

WOOD CARVING

KEV ALVITI GUEST EDITOR

- Introduces the issue
- Carves a decorative butter mould
- Profiles carver Chris Pye



PROJECTS TO CARVE Green man • Celtic-style whale • Bichon frise
• Relief carved map • Nordic horse • Tree frog • Owl head walking stick
• Watering can – part 2 **TECHNICAL ADVICE** Knife sharpening guide



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Guest editor's letter

Kevin Alviti



Looking at a project, sometimes it can seem insurmountable. I often think that starting is the hardest part – once a project has been started the rest just flows. I can remember that same sense of dread of starting one particular project when I was an apprentice carpenter. We turned up at a barn conversion that needed a new roof, one of the biggest single roofs I'd worked on. It went from about 3ft off the ground up almost three storeys and was to have five runs of purlins in it.

I was apprehensive about starting it, but Andrew, the carpenter who trained me, just broke it all down into its component parts. We walked around the job, looked at the plans and knew what we were to achieve. Then we started with the structure and built up from there, knowing the end result we wanted but not getting overwhelmed by the sheer scale of it. As I drive past it now, some 20 years later, I often think of that first day on that roof and the lesson of not feeling overwhelmed he taught me.

I was reminded of this when my daughters (eight and 10) were doing some carving with me the other day. They have done some minor projects and wanted to try something more complicated. I was wary of them getting disheartened if they just chipped away at what they thought were good ideas that didn't turn out quite how they saw them in their mind. They set themselves very high standards as they spend so much time doing crafts and sewing.

I gave them each a blank piece of lime and a simple project to carve – a feather. I handed them an example of mine from when I started as a reference for them. From the look on their faces,

they were obviously worried about how much work they had to do to that piece of wood and if they were capable.

But I broke it down into steps with them (lining in, lowering, levelling, etc) and suddenly it becomes something they can do and work at. They began at the start, a point that is only logical when you know how to carve, and worked their way from there, slowly completing a step before moving on to the next. In doing this I'm trying to teach them the process of carving rather than just showing them how to use the tools safely, the same way I'll one day teach them the process of cutting on a roof.

They enjoy their time in the workshop far more when they can work like this. I'm not constant guidance, I leave them to make mistakes and learn through doing, but I can make the whole process go a lot smoother by breaking it down into steps, even drawing the direction that the chisel must work up and down the wood, but the end project is something they created and can be proud of.

This is one of my reasons for liking projects I can follow and feel very lucky to get to write some in magazines, it's always been an ambition of mine. As an apprentice, my 'bait' bag (where I kept my lunch) was always stuffed with wood-related magazines and books. I'd read them as I ate and often used to get teased that I would eat, sleep and play woodwork, obsession seizing me from day one. To be fair, I'd get back from work, eat, then go out to my workshop. Enjoy your carving.

Kevin Alviti

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Butter mould

Kev Alviti spreads the word about this decorative dish for his favourite dairy product



Butter is heavenly food. I've realised how early on in life we discover this, as I had to stop my own children when they were younger trying to cut large slices off a block and sampling it like it was fine mature cheddar cheese and they were trained connoisseurs.

Butter is also a great way to pep up a meal and use unusual ingredients. My children and I often go foraging and one of our favourite ingredients is wild garlic. We make many things with it: we cook with it fresh, ferment it as a super-strong ingredient, and make wild garlic butter, which is simple and it can be stored in the freezer for use later in the year (it makes great garlic flatbread cooked in our mud oven).

In the past, if you made butter that you sold at the market or to customers, chances were you marked it in some way. A stamp was the easiest way to do this as it meant that the butter from your farm and animals was easily identifiable. One step up from this was to use a mould which meant that, as well as it being identifiable, people knew they were buying a set weight of butter.

Of course, there were many styles and types of butter moulds, being handmade by local craftsmen the variety was huge. Having a bit of an obsession with all self-sufficiency related items, I thought this would be a great project to try. I like the idea of making a few items that one day might become antiques that will make people ponder what sort of life I led to end up making one.

Looking in a book on the subject (yes that's right, I bought a book about butter moulds) I could see there were a few hinged types that were a popular European style. To me, they also looked like an easy way to get the butter out of the mould.

When researching this I found a few different timbers were used, but sycamore seemed to be the most common. Sycamore gets a bad rap as a tree because its helicopter seeds are very

fertile and spread like crazy, colonising new areas in rapid time. As a timber, it's had many uses, although it seems to be falling out of favour a bit. Maybe because it can be tricky to dry without warping, or because of the way we grow our trees, but it does carve well and is completely food safe. For centuries, it has been used to make kitchenware and was the wood of choice for some Welsh lovespoon makers. I had to drive a bit out of my way to get some that was the 50mm (2in) thick I wanted for this project. I bought plenty so I could use it for future projects as well. Fruit woods used to be used for this as well, pear would work really well.



Things you will need

Materials

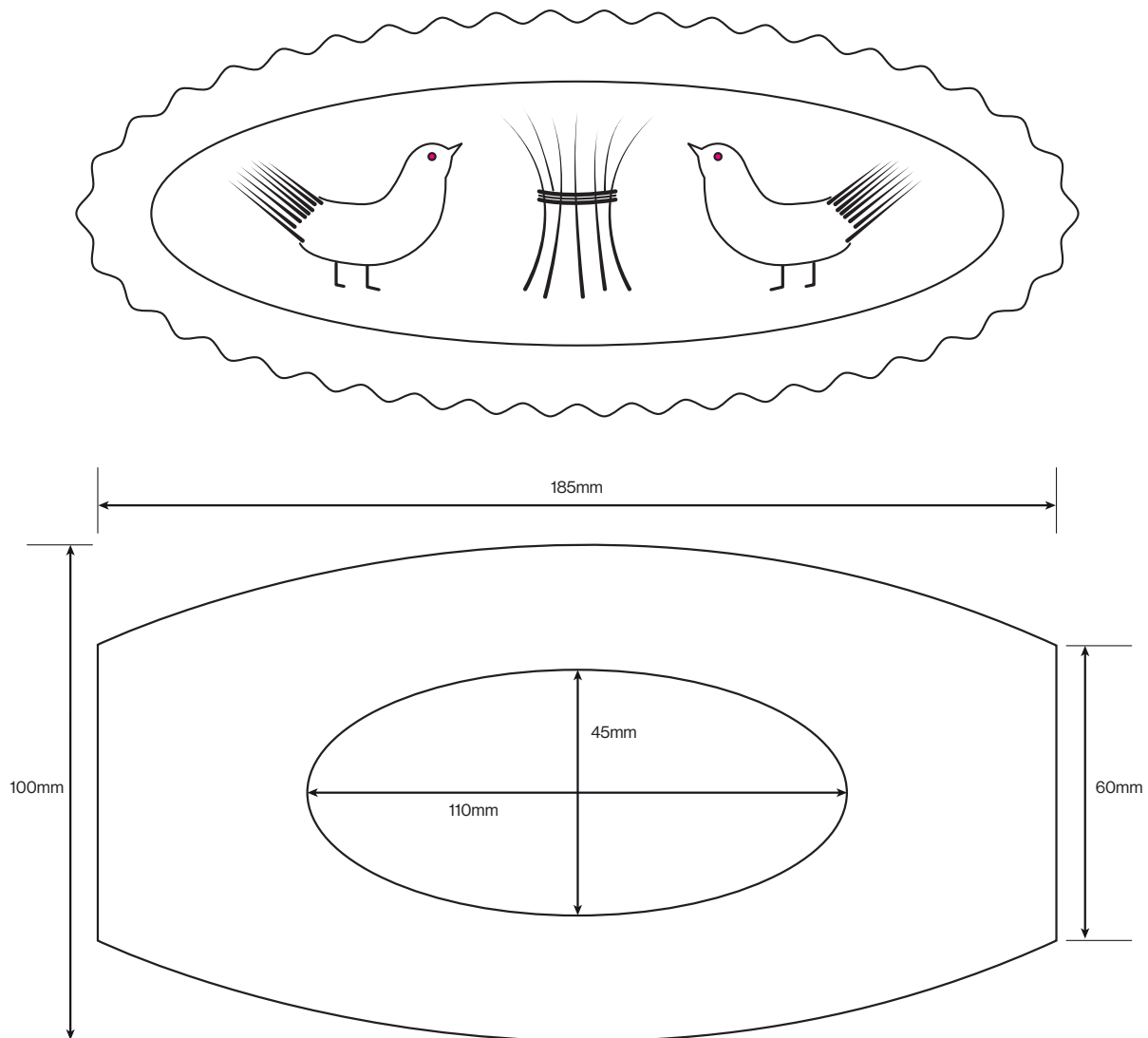
- 185 x 100 x 50mm wood blank
- One 25mm hinge
- Small side hook
- 4 angle brackets (stainless steel if possible)

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- Bandsaw
- Planer or planes
- Drill
- Sander

Carving tools

- Lightweight carving mallet
- 6mm, 60° V-tool
- No.6 gouge, 13mm
- No.6 gouge, 8mm
- No.9 gouge, 10mm
- No.9 deep gouge, 3mm
- No.9 deep gouge, 2mm



1 As I mentioned, I managed to source some sycamore for this project. It was quite a slab, so I cut roughly what I needed to make it easier to manage. I was tempted to plane the whole board but, as I'm unsure what future projects will bring (or when I'll get round to using it), leaving it in this state is preferred.

2 For me, there was a bit of experimentation involved in getting the size approximately how I wanted it. A lot of the old butter moulds of this style held about 1lb (500g) of butter, which I thought was too much, as about half of that is a more common size to buy. I took the sizes from some antique ones and roughly halved them. Eyeing it with a packet of butter on top is crude but gives me the approximate dimensions.

3 The first time I made this I just sketched out the rough shape and cut it, but it makes so much more sense to make sure it is even all the way around. To do this, make a simple template, folding a piece of paper four times and just cut one-quarter of the design, then unfold it. A bit like making paper snowflakes with children at Christmas time.

4 With the paper template made I cut a square blank to the largest points on the width and length. This is approximately 185mm (7¼in) by 100mm (4in), it might be easier to keep it larger while you plane the top and bottom using a hand plane.

5 I then cut off what I needed for the base for the mould, about 13mm (½in). If I didn't have wood deep enough this would be simple to make from a separate, thinner piece to make up the difference. I used a bandsaw to rip it down, keeping fingers well away with a push stick.

6 I sanded the cut edges, then I used some masking tape to reattach the top to the base. Using the paper template I marked out what needed to be cut away to get the shape I wanted.

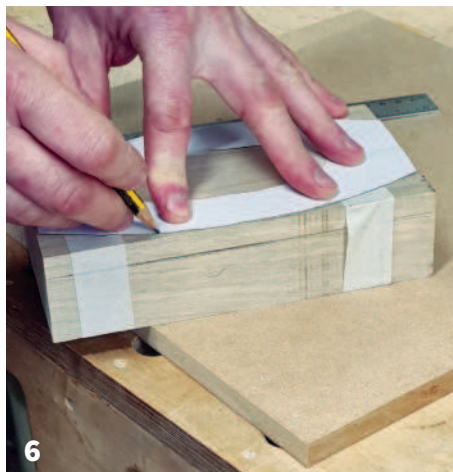
Useful tips & advice

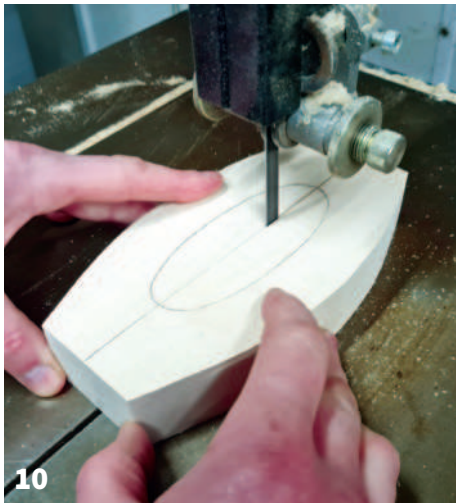
If you don't use masking tape too often it can sometimes rip into annoyingly small pieces when you go to use it for the first time (especially in a cold workshop). If that is the case then pop it in the microwave (keeping a close eye on it) for 15 seconds or so – this seems to soften up the glue and it'll work like it's fresh out of the packet again.

7 Using the bandsaw, cut the outside curves of the mould. It can be any shape you like; some were more like an eye in shape, but I quite like the lozenge-shaped oval for mine.

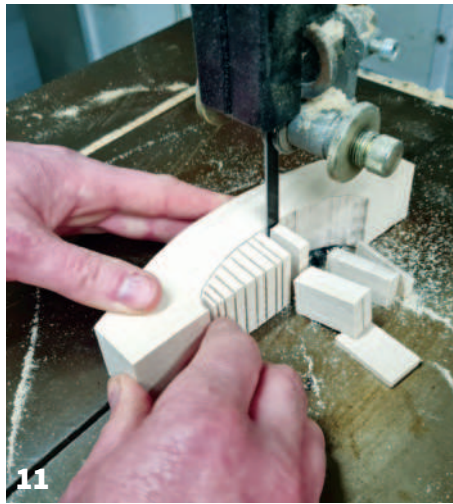
8 The outside cuts made, sand the edges smooth. A mounted sander would be a far better option for this, but alas my workshop will never be big enough! It will need to be sanded again to allow for the kerf when the bottom piece is cut. Put some witness marks between the top and bottom piece so it's easy to align them later.

9 Set aside the top piece for now and mark up the larger bottom piece. Use the template to mark the parts to be cut out. Measure and mark a centreline to work to.





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10 Using the bandsaw, cut this larger bottom piece down the halfway line. This is where it will hinge in the future and come back together.

11 As I had recently snapped my narrow blade in my bandsaw, I used the wider one (9mm) and made plenty of relief cuts to easily make the internal cuts. If you do it this way, just take care the offcuts don't slip down into the saw.

12 Don't worry too much about getting the inside edges too perfect due to the next step, but mark them up so you know which way up and round they go.



12



13

13 Now is the time to grab the first carving chisel, a No.6, 6mm gouge. Using the weight of my torso (some might say considerable), I push this down the edge of the internal curve we just cut, moving from one cut to the next round the whole piece. Make sure when using your weight like this that the workpiece is well supported and clamped.

14 I found it necessary to turn the piece over and just tidy the cut edges where it had met the board I was cutting down on to. I will also say that to get cuts as clean as possible like this, as one side of each cut is liable to 'rag' the grain a little, make sure your gouges are super sharp. But then again make sure they're super sharp for everything.



14



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15 Taking a piece of paper, I then drew around the inside multiple times to sketch the design that would end up on top of the butter once moulded. Remember, if you choose to use writing here everything will be inverse. I settled for a simple design with birds and a wheat sheaf – fitting as I often try growing small amounts of heritage grains, which invariably get eaten by local wildlife.



16



17

16 I sketched this out on to what will be the inside top of the butter mould, allowing enough room around the outside for what will be a ring of detail to look like a simple wreath.

17 Start by hollowing out the ring around the design. As this is the inverse of what will be on the butter, this will leave a raised ring along the edge. I used quite a deep No.9, 10mm gouge and worked with the grain, changing the direction of my tools often.

18 Using a very fine veining gouge, cut a line in the centre of this trench. Working from this line cut short lines from the middle to the outside of the ring at an angle. Space these by eye but try to make them roughly even.

19 With that cut, move on to the central design. To make the wheatsheaf look raised when the butter is free of the mould, it is a good idea to lower the whole of it. Take a No.6, 13mm gouge and make some light relief cuts, working from the outside to the middle, then flip the workpiece and do the same from the other side so the cuts connect smoothly.

20 Using the 2mm veining chisel, again add some simple detail to the wheat, lots of small gouge lines give the impression of stems, then add a few at an angle at the top to look like the seed heads and one perpendicular to look like the cord to bind it.

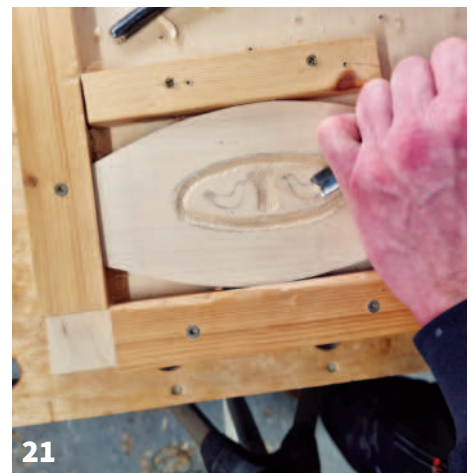
21 With the wheat done, switch to working on the birds. Lower the whole shape of these in the same way as the wheatsheaf – small, chubby birds will sit well on your butter. As this is a bit like reverse carving this moves quite quickly as there is no need to lower and level the background.

22 Add in detail using finer chisels again. Simple lines represent feathers well when the mould is poured. I did do some sample carvings and used dough to see what kind of detail level would work well, it doesn't want to be too much otherwise it won't transfer.

23 I added a little extra detail using a small V-tool to make the beaks of the birds and then a small oval nail for the eye, although this will mean the eye sticks out of the butter, it will still look right (hopefully).

24 I used a single pair of hinges on one end to open and shut the bottom of the mould. These are fiddly to fit, especially into end grain like this. To make it easier I screwed the hinge on first, then cut around with a knife to mark the edge. Remove the hinge then chop in like you would a normal hinge. My large bench mounted vice worked well to hold it while I worked on it.

25 The rather unusual ironmongery on this piece is the brackets that hold the top to the sides. I used four corner brackets. Lay them out evenly across the workpiece then mark around them where they're to be sunk into the wood. In doing this it means you won't inadvertently scratch a tabletop when you're filling it with butter.

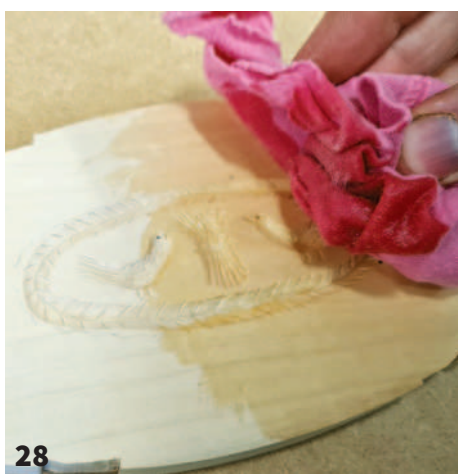




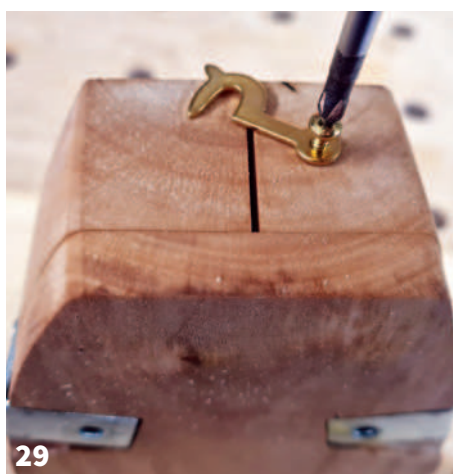
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26 When they are set in somewhere near, the corners will also need to be reduced at an angle to allow it to open. This will require a bit of trial and error to get right but keep taking some off until you can open it and close it easily. Remember the top wants to be pressed tight to the bottom piece otherwise butter will push out between them.

27 Go slow and steady at this bit until everything is a tight fit.

28 Antique butter moulds have a beautiful patina to them and I'm sure this is built up over years of being used to make butter and being held and handled. I used some pure tung oil as a food-safe finish, rubbed in with a cotton rag. Treat the rags for this in the same way you would for linseed oil – be aware they can spontaneously combust if left crumpled up. Read the safety precautions and follow them.

29 Add this final catch to hold it together in use. They're called a side hook and be careful when fitting as you're screwing into end grain so it's easy to use too much pressure. Also be mindful that often the screws that are supplied with this type of item have the tensile strength of a strong Wensleydale cheese, so it might be necessary to use a pilot hole.



Useful tips & advice

Using the mould took me a few attempts to get right. Put the mould in the fridge and get it nice and cold. Do the opposite to the butter, leave it out on the side until it's a nice, spreadable consistency. Don't microwave or try to melt it with heat. Then simply push the butter into the mould making sure it gets right down to the bottom, level off the top with the back of a butter knife and pop the whole thing in the fridge.

Leave it for a few hours then it should come easily out of the mould and be ready for a breakfast of toast and fresh butter, or to go on the dinner table to impress guests. ●

A master CARVER

Guest editor Kevin Alviti talks all things carving with world-renowned master carver, Chris Pye

When I was asked to pick a carver to feature for this issue, one person instantly sprang to mind. I'm sure everyone will agree that Chris Pye is a household name in the carving world and I felt incredibly lucky that he agreed to be interviewed (I skipped around the room when he replied). His books were some of the earliest I owned on woodcarving and, coupled with his online teaching website, he really helped me develop my skills as I was learning to carve. Not only is he an incredible educator when it comes to carving, but he is also a true artist who creates amazing works of art, some of which seem to defy the material they are made out of.

How did you become a carver? What was training to be a carver like?

I wouldn't say I was 'trained', any more than a duck 'trains' to get on to water. Woodcarving wasn't even a twinkle in my eye when I conceded that, after four years as a medical student, I was going down the wrong path, and left. I had no idea what another 'path' could be and it was only by sheer accident (and very good fortune) that I met the master carver who became my mentor, Gino Masero.

