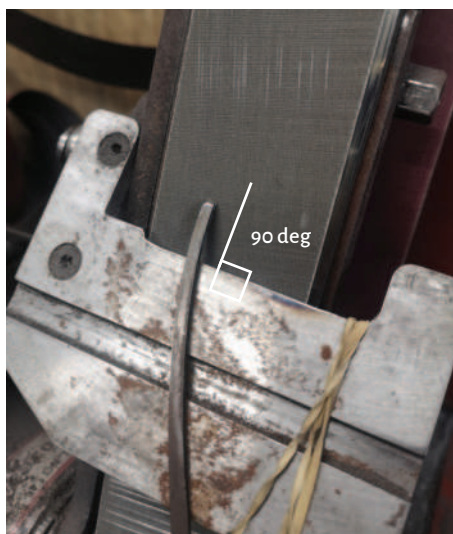
The outside

Sharpening the outside wasn't that difficult. The ProEdge was set up at 25° and it was a case of taking gentle cuts and checking, then working through the grits. Using this method you are relying on the grinds on the outside of the tool as the register to define the bevel grind, if they are not parallel to the inside grinds you will get inconsistent bevels, as it was there was some divergence but it wasn't that hard to correct. As the tool was so small it ground away very quickly and frequent checks were required to keep the two sides even.

As the bottom of the tool was curved it would obviously rock, so I used a suitable diameter of steel rod to provide two points of contact to make things easier.

Finally, two small cones were needed in the corners of the tool, as you can see from the dimensionally accurate diagram, there was a tiny radius in these corners and obviously three flat bevels could not make for a straight edge. This small cone is also useful as it allows the tool to rotate and turn in the cut, if there is a crisp corner it will dig into the wood and guide the cut in a straight line like a keel on a boat, which would not have been helpful when used for the intended texturing cuts.

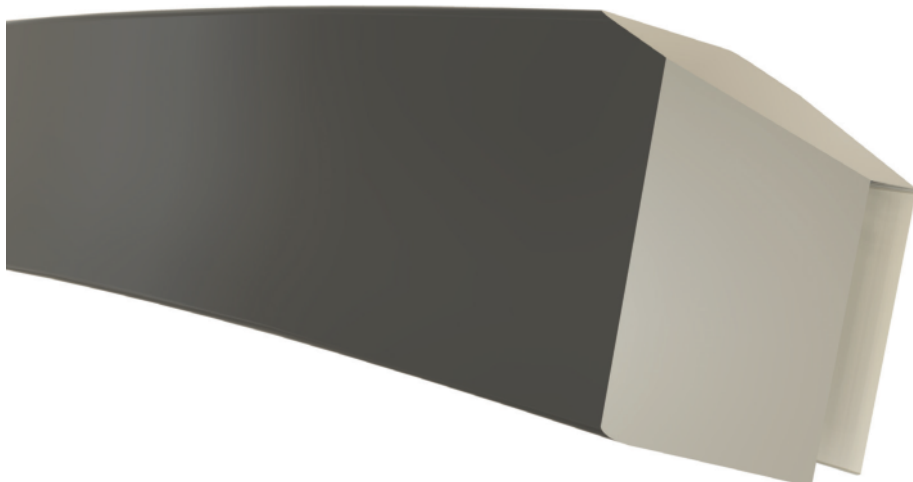
These sections of cones were formed using a honing pad and, as ever, self-adhesive wet or dry paper. So little steel needed to be removed that I felt sharpening and stropping by hand a much safer option. Finally, any burr on the inside was removed with the tool I had made with the worn 10,000 grit paper in place of a strop, there was less than 0.2 mm of clearance so no space for even a thin leather or suede strip.



Grinding the sides: the tool should be presented at a right angle to the belt



Grinding the bottom of the tool- note steel rod in place, also as this section is thicker this bevel will be longer



The two flat bevels need blending into a radius/cone

Gaining control

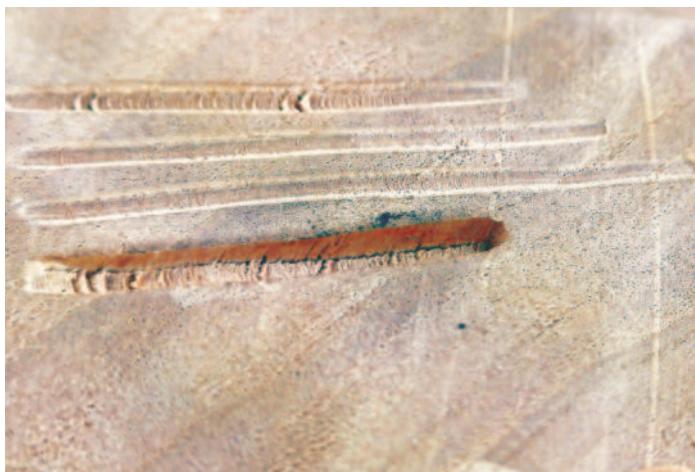
The tool definitely cut better after this treatment. Although it still had a tendency to bury deep into the end grain, controlled and smooth cuts were possible with care.

The cuts in the hollow were much easier to control and you can see from the quality of the shaving that the cut was much cleaner, although these were, in theory, binding.

So, with a bit of care, I was able to make a noticeable improvement on this tiny tool. I wasn't happy about not really being able to replicate the cuts this tool was meant to be able to make and given more time I would have spent longer on this. It was the most challenging to date, however it paled in comparison to the one that I couldn't complete, but more on that next time.



Bevels in all their glory



Final test cuts



Final cuts into hollow

THE SHARPENING CLINIC IS OPEN

As the name suggests I would like to help carvers with sharpening problems – this will allow me to focus my articles on tools that are relevant to you, the readership.

What I am looking for is for readers to send a brief email with a description of the tool, the sharpening equipment they are using and problems they are having. Please do not send images at this stage as it clogs up my email system far too quickly!

I will try to answer all emails but will only be selecting one tool per article. You would then send the tool to me at your expense, I will sharpen it and make it the subject of the article and send it

back to you at my expense. Turnaround will be up to a month as I will need to get the tool well before the deadline to be certain I can fulfil my obligation to WC of turning in a quality article each issue. If not selected, please do not send me your tools. I don't have time to sharpen them in my day-to-day business, and I don't have the budget to return them to you if you do. Also, due to the timescales involved with overseas post currently this is only open to carvers in the UK.

If you are interested, and I hope you are, then please email me at nic.westermann@btconnect.com



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Rolling with the flow

Kev Alviti cooks up a useful baking implement



Baking is a big thing in our house. It's something we all love to do (and I potentially have the increasing waistline to prove it) and we often do it together. It has also become a bit of the love language between my middle child, Melissa, and myself. We have very similar temperaments and if we ever fall out then baking seems to be the thing that pulls us strongly back together quickest. She's only eight but has said she wants to be a baker since she could first string a sentence together.

In fact, all three of my children have been baking and cooking ever since they could hold a wooden spoon. They help make everything: we bake bread most days, lots of cakes and biscuits, prep the veg for tea. I feel very lucky that they're so willing to help with all this. I like the saying that you should 'prepare your child for the road, not the road for your child'. By helping with these jobs and chores daily it makes them grow up as practical people for whom adulthood and responsibility will come as less of a shock.

Looking to a carving project, it's always nice to make something we can use together, so baking is an obvious avenue for me. My wife had often looked at carved rolling pins to make fancy biscuits for birthday presents, but been put off by the provenance of the item, the fact that many are machine made or handmade ones often shipped from around the world where you don't know how the workers are treated.

I thought it would be a great project to undertake, where for once the joy of carving and creating something beautiful might be elapsed by the many years of use we'll get from it together. It is also a little out of the usual as the carvings have to be worked

inversely and I'm sure there are probably ex-pattern makers reading this for whom this will pose no problem, but for me it involved a fair bit of thinking before I even put the chisel to wood.

The timber I chose for this project was beech. A kitchen utensil like this that gets rolled across a worktop wants to be from a fairly hard wood that is food safe. Beech carves surprisingly well, and as the carving will often be at awkward angles, having a wood that doesn't split too easily certainly makes it easier. Sycamore would have been another good option for this.



Things you will need

Materials

- 50 x 50 x 460mm beech

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- Lathe
- Sander (optional)
- Tablesaw (optional)
- Tenon saw
- Clamps
- Lathe tools
- Roughing gouge
- Skew chisel
- Parting tool
- Spindle gouge
- Sandpaper of different grits

Carving tools

- Small carving mallet

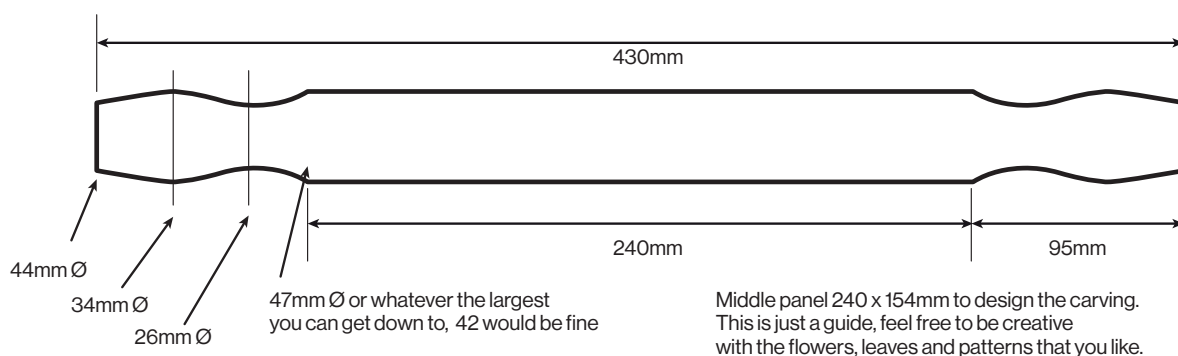
Gouges:

- No.1, 3mm
- No.3, 13mm
- No.3, 16mm
- No.6, 6mm
- No.6, 13mm
- No.6, 20mm
- No.3, 6mm fantail
- No.6 gouge 6mm fantail
- No.9, 6mm fantail
- 13mm V-tool 60°
- Toothbrush for applying wax

Useful tips & advice

Aftercare and treatment

Chances are you might be giving this carving as a gift to someone. Make sure they know not to run it through the dishwasher. When it's been used it should be washed off and dried immediately, and the finish reapplied every now and again depending on the use it has.



This drawing gives a rough representation of the scale of the flowers and the vines, when adding the drawing to your workpiece sketch the design on and make sure it flows around it, so it makes a continuous loop. Add leaves and flowers where there is any space, the more detail the better.



1 Select some timber that will finish large enough for the final item as gluing pieces together for this won't be ideal. In my offcut rack I had some pieces of 50mm beech that were the right length for what I needed. Clean, straight grain and knot-free is also pretty essential, especially in the section that is to be carved. As a template I used a rolling pin that I had turned some 15 years ago.

2 Rip the pieces square to make turning easier. I used the tablesaw but the wood isn't very long, so cutting down with a hand saw won't be that difficult. Square up the ends – I left mine long for turning, so add an extra 20mm either side to allow for this.

3 Mark the centre of each end and use a punch to strike it to make mounting on the lathe easier. I use a bearing-mounted centre on the tailstock and a four-pronged drive centre on the business end.

4 Make sure you run up the wood slowly to start with, turning it by hand first to make sure it's not fouling the toolrest. Using a roughing gouge, reduce the wood down until you have a cylinder, always working cuts in the right direction so you're not fighting the grain.

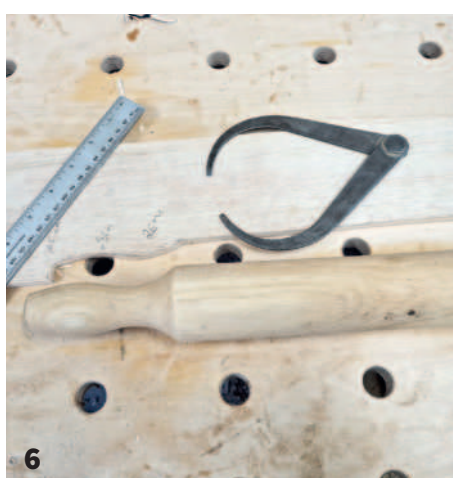
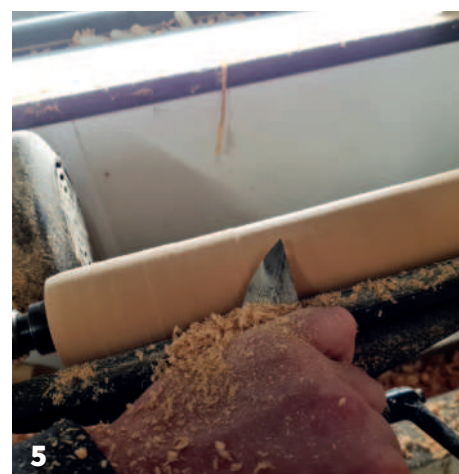
5 Use a skew chisel to get as smooth a cylinder as possible. To use the skew, it is often easier to lift the toolrest up above centre. I reground mine many years ago as I find the curved shape reduces the risk of catches when turning between centres. Keep the cylinder as large as possible, making sure it is parallel all the way down – mine finished at 48mm, but it won't matter so long as it's even.

6 Because I was making multiple rolling pins, I thought it would be a better idea to make a template to make marking them up a bit easier, I used an offcut of ply to do this. Of course, if you're just making one it's equally fine to measure on to the wood and mark the lines around by turning the workpiece.

7 With the positions marked, take a parting tool and a gauge, carefully reduce down the right diameter where the low and high points will be on the handle, as well as reducing down the point at either end where it will be eventually parted. I use the gauge while the machine is running, approaching with it carefully from behind while the other hand holds the parting tool and reduces it to the right diameter. When the gauge slips over the wood, I know it's there.

8 Blend and smooth these points together using either the roughing gouge or a spindle gouge – the line wants to be sweeping and flowing to look right and try to get both sides to have some symmetry, if possible. Then sand and work up the grits. With each grit stop the machine and sand along the grain to prevent scratches.

9 I then set about working out a design for it. I cut a few squares of paper and started to sketch out some patterns roughly. Then, with a pencil, I just sketched them freehand on to the rolling pin, making sure the vines all lined up and that there were enough leaves and flowers to cover the whole thing, I added extra leaves to fill in any gaps.





10



11

10 Holding work steady is very important when carving, but as it's a round workpiece, having it so it's easy to move was also equally important. I came up with this simple jig using some clamps and offcuts.

11 The rolling pin is held by two pieces of wood acting as fences, then, to stop it rotating, a piece of wood acts as a clamp on the handle both sides. To rotate the piece, undo the clamps slightly, roll and then clamp them back up. I find the MFT-style workbench to be really useful for holding a variety of workpieces, and here is a perfect example of it being put to use.



12



13



14

12 The fun bit – time to start carving. Remember that all the low bits will become high and all the high bits will become low. Leave the background alone for now and concentrate on the flowers first. Use a No. 6, 6mm gouge to cut out the centre of the flower. Then, using chisels to suit the curves you've drawn, strike out the outline for outside of the petals.

13 Working from the centre out towards the petals, carve either side of where the petals would normally meet to leave this as a high point. Remember, everything is the inverse of how it will roll out when in use.



15



16

14 Using a selection of chisels, shape the inside of the petals. Leave the inside slightly textured to add detail when it's rolled out. Try to make it so nothing is undercut as this will make it harder for the dough to come out.

