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DAVE WESTERN GUEST EDITOR

- Introduces the issue
- Talks about his love of spoon carving
- Profiles carver David Stanley



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Guest editor's letter

Dave Western



As a fellow woodcarver and frequent contributor to *Woodcarving* magazine, I am tremendously honoured to have been entrusted with the position of guest editor for this month's edition. I derive a great deal of pleasure from invariably being taught something new and exciting every time this magazine drops through the letterbox. I believe I owe *Woodcarving* magazine a debt of gratitude, and hope to return the favour by contributing a couple of worthwhile and engaging articles.

Whether you are a professional, keen amateur or a relaxed hobbyist woodcarver, you no doubt appreciate the difficulties and the triumphs of executing a carving successfully. From the initial germ of an idea, through to the polished, gleaming result, there is much that can either go happily right or terribly wrong. Wood, as we all know, is a capricious material. To become a good carver requires the mastery not only of many techniques and tools, but also of the understanding of a complex living material that frequently sets its own rules. While many of us spend countless years learning this through solitary trial and error, reading the articles and exploits our carving colleagues share within these pages can help us speed the educational process, avoid myriad mistakes, stimulate our imaginations and give us a sense of community.

Carvers are a diverse bunch and to see the range of projects, techniques, and features presented each month in *Woodcarving*

perpetually makes me realise how vast and varied a subject woodcarving is and just how much I have yet to discover and learn. But I also believe this magazine's value is not simply restricted to what I can learn from each individual issue. Frequently, I see something in these pages that makes me pause and seriously reflect on what it means to me to be a woodcarver.

It might be something as simple as seeing a picture of an elegant piece of tropical hardwood that moves me to consider how I feel about the environmental sustainability of forest practices, both of foreign countries and the one where I live. Perhaps a historical carving or design style makes me ponder my connection to the rich histories and traditions of woodcarving, and whether my work is honouring or debasing them. Or it may be the sight of certain tools in use that encourages me to consider the variety of ways different cultures have approached the work of carving, and what I can learn from them. Whatever triggers one of these responses, I always find it an enlightening exercise to think about woodcarving beyond the simple boundaries of techniques and tools.

I sincerely hope that you will be motivated, enlightened and entertained by the projects and techniques in this month's issue. I also hope that you will discover one or two of those little thought-provoking nuggets that fire your creativity, and heighten your enjoyment of this remarkable craft.

Dave Western

Contents

Woodcarving issue 187



Guest Editor

- 1 Guest Editor's letter**
Our Guest Editor, Dave Western, welcomes you to this issue of *Woodcarving*
- 4 A seduction of spoons**
Lovespoons may be familiar as objects that originate in Wales, but Dave Western offers an insight into their broader European heritage
- 19 Celtic charm**
A gallery of our Guest Editor's past work
- 28 Art down under**
Dave Western introduces Australian artist David Stanley



Projects

- 10 Limewood floral posy**
Steve Bisco makes a foliage carving on a small scale
- 20 Watering can in boxwood**
In part one of a two-part article, Zoë Gertner makes the main body and spout for this garden staple
- 36 Meditation board**
John Samworth gets lost in this labyrinthine project
- 46 Water poppies**
Cynthia Rogers carves these delicate flowers from basswood
- 54 Nestling swan and cygnets**
Mark Gough creates a group of nestling birds with a vintage look
- 62 Orca within an orca**
Cedric Boyns undertakes an impressive whale project



46



62

Techniques

- 16 Do we see what we are looking at?**
Peter Benson's tips on how to better observe the physical attributes of figures you wish to carve
- 42 Carved eating spoons**
Working with form, grain types and orientation, as shown by expert green woodcarver, Paul Adamson
- 58 Nosing ahead**
This issue, Nic Westermann tackles an easier project when he sharpens a modified straight chisel

Community

- 35 Triton competition**
Find out how you could win a prize worth over £800
- 40 BDWCA news & events**
The latest news from the Association for Bird Carving
- 53 Subscribers**
Find out about our latest subscription offers
- 72 From the community**
A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community
- 79 Next issue**
Can't wait to see what's in store for the next issue of *Woodcarving*? We reveal a sneak peek at what to expect

Features

- 70 Supporting British craft**
We find out how QEST scholarships are helping carvers develop their talents
- 74 Carving countries**
Will Barsley continues his tour of Thailand
- 80 Thai Royal Barges, Bangkok**
We admire the carvings on the boats displayed in Thailand's National Museum of Royal Barges



36

A seduction of spoons

Lovespoons may be familiar as objects that originate in Wales, but Dave Western offers an insight into their broader European heritage

Although many may have a passing familiarity with the Welsh lovespoon and might even know a bit about its close ties with the courting practices of 17-19th-century Wales, generally very few know much about the romantic spoons that were carved throughout the rest of Europe during this same time period. It could well be argued that many European regions enjoyed 'romantic' spoon traditions every bit as rich (and often more complex) than that of Wales and it is thus a great shame that many of them are not better known by British and North American carvers. Perhaps as more and more museum collections are digitised and loaded to the internet, this wealth of history and tradition will become more accessible and will begin being studied in more depth.

While historically spoons were just one of myriad wooden objects that were frequently ornately carved and offered as romantic gifts, they remain one of very few traditional tokens still being crafted in appreciable numbers.

Why spoons?

Spoons were a remarkably popular love token throughout Europe and were carved and gifted in countries from Scandinavia through to Romania.

Many theories exist to explain why spoons were such a popular romantic gift; they are relatively easy to make, they are supremely portable and making one doesn't require much equipment. Lovestruck herders at pasture, sailors at sea and farmers toiling away by candlelight after a day's labour could all make a beautiful gift for their sweetheart with a couple of knives, an axe and a well-selected billet of wood.

It has often been suggested that romantic spoons were the offshoot of utilitarian soup spoons, invented when these unassuming utensils were ornamented with some modest love symbols, such as hearts and diamonds. The theory suggests that over the years, the adornments grew ever more complex until the spoons eventually lost their practical function and became ornamental. Despite being a good and plausible theory, it is more likely that they came about as a way for rural folk to mimic the

new-fangled metal spoons that were in vogue in 1600s Europe. The designs and patterns found on many Scandinavian spoons show distinct similarities to metal spoons and virtually no lovespoons found in Welsh collections have the rounder bowl of the cawl (soup) spoons which were carved for use at the table. Most romantic spoons tend to feature the more egg-shaped bowl that we are familiar with today and which had appeared in the early 1600s.

Wood can be a fragile material, and the existence of so many historical spoons in museum collections suggests that, even from the very earliest days of romantic spoon carving, a clear distinction existed between spoons that would be put to work and those that would be shown. Even some of the oldest dated examples, such as the Welsh spoon of 1667 and some of the European spoons from roughly the same time show little to no wear and tear. Indeed, the only noteworthy damage





1

1 Spoon bowls showing tip damage indicative of a fall to a hard floor

that appears on these old spoons are chips to the tip of the bowl where the spoon has fallen from its display hook on the wall and has been damaged by contact with the ground. Romantic spoons seem to have been honoured, valued and displayed with a good deal of care and attention.

Types of spoons

Although we may be tempted to think of romantic spoons merely as gifts given by lovestruck young suitors to initiate romances with the young ladies who had caught their fancy, the carving and gifting of these spoons was a complex and varied process. Like most customs and traditions, different regions developed their own ways both of carving spoons and of presenting them.

◀ Feeler/tester

This type of spoon would typically have been given more frivolously than the more serious courting and lovespoon-type romantic tokens. Often they would be carved in numbers either by the young man himself or by professional carvers, and would be only lightly detailed and decorated. At festivals or gatherings, the young man might give several of these spoons away to a number of young women who had caught his eye. He would judge the response of each lady to his gift, hoping they would be positive and encouraging. In this way, the young man could 'test the waters' without being overly committed.

The spoons typically would have lacked both the ornate detailing and the feeling of passion that more complex love and courting spoons demonstrated and were usually fairly straightforward in design. In some regions, the number of spoons she received from prospective suitors could bolster a young woman's social standing and desirability and she would proudly display them in a spoon rack or dowry chest.

Courting spoons

These spoons are of a type carved after a courtship was underway. The goal of the carver would not only be to astonish the young woman with virtuoso carving, but also to impress her father and family. These spoons are typically far more detailed and considered than the simpler tester spoons and are stylistically more in line with the spoons we recognise as lovespoons. Like many other wooden courting gifts of the time, the spoon would be shown in a position of prominence both during courtship and after the marriage had occurred. Courting gifts were objects of sentimental and material value and were much more highly prized and valued than tester-type spoons. A legend I have heard is that a young suitor would be allowed private visiting time with his intended if his hands were kept busy working on the spoon and he could show the young girl's father that noticeable carving progress had been made on it during the visit.

Lovespoons

Lovespoons, and in particular Welsh lovespoons, are likely the style most think of when they consider the spoon as a romantic token. Famous for their eclectic designs, Welsh spoons were very much works of unbridled passion. They were most likely given as relationship initiators rather than betrothal or courting gifts and were generally carefully and scrupulously carved. Judging by the level of carving skill, the commitment of time and the thoughtfulness of the designs, there must have been a lot riding on the acceptance of the suitor's offering by the young lady who had captured his heart. With the exception of a few simple pieces, most antique lovespoons appear to be the type of gift that would be given when a positive response seemed likely. Unlike its more conservative and uniform European counterparts, the Welsh lovespoon is much more flamboyant in its designs. Spoons are frequently awash with chain link, rolling balls in cages and may feature large, broad panels on which fretted, low-relief, etched and engraved designs flourished.

While the romantic spoon traditions of other countries faded away or became greatly diminished, the rural nature of Wales helped to sustain old traditions and spoons continued to be made in the old way right up to our modern era.

Likely due to the eclecticism of their designs and the richness of mythology (genuine and otherwise) surrounding the lovespoon, Welsh carvers were inspired to reimagine the spoons into the simplified tourist souvenir that has now become an iconic symbol of the country.



2 Although generally simply designed and ornamented, tester spoons displayed much carving skill **3** Greater complexity of both design and technical carving are hallmarks of a courting spoon **4** Welsh lovespoons are the most eclectic of all the European romantic spoons



Festival spoons

In some areas of Europe, ornately and romantically carved spoons were occasionally made for festival use as well as to be given as romantic tokens. The most famous of these are today known as 'Breton wedding spoons', although a more accurate name might be 'Breton festival spoons'.

In this particular region of France, young men would carve, or would hire professionals to carve, extremely elaborate and lavishly inlaid spoons that they would then take with them to social gatherings such as weddings, fetes or celebrations. Here the spoon would be shown off ostentatiously, either as a sample of the young man's carving prowess or as an indicator that he was financially well off enough to afford the services of a craftsman.

Often these complex spoons were hinged so they could be folded and the detailed faces protected during transport. The decorations most frequently consisted of intricate geometric chip-carved patterning that was often inlaid with sealing waxes or with molten substances such as lead or sulfur. While these folding and inlaid spoons seem to have been more often used for showing off than for gift giving, it is likely that many similarly carved spoons were given as courting or wedding-type gifts. The preponderance of love hearts, initials and fertility symbols (such as plants or flowers) which appear on many (especially non-folding) spoons from this region would indicate that the spoons also had romantic purposes.

Wedding spoons

Wedding spoons are unique in that they are presented and used at the end of a courtship when vows are undertaken and the union formalised. Most frequently, the marital couple uses them to enjoy a first meal together and symbolically signify the notion of two becoming one. The spoons were initially likely to have been carved by the groom as a display of skill, but it seems that, later

on, professionals who may have sold their work directly to customers or through large shops specialising in traditional handcraft such as the Norwegian Husfliden, became the primary carvers of this type of spoon. The Norwegian chain-linked spoon is likely the best known of this type of romantic spoon and features a pair of panel-style spoons united by a length of hand-carved wooden chain.

Familial spoons

Rare though they might be, there is a probability that among the various museum and private collections of antique ornamented spoons, there are some that were carved from familial love rather than the romantic love of courting and wedding gifts. Perhaps a spoon would be carved as gift from a father to his wife or his daughter, or from a son to his mother; whatever the circumstance, it seems likely that during long winter months when there was time for carving and decorating, gifts of a loving nature may well have been made. Unfortunately, most spoons enter collections with little to no provenance, so learning the history of individual pieces is nearly impossible. This means that a certain amount of guesswork enters the frame when trying to discern whether a spoon was carved for romantic, religious, commercial, utilitarian or familial purpose. So, I cannot point with 100% academic certainty to particular spoons that may have been carved for a familial purpose, but I believe that there certainly are some out there.



5 Intricate patterning and delicate inlays were the trademark of Breton spoon carvers **5A** To achieve crisp inlay patterns, sharp knives and very dense woods were necessary

6 The twin handles united by a length of chain are the best known of the wedding spoons **7** Double spoons with a bowl at each end were also very popular wedding spoons

8 Although not common, it's likely that ornamented spoons were carved and given between family members simply as affectionate gifts



9 This trio of Welsh lovespoons features an antique from the mid 1800s (l), a modern souvenir-style spoon (m) and a modern bespoke design (r)



10

10 An antique Norwegian wedding spoon is shown beside a modern wedding spoon carved in Art Deco style **11** An antique style Breton spoon (l) and the modern counterpart (r) it inspired



11

What has become of the romantic spoon tradition?

During the late 1880s and into the early 1900s enormous changes and upheavals completely altered European society and its many traditions and practices. The custom of ornamenting wooden romantic tokens all but vanished as tastes changed to favour more commercially available gifts. The advent of cheap products such as various metals and plastics spelled the end of wood as the material of choice for romance and, with gemstones becoming ever more affordable, wood also began to be equated with poverty. As rural populations gradually became more urban, young men were less exposed to woodwork and its attendant skills and with a societal change in the view toward romance and courtship they found more distraction and engagement in activities such as school, sport and social clubs and dancing.

Somehow though, spoon carving has managed to endure through this enormous change and is even now enjoying something of a renaissance. Utilitarian spoon carving is booming, with clubs and websites throughout Europe and North America, and art spoon carvers have pushed design boundaries to the point where they have succeeded in turning the lowly spoon into fine art.