My education up to that point had been scientific and I knew next to nothing about wood, except the 'growing on trees' part, never mind working it. I had, however, loved painting and making things, so I guess I was open to the idea of something art or craft-oriented. I was actually thinking of stone carving as I stepped into Gino's workshop...

When I saw what he was doing and breathed in the heady aroma of limewood, well, I was like that duck, finding its pond and desperate to get swimming.

Carving is an odd, back-to-front craft. I had no experience of wood or chisels, nor training in art and design, but my brain just seemed to be wired for it, the whole thing. It was as if I knew about woodcarving before I knew about woodcarving...







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1 This is me in 1975 carving an organ screen in pierced relief in my first workshop down a Cardiff back street **2** I designed and carved this limewood coat of arms exactly one year after I first picked up a carving tool. I see all sorts of faults with it now but rejoice in the young man who had a go **3** Another early piece: I sculpted this elmwood piece in 1976, while waiting for my son to be born **4 & 5** Details of Hanging Coat and Hat, carved in French oak

At what point did you set up on your own?

Cutting a short story shorter, a year later and after obsessional study, practice at home and with advice from Gino, I took on a simple lock-up shop and started offering my services as a woodcarver. I put things I'd carved in the window and contacted as many people as I could think of for work. And, somehow, the duck started swimming. Looking back, I can't believe I did this. Luckily I was young and foolish.

Quite early on I got work incising house names into pre-cut boards for a firm that supplied them through garden centres all over the country. I was paid per letter. Painfully slow at first, before too long I had built up my speed and ended up carving hundreds of letters every week.

Something happened that was a revelation: lettering demands a high level of skill, both in the laying out and the carving, and I really worked hard at that. What I didn't realise was how this discipline – the demand for precise tool control, visualisation and repeated cutting – drove all my other carving skills to a higher level.

Other work came in: classical decorations and mouldings for a fireplace manufacturer, restoring furniture, commissions for organ screens or rocking horses, free sculpture and relief carving – all sorts of things. My rule was never to say no, which I didn't, even when I'd no idea what I was letting myself in for.

So, summing up, I see myself as self-taught but with a huge formative start in tools, sharpening, handling and the traditional carving 'process' from Gino Masero, with whom I continued to keep in touch until his death in 1995. I dedicated my first book to him and every time I teach I feel I'm a conduit for his knowledge and generosity of spirit.

What has shaped your carving style?

I carve by leaving my work 'straight for the chisel'. So the last caress of the gouge lies on the wood surface, like the brushstrokes of a painter. I rarely, and then discretely, use sandpaper – for a snail shell, say, where a polished surface is absolutely called for.

Working directly with the tools is how I was initially taught, an approach I'd loved since I first picked one up. It may seem a cliché but truly, as I carve, my tools become extensions of my hands. I don't think about them; they just appear in my hands as I focus on the wood and the forms I visualise beneath.

As to the design style of my carving, I've never specialised – unlike most of the other members of the Master Carvers Association (MCA) who are true experts in, for example, Rococo or Baroque. This has a lot to do with reproduction or restoration, and earning a living. Which is not to say that the MCA isn't full of wonderfully creative and talented carvers producing unique work. However, I've never tried to specialise myself and happily carved whatever unique style-free pieces clients have asked of me.

I was very keen on wood sculpture when I first took to carving. It was the sad time of the 'elm glut' and some wonderful stumps were to be had, but I couldn't see how I could earn a living from it.

I still retain a deep interest in sculpture, especially glyptic forms. When, for example, I carved a hanging coat with an accompanying hat – from one block of wood – it's the underlying sculptural forms I go after first and foremost, with the detail added to that. The underlying forms are the rhythms of the song; the details are the overlying melody.



6-8 Pond Table in limewood and willow, with toughened glass and stainless steel **9** Cap & Dog Lead carved in lime, box, oak and yew woods

Where do you look for inspiration for your next carving?

Over the years, almost all of my work has been commissioned, which means I've been given parameters. I love having a brief; it puts a fence around what would otherwise be the equivalent of a blank canvas, with its concurrent, what-do-I-do anxiety. I'll (almost) interrogate clients about what they have in mind; after all, they're the ones who'll have to live with the finished piece, not me!

On the other hand, I don't like too many constrictions, which is the main reason I dislike reproducing the work of others. What I want is a seed from which to grow my ideas and designs and – limits apart – I do like coming up with ideas, developing and working from my own designs.

To my mind, the pre-carving, creative bit is more important and usually more fun than the hard work of actually carving.

Where do you see your work heading in the future?

I've never seen myself as having a path or journey, as professed by many artists, but more and more I find I'm undertaking fewer commissions and carving just for myself. A good example would be my latest project, the Pond Table. The idea came to me as I canoed over a glassy morning lake in Maine. Looking down, I could see the bottom with reeds through which swam little fish, and I wondered if I could capture that sense in a glass-topped table.

What is your favourite wood to carve?

Air-dried, close-grained limewood is right up there at the top. I love the smell, the colour and the way shavings peel from a cutting edge. Limewood is justifiably well-renowned as the carvers' wood and takes fine detail. Very close is clean,

air-dried French oak. French oak is grown and harvested differently when compared with oak in the UK. It carves very well with a light, crunchy feel. The more open grain requires more robust details.

For my carving I need a bland wood to show off the lights and shadows of the forms; no knots or figuring. Both lime and French oak are really quite boring woods! Who makes a piece of furniture out of limewood? And you always want the silver rays or interesting knots in oak furniture. But for me, that's great; all the more of the boring stuff left for us carvers.

Knowing nothing about wood when I began carving, I needed to educate myself quickly. Finding samples of various woods was an obvious start, but I also collected their sawdust in jam jars and learned to distinguish different woods by their smell. Even now I could walk blindfolded into a workshop and know what wood they've been working with.

Do you use any tools with real sentimental value?

I have a couple of tools that Gino gave me. As you can imagine, these are quite precious.

Other tools I really love are the old ones, with the names of previous owners on the handle, sometimes half a dozen, one below the other. And then, look! There's mine at the bottom of the list. And I wonder who will have custody of the tool after me...

How many chisels do you own?

I've never deliberately collected tools but after nearly 50 years since I started professionally carving and teaching I've built up a ridiculous number: tools bought for myself as needed, or for my

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classes here and in the US; tools gifted to me from retired carvers, or carvers' widows; tools I've designed for various manufacturers; tools I've forged for myself; tools I've reviewed for magazines, and so on. It's a long list. I'm not going to count them...

But tools aren't carving, are they?

Many beginners get sidetracked into the tools, wanting to build up a 'set' before starting, and spend too little time using them at the bench. For nearly all my work I use a hard core of around 70 to 80 tools, and that's for everything, from lettering and mouldings to relief carving and sculpture.

As I get older, I use fewer and fewer tools, and look forward to swamping eBay with the rest.

How did the Covid-19 lockdowns affect you, your work or your carving?

Very little really, introvert that I am, tucked away on the border with Wales in rural Herefordshire. The sadness was not seeing friends and family.

How do you think you've influenced the world of carving over the years?

I've been teaching and writing about woodcarving for many years and more recently created an online woodcarving instructional site. This, I think, has been my best effort yet: if a picture is worth a thousand words, how about a moving one?

And I like to think I've passed on – given back? – what was given to me and much more, and enabled many people from around the world to feel the joy of carving and to become better carvers. From feedback I've had, I think I've been largely successful.

I think my original background in scientific methods has separated me from other teachers: I've been more able to analyse and clarify what I am doing, whether that's how to sharpen carving tools efficiently or the actual process of carving, and then explain it simply either in my books or for magazines, or directly with students.

My aim has always been to teach transferable skills. I've often thought I only have a few carving techniques – though I do them well – and I just apply them to different projects. That might seem a bit reductionist but, at a granular level, carving is a very simple thing to do. It's the mind behind the carving that separates us.

Here's the thing: I learned from Gino Masero, one of many unpretentious, unknown carvers. He learned from his own teacher who in turn learned from his. Who, in turn had learned from his, and so on.

Hold that heritage in your mind and let me add this:

In the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, stands a wooden figure of an Egyptian scribe called Ka'aper, carved in sycamore some 4,580 years ago. I saw the work many years ago in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Looking around the back I found gouge marks. And I immediately knew what I was looking at: the gouge would have been copper but I could name the sweep, and I could see the carver was right-handed by the way the facets were cut into the wood.

Here's what blows me away and why we carvers are so privileged: there is a real line, a legacy winding through history between that Egyptian carver, through ancient Greece, the Dark Ages, the Northern Renaissance, somehow, to my own teacher and to me. And on to anyone who has learned something for me, and passes it on.

Do you have any funny woodcarving stories?

So... I'm in the chapel in Clifton College, Bristol, on my knees and bent painfully forward over the seat of a fixed bench by the wall, straining towards its upright back. I'm incising a list of names, adding to a previously carved roll call.

It's a really awkward, twisted position from which to carve anything. And first I must carefully draw the names on to the dark, vanished oak, then cut directly into the bench itself. The newly cut letters stand out, white, against the dark brown varnish. So, really precise cutting with no second chances, but so doable.



10 Carving of the ancient Egyptian scribe Ka'aper **11** Lettered bowl in lacewood featuring the words: Coming Around and Going Around **12** Horseshoe Crab table. The full Latin name of the crab makes up the scuttling marks on the sand. Yew wood crab on a walnut tabletop **13** Merlin Hawk on Post, carved in lacewood **14** Baseball Cap carved in limewood

What I hadn't clocked was the big rack of organ pipes just above my head. Without any warning and just as I was cutting around the outer edge of a letter 'O', some mad organist started their day by crashing down on all the organ keys, one shattering chord just above me. Let's put it this way: I nearly disgraced myself as I jumped out of my skin. The gouge jerked out of the carved letter and scored a white gash across the dark wood...

It's sort of funny now but I stood there aghast, taking deep breaths and wondering what to do.

I was lucky in that I hadn't made the final cut around the outer edge of the 'O' so I had just enough spare wood to cover the big exit nick and, after burying the organist, I repaired the main edge of the letter. However, the white scratch still remained, distressingly and obviously my own work.

Stepping back I also noticed that years of use had left all sorts of other scratches on the bench. That was my way out.

I always take my oilstones with me when I'm carving on site and one of them had oily, black, metal gunge on its surface from when I'd sharpened a chisel. I scraped the old oil off, mixed in dirt from

beneath the bench and rubbed the concoction into the scratch line. The result looked just like some of the other marks and gashes on the bench. So all looked 'well', though I knew I'd got off lightly.

The work was inspected – they were very happy – and I just lied: 'Sorry. Nothing I could do about that old scratch; just had to work around it. What? Have I seen the organist? What organist?'

What hobbies do you have outside of woodcarving?

I've been playing 'clawhammer' banjo for the last six years. It's a beautiful old style that goes back to the instrument's African roots – as opposed to the Bluegrass (*Deliverance*) Scruggs-style with its frenetic picking, which I don't particularly like. I have an online tutor, practise every day and play with friends in a small band. We write and perform our own material now. I also love writing, haiku in particular:

shiny bevel.
catch myself peering out
smelling of limewood

Gothic green man

Steve Bisco carves a forest spirit with a distinguished Gothic provenance



The traditional ancient symbol of the Green Man, with foliage sprouting from his mouth and other facial features, is well known to woodcarvers. Most examples are based on the pagan Druid tradition with naturalistic oak leaves forming the foliage, but this example is unusual in being Gothic in style and in origin. It is illustrated in *Pugin's Gothic Ornament* (see box) and its provenance is listed as a 'wooden ornament from stalls, New College Chapel, Oxford'.

Anyone familiar with the names of Oxford and Cambridge colleges will know that the word 'new' actually means 'very old'. New College was founded in 1379 and was called 'New' to distinguish it from its older neighbour, Oriel College. There is a folly in naming things 'new' just because they were new when built, but this lesson wasn't learned in the naming of university buildings. What is 'new' in this depiction of the Green Man is that the foliage sprouting from his mouth and eyebrows is Gothic stiff-leaf decoration, which may have helped this overtly pagan symbol sit more comfortably in a medieval Christian chapel.

The traditions of medieval woodcarving, the Gothic style, and the Green Man all demand that this carving should be made in oak. I have used a block 240mm square x 50mm thick. 'Green' oak that has been air dried for up to three years is easier to carve, but my piece had been stored in my house for about 10 years, so it was harder than I would normally choose.

The 50mm thickness (although 38mm would do) is needed to accommodate the nose, which must necessarily protrude forwards in the front of the face. At the edges the stiff-leaf foliage only needs to be about 18mm thick, but its stems need to be much higher in the middle of the carving where they sprout from the creature's eyebrows and mouth. Sorting out the levels is therefore an important part of the carving. Working from Pugin's drawing, I was dependant on his shading and a bit of common sense to work out the levels, but I hope my step photos will make the job a bit easier for you.

ORIGINS OF THE GREEN MAN

The Green Man is a pagan symbol related to the worship of earth and nature deities. It is very ancient, and variations of it occur in many civilisations throughout the world. In Britain it is mostly associated with Druid and Celtic mythology. It is thought to represent springtime and new growth, and is commonly depicted in drawings, carvings and sculpture as the face of a 'forest spirit' surrounded by leaves with stems that sprout from the mouth and nose, and in many cases ears, eyes, eyebrows and beard.

Despite its pagan origins, carved examples can be found in Christian churches, but mainly under 'misericord' seats, which tend to feature non-religious subjects as it would be sacrilege to sit your bottom on a holy symbol. The Green Man is a popular pub name in England.

Things you will need

Tools

Gouges:

- No.3 – 10mm
- No.3 fishtail – 18mm, 10mm
- No.5 – 7mm
- No.7 – 10mm
- No.8 – 8mm, 8mm curved
- No.9 – 20mm, 3mm
- Veiner – 2mm
- V-tool – 6mm straight, 2mm straight

Chisels:

- Flat – 20mm, 6.5mm, 3mm, 2mm
- Bent – 5mm
- Skew – 10mm
- Hooked skew chisel – 16mm

Other:

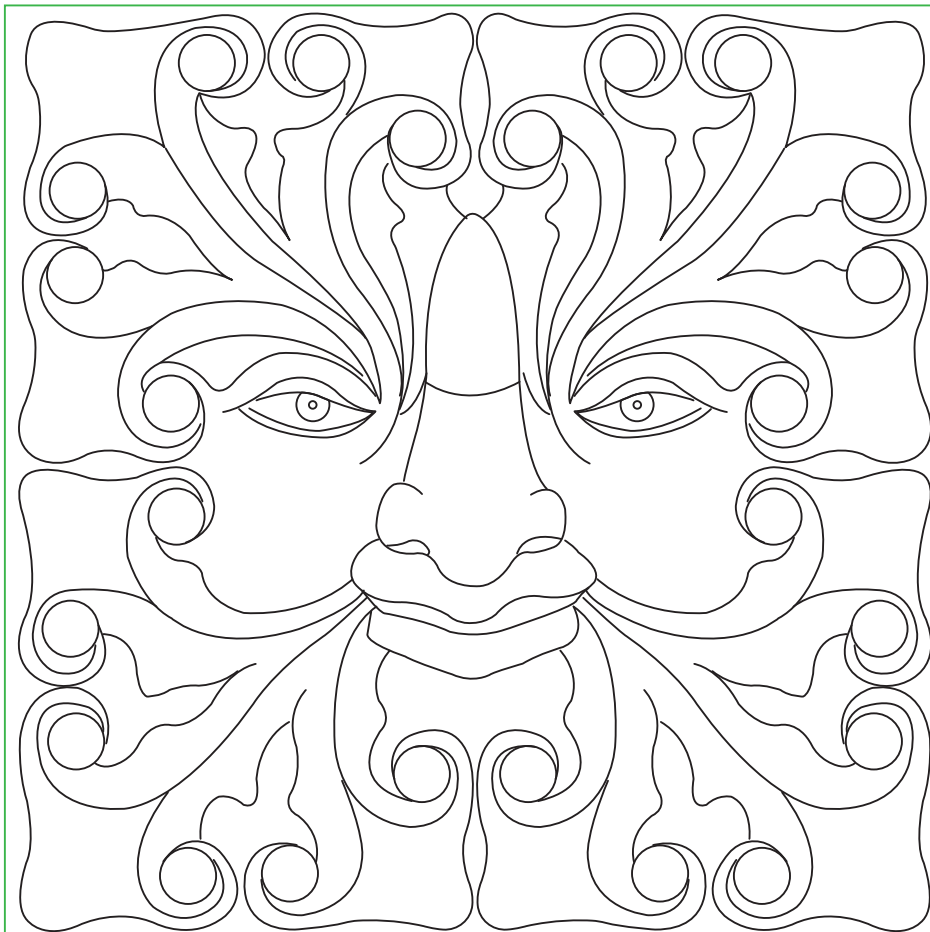
- Bandsaw/scrollsaw

Materials

- Oak 240 x 240 x 50mm
- Wax polish (Antiquax Original)

Gothic style

The Gothic style started around 1150 in France and spread quickly to Britain's churches and cathedrals. Its key features were pointed arches with large windows and delicate tracery, together with steep crocketed pinnacles and flying buttresses. Inside, clusters of thin columns soared upwards to ribbed vaults and carved bosses in impossibly high ceilings, reminiscent of the tree canopy in the surrounding forests. Carved ornament abounded in wood and stone, much of it featuring stylised plant forms such as the 'stiff-leaf' ornament used extensively on capitals, bosses and friezes. The wood used was nearly always the oak growing abundantly in the local forests, notable for its durability. Medieval Gothic lasted until around 1500, before returning in the spectacular Victorian Gothic Revival that dominated the 19th century.



Pugin's Gothic Ornament

Pugin's Gothic Ornament is a collection of drawings of authentic medieval ornament copied mainly from churches and cathedrals in England and France. It was produced in 1828 by A.C. Pugin – assisted by his young son A.W.N. Pugin, who became the shining star of the Victorian Gothic Revival. It is still in print today from Dover Publications (www.doverpublications.com) and is an excellent source of Gothic detail for woodcarvers.

LEFT: Pugin's illustration of the Gothic Green Man

Preparations

1 Get a piece of oak 240mm square x 50mm thick and make a full-size copy of the drawing to fit the block. Also trace the pattern on to a piece of OHP transparency film which, when held over the carving, will help you redraw the pattern on to the block as you carve away the surface.

2 Place some carbon paper on the block and tape the drawing firmly in place over it. Trace the pattern directly on to the wood. Alternatively, you can paste the drawing on to the block and carve through it, but I prefer to see the grain when I am carving.

3 Use a bandsaw, scrollsaw, or whatever saws you have, to cut around the edges of the stiff-leaf pattern. Alternatively, you can place the block on edge in a vice and use a flat chisel to carve a vertical edge around the pattern. It helps if you draw around the pattern edge first with a red pen to avoid getting lost while cutting.

4 Set up the carving on your bench, held in place by wooden strips to stop it from moving. Sharpen your tools and you are ready to carve.

Roughing out the levels

5 Start by partly chiselling out the narrow gaps between each of the stiff-leaf sections so you don't completely lose the pattern as you work down the levels. It helps to see the pattern if you colour in the parts you are chiselling out. Cut down about 18mm for now, and try to keep a vertical edge so the pattern doesn't spread. You can drill out some of the sections to depth first, but put some tape on the drill bit to mark the required depth.

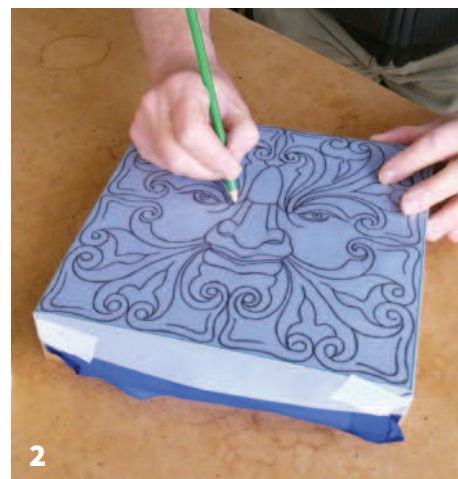
6 Mark out the edges and key features of the face, nose and mouth with a V-tool. Also mark the dividing lines between each of the leaf swirls. This helps to visualise the layout better.

7 The tip of the nose remains at the full 50mm thickness of the board, and everything else takes its level from this point, so we first need to cut away the sides of the nose and mouth and rough out their shape. This involves cutting down to about 18mm depth at the edges of the nose at this stage.

8 Cut away the level of the cheeks down about 8mm from the board surface, and rough out their slightly bulbous shape so that the bottom edge is about 13mm below the original surface. Rough out the slope of the leaf stems that emerge from the mouth.