15 Use the V-tool to add a couple of little lines by the base of each petal – although this will actually stick up slightly proud it will add a bit of detail to each flower.

16 Once I had a few flowers carved I did a proof of concept with some Play-Doh. I do stupid things so you don't have to. Play-Doh must have some quite strong dye in it so it was quite hard to get the green off my rolling pin. That said, my project worked well as a rolling pin and the carved flowers were layered the way I intended.



17



18

17 Set to carving the vines, which are just a simple trench carved with a No. 6, 6mm gouge. I made these lines flow up the rolling pin, making sure they met back where they started.

18 With the flowers and vines carved it is time to start with the leaves. These are done in much the same way as the flowers, with an outline first. Using shallower gouges, like this No. 3, 14mm.

19 The leaves, being the inverse, need to have the centre raised rather than lowered as we normally would on a carving. I ran two gouge lines either side of the centre, then, using a flatter chisel, continued this to the edges, leaving a centre ridge.

20 Use the V-tool to add some detail. Although the detail will stick up proud rather than lower down it will still be pleasing to the eye when rolled out.

21 Having some leaves overlapping makes the piece look really 3D. This picture shows where I did the overlap the wrong way round, as the overlap will be on the lower leaf. I wish I could say I did this deliberately to prove a point, but I didn't. It was easily rectified, luckily, but it shows how hard it can be thinking about the inverse of something.

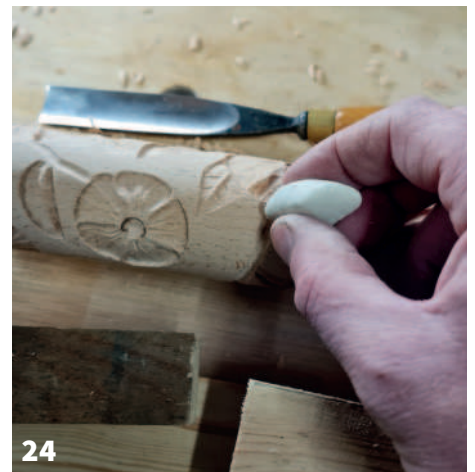
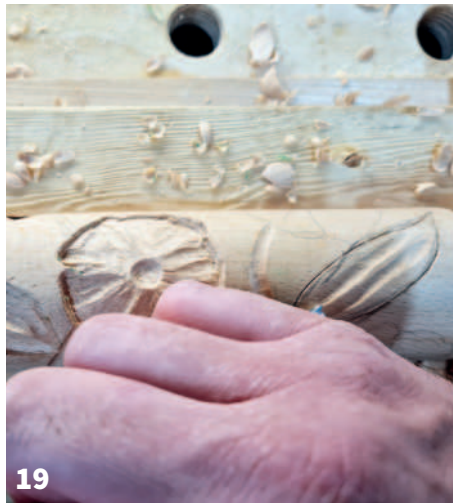
22 With the carving finished, I remounted the rolling pin on the lathe so I could remove any marks left by my clamping method and sand any bits that needed it.

23 Remove the lathe mounting points. Reduce it down as far as you dare on the lathe with a parting tool then saw off to complete. Sand the ends smooth and remove any sharp edges.

24 It's worth spending a bit of time cleaning up the carving. Go over it and make sure there are no loose bits of wispy wood (my public enemy No.1) and use an eraser to remove any pencil marks that might have been left (especially if you sketched the design on as I did).

25 Start applying the finish of your choice. I went for a wax oil that is completely food safe, a mix of coconut oil and carnauba wax. I use an old toothbrush to rub it into all the detailed areas, then left it for an hour before removing any excess with a rag. Build up a few coats this way for longer-lasting protection. Don't put the toothbrush back in the bathroom when you're done...

26 When the finish has dried it's time to test it out on your favourite biscuit or pastry mix – although make sure it's one that doesn't rise in the oven otherwise the details will be lost. ●



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BDWCA news & events

The Association looks at one of the categories in their 2021 Show

Continuing to look at the different birds that were entered in our Annual Show in September 2021, this time we will look at the Bird of Prey category and specifically the owls.

Owls are intriguing birds that easily capture the attention and curiosity of bird carvers. Owls can rotate their necks 270°, which allows some very artistic poses and gives the impression that they are always looking straight at you, whatever the position of the head. (The eyes of an owl are not true 'eyeballs', their tube-shaped eyes are completely immobile, providing binocular vision which fully focuses on their prey and boosts depth perception.)

There were seven owls on the Advanced table, six with detailed carving, texturing and painting, and one Interpretive carving, a Barn Owl in spalted beech by Owen Wignall.

The owl which won the trophy for Best Bird of Prey was a Barn Owl in Flight by Tom Fitzpatrick, with a Little Owl by Steve Toher in 2nd place. Runners-up, awarded Highly Commended, were a Short-Eared Owl by Alan Pickersgill and an 80% lifesize Great Horned Owl – full size is 24in – by Tom Fitzpatrick.

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

Barn Owl in Flight (65% lifesize), by Tom Fitzpatrick, 1st in Advanced Bird of Prey

For further information...

...on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk.

Membership includes 3 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



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY FRANCES MILBURN FOR THE BDWCA



Little Owl, by Steve Toher, 2nd in Advanced Bird of Prey



Short-Eared Owl, by Alan Pickersgill, Highly Commended in Advanced Bird of Prey



Great Horned Owl (80% lifesize), by Tom Fitzpatrick, Highly Commended in Advanced Bird of Prey



Screech Owl – Red Phase, by Tom Fitzpatrick, Advanced Bird of Prey



Long-Eared Owl (25% lifesize), by Mark Richards, Advanced Bird of Prey



Barn Owl in spalted beech, by Owen Wignall, Advanced Interpretive Wood Sculptures – Natural Wood

Daffodils

Dave Western celebrates the onset of spring with this flower panel

Spring is, for me, always a time of daffodils. Whether for their importance in the 1 March celebration of St David's Day or when they are used as a symbol for cancer fundraising in March and April, daffodils always say hope, renewal and strength. Their cheerful bonnets and brilliant colour liven up our lives after the dullness of winter and, as Wordsworth himself said of them: 'They outdid the sparkling waves in glee.'

To honour them I've designed this little panel, which can be carved in low relief or fretted, as I have done. It highlights the daffodils from several aspects and offers up some nice carving challenges. Whether you choose to carve it fairly simply and in a stylised way or go for full realism with gracefully arched petals and detailed trumpets, this pattern will lend itself to whatever type of rendering you wish to apply.



I used a lovely piece of yellow cedar (aka Nootka Cypress), which is renowned for its buttery, tight and straight grain, its lightness and rigidity, and its remarkable scent, but which I chose because its lovely yellow tone was very much like a daffodil's. It might not be so easy to find where you are, but pine, light maples or sycamore could work well instead. I would avoid woods with really strong grain, such as oak, ash or beech, as the grain will overwhelm the delicate design and distract from the flowers.

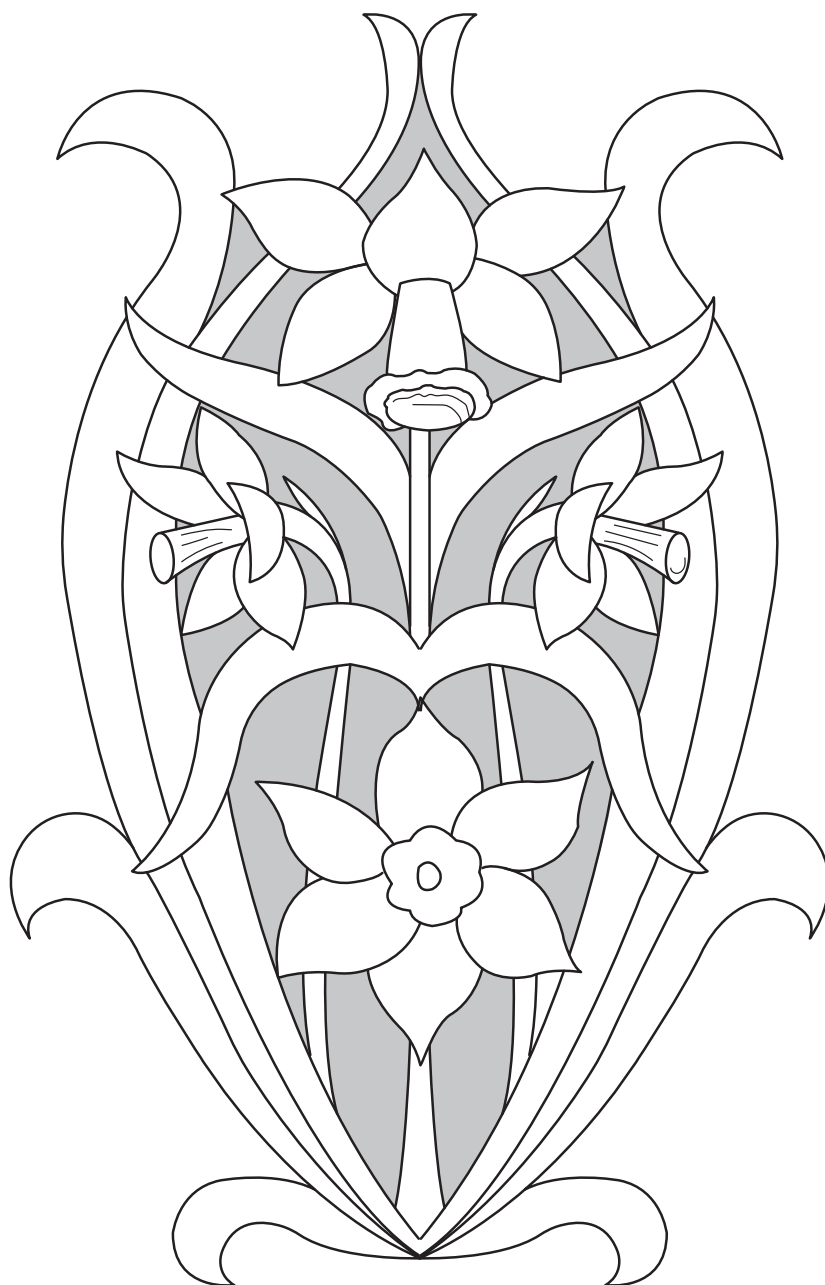
Glue the pattern to your workpiece with a glue stick, aligning the grain though the pattern from top to bottom.



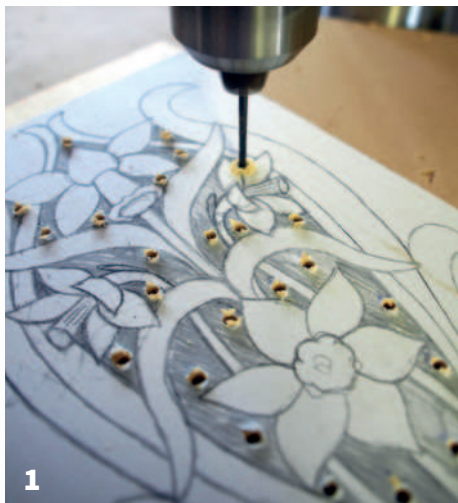
Things you will need

Tools & equipment

- Scrollsaw or coping/ jeweller's saw
- Drill press or hand drill
- 18mm (¾in) and 24mm (1in) straight knife
- No.7, 14mm gouge
- No.9, 10mm gouge
- No.9, 7mm gouge
- No.1, 24mm gouge
- No.9, 6mm gouge
- No.9, 3mm gouge
- 320 grit abrasive paper
- Penetrating oil and/ or beeswax polish
- Glue stick and photocopied pattern



Daffodil



1 If you are planning to fret the design as I did, use a drill press to drill out all the areas to be cut away. If you lack a power saw, I would use the largest drill bits you can to remove as much stock as possible before resorting to hand coping saws or cutting with a straight knife. If you lack a drill press, use a hand drill, but be conscious of keeping the bit at 90° to the workpiece as much as possible.

2 If you have a scrollsaw, removing all the waste stock in the interior

sections will be easy. If you are doing it by hand, you will need to remain conscious of keeping your hand saw or knife blade as close to 90° to the face of the workpiece as possible. This is especially important where the little narrow stalks run through the design. Excessively undercutting these areas can significantly weaken the piece and you run a risk of breakage in those areas. Take your time and make these cuts as clean and as vertical as possible.

3 With all the sawing completed, I took a rest from the fretwork and started laying out the lettering. Because I didn't have a large assortment of gouges on hand, I did a fair bit of my cutting with a straight knife. To ensure the process went as smoothly as possible, I scribed a vertical line down the centre of each letter, using the tip of a $\frac{3}{4}$ in straight knife. As with the drilling, try to keep the knife blade at 90° to the face of the workpiece and scribe to a depth of about 3mm. To avoid the knife running off course, I cut in three light passes rather than digging straight in and hoping to get it in one pass.

4 On curved letters where I had gouges of similar circumferences, I used them in the traditional way and saved myself the stress of cutting the curves with the tip of the straight knife. Unfortunately for me, I only had a few that matched, so much of the curved letter carving was done with the knife tip. Having the scribe line through the middle of the curves helped me to avoid taking too much material from either side, whether I was gouging or straight knifing.

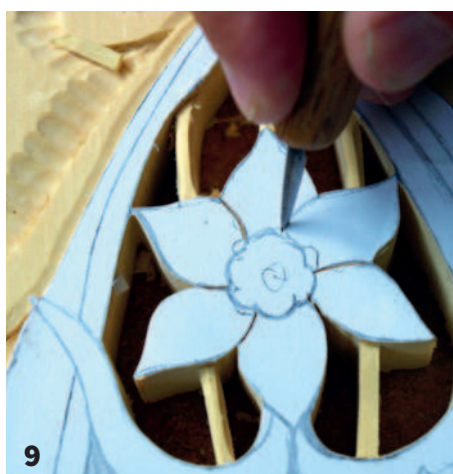
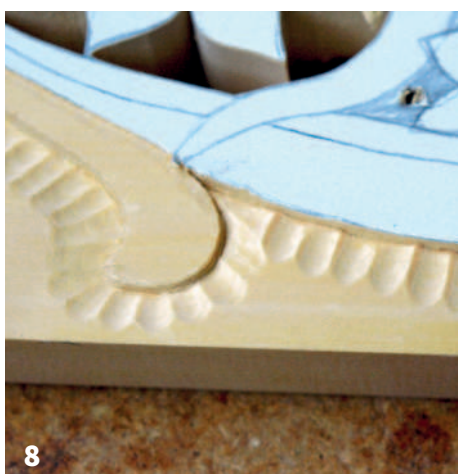
5 (Photos A & B) With the lettering completed, I took a few minutes away from the job and then came back to look at what I had done with a fresh and more critical eye. While it all looked good at first glance, it soon became apparent that there were plenty of areas where the two sides were uneven, where the cuts didn't meet at the bottom, or where bits had been missed. I went over it all one more time with the straight knife and carefully evened out all the cuts. Those handy at lettering will probably laugh at all the extra time and effort I had to apply to cleaning it up, but I think in the end I got them fairly tidy.

6 Once the lettering was completed and the fretting all done, I began scribing the outer edges of the design with the straight knife. I was a bit more vigorous about the depth and cut to about 6mm, but again, in several passes to avoid hooking into some errant grain and being dragged off course. The long, gentle curves were relatively easy to do, but some of the tighter, shorter sections proved tricky, especially if they went across the grain in any way. It's slightly fiddlier than you might expect, so take your time and don't try to rush it or you will inevitably run off course and make life more difficult for yourself.