Romantic spoon carving, meanwhile, seems to have ventured along two distinct paths. Individually and crafted spoons are still being made in the traditional manner by dedicated craftsmen, but a thriving commercial industry has sprung up to supply souvenirs, creating a flood of economically priced and modestly designed spoons. The occasional amateur may be tempted to give one a go as a gift for a sweetheart, but whether handmade or mass-produced, most romantic spoon carving done today seems to be undertaken by professional carvers.

It's likely that this will be romantic spoons' future too. They will never again be as important in a courtship as they once were, and will never be made as they were a couple of hundred years ago,

but I believe that they will remain relevant. With their rich tradition and increasing exposure in carving circles, they still have a hopeful future. ●

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Limewood floral posy

Steve Bisco makes a foliage carving on a small scale



We usually associate limewood foliage carving with the huge overmantel festoons of Grinling Gibbons, but this project is at the opposite end of the scale – a small posy of flowers barely 9in (230mm) tall and small enough to hold in the hand. It uses just a small amount of wood so is perfect for practising your foliage carving skills. If it all goes wrong you've only lost a small piece of wood and gained some experience to try again.

'Posy' is an old-fashioned word that has been around for hundreds of years to describe a small bouquet of flowers, usually hand-held or pinned to clothing, such as a country lad may pick for his lass or a bride may carry on her wedding day. Today a posy is simply a mixture of a few different flowers, but in Victorian times, when the 'language of flowers' assigned particular meanings to specific flowers, a posy could be given to convey a particular message. The small flowers I have included in this posy were chosen totally at random and hopefully they wouldn't say anything inappropriate to a Victorian lady.

A posy is usually tied together with a ribbon or held in a posy holder. In this design I have used an acanthus leaf behind the flowers and wrapped around the stems, as a posy holder. This allows the delicate composition to be carved from a single block of wood. The flowers are carved and deeply undercut to form a loose bunch within the leaf. I have used an arrangement of Canterbury bells, foxgloves and hollyhock flowers purely for their decorative effect and because they, and the acanthus, all grow in my garden.

I won't pretend that this piece is easy to carve as it is very small and fiddly, but it is good practice for tackling larger flower carvings. It covers the main elements of foliage carving – creating very thin petals and leaves, deep excavation and undercutting to separate the elements, and trying to reflect natural features with various surface textures.

I have left this carving in its natural limewood finish, as Gibbons did with his festoons, but you can decorate it if you like. You could use white chalk paint to give a matt 'icing sugar' finish, or even colour it as the Victorians would have done. The choice is yours.

Things you will need

Tools

Gouges:

- No.2, 25mm
- No.3, 10mm, 5mm bent
- No.3 fishtail, 18mm, 10mm
- No.4 fishtail, 6mm
- No.5, 7mm, 5mm bent
- No.7, 10mm
- No.8, 8mm, 8mm curved
- No.9, 3mm
- Short bent, 8mm
- Back-bent, 12mm
- V-tool, 6mm straight, 2mm straight, 4mm curved

Chisels:

- Flat, 6.5mm, 3mm
- Bent, 5mm
- Hooked skew chisel, 16mm

Other:

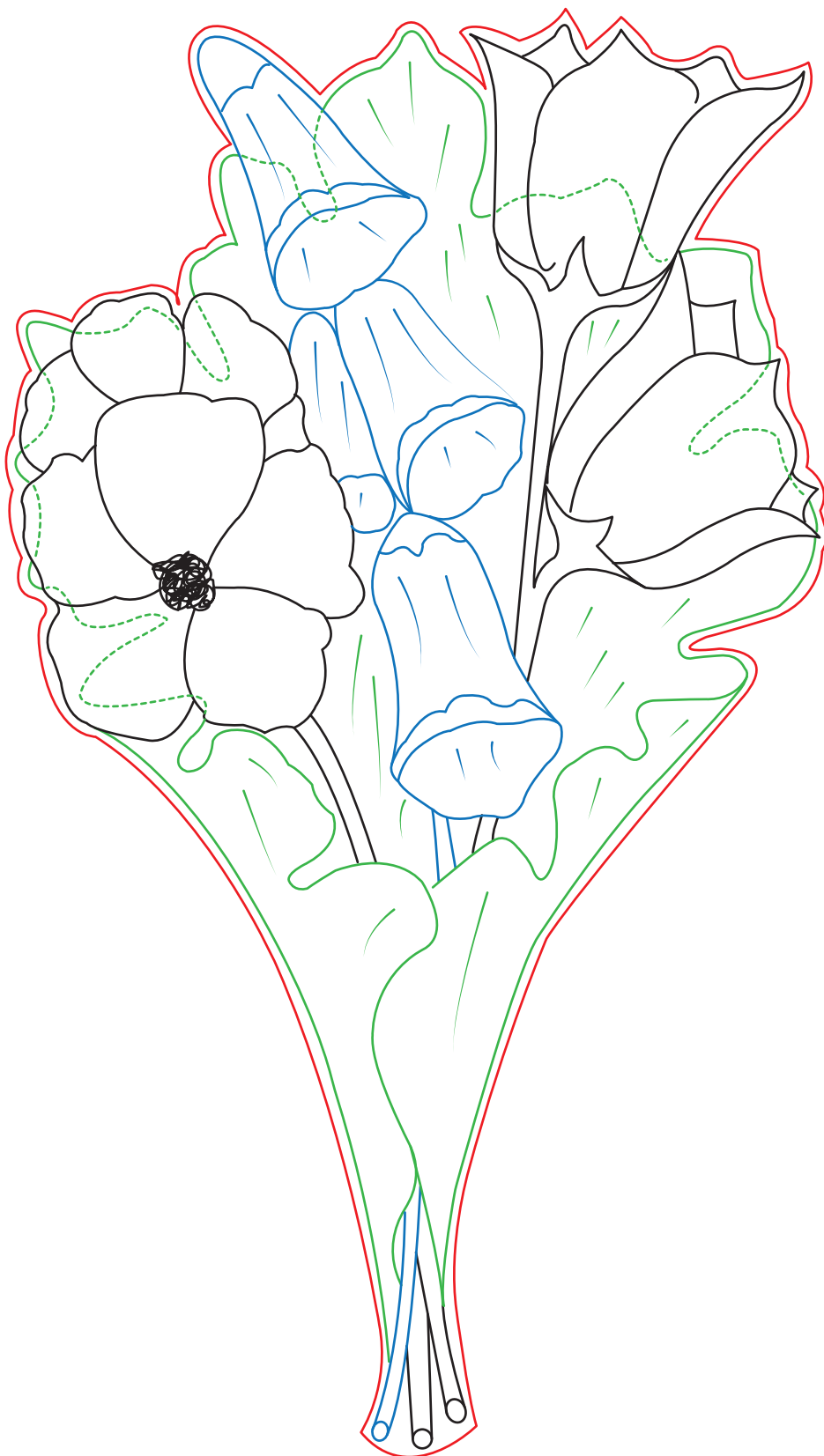
- Bandsaw, rifflers

Materials

- Lime 230 x 130 x 45mm

Did you know?

Flower carving is not just a feature of limewood festoons. It is common to many styles of carving, especially the Baroque and Rococo styles where acanthus swirls and other classical details are interlaced with naturalistic flowers. Learning how to carve flowers will stand you in good stead for many styles of decorative carving.



Useful tips & advice

- When carving hollow flowers it is best to do the bulk of the hollowing at the roughing out stage. A hollow flower is like a dome in that it can withstand pressure from the outside pushing in better than from the inside pushing out, so it is best to work on the hollow inside while there is still plenty of thickness in the walls to withstand the outward pressure.
- Rifflers (small, narrow files in various shapes) are useful for refining the finish in difficult places where the gouges cannot get a clean cut and abrasives can't reach. They are particularly useful on a small carving like this one where the details are very small.
- When designing for limewood foliage carving it pays to build up a file of flower photos on your computer. Take close-up pictures of decorative flowers, fruit, and their leaves in your garden or wherever you see them and use them for reference when designing and carving. Whenever possible, use the actual plant as a model. Observe the key distinguishing features of each plant and incorporate them in the carving.

Preparations

1 Get a piece of lime 230 x 130 x 45mm and make a full-size copy of the drawing to fit it.

2 Tape the drawing securely to the wood, with carbon paper under it, and trace the pattern on to the wood. You can, if you like, paste the drawing on to the wood instead, but I prefer to see the grain of the wood when I am carving.

3 Draw round the cutting lines in red and cut out the pattern with a bandsaw, scrollsaw, jigsaw or coping saw. When using a bandsaw on small pieces like this, take great care to keep your hands clear of the blade and use a push stick.

4 For workholding with a small carving like this, it is best to glue the work to a piece of card, which in turn is glued to a backing board. The card will allow you to prise it off later. Set this up on your bench and, when the glue is firm, you are ready to start carving.

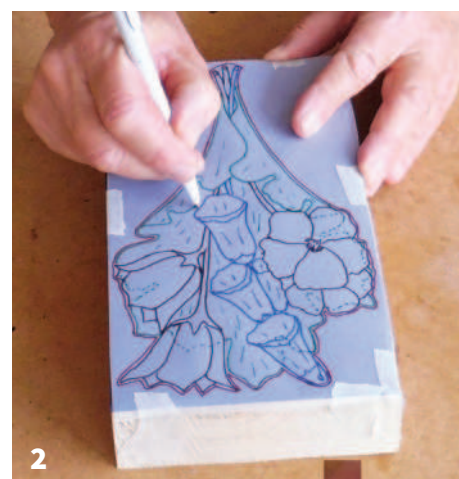
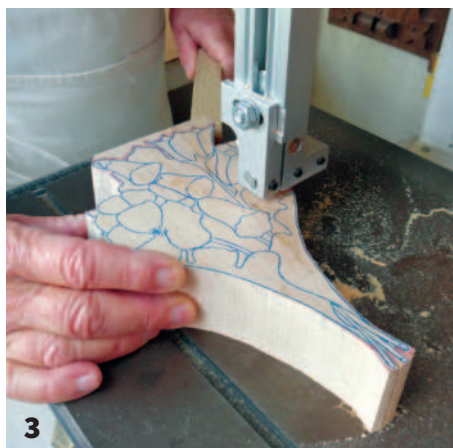
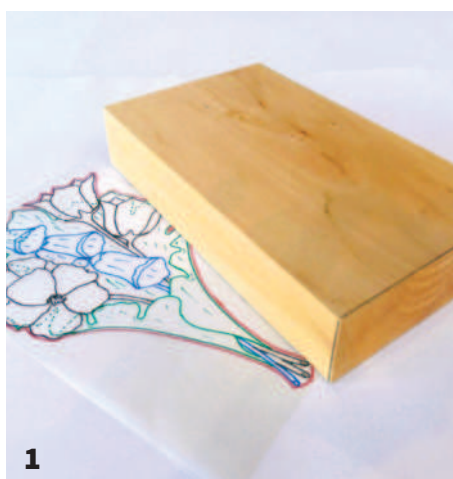
Roughing out

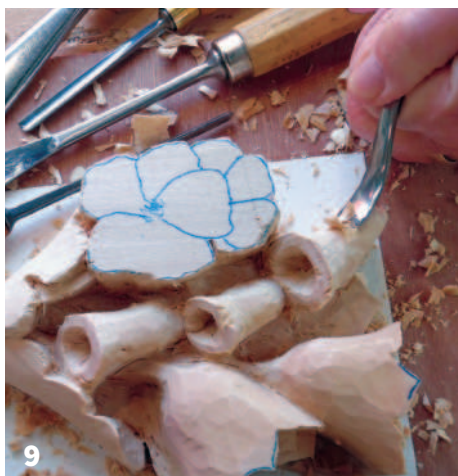
5 First, we need to separate the individual elements and carve down to the background between them. To get a clearer view of the task it helps if you colour in the background, which will be the acanthus leaf behind the flowers, with a wax crayon.

6 Excavate the gaps between the flowers, and the bits of acanthus leaf outside them, down to a depth of about 10mm from the backing board at this stage. 'Drilling' down by rotating and pushing a No.8, 8mm gouge helps to open up the area so you can 'bost' down the flower edges to the background. Don't try getting the very narrow gaps down to depth at this stage – they can be tackled more easily when we shape the flowers.

7 Rough out the lower part of the acanthus leaf to form the 'posy holder'. The downward slope of the front face should roughly match the inward curve of the sides, but allow enough thickness at the bottom so that the three stems can stand away from the wall when hung up.

8 Next, rough out the shape of the Canterbury bells. Round over the outsides and slope them down towards their stems, then partly hollow out the insides to give a better feel for how they will look and hang within the bunch.





9 Rough out the three bell-shaped foxglove flowers, which lay with their lower end towards the front and their top end laying back under the one above. There is also a fourth one that is partly hidden under the hollyhock flowers, but you can't do much with this until later. 'Drill' out the inside of each 'bell' with the No.8, 8mm gouge, making sure you slope it backwards in line with the flower.

10 We finish the roughing out by shaping the two hollyhock flowers, one of which is partly hidden behind the other. These slope sideways from the fourth foxglove flower down to the side of the acanthus leaf.



Carving the flowers

11 With the elements all roughed out in their relative positions and proportions, we can start the detail carving by forming the outside of the Canterbury bell flowers. These have a five-sided bell shape of one single petal with no joins or overlaps. There is a crease at each point where the five sides meet, and also a crease down the middle of each side. Carve a shallow hollow between each crease.

12 Repeat the five-pointed bell shape on the inside of the flower, taking it down to the background. Hollow it out with a spoon gouge and use a curved V-tool to carve the inside creases. The real flower is paper-thin so try to carve the petal as thin as you can. Use a hooked skew chisel to carve very sharp edges.



13 Open out the mouth of each of the foxglove flowers to form a 'trumpet' shape. It is best to carve the inside first as the thin wall can withstand the final thinning better from the outside than from inside.

14 Carve the outside of each foxglove, with the little 'cap' of sepals on the top. Add naturalistic grooves on the outside and on the trumpet end. Undercut beneath the flowers down to the stem underneath and shape the sides and the curled-over stem at the top. Try to add what details you can to the half-hidden fourth flower.



15 The hollyhock flowers are relatively easy to carve as their faces are fully exposed. Separate the petals and give them plenty of curl, with lots of thin grooves on the petal surface, sloping steeply into the centre. The stamen in the centre should give the appearance of a fluffy lump, which is best achieved with some fine hatching.