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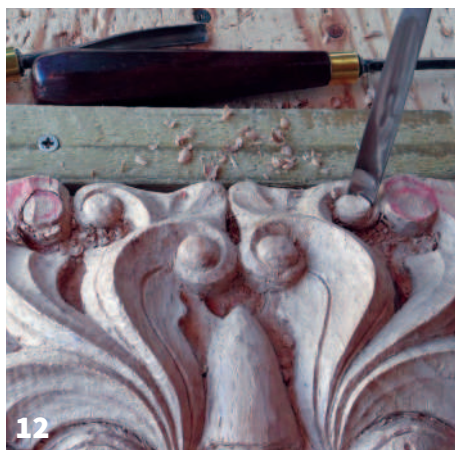
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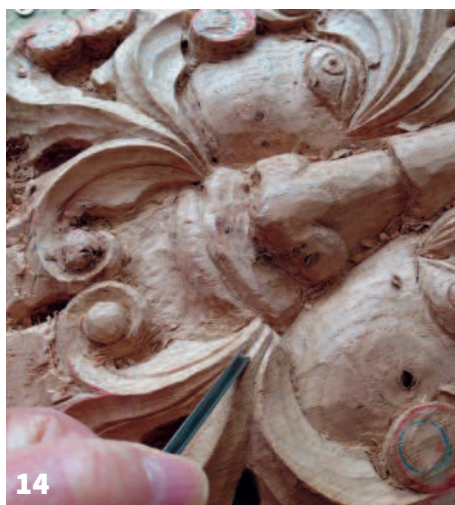
9 Cut out the shape and level of the eyes, making sure you leave enough wood for the detail. Use the transparency to carefully mark in the position of the eyelids with a small V-tool, and the position of the pupils with a 2mm veiner. Cut away the cove in the leaf above the eye, and shape the inner ends of the leaf stems as they slope into the eyebrows. The face of the wood spirit is now gradually emerging from among the leaves.



10 Draw a circle about 170mm diameter around the face, and draw a line around the sides of the block 25mm from the base at this stage. Using these lines as a guide, slope the outer ends of the leaves away from the face so they end up at the 25mm line. Use the transparency film to redraw the pattern lines on the leaves.

Carving the leaves

11 Starting with the leaves that flow out from the eyebrows to the top corners, shape the ridges to curve down towards the volutes and leaf points in the corner. Carve the coves alongside the ridges as far as the volutes. Curve the inner end of the leaf stems into the inner corner of the eye. Excavate the gaps between the leaves a bit deeper if needed.



12 Carefully mark out the pairs of volutes on each leaf, making sure they are all the same size and in the correct position, flowing from the divide in the swirling centre line of each leaf stem. Use a No.7, 10mm gouge to carve the volute, taking great care not to pop it out in the short grain. Use a No.8, 8mm curved gouge to carve shallow grooves splaying outwards in the leaf end.

13 Carve the rest of the leaves each side to complete the top two quadrants.

14 Now carve the stems coming out of the mouth into the lower quadrants. These are spaced wider than in the top quadrants.

15 Carve the rest of the lower two quadrants to complete all the stiff-leaf carving. Tidy up the outer edges of the block.

Carving the face

16 With the levels and basic forms of the face already roughed out, we can start the detail carving by refining the shape of the nose and the pointed bulbous feature above it. The tip of the nose remains at the full 50mm thickness of the board. Cut the sides of the nose back into the face until you get a reasonably three-dimensional nose shape.



17 Very carefully 'drill' in the nostrils with a No.8 8mm gouge and shape the underside of the nose back into the upper lip.

18 Refine the mouth and shape the chin to sit at the right depth between the lower leaves. Refine the ends of the inner stems of the leaves as they protrude from the lips.

19 Cut the cheeks back so they are about 13mm behind the tip of the nose. Shape them to form a shallow bulb that curves under the framework of leaves at the outer edges. Reshape the coves of the leaves if necessary to suit the new level.

20 Reset the depth of the eyes to fit in with the nose and cheeks. Drill in the pupils with a 2mm veiner so you don't lose the positioning as you carve. Recheck the position of both eyes with the transparency (eyes tend to creep downwards as you carve) and cut in the eyelids above and below. Carve a hollow under the eyes to separate them from the cheeks, then carve in the shape of the eyes.

21 Precisely carve the eyeballs. Use a skew chisel to cut in the corners neatly. Hollow the centre of the pupil with a No.9, 3mm gouge. Carve the iris by 'pricking' a circle with a No.5, 7mm gouge then form it into a shallow dome. Check again for position – the wood spirit is supposed to look a bit sinister, but you don't want it to be boss-eyed.

Finishing

22 Tidy up the carving and try to achieve a good tooled finish overall. A good-quality wax polish is generally the best finish to bring out the natural colour of oak (I use Antiquax Original). Work the first coat into the crevices with a brush, then add one or two further coats by cloth. When the wax has been absorbed into the surface, buff it up to a satin finish with a dry cloth.

23 Here is the finished carving, with the ancient wood spirit staring disturbingly from within the Gothic foliage. Hang it where the light will strike it sideways.



Useful tips & advice



It is common to expose splits and fissures in oak while you are carving. If these disfigure the carving you can make them less visible by filling the crack with beeswax, which is roughly the same colour as oak. You can buy blocks of solid beeswax from craft shops. Cut off shavings from the block, preferably when it is warm, and push them into the crack with a knife until the crack is full. Scrape it smooth and you will have a repair that is much less visible than the crack. ●



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Celtic whale

Dave Western uses an interweaving technique to create a spectacular sea creature

For several years it has been my intention to create a larger carving from this lovely Celtic-style orca whale pattern that I had originally designed for a lovespoon. I thought that when judiciously placed at the top of a tall column of wood, it would look as though it was leaping from deep water and riding a swirling wave. After rediscovering an absolutely spectacular plank of highly quilt-figured maple that had originally been destined to make a mandolin body, I knew I had found the perfect timber. In retrospect, it probably wasn't the easiest wood to work, as its interwoven grain threw out no end of challenges and problems, but it was certainly worth the effort for its extravagant appearance. I honestly don't recommend carving wood this figured unless you are willing to take a bit of a beating and, were I to do it again, I think I would gravitate to a more accommodating and easily carved wood. Lime or birch would probably make a beautiful piece and for those who like a bit more colour, cherry or an unfigured piece of maple might be a nice way to go.

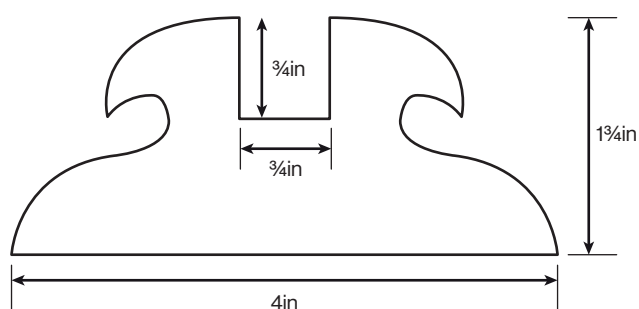
Whatever wood you settle on, this is an engaging project full of challenges that reward you with a spectacular Celtic-style whale and a nice talking feature when guests drop by.



Things you will need

Tools & equipment

- Glue stick and pattern
- Band/scroll/jeweller's-type saw
- Drill/variety of bits
- 1in straight knife
- Needle files
- 3/4-1in flat and rounded files
- 1/4in chisel
- Veining tool (optional)
- Cloth-backed abrasive paper 150 grit
- Variety of abrasive papers 150-320 grit
- Abalone dot or oval
- Pliers
- Epoxy or cyanoacrylate glue
- Cabinet scraper
- Oil finish/brush
- 600-1000 grit wet and dry abrasive paper
- Beeswax polish



1 Select a suitable timber. Mine was 22.5in long by 7.5in wide by ¾in thick. I used a photocopier to enlarge my drawing to fit the workpiece comfortably. Aim to line up the drawing so it reaches both side edges of the wood. If your drawing is a touch narrow, consider enlarging the image or cutting a slice off your wood. I used a common glue stick to adhere the picture to the wood.

2 Use a bandsaw, scrollsaw, jeweller's saw or a straight knife (and lots of sweat) to remove the waste material above the whale's body and dorsal fin. Drill pilot holes to begin clearing the spaces between each knotwork segment. If you lack a scrollsaw, make the holes as large as possible to cut down on the material left behind which has to be cleared with a handsaw, knife tip or needle file.

3 A scrollsaw is the quickest and handiest tool for removing the waste stock around the knotwork. Take your time and cut as accurately along each line as possible. I find that blacking in the areas to be cut away enables me to see more clearly what I am doing and to stay more focused.

4 Although I think this design looks best with the knotwork cut right through the wood, it will also look nice without the fretting. If you lack a scroll or jeweller's saw, consider simply cutting an inverted pyramid instead of fretting. I have used a fine-tipped straight knife to illustrate this process. Angle the knife at about 30-45° toward the centre of each space while cutting along the lines of each knotwork segment.

5 A little chip should pop out cleanly if you control the tip of the knife correctly. You'll want to make sure your knife is razor sharp to achieve clean cuts.

6 To clean up fretted knotwork, I make heavy use of needle files. These tools allow me to work in tight spaces and neatly clean up any rough edges that may have been formed by a wonky knife cuts or sloppy scrollsawing. Concentrate on keeping the file at 90° to the face of the work to keep the knotwork crisp and tidy. If you lack suitable needle files, you can use a very fine knife blade to achieve much the same effect.

7 With the fretting or chip cutting all done, you can begin forming the over and under segments of the knotwork strands. I recommend using a ¼in chisel or your straight knife tip to cut small 'ramps' either side of the crossover points. Try not to get too carried away and cut these ramps too deep on the first pass. It's surprisingly easy to get your sequencing out of order, so if you make a mistake, it's much easier to repair a shallow cut than a deep one. With knotwork like this, I like to work on sections rather than cutting the entire design so the repetition doesn't become overwhelming.





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8 When you are satisfied that the over and under ramps are all correctly cut, you can begin shaping the strands and lengthening the ramps. I generally use the same $\frac{1}{4}$ in chisel and gently move further away from the intersection as I shape each strand. Take your time and be aware of directional changes in your grain as you progress, especially with curved strands in highly figured wood. I aim to make the final depth about $\frac{1}{4}$ in deep at each intersection.

9 This picture shows a section of roughed-out knotwork. With a bit more cutting and shaping it can be final cleaned and have the edges of each strand rounded over a bit. The area where each strand crosses over the other is the high point of the knot and should be the point you work your ramping from. Work in both directions from the centre point to avoid pulling up the grain and chipping the strand. With highly figured wood such as this maple, the interwoven grain may cause challenges orienting the direction of the knife cut, so cut lightly and constantly be on the alert for the knife digging in at unexpected places.

10 The Celtic 'swirl' throws up its own unique set of challenges which you can battle either with a veining-type gouge or with the tip of a straight knife. I confess that I have never been very good with a veiner, so I tend to cut my Vs with the end of my $\frac{1}{2}$ in straight knife. To get a nice shape, I cut at roughly 45° down toward an imaginary centre line between each drawn line. If I manage it right, a triangular strand pops out of the cut and leaves the clean swirl shown in the picture. Take your time and if you don't feel confident, cut a shallow V-groove that you can gradually enlarge with successive cuts.

11 If you decide to cut both faces of the timber, you will have to remember to reverse your pattern. I hand drew the back once the knotwork had all been completed on the front, but had I been a bit quicker off the mark, I would have simply made a reverse image on the photocopier and aligned them both at layout time. However you do it, remember to orient the knotwork so that the back face overs and unders are the exact opposite of the front. It's also a good time to draw the centre line through the dorsal fin and mark out so you can begin carving a bit of shape into both the whale's body and its fin.

12 Begin shaping the whale's body and dorsal fin with a large chisel, rasp or file. Aim to develop a nicely rounded body shape and a tapering dorsal fin that narrows toward its front edge. If you are using heavily figured wood as I did, be aware of the danger of chipping chunks out in vulnerable areas such as the tip of the fin. The pencil centre line should be continually referenced and effort made to ensure the same amount of material is removed from both front and back faces.

13 Making use of a variety of files can be especially useful with figured grain. The file's shearing action removes material without leaving the scratches and grit of abrasive papers and leaves a clean, shiny surface that can go straight to finish. A flat file is good for long smooth areas such as the fin and the back part of the skull, while a rounded file is very useful for the curved areas such as the face and the junction of the fin and body. Files seldom receive the credit they deserve as excellent shaping and finishing tools!

14 When you are happy that the body has been suitably shaped and the knotwork is complete, you might find that gently rounding over the edges of the knotwork gives the work a gentler and more refined appearance. Some fine, cloth-backed abrasive paper (no coarser than 150), torn into long strips and worked over the edge as shown in the picture, will quickly and neatly allow you to develop a uniform soft edge. Be very judicious with material removal as any more than a light $\frac{1}{16}$ in round-over starts to look too rope-like and very much loses its crispness.

15 A really eye-catching feature of the carving is the inlaid abalone eye. It was made with a little abalone dot (available from a luthier's supplier or frequently from bead stores and craft supply shops), which I shaped into more of an eye shape with a file and a pair of pliers. If you shape, sand or file abalone, please be sure to wear a dust mask as the very fine dust is a carcinogen. You may be able to find oval abalone, in which case you can skip much of the shaping and inlay it as is.

You can also inlay with wood or good-quality sealing wax if you are unable to acquire any abalone or mother of pearl material. If you'd rather just carve the eye, simply cut in a shallow line where you'd like the eye to be and then shape the space to suit.

16 If you want to inlay material, lay it where you wish the eye to be located and then scribe a line around it with a sharp knife tip or very finely sharpened pencil. It can be tricky to keep it tightly in place and it might take one or two attempts to get it just right. The more accurate you are with your line, the tighter and more professional the fit will be later in the process.

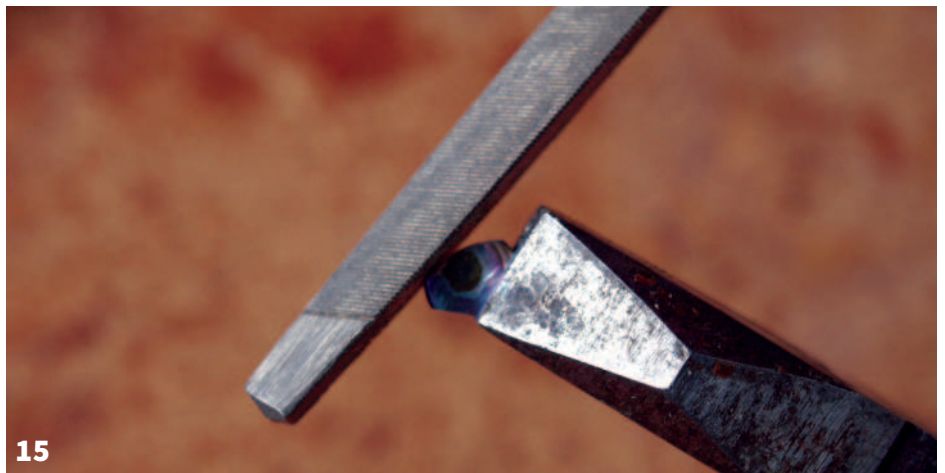
17 Scribe along the line with a straight knife to a depth of about $\frac{1}{16}$ - $\frac{1}{8}$ in, then carefully remove the material within the area of the eye. Work to maintain a level base for your inlay material as a bumpy or out of level surface will make setting the inlay and achieving a good gluing surface more difficult. Use epoxy or cyanoacrylate glue for a really strong bond, especially if you use abalone as the inlay material.



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18 When the glue has dried, use a file to level the inlay flush with the surrounding wood surface. If there are gaps around the inlay, they can be filled with a mix of carpenter's glue and some fine wood dust generated by sanding the adjacent area a bit. I don't recommend cutting abalone down with your carving tools as it can be hard on the blades, but a good-quality flat file will handle the task easily and will allow you to dome the eye a little to follow the contours of the surrounding carving. As previously mentioned, be sure to wear a mask when filing abalone or mother of pearl.



20

19 Once you are certain all the carving, inlaying and filing has been done for both faces of the carving, (or for just the one face if you keep the design as a panel) go over the entire carving with your favourite tidying materials. I used a cabinet scraper followed by a selection of abrasive papers, beginning at 150 and stepping up incrementally until my final sanding at 320. The process is a bit more drawn out for highly figured woods than it is for more homogenous material such as limewood, but for both, aim to sand with the grain as much as possible and level any dents or high spots.



21

20 To finish, I made a mix of a third satin spar varnish, a third boiled linseed oil and a third mineral spirits, which I applied with a brush in four coats. After the second coat, I began wet sanding each new coat with 600 grit wet and dry paper for a really nice, silky feel. I left each coat on the wood for about 20 minutes before thoroughly drying with cotton rags. Leave to dry for approximately 24 hours between coats and be extremely careful to dispose of the wet rags carefully as there is a real danger of them spontaneously combusting if they are left in a heap. After a week of curing, a final buff with some beeswax polish brings up a nice, soft sheen.



22

21 I made a couple of little feet to hold the piece in a vertical position for display. I used black walnut for a nice contrast in colour and tone and designed a simple little 'wave' to echo the idea of the whale leaping above the rolling waves. To make it, I simply sawed a small dado across the top face of the foot that was the width of the carved board and just under half the depth of the foot.

22 The wave can be cut with a scrollsaw or shaped by drilling hole and then shaping with a knife or jeweller's saw. ●

Landscape carving in three dimensions

Graham Thompson undertakes a project that combines his love of landscapes and woodcarving



It escapes me now why I started on this course of depicting the effects of natural erosion, but just like the great glaciers, rivers and smaller water courses, I found the force of gravity to be irresistible. Some of my earliest memories are of the panorama from Beacon Hill overlooking the great natural bowl which became the home of the city of Bradford in West Yorkshire. Wind the clock back some 500 years and it's easy to see why the hill was chosen as a communication site to warn of the Spanish Armada's approach. Standing at over 900ft there are long distant

views in most points of the compass. It's little wonder that geography became my best (only?) subject at school. That brings me to the purpose of this article, which is to hopefully inspire or rekindle some of that wonder in you, dear reader.

Topographical study

Residents of and visitors to the British Isles are blessed with access to one of the most varied geologies in the world. Certainly, there are hundreds of different varieties of exposed rock strata but even the areas where

the bedrock is covered by silt, soil, clay or even water, the topography is invariably fascinating. I thought it would be interesting to, in some way, represent an area of interest or, indeed, an interesting area – such as where you live. So, as an example, and for the purposes of this article, I will attempt to recreate or emulate a landscape that is likely to be familiar to many readers and you can, if you wish, simply copy the process or, if you feel sufficiently adventurous, attempt another location all together – or even the same area to a different scale.



Panoramic view of the Isle of Arran from mainland

Location, location, location

To date, I've completed a few of these carved three-dimensional landscapes and so far have found that it pays to avoid simply copying what you see into a perfectly scaled and detailed, physical relief map. You may disagree, and that's fine by me, but I like to add value and interest by incorporating a degree of improvisation, even vision. My chosen location: the Isle of Arran – known to visitors as Scotland in miniature. It offers an interesting topography without being too complex, so should serve us all well as an example of the art. Arran is well known and accessible so many readers will be able to visualise the landscape as they add detail to their carving using photographic sources – including their own, perhaps.

Material

Virtually any planked wood will do – particularly if it has a pronounced grain. Grain is a natural aid to contour recognition, even if it doesn't always follow the true levels which are, of course, simply 'imaginary lines joining places of equal height' – to quote my geography teacher. If you really want to highlight the contours why not try a good quality plywood (with apologies to carving purists) and laminate as many layers as necessary for each part of the project. Using plywood can also be a help to calculate the correct elevation – simply divide the overall height by the number of plies. (See Pen-y-Ghent image.)

Research

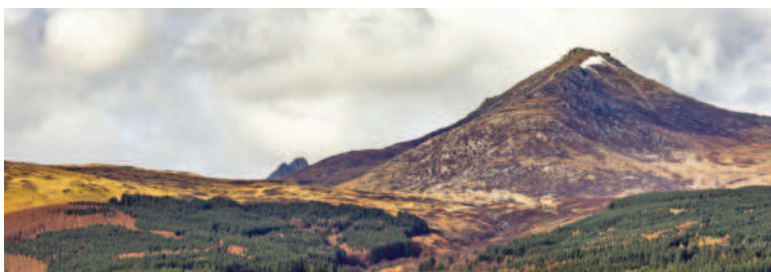
Online relief maps are very useful for the initial selection of an interesting location and helped me to eliminate, at least for this exercise, a few sites which initially appeared attractive but were either too complex or were literally too plain – I won't mention names as you may disagree. For detailed work maps of all scales have a use but my favourites are the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 scale leisure maps. Use all sources to gather a rough appreciation of the topography, i.e. what overall shape is your location? Arran is a sort of shallow wedge with most of the higher ground in the northern half, including Goat Fell at 874m. Having said that, the southern half is more of a plateau with many rounded tops at 300-500m.