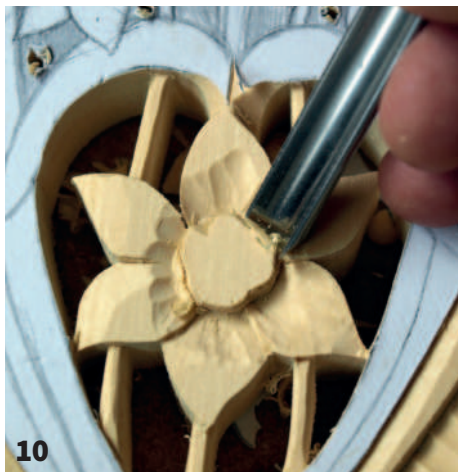




7 The next step is to clear away stock from the outer edge of the design. This will create the low relief effect of the design standing proud, so the deeper it is cut, the taller the pattern will stand. I opted for about 6mm to give it some vigour, but not to make it too high and unwieldy. There are several very different ways you can cut this material away. I used a bent knife to remove the initial stock before using a gouge to tidy the area up with more uniform and evenly spaced finishing cuts. I made about three passes with the bent knife, each time taking slightly more material. This enabled me to avoid chipping out any sections of difficult grain.



8 Although I could have opted to leave a more random pattern from the bent knife or to go for a smooth transition, shaving it down with a straight knife or flat chisel, I decided I wanted the more lively look of even gouge cuts. Use a really sharp gouge for this task and go in gently to avoid tearing at the edges. Also, wear your glasses if you need them so you can see any defects in your edge sharpening and you don't have to go back and redo the whole process a second time – as I did.



9 When I started getting weary of gouging the pattern around the exterior line, I switched tasks and began shaping the daffodil flowers. I started with the big 'head-on' flower and carefully scribed a good 3mm-deep line with a straight knife. This allowed me to keep track of the petals and avoid any splitting that might occur, damaging adjacent sections. I also used the tip of the knife to carefully scribe the not-at-all-circular line of the trumpet. This is tricky so you'll have to go slowly to avoid wandering off course.

10 With the lines all scribed, I used a gouge to begin clearing away the excess stock. It's important to get down to at least 6mm to build up the trumpet section and to make room for some curving flow into the leaves. As I cleared away parts of my scribed petal lines, I periodically refreshed them with the straight knife and then began smoothing and shaping each petal. You can stay simple and stylised or get really carried away and shape each petal to be as lifelike as possible.



11 Once I had the petals rough shaped and the trumpet standing proud, I used a small No.9, 6mm sweep gouge to clear and shape the trumpet's interior. I left a little 'button' of stock at the bottom of the trumpet to form a stylised stigma. Be cautious here as it is easy to pull the button up and chip it badly if you get too carried away with the gouging. Once the button is standing proud, use the tip of a straight knife to dome it over and soften the edges.

12 This close-up shows the flower after rough shaping. The petals sweep down nice and deep as they near the trumpet and each has an edge proud of its neighbour for additional movement and visual clarity. Later, go back over the entire flower and smooth out rough areas. Use a really sharp straight knife to gently undercut the trumpet walls a bit so that it looks less stiff and mechanical.

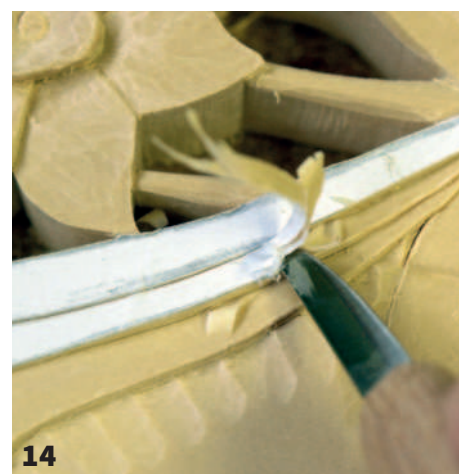
13 I then began shaping the stems and leaves using a No.1, 12mm gouge. Work from the bottom leaf upwards so that you are always cutting towards full dimension material. If you start at the highest leaf and work down, you will constantly be cutting toward thin, shaped edges and run a serious risk of chipping or cutting through previously worked sections. Be continuously aware of grain direction and alter your cutting angles to take any changes of direction into account. These leaves can easily chip or split out, so shallow, gentle cutting is the safest bet.

14 If you opt to use a straight knife for this process, follow the same instructions as for the gouge. Control the tip of the knife to avoid digging into the section in front of each knife cut. I generally make three or four shallow passes to cut my way down rather than the one big theatrical cut shown in the photo. If you are handy with a knife and steady of hand, you can probably do it in one smooth pass, but I like to err on the side of caution.

15 Some of the interior leaves are a bit challenging as you cut around petal tips etc. Use a nice No.1 gouge to access these areas and cut gently. Angle them and even carve a slight dome for added vitality. I found that changing the angle midway along the leaf mimicked the tendency of leaves to bend and twist in the natural world and gave the leaf a bit more visual appeal.

16 On the smaller, side-view flowers use the same techniques as with the big flower to gain depth near the trumpet and build it up a bit. I used a tiny No.11, 3mm gouge to cut some nice grooves along the trumpet, but it also looks good left smooth. I also used the tip of my 24mm straight knife to undercut the mouth of the trumpet and the bottom rounded leaf.

17 This carefully posed photo shows the straight knife being used to carve the top section of leaf. It also nicely shows the slight doming and angling on the large leaf to the right of the image, as well as the gouged exterior area. The flower is in the midst of being shaped, illustrating the depth the petals can be cut to set the trumpet proud. Finally, it clearly shows the angle change on the bottom right leaf and how nicely that simple bit of cutting can enliven things.





18 I used a No.7, 14mm gouge to cut the trumpet's opening. I wanted a nice, smooth and very fair curve for this and wanted to be able to cut quite deeply with good control. You can also cut this part with the straight knife if you lack a suitable gouge, but with the knife it is much trickier to deal with the changing grain without pulling up a chip.



19 After I had shaped the flower's trumpet section I decided that it could do with a bit of livening up. I used a small No.9, 3mm gouge to cut in these little grooves and then set about tidying up the scruffy areas and undercutting the petals a little bit more. I also wound up going over the whole flower again and cutting everything a bit deeper at the bottom of the trumpet to give a bit more angle to the trumpet and depth to the petals.

20 With the carving completed, I went over all the flat surfaces with a small piece of really fine, 320 grit abrasive paper to clear away any scratches or dirt that had accumulated during the carving. I avoided sanding any of the carved leaves and flowers to ensure the piece stayed vibrant and active and that smoothing didn't dull the carved section. I lightly chamfered the exterior edges of the piece with a few quick passes of the sandpaper, but made sure not to overdo it.



21 If you have opted to fret your carving through as I have done, spend a few minutes with a small piece of abrasive paper or with some cloth-backed abrasive and gently round the back interior edges over a bit. You can undertake this operation with a knife, but I have found that a lightly rounded, sanded edge looks nicer and is slightly less harsh than a cut edge.

22 When you are confident that all the carving is completed and the sanding is to your liking, give the piece a quick coat or two of penetrating oil before finishing with a buffed coat of beeswax polish or similar. If you prefer not to use oil finishes, go straight to the beeswax. I recommend against surface finishes like varnish or polyurethane as the gloss is too distracting and the product tends to clog the fine details of the carving and render them a bit bland and homogenous.

23 Finally, because I am a spoon carver and I just can't help myself, I have also rendered this carving in spoon form. To make a spoon instead of the panel, just cut the outer edges of the pattern away, add a bowl and 'hey presto', there you have it. ●



Herons in reeds

Zoë Gertner carves a relief scene featuring two majestic wading birds



Herons – fascinating large grey and white wading birds that I spent many hours watching when I lived on the wetland Somerset Levels some years ago. Being predatory, a hungry heron has two techniques it can employ to catch its dinner – either to stand motionless on the riverbank and patiently watch for movement in the water below then make a sudden strike, stabbing its long sharp

beak into its hapless prey; or to stalk food with head and neck drawn back in its characteristic kink, long legs wading through the shallow water in a somewhat ungainly manner in stealthy pursuit of his tasty fish supper.

Where possible I try to use recycled wood for my carvings. My two hunting herons decorate a piece of an unwanted oak bookcase.



Things you will need

Materials

- Unwanted piece of oak bookcase

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- No.39, $\frac{1}{4}$ in and $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool
- Selection of widths of No.3 gouges

(Swiss No.2), including $\frac{1}{2}$ in, $\frac{1}{4}$ in and $\frac{1}{8}$ in

- No.5, $\frac{1}{2}$ in gouge
- No.9, 10 or 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge
- Light hammer and pointed nail punch
- Circle nail punch
- Wax polish and lint-free duster



Get creative.
Here are my
two drawings
of the herons
for reference

Preparation

1 For the carving I used one side of an old rustic-style oak bookcase I found in a local auction, which had a distinctive sapwood strip and its bark firmly attached to the edge. The timber was brushed clean and wiped with a damp cloth to remove dust and grit. Any remaining water stains or machine marks on the surface will be removed during the carving.

2 The drawing of each heron was traced and transferred to the wood using transfer paper, positioning each so they would be standing in the contrasting, lighter-coloured sapwood on the outer edge of the piece, in which the flowing grain pattern will serve as the water.

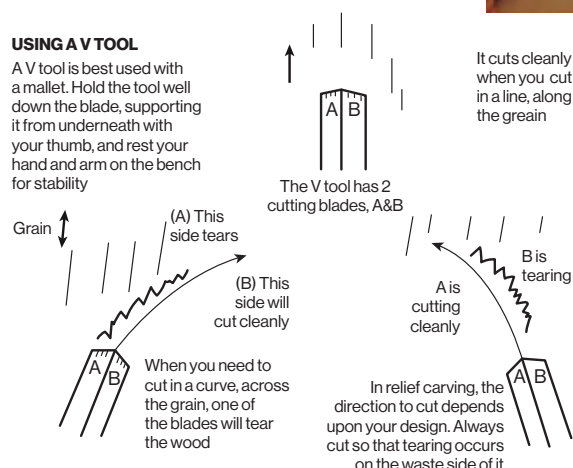
3 The outline of each bird was cut using the No.39, 1/4in V-tool with a mallet, cutting in the appropriate directions according to the lie of the grain and ensuring all the outlining edges were cleanly cut. (Diagrams 1 & 2)



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ZOE CERTNER

USING A V TOOL

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



WHEN STARTING

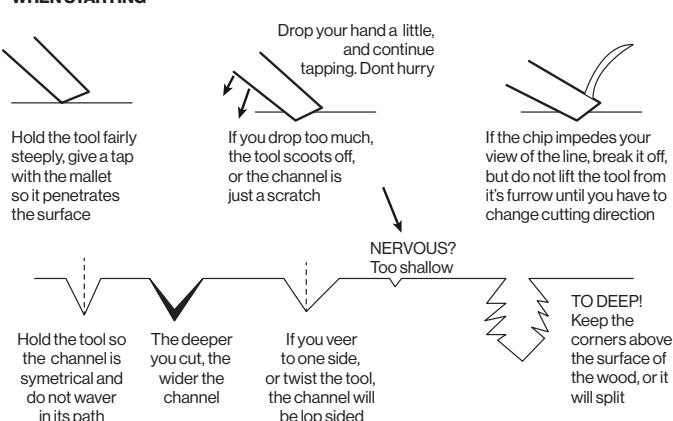


Diagram 1

Diagram 2

Beginning the carving

4 To start relieving the birds, sets of opposing cuts are used to deepen and widen the initial V-tool channels around the outlines so that the background can be removed safely without damage. Using No.3 gouges which correspond with the curves of the outline, first cut downwards and outwards away from the bird, having placed the cutting edge of the gouge within and against the side of the V-channel. Work with continuous cuts around the outline, always resting the tool against the side of the V and continuing the cuts at the same downward angle, cutting away from the outline and turning the gouges as necessary according to the shape of the bird. It may be helpful to



mark your starting place with chalk so that you can see when you have completed the first set of cuts around the outline.

5 A second set of cuts, the opposing ones, is made towards the first ones, starting them a little way from the outline and angling them downwards and towards the outline so that they meet the first set at the same depth, thus making your original V-tooled channel deeper and wider. Opposing cuts are always made using the gouge with its bevel underneath so that the enlarged channel is cleanly cut. If the result is not tidily cut, it may be that you have inadvertently worked with the tool bevel uppermost, or that your opposing cuts are either too shallow or



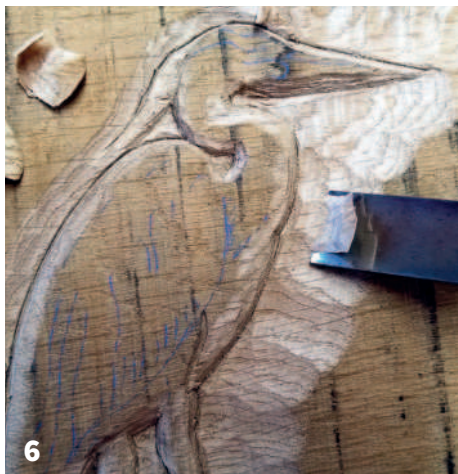
too deep, having been incorrectly angled. Where a curve lies along horizontal grain, such as at the top of the heron's head, to obtain a clean chip without splitting the wood simply alternate your cuts from each side of the curve, joining these at the top of the convexity, and the chips will be released cleanly. Repeat both sets of opposing cuts several times, extending and deepening the channel around each bird, ready to remove the adjacent background.

Removing the background

6 Using the No.5, 1/2in gouge, start your cuts at the edge of the enlarged V-channel, ensuring the corners of the tool are kept above the surface. Cut across the edge into the V-channel at a slight angle towards the bird and remove it around the outline. Then, starting a little way back from there, gradually extend your cuts so they overlap the preceding ones, ending them in the extended V-channel around each bird. Gradually reduce their depth as you lengthen your cuts to create a gentle slope towards the bird from all round it.

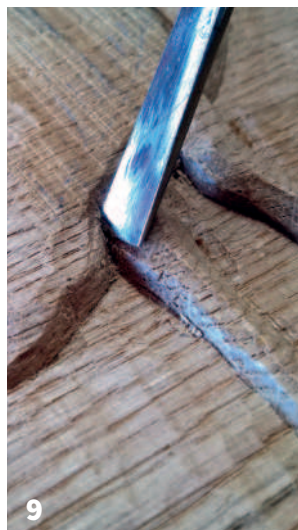
7 Using the No.3, 1/2in gouge, round over the outer edge of the birds. Starting along the bird's back, cut outwards and over towards the adjacent background, lifting your gouge hand to produce rounded cuts over its edge. Carefully reducing their depths, extend your cuts until the highest places along the bird, i.e. along the wing, shoulder and tail, are reached and the original surface of the bird has been worked over completely. Then round over the breasts and both sides of the legs in the same way.

8 Remove the background between the two birds. From each side, work towards the outlines opposite to each other, extending your cuts up to the middle of the area between them, at the same time removing any water stains or other surface marks. Take care at the middle of the area between them where the surface could lift – change your cutting direction and pare with shallow cuts to ensure the whole background area is shiny, smooth and cleanly cut.



Shaping the herons

9 If necessary, tidy the edges of the legs where they meet the background then reduce the upper surface of the furthestmost leg so that it appears to be beyond the foremost leg, the other side of the bird. With the appropriate No.3 gouge, cut a small V-channel, marking the top of the leg from under the underbody, then round over each side of the leg by cutting away from the highest place, i.e. the middle of the leg, along each side towards the background, gradually reducing the surface of the leg and that adjacent to the underbody so that it lies deeper than the foremost leg. Then repeat for the remaining legs of the two herons, reducing their ends, and gradually merge their ends into the surface of the water in which the heron stands.