16 Deeply undercut the main hollyhock flower and carve the half-hidden flower behind it.

◀ Carving the acanthus leaf

17 Carve deep, flowing grooves in the lower part of the acanthus leaf where it wraps around the stems. Open out the 'eyes' in the upper edges and carve convex folds down the leaf beneath them. Shave away the edges of the leaf and excavate the hollow inside the posy holder. Undercut the sides of the posy holder and carve the three stems that poke out from the bottom of the leaf.

18 Refine the shape of the outer edges of the acanthus leaf behind the flowers and further excavate the background with short-bent gouges to create some shape to the leaf surfaces. Use a curved V-tool and the hooked skew chisel to carve vein lines into the leaf surface.

19 Refine the flower stems as much as you can. Access is difficult, so use the smaller bent tools to get under the flowers. Excavate under the stems where you can to make them look more detached from the background. Try not to damage the flowers in the process. Deep undercutting and excavation between flowers and stems is one of the key skills to be learnt with limewood foliage carving.

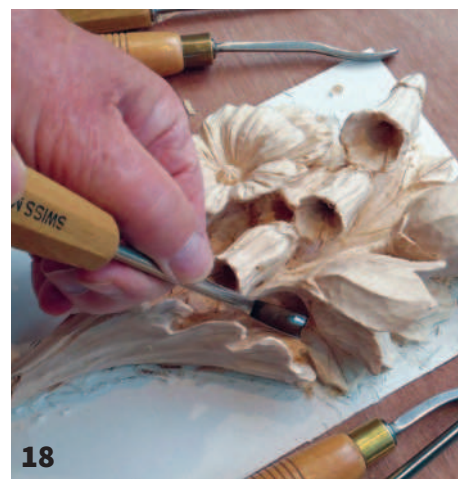
Undercutting and finishing

20 Tidy up the carving then undercut as much as you reasonably can around the sides while it is attached to the board. Then prise the carving off the board by carefully sliding a flat knife through the card between the carving and the backing board.

21 To undercut the sides of the carving from behind and clean up the back, lay the carving face down on a very soft surface, with blocks of wood attached to the bench to stop it sliding about. Carefully shave away the edges, and the remnants of the card, with very sharp tools to create sharp edges to the acanthus leaf and the flowers overhanging the edge. With the work now unsecured you must protect your hands with cut-proof gloves, and be careful not to put too much pressure on the delicate parts of the carving. If you break any bits off, try to retrieve them from the shavings and glue them back on.

22 Give it a coat of sander sealer then use abrasives to remove all rough edges and stringy bits, but take care to preserve the texture of each surface and not obliterate detail. Riffles (thin shaped files) are useful to get at the places you can't easily reach with abrasives.

23 Here is the finished posy, small enough to hold in the hand, with its natural pale limewood finish. ●



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Do we see what we are looking at?

Peter Benson's tips on how to better observe the physical attributes of figures you wish to carve



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER BENSON

During the last 10 years of my previous life as a school teacher I was responsible for helping children with special educational needs. As most of them had spent a lot of their lives coping with lack of success in much that they attempted, this was not only very challenging but very rewarding. It also taught me a great deal about failure – something that can be a problem with many adults. While we hate to fail at anything we try to do, in fact we learn far more from our mistakes and failures than we do from success.

During this time I was confronted with all sorts of issues, some easily resolved and others much more difficult. One particularly unusual case was that of a 14-year-old boy I will call John, who could read beautifully but didn't understand a word that he was reading. All sorts of efforts had been made to remedy this but all to no avail. Quite by accident, during a session when I was reading to him it became clear that he wasn't visualising what I was reading, he had no ability to form pictures in his head.

After investigation I learnt that his parents could neither read nor write and had never read to him as a small child. I then set in motion a programme of reading very descriptive stories to him until one day, during a session, he leapt off his seat and ran around the room shouting: 'Ask me some questions!' The answers to each question about the story were amazingly descriptive and accurate and his absolute joy was incredible to experience.

We followed up with all kinds of memory exercises and, remarkably, it turned out that he had an amazing photographic memory, far greater than I had ever experienced.

The reason I mention this is that we take for granted the ability to recall past memories and visualise what we want to remember. Imagine how it would be if we couldn't remember what loved ones

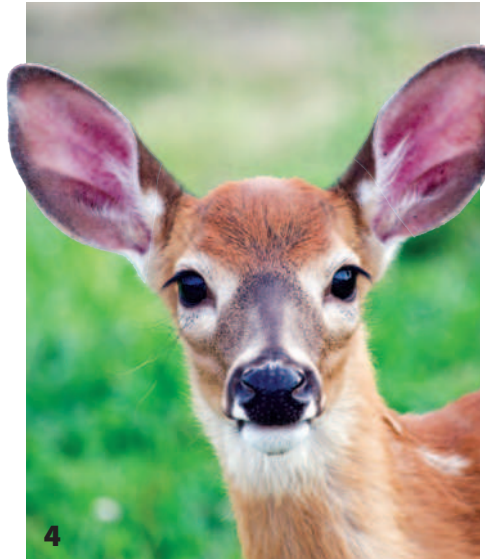
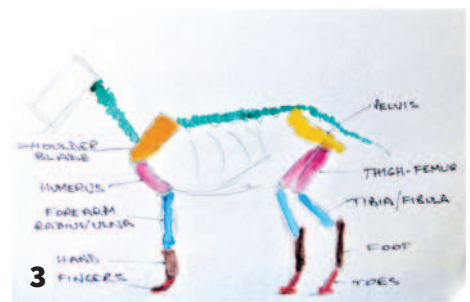
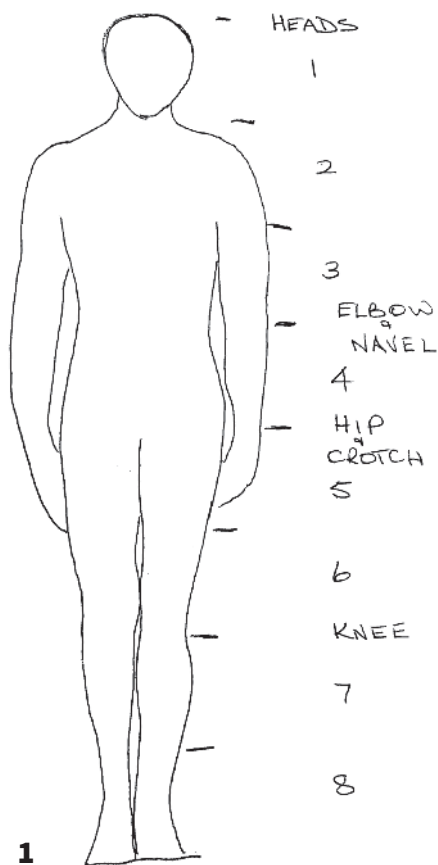
or favourite places or even our own house looked like. Fortunately, my experience with John showed that things can be improved with the right approach.

How, then, does this affect us as woodcarvers? If we are to carve pieces of our own design we need to be able to visualise what we want the piece to look like. In other words, we need to be able to turn our ideas into pictures and also to draw on any pictures we may already have that relate to whatever it is we are doing.

Unfortunately, in order to function from day to day, we can't afford to register and record everything that we actually see and therefore just commit to memory enough to recall when required. This is one of the functions of the left side of the brain. Far too much effort and time would be needed to do anything more complex.

For any activities that need more information, like woodcarving for example, we need to access the right side of the brain, which is more willing to spend time concentrating on the more specific details. This can be done by making the subject unfamiliar, by looking at it in a mirror or upside down. This causes the left side to shut down, as it doesn't recognise what is being seen. Alternatively, breaking down the subject into its individual components will do the same thing.

In general, the greatest errors we make as carvers are with carving human or animal forms. We rely on our memory and don't actually look at what we want to carve. Before even starting on a human figure we need to be clear about the proportions of the basic figure, then adapt these to fit the specific figure we want to carve. There are many books on the subject but, generally, the whole body can be broken down into various numbers of heads.



1 Human figure broken down into 'heads' **2 & 3** Drawings that I have used before to compare human and animal skeletons **4 & 5** Eyes & muzzles of a deer and big cat for comparison **6** The large eyes of a cute bunny **7** A slouched posture

Body and heads

Once you are clear about this, it is not too difficult to apply the same thing to other animals. Structurally, most of the skeleton is very similar and you only need to check on the length of most of the bones. This can best be done by looking carefully at the animal you wish to carve, noting the position of joints, length of skull, position of eyes, ears and jaw line in the head, length of neck and so on.

Prey and predators' eyes

All these will vary from species to species and especially from predator to prey animal. Predators have forward-facing eyes and short, strong muzzles or beaks, whereas prey animals have side-facing eyes and longer, weaker muzzles or beaks. Also, prey animals tend to have larger ears that are very mobile. It is very easy to get these wrong, but a little study can avoid this happening.

Critical Elements

I am not suggesting that you have to spend all your spare time out in the countryside or visiting zoos as most of the information you need, if not readily available, can be found in books or on the internet.

Every creature has its critical elements, some very obvious, some less so, but each contributes to what makes the creature what it is, and recognisable to the viewer.

We all recognise a shark by its dorsal fin (a dolphin has a similar fin), but that is not its only characteristic. You need to know the basic body shape, what the tail looks like, where the eyes and mouth are, and so on.

If I were to give any advice to a new carver wishing to carve the animal or human form, I would suggest carving several pieces of the same, or similar, subject so that the information you collect is put to the best use and really reinforced before starting a new period of study.

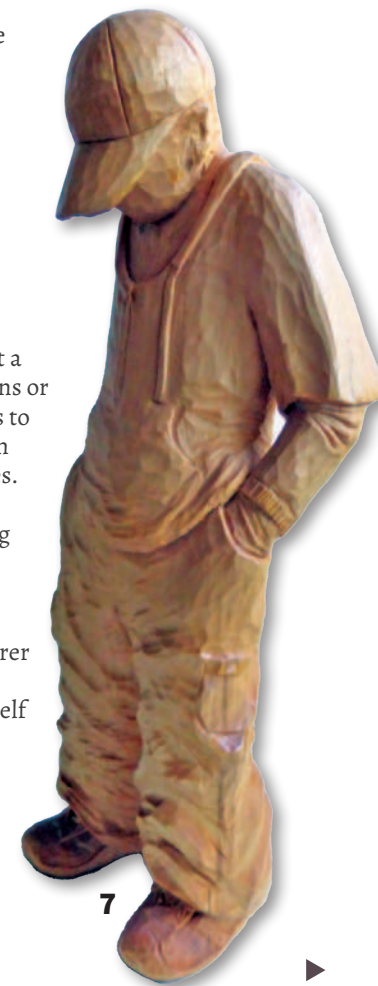
This is really only the start of your observation journey and will probably only be enough to carve fairly standard subjects.

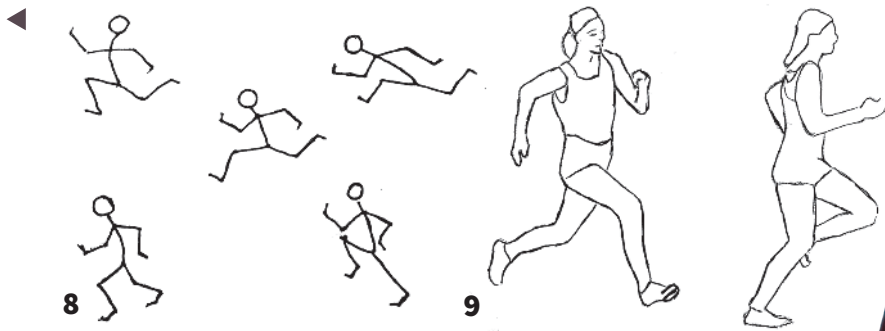
If you wish to add movement, character or age to a piece you will need to delve deeper and become an animal or people watcher, asking yourself specific questions. Some of these might be:

- What happens to posture as a subject ages?
- How does a face change with age?
- How do the ears sit on a lion or deer or mouse or any other animal?
- How wide is the skull on a horse?

One way to get you to appreciate what a picture is telling you is to look at cartoons or animations. The skill of the illustrator is to pick out the bare essentials of any action or mood with just a few well-placed lines. Alternatively, study silhouettes to get the correct form without any distracting detail. Much of what is needed will automatically fall into place if the basic form is correct. Think of it as someone approaching down a dark alley. The nearer they get the clearer the detail becomes.

It won't be long before you find yourself noticing even the smallest variation from the norm in both people and animals or even inanimate subjects. Be warned, though, as this can be a curse. You may find yourself missing some of the plot of your favourite movie or TV programme as you study the fact that the male lead has very large ears or a long nose.





8 These stick figures all show running people, but each sends a slightly different message **9** Two drawings taken from photos of a girl running – one seems to show power and effort, the other less so **10** The changing shape of bodies when sitting or lying down **11** Standing figure with line showing the centre of gravity **12 & 13** Carvings showing standing figures with different centres of gravity

Stick figures and runners

What I am getting at, and have mentioned before, is that there is no point in trying to add detail before you have got all the basics in place. If you want to carve someone running, spend half an hour looking at the way runners move. They will not all be the same but there will be common factors in their posture that says quite definitely that they are running. The body shape changes as well as the balance, and will give a great deal of information about what sort of running is actually taking place. I always start a particular pose with a stick figure, altering until I think it looks right and then turning it into a working drawing or model.

When a person sits or lies down, the body shape changes, as do the bodies of animals. How often have you seen a carved female nude sitting or lying with breasts that don't look natural? All tissue, especially soft tissue, is subject to gravity and this needs to be borne in mind.

Centre of gravity

The main problem with all of this is not that we don't actually look at what is in front of us but that we don't really appreciate what we see. I remember being asked to see what was wrong with a carving of two people walking side by side. It was a really nice piece, very well carved, but somehow it looked wrong. Fortunately, the fault was a very common one and easy to put right. When a person stands, the perpendicular line showing the centre of gravity drops from the vertebra at the base of the neck to the instep of the weight-bearing foot or feet. Any movement of the body will involve a change in this position. Movement forward, backwards or sideways will cause the body to become off balance – in effect,

falling towards the direction of movement. Have you ever fallen forwards by stubbing your toe on a raised paving stone or step?