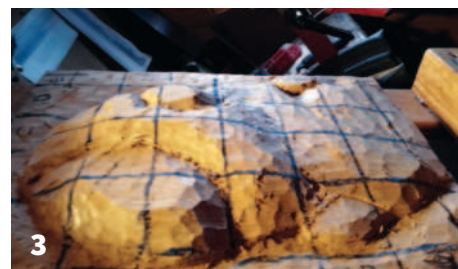
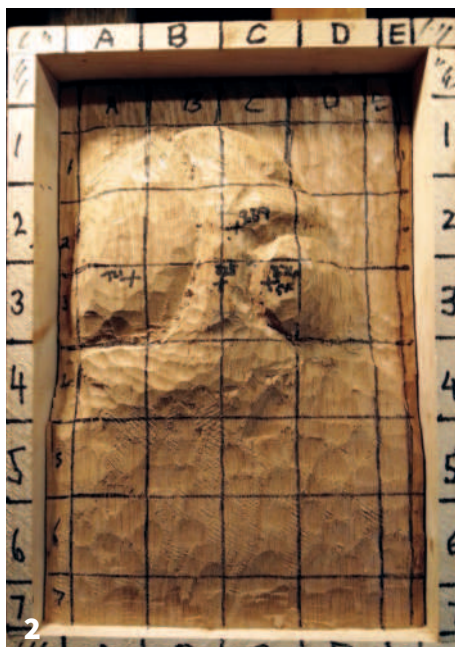
The famous
Yorkshire peak
of Pen-y-Ghent



Ordnance
Survey map
of the Isle
of Arran

Brodick Forest
& Goat Fell
on the Isle
of Arran





1 Basic shape and rivers marked 2 Grid frame 3 Arran in the rough plus bench neighbour 4 Northern high ground takes shape

Overall shape

To help you visualise the overall shape, try to imagine your landscape without any valleys but incorporating all high points. The thing we know best is 'the back of your hand' – nonsense, but a good example of how I can explain the overall view technique. Place your hand, palm down, lightly on to a flat surface – a hard-back book is ideal. Then look at your hand from the sides, noting how the fingers are anything but straight and your knuckles are the peaks with the second finger knuckle uppermost. Now try the same position having put on a mitten or thick glove. You will see that the covered hand provides the overall view of your hand. Now apply a metaphorical mitten to your landscape and move on.

Scale

Unless you are favouring a particularly mountainous location, I suggest that you use – as I will do with this example – a ratio of 2:1 for height to length, so for every unit of north-south or east-west travel the third dimension should be increased by a factor of two. Otherwise, for most non-alpine areas, the piece will look, literally, a bit flat. There is a downside (every pun intended) to this exaggeration; the higher the ratio between altitude and the horizontal the steeper the slope – but I feel that this can, up to a point, be exploited to give the piece an interpreted nature. Vertical exaggeration is nothing new, witness many Victorian landscape paintings for dramatic licence. With a land-locked subject I like to ignore – or see through – any standing water, be it ocean, sea, loch, lake, tarn etc. But, in this case, an island with its surrounding sea is neatly encapsulated. The only exception is the 3km long rock set 500m off the south-east coast called Holy Island. With its own 'mountain' it deserves to be attached to the mainland by an invented super-low tidal beach connection from Lamlash Bay.

Relax and enjoy the process

Remember that this is your interpretation or version of a landscape so it doesn't really matter if a river appears to run uphill and your third highest point is actually the fifth – it's more to do with the overall look and whether you enjoy the process or not. So, as always, keep moving round the work removing small amounts so you can always remove a bit more if necessary. The best effect comes from the various features working together, not necessarily on the out-and-out accuracy of every single level. Another way to check levels is to note the depth of each intersection on the grid and check that your gougings are still on the right side. This does, of necessity, require you to use a top-down approach so even the highest point is below the original material surface.

Let's get started

Apply your scaled grid to the material, numbering the rows and columns. If you are laminating pieces to different heights (Arran is roughly twice as high in the north as in the south), I recommend you just have two different areas. Now it's time to bash away with the largest shallow sweep gouge you can handle and quickly reduce the piece to the overall shape we discussed earlier. Alternatively, you could router the larger areas of waste, but be careful to always err on the side of caution. A vertical cut in the wrong place could be very difficult to hide, let alone remove.

Grid-marked surround

As the work develops you may find that it becomes increasingly tricky to redraw the grid, so I suggest that you make a removable 'frame' which fits neatly against the plank's four sides. Something like 20mm-thick batten wood adjusted in height to match the material will be suitable. Mark the frame for vertical and horizontal positions and column/row references. (See pic 2. Grid Frame.)

Make your marks

Take a sharp pencil and draw in the coastline and main valley rivers, chevroned for direction of flow. Mark the higher watersheds (a point at which water can flow in more than one direction) again showing the downward slopes. The highest points are mountain peaks and ridges followed by saddles (a broad ridge) between summits.

First features

Keep in mind your overall 'gloved' image of the subject while refining the basic shape. If your subject allows, try to divide the piece into sections. Identifying areas separated by rivers or major variations in height will help you refine your technique and encourage progress by concentrated regional effort. So, for example, looking at my early images you will see that the island is naturally divided into four or five natural sections, with the highest being at the north-east corner. This section will naturally (having the highest point – Goat Fell) be the one which tops out at just below the material's uppermost surface.

Details

Take a V-tool and mallet and, working from high to low, cut along the main river/stream lines. Imagine you are effectively doing the work of thousands of years of erosion – in a few minutes. Widen the valleys a little, all the time taking note of how deep you are



5 Most features in place **6** Bandsaw coastline **7** The finished scene **8** Suilven – Have a go!

going. A depth gauge such as a straightedge spanning the piece with a pointed instrument marked with the scale will help you to judge when you are (say) $\frac{3}{4}$ of the depth required. Also, keep an eye on the edges (coastline) as, believe it or not, this is where the water ends up. So, the river lines from shore to source will be extra steep as we are using an exaggerated gradient.

Refine and correct

Move around the piece removing small amounts here and there that help to improve the shape of a ridge line. Invariably, the upland areas are – when you look closely – all apparently similar yet also very different to each other. Influenced by the jumble of rocks and strata, the resulting formations are all individuals. The resulting variations of material in angle and density allow for an unlimited variety of formations. Capturing just a small part of the variety will create great interest and recognition in your work.

A caveat

Creating the landscape of Arran was much more technical and time consuming than I expected. My natural inclination to accuracy doesn't help, so please consider lowering your sights a little and maybe go for a narrower subject such as an individual hill or mountain – or even your local area. Keep it simple and enjoy.

Useful sources

- Ordnance Survey Landranger map no. 69 – Arran
- Online photos
- Google maps terrain
- The Map That Changed the World by Simon Winchester – not essential but fascinating

Suggested subjects

- The Surrey Hills
- One of the Yorkshire 3 peaks (see Pen-y-Ghent photo)
- Torbay
- Cotswolds
- Snowdon
- Newlands Valley
- Skiddaw range
- Land's End
- Isle of Wight
- Ben Nevis
- Suilven (see Suilven photo)
- Beachy Head
- Your home town or favourite walk? ●



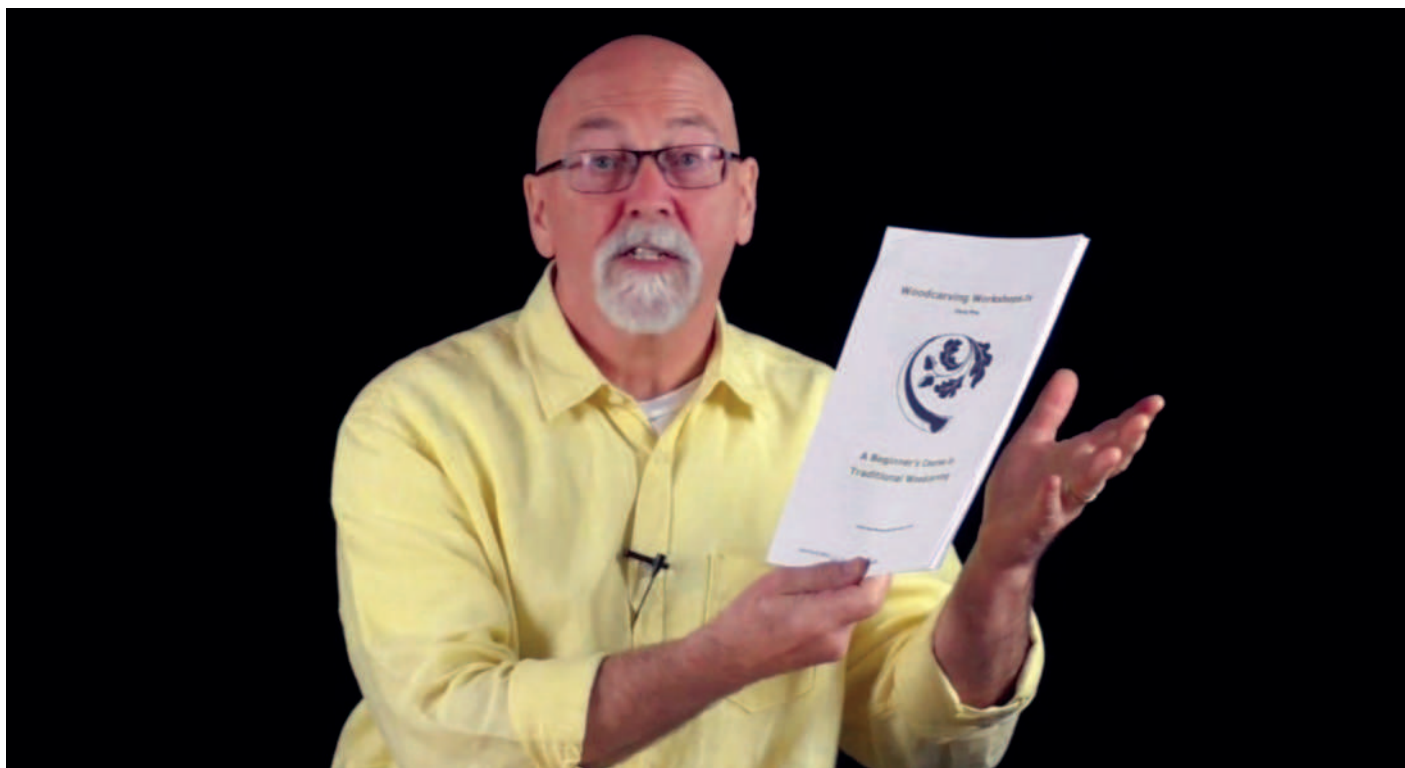
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Woodcarving Workshops

Guest editor Kevin Alviti, reviews master carver Chris Pye's woodcarving tutorials

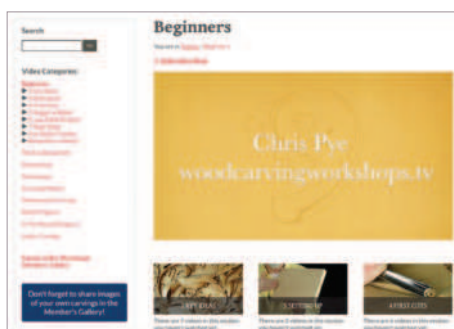


Tuition is sometimes difficult to find in woodcarving. I know when I've looked it's either been at inconvenient times for classes (often in the daytime at a local college) or out of my price range or distance for one-to-one tuition for more than a few sessions.

So, a few years ago I turned to the internet to further my carving education, initially using YouTube but the quality isn't there. Fortunately I found Chris Pye's Woodcarving Workshops (www.woodcarvingworkshops.tv). I signed up for just three months to begin with but ended up using the website for well over a year, so I feel I can give a fair review of how useful I felt it was.

Woodcarving Workshops is billed as a comprehensive online resource for woodcarvers, and I have to agree. I could carve but I was desperate to improve in certain areas, I wanted to find that easy, methodical approach I'd seen that some have when tackling a workpiece. So the first thing I did was to start on the beginner section and work my way through the projects there, using mainly just three tools.

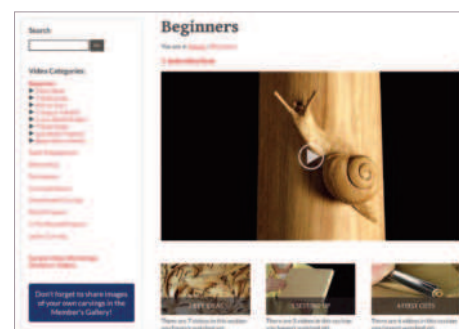
Chris has a great way on camera – if woodcarving was more universally popular, he would easily be like Monty Don with hoards of people tuning in on a Friday night to watch him. He explains everything in a calm and thought-out way. The camera,



operated by Chris' wife and partner in Woodcarving Workshops, Carrie Camann, is always where it needs to be, showing what the tool should be doing and how you should hold it. There are other videos breaking down the more complex aspects.

I found myself carving on an evening, tools and workpiece spread before me with my laptop out, videos playing while I carved. If you have any questions, you can comment on the video – Chris responds to these really quickly and often a question and response will already be in the comments section.

The section on sharpening is brilliant. It's always a subject that makes a lot of woodworkers twitch as they all have their own way to go about things. I went straight to the Sharpen Your V Tool section, the tool that possibly causes the most hassle with woodcarvers. Split into eight sections, it methodically explains how to go about



setting up this tool so you can get the most from it.

I remember tentatively uploading a few pictures of an early carving project to the member's gallery. You can allow people to contact you (if you choose), which I did, and I received some lovely, encouraging feedback almost straight away, it's such a nice little community.

As well as more than 900 videos and 90 projects on the website, there is a monthly email and a blog (which is free to read even if you're not a member) where Chris will talk about techniques, projects and tools. I still receive the emails and find it inspiring to get out to the workshop and carry on carving.

I've had a number of people ask me how to begin learning to carve and I've suggested this website as a good starting point, and also great to develop skills for those with more experience. ●

Bichon Frise

Oliver Richardson carves a pedigree dog



This was a commissioned piece, a surprise birthday present for the client's wife. Her Bichon Frise is her pride and joy and he wanted to capture its character in a small sculpture. After carving mainly farm animals and wildlife, working on a dog was an exciting challenge. Two things that would prove a little tricky were the proportions of the dog – the breed is slightly out of proportion due to its large head and short legs – and getting the texture of the coat right as it was almost like a sheep's fleece. Capturing as many photographs of the dog from all angles helped with getting

the proportions right, making adjustments along the way. Even when fine detail is being carved in, it can show up any small defects in the surface that need to be adjusted. I usually avoid colouring wood, but on this occasion a little stain brought it to life. The size was chosen by the client – to maximise the impression given from such a small piece, having the dog in a seated position seemed to offer the most potential and with its mouth open and tongue hanging out gave it the happy character needed.

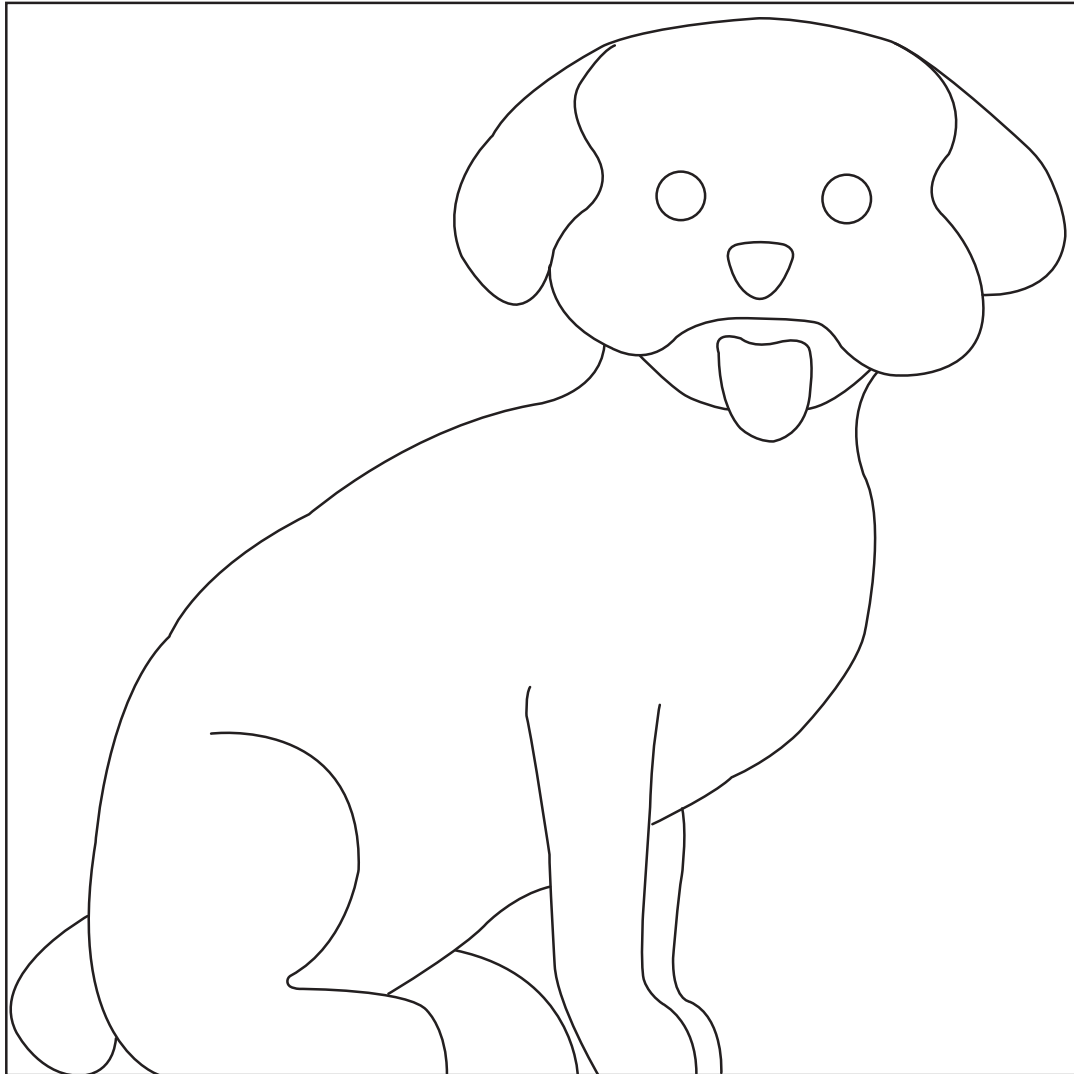
Things you will need

Materials

- Limewood, 140 x 140 x 100mm
- Elm, 160 x 140 x 25mm
- White ash wood stain
- Black acrylic paint
- 320 & 120 grit sanding mesh
- Spray lacquer
- Clear varnish

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- No.31, 10mm gouge
- No.23, 10mm gouge
- No.8, 6mm gouge
- V-shaped 6mm chisel
- Small carving mallet
- Z-saw Japanese DBL edged
- Dremel
- Selection of rotary burrs
- Carbide rotary carving bits
- Bandsaw
- Coping saw
- Carving knife
- 10mm drill bit & drill



1



2

1 The first steps are to trace the side profile image on to the wood, cut the outline out using a bandsaw, roughly draw on the front profile, cut out with a coping saw and attach to a turntable base.

2 Continuing with the coping saw, block in surfaces such as the nose, face, ears and tail positions. Roughly draw on some of the main features to give yourself an idea of proportions.

3 Using a No.31 gouge, work in the curvature of the main body. A visible centre line drawn on that runs down the back and across two axis on the head will make sure the surfaces are in correct positions and when viewed from a distance can offer helpful focus points.

4 Work in some of the key features of the face using the No.8, 6mm gouge and also the No.31 gouge on the curved surfaces of the cheeks. Find and fix the positions of the eyes and nose – this will give you a reference to work from to develop the rest of head.

5 Now that the rough shape of the head is in, even though it is still too large in proportion, surfaces can be moved in to fit in line with the head's position. By not working surfaces into their final position and depth too early, proportions and positions can be played around with.

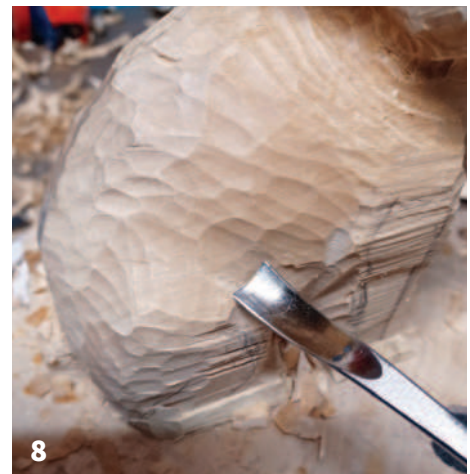
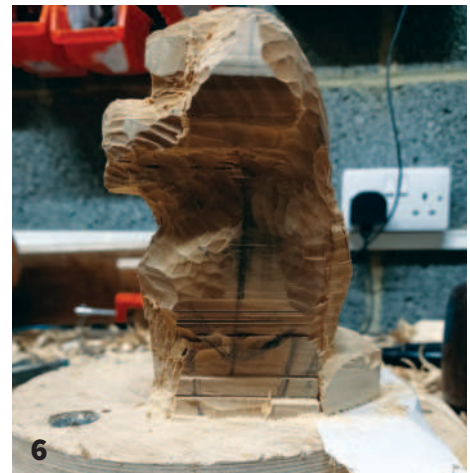
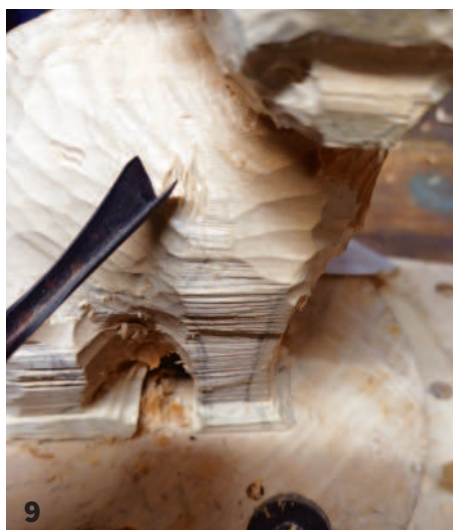
6 Using both No.23 & 31 gouges, work in the surfaces of the torso together. Keep turning the piece to carve from different angles so that no one side is worked solely and enables you to view surfaces from all angles.