10 Reduce and taper the beak towards its tip, again by cutting away from the middle of the beak towards the background each side until there is a chamfer or 'peak' along its length to its tip. Take care to cut in the correct direction as there may be 'short grain' which can easily break (but if this should happen, simply reduce the adjacent background a little then re-carve the beak).

11 Using the No.3 gouge, reduce the heads, necks and breasts and round over their edges as described before.

12 Reduce the end of the herons' tails. If the grain lies horizontally across it, cut away from the middle towards the outer edges as detailed above for the legs.

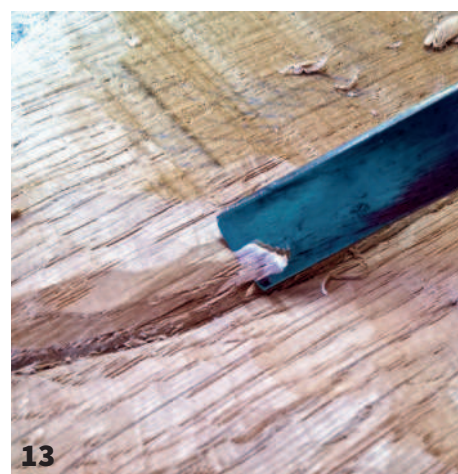
13 Where the heron's tail lies along the grain, reduce its end using light paring cuts. Begin at the end of the tail with the gouge tilted and make a series of short, overlapping cuts in the same direction, cutting along the edge towards the tail, then round it over and down to the adjacent background beneath the bird.

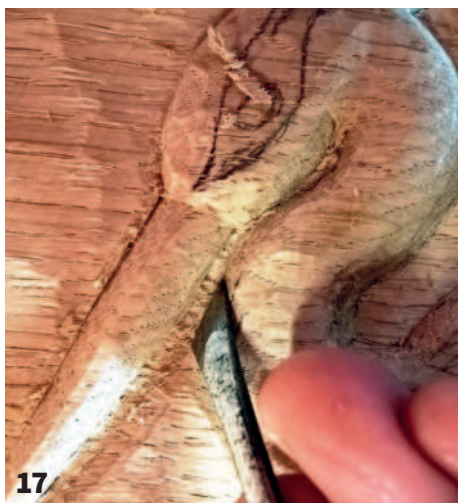
14 Continue rounding the back along its edge, from tail end, shoulder and neck, taking care to change your cutting direction at any convexities on horizontally lying grain. Gradually work over the whole surface of each bird with light cuts to remove any imperfections on their bodies, ready to start carving the details on each bird.

The beaks

15 Having tapered and chamfered the beaks, cut a light V-channel across the base of the upper mandible, the cere, to mark the separation of the beak from the head. Using the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge held at a slight angle, roll the cutting edge across the top of the beak and up towards the peak of the chamfer from each side. Repeat a matching set of angled cuts from the opposite direction, so forming a small V-channel that marks the top of the beak. The division between the mandibles will be cut later on. Then draw the eye and the black eyestripe area on the head ready to mark them later on.

16 Reduce the head and neck, reduce the width of the tassel or plume and taper its end, then using the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, carefully pare both sides so it is rounded along its length. Take care along each side of the curve as you may need to change your cutting direction due to the lie of the grain – if the grain is horizontal, on the convex edge pare outwards from the middle with the gouge inverted, but on the concave edge cut from each side towards the middle with the gouge bevel beneath.





17 Now tidy up the outlines of each bird, making sure all edges are rounded and meet the background cleanly, ready to carve the details on the herons. Where an outlining edge lies along the grain you can tilt the No.3, 1/4in gouge and cut along the edge in the direction of the grain – if you cut vertically downwards it may split awkwardly along the grain. The 1/4in skew chisel will be helpful to refine edges between the beak and neck that are close together.

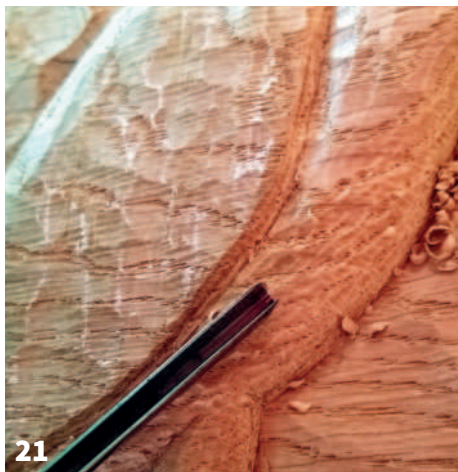
Carving details on the herons



18 On the fresh surface of each bird, draw the wing and, using the 1/4in V-tool in the appropriate direction, mark the edge of the wing from the tail to the shoulder.

19 Following the line of the wing, sets of opposing cuts, as described before, are now made to relieve it, using the 1/4in or wider No.3 gouge inverted to match the shape of the wing. As before, make your first set of cuts from within the V-channel, angling your cuts downwards and away from the edge of the wing.

20 The second set of cuts is then made towards the first, creating the edge of the wing, which is then rounded over along its length. Reduce the adjacent surface of the body and the base of the neck, merging it smoothly into the breast, ready to texture it.



21 The soft feathers over the surface of the breast are made by using the No.11, 1/8in gouge (a small, deep 'horseshoe' shape) with a light flicking action to cover the surface with small shallow grooves. Start these cuts at the outer edge of the breast and, cutting in the same direction, work over the full surface of the breast to the edge of the wing and below the tail, the undercarriage of the bird. Take care not to cut too deeply – for clean cuts the corners of the gouge must always be above the surface of the wood and be shiny.



22 With the 1/8in V-tool, cut the lines on the head and around the eye socket, and then, with a light hammer, mark in the eye using a circular nail punch. Follow this with a pointed nail punch within the black eyestripe area to show the distinctive darker area above the eye.

23 Next, draw the division between upper and lower mandible along the upper edge of the chamfered beak, and starting at the cere with the 1/8in V-tool, carefully cut a straight line along the ridge to the tip of the beak. A V-tool with a hook at the intersection of its blades will be helpful to make this cut, which needs to be as straight as possible.

24 Continuing with the V-tool, mark the ends of the primary feathers along the edge of the wing. With the No.3, ¼in gouge inverted and matching the shape of the feather, make shallow opposing cuts as described before, reducing the upper edge of each underlying feather so each feather overlaps the one below. Tidy the intersection of the feather edges with the adjacent body of the bird. A skew chisel may be helpful to access the tiny triangular area between.

25 Along the neck, from the crop to the breast, using the ¼in V-tool mark the fine feathering along and down over the edge of the bird to the background, then with the point of the skew chisel, remove the tiny triangular areas between each V-tooled feather and the background.

The reeds and grasses

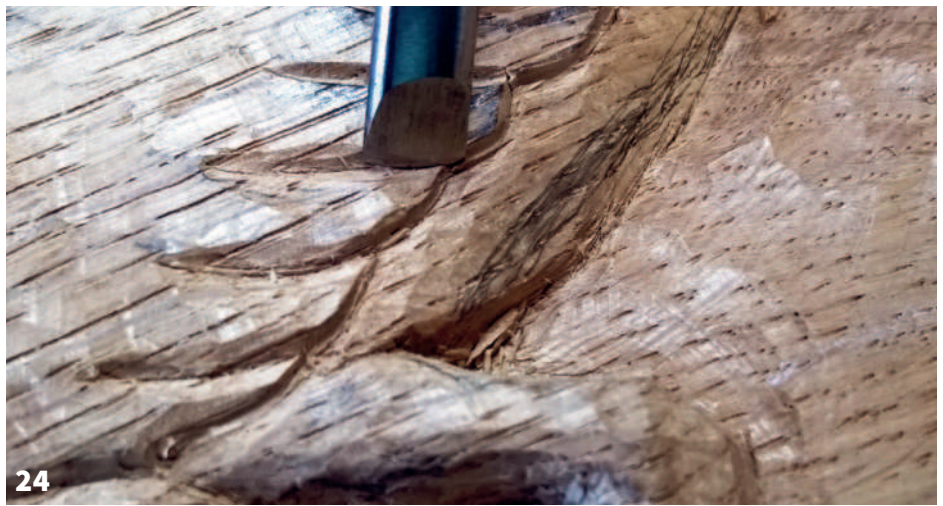
26 These are made using bold sweeping cuts with the ¼in V-tool, and to build up your confidence it is best to practise them beforehand on a similar piece of wood with a corresponding grain direction to your carving. To make the ends of the leaf sharply tapered, lower your tool hand as you cut forward towards the tip and the chip will be released cleanly at the end of the stroke. Practise tilting the V-tool slightly to one side as you work and experiment with the effect of the shadows thus produced, and make your cuts as quickly as possible without hesitating.

27 Reeds around the waiting heron.

28 Reeds around the stalking heron.

Finishing touches

29 Along the back of the waiting heron (LH) additional feathers can be marked using the No.11, ½in ('horseshoe' shape) gouge. Additional body plumes can then be cut on the body of the stalking heron (RH) with the V-tool. Finally, any areas of the original surface of the wood remaining are removed using the No.5, ½in gouge and all edges and meeting planes checked to be cleanly cut. Having erased pencil marks, a coat of wax polish can be applied and the finished carving buffed to a sheen with a lint-free duster. ●

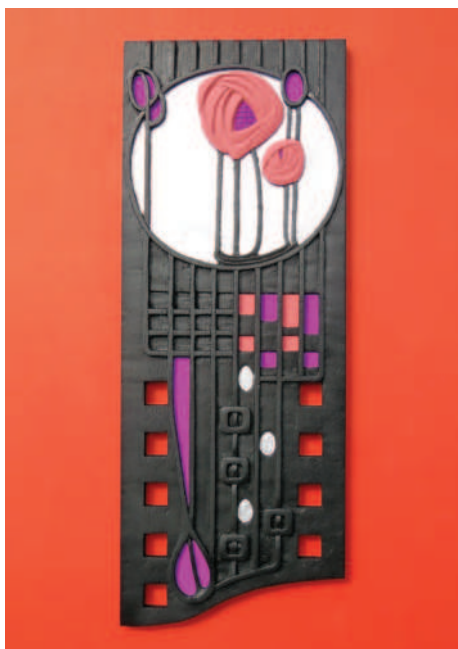




History in wood

Our guest editor's past work

Guest Editor, Steve Bisco, has been carving for over 30 years, specialising in decorative carving in period styles, first in wood and recently in stone. His interest in historical carving and the work of the famous woodcarving master, Grinling Gibbons, is often featured in his work, as we take a brief look through his past projects.



Butterfly on a flower

Inspired by his granddaughter, Cedric Boyns has created a sculpture that incorporates several wood types



This project was spawned when my granddaughter was asked if there was anything she would like me to make for her. The reply, after some thought, was a butterfly, but it should be on a flower. I came up with the following idea, which I felt should not be too flimsy as she was only six at the time. It gave me the opportunity to incorporate several woods in the design and included some turning as well as carving.



Things you will need

Materials

- Black walnut block (butterfly), 170 x 105 x 25mm
- Oak block (flower), 140 x 140 x 40mm
- Cherry block (flower stalk), 45 x 45 x 170mm (to allow extra length for chucking)
- Lime offcut from which to craft the proboscis, 20 x 10 x about 70mm
- Short lengths of 12mm beech dowel, 16mm ash dowel and 6mm lime dowel for the decoration

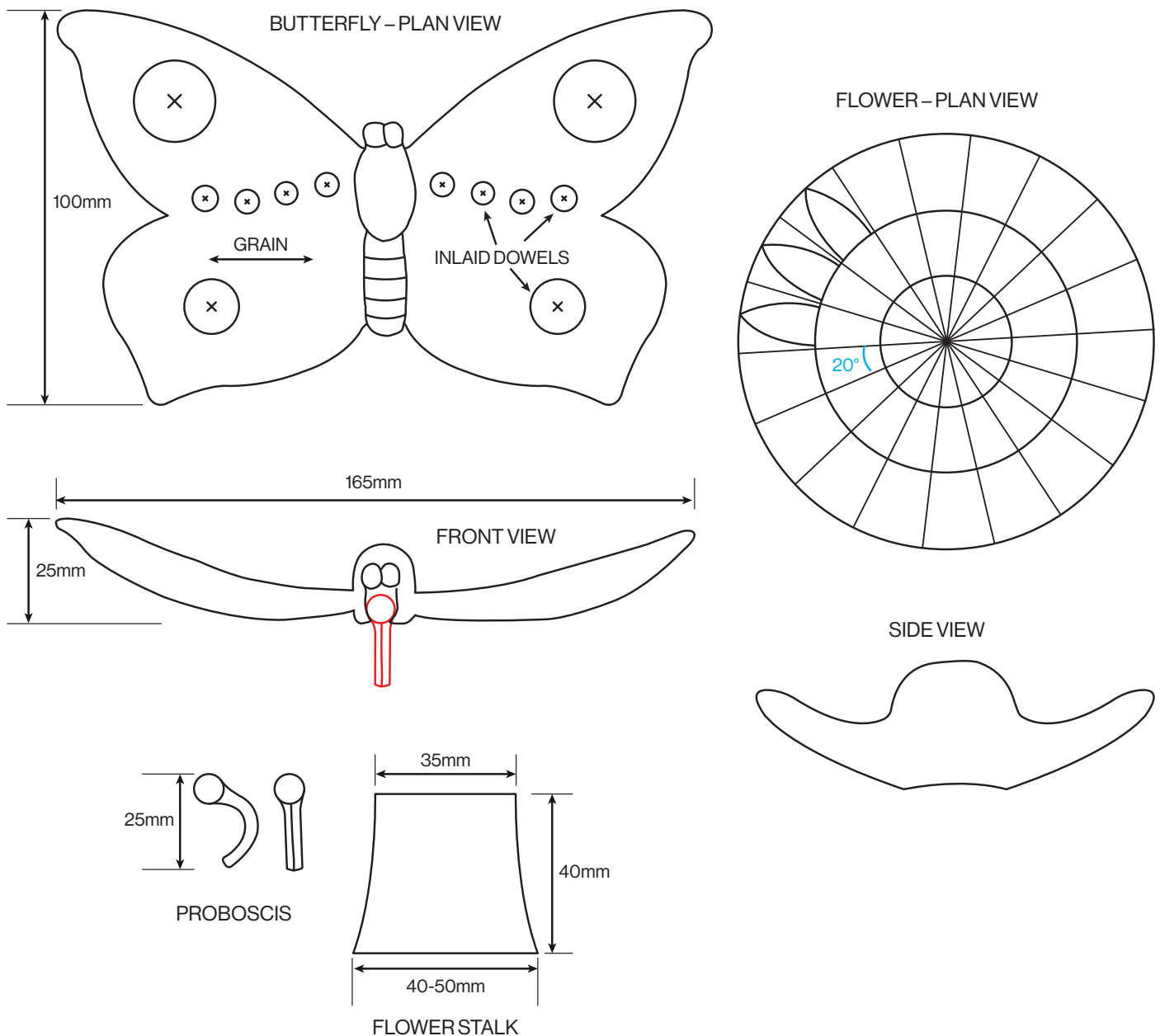
Tools & equipment

- Templates for the butterfly and flower to draw around prior to cutting out
- Suitable PPE and dust extraction
- Carver's chops for work holding
- Bandsaw, scrollsaw and junior hacksaw
- Pillar drill with stop and hand drill
- Forstner drill bits, 6mm, 12mm and 16mm
- Twist drills, 1.5mm and 2.5mm

Gouges

- No.1, 6mm and 12mm
- No.2 (Pfiel), 3mm, 5mm, and 10mm
- No.3, 6mm

- No.5, 6mm and 20mm
- No.7, 6mm
- No.9, 6mm
- No.11, 0.5mm and 2mm
- Detail carving knife
- Riffler, 'knife and spoon'
- Compasses, dividers and protractor
- Abrasives, 120-400 grit
- Hot-melt glue gun and wood glue
- Wooden glue chucks
- Bowl gouges, 9mm and 12mm
- Spindle gouge, 9mm
- Parting tools, 2mm, 5mm and 10mm





Making the butterfly

1 Make a copy of the butterfly template. Transfer the butterfly outline on to the block using this template. Draw in the position of the head and body (thorax and abdomen).