All that needed doing with the carving was to lean the subjects slightly forward by cutting a thin wedge off the underside of the base and the piece was transformed.

Conclusion

In summary, as in life generally, nothing worthwhile comes easily. To get good results you have to put in the effort. Good carvings have very little to do with how intricate or complicated they are, it is about how well they are executed. While clean cuts and respect for the wood are important, so is how well, accurately and pleasingly the subject is portrayed. Everything you put into your carving should be there for a reason, even if you leave something you didn't intend but really like. Do your homework, study your subject and go for it. Most of all, have fun. ●

Useful tips & advice

You might like to get hold of the following books by Jack Hamm that I have found extremely useful over the years:

- *Drawing the Head & Figure*
- *Cartooning the Head & Figure*
- *How to Draw Animals*

They contain a wealth of valuable information.



Celtic charm

Our guest editor's past work

Guest editor, Dave Western, is a professional lovespoon carver and the author of a number of books on the subject. He carves to commission and also teaches carving classes. His passion for Celtic art is reflected in his work as we take a brief look through his past projects from the pages of *Woodcarving* magazine.



Watering can in boxwood

In part one of a two-part article, Zoë Gertner makes the main body and spout for this garden staple



Among the garden tools I was gathering up in readiness for our house move was Grandad's old two-gallon galvanised metal watering can, a treasured memory of him that was to come with us to our new abode. It's slightly battered but an interesting shape, and something I have had on my garden-themed carving list for a long time. Although you may find it challenging since it requires a delicate touch with very sharp tools, if you follow the steps closely you should find it is a relatively straightforward woodcarving using several techniques from my previous project, Mushrooms in Boxwood, issue 178.



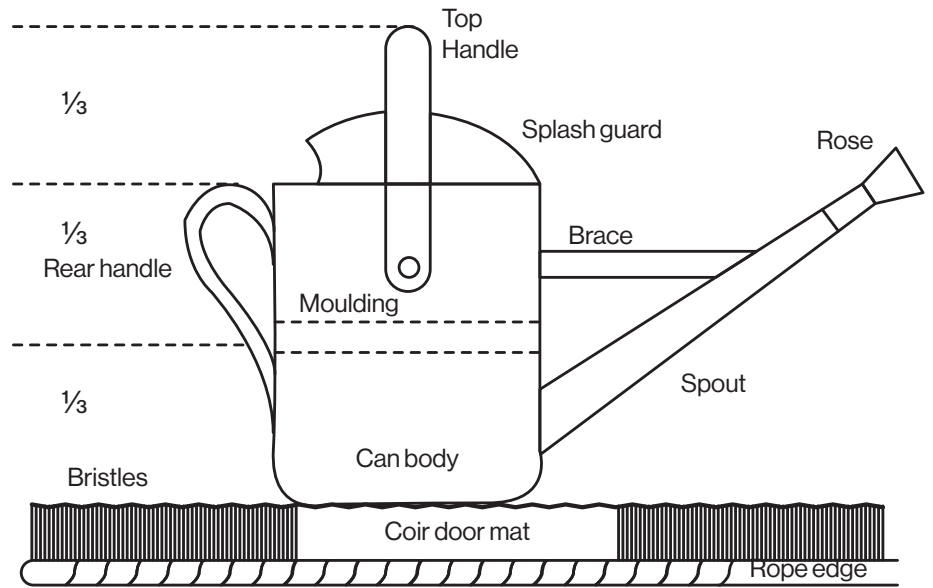


Diagram 1

Things you will need

Materials

- Boxwood

Tools & equipment

- PPE as appropriate
- No.39, 1/4in and 1/2in V-tool
- Small fine-toothed saw
- No.5, 3/8in & 1/4in gouge
- No.9, 1/4in gouge
- No.3, 3/8in & 1/4in & 3/16in & 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

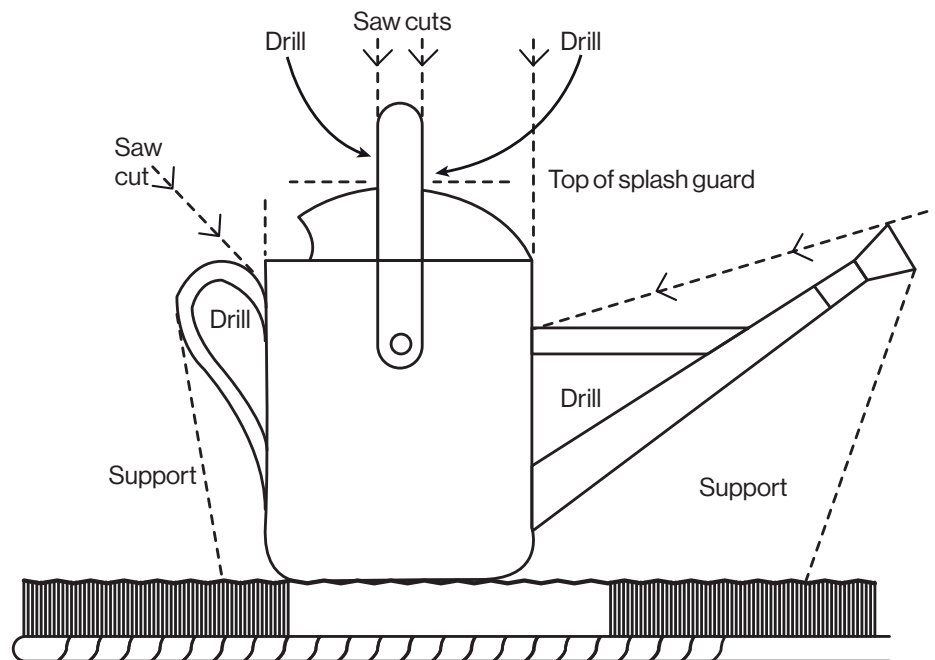
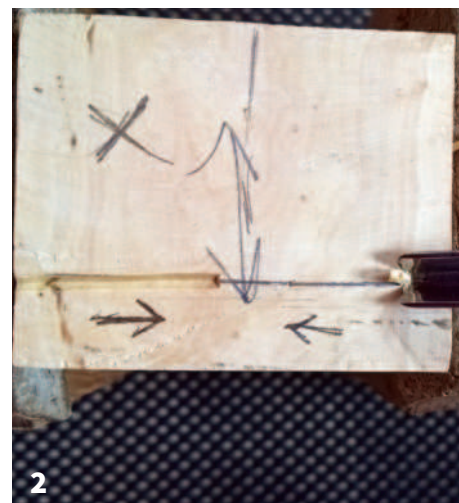


Diagram 2



◀ Starting the carving from a log

1 For my small carving I used a short piece of a branch of boxwood approximately 3in diameter and 2in long (but it can be made any size you like with larger tools). On the underneath of the cross section, draw the outline of the rectangular doormat and remove the four outer sections as shown using a small saw, forming a rectangular block with its grain vertical. Because the carving will be detailed and delicate, a tightly grained, light-coloured wood is best for this carving. Some suitable close-grained alternatives to boxwood could be sycamore, yew, pear, apple, laurel and rhododendron.



2 On each of the four faces of the block, draw a line showing the upper edge of the surface of the doormat, allowing sufficient depth for the garden tools lying beside the watering can if you are going to include these. Then cut round the block along the line with the No.39, 1/4in V-tool. Work from the outer corners towards the middle of each face then draw the top outline of the can on the top surface of the block.



3 Mark X across the corners to show the areas around the can that need removing and, using a small fine-toothed saw, cut horizontally within the V-cut you made previously – the upper surface of the doormat – up to the outline, ready to remove the corners above the base of the carving.

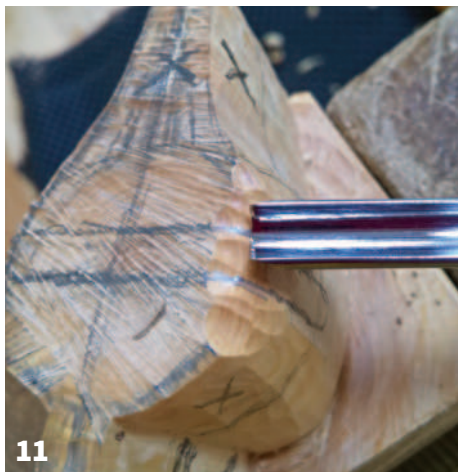
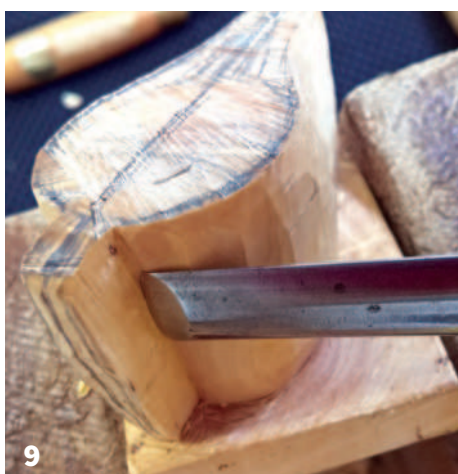


4 Carefully remove each section by using the No.5, 1/2in gouge to split away tiny vertical slivers, following the grain downwards and to the horizontal saw cuts you made each side of the can, its rear handle and spout. Take care to follow the line of the grain downwards and ensure the corners of the gouge are always out in the air so that the slivers will be removed easily.

5 Using the No.9, 1/4in gouge and cutting upwards on the upper areas, reduce the shape each side of the rear handle and alongside the spout (marked X) to that of the drawn outline on the top surface.

6 Now reduce the lower areas down of the base of the can to the outline, including the rear handle as seen from above. Start by cutting towards it from the surface of the doormat, i.e. horizontally, with the No.3, 3/8in gouge, then downwards from the surface of the can towards the first cut, meeting both cuts neatly at the bottom of the watering can. Keep the surface of the doormat adjacent to the watering can as smooth and cleanly cut as possible. Use the No.9, 1/4in gouge to start an indent each side of it to begin forming the handle at the back of the can.





7 With the No.3, 1/4in gouge, refine the indents each side of the rear handle ready to reduce its width. On its end draw a centreline down its length, then working on each side of it, invert the gouge and start near the base to slice downwards towards the doormat in short increments. Work along its length to the top, reducing the width. At the top, finish each side by cutting upwards with the grain. Refer to the centreline and remove the same amount each side so that your handle is upright. The handle will need to be supported from underneath until the carving is finished.

Rounding the body of the watering can up to the handle

8 Cutting horizontally across the grain with the No.3 or No.5, 1/4in gouge slightly tilted, at the junction adjacent to the body of the can, work down the length of each side of the handle with shallow cuts. Leave the chips attached. Cutting in the same way towards the handle but from the body, round over the surface of the can as you detach the chips at their junction. Repeat the two sets of cuts on both sides of the handle, extending the curve of the body on both sides into the junctions at the sides of the handle.

9 Invert the No.3, 1/2in or 3/4in gouge and smooth the convexities of the watering can each side of the handle, tidying the meeting edges of the handle and the body, and making a clean junction between them. You may find the 1/4in V-tool useful for tidying up the junction each side of the handle.

10 As in Steps 5 & 6, remove the excess wood (marked X) each side of the spout and the front of the can using the No.9, 1/4in and No.3, 3/8in gouges. Periodically smooth the adjacent surface of the mat.

Starting the top handle

11 Draw the centreline along the top of the can from the rear handle to the end of the spout and, with the No.9, 1/4in gouge, round over the sides of the area to be the top handle. Work towards the centreline from each side, lifting your gouge hand as you cut until both edges are rounded over.

12 With the 1/4in V-tool cutting towards the centreline from each side, on the top surface mark both outer faces of the top handle. Extend the V-cuts by cutting downwards around its lower end and the attachment on both sides of the watering can.

13 With the fine-toothed saw in the V-cuts marking the faces of the top handle, make a shallow cut downwards each side as far as the top of the convex splashguard.

14 From the rear-facing side of the handle, reduce the area adjacent with the No.9, 1/4in followed by the No.5, 1/4in gouge, working towards the centreline from each side to start it projecting above the watering can.

15 Redraw the upper edge of the can and the outline of the rear handle on both sides of its projection at the back of the can, and with the saw remove the rectangle above the rear handle adjacent to the top edge. Continue extending that face by reducing behind it, then use opposing cuts to relieve both attachments on the sides of the can with the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in or $\frac{1}{8}$ in gouge. Place the gouge in the V-channel marking the end of the handle and make cuts around and away from it, linking up with the emerging handle on top of the can. Make opposing cuts towards the first set with the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge and remove the adjacent surface of the can body then readjust its curvature on each side.



16 With top handle attachments in place, remove the opposite area from the front face of the handle and above the length of the spout (marked X), leaving it a little higher than behind the handle to allow for the splashguard. Work from each side towards the centreline with the no.9, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge followed by the No.5 or No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in, leaving enough width for the rose. Redraw the circular top outline of the can on the new surface either side of the handle.



17 As you reduce both sides adjacent to it, the height of the top handle will increase and its curvature will need adjusting with the No.3, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, cutting towards the top from each side. Continue to reduce the circumference of the body and handle attachments until the top handle projects upwards for around a third of the height of the can and is fully rounded. Draw both inner curves on the two vertical faces, joining them to their attachments on both sides of the can. They will be cut later.

18 Using the $\frac{1}{4}$ in V-tool in front of the top handle, mark the outer edge of the can starting from the inside of the handle each side, meeting the cuts at the centreline. You may have to adjust the circumference of the can adjacent to the rear handle to maintain the circular shape around the can body.



19 In line with the bottom of the splashguard and the back edge of the can, make a horizontal cut with the fine-toothed saw above and from the end of the spout and rose towards the front, stopping short of the front of the can body. Remove the area above the brace and spout by cutting small slivers downwards into the saw cut with the No.5, $\frac{1}{4}$ in gouge, then shape the front of the splashguard.

20 Draw the top view and centreline of the brace, spout and rose outwards. The spout and rose may need shortening to keep it in proportion (X). If so, make a horizontal saw cut in line with the doormat then remove the end, taking slivers downwards with the No.5 gouge. As shown in photo 20, redraw the splashguard and line of the top edge of the can, the brace, and the projecting spout.