7 Drill into the centre line in between the legs. Do this three or four times in this area to help remove material easily, go in about 15mm.

8 Work in the shoulders and upper legs so that the surfaces start to blend with the torso. Now that the hips are starting to form, take material off near the base to give the impression of the surface rolling under so it doesn't look flat.

9 With the coat of the dog being very thick, and while there is excess material, use a V-shaped chisel to trial some texture patterns to see how it looks on the surfaces and to give you an idea of what angles work best.

10 Use a rotary burr to put in two nostrils then, using the No.8 gouge, work in the nose. Using the V-shaped chisel create the fur texture. Work back until you can put the eye in with the gouge.





11 Work one half of the face, applying the fur-like texture to the rest of the head and neck. Use the gouge to carve out a U-shaped tongue. The features aren't finalised.

12 Keep working in the fur. Use the direction of the cuts to create contours in the piece – fur doesn't travel in one direction. When carving each line, move the chisel in an S shape, overlap some and don't make them all the same size.

13 The tail of the dog had longer, less-curly fur, so using the same tool and technique, make the cuts longer and try to create a cylinder shape by carving back into the base so the surfaces roll under.

14 With the legs being small and at risk of breaking, using a rotary burr to create the shape is a safer option and more efficient in getting the correct form.

15 Remove the piece from the base. Continuing with the burr form the underside and then using the carbide carving tool, make the same fur as on the rest of the dog, but in a small pattern as the fur is denser there.

16 Using the knife and the No.8 gouge, cut in a finer intersect on the rear leg at the knee joint.

17 Using the same tools as the previous step, cut in a visible intersect to expose the tail as a separate feature to the main body.





18 With a carbide burr, soften any intersects to remove chisel cut marks or to create radii, such as where the ear meets the cheek. Soften the fur on the ears to make a visible difference in the surface.

19 Again, with the rotary burr, smooth out the lower eyelid surface. On the real dog this area had very little hair, it was almost just skin that was visible.

20 A light sand with 120 and then 320 grit. The lime used was still a little too dark, but a white stain added a more realistic appearance and still allowed wood grain to be visible.

21 Another light sand between coats, three coats in total using a fine paint brush and a sponge.

22 Black paint is used on the eyes and nose, and a dark oak stain is added to the lower eyelids. The tongue is left the natural colour of the wood. Spray lacquer is used to seal it due to its complex surfaces, giving less chance of any painted-on finish leaving residue in the gouges.

23 A piece of elm is chosen for the base due to its character grain, giving a nice contrast to the sculpture. A simple edging design is routed on and finished in clear varnish. Finally, fix the base to the sculpture with a little wood glue. ●



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Watering can – part 2

Zoë Gertner finishes her gardening project with some fine carving

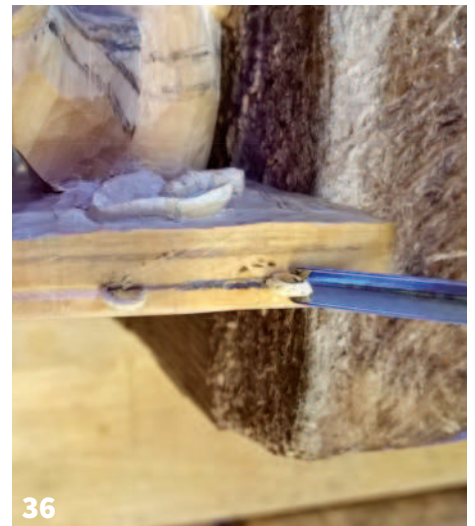
Having completed part one, the watering can is ready for more delicate carving – texturing the doormat and finishing the rear and top handles, brace and spout.



Starting the coir doormat

35 Carefully pare and round off each of the four corners of the doormat, then with the No.3, 1/4in gouge inverted, pare the lower edges so they are rounded under.

36 Draw the line showing the top of the rope edging around the bottom of the mat, then use the 5/8in V-tool to mark this, working from each outer corner towards the middle of its face.



Things you will need

Materials

- Boxwood

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- No.39, 1/4in & 1/8in V-tool
- Small fine-toothed saw
- No.5, 3/8in & 1/4in gouge
- No.9, 1/4in gouge
- No.3, 3/8in & 1/4in & 1/8in gouges
- No.2, 1/4in skew chisel or Ray Gonzalez hooked skew palm chisel
- No.1, 1/4in chisel
- Hand drill & 1/8in drill bit
- Nail punch, round punch and a light hammer
- Redundant toothbrush, wax polish and lint-free duster

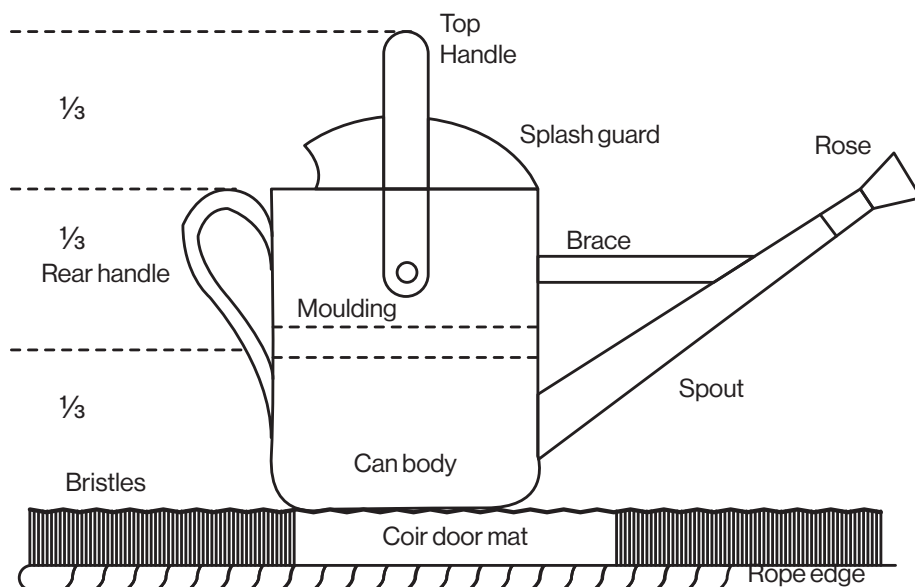


Diagram 1

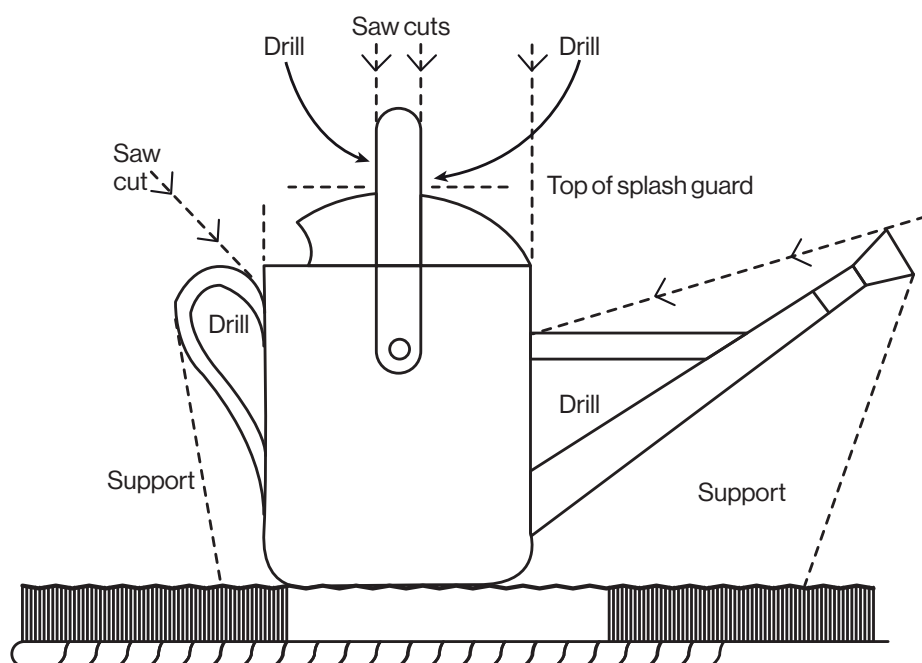


Diagram 2



37



38

37 Invert the No.3, 1/4in gouge and tilt its corner against the lower side of the V-cut, then on each face cut from each corner towards the middle, carefully paring the edge and rounding it over along its length, making a 'sausage' around the bottom of the mat. Mark the diagonal braids along it and, using the 1/4in skew chisel or the Ray Gonzalez palm hooked chisel, roll the cutting edge diagonally over the rope from one side, then from the opposite, to cut tiny V-channels along it around the bottom of the coir mat.

38 With the No.3, 3/8in and 1/4in gouges, smooth the upper surface of the doormat, ensuring the meeting edges of the watering can and hand tools are cut cleanly. Then use the 1/8in V-tool around the outer edges to mark the bristles with close parallel V-cuts, working upwards from the top of the rope towards the upper surface of the mat.

◀ Preparing the handles for drilling the rear handle

39 Use as little pressure as possible to reduce both sides of the rear handle equally to make it as narrow as you dare (it will be delicate, hence the need for using a close-grained wood). With the No.3 gouges, pare with shallow slivers from the middle, downwards to reduce the lower part and upwards towards the convexity for the upper part. Then shape its outer profile and attachments on the body of the watering can, and draw the inner edge of the handle within it.

40 With the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, mark the inner edge of the handle, working in the correct direction of the grain, i.e. from the top of its inner curve towards the can and its upper attachment, then from the lower attachment towards the top of the curve, joining the cuts together around inside it.

41 Using as little percussion as possible, deepen and widen the V-channels on each side of the handle, using the appropriate width No.3 gouges to make opposing cuts. Next, reduce the depth of the inner area each side, working towards the enlarged channels from all round, then round over the inner edges of the handle into the reduced area both sides, leaving drilling through for later.

The top handle

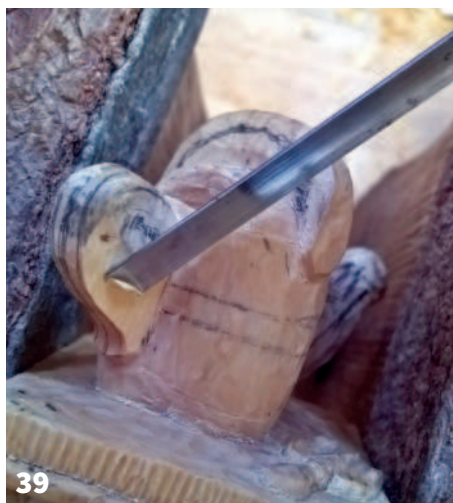
42 Mark round the previously drawn inner edges on both sides of the handle, working from the middle at the top towards each of the lower ends with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, then repeat Step 41, ready to drill through later.

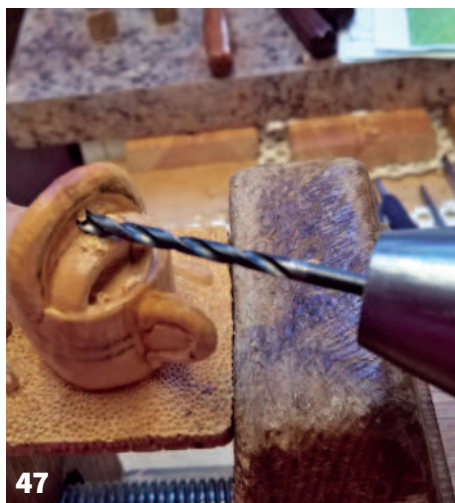
43 Tidy around the handle attachments on the can then, with a light hammer and circular punch, mark the rivet attachments of the handle on the body of the watering can. Now with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool cut round the inner rim, holding the spray plate on the rose, and reduce the area within. Finish the inner plate by punching concentric spray perforations on it using the light hammer and the pointed nail punch.

Starting the spout and brace

44 Using the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool on each side of the brace, spout and rose, first mark the lower edge of the brace then the upper edge of the spout beneath it, showing the triangular area between them which will be removed from in front of the can body later on. Next, allowing sufficient width for shaping it rounded later, mark the outline of the spout emerging from near to the bottom of the can so it is straight and angled upwards towards the rose on its end. A short ruler or other straight edge may be helpful to align them.

45 With the No.1, $\frac{1}{4}$ in or a narrow chisel, flatten the upper surface of the brace, then, as in Step 41, reduce the depth of the triangular areas each side and in front of the can, leaving the drilling for later.





Texturing the coir doormat

46 Starting at the base of the can and working outwards towards the edges of the mat, use the point of the nail punch with a light hammer and stipple the surface with closely packed indents, covering it completely. The small area beneath the spout after it is finished will be stippled in the same way.

Finishing the top handle

47 Using the 3mm drill bit in the hand drill, carefully drill halfway through from each side – this ensures you do not misalign it and inadvertently break through the opposite face in the wrong place, and also minimises pressure against it. With the skew chisel or Ray Gonzalez hooked skew chisel, carefully enlarge the drill hole, gradually removing the area below the handle and above the splashguard and making the gap through from each side.

48 Now working on the undersides of the handle using the skew chisel, carefully pare along the two inside edges to round them over further, starting at the middle and cutting downwards towards each end adjoining the splashguard. Then in the space beneath the handle, from each side smooth off the top of the splashguard so that it is now fully rounded, convex and sitting over the top of the watering can.

Finishing the brace

49 Drill from each side as shown in Step 47 and, using the skew chisel from each side, enlarge the drill holes to form the triangular gap beneath the brace, at the same time continuing the vertical curvature around the front of the can below the attachment on the front of the can. Within the triangular area, round over the upper surface of the spout, ready to start shaping it out of its support below it.

Finishing the spout and removing its support

50 Under the rose at the outer end, invert the No.3, 1/4 in gouge and gently pare from its sides downwards around the lower half of its circumference. Having removed beneath it, shape the rose circular at the end of the spout.

51 Starting from behind the rose, gradually reduce the remaining support underneath the spout along to the front of the watering can by cutting downwards alternately from each side, paring slivers with the No.3, 3/8 or 1/4 in. Release the pared slivers with horizontal opposing cuts from the surface of the coir mat as in Step 33.

52 As you work towards the front of the can gradually removing its support, round off the underneath of the spout, aligning so it tapers outwards to the base of the rose on the end from near the bottom of the can. Cutting from each side with the skew chisel, continue around the bottom of the front of the can, between the doormat and the emerging spout, so it is in line vertically with the front of the can underneath the brace. Then smooth the surface of the mat now revealed beneath the spout, ready to finish stippling it as before.

53 On the top of the spout, starting at the junction with its brace and cutting upwards from each side towards the middle and towards the rose, use the skew chisel or Ray Gonzalez hooked chisel and carefully pare with as little pressure as possible, adjusting the angle from brace to the bottom of the rose, then shape the back of the rose on the end of the spout so that it is conical.

54 With the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool and as little percussion as possible, mark the front and side edges of the brace lying over the spout, cutting towards the centre line from each side, and mark the end of the stem of the rose fastened on the spout. Finish stippling the coir mat beneath the spout with the nail punch as described before. On the splashguard you may like to add a small plate in relief, marked with the capacity of the watering can.

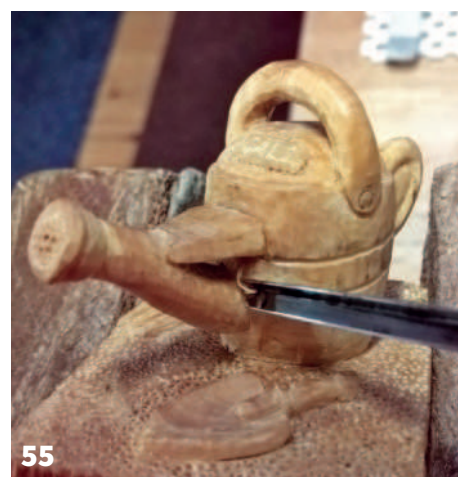
55 Tidy the circumference of the edge of the bottom of the can meeting the doormat and check that the body of the can is vertical and not leaning to one side. Then with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool mark the double line of the moulding around the can, working from each side from the rear handle and meeting the cuts at the front of the watering can in the space between the spout and brace.

Finishing the rear handle

56 As described before, carefully drill from each side, enlarge the drill holes using the skew chisel and pare the surface of the can between the handle attachments on the back of the can so it is rounded vertically in line with its adjacent surface. Then with the $\frac{1}{8}$ in V-tool, extend both lines of the moulding from each side, finishing them between the top and bottom of the handle at the back of the can. The skew chisel could be used to cut the V-channels if access with the V-tool is difficult.

Finishing the watering can

57 Erase any remaining pencil marks and remove any deep digs, scratches or errant cuts, making sure all meeting edges are cleanly cut. Check that the coir doormat is fully stippled and no gaps remain. Finally, apply wax polish with a redundant toothbrush and buff the carving to a shine with a lint-free duster. ●





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Nordic horse

Iain Whittington carves an equine-inspired handle for a mangle board



This is a project to show the use of combining a carving knife with other tools to produce a traditional Norwegian handle.

The horse was such a significant asset to agriculture and warfare in the pre-industrial world, it is no surprise that it is a common theme for woodcarving. It not only provides scope for decorative work, but its shape lends itself to toys, such as the famous Swedish Dala horse (Dalahäst), which started life as a toy in the 19th century but has since grown into a folk art icon. The same basic shape that makes a sturdy child's toy also works well for handles, as the curved belly provides a comfortable grip, while the solid legs can attach to a variety of utensils.

This project is designed to bring together a variety of tools and skills in a single carving, that will provide a template for any number of ornate handles.

This style is modelled on the ancient Norwegian Viking horse, whose descendants can still be found in the west of Norway in the Fjord horse (Fordhest). These are a stocky all-rounder working through until the late 20th century in harness, pulling

Swedish Dala horse

carts, ploughs and sleighs, so it's no surprise they were also put to use pulling doors and lids.

There are several variations on the pattern available in Odd Fauske's *A Norwegian Textbook*. While the basic shape can be achieved with the use of the straight blades of carving knives, I have chosen a pattern where some of the ornamentations will need the use of carving gouges. As it's intended for use as a handle, the cross-section has been modified to include tenons as its hoofs.



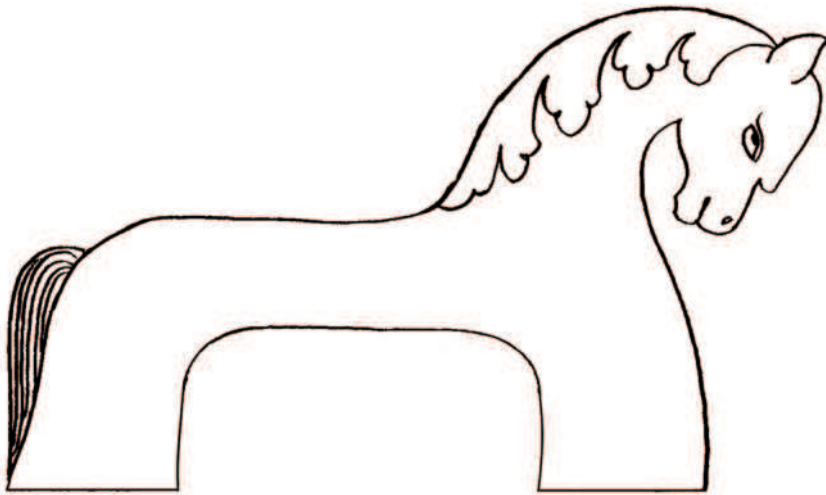
Fjord horse

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

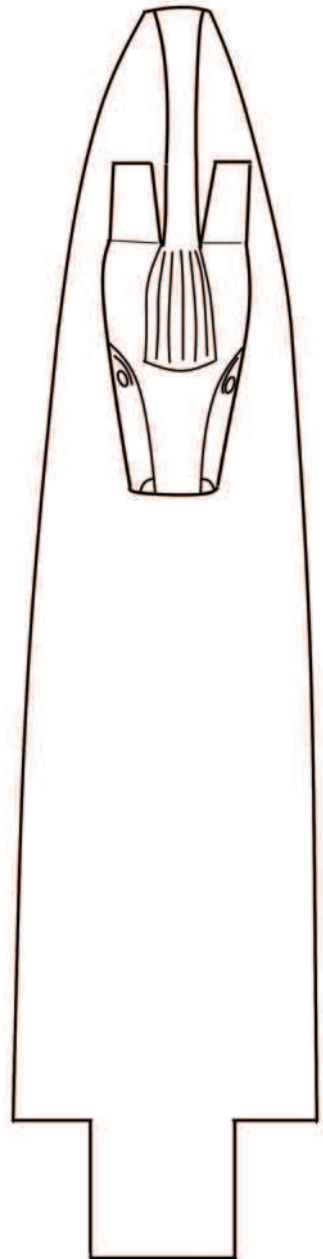


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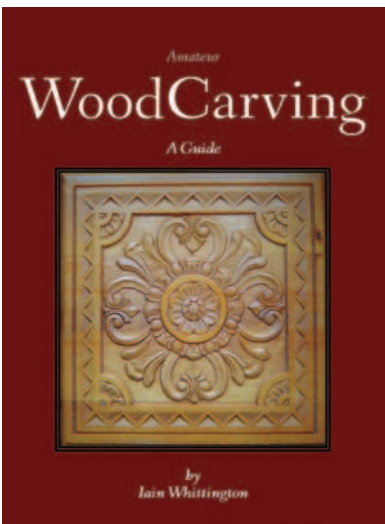
Viking rock carving at Oseberg burrow in Norway depicting horse heads



Odd Fauske pattern



Cross section



Amateur WoodCarving: A Guide by Iain Whittington

This article has been compiled from original information in the book, where you will also find many more project ideas. The book is a guide to learning the craft of decorative carving with chisel or knife, starting from tool selection to sharpening, workholding to finishing, with detailed design guidance from basic ornamentation to design and drawing of acanthus carvings. With step-by-step instructions for a series of varying projects, using a number of different styles and tools, there are detailed illustrations for each step, from start to finish, in this wide range of projects.