2 Cut around the outline of the butterfly using the bandsaw.

3 Cut in the head and body with shallow stop cuts, using suitable gouges to follow the outline. They should be shallow to start with, but they can be deepened as wood is gradually removed and the wings take shape. Start this removal of wood near the body with a small gouge as shown.

4 Continue to remove wood with the idea that the wings should slope down from the side edges towards their attachment to the body as shown. Quite a bit of wood needs to be removed closer to the body and I used a No.5, 20mm gouge for this, working across the grain most of the time.

5 As a guide, remove about two-thirds of the wood close to the body. (Quite a bit more to remove at this stage shown.)

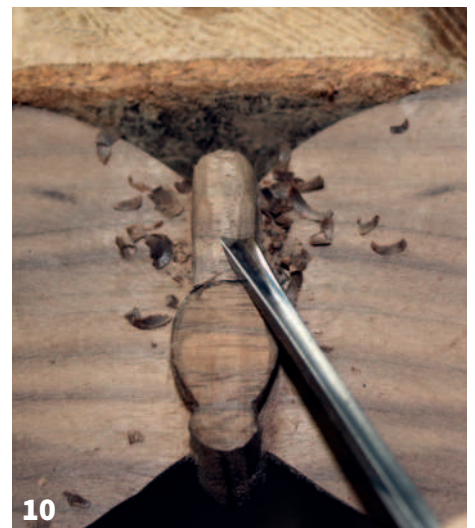
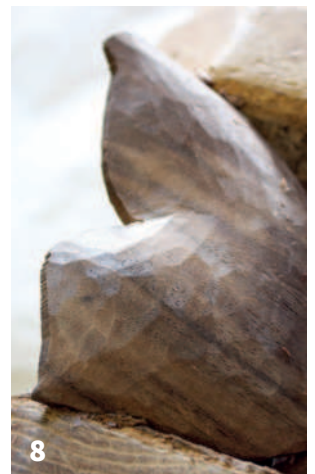
6 On the underside it is necessary to remove more wood towards the outer edges of the wings so that they get thinner in this region, and also slope upwards. Again, most of this shaping was done with the No.5, 20mm gouge, but the smaller gouges were used for the more detailed work close to the margins of the wings.

7 Cut in the body on the underside too as the shaping progresses, but not too deeply.

8 The completed rough shaping is shown here. I have left a reasonable amount of wood towards the centre of the wings, both to make the wings a little more robust, and also because the decoration later requires drilling into them.

9 I gave it a good sand at this stage with 120 grit.

10 The body was then reduced in height with the abdomen slightly below the thorax. The abdomen can have some segmentation added using a No.11, 0.5mm veiner. The head was also shaped to give it a realistic appearance, and the eye detail cut in later.





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Adding the decoration

11 Use the template to mark the positions of the inlaid dowels on both wings. I used the sharp point of a pair of dividers for this as shown.

12 Drill the appropriate flat-bottomed holes with a Forstner bit to a depth of about 6mm. I used a pillar drill but it can also be done with a hand drill.

13 Short lengths of dowel can then be cut and glued into the holes as shown. These need to project above the wing surface, and will therefore need to be at least 8mm long. It doesn't matter if they are a bit longer.

14 Once the glue is dry, the dowels can either be pared down level with the wing surface, or shaped as I have done to leave a slightly convex surface.

15 The wing can be sanded through the grits at this stage so that the outer edges of the dowels are flush with the wing surface.

Did you know?

The proboscis

This structure is used by the butterfly to gather nectar (i.e. feed). It consists of a pair of tubes which are normally curled up beneath the head when the insect is not feeding, but is extended when it alights on a flower, and thrust into the flower in order to suck up the nectar.



16



17



18

Making the proboscis

16 I found it easier to craft the extended proboscis on the end of a small block of lime. Draw it on from the template.

17 I created the necessary inner curve using a 12mm Forstner bit as shown.

18 & 19 The rest of it I then cut out using a scrollsaw (or a fretsaw or bandsaw with a 6mm blade), leaving the head end portion still attached to the block to allow further shaping and sanding.

20 It was too wide at this stage, so I cut it in half to leave it 5mm wide. I used a junior hacksaw for this. The proboscis was later cut away from the block and sanded.

21 To give the illusion of it consisting of two tubes, a groove was formed along it using a No.11, 0.5mm veiner as shown.



19



20



21

◀ Making the flower

22 Either use the template or a pair of compasses to draw a circle 130mm in diameter on the oak block. Cut out on the bandsaw. Then a previously made glue chuck can be glued centrally on one of the faces using blobs of hot-melt glue, so it can be mounted on the lathe.

Turn the base of the flower, leaving a flat area about 40mm in diameter in the centre and creating a gentle curve up towards the outer circumference from the outside of this.

23 After sanding, attach another glue chuck to the base of the flower and turn a spigot to fit the lathe's chuck. The flower can then be turned around and the first glue chuck removed from what will become the top of the flower.

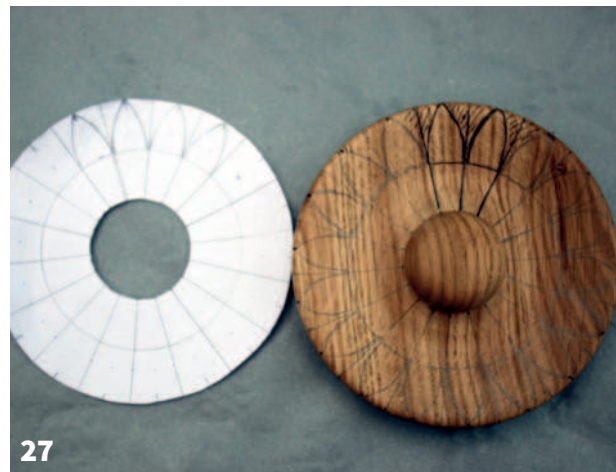
24 Mark a circle 40mm in diameter in the centre with a pencil.

25 Start to form the centre of the flower. I cut in with a 2mm parting tool at first.

26 Use a suitable tool (bowl or spindle gouge) to shape the flower as shown. I decided to make a sharper division between the outer concave region, which will become the petals, and the convex centre of the flower than is shown here (but is shown in subsequent photos). This was achieved with a spindle gouge. The thickness of the petals is a matter of personal choice, but I tapered them from about 18mm at the centre to about 7mm at the edges.

27 Once the tool work is complete, the top of the flower can be sanded and a coat of sanding sealer applied to keep it clean. It can then be removed from the glue chuck, and the template can be used to mark the detail of the petals and the regions to be removed between them. (It is easier to do this if the centre of the template is cut out so that it will lie as flat as possible on the flower).

28 & 29 The petals can then be cut out in two stages using the bandsaw.





30 Using a suitable small shallow gouge, the petal tips can be rounded over on both top and bottom to refine the shape required.

31 The divisions of the petals can be cut in with a No.11, 2mm veiner as shown.

32 The whole flower can then be sanded through the grits.

33 It should then look something like this.

Making the base (flower stalk)

34 Fix the cherry block in the chuck and turn the free end to a cylinder 40-45mm in diameter. Mark off 40mm from the end and taper the cylinder down to a diameter of 35mm.

35 Sand through the grits down to 400 and part it off.

It is probably best not to glue the stalk to the flower at this stage. However, I did drill a 6mm hole centrally on the top of the stalk and the base of the flower and used a short dowel to join them together. This achieved a solid joint when they were glued later.



Attaching the butterfly to the flower

Establish where you want the butterfly to 'sit'. I decided to have the head positioned over the centre of the flower.

36 Cut a small groove in the base of the butterfly's body with a No.9, 6mm gouge. This will allow it to rest on the appropriate part of the flower centre. (This positioning will need to be judged by eye.)

37 Drill 2.5mm holes to a depth of about 8mm in both the flower centre and the groove in the base of the butterfly body, to house a small dowel peg whittled from a waste piece of lime. This will help to strengthen the glued joint when the sculpture is assembled.

38 & 39 Final adjustments to the head end of the butterfly should be done at this stage (before final gluing) so that the proboscis can be positioned with the tip of it resting on the centre part of the flower.

40 I used a tiny 1.5mm dowel peg in the joint between the head and the base of the proboscis as shown.

41 & 42 Once I was happy that all parts fitted together in the right places, I did the final gluing in the following order.

- Butterfly to flower.
- Proboscis to butterfly and flower.
- Flower to flower stalk.

When all the glue was dry, I applied two thin coats of Danish oil, thinning the first coat by 5% with white spirit. When it was totally dry I buffed it with a soft, lint-free cloth. The finished sculpture should look something like this. ●



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 the wood grain.

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Sleepy child

Cynthia Rogers shows how to carve this charming child who is ready for bed

I find basswood excellent to carve; it is perhaps not quite as tight-grained as European lime, and it is a little denser, but also less likely to splinter. It can be left chisel-finished or sanded.

True red cedar is a pleasure to use, either for a backing or to carve with. Often sold as 'red cedar', however, is plantation cedar, which is extremely soft and very furry, making it difficult to obtain a good finish.

This project is designed as an introduction to a simple figure study, with the added challenge of carving cloth folds. The reaction of the material where it touches the body and the way the movement of the body reacts against the material are one of the major factors in this project.

The clay model

Make a model of the design the same thickness as the carving timber, and etch the details of the drawing into it with a skewer.

Try imagining a child in this position, or stand like this yourself to see where your feet are situated and how the buttocks stick out. There are only two ways to stand like this: either with the bottom stuck out or with the tummy pushed against the wall and the bottom in. The first option has been chosen here.

The overalls will pull against the cheeks of the bottom as the left arm is raised, and the buttocks will stick out the furthest from the body. The blanket sweeps from close to the wall to swell out against the leg and around behind the right foot.

Things you will need

Materials

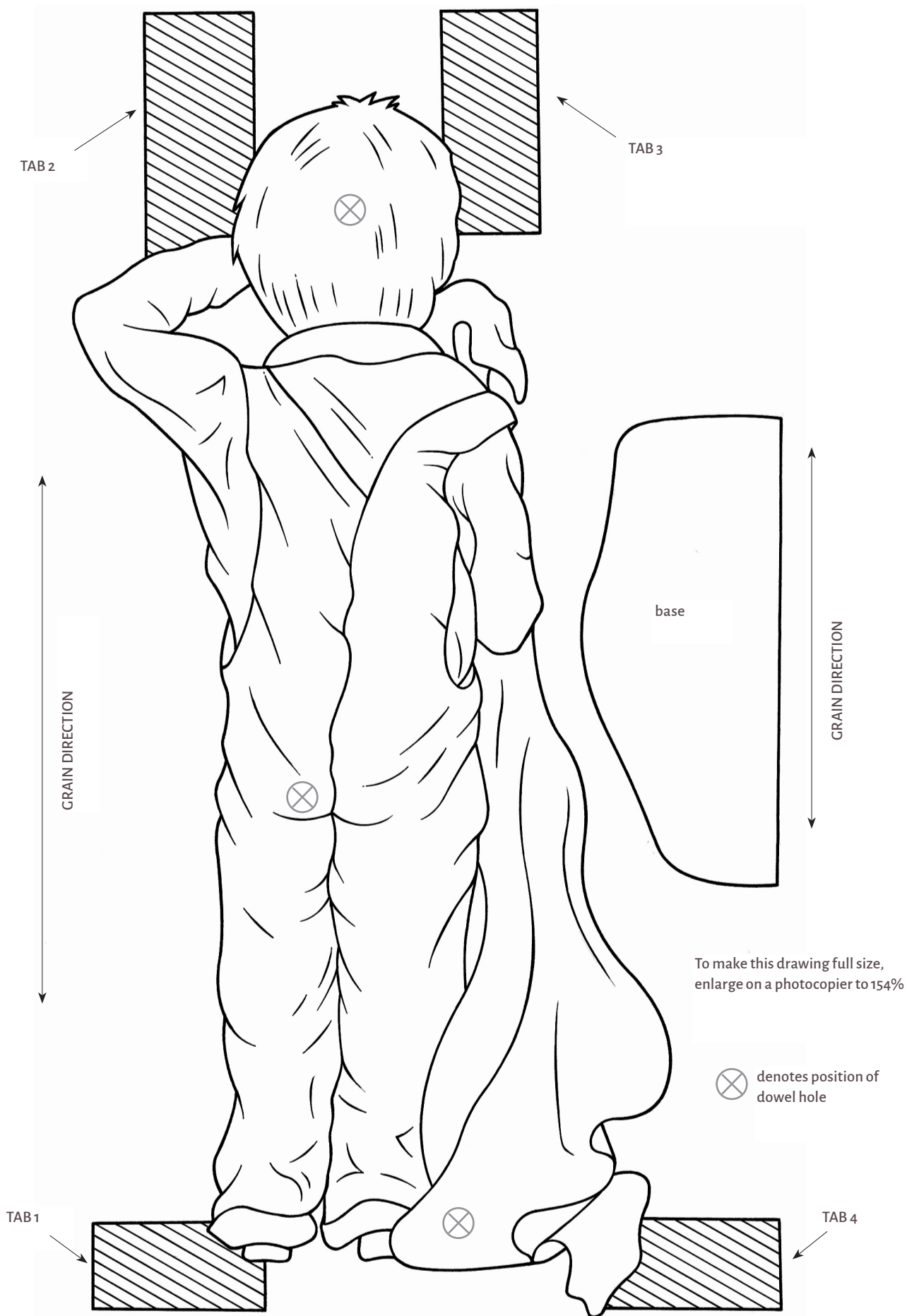
Carving

- Basswood (American lime), 8 x 15in (203 x 381mm) x 2in (50mm) thick

Backing

- Red cedar, 7½ x 14½in (190 x 368mm) x ½in (12mm) thick, or any size larger than the figure





1 Cut the head back to $1\frac{3}{8}$ in (35mm) thick, keeping it level for the moment. Reduce the top section of the blanket to 1in (25mm) thick. Make a mark at halfway up (at the small of the back), and from this mark to the collar reduce the thickness of the clay by $\frac{1}{2}$ in (12mm), leaving a step for the collar. Round the head slightly, taking the clay from the edges but not reducing the thickness in the middle. Lower the left arm so that it slopes from shoulder to elbow, then from elbow to wrist. The right shoulder is now lowered and rounded; because the shoulder is shown dropped, the shoulder strap of the overalls has slipped down. Shape the top half of the overalls, setting in the folds. Lower the blanket to slope from under the right elbow to the hip. Lower the right arm where it is tucked against the body. Leave the head slightly oversize to allow the hair to be cut in; the collar can also be fitted into the neck.