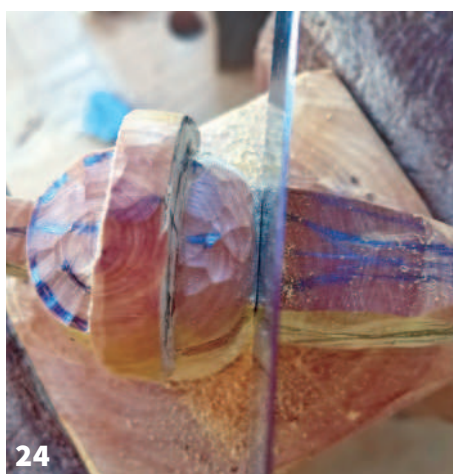
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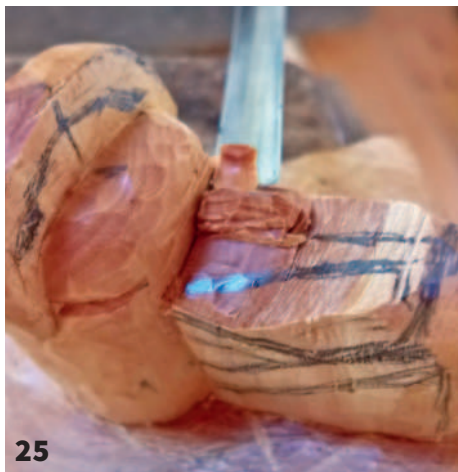
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Starting the brace, spout & rose

21 At the outer end of the spout, round over the upper edges of a short length to be the rose, working upwards towards the centreline from each side. Then draw a small circle on the face to be the perforated sprayfront of the rose.

22 Returning to the rear handle, remove a small triangular area adjacent to and above the watering can (marked X) with the small saw so that its handle attachment is now at the top edge of the can. With the No.3, 1/4in gouge, round over its top by cutting outwards (with the grain) from the can, then on the outer curve, from the opposite direction, over and towards the can, thus with the grain. Here you may find a 1/4in skew chisel or a Ray González hooked palm chisel helpful. As before, leave the lowest part attached to the doormat to support it.

23 With the 1/4in V-tool, mark round the upper edge of the can both sides from the splashguard at the front to the attachment of the rear handle at the back of the can.

24 Make a vertical saw cut at the front of the can and down to the top of the brace, as drawn on both sides of the spout projection. Follow this with a second saw cut from the top of the rose angled towards and meeting the first vertical one at the front of the can.

25 Next, cutting towards the centreline from each side, remove and flatten the upper surface of the brace in front of the can, leaving the rest of the spout angled upwards towards the rose.

26 Continue reducing and rounding over the splashguard in front and behind the top handle until it is domed. The aperture in its rear part for filling the can with water will be made later.

27 Now, as described in Steps 5 and 6, reduce the width of the spout and brace to its top outline, tapering it along its length from the lower part of the can towards the rose and curving the can rounded towards the front from each side. Then redraw the outline of the spout, brace and rose each side.

28 Tilt back the rose on the end of the spout by cutting upwards with the No.3, 1/4in gouge until it is angled away from the end so that the upper edge of its rim is nearer than its lower to the can. Then behind the head of the rose reduce the spout so that the rose at the end will be wider. With the gouge inverted to match its curve, from each side use opposing cuts beneath the rose, starting to form an angled conical shape on the end of the spout.

29 Maintaining its support at the outer edge of the rose, begin reducing the support beneath the spout from each side by cutting back at an angle below the rose (marked X). Then working towards the centre from each side, flatten and smooth the upper surface of the brace using a No.1, ¼in or standard chisel, leaving the rest of the spout along to the rose until later.

30 With the ¼in V-tool cut the curved upper edge of the splashguard aperture on the rounded surface behind the top handle (marked X), for filling the watering can with water.

31 Using the No.3, ¼in or ⅝in gouge inverted within the V-channel marking it, and its cutting edge tilted towards the handle from below the edge of the splashguard, make opposing cuts and reduce the area level with the upper edge of the can. Then mark the inner edge of the can running from the inside edges of the splashguard aperture with the V-tool. Carefully paring with the No.3 gouge, adjust the outer adjacent shape of the splashguard, making the upper edge of the can line up with the inside of the handle each side. Then reduce the area within the can itself so that its upper edge is now proud of its contents.

32 To keep it in proportion my can needs lengthening, this is done by using sets of opposing cuts. The first cuts are made downwards in line with the body of the can, working around its base with the No.3, ¼in gouge inverted and matching its circumference. As you work round the circumference, cut back under the rear handle a little but still keep it well supported.

33 Now work round the can, cutting towards it (with the gouge bevel beneath) and reduce the adjacent surface of the doormat, repeating both sets of cuts as necessary to lengthen the can body and alter its proportions.

34 I added a hand trowel and fork on the doormat, relieving them as normal with the ⅝in V-tool to mark their outlines, then with the No.3, ⅝in and ⅝in gouges to make opposing cuts and reduce the surface of the doormat adjacent to them, then shape them.

Now that the basic shape of the watering can is finished, more intricate carving can be carried out, as will be shown in part two. ●



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Art down under

Guest editor Dave Western introduces Australian artist David Stanley



Although I came to know him through his absolutely exquisite lovespoons, I quickly fell in love with Australian artist David Stanley's complete mastery of both illustrated and carved work. From his striking pen and ink drawings to his meticulously rendered wooden constructions and carvings, everything David does is elegant, clever and thoroughly considered. His unique and mesmerising creations are truly world class, and it has been a great pleasure for me to interview him and inquire into his creative process and his artistic vision.





◀ **As I look at your work, I can't help but be impressed by both its technical virtuosity and its refinement. How did you come by your woodworking talents?**

As a child I had an interest in drawing, which was always encouraged by my father. I had a tendency to regard my toys as inspiration for making derivatives and had access to a stimulating environment of materials and Edwardian period tools in the backyard shed of my grandfather, a builder. I was also influenced by a next-door neighbour who made jigsaw puzzles with a fret saw, and when model making became an interest, my drawing interest turned to the design of unintentionally non-functioning 'working' models. My first job was as a survey draughtsman and I developed an interest in calligraphy and lettering. Later, as a biological illustrator, I could draw freehand (but still technical) subjects to high standards of accuracy. This led to working as an educational illustrator and some picture book illustration in a wide range of genre from technical to much more whimsical. Eventually, my design and illustration background, along with a general interest in woodwork and model making, resulted in a blending of past work and interests into a pursuit of wood-art in retirement; mostly wood carving, small-scale wood carving and lovespoon carving in particular.

Each of your designs appears effortless, yet they all reflect an enormous amount of thought and effort. Can you tell us a bit about the process you go through to create a design?

My design process almost always begins with pencil and paper. This would, of course, be a natural starting point for someone with an illustration background, but I have come to think of carving as a type of drawing. The practice of carving adds to drawing skills and drawing adds to my understanding of what is happening when I carve in the presence of a raking light that shows the form-describing shadows to effect. I suspect that carvers who do not use drawing much are in fact drawing when they carve, albeit in a way that allows little possibility of change along the way. Little possibility, that is, but always some, because having said that, when I am carving a lovespoon I most often confine my drawing to a plan view of the front and sometimes the back. After that I let things develop, making incremental design and redesign decisions along the way that can even be suggested by intersecting tool marks. The things I consider in a design before I set out to carve (besides specified elements in a brief, as in the symbols in a lovespoon or emblems in an heraldic piece), are the general shape and form of the whole work, and the style of the whole piece. The wisdom of 'less is more' is a design principle that eludes me but I try to begin with a structural form that has an elegant simplicity underlying everything I attempt to festoon it with, while somehow endeavouring to retain the presence of that simple form. Form and function belong together, almost to the point of an ethic, especially according to the precepts of Modernism, but I am not ashamed to have 'decoration' actually be the function. There is great beauty and much to be admired in a nicely carved wooden spoon where the entire form is pleasingly and elegantly shaped toward its function with a guileless resolve. However, many decorative works and lovespoons in particular begin with a certain function-suggesting form, like the nurturing purpose a spoon suggests, and build a story upon it and beyond its, now vestigial, spoon function to become a – sentiment. Now, if that seems a slight thing, it is no 'mere sentiment' but a carefully and lovingly worked sentiment, a romantic sentiment for having, holding and keeping... but not using. And that is as it ought to be. Likewise, an automata, at least for me, isn't a machine designed with a purposed task to do, but an assembly of interesting movements, components and forms with a pictorially rendered pretence of function overlaid for comic effect; a pretence without deceit, designed to amuse and delight and be seriously silly. So less is more, and more is more as well, and sometimes, even more again. While something that simply looks good or looks interesting might simply do what it is. (Pics 1 & 2)



There's little doubt that crisp draughtsmanship plays a key role in the success of your pieces, how much time do you spend drawing?

When I am carving I am drawing, when I am not carving I am drawing; drawing graphic works on paper, designs for carving, for automata, drawing hand-lettering and illumination for calligraphy, for model making, toys and instructional materials. A pencil and paper is the springboard to the creative third dimension.

How did you come to choose the lovespoon as a main carving focus?

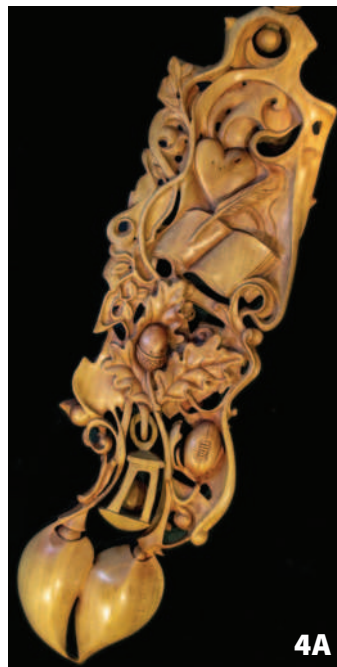
Primarily from reading woodworking magazines on the train commute from work, as well as a trip to Wales, where I took some handmade gifts for relatives during the early days of my retirement. A lovespoon seemed just the thing for my uncle with whom we would stay during the trip. It was a lovespoon something like those I had read of in an article about the lovespoon carver Ralph Hentall years before. It was my first lovespoon and had the features that I associated most with lovespoons; chain links, a caged ball and two smaller spoons linked to the sides. It wasn't until three years later, in 2010, that I carved my second lovespoon, a lovespoon to commemorate our thirty-eighth wedding anniversary. I carved this one after I had come across a book that changed my approach to lovespoon carving. This spoon still had the chain link, a caged heart a swivel at the top and some Celtic knot work but these features complemented a very intentional spoon form and, most importantly, a bowl that held pride of place in the design.



3



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4A



5



6



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You mention the remarkable lovespoon carver Ralph Hentall, were you able to find inspiration from any other contemporary lovespoon carvers?

Your book, *The Fine Art of Carving Lovespoons*, was a great influence and inspiration for my adopting carving and lovespoon carving in particular as my main avenue of artistic expression. Dave's own work as well as that of other lovespoon carvers featured in his book, such as Alun Davies and Sion Llewellyn, Mike Davies and the delicately elegant work of Laura Jenkins have all inspired and influenced my work and informed my appreciation of the work of many others besides. Possibly due to drawing being my background skill, with its own developed stylistic tendencies and personal calligraphy of line, shape and form relationships, I have been able to avoid even unconsciously copying my influencers and inspiration sources. It is possible to be inspired and influenced to the maximum degree by the work of others and still produce work that is uniquely your own when the design comes from your own taste, sensitivities and hand at the drawing board. (Pics 3, 4 & 5)

I noticed you designed the most amazing portable carving and drawing 'desks'. Can you tell us a bit about them?

I have made several of these lap bench-style carving benches and drawing boards over the years, smaller when in a travel-light frame of mind and larger when in everything-imaginable-at-hand mode. The carving version is based on a jeweller's bench with

provision to catch chips and shavings. Their purpose is ostensibly practical, so that detailed carving work and miniature drawing and painting can be carried out, with company, in an evening armchair setting. Their other purpose is to signify to yourself and to others at shows or at home, either how little a person can get by with in the craft or how interestingly entwined we are with a picture of history's crafters and their tools. There is nothing deceitful about this decorative role-playing aspect if you are not trying to mystify anyone by it and, like having 'too many tools', it adds interest, or you can portray 'see how little is necessary', in order to encourage, either way. (Pics 6 & 7)

Living in Australia, you are exposed to a range of timbers very different to those in Europe and North America – do you have any particular favourites?

The types of wood I favour are hard and tight grained, able to hold fine detail and with some toughness when short grain can't be avoided. Rock maple is a favourite, Tasmanian myrtle, Tasmanian sassafras, New South Wales rosewood, walnut and many others. With lovespoon carving, because the carving is from a single piece, strength is important and a little weight is also good. Jelutong is easy to carve, holds detail surprisingly well and finishes well, but in the end produces an unsatisfying lightweight object. With both lovespoons and automata, a huge range of small-section timbers can be used.



These include larger garden prunings and also highly figured timbers that would interact distractingly with the forms in many other types of carving but can work well with lovespoon designs and as automata components.

How do you achieve the warm, inviting look of your finishes? They are always so rich and vibrant.

My preferred finish, because the small scale of most of my work means it is often being handled and examined closely, is to prepare most of the accessible surface to the finest abrasive grit possible until a definite sheen appears on the raw timber. After that, just about any polyurethane or oil available, but thinned a little, and then wiped off with a rag that has been dusted with

some rotten stone (tripoli powder). Everything is then carefully and vigorously wiped and rubbed in a single session until dry to touch, brightly polished and silky feeling. This might be the main finish before a final coat of hard wax, unless some staining to accentuate the forms is required. In that case, I would use artist's oils, or even boot polish as a glaze, to get the desired effect. On some carvings such as automata components, the range of artist's oil paint colours might be extended to a polychromed effect. My approach with all of the finishing products is to apply them with a brush and then work feverishly with rags as if trying to totally remove all traces. Then doing the same with glazes, usually in a single session, until it is right to look at and to touch. The end result is polished timber with no perceptible coating. (Pic 7)

Every one of your pieces is remarkable; do you ever enter any carving competitions and how do you feel about woodcarving as a competitive event?