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1 With the pattern resized to suit the intended purpose, stick it down on the timber and drill out the underbelly area needed for the hand grip.

2 As this is to work as a handle, it needs a tenon cut under the base to make a 'hidden' fixing, with a pegged tenon joint. It's worth remembering to do this before roughing out the blank, as it is easier to hold when still as a block. One way would be with a saw (bandsaw or a tenon saw), but I chose to use a rebate plane as I find it gives a tighter fit. A useful by-product of cutting the tenon early is that it provides a holding point that won't damage any work in progress.

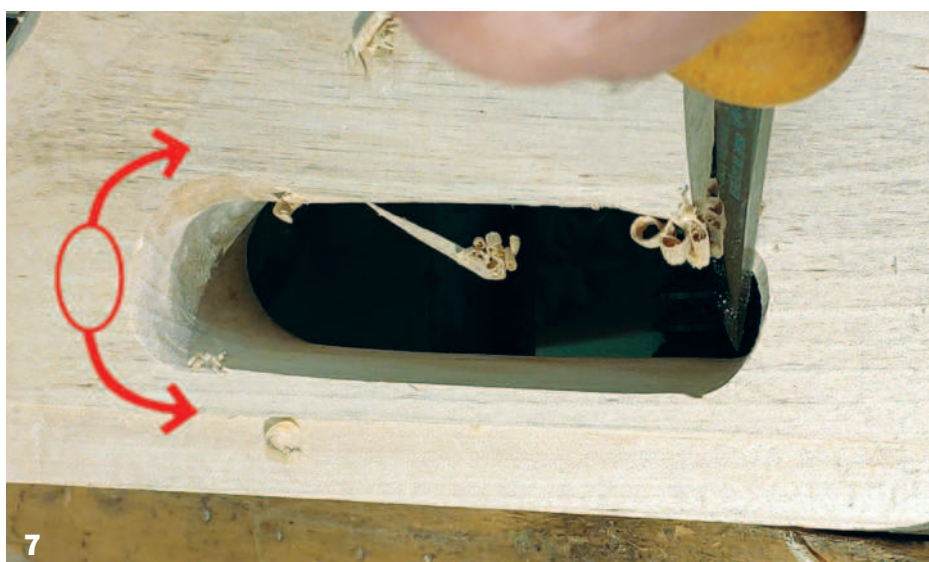
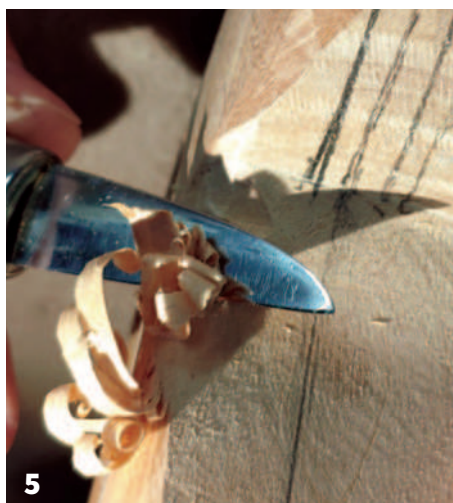
3 After cutting out the horse profile on a bandsaw, the underbelly will need to be cleaned up either with a knife or a series of rasps and files, to leave a suitably tactile finish for a hand grip.

4 Roughing the figure can start with slimming down the neck, which can be achieved in several ways, but here I show the use of a Scandinavian twin-handles knife, which is used like a drawknife but is less expensive to buy.

5 Changing from the two-handles blade to a short-blade knife, the neck is then roughly tapered into the shoulder towards the rump, using a series of deep cuts with the necessary changes in direction to accommodate the grain.

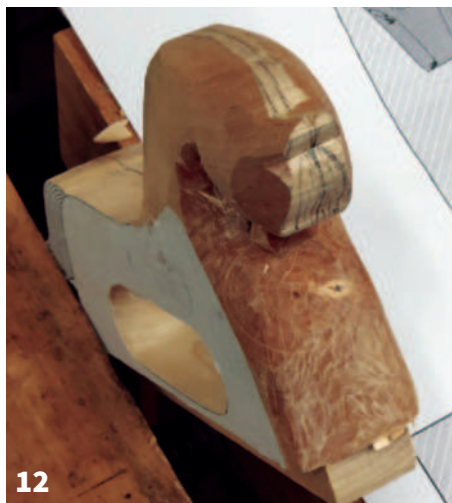
6 When the required profile has been achieved, swap to a long blade knife for the fine finishing, if necessary, using gentle pressure on the back of the blade to guide and fine-tune the careful paring of the finished surface.

7 The same techniques are repeated to shape both sides of the neck and body, tapering in the profile of the underbody 'grip' along the way, using multiple opposing shallow slicing cuts with the long blade knife. This constant change of direction will accommodate the difference in how the grain runs under the belly.





8 Having carved the neck and both sides of the main body, turn attention to the two ends, starting with the tail. If you are using only a knife, you will have to carefully whittle away to form the round shape where the tail leaves the body. However, this can be achieved much more easily with a carving tool – here a wide No.7. It will need a couple of cuts, first a stab to get the depth, then a complementary rotating cut to establish the round shape where the tail joins the body.



9 With the base established, the wide taper of the tail plume can be outlined with a couple of cuts with a fine backsaw, carefully mating with the width of the tail's base.

10 Again, the shape of the tail plume can be established through careful whittling, but resorting to the inside of a small No.7 gives a suitable profile for the convex curve that joins the fan shape of the tail plume.

11 The end of the tail flips up in a smooth curve that is an ideal shape for the carving knife to smoothly join the two together.

12 The front of the animal is carefully carved, again using the same combination of the short blade for rough cutting followed by the long blade for gentle paring to the final finish.

13 This design has a stylised acanthus pattern for the mane, to symbolise the careful presentation of the horse's mane for an event such as a wedding. This can be carved using a short blade, such as a chip-carving knife, but is again more easily rendered using delicate carving tools.



◀ **14** While the outline and undercutting of these delicate shapes benefits from the use of carving tools, the confined space still leaves room for the knife blade for the paring of the top surface of the acanthus pattern, enabling a suitable tilt to the surface to align better with the neck-line.

15 While the use of only the knife only requires the model to be hand held, the introduction of the carving tools calls for a firmer grip. This is one of the times that the makeshift 'third hand' of a small vice mounted on scrap timber enables the carving to be presented in various angles by clamping the mount in the bench vice.

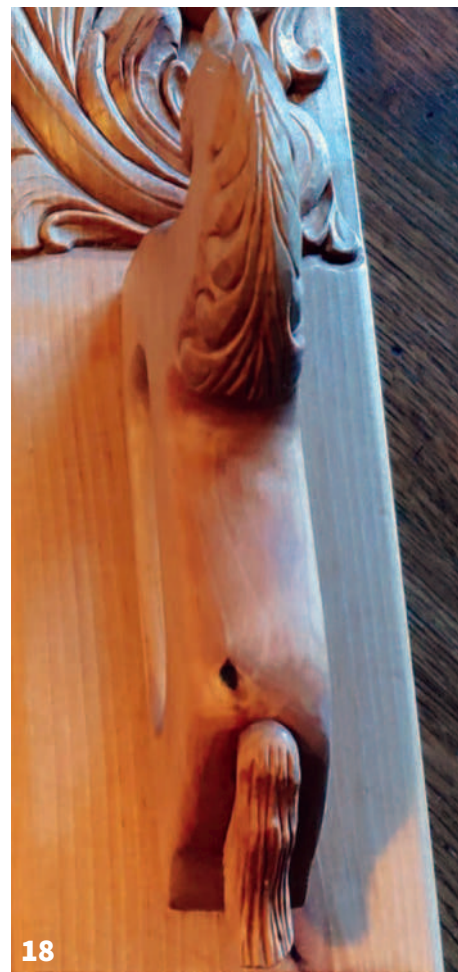
16 With the mane finished, that leaves the forelock to complete, which uses a similar technique to the tail, where the small fan shape is cut into the horse's face by reducing the forehead above the eye ridge. As with the tail, this takes a number of wedge-shaped cuts and a lot of patience.

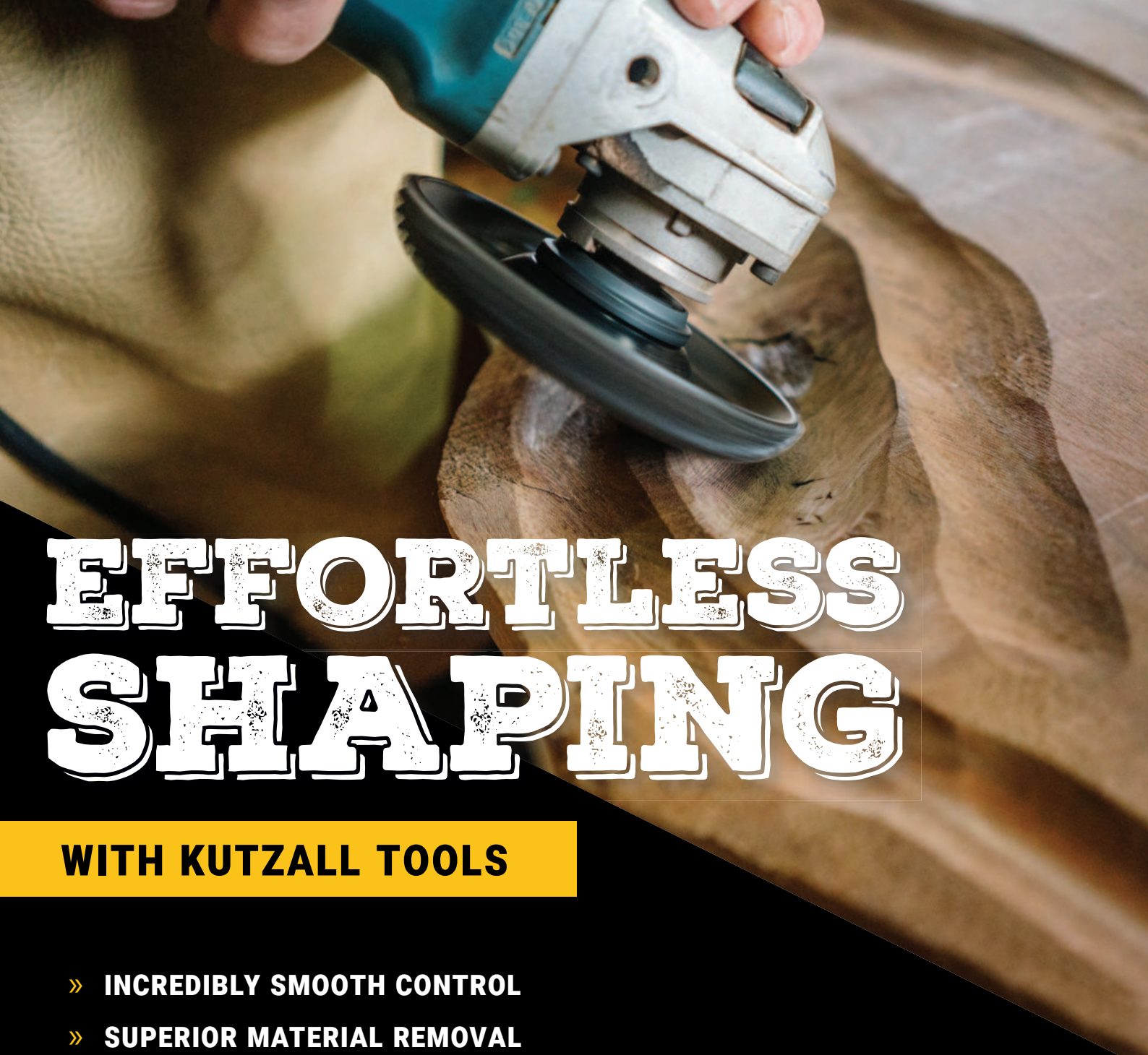
17 With the figure complete some basic carpentry remains to prepare the 'home' rebate for its mounting, which was simply drilled out then squared with an appropriate chisel.

18 Detailing of the 'hair' on the mane and tail is the final task, for which I used a No.11 veiner, although the same effect can be achieved with a couple of strokes of a knife point to pop out a smooth groove.

19 The final carved handle shown on the mangle board.

The detailed instructions for carving the mangle board for this handle are included in the book *Amateur WoodCarving: A Guide*. ●





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Owl head for a hiking stick

Peter Benson makes this owl head in an extract from his book

Many small carvings that can be done mainly with a knife can also serve a useful function. This project is not only decorative but also useful when out in the countryside. A hiking stick is invaluable for finding a safe way through thick undergrowth, as well as being an effective deterrent to would-be assailants.

The barn owl is one of the most popular birds and can often be seen during the day patrolling the fields in its territory. It is not difficult to carve but needs care to get it right. This stick will have just the head and shoulders of the owl and can be painted or left in the natural wood. Any straight stick will do to fit it on, but hazel or chestnut are probably the most common. If you cannot find a suitable stick yourself, there are many suppliers who can sell you a stick that has been dried and straightened.

I used a piece of lime 6 x 3 x 2¾in (150 x 80 x 70mm). The overall length of the pattern is 5½in (140mm). I attached the owl head to a hiking stick around 48in (1200mm) long.

Things you will need

Tools & equipment

- Paper and pencil to plan design
- Acetate sheet and marker pen
- Coping saw or bandsaw
- Murphy knife
- Safety glove
- Small No.9 gouge or similar
- Abrasives
- Drill
- Masking tape
- 100mm of 8mm threaded rod
- Epoxy glue
- Horn, bone or wooden spacer (optional)
- Acrylic paints (optional)
- Finishing oil and wax

Useful tips & advice

To make sure that you get the detail from the pattern accurately on your carving, I suggest that you trace all the detail on to a piece of clear acetate sheet with a permanent marker pen. You can then check that you are right as you go along by holding your acetate sheet in front of your carving.

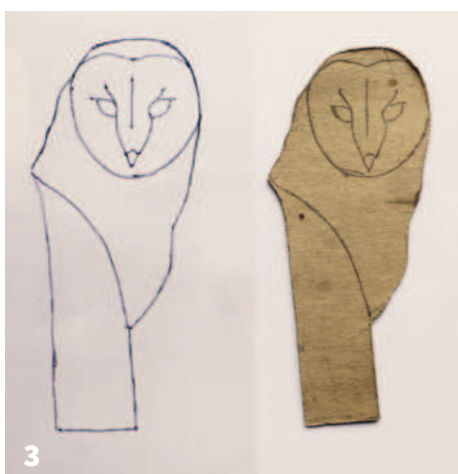




1



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4

1 Trace this pattern of the owl from the front and increase it to the size required.

2 Increase this pattern of the side view, left-hand side, to the size you want and transfer both the patterns to the wood. Take care that you have the patterns the right way round or your owl will be facing the wrong way.

3 Transfer the detail from the front pattern to an acetate sheet so you can check for accuracy while carving.

Useful tips & advice

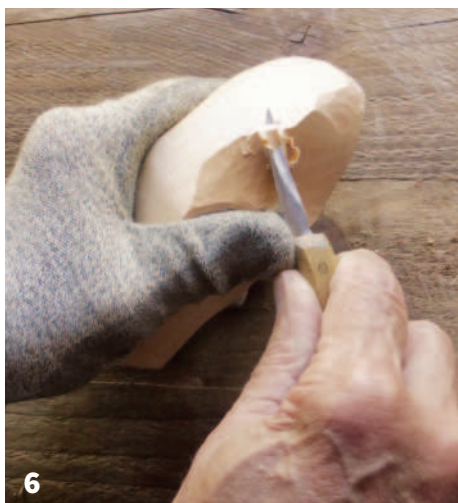
If you use tracing paper for your detail it can be more difficult to see clearly, as the paper becomes less translucent with age and can also shrink. Acetate sheet remains clear so that the lines underneath can be checked.

4 Cut out the shape using a coping saw or bandsaw, making sure you don't cut inside the lines. It is better for your owl to be too fat than too thin. Add the face detail using acetate and a pen.

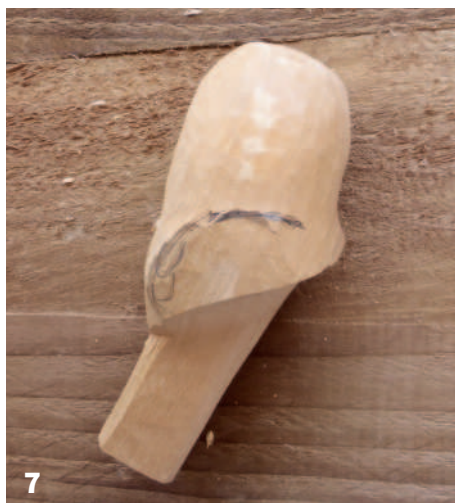
5 Cut the sides of the head back so that you have an angle of around 90° at the centre of the front.



5



6 Round off all the corners until there are no flats left on your block. Keep the overall shape a smooth round curve. Avoid adding flat areas of your own. You will not need to remove much wood to achieve this.



7 Once the shape is rounded, draw in the position of the wings on the front and the back. Check that they line up with each other and are the same shape. You might like to make a paper pattern to check this.



8 Shape underneath the face to form a hollow above the owl's right wing. Check the shape of the face with your acetate drawing. It is easy to make a mistake here and make the face too small or pointed.



9 Remove the waste underneath the bird's body to shape the block underneath that will form the stick extension.



10 Blend into the block underneath, avoiding any hard lines. Keep the actual extension piece square at this stage.

11 Using a small No.9 gouge or similar, you can now start shaping the face. I advise you to get a decent photograph of a barn owl's face before you do too much shaping. So often, what you think you see is not actually there.





12 It is a good idea to carve the eyes at this stage. You will almost certainly need to set them back further when you finish the face, but shaping them now gives you some practice – you may have difficulty getting them right first time.

13 Draw in the feathers at the front edge of each of the wings – these will be the only feathers that you will need to carve.

14 As the head is turned, the feathers at the back don't need to be as detailed as those at the front. The feathers of the back cover most of the wing feathers.

15 Carve the wing feathers with a knife or small gouge and sand to a good finish. You can now sand the whole of the body and wings.



16 Before you do the final detailing to the face, I suggest that you prepare the head for fitting to the stick. The first thing is to draw lines down the centre of each face of the stem and a cross where they meet at the end.

17 You will need someone to help you when drilling a 3in (8mm) hole for the threaded rod to go down the centre. His or her job will be to ensure that you drill straight down the lines you have marked, otherwise the head will not sit straight on the stick. Drill to a depth of around 2in (50mm).



18 Using the same procedure, drill a hole down the centre of the stick to the same depth. If you wrap some masking tape around the top of the stick you can protect it from any damage as you work.

19 Ensure that the end of the shaft of the owl head is absolutely flat and square before gluing in your threaded rod with epoxy glue. You will need to twist it around to ensure that it reaches the bottom of the hole with no air inside to force it out. If you wish to use a spacer between the head and the stick, as I did, this will need to be glued at this stage. A spacer made of horn, wood or bone would be suitable. Offer up the head to the stick and mark the shape of the stick on the base of the head ready to remove the waste wood.

20 Remove as much of the waste as you can before gluing the two together.

21 Glue the two parts together, either holding tightly in place until the glue sets or tying firmly in place with string or tape. Using your knife or, if you have one, a fairly fine rasp or file, blend the shaft of the owl to the top of the stick. Make sure that the two form a straight line and a consistent diameter from stick to owl.

22 You can now go back and finish the detail of the face using your owl pictures as a guide. Check that the eyes are symmetrical and the same shape. I have painted the eyes here as I feel this gives the carving more life. I used black acrylic paint with a small drop of clear nail varnish on top to give shine. Two tiny white spots finish the eyes. Once this has been done, give the whole carving a coat of finishing oil and then polish it with wax.

23 If you choose then you can paint your owl. This photograph of a full-sized carved barn owl shows what the painted carving would look like. ●



18



19



20



21



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23



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BDWCA news & events

Shows and competitions

When this issue of the magazine arrives on your door mat we will be in the process of getting ready for the Global Birdfair at Rutland, Oakham, on 15–17 July. One of our prize-winning carvers always volunteers to provide a bird for our raffle, which is popular with the visitors. This year, Steve Toher has put his hand up, although what bird it will be is still a secret at the time of writing, but the waxwing he carved for us back in 2017 was very popular. We'll tell you about this year's bird in the next issue.

Back in 2016 the Birdfair raffle bird was a green woodpecker, carved by Roger Francis, which kept trying to walk off the table. I wonder if there will be any trying to emulate that trick at our Annual Show and Competition at Bakewell on 10 and 11 September because we are expecting a display of woodpeckers in our Regional Group Competition!