2 Looking at the model, it is apparent that the lower folds of the blanket sweep around and behind the lower part of the right leg. Shaping this part of the blanket first sets the depth for the feet and legs. Lower the heels by $\frac{3}{8}$ in (9mm) and, leaving material for the cuffs, slope up to under the buttocks. Reduce the right heel a further $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) and slope in the same way. Set the blanket so that it curls slightly around the right lower leg. Remove clay from under the buttocks and between the legs at the crotch. Shape the bottom, then work up towards the small of the back. With the buttocks completed, it should be clear what adjustments are required to shape the model and the clothing. Set in the folds in the clothing: the drag will be from the left arm, since this arm is high and the right shoulder dropped. Clean up the legs of the overalls and allow for the cuffs, remembering to leave material for the folds. The clay head is left oversize so that when cutting the timber it will not be made too small; the hair still has to be cut into it. The perspective has now been sorted out and allowances have been made for the folds in the clothing. If any adjustments are needed they are now marked on the pattern and the timber cut.

Carving the figure

All measurements are to be taken from the model, so make any adjustments needed to the model before starting on the wood. We are using the same method to test the depths of the clay and relate that thickness to the timber as we did with the other projects. Cut the three dowel holes in the back of the carving and make the template as before.

3 Use the $\frac{3}{8}$ and $\frac{1}{8}$ to cut a trench in tabs 2 and 3 for access to the head and left arm. Stab-cut along the pencil lines so the shape is not lost. Our aim in this carving



is to rough out the whole of the timber model and then go back to refine it and work on the details. Stab-cut the collar and shoulder, and use the $\frac{1}{8}$ to reduce the head and the tip of the blanket to the same depth as the model; then level these areas with the fishtail. Use the V-tool to set in the straps and the V in the back of the overalls, leaving plenty of timber to work on later. Make sure the base pieces are all level and flat underneath. I used a quick-setting laminating adhesive, but ordinary PVA will suffice.

4 Lower the surface of the left arm, sloping from shoulder to elbow, then from elbow to wrist. Remove waste from the V-shape below the collar and cut the right arm in. Use the V-tool to cut in the sides of the overalls and to plan the folds in the cloth; use the $\frac{3}{8}$ for the softer folds. Under the base and on top of the dish, and mark the centre of each one. Carefully cut around the outside of each circle with a jigsaw or coping saw to create the edge of the circular base and dish. On top of the dish you will need to add a piece of plywood 18mm thick with a segment cut out to create a flat surface for the jigsaw level with the top of the scroll.



5 Sand all over with 180 grit to give a clearer picture of the general effect.

6 Stab-cut to set in the cuffs, and work the folds into the trouser legs. The form of the upper legs should be visible where the material is pulled against them. The left side has pulled higher, due to the raising of the left arm. The right side is baggier because the shoulder strap has slipped down, but still pulls against the buttocks. Cut the groove between the legs with the V-tool and set in the shape of the legs and the folds. The fishtail can also be used to deepen the cleft between the legs; it can be used on either the inside or outside



of the blade. Use the fishtail to set the clearance between the blanket and the right leg, keeping a nice sweep on the folds of material. Gouge the main folds in the blanket, but leave the tight folds on the lower right until the finer details are cut in later. Sand over with 180 grit. Any changes to the general shape can be done at this point before starting on the final details.

7 Remove the corners from the head block with the $\frac{1}{16}$ gouge and smooth over with the fishtail, without lowering the depth. Deepen the trenches in the tabs as needed, but do not remove them yet. Reduce the collar thickness and work across the back



and shoulder area to make it match the head. Use the $\frac{1}{8}$ gouge to cut the groove at the nape of the neck, then the $\frac{3}{8}$ and sandpaper rolled into a tight tube to soften the contours. Shave the collar a little at a time with the fishtail; using it upside down leaves a rounded cut. Mark the shape in pencil before cutting. Standing the carving up vertically and stepping back from it now and then puts the eye in better perspective for viewing the general appearance, and faults are easier to see. Areas that need cutting are marked with soft pencil before clamping down again. Start rounding the back of the head with either gouge, then smooth off with the fishtail and continue to refine the upper area of blanket, collar, arms. Reduce the thickness of the shoulder straps to suit the new levels and make them fit. Sand all with 180 or 240 grit.

8 If you are satisfied with the shape and contours of the upper area, then undercutting may begin, on the upper torso only. Where access is required, the project may be turned upside down and held securely by the tabs without any risk of damage to the carving. Start at the area below the left arm; shape the loose folds of the overalls from just above the waist, leaving a space between them and the shirt. All shapes and folds should follow the curve of the body towards the front in a gentle sweep. Undercut the shirtsleeve and arm up to tab 2 without removing the tab, shape and undercut the inside of the arm. Undercut the front of the overalls where they pull to the front of the chest, keeping the flow of the wrinkles. Check the thickness of the shoulder strap, lower it to its finished shape and undercut. This strap is narrower than the other, because it has creased as it has been pulled up. The strap is undercut only a small amount – more where deep folds occur. Use the carving knife as much as possible when undercutting to get the cleanest result; the corner of the fishtail can also be used to good effect, without leaving ugly marks or gouges. At times there is no choice but to use the $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$ chisel and then sand any tool marks from the timber. When using the knife, lay the blade as close as possible to the contour of the main timber and draw it slowly along. Raise the blade and cut downwards, following the contours as you draw it towards you, very much in the same way as it was used to undercut the leaves in earlier projects. When undercutting the folds, make the lower cut first with the knife and then use either the $\frac{3}{8}$ or the $\frac{5}{8}$ from above to cut down at the required angle; then sand. Leave the hair until we return to remove the tabs.





9 On the right side, clean up and shape the tip of the blanket, and finish the blanket folds and right arm where they meet. Use the $\frac{5}{8}$ gouge to shape the blanket folds. To sand the narrow space between blanket and shoulder, fold a long strip of sandpaper and use a sawing motion, taking care not to break off the fragile end. The right arm and shoulder are tucked against the body and the blanket, so they are not very visible. Suggesting the folds and shape is sufficient, providing some definition is shown.

10 Continue to work down the right side, shaping both the right leg and the blanket, cleaning any marks and clarifying details. Sand the blanket, but leave the very lowest right-hand folds until later. Undercut the buttocks slightly and sand. Deepen the valley between the legs if required. Remove the waste between the legs by using the carving knife or the tip of the fishtail; turn the fishtail to cut with either the left or right edge of the tip as needed. The sharp fold or crease between the right leg and the blanket is cut in the same manner as between the legs. The inside curve of the fishtail (used upside down) is perfect to keep the sweep of the blanket while removing waste. The left tip of the fishtail, or the carving knife, can then be used to cut down alongside the trouser leg to complete the shape. If using the carving knife to cut the deep recesses between legs and blanket, then cant the knife at a slight angle. Repeat the cut, angling the knife the opposite way. Mark the contours of the blanket folds lightly in pencil; they can be altered to suit your own tastes very simply as the shape emerges. Use the $\frac{5}{16}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$ gouges to get nice sweeps into the outside curves of the folds; the fishtail is useful to even up the surface. For the inside curve of the tight folds at the bottom, stab-cut the boundary line, then use the $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{5}{16}$ to remove the waste a little at a time. Finish by sanding. The deep gap between the lower right leg and the blanket is cut using the $\frac{5}{8}$, a little at a time. When the depth required has been reached, the bottom is then scraped by dragging the chisel back and forth. Smooth



with sandpaper rolled into a tight tube. Set in the trouser cuffs, and drill the space between the ankles using a $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) drill bit. Complete the shape with the $\frac{5}{8}$ chisel, then sand. The blanket should now project beyond the trouser leg slightly; leave the tab as it is. Cut back the shoe so the heel is below the level of the cuff.

11 Shape the outer edge of the left leg before undercutting the front edge; keep the contour of the undercut full and round. Continue to carve in the wrinkles round the side of the cloth, and work it to match the area above the waist that was completed earlier. Mark where you think the side seam of the trouser leg should be; this will clarify the thickness of the leg, and where the folds are pulling from. The waste may then be removed from the front



of the leg to provide room for the foot, which will be seen from the side. The whole area is shaved back to the pencil mark shown in the photograph, so that when it is viewed from the side there will be ample depth to show the perspective. The left leg is carved and sanded enough so that no flat spots show from the side profile. The toe will be shaped after the tab has been removed.

12 On the left side of the boy's trousers, a pencil mark has been drawn to show where the side seam lies; the carving knife is then drawn down along this mark to cut the seam. Notice that the seam is not straight but tends to follow the wrinkles in the cloth. Repeat this procedure on the right side, where only part of the seam will be seen because of the folds of the blanket.

13 Lightly pencil in the back seam before cutting in the same manner as for the side seams. Note that the top of the seam leans to the right where the strap falls from the shoulder; the seam also follows the humps in the cloth. Cut it by drawing the carving knife firmly along the pencil mark, preferably all in one stroke. Now check over the entire project in case blemishes have been missed, and sand where required.

14 Using the $\frac{5}{8}$ gouge and only making shallow cuts, pare away tab 2 a little at a time, staying outside the line of the carving. Clean up using the fishtail, and finish any adjustments needed to the contour to complete the arm; then sand. If any marks persist in the neck and collar region, either roll the sandpaper into a tight

tube to access them, or fold the sandpaper in half then fold again to form a tight, firm rolled edge. Leave tab 3; it will be the last to be removed. There are many ways to show hair, but a simple shaggy style is the easiest and will suit this project. If we give the boy curly hair there will be difficult areas to get into at the sanding stage. Straight, neatly combed hair would not suit this subject, and is also harder to cut. I recommended practising the style on the clay model (using a kebab stick) before cutting into the wood. This helps to give a clear idea of what you are trying to achieve. Notice that all the directions of hair fall from the crown of the head. Drawing some directions lightly with the pencil before you start cutting helps you to stay oriented. Cut a gap in the hair where the left arm meets the head; this will

allow the hair to 'open up' and fall around the wrist. Use the $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$ to give this gap some depth, by leaving a slight bulge above the wrist; lines may be cut into it to suggest hair. I have used the V-tool to make all the cuts. Some have been only lightly cut in, while others have been cut more heavily. Try not to keep all the cuts straight, but sweep them or cross over them as you please. What we are after is a 'messed-up' look, so try not to be too formal. When you are satisfied with the general effect, use the carving knife to score many finer hair lines all over the head, leaving the area around tab 3 to be finished later, then sand lightly.

15 Hold the carving by tab 1 and gently cut away the waste from tab 4 until it is the same thickness as the blanket. Draw the tip of the blanket onto the wood with a pencil. Note how the blanket drops over at the tip; this will allow it to hang over the edge of the base when it is mounted. Shape the remaining wood to fit in with the folds on the blanket and carefully cut away any waste from under the blanket with a fretsaw; then sand.

16 Using the $\frac{5}{8}$ or the fishtail, gently cut away the bulk of tab 1, leaving enough material to finish the left trouser cuff and shoe. Continue to shape the cuff on the outer side of the shoe to match up with the front and back. When you are satisfied with the size and shape, finish shaping the boot, which is set back below the level of the cuff. Before cutting off the waste below the heel, draw a baseline to ensure that it is in line with the right foot and the blanket. Use the bastard file if needed to get this area level, taking care not to damage the tip of the blanket.

17 Continue the shaping of the foot and shoe, then clean and sand. Drill two $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm) holes, one under the centre of the right foot, the other under the centre of the blanket area, for dowelling the boy to the base. Make a template of this area in the usual way.



13



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◀ Base and backing

18 I have used basswood for the base, but a piece of the same material as the backing would also be appropriate. Cut out and sand the base, testing against the feet and blanket to ensure a good fit. Secure the template to the base and drill matching holes for the dowels. Cover the holes with masking tape so polish will not get in; check the base against the carving to make sure the polished area is clear. The shape I have given for the backing panel is an informal design; if you prefer a different shape, decide now. The backing is planed, cut to shape and sanded all over. Fit the template of the boy to the backing and drill the matching holes for the dowels. Cover the holes with masking tape to keep out the polish and leave a clean area for the glue. Brush all three sections of carving with clean, hot tap water and leave overnight to dry, then sand all over with either 0000 steel wool or very fine sandpaper. I applied three coats of oil to the entire project by the 'rubbed' method. The hanger will not be placed in the centre of the backing this time, because the figure, which is the greatest weight, will be attached off-centre. Place the boy in position on the backing and make a small chalk mark at the top of the backing, in line with his right leg. Remove the boy and turn the backing face down onto a towel. Make a chalk mark at the top, then measure down $1\frac{1}{2}$ in (38mm) and mark with a pencil. Wipe off the chalk mark and attach one flap hanger on the back at the pencil mark.

19 Strip off the masking tape from the various pieces and check that there are no lumps or hard drops of polish on the surfaces that are to be glued. Carefully remove any hardened drips that you find with the fishtail. Cut the dowels to length and fit them into the carving

without glue to check that all the segments still align perfectly. When satisfied, apply glue and fix the boy to the backing. Check the alignment of the base plate, apply glue and allow all three parts to set for 24 hours with cloth and weights to keep them firmly together. ●



From the community

A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community



Festive tree-ts!

Our carving club had a tree decoration Christmas challenge. The club as a whole raised their game and concentrated on Christmas star carvings. It is amazing how a challenge concentrates the effort – in fact, I prefer a deadline and a suggested topic.

That's just me, but it seems to work. I sent you some pictures of past Christmas carvings and my attempts for this year. The club comes together with the local Pontesbury church in rural Shropshire, there were in the region of 70 trees from various village groups and organisations to raise funds for the upkeep of the church. The atmosphere was wonderful and the light given

off by all those trees reminded me why churches had such large stained glass windows in the past, the reflections from the windows and brass were wonderful.

There is a prize draw, tea and cake, and a small charge to view the trees. The event is quite unique and I would love to see this type of event spread. The children were enthralled by the different trees, some amazingly creative ideas. I particularly liked the tree from the local garage – a stack of tyres starting out large and slowly diminishing to a point painted green and adorned with baubles and tinsel. As I said, wonderfully creative.

Mick Price ►



Inspired by Andrew Thomas

Looking through some old issues of *Woodcarving* I was inspired by an article by Andrew Thomas, Carving a Sea Lion. I enjoyed carving one so much I've now created a collection of five sea creatures, all about nine inches. All in lime except the hammerhead, which is in tulip wood. They are all mounted on lovely pieces of yew I was fortunate to acquire.

Keep up the excellent work on the magazine, I find it a great inspiration.

Yours, George Stopps

All the fun of the fair

Here is a picture of my carousel carvings project. This photo has a cut-out figure at the bottom. The rounding board from *Woodcarving* is in the centre. They have been made over a period of years, not all at one time. Fun projects to do, I enjoyed the carving.

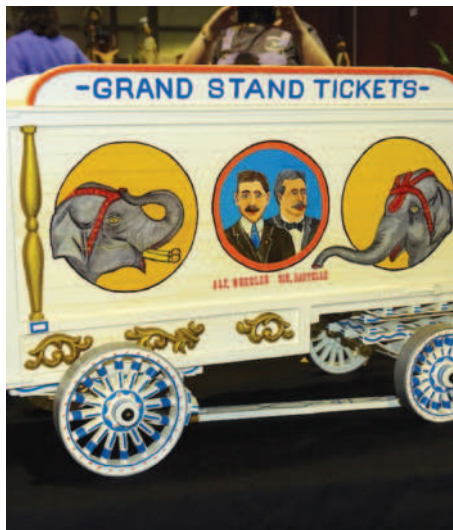
Everybody I have shown the *Woodcarving* article to about our Carve In 4 & 5 event has been thrilled.