I have won a number of carving competitions in local shows and once for the knife-work section in International Wood Carver of the Year 2012. I am in two minds about competitions because if they include carving at all, they frequently lump every type of carving into the one category under the broad heading of 'woodwork'. The displays of entries do, however, help promote the crafts and attract public interest. Our wood crafts club has a display and demonstration space at the main local shows now and I prefer that, as much more work can be displayed. I still like to participate in the competition side of things when I have something to show, but commissioned pieces generally aren't available. I've found it is very risky to enter lovespoons to be competed against as they have to be 'the best' for their recipient, so anything less than first place finish is fatal. Lovespoons are best kept as 'would-have-won' and if they are carved with proper intent and genuine affection, should be deemed 'ought-to-have' won.

Do you have a personal favourite among the many pieces you have carved?

I suppose the second lovespoon I ever made, which was carved with a fuller knowledge of what modern lovespoons could be and was carved with a little more experience, might pass as the favourite. I made it for my wife and myself for our 38th wedding anniversary, so it has a certain sentimental value beyond as a simple woodcarving. Then again, there is the 'next one'. Our 50th anniversary is approaching and I already have a perhaps overly extravagant design drawn ready for that. (Pic 8)

The last few years have been a strange and stressful time, has the pandemic affected your work and how you approach it?

We have had some long Covid lockdowns in Australia – regular commitments were put on hold and instantly, a bonanza of time and only-dreamt-of freedom to use it unexpectedly appeared, but strangely, too much freedom has a paralysing effect. When carving, the driving force at the handle-end needs a restraining force from the guiding hand to make purposeful progress. Suddenly having no time restraints can be like trying to carve one handed; unless, of course, you are a very wise, self-disciplined

person who can direct your working habits with dutiful efficiency. Truly, though, who is like that?

Despite that, I gather you have been inspired to work in a very exciting new direction.

Lockdown presented me, by accident, an exciting new artistic outlet. I had participated in a community project through the Facebook group NSW Rocks (www.facebook.com/groups/NSWROCKS), where painted rocks are left for people to find, keep or re-hide. The spirit of the project was for the rocks to be free but when private message requests for painted rocks started to pile up I realised I had 'painted myself into a corner'. I had been fulfilling the requests by accepting a screen shot of a charity donation as payment but had to replace that with a charity auction of three rocks each week and discontinue all commission work. As gratifying as this popularity was I couldn't help feeling envious as a wood carver (my main interest) when painted rocks that take me hours of work, attract more payment than carvings that take me days or weeks. Even though the rocks are great fun, I still prefer the slow progress of carving; the time to think as the progress you make suggests more refinements and promises better to come. (Pics 9-14)

You seem to be blessed with a bottomless well of inventive ideas. Any idea what your carving future might hold?

Future projects are my favourites and I hope to do lots of them.

It is especially the case with lovespoons. They are made for someone else and they are meant to be 'their' favourite piece. You are in it with them until they take it, and then you move on to the next favourite spoon.

I'd like to carve some simpler lovespoons that get to grips with 'less is more', but would also like to carve a few more really complex lovespoons, because in my way of thinking, 'more really is more'. Some more automata, sculptured boxes and carved dollhouses also appeals to me. Most of all, I want to produce well-documented and illustrated step-by-step tutorials and instructional material on these projects that will contribute to the culture of making things from what we have been given. (Pics 15, 16, 17)





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Meditation board

John Samworth gets lost in this labyrinthine project



A maze is full of branches, dead ends and bad choices. A labyrinth twists and turns, but is essentially a single path from start to end. Do you feel as if your life is a maze when you would prefer to live in labyrinth? Then, perhaps, meditation is for you. This meditation board offers a rich and tactile object upon which you can focus your thoughts, running your fingers around the gentle curves of the labyrinth, unwinding while leaving your worldly cares behind.

As a carver, the feedback from the handle of a sharp tool in hand slicing through wood is relaxation enough for me, however we all know someone close who would benefit from just a few minutes relaxation. In my workshop I had been storing the perfect piece of oak for this project. It was meant to be! For this project I used European oak, but any tactile and interesting grained wood will be perfect.

Background on the labyrinth

The originals of the labyrinth go back many years, certainly to the Ancient Greeks and possibly beyond to Early Egyptian. Definitive images of labyrinths can be found in Greek literature, the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and stamped into the face of coins c.430BC. Vague references to complex and confusing Egyptian structures (which no longer exist) date back as far as c. 1800BC. Possible these structures were designed to protect the wealthy

person's body in this life while their soul prospered in the afterlife. It would appear that the labyrinth served two purposes; to stop what horrors are inside from escaping or to protect what valuables are inside from those outside entering.

Over the following centuries, many cultures across the world explored the properties of labyrinths – by the 9th century the Chartres labyrinth appears as a design within Christian cathedrals, the purpose now evolving into a trap for the human spirit as you enter the building. By Renaissance times, the maze and labyrinth become interlinked. The planting of hedges allowed couples to hold secret rendezvous away from prying eyes and wagging tongues.

Today the labyrinth is a popular image, appearing in literature and films from Dan O'Bannon's *Alien* to JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. In sci-fi many space ships and cities appear as vast labyrinths. In most instances the purpose is to confuse the audience, allowing their subconscious fears to permeate forward, setting up the shock moment. This is opposed to the alternative use of labyrinths for spiritual healing and wellbeing. If you are secure in your environment, then walking the maize field on a warm summer's afternoon, tracing the pattern on a meditation board or walking the pattern on the floor of Chartres Cathedral helps you to relax and contemplate on the day's offerings.

Things you will need

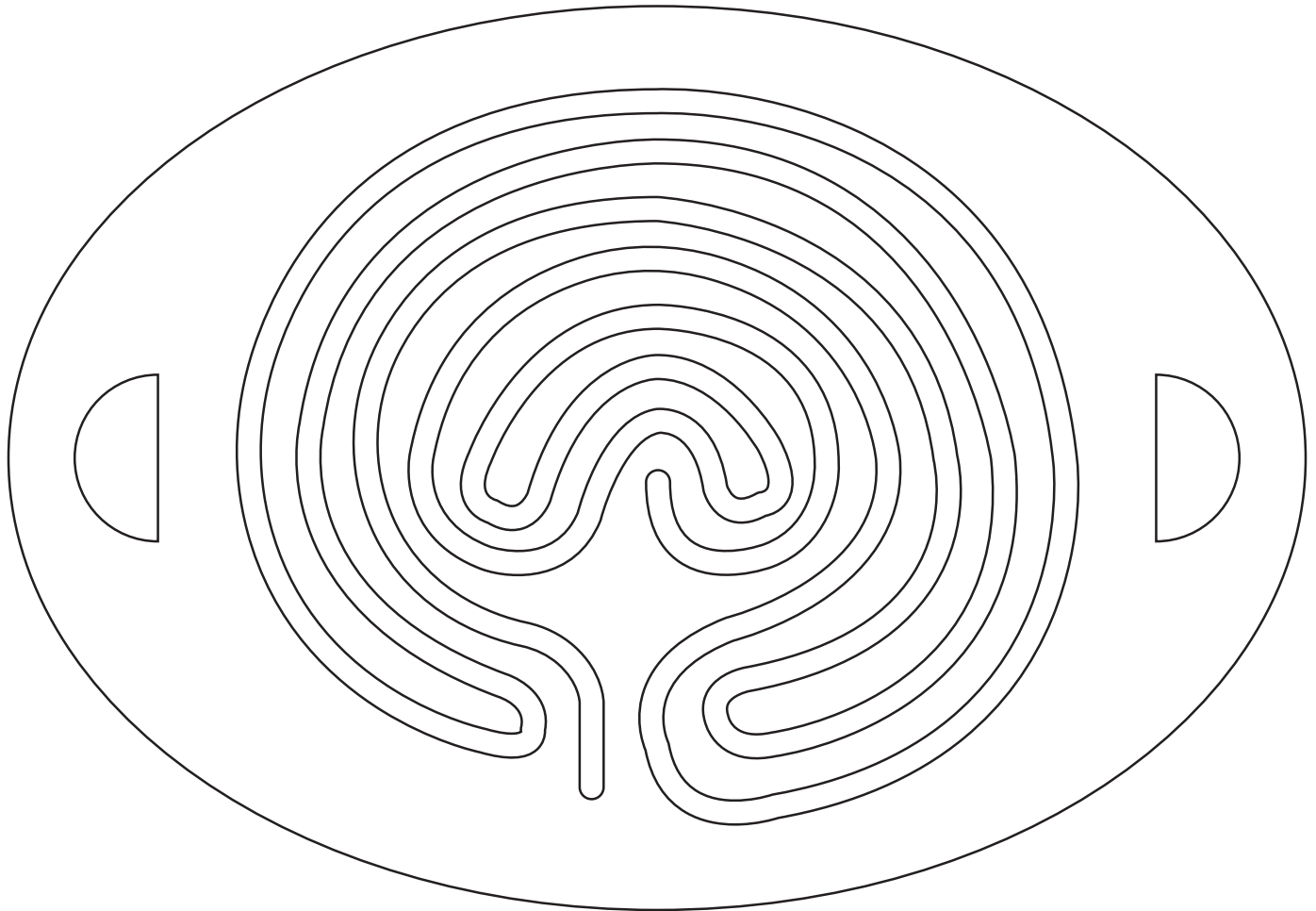
Materials

- For this project I used European oak, but any tactile and interesting grained wood will be perfect

Tools and Equipment

- PPE as appropriate

- No.3, 25mm gouge
- No.8, 10mm gouge
- No.3, 6mm gouge
- No.11, 6mm veining tool
- No.6, 6mm back bent gouge
- Plane and abrasive paper(s)



PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Rocky Valley labyrinth – Tintagel



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

Postage stamps printed in Greece, shows Ancient Greek Coins: Apollo & Labyrinth, circa 1959



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK

Labyrinth at a castle

1 The plank I have for this project is a rough-sawn offcut, tapering from 10mm at one end to 45mm at the other. I chose a section close to the thin end, away from any end splits which incorporated a section of medullary rays and an awkward knot. I will be able to cut around the knot.

2 I began by levelling the timber on both faces. Here I used an electric hand plane, but any fore plane will do the job nicely. I finished at 10mm thick, however anywhere between 10 and 15mm will be fine. Thick enough to take the cut, not too heavy and cumbersome to hold. The medullary rays are shining.

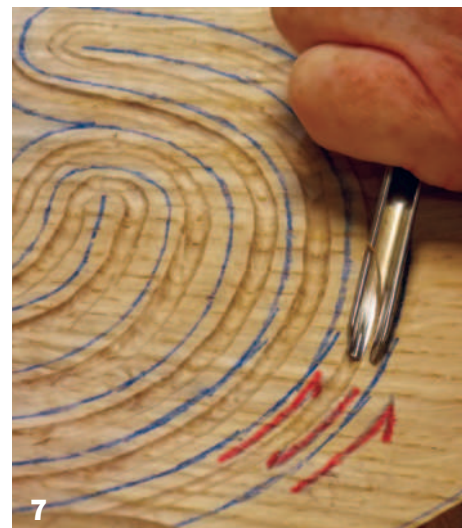
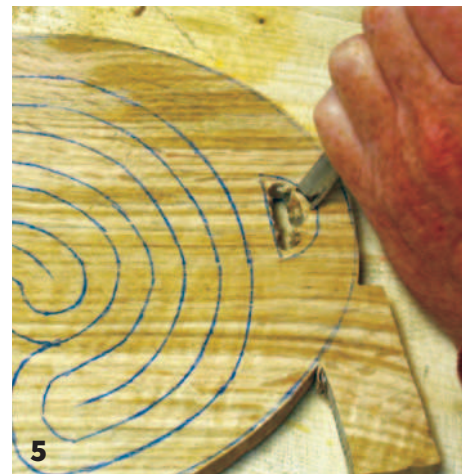
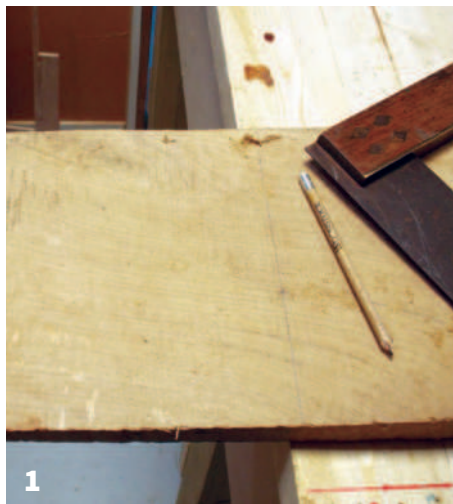
3 Copy the design on to the board. I taped carbon paper over the surface and etched the plan on to the board, avoiding the knot (indicated by the pencil's tip). It is just personal preference, but I chose the grain to run along the major axis of the elliptical frame.

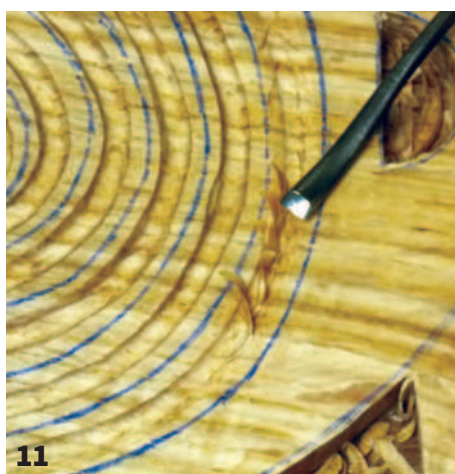
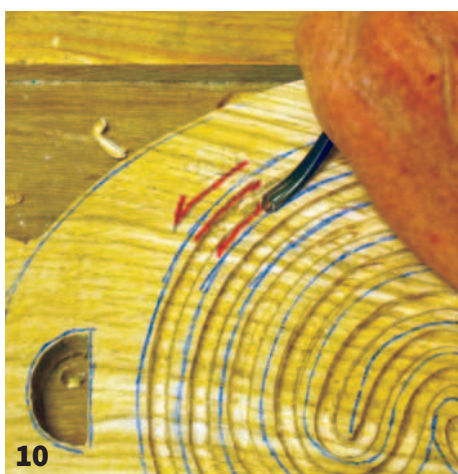
4 Saw away the waste. A simple coping saw is just as quick and simple as any expensive, electrical saw for this thickness and size board. Note: I left two lugs of wood to secure the board when working the face. Pre-drill the hole for the handles. Invert a broad, flat gouge, and smooth over the edge, trimming back to the line. Here I used a No.3, 25mm gouge.