This year's subject, chosen by our Cheshire Group who won the 2021 competition with their display of kingfishers, is any British woodpecker – lesser spotted, great spotted and green, and also the wryneck, which is a member of the woodpecker family.

Over the years there have been quite a few woodpeckers appear on the competition tables, including the great spotted woodpecker which won Kathleen Winn the Best Youth award in 2009, but not many carvers have displayed all three on one branch as Ron Dickens did in 2008.

Talking about our Annual Show, we anticipate having two wood suppliers at the show, and in previous years have watched pallet trucks of wood being wheeled out of the hall. One supplier will have plentiful supplies of blocks of Jelutong and European Lime, and the other more specialist woods, almost certainly including English Lime, so you could visit the show and stock up on your wood supplies at the same time!



2008 Woodpeckers by Ron Dickens



Best Youth carving 2009, Great Spotted Woodpecker by Kathleen Winn



2008 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker by Keith Royle



2016 Raffle Green Woodpecker by Roger Francis

BDWCA Raffle



Win this beautiful carving of a Waxwing

Carved by
Award Winning Carver, Steve Toher

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2017 Birdfair raffle for a waxwing carved by Steve Toher

Diary dates

Friday to Sunday, 15, 16 and 17 July 2022

The BDWCA will be exhibiting in the Art Marquee at the **Global Birdfair**, which is being held in its new location of the Rutland Showground, Oakham.

See www.globalbirdfair.org for more details.

Saturday and Sunday, 10 and 11 September 2022

The National Bird Carving Championships, 'The Festival of Bird Art', in Bakewell, Derbyshire.

Featuring the BDWCA Annual Competitions for members and the British Bird Carving Championship 2022, which is open to all.

A wide variety of bird and wildfowl carvings at Youth, Novice, Intermediate and Advanced levels.

Demonstrations of wildfowl carving, painting, stick making, and decorative techniques will take place during the weekend.

Stockists of carving supplies, books, equipment, paints and wood for carving will also be present.

See www.bdwca.org.uk for more details.



Cheshire Group 1st 2021 Regional Group Competition

For further information...

...on the BDWCA, as well as membership details, visit www.bdwca.org.uk. Membership includes three issues of the full colour magazine, *Wingspan*.

Or contact the membership secretary:
Mrs Janet Nash, 26 Shendish Edge,
Hemel Hempstead, HP3 9SZ, Tel: 01442 247610
Alternatively, please email:
pam.wilson@bdwca.org.uk

From the community

A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community



Back to the club house

Just to show my first carving since Shropshire Woodcarvers reconvened after the lockdowns. It was great to get back and chat and carve and drink coffee and chat some more. It was also good to get advice on this carving from other members, which I guess is why many of us do belong to clubs (forming the reeds as relief work is not my forte). Background is ash. The otter, inspired by North American first nation art, is in rosewood.

*Cheers, Dave Taplin
(Shropshire Woodcarvers)*

A nod to the master

I have included my recent rendition of the master, Mike Woods's Fieldfare. I hope you feel I've done him proud. I did want to carve it but was conscious that I had to do well for the master.

*Hope you like it.
Regards, John Williams*





Meeting Mike Painter

Shropshire WoodCarvers have had the most amazing luck – the fabulous world-renowned master wood carver Mike Painter has moved to a little town called Clun in Shropshire. What is lucky about that you may well ask. Well, after finding out about his move to this little gem of a town we invited him to come to one of our weekly meetings, whereupon he agreed to come back and give us a talk on carving letters.

All went well on the letter carving night and Mike seemed to relax and enjoy himself and his insistence on letter spacing and getting it right made a big impression on all in attendance. At our next meeting a proposal to offer Mike an honorary life membership was agreed unanimously and Mike graciously accepted.

Of course, we soon had Mike lined up for another demo and this was to be the carving of eyes, something that we all struggle with.

This is where the real value of someone of Mike's standing and skill becomes so valuable to the members. Besides the small carving he did for us during the session and explaining the measurements and spacing of a face, he also brought with him a fantastic bust of William Morris of the Arts & Crafts movement plus a number of busts which put me in mind of Victorian death masks.

Mike explained that he had made at least five of these busts of William Morris, plus other luminaries of the Arts & Crafts movement for a commission. When you see and touch a piece of this quality it hits home how far you can go as an amateur (or not). Being a very modest man when I commented what a fantastic artist he is, he demurred and insisted that he is just a carver, albeit a master carver. But I'll stick to my opinion of what an artist he is.

Kind regards, Mick

Tree frog

*Cynthia Rogers carves
this arboreal amphibian*



Teak was my choice for the frog because of the definite lines or stripes in the timber. Don't be deterred by the natural colours that are in various timbers as often they can work in your favour. This timber is fairly soft and cuts easily, but does tend to be a little 'hairy'. This results in the need for sanding – this timber is not recommended for a chisel finish.

Any timber of contrasting colour could be used for the

backing, but lime would have to be one of the most preferred timbers for woodcarvers worldwide. It cuts cleanly and crisply without a great deal of effort, holds detail extremely well and can be sanded or left with a chisel finish. It does, on occasion, have small faults in it, but these are overlooked as being indigenous to the craft. It is well worth using this timber on any carving project.

Things you will need

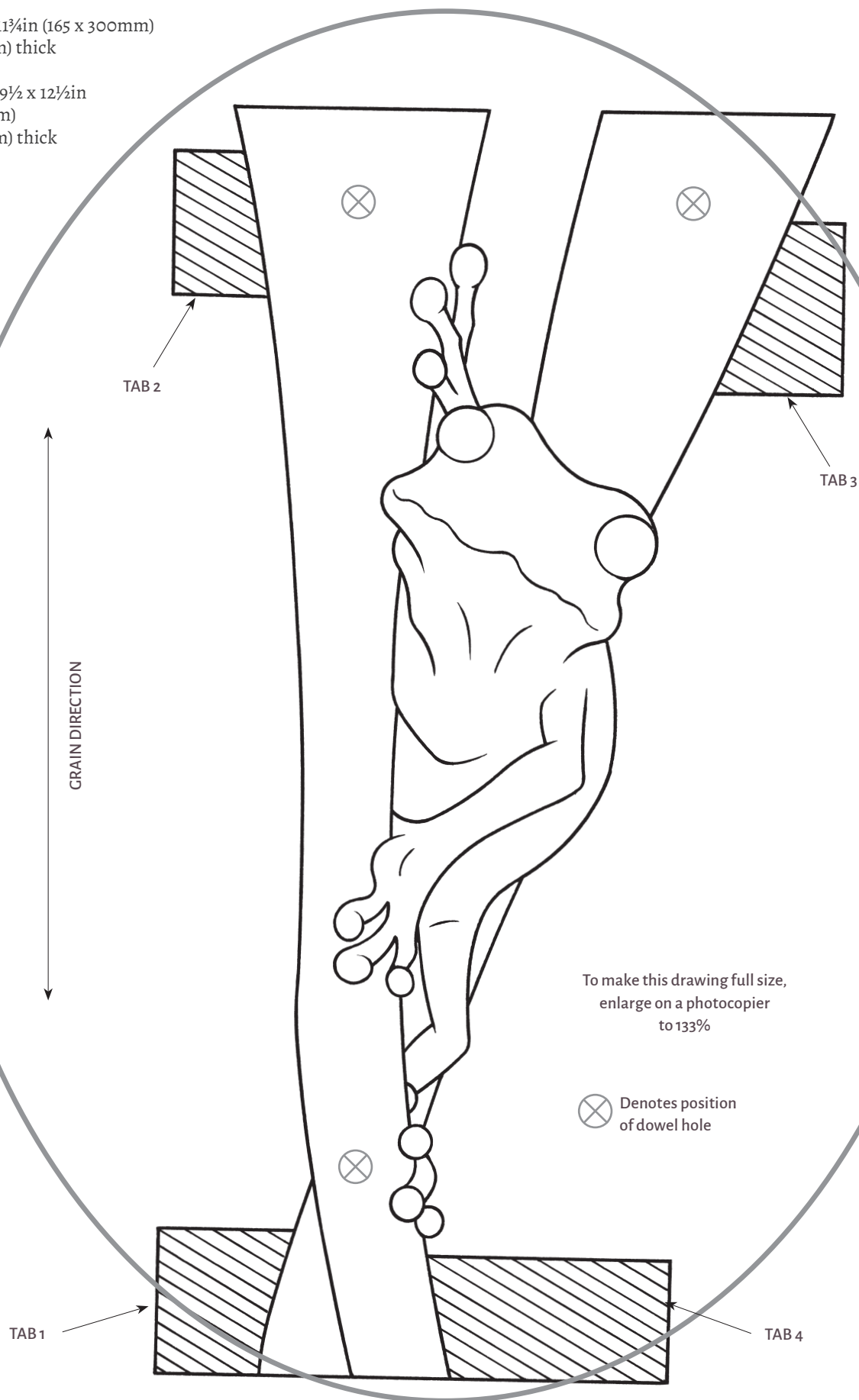
Timber

Carving:

Teak, $6\frac{1}{2}$ x $11\frac{3}{4}$ in (165 x 300mm)
x 2in (50mm) thick

Backing:

Lime, oval, $9\frac{1}{2}$ x $12\frac{1}{2}$ in
(241 x 318mm)
x $\frac{3}{8}$ in (16mm) thick



◀ The clay model

1 Make a basic model in the usual way, pricking the design through the paper to leave the details prominent. The frog is clinging to a type of cane and is actually between the two stalks, the piece on the right being the furthest away.

Scribe a line along the right-hand side of the clay, 1in (25mm) up from the baseboard (that is, half the thickness of the clay) at the top end, sloping down to $\frac{3}{4}$ in (19mm) at the lower end. Reduce the clay on the right-hand stalk to this mark. Do not remove clay from behind the frog.

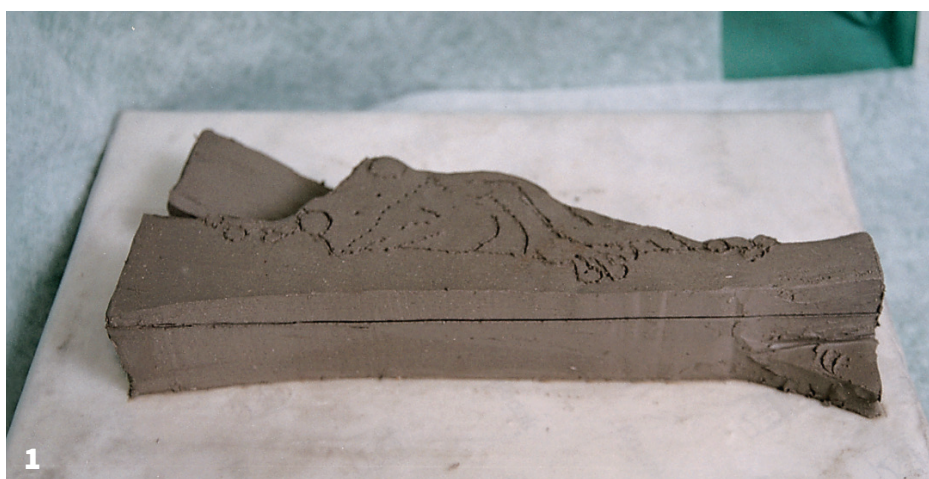
Mark the left stalk on the outside $1\frac{1}{2}$ in (41mm) thick at the top, sloping down to $1\frac{1}{4}$ in (32mm) at the bottom.

2 Lower the clay on the left stalk, working slowly so as not to remove the detail of the toes. Note the small sections on the right where the pencils are pointing; these areas are part of the right stalk and need to be reduced to the line made earlier.

3 Round the edges of the stalks by removing a little clay from the corners. On the top (wider) section of the right-hand stalk the leaf has been 'stepped' to give more contour and to add interest. This is done by dragging a V-shaped piece of wood through the clay repeatedly. Do not undercut.

4 Treat the top of the left leaf in the same manner, only sloping it down towards the centre – making sure you leave enough clay for the foot. Sloping the clay down on the inside makes it easier to get the foot situated. For the upper foot (above the head), lower the clay to $\frac{1}{2}$ in (3mm) above the leaf and shape the fingers. The frog's 'hands' have definite fingers, with round and bulbous tips; they should look as though they are holding on to the stalk.

5 Do the same for the bottom foot, remembering that these do not have to be perfect as the model is only a guide. Set in the hind leg and the belly so it all fits in place, working only as far as the shoulder.





6

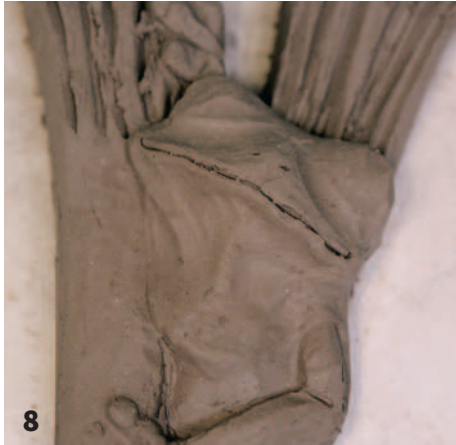


7

6 Notice that part of the frog's chest protrudes in front of the stalk. The lower chest area is below the level of the stalk and creates a hollow where it joins on to the abdomen. Shape the lower hand and arm up to the elbow.

7 The centre of the mouth is the highest point (the furthest forward); from here the mouth curves back to the corners. Reduce the clay at each corner of the mouth until the correct curve has been achieved, then redraw the mouth line. Now that the mouth profile has been established, the chin and throat area can be set in. Keep in mind that frogs have a 'baggy' throat and that on these fellows wrinkles look good.

Scape the clay in the direction that you wish to form the wrinkles, leaving a ridge below the mouth for the jawbone. Fit the top of the arm to suit.



8



9

8 The nostrils are sited on the high ridge of the face, which slopes down on both sides to the outer jaw and back to the top of the head. Scape the clay away to obtain the shape, then roughly round the eyes.

9 Mark in the eyes using a skewer or kebab stick, leaving them very bulbous so that they protrude. The model is now complete and ready for us to measure from.



10

The carving

Drill three $\frac{3}{4}$ in (6mm) holes for the dowels in the back of the timber and make the template; this is easy to do while the wood is flat.

10 With either a chisel or the knife, stab-cut along the line of the design above the frog's head, and between the leaf and tab 3. Lower the top of the leaf to match the clay.

Notice that the ends of the leaf have been profiled by using the V-tool repeatedly to give an irregular depth and look to the leaf.



11



12

11 Stab-cut the left side of the design, taking care when working around the toes. Lower the level on this side and round the stalk with the fishtail. Match the top of the leaf by again cutting with the V-tool.

12 Stab-cut along the lower edge of the arm and reduce the level of the timber with the $\frac{3}{8}$ until the belly has been reached; then redraw the details.

13 Cut in the leg and the lower levels of the stalk with either the $\frac{3}{8}$ or the $\frac{5}{8}$; the groin will be the lowest area shown. The details of the hands and feet will be left until last.



13

14 Stab-cut along the line of the arm and reduce the arm to the required level (checked from the model). Use the $\frac{5}{8}$ to reduce the bulk of the waste from under the chest until the level of the arm is reached; revert to the $\frac{5}{8}$ and the $\frac{3}{8}$ to cut the area between arm and belly. Cut away the sharp outer edge of the belly with the fishtail to round it off.

15 Use the $\frac{5}{16}$ to shape the contour of the jawbone, leaving enough of a ridge underneath for the chin and lip. Cut the sagging skin under the throat and upper chest with either the $\frac{5}{16}$ or the $\frac{5}{8}$ and blend it into the belly area. Sand lightly to clarify the details.

16 Using the $\frac{3}{8}$, lower the height of the top hand above the stalk to $\frac{1}{8}$ in (3mm); then leave it for the moment. When shaping the face of the frog, cut away only small amounts of wood at a time, and step back now and then to get the work into perspective. Use the $\frac{5}{8}$ to relieve the wood from between the eyes and round the top of the head, ensuring that plenty of timber is left for the eyes to protrude from the face. The $\frac{5}{8}$ is also used to cut the groove that runs from above the side of the mouth, below the eyes and up to the ridge of the nose; check with the clay model at regular intervals for measurements. Pencil in the eyes again but do not cut them yet.

17 Redraw the details of the fingers of the upper hand on the timber. If you feel that there is insufficient wood to fit the hand in, then lower the whole area of the upper frond. Canting this area towards the centre will allow a larger amount of timber for the fingers and hand. Redraw the details.

Tabs 2 and 3 can now be removed. Slope the back of the head down towards the right frond – this needs cutting back only enough so that it cannot be seen from the front – then sand. Sand the whole face, round the eyes so that the bulbous shape is very definite, and make sure that they are of equal size.

18 Trim excess from around the fingers and the back of the hand with either the $\frac{3}{8}$ or the $\frac{5}{8}$. Take very small cuts and work slowly so the timber does not splinter away from the design.

Continue to remove the waste gently from around the fingers until the shape has been cleared; when stab-cutting around the fingers take care not to cut too deeply, so as not to mark the lower timber. Use the $\frac{5}{8}$ to cut the depression between the soft ends and the fingers; the photograph shows the ends of the fingers being shaped using the $\frac{3}{8}$.

19 The inside curve of the $\frac{3}{8}$ is here being used to round the top edges, cutting across the grain at an angle to lessen the chance of splintering. Sand the hand all over for clarity.



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20 When you are satisfied with the fingers they can be undercut gently using the $\frac{5}{8}$, the principles being the same as for the previous projects.

21 Pencil in the eyes, but do not cut them yet. I find that if they are drawn in and then left a while, any lack in symmetry will be noticed when we return. Undercut the side of the face, neck, and chest areas where they touch the stalk, and sand the area under the jaw.

22 Draw in the mouth if necessary and, using either the carving knife or the $\frac{5}{8}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$, cut in the mouth line. The photograph



shows the left side of the mouth cut in an irregular line by stab-cutting with the $\frac{3}{8}$ chisel, turning it to follow the contour as required. The edge is then pared away carefully with the same chisel so as to open the gap slightly. Sand gently.

23 Cut the right side of the mouth to match the left, and sand the area gently. Continue to sand the stomach, stalk and arm down to the lower hand, and draw the details of the fingers ready for cutting. Clean up if required any small rubbish between hind leg and stalk, then sand the lower belly and hind leg down to the back foot. Cut the eyes in the same manner as you



do for other animals – the only difference here is that the eyes are round and bulbous. Ensure that the chisel used ($\frac{5}{8}$) fits the curve of the eye, or there will be unsightly marks left all around the eyeball. Use the same chisel or the $\frac{3}{8}$ to round the ball of the eye. The photograph shows the right eye cut in but not yet sanded.

Cut the left eye to match the right before sanding both of them together; this makes it easier to get them to match up.

24 Cut the lower hand in the same manner as the top hand, by removing the waste and cutting the pads in first, before shaping the fingers and sanding. Do the same for the lower foot, cutting away only enough of tab 4 to allow access to the toes. Sand all over and, when satisfied, cut away tab 1.

25 Mark the nostrils in with pencil, and then drill the two holes using a $\frac{1}{32}$ in (0.8mm) drill. Wet to raise grain, sand and dry.

Painting the eyes is optional. I have oiled the carving with one coat of Danish oil to seal the timber before using artists' acrylic raw sienna to hide the stripes in the timber. Mars black was used for the slits, which can be either horizontal or vertical – both are correct. As our irises widen in the dark and shrink in the light, so do frogs' eyes, with the exception that theirs close to a slit, depending on the species.

The last remaining tab is now cut away and the area sanded. The entire carving was then finished with Danish oil. This was rubbed on to the stalks, but left thick on the frog to make him look shiny and wet.

The backing

Since drawing ovals can be difficult for those not familiar with the task, I suggest that you find a friendly picture framer near you. When they cut mounts (coloured cardboard surrounds) for photos and paintings, they throw away the centre part where the picture sits. If you ask, they will often sell or give you the centres of ovals and circles, and you can use these as templates to mark your backboards. It saves a lot of time.

Cut the oval and mark in pencil $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) from the back and $\frac{1}{2}$ in (12mm) in from the front edge. Bevel the edge back to these two marks in the same manner as used previously.

The backing in this case was given one coat of Danish oil and allowed to dry thoroughly; then the bevel only was sanded back to bare timber. The bevel then had one application of Contemporary Maple stain applied to it and allowed to dry. Coating the timber with one layer of oil beforehand allowed the stain to be confined to the one area, without bleeding onto the face of the wood.

When dry, the backing can be re-oiled in the normal manner, the hanger attached and the frog glued on with the dowels. ●





Sharpening in person

Nic Westermann invites a carver to his workshop to help with a troublesome tool

With the risks from Covid seemingly subsiding, I was finally able to enact one of my earliest plans for the Sharpening Clinic: for a carver to come to my workshop with tools they are having trouble sharpening. We would then analyse what we are trying to achieve and get to work, ideally using methods and equipment that the carver can then replicate back in their workshop.

Adam, who sent some of the first tools that I sharpened in this clinic, was having difficulty keeping them sharp and asked if I could provide some further instruction. It seemed like the perfect opportunity to kill two birds with one stone – Adam would learn and I would have an article.