Take care, John Sutton



Circus history

Patrick and Brenda Wentzel display their vintage circus collection



My wife Brenda and I have collected and restored the circus over the past 30+ years. Most of the animals, figures and wagons were carved and built in the late 1940s through to the early 1960s. Everything seen in the photographs, with the exception of the small dogs and two clowns is hand carved or hand built. There are four or five different carvers represented in this display, including myself.

My main interest has been amassing the various elements of a vintage early 1900's circus street parade. This representation of a miniature circus parade was assembled from many different sources and collections. At Dayton, we exhibited approximately 50 feet of circus parade. Once we've restored other carvings and wagons in our collection, we should be able to exhibit a parade well in excess of 160 feet.

In addition to the parade, we displayed miniature circus carvings representing circus acts, circus back-yard scenes and circus menagerie. As points of reference, a standing human figure is approximately 6 inches in height and our carved giraffe is 14 inches tall.

None of this would be remotely possible without a VERY understanding 'banker' who happens to be my dear wife,

Brenda. Brenda was a great circus trouper in the highest regard over that weekend. She discussed the circus and answered questions with as many people as I did over the two days.

Artistry in Wood

Seven years ago, we were invited to exhibit our 1/12 scale hand carved miniature circus collection as the featured display at the '2014 Artistry in Wood Show' in Dayton, Ohio. This is reported to be the largest woodcarving show in North America with over 6,000 attendees. It was a great honour being invited to exhibit our collection.

We plan to display the collection in Parkersburg sometime in the next few years. We also have a small display of various scales of miniature circus on permanent display and loan in a children's museum in Marietta, Ohio. We receive no compensation for the display except the great joy of sharing the circus 'with children of all ages!' That display is dedicated to my Father. www.patrickwentzel.com/Patrick

Classic Carousel Carvings
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Carving with rasps

Mark Gough discusses the use of rasps and associated tools

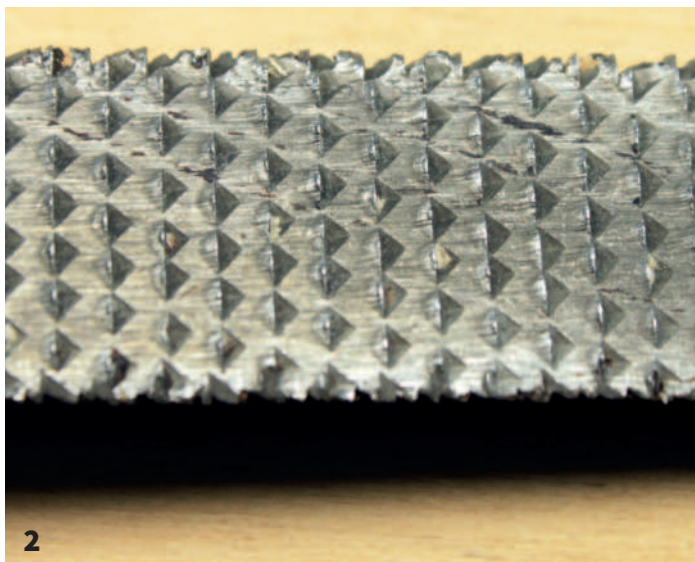


Without doubt the best and most satisfying way to shape wood is by carving with gouges, which are beautiful tools to use and collect. I love it when I have spent a day sharpening and honing my gouges and see them all set for action in the rack, but 'gouges are not the only tool', to coin a phrase. I incorporate the use of rasps often in my work, especially when I need to remove a lot of waste quickly. Rasps cut differently to gouges – gouges cut cleanly through the fibres with razor-sharp edges, leaving a smooth, polished surface; rasps rip into the fibres and tear them out, leaving a rough surface which needs sanding down. Each has its pros and cons. To carve a full project with gouges

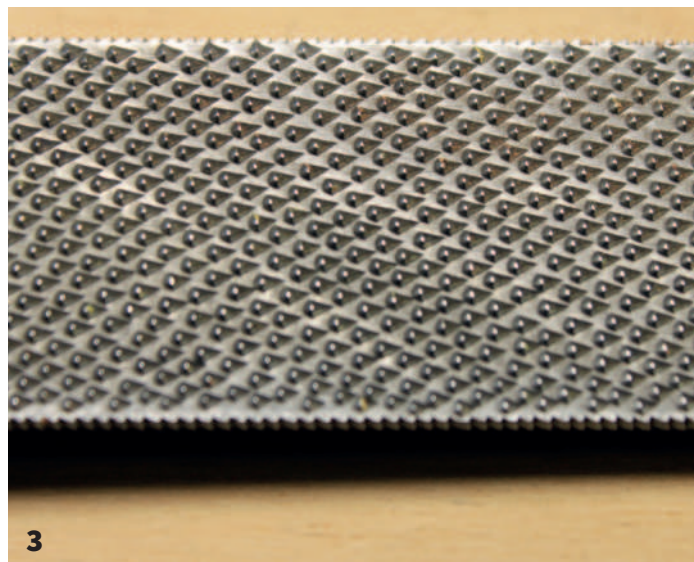
usually means using a selection of different sizes and shapes and this can be offputting and expensive for beginners with a limited budget. As woodworkers and carvers, we all like to buy new tools – walking into a well-stocked tool supplier is like being a child in a toy shop again, and this comes in time as we progress, but to start carving wood a simple, good-quality rasp can be a good choice. Some purists might say this is not proper carving and they might be correct, but for me, carving wood is shaping wood by any means and there are no rules in your own workshop. It may be different in a production environment but hey, most of us are hobbyists.



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The must-have tool

If you only buy one tool to begin shaping your project with, consider the Japanese saw rasp (**photo 1**). As it suggests, it is basically several hacksaw blades grouped and riveted together to form a flat cutting surface, coarse on one side and fine on the other. It can be a little uncomfortable to use at first, but you will soon get used to it. This is a fantastic tool for bulk removal of waste, best used in the direction of or across the grain. It will dig in if you go in the opposite direction, but with a little practise you can use the edge of the tool to carve out some fairly detailed curves, and with the fine side you will achieve a reasonable enough finish to mark in the detailed areas of your carving as you progress.

The Japanese saw rasp is a fairly inexpensive tool, but the next choice is quite the opposite. First it might be wise to know the difference between a machine-produced rasp and a hand-stitched rasp. The term 'stitched' is misleading – a better description is hand-punched. With machine mass-produced rasps the teeth

are raised by an automated process and are usually all in line, set either at an angle or straight across the face of the tool (**photo 2**). All the angled ones I have come across are made for right-handed people. That's not to say left-handed ones don't exist, but if they do, they are not common. When using this type the cut is uniform and produces deep grooves, which require further work to remove. They tend to be made from cheaper steel and will not last long if used on some harder woods for any length of time like oak or maple. In contrast to these, hand-stitched rasps are much more expensive but worth the outlay if you can afford it. The steel is of a higher quality, making it last much longer and, more importantly, the teeth are raised by a hand-punching process resulting in a random pattern (**photo 3**), which cuts more evenly as the teeth are slightly offset from each other. They also come in right or left-handed versions which, for me, as a lefty is a bonus. These tools are without doubt my favourite and well worth considering. (**Photo 4** Factory-produced rasps and **photo 5** Hand-stitched



Similar to these in shape and size are the tungsten carbide rasps (**photo 6**), which are fairly new to the market. They are pieces of flat or half-round bar with tiny pieces of tungsten carbide randomly bonded to them (**photo 7**). Tungsten carbide is very hard and keeps a sharp edge much longer than steel and, in this form, can be used in any direction without snagging or splitting the grain. The only snag I found is that they tend to clog more frequently, especially with oily woods such as rosewood or teak, but they can be cleaned easily with a wire brush. Available in coarse or fine, they will remove waste adequately and are in the middle price range, although some cheaper brands are available now.

Other versions of these are the smaller, finer type for modelling (**photo 8**).

Made with minute pieces of tungsten carbide, they are good for removing tool marks ready for sanding and cutting in smaller curves and contours. As a stick maker, I find these perfect for

forming the joint between the carved top and the natural bark on the shank.

Photo 9 shows a set of needle rasps, ideal for fast cutting of smaller areas, generally made from cheaper hardened steel, not long-lasting but priced right.

The next group of tools are worthy of a mention but are not rasps as such. **Photo 10** shows a pair of riffler files. These are good-quality, hand-punched versions and priced accordingly – very versatile, but a bit awkward to hold, which is why I made some wooden handles for mine.

Photo 11 shows a set of Japanese finger files – very versatile and excellent little tools for detailed work, long-lasting and a pleasure to use.

Finally, I must include rotary burs. They cut in the same way as a rasp by ripping out the wood fibres, they come in all shape, sizes and forms, including carbide and ceramic



9



10



11

types. A rotary power unit of some sort is necessary, preferably with a flexible shaft and a hand piece to secure them safely in use. The downside to using these is the noise dust factor, so an extraction system is advisable, as is good-quality PPE, which makes it an expensive option but, in my opinion, worthwhile. It depends on what you intend to carve in the end.

Rasps, unlike gouges and chisels, cannot be sharpened effectively but they can be maintained simply by cleaning the cutting faces out with a file card and wire brush, working over the back and across the cutting edges, not into them. Any awkward particles can be picked out with a small panel pin (**photo 12**).

Rasps cannot replace the use of gouges, but they can be used in conjunction to provide an enjoyable carving experience and provide us with the means to produce some interesting work. The article to follow in the next issue titled Nestling Swan and Cygnets was produced mainly with rasps as an example.



12

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Zoë Gertner carves a watering can from boxwood

Steve Bisco creates a floral posy in limewood

Carve John Samworth's meditation labyrinth



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Printer Precision Colour Printing
Distribution Seymour Distribution Ltd
T: 020 7429 4000
Woodcarving (ISSN 0965-9463) is published bi-monthly by Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd.
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Carving with joy

Peter Benson offers some advice on getting the most out of your carving efforts

I often wonder why a lot of carvers actually do carve, especially those who attend clubs or classes. During the periods of lockdown it appears that many of the people who regularly attend such gatherings have done little or no carving. As I mentioned in an earlier article, this may be due to a lack of confidence to carve without guidance, but I wonder. I am regularly asked for ideas for people to start carving and have, in the past, had problems finding something to inspire me. As a result I have spent quite a lot of time trying to think of ways to help with finding ideas or subjects for others, and myself, to carve.

The first, obvious, thing to do is to make sure you carve something, even if it is not really exciting – hence my suggestions for simple pieces that can be useful for practise as well as possible gifts for friends and relations. This is, of course, fine as long as you don't spend a lot of time on any piece. I can remember a time when I was carving small mice to sell at craft fairs, very successfully as it turned out, but I realised one day as I carved my millionth (it seemed) mouse that I was becoming known as the man who carved small mice and not as a woodcarver. I was also doing so many that there was no time to do anything else.

The second consideration is to ask two simple questions: what do you really like, and how much do you know about any subject that you may want to carve? Remember that you cannot successfully carve anything about which you know very little. To know enough about something to be able to reproduce it with any degree of accuracy, without guidance, requires a lot of research and study and you must be prepared to put in the necessary time.

Therefore, don't pick a subject for a major project if you don't feel confident about your knowledge or are really fired up to do it.

I love carving animals, people, trees and reliefs, so I generally steer clear of anything else. Each one of these generally involves as much time swatting up on the details of form, balance, movement and design as it takes to do the actual carving. Making clay or plasticine maquettes can help considerably, as can trying a simple practice piece in a softer wood than that you are intending to use. If successful, someone will also treasure your practice piece.

If you have read any of my ramblings in the past, you will know that I am not a great advocate of extensive copying of the work of others, either pictures or sculptures. While this can be very valuable to give a guide as to how effective and accurate

your reproductive carving can be, you miss out on the pure joy you can get from successfully completing a carving to your own exclusive design, even if it has involved taking your own photographs. On this point, if you are taking the pictures yourself, you can take them from every angle that you may need during the carving

process. Working from a single picture can lead to all sorts of problems.

How, then, can you start to design a carving that is your own idea and design? One way is to start from a different point. Instead of trying to find a piece of wood to fit a shape you have come up with, why not start with the piece of wood and



fit your subject to that, using as much of the original shape as you can? You can pick up any odd offcut and see what you can make of it. This method works quite well if you want to carve trees, as their very structure makes it very difficult to reproduce the natural form. By fitting them into a predetermined shape, not only do you create limits within which you have to contain your design but you also make

yourself focus on what is necessary to make a tree look realistic without the fragility of its natural shape. Once you have decided on the overall shape, you have much more freedom while carving. (See pictures below.)

Each of these carvings is basically the same subject but has started from a totally different initial shape.

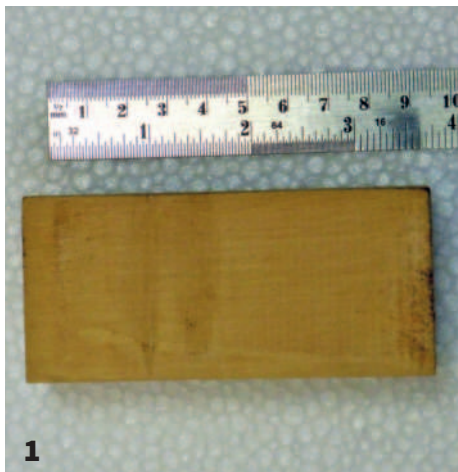
What follows is an attempt to carve a small and delicate tree from a simple

rectangular piece of boxwood, 95 x 40 x 40mm. I have a rough idea of what I wish to include in the scene and of the shape of the tree, but this will develop as I go along. In anything that is going to be small and delicate there is always a need to allow for 'unforeseen changes in design' or, in other words, the occasional breakage or mistake, usually as a result of crushing the piece while holding it in the hand.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER BENSON

Trees 1, 2 and 3



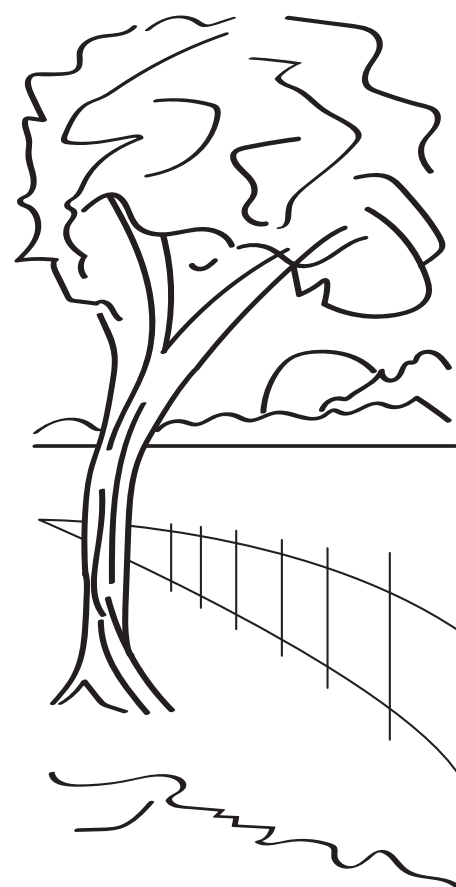
1

The initial design

1 & 2 It is important that you start with a positive design, otherwise you will go nowhere, but you must be willing to change direction as the mood takes you, or as suggested by the cuts that you make. What I am about to show is just one idea of my own. I am not suggesting that you copy it or even try something similar. It may not even turn out as I want it to. Pick up a piece of wood from your stock or waste bin and give something a try – anything that you fancy. The important thing is that you have fun and carve with freedom. Be prepared to play with this sort of carving – there will be plenty of stress when you attempt your masterpiece.