5 Clean out the handles using a No.8, 10mm gouge for the curved section and a No.3, 6mm gouge for the straight edge. Where the curve meets the straight edge, cut across the grain first, into the corner to reduce the risk of the wood splitting.

6 Using a No.11, 6mm veiner, begin to cut the grooves of the labyrinth between the blue outlines. Either tap the gouge gently with a mallet or put a slight rock into the cutting motion to help with the cutting.
Technical: Veiners cut across the bottom of the groove as well as both sides of the groove. With the first pass the veiner will have to cut both the sides simultaneously and leave one rough side, but on the second and all subsequent passes cut to one side with the grain.

7 The cutting edge on the veiner is narrower than the outside width of the tool, consequently veiners cannot be used to cut deeply into a board without widening the groove as you work. Lean the tool into the side to be cut with the grain and widen the groove. Repeat Steps 6 and 7 until the grooves are an even 4-5mm deep. The sweep of the sides of the veiner are flatter than the middle section, and the resulting groove will have an interesting cross section catching light and presenting a natural flow feel to the fingertip.





8 Wherever possible, cut out of the tight corners. If the tool slips out of the corner it will run along the smoother groove, less likely to cause damage. If the tool slips into the corner it may cause damage which cannot be repaired.

9 At the beginning and end of the groove, use a chip carving technique, cut an angled-in stop cut before removing the chip with (shown here) a final horizontal cut into the stop cut.

10 Using a specialist No.4, 6mm back bent gouge, and working with the grain, round over the ridges between the groove. If you do not have a back bent gouge, invert a similar side No.4 gouge sharpened and with an inside bevel to prevent the gouge digging into the wood.

11 Should the bent back gouge begin to tear the base of the groove, this indicates that the groove is too shallow in this place. Simply tidy up and lower as necessary with the veiner.

12 Remove the fixing lugs and use the back bent gouge or your inverted flat gouge to round over the edges and tidy up the handles, ensuring there are no sharp corners. Sand over the piece, working through the grits. I used 60/80/120 and 180 grits.

13 The board is intended to be handled, therefore, it is important to coat it with a finish that is safe and comfortable to hold. I used a natural colour coat of a mixture of soft beeswax and carnauba wax. The manufacturers recommend using wire wool to apply the wax. Do not do this, because it may leave small shards of steel in the wood. Either these shards will be caught in your fingertips or the oak's tannins will corrode the steel, leaving rust marks. Having used the board for meditation, now my new anxiety is how is to stop my wife from using the board as a table mat. I made two. ●

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BDWCA news & events

The constitutional aims of the BDWCA



The BDWCA stand at the 2019 Birdfair

One of the constitutional aims of the BDWCA is to promote interest in the art of bird carving, both nationally and internationally, and our best opportunities to do this are when we are exhibiting at events that the public attend – something we have been unable to do during the pandemic.

The annual Birdfair, staged at Rutland Water Nature Reserve, which we were hoping to be able to attend this year, has been our best opportunity to introduce our art form to a large audience, so we were very disappointed to learn late in 2021 that the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust (LRWT), who had run it for over 30 years, had made the decision to no longer do this.

Good news, however – the Birdfair has recently been resurrected as the Global Birdfair and will be held at the Rutland Showground, Oakham, in July 2022, not far away from the old location. And we will be there! At the time of writing we don't yet know where exactly our stand will be located in the Art Marquee but will report this on our website – www.bdwca.org.uk – and Facebook page – www.facebook.com/bdwcapage – once we have further information.

This event is, for our association, a great way to introduce our art form to a wider audience of people and showcase the work

of our members. We are planning an even better display of carvings than we had in 2019, for which we received the Best Stand, Arts & Crafts, award. Maybe we'll see you there and let's hope the weather is good.

Pictures of all the carvings entered in our show – the Festival of Bird Art – which we were fortunate to be able to hold in September 2021 are on the Bakewell Show page of our website – www.bdwca.org.uk – as well as pictures from the previous few years.

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



Some of the birds displayed



More of the birds on display



The 2019 Best Stand, Arts and Crafts, award

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.



Bird head walking stick handles and more

Carved eating spoons

Working with form, grain types and orientation, as shown by expert green woodcarver, Paul Adamson

Eating spoons come in a range of styles dependent on the function, regional culture or the mood of the maker at the time. This article will guide you through the type I like to make and also describe using different types of wood in various ways. This can make use of interesting sections of heartwood and the extra colours they provide.

Creating good form

I will always advise a student to create a spoon with good form first so that it feels right in the hand, mouth, and bowl. This is important and is soon learned. After this there is scope to add decoration work through chip carving and kolrosing (fine line surface detailing), but often a great piece of wood already has lots of character to start with.

1 Small branches of about wrist thickness are an easy material to get hold of, and most spoons can be carved from them.

2 After splitting the wood in half you have the option of drawing the top profile of the spoon shape on to the conveniently flat split face. Or you can flatten off the bark side of the half-log and draw on to this tangential side. This is often the preferred way as it's argued that the spoon bowl is stronger, but there are also nice circular patterns in the inner bowl once finished as a result of cutting through the annual growth rings.

3 If you are lucky you might have access to larger diameter logs, often as waste from tree surgery work. Larger trees have had more time to establish an inner distinctive heartwood, which contrasts nicely with the sapwood closer to the bark.





4 This can be played with if the log is split radially, just like a cake. This creates two flat sides on a wedge shape, and by drawing the top profile of the spoon on one of these sides, you can incorporate the straight lines of the growth rings and two or more colours.



5 Once you have a tangential or radial-split piece of wood, it's easier to plan the spoon if this is trimmed into a rectangular billet around 200 x 50 x 30mm. The radial piece just needs the corner of one side splitting off and a quick trim of the edge to square up. These radial billets of wood are quick to create and there is minimal waste, so perfect for production spoon carving.

Handle crank

As we are making eating spoons, the most important part to get right is the crank. We are using straight sections of timber here, which saves time in gathering and processing, but a great eater has a handle higher than the bowl, or a bowl which 'kicks up', depending on the way you look at it. The first process to allow this to happen is to weaken the fibres at the lowest part of the bowl section of the eventual spoon. The easiest way to do this is by using a saw to make a stop cut around 7mm deep and the full width of the billet, two to three finger widths up from one end.



6 Then start to axe down from near the top of the handle to meet the stop cut.

7 Slicing from the side of the billet with the axe, trim off the remaining end to create the start of the cranked section of wood. This does take practice and there are the obvious dangers associated with fine, close axe work. If in doubt, get some training in the correct use of carving axes. Those who have access to a bandsaw could obviously use it to complete this wood removal easily.



8-11 Now we can reduce the width of the spoon by axing off material from the side profiles. This again can be helped by the use of sawn stop cuts to allow entry to the union of the bowl.

Once this is completed the top corners of the bowl can be taken off, followed by the bottom corners.

12 The next thing I like to do is thin the piece slightly by removing some of the wood from the underneath of the spoon handle and bowl. Leave around 15mm of thickness though, so that we can create the depth of the bowl and adjust the spoon form as necessary.

Woodcarving knives

The spoon is now roughed out with the axe and it's over to the knife to tidy up that top profile so we know the crank is properly set and that the bowl will enter the food and mouth at the right angle. I use woodcarving knives with a fixed handle and flat ground bevel or slightly hollowed. Avoid convex grinds or blades with a secondary bevel.

13 The top of the bowl is hard to trim with the straight knife so a curved spoon knife is great for starting off a depression, which the straight knife can then tidy up around the top edges that remain. You could complete all the bowl hollowing at this point.

Knife grips

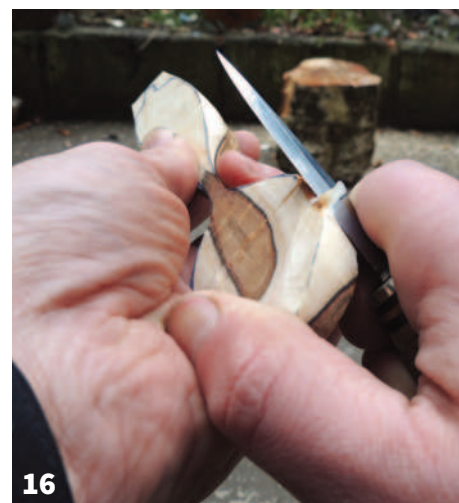
Now that the top is complete, we can tidy up the sides of the spoon with the knife and get down to a finished width. There is a range of five knife grips or holds that can be used to make each carved section as safe and easy as possible to complete.

14 The handle sides can be done by bracing the spoon against the body and working towards yourself. This grip is best described and practised in the company of others who are proficient. When done safely it is a very useful grip indeed for long sections of wood.

15 The thumb push is great for the top corners of the bowl. Simply hold the knife in your dominant hand, place against the wood, but only push on the back of the blade with the thumb of the opposite hand. You can use this thumb as a pivot too. It's a great way to remove small pieces of wood carefully.

16 The potato peeler is as it sounds, and is the best grip for the sides and end of the bowl. Cut towards yourself carefully with the squeezing action of the dominant hand. Just don't cut directly towards your thumb which is braced against the work. Again, take your time and if knife work is new to you, consider joining a club or a course where you can get help.

If you haven't finished off hollowing the bowl with the bent spoon knife, now is the time. Go deeper at the back near the handle and almost flat and shallow at the front, so as to allow the food to be stored but also to be removed by the lips.





18



19

17-18 Top profile and sides complete.

The last section to complete is the underneath of the spoon or the bottom profile. This just needs to be lifted to suit the top profile. Leave thickness where the handle and bowl meet to retain strength. This can be described as the same shape as the keel of a boat. The remaining areas should be thin, down to 2mm.

19 One of the knife grips you can use here is the forehand grip. Hold the knife in the dominant hand and form a fist, edge facing away from you. Imagine forming the point of a tent peg, cutting away from you into fresh air and leaving the end of the workpiece. It's a powerful grip and with less control, so be mindful of where the edge will end up. Check for other people close by.



20



21

20 A safer grip is the chest lever grip – just as powerful but with more ability to control the amount the knife moves. Hold the knife as in the forehand grip, straight out in front of you, but rotate the knife 90° so that the edge is facing to your dominant side.

Place the edge on the wood and bring both towards your body so that the backs of the fingers are in contact with your stomach or chest. The wood and the knife should form a cross. Move both knife and wood at the same time when cutting and it should work like a pair of scissors. As long as the backs of the fingers are placed on the body and rotated through the cut, the upper body can be used to good effect.

21 Give all the edges a bevel to remove the sharp edges left by the carving and to help further thin the piece.

22-23 All done, and finished with a rub of cold-pressed linseed oil, then burnished with a smooth, hard surface. Leave to cure for a few weeks and they are ready to use for many years.

I hope this will help people to not only make great eating spoons, but to carve other items well too. ●



22



23

Water poppies

Cynthia Rogers carves these delicate flowers from basswood



Basswood was chosen for this carving not just because of its paleness. I required a timber that would be strong and stable, without tearing when cutting across the grain. As you can see in the drawing, the grain runs horizontally through the work, so, while the leaves have their grain lengthwise, the poppies themselves will be cut fairly thin in cross grain. Many other timbers would not lend themselves to this approach: they would splinter and break away, or crumble when being handled during sanding. However, others, such as camphor laurel, could have been used with the same confidence as basswood.

I used walnut for the base for two reasons: its depth of colour, for contrast with the carving, and its weight, which gives stability to the carving when finished. The stand can be made from any timber, but it is better if this is also fairly dense.

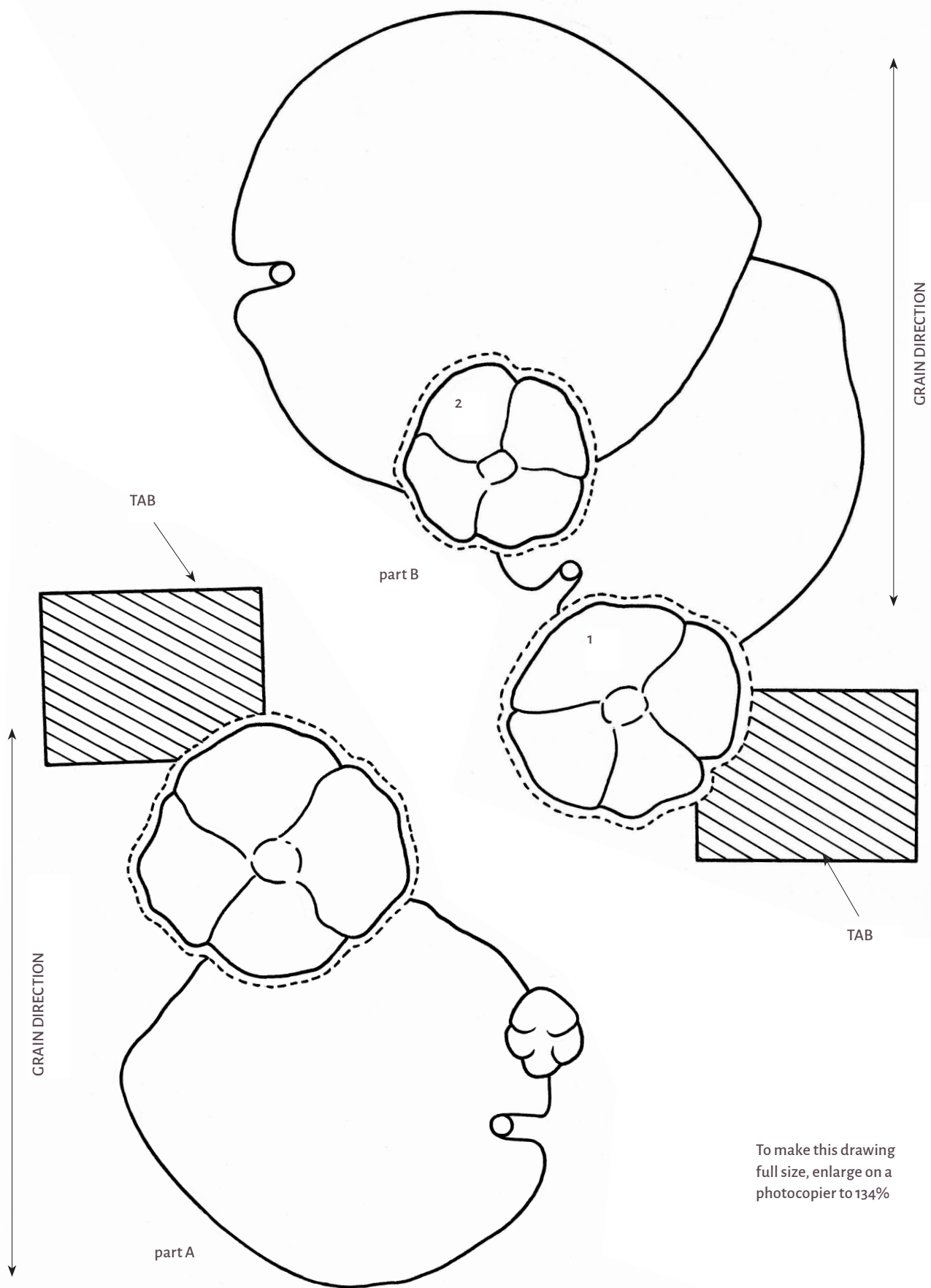
Water poppies are a deciduous or semi-evergreen perennial

deep-water plant with poppy-like flowers held above the floating foliage. They are a pale yellow with red-brown stamens. (I have taken a little licence in adding some colour to the rims of the flowers.) They were chosen for this project to show a different method of carving the shape and contour out of a set block of wood.

Things you will need

Materials

- Carving: basswood, 10 x 8¼in (254 x 210mm), 2in (50mm) thick (or can be cut from two pieces of timber – see drawing)
- Base: walnut, 11in (280mm) diameter, 1in (25mm) thick
- Stand: any timber, 3in (76mm) diameter, 2in (50mm) thick



◀ Walnut base

1 Plane the board and mark the circle with a compass – or you could use a dinner plate or similar as a template. Cut the walnut out on a bandsaw, or cut by hand.

After sanding, mark a line all the way around the underside $\frac{1}{2}$ in (12mm) in, and bevel from this mark to the opposite edge. Use any gouge to remove the bulk of the waste; when nearing completion, use the fishtail, then finish off with the bastard file. Wet to raise the grain and sand again.

Stand

2 Use any dark timber that matches your base or that can be stained to match. Cut it into a 3in (76mm) circle, using the file to even the outer edge before sanding. Wet to raise the grain and sand again before staining if required.

3 Before cutting the timber for the flowers, draw the design on to tracing paper and lay it over the base timber. The grain will be clearly visible through the tracing paper, making it simple to choose where you wish to position the flowers to enhance the carving. Marking the grain direction on the tracing will help you in positioning the design on the wood.

Use masking tape to hold the tracing in position, then slide the carbon paper under it – this way the design will not move.

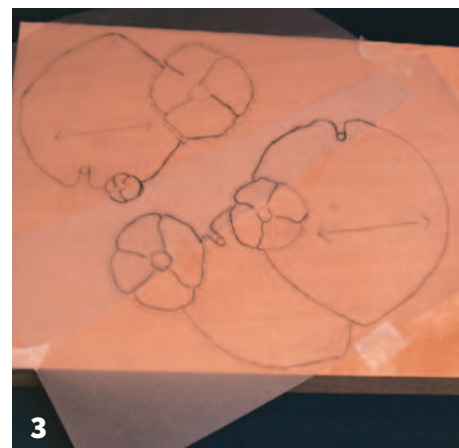
Notice the dotted lines round the outside of the flowers: the timber should be cut to this line. Cut as normal on the solid line for the leaves. For ease of working it is best to cut A and B as two separate pieces; this will also give you more flexibility in fitting the design on the timber.

4 Mark a line $\frac{1}{2}$ in (12mm) from the bottom on both sections A and B. Notice the small pieces with the grain running vertically that have been saved from the offcuts: these will later be used to make the stamens. This time there is no point in making a clay model, as the shape is very simple and we will be working downwards all the time. The lily pads or leaves are almost flat, and the poppies are a simple cup shape. The difference, however, is that this time the centre of each flower is completely shaped before the outside is cut. Leaving the outer timber intact gives support and strength to the flower while it is being worked; the outer is then shaped a little at a time to conform to the inner shape.

Carving part A

Please note that in some pictures the clamps have been removed to give a clearer view for photography.

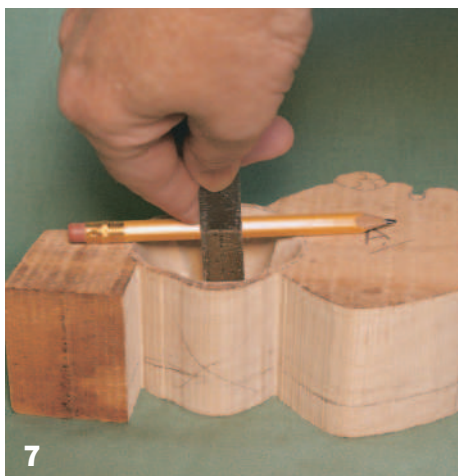
5 Hold the work with a G-cramp anywhere except on a flower or bud. Working from the outer edge of the flower, cut in towards the centre with the $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{5}{8}$ gouge. Take only small cuts. Work your way around the



whole area, cutting the centre deeper each time around but staying well within the pencil line at the rim. Make sure that the inside of the flower wall is not straight – a curved inner wall like the inside of a teacup is the shape that is required. Take care not to lean on the top edge of the carving, as it may crumble or break. If the timber tends to tear, use the $\frac{3}{8}$ and make thinner cuts. You will get better results if your gouges are sharpened with a reasonably steep bevel – a shallow bevel would cause the tool to dig in.

6 The cavity does not have to be symmetrical, but you can see that ridges have been left to form the edges of the petals. Measure the depth of the recess regularly so that you do not cut too deep.





7 A small ruler and a pencil (or similar) laid across the top of the recess can be used to



gauge the depth. Use the $\frac{3}{16}$ to scrape the base at the bottom of the hollow to make a reasonably flat surface for the stamen to sit on.

8 Sand the inside with 180 and 240 grit, enough so that the shape can be seen; but don't worry about some undulations in the form. It helps if the sandpaper is wrapped around a chopstick or similar; this gives more reach and saves the wear on the fingers while allowing more pressure to be applied.



9 With the $\frac{3}{16}$ or the $\frac{1}{8}$, cut a trench $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) deep outside the dotted line to allow access to the rim. Mark in pencil where the petal edges are on the inside of the flower, noting that if the left edge of a particular petal is on the inside then the right edge of that petal will be on the outside, because they overlap. Also mark a slight curve in the top edge, and where the petals lie on the outside of the flower.

10 Use the carving knife held at an angle to cut the edges of the petals on the inside. Cutting at an angle allows for a slight undercut when the waste is removed. The cut need not go all the way to the bottom, and should only penetrate the wood to a depth of $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5–2mm) or a fraction more. If it is cut too heavily, it will show through when the outside profile is shaped.



11 Using the corner of the fishtail, gently cut away the timber to the left of the knife-cut line; this will leave a small undercut on the petal edges. Sand clean, working through the grades of sandpaper. Pressure can be applied while the walls of the flower are supported by the waste; once this has been cut away they will be very fragile.

12 Mark the centre of the inside and drill a $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) hole all the way through the base. This serves both for dowelling the flower to the base and for fixing the stamens.



13 Cut the leaf and the tab down to the depth of the trench using the fishtail, then re-cut the trench in the same manner as before. This now leaves the rim of the flower exposed enough for it to be shaped with the inside curve of the fishtail. Before starting to cut the petals, mark where their edges sit at the top edge of the flower, and where the outer petals overlap. Use the carving knife to cut the separation between the petals on the outer edge. By working down slowly, cutting each section and sanding as we go, we are working with the strongest section of the timber at all times.

14 The contouring of the outside can now be started. Use the knife to cut in the outer petals, undercutting with the fishtail as before. Use the inner curve of the fishtail to shape the outer edge of the rim. Lower the leaf and the tab to the level of the trench, then re-cut the trench.

15 Mark the height of the bud on the outside of the timber at 1/4in (32mm) from the bottom. When this depth is reached, draw the bud on the surface of the timber and cut a trench around it so that it won't get cut off by mistake. Continue to shape the outside of the flower as you work down, leaving the bud until later.

16 By re-cutting the trenches each time as the level is lowered you minimise the risk of the timber splitting, or the chisel running into the flower. The outside of the poppy is profiled and sanded in stages as you work down.

17 When nearing the pencil line which marks the height of the leaf pad, cut away small amounts until the surface is almost flat. Continue to shape the flower and start to undercut the stem area. The bud is left standing, ready to shape.

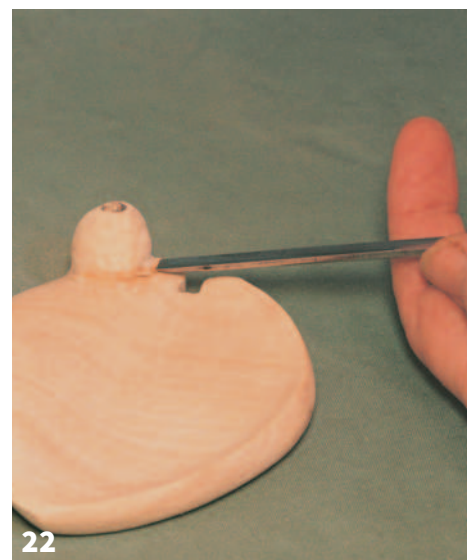
18 Mark the centre of the leaf, and use the % to slope the surface towards the centre. With the same chisel cut a groove in the edge opposite the flower to form a raised rim. Shape the bottom edge of the flower, leaving the stem thick around the previously drilled hole.

19 Sand the flower smooth. Note how the leaf dips down where the flower sits on it. The outside edge opposite the poppy has been rounded using the inside of the fishtail. The edge where the poppy sits has been cut lower and undercut, using either the knife or the fishtail and the %. Sand all edges.

20 Turn the project over and carefully cut away the waste between the tab and the central hole. Leave a ring around the stem, and finish shaping the bottom of the flower and the undercut edges of the leaf. The work will have to be held in the hand while this is done, so care must be taken with the chisels. Do not remove the tab.

21 Draw a 1/8in (3mm) circle on the top of the bud. With the timber clamped by the tab, gently cut away the corners to form a dome shape. Any chisel may be used, but take only small cuts and do not lean heavily on the bud or strike hard with the mallet, which might snap the bud off.

22 Start to shape the bottom edge of the bud where it sits against the leaf, undercutting it with the % and continuing the downturn of the leaf edge.





23 Draw the petals on to the bud, and use the knife to cut along the pencil lines at a slight angle so as to leave a small undercut.

Mark in pencil where the stem comes up from the water and is attached to the leaf. Cut the edges away and slope this part down using the $\frac{3}{8}$ to form a stem.

When removing wood from the outside of the bud, cut and sand at an angle from left to right so as to put a twist into the shape.

At the top of the bud, where the petals cross over, there is a diamond shape; use the $\frac{3}{8}$ to stab-cut along these lines. Remove a small amount of wood to leave a depression about $\frac{1}{16}$ in (1.5mm) deep.

24 Holding the flower carefully, slowly cut away the remains of the tab. Take care that the chisel is not facing your hands as you pare away the remains of the tab. If you have protective gloves, wear them. Sand where necessary, then put part A in a safe place until part B is completed; do not oil yet.

Part B

25 Remove $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) from the entire face of part B, then redraw the details of the flowers on the timber, both inner and outer lines.

Hollow the larger flower (1) next to the tab in the same manner as was done for part A, shaping and sanding the inside as before and drilling a $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) hole in the centre. Cut and shape the petals in the same manner as for part A, and then cut a $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm) trench around the flower.

26 Shape the top edge of flower 1 next to the tab, and then lower the entire area of the leaves to the level of the trench. This effectively lowers the level of the second flower by $\frac{1}{4}$ in (6mm). Redraw flower 2.

27 Continue to shape flower 2 in the same manner as before, while alternately shaping the top rim and outside of flower 1. Continue to cut the trenches as the level is lowered to the pencil mark.

28 Notice that the outsides of the flowers have only been sanded on the upper areas; the lower parts are still rough. Undercutting cannot take place until the shape and contour of the leaves has been set.

I originally drew both edges of the leaves, before deciding which one would lie on top. Eventually the larger, more dominant leaf was chosen to be on top. The centres are then marked and the knife used to separate the two leaves. Cut towards this line from the centre with the fishtail to leave the larger leaf higher than the smaller.

Use the $\frac{8}{7}$ to gouge a dip from the centre of the leaf to the stem; there should be no undercutting yet. Cut a depression along the inside of the large leaf, using the $\frac{9}{10}$, to form a curl in the leaf as shown in the photograph.

29 Note that where the leaves meet, and where the flowers sit, the edges of the leaves are naturally lower than elsewhere. Continue the shaping of the flowers, and do not start to undercut them until the leaves have been fully shaped.

30 Now the poppies can be finished by undercutting where they sit on the pads. The same method is used as before, taking particular care when working between the two flowers. The large leaf can also be undercut and both leaves sanded. Use the inside curve of the fishtail to complete the sweep of the outer undercuts.

All that remains is for the last of the tab to be cut away carefully, as we did with part A.

31 Parts A and B are now both complete, and have been wetted, dried and resanded ready for the next step.

32 To make the stamens, cut a 6in (150mm) length of basswood (or bamboo chopstick) and round it with the file or sandpaper until it is ¼in (6mm) in diameter. Take the small blocks that we cut earlier and mark ½in (12mm) squares on them. Drill a ¼in (6mm) hole in each square.

33 Separate each strip so that there is enough timber to hold with the clamp while the ends are cut into round balls similar to a wooden bead. Cut the dowel into three 2in (50mm) lengths. Drill a ¼in (6mm) hole in a piece of waste and insert a piece of dowel so that 1in (25mm) of it stands up clear of the waste timber. Use the fishtail to cut repeatedly down into the dowel until the end has a frayed and ragged look. Repeat with the other two pieces of dowel. These will become the centres of the stamens.

34 All three balls and the three stamen centres, along with the top edges of the flowers, have now had a dark red stain applied to them. I mixed