The tool we are going to concentrate on in this article is a Stubai knife, which is listed as a chip carving knife, but when I looked at product reviews it seemed to be a popular whittling or carving knife. It looked to me with the grind it had that it would make a better whittler than chip carver. While there is an argument that a blade like this should have a convex bevel, it can be very difficult to sharpen as it is hard to know which bit of the curved bevel you are on. This can be seen from the first picture – what looks like a chunk out of the tip is actually another, steeper bevel that is effectively in shade. This was from some of Adam's earlier sharpening. (Pic 1)

It made sense to me to try to reshape this bevel to flat, as it would provide a good starting point for the final sharpening. So the first job was to accurately re-cut the bevel. Adam had brought a Lansky sharpening system with him so it made sense to work with this.

It took a bit of setting up as the primary grind on the blade meant that we didn't want the jaws to be parallel, they had to be angled inwards at their tips. Once this was done the blade was held reasonably firmly. I didn't have any instructions at this point but it was apparent to me that the numbers on the holes were relatively arbitrary. This was a very narrow blade and simple geometry meant that the sharpening angle varied with blade width. (Pic 2)

However, this didn't really matter, as we just picked the hole that came closest to matching the existing bevel, in this case nominally 20°. We did this by marking the bevel with a black Sharpie and it was pleasing to see that to start off we just removed the middle of the bevel, which showed how curved the bevel had become. In theory, if the blade was securely held in the jig we would end up with perfectly formed flat bevels. It's a capable system, it won't



cope well with stock removal or product work but to touch up narrow bevels it seemed to tick all the boxes.

As we progressed with the coarsest grit we could see that we were slowly getting towards forming an edge, finding that holding a piece of paper up to make a white background made it much easier to track this progress, however I also encouraged Adam to feel with his fingers for the all-important burr. This is simply done by stroking from spine to edge across the bevel that is opposite the one being sharpened. (Pic 3)



1 Stubai in need of attention 2 Blade held in place and stone offered up to the edge 3 Nearly there – all the black marker needs to be removed, and a burr felt



4 A more rigid set-up in the vice **5** Adam polishing **6** Final bevel – not totally flat but a good foundation to work from

At this point we held the jig differently in the vice, this meant we could use more force on the set up before it was obviously flexing and thus altering the geometry of the bevel. (Pic 4)

Once we had burr along the entire length of the blade we flipped the jig and worked on the other bevel. This was much narrower – suggesting that either the initial sharpening we were working with was wildly inaccurate and the edge was not down the centreline of the blade, or the jig was not holding the blade centrally. We could have fixed this by spending more time on the narrower bevel, thus lengthening it, which has the effect of shortening the opposing bevel. In my production work I call this balancing the bevels, and with a powerful grinder it is quickly done. By hand it is much more long winded and, as it is more of an aesthetic issue than something that is actually noticed in use, we decided to leave it as it was.

The first step was complete when the edge had been formed by grinding both bevels flat. We now had to sharpen the tool by refining the finish on these bevels, working down through the grits, removing the scratches left from the previous grits.

In a well-held (jigged) system this should be very quick, as each grit should have a tiny amount of steel to remove, just the depth of the scratch patterns. To check this we marked the bevels with the Sharpie and put in the next stone – it lined up reasonably well but not perfectly – but it didn't take that long to obliterate all of the marker. To be safe, we then marked it again and repeated the process to be sure we had got through the scratch pattern.

This was repeated for both bevels and we worked down through all the grits to the enigmatically named extra fine. It wasn't perfect and the finer the grit the slower it is to cut a subtle new bevel angle, but we got there in the end. Adam was able to feel the burr bedding progressively finer along with the grits, which was a useful lesson as well.

But, after all this effort, did it cut? Sadly, no, not really. I like to take test cuts in paper as you get to feel for the state of the whole edge – the knife cut in places but there were lots of blunt spots along the edge. I could see Adam was disappointed, but looking at the amount of flex in the whole system I wasn't that surprised. As we tried to cut with the finer stones we used more pressure, which caused the system to deflect more. This deflection meant we ended up working at the back of the bevel rather than the edge. It might make things look pretty but it contributes nothing to the quality of the edge. This flex meant the edge we had formed varied slightly in the cutting angle and the finish, depending on which

stones had reached the edge. However, despite all this the bevel form was much improved from our starting point. We moved on to my polisher to even out and refine the edge, on a hard felt wheel loaded with compound. I spent some time explaining how to polish the bevel safely but let Adam complete this stage all by himself. As ever, we used the Sharpie-marked bevel as an instant tell of where the polishing was actually being done. (Pic 5)

And within a few minutes it was done and slicing paper beautifully. I usually try to get a blade sharp before polishing, as polishing is not very accurate and will tend to round a bevel, so the less you have to do the better. But this knife is not one of my bread-and-butter sloyd blades where a dead-flat bevel is paramount. A slightly convex bevel can actually be an advantage in some of the carving that Adam does. And realistically stropping – the hand-powered version of polishing – is how Adam will maintain this edge for the foreseeable future. (Pic 6)

Someone less forgiving than Adam might ask: why spend ages unsuccessfully flattening a bevel to only convex the edge later on, and then pretend that was what you were after all along?

It's a good question. And yes I would have preferred a dead-flat bevel form to start with, while accepting that it would get progressively more rounded by repeated re-sharpening. But the thing is we ended up with a blade that started with a relatively shallow edge angle. We could have just put the blade straight on the polisher with a coarse felt to blend in the wonky bevel and then refined the edge on a finer felt and it would have felt sharp and been done very quickly. But the edge angle would have been incredibly obtuse and would have only got worse with repeated stropping. An edge like this goes blunt very quickly and needs more and more stropping to recover the edge, which exasperates the problem. And once this stage is reached there would be no way for Adam to recover the blade.

Another aspect is that if you aim for dead flat you will probably get quite close with a small amount of convexing, however in my experience if you aim for convex there is no real way to quantify how convex you want the bevel to be and so often the edge angle ends up way too obtuse, as this blade was when I first saw it.

The process we followed was not perfect but was one that Adam is now able to repeat when necessary. Hopefully it will be a while before he needs to, but we spent so long doing it I'm hopeful he will find he still has the muscle memory of the process when the time comes.



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.

I am looking 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 time scales 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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Carving Countries

Will Barsley visits the carvers of Laos

In this series, William Barsley looks back on the journey that inspired his career change from an office worker to a professional woodcarver. William travels into Laos from Thailand, where he meets an indigenous community of woodcarvers and discovers an inspiring social enterprise called Backstreet Academy

The journey

Our time in Thailand had come to an end and we were ready to move on and into Laos. We had heard of a two-day boat ride down the Mekong to Luang Prabang that departed from near the Laos/Thailand border crossing. Loading up the bikes, we set off for the border, passing through Chiang Rai. It was a hard four days of riding that saw us pass through storms, steep hills, and endless stretches of coffee plantations, but we were rewarded with two of the best hours of riding we've ever experienced through a quiet and flat valley surrounded by hills. The boat, a long thin vessel much like the narrow boats found in the UK but capable of holding near to 70 people, left early in the morning. Loading the bikes on to the roof of the boat, we set off down the river. The next two days were spent weaving our way through steep gorges and fast flowing rapids, the skipper masterfully avoiding many protruding boulders.

Laos covers an area of 236,800km², slightly smaller than the UK, and has 16 provinces stretching 1,162km from north to south. It's a country of huge diversity, whether that be in the landscape, which seemed to consist largely of either huge mountain ranges over 2,000m high, or the Mekong river valley near to sea level, and in the ethnic diversity of its 6 million people, distributed among four main ethnolinguistic groups representing over 100 ethnic groups and sub-groups. As we've found in other countries throughout this journey, woodcarving has been popular in Laos for many years, particularly within the Royal Palace and Buddhist temples, which are adorned with sculptures and religious figures.



◀ Notable Woodcarvers

The Ta Oy

While visiting the Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre in Luang Prabang I met with the director, who kindly informed me of an ethnic group in southern Laos called the Ta Oy, who still practice their traditional methods of woodcarving. The particular group I wanted to find was located in the village of Ban Nong Bueng. Knowing only the location of the village, I spent the following few days trying to find a translator and guide as the group was a long way off the beaten track. Eventually, I found Mr Tong, who worked in a nearby hotel and not only spoke great English but was, in fact, the nephew of one of the main woodcarvers in the village. We decided to leave early the next day. It turned out to be a long and dusty journey on his bike, about an hour and a half each way, transitioning from the busy town of Pakse through quiet suburbs and then beautiful countryside. Tong had pre-warned the village of my arrival and so, as soon we arrived, we were met by several carvers.

At the entrance to the village was a small community meeting house, adorned with symbolic woodcarvings. The village Bang Nong Bueng was formed in the 1800s by three families who relocated from the nearby mountains. There are now 35 Ta Oy families living in the village, many of whom rely on carving and farming for their livelihood.

Wandering around the village, we first came to Mr Na sitting on the ground carving a number of huge figures. It would take him two weeks to finish this carving. Mr Na, then 45 years old, began carving in 1995 and was taught by his uncle. He usually sells his work in either Pakse or the capital, Vientiane. Like many carvers in the village, Mr Na is a seasonal carver, tending to his rice fields during the busy farming months between June and September. The chisels Mr Na was using were given to him by an NGO called the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which bought tools for all the carvers in the village and helped them sell their work. As you can perhaps tell from the photos, members of this community live a basic life, receiving very little for their carvings in comparison to what they are sold for in the cities. Nevertheless, Mr Na and his wife say they are happy and enjoy woodcarving a lot and that, with the help of NGOs like JICA, they have better access to markets and can eventually receive a good price for their work.

Next, we came to Mr Klang, sat in a woodland glade, who was carving a figure of an elderly lady out of green wood. He says that it's a common practice to carve with green wood in the village as they prefer carving when the wood is softer so that they can finish a statue such as this in a single day. At 37 years old, Mr Klang has been carving for 15 years and does mainly commission-based work for hotels or private buyers. I was amazed by the speed of his carving, and it was clear he had perfected his design and imprinted the process in his memory. He told me that at least 50% of his income comes from carving. Inside a nearby hut was a huge panel of solid wood intricately carved with a scene of daily life. Mr Klang was commissioned to do this piece three years ago by a new hotel, but had not been set a time limit. The carving is not far from completion, and is a beautiful piece of work, covered in fun images of traditional daily life in the village. The hotel is said to be paying him 12 million lak for the project, the equivalent of approximately £1,000.

It was a special day meeting the carvers of Bang Nong Bueng and seeing their passion for carving. A special thanks must go to my guide and translator, Tong, without whom I would have struggled to find the village and bring you these stories.



1



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3

1 Spot the bikes on the roof of the boat heading into Laos 2 Mr Klang carving with his apprentice 3 A close-up of Mr Klang's carving for the hotel



4 Mr Na with the biggest chainsaw I've ever seen, about to prepare a huge log for carving an elephant **5** Mr Na carving two huge figures **6** A few of the large carvings on display outside a carver's home—notice the black colour from burning the timber **7** Applying the finishing wax to the carvings after they have been burnt



8



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11



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8 Myself and Mr Lon, with the finished elephant 9 Mr Lon carving a buddha 10 Carving the elephant, bench was a little bit low for me here 11 Roughing out the elephant profile 12 Close-up of the elephant carving

Backstreet Academy

Inspired by my time with the Ta Oy, I set about looking for a way to get carving myself. By chance, I stumbled across a project called the Backstreet Academy, which provides meaningful experiences for travellers such as myself. It was exactly what I was looking for.

'Do good as you travel. Make a difference to local communities wherever you go with unique hand-crafted experiences. Alleviate poverty, conserve heritage, and bring home an experience to remember, all at once'. Quote from Backstreet Academy website.

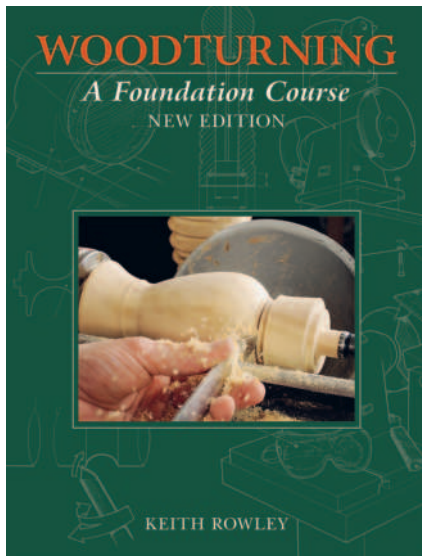
I found a two-day carving course with a master carver called Mr Lon in the beautiful town of Luang Prabang. The project connected me with a translator who joined throughout the course, helping me to communicate with Mr Lon, who spoke very little English. Mr Lon studied with a carver from the Royal Palace and has since become a well-known carver throughout Laos in his own right.

Starting early at 8am, I cycled down, carrying my bike across the river over a rickety old bamboo bridge and up steep steps

to his house. Our task for the day was to make a small elephant which is commonly seen throughout Laos. Knowing I had some carving experience, Mr Lon invited me to use the harder wood with a beautiful golden grain. He was an excellent teacher and was extremely encouraging and trusting in the process. We carved the elephant step by step and at each stage he would show me the lines to cut and the waste wood to be removed. It was my first time carving an elephant, so it was amazing to see the form slowly taking shape. Since I completed this journey back in 2014, Backstreet Academy has gone from strength to strength, winning many accolades. Its ability to connect people looking to experience a country's culture and arts, but also give back in a fair and honest way, is spot on.

Next time, William crosses over into Vietnam, cycling down its coast, meeting woodcarvers and discovering a small island dedicated to carving and the arts. ●

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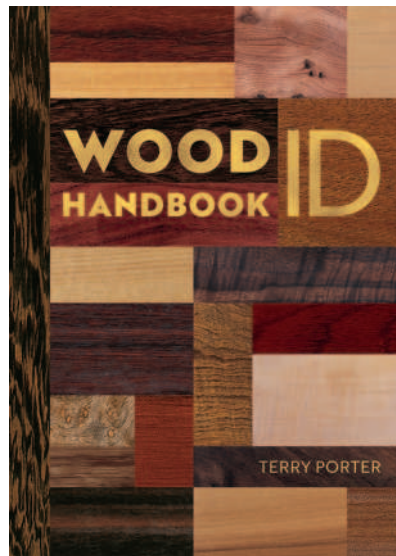


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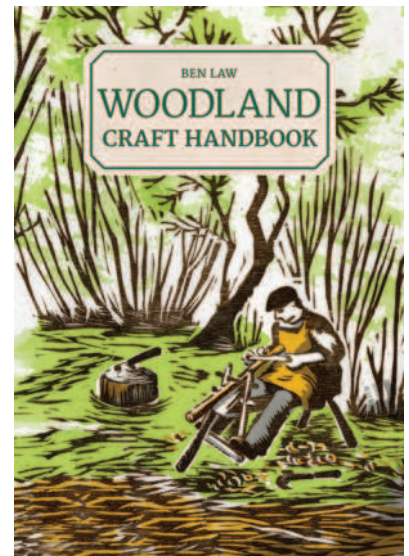
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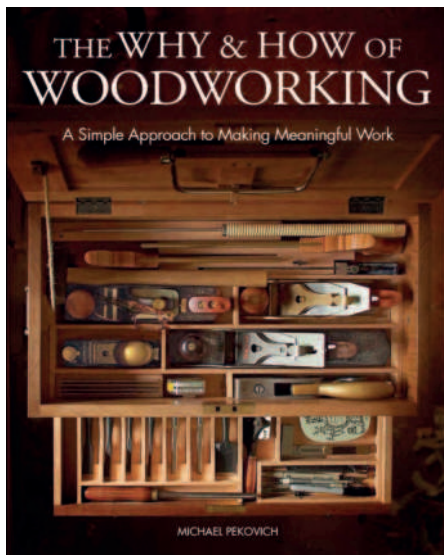
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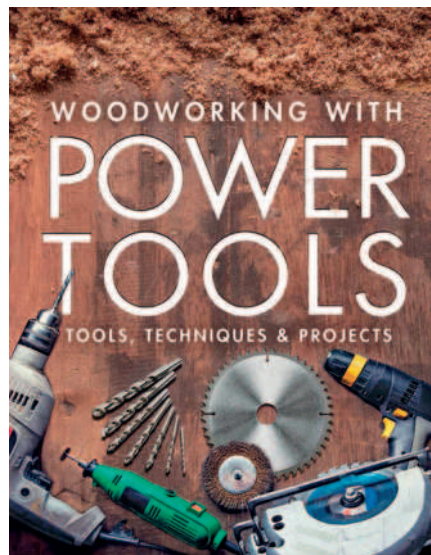


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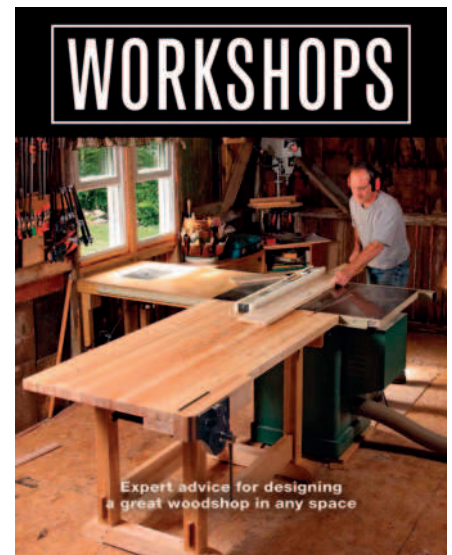


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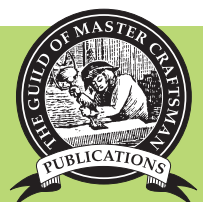
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Kevin Alviti makes a set of gnocchi paddles with a decorative pattern and Steve Bisco carves and gilds an elaborate Baroque swirl

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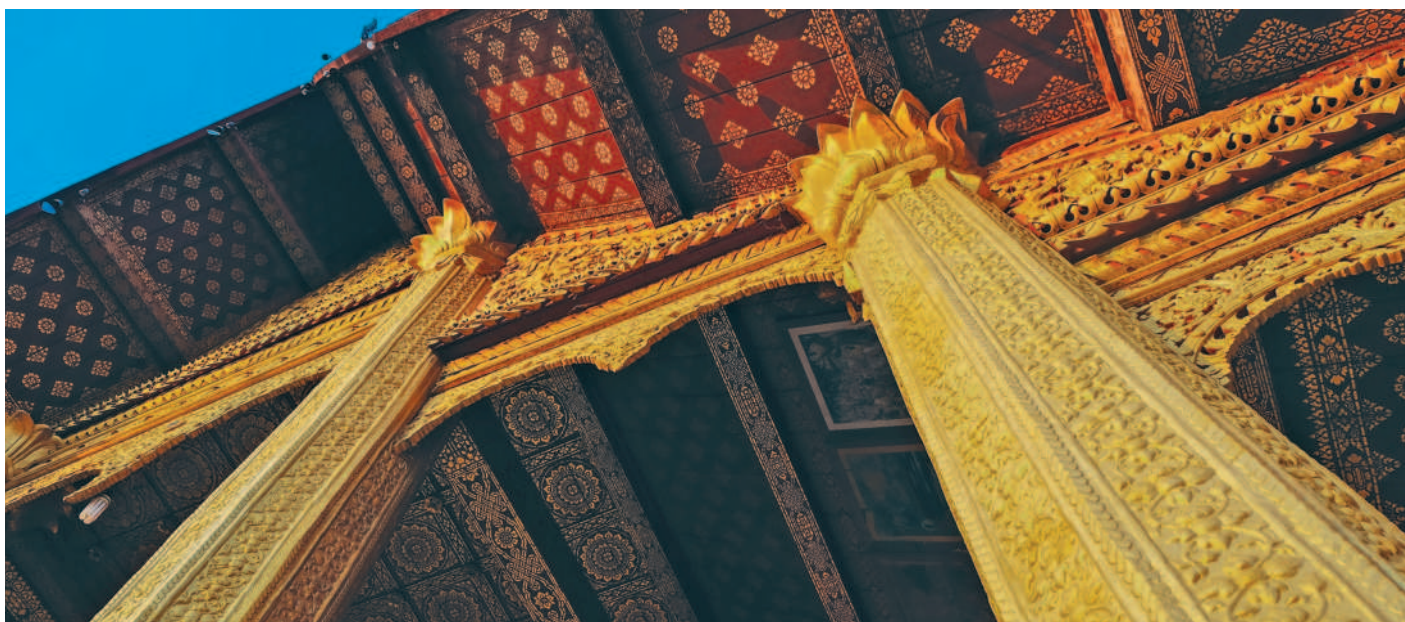
Wat Sensoukaram

We take a closer look at one of the architectural jewels of Luang Prabang, Laos



The city of Luang Prabang in north central Laos is a World Heritage site, known for its architectural, religious and cultural background. One of its greatest sights is the Buddhist temple Wat Sensoukaram (The Temple of 100,000 Treasures), its name referring to the 100,000 kip donation that was used to build it. The temple was commissioned by King Kitsarath in 1718 and was constructed using stones from the Mekong River.

The temple's façade is impressive: the stone walls are painted a rich ruby red and decorated with intricate gold inlay. These golden designs include images of Buddhist deities standing on horses and lions and holding lotus blossoms. The sim (assembly hall) is made in an architectural style that is more common in Thailand, particularly with its orange roof tiles. The temple was restored in 1957 to commemorate 2,500 years since the Buddha's birth.



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