2



◀ Basic shaping

3 & 4 I have drawn up the tree and background and removed the bulk of the waste that I know will not be needed.

When carving something like this that you hold mostly in the hand, the greatest danger, as I mentioned earlier, is you may break fine detail by crushing the piece. I suggest that you maintain as much strength in the structure as you can, leaving the thinning down of the finer parts until near the end.

The biggest problem area is the branches of the tree, especially the thinner ones. My way of dealing with this is to carve as many holes as I need to get to the inside of the tree – in other words, access holes. I then locate all the inner branches as best I can, leaving blocks for the leafy areas. Care needs to be taken to ensure that each branch is actually attached to the tree and is supported at the outer end by a leaf area or another branch. This will take quite a time but it will be the safest way to proceed as I am unlikely to damage what I have already carved, which is what could happen if the outside is carved first. Once I am happy with the inner branches, I can shape the outside of the tree from the wood left around the holes.

Starting to refine the tree

5 Eventually the trunk and branches will be thinned down considerably, but the more bulk I can leave at this stage the safer I will be.

The main thing to concentrate on now is getting the leaf areas done and the smaller branches that support them. This could be done by drilling some of the holes or using a rotary burr in a micro-motor. This is easier than trying to cut with a chisel or gouge as less pressure is needed. It depends what tools are available.

If you are concerned about crushing the piece in your hand with a carving like this, you could use a carving post on a small carving table. Obviously, from now on more care is needed as the piece gets more fragile.

Carving inside the tree

6 & 7 As a break from carving the tree, I tackled the fence and background. Here I found that drilling through the fence spaces made the whole process much easier. I wasn't too worried about the fence breaking as, sometimes, broken detail like this adds to the character of the carving. This does happen to fences! I left as much of the background in place for two reasons. First, it gives support to the tree for as long as possible and, second, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with it anyway. Initially, I wanted a sunset with some colour and shadow but am still not sure. Part of the attraction of a carving like this is being able to adapt or modify the design as you go along. I like the challenge of carving very fine detail, but know that I can always change any areas I am concerned about. Boxwood is very resilient and any carver will soon discover what can be got away with and what can't.



Adding detail

8 From now on, it is a matter of fining everything down as much as possible. Tools are regularly honed to keep them extra sharp to reduce the pressure needed to get a good finish.

9 I decided that I would go with my original idea of a sunset and roughed this out before the final detailing. It will no doubt change as I go along.

10 There are just a few thoughts that I would like to add as a summary.

Michael Painter once said something to me that has stuck for many years: 'What we are carving are shadows and are removing wood to create these.' Simple, but very wise and true.

Don't get hung up on your mistakes – we all make them and that is how we learn.

Remember, professional carvers have to stick to a design or brief and are therefore restricted in what they can do. The majority of us carve for pleasure and should make sure we enjoy it and feel free to do whatever we want to do.

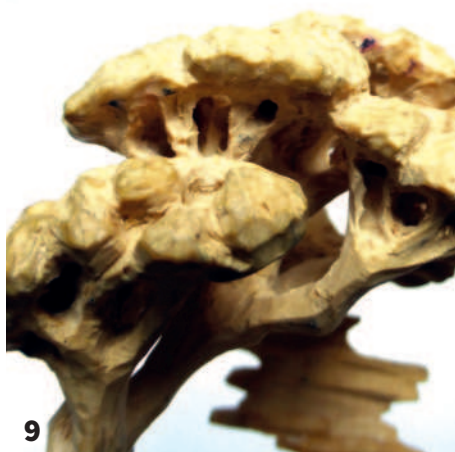
I have found in a lifetime of teaching that some people want to learn and get better while others thoroughly enjoy what they do at a standard that suits them. You cannot argue with either attitude but I will add; if you don't enjoy it and want to do more, why do it?

I tried several different ways of showing the sunset but none looked as I wanted it to look, so the end result is a bit of a compromise.

Finishing

11 The whole exercise is an experiment and, although it is not as intended, I am not disappointed. I wouldn't do the same thing again but I have learnt a lot and have enjoyed the process. I very rarely discard something I have carved as each serves as a lesson – sometimes showing something that was unsuccessful, sometimes a very rewarding success.

Whatever you do, there can be joy in all of it, you just have to find it. ●





Carving Countries

William Barsley visits Thailand

Continuing his series, William Barsley looks back on the journey that inspired his career change from an office worker to a professional woodcarver. Having explored Bali and Malaysia, William heads north to Thailand.

It is as if the carver is an archaeologist uncovering an ancient scene hidden beneath the wood



1 Cycling past rice paddy fields en route to a lesson with Nopphadol **2** Elephants are hidden everywhere at Baan Jang Nak **3** Chiang Mai train station

Thailand

Located in the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand is popular not only for its beautiful islands, beaches, mountains, and food, but also for its vibrant decoration that is synonymous with Buddhism, the dominant religion in the country. This made for a noticeable contrast with Malaysia, where the spread of Islam after the 14th century brought with it more abstract but subtle forms in line with Islamic teachings.

In Thailand, decoration and ornamentation were everywhere to be seen, from house designs and shop fronts to temples and roadside shrines. As in many cultures, wood plays an integral part of the traditional way of living in Thailand. Houses are often made of wood, while the richest carvings are saved for temples and religious items. Nowadays, aside from the current impact of Covid on global travel, Thailand has a thriving tourism industry and, as such, gift shops are another key avenue for the country's woodcarvings.

The journey

Towards the end of our time in Malaysia, we became caught up in some severe floods, which cut short our plans to cycle into Thailand. Instead, we managed to load our bikes on to a bus for the 14-hour journey up to Bangkok. Although sad not to be cycling, it was a good opportunity to reflect on the journey and gather our energy for what would be an action-packed month in Thailand.

Bangkok was a bustling city with incredible sights, sounds and smells. Carvings were on display at every corner, particularly in gift shops where they would overflow the shelves as tourists' favoured form of souvenir. A trip to Thailand wouldn't be complete

without seeing some of its majestic temples and, as they are heavily ornamented with woodcarvings, scouting out temples quickly became our favourite activity in the city.

Being the third country of the trip, I was getting better at learning how to find woodcarvers, which I achieved through a combination of online research, visiting art galleries and museums, and asking as many local people as possible. It was the city of Chiang Mai, located in north west Thailand, that kept being recommended to us as a haven for woodcarving – so we packed up the bikes and off we went.

Fortunately, Thailand proved to be an incredibly cycle-friendly country. Accommodation was cheap, the food was delicious and plentiful, we could access Wi-Fi or 4G almost everywhere, making research and navigation simple, and the roads, although busy at times, were generally well looked after.

Notable woodcarvers

The elephant carvers – Baan Jang Nak

One of my first ports of call was a family-run carving business called Baan Jang Nak, which is located on the outskirts of Chiang Mai and specialises in elephant carving. The elephant is so synonymous with Thailand that I thought it appropriate to start here. I quickly learned that these carvers are some of the best in the country and their skill in carving elephants is, unsurprisingly, second to none.

Mr Viriya, who founded the business, took up carving at the age of 17 and, while undertaking a formal carving apprenticeship, he became fascinated with carving elephants. Forty years later he is renowned across Asia for his elephant carvings, having spent his life's work on this.



4 A gigantic elephant carving on a single section of timber **5** Nopphadol **6** Nopphadol's chisels – notice the unique handles **7** Nopphadol's Woodcarving College and his beautiful sign

Baan Jang Nak is now a thriving family business, with Mr Viriya's siblings and children also involved. What struck me while walking around the workshop was how relaxed and happy the carvers were. It felt like a deeply creative working environment and I wondered whether this had to do with the subject matter never changing, meaning unique design styles and composition, together with excellent quality, were crucial in order to stand out.

To say I came away inspired is an understatement. I've rarely seen such creativity and realism in this type of carving. It seemed as though the elephants could come to life at any moment. Such quality comes at a price, though; the carvings aren't cheap and, with some of the larger projects taking years to complete, you can understand why. In a world where the majority of people want things to be made as quickly and cheaply as possible, it was refreshing to see these carvers taking the time they needed, and the results of this were obvious to see.

The mythical sea monster

My next stop was the museum and private collection of Mr Charoui Na Soonton, just a short way south of Chiang Mai. Mr Soonton's passion for carving is incredible and he's made it his life's goal to preserve the heritage of Thai carving. As such, he has collected and commissioned hundreds of superb carvings. These are now all on public display in his museum. It is the authenticity and quality of the carving that is important to Mr Soonton and he therefore chooses a select few carvers to work for him, giving them freedom to create their best work, saying: 'Whatever price they ask, I give it to them and there is no time limit either.' As a carver myself, I know how important it is to have the time not

only to carve a piece but to do so to the very best of your ability.

Taking time out of his busy schedule, Mr Soonton kindly spent the morning giving us a rare introduction to his collection and took us to meet one of his woodcarvers, Mr Sombat. Mr Sombat is nearly 50 years old and has been carving most of his life. He predominately carves in teak wood and focuses on mythical creatures and dragons. After a bumpy and dusty trip in the back of Mr Soonton's truck through beautiful farmland, we stopped outside a run-down shelter. Assuming this was for a short stop off, I was surprised when Mr Sombat stepped out and beckoned us inside to see his work. Stepping out of the bright sunshine and into this shelter, my eyes took a moment to adjust. What I saw completely blew my mind. In the middle of the hut stood the most incredible carving of a gigantic mythical fish. Maybe it was the stark contrast between the dilapidated hut and the beautiful carving, but Mr Sombat was clearly a master of his profession.

As with many of the carvers in the area, Mr Sombat supplements his carving income working as a farmer during the busy harvest season. Given his farming commitments and the fact there is no strict completion deadline, Mr Sombat had already been working on this piece for two years and it was expected to take another 10 months to complete.

Woodcarving course with Nopphadol Kamlae

I was recommended to visit the carver Nopphadol Kamlae by the master carver Norhaiza Noordin who I met in Malaysia and who I wrote about in the last article of this series. It turned out that Nopphadol lived near Chiang Mai and ran a woodcarving college teaching both locals and tourists to carve. Luckily, he was available to give me a two-day lesson, and I jumped at the opportunity.



8 A woodcarver at Baan Jang Nak **9** Technical drawings surround the workshops at Baan Jang Nak **10** Work in progress on the carving course **11** Mr Sombat carving a mythical sea monster

The course began at 8am, meaning an early start to the day as Nopphadol's home was over an hour's cycle south of Chiang Mai, where we were staying. It was a beautiful, crisp morning on my first day of the course and the sun rose over a quiet river that followed the road I took south along lush paddy fields.

Born in 1965, Nopphadol learnt to carve from his uncle and developed his background in the traditional Lanna style, common throughout northern Thailand, specifically Chiang Mai. He has also tried his hand at other carving styles, such as European heraldry (as you can see in his sign) and, in 1994, was commissioned to carve a 3.5m-high buddha in Munich city hall. Nopphadol continues to receive requests for large, international commissions, as well as advising on a number of construction projects in the local area.

After some thought, we decided to carve a small relief of an elephant combined with a traditional floral motif, big enough to take two days to carve, but small enough to carry on the bike. Using a piece of teak wood, Nopphadol began sketching the initial design straight from his memory. Over the course of the day, the piece slowly took shape, and we stopped only to enjoy a delicious meal made by his wife. As always with the carvers I've met on this journey, I am fascinated by the tools they use and how they differ

(or not) to the tools used by other carvers I've met. Nopphadol's tools felt unique. He was using a set of chisels made from recycled old railway lines, the handles of which were split at their ends to create a cushioning effect when striking with the hammer. They were great to use. Teak is a relatively hard wood and extremely durable, so it required a good whack. It felt wonderful carving at a bench again after my time spent carving seated on the floor in Bali – something I don't think my body could ever get used to.

Nopphadol was a good teacher and very trusting in that, after showing me a certain technique, he would let me get on with it, providing guidance only when needed. By far the greatest lesson I learnt was to take bigger and more positive cuts when roughing out, saving a lot of time in the process. These two days proved to be invaluable for understanding Thai carving and I made it my goal to undertake a similar course in each of the remaining countries of my trip.

Next time, William continues his journey in Thailand, visiting the astonishing carved temple of the Sanctuary of Truth, a colossal feat of engineering and woodcarving. He also meets a Scotsman carving in Buddhist temples in Udon Thani, east Thailand. ●



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The Sanctuary of Truth

We take a closer look at the intricate teak carvings on Thailand's unique cultural monument



Part temple, part palace and part museum, the Sanctuary of Truth in Pattaya, Thailand, was commissioned by Lek Viriyaphant, a wealthy Thai businessman with an interest in preserving ancient building techniques and architecture. Construction began in 1981 and is still ongoing – tourists at the site have to wear hard hats. The building is made entirely of wood, mainly teak, and does not even contain any metal nails. It is divided into four wings, each dedicated to a different form of religious iconography: Thai,

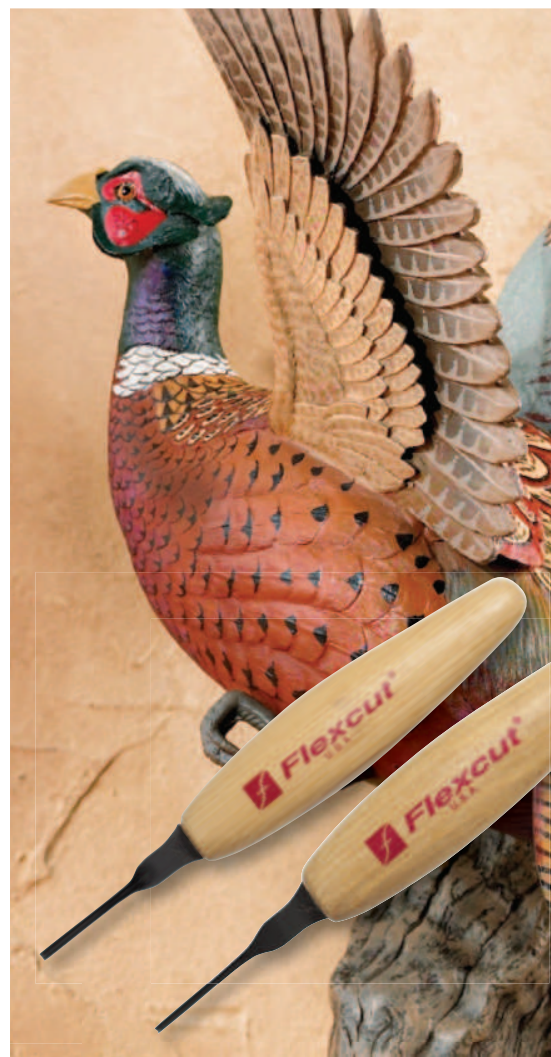
Khmer, Chinese and Indian. The Sanctuary is entirely covered in detailed wooden carvings depicting animals, people and mythological figures. The carvings were made from teak using traditional techniques and, due to the effects of the weather and environment, they constantly need to be replaced, meaning that work on the Sanctuary will never be complete. This represents the nature of human existence but also makes the Sanctuary a monument to Thai craftsmanship.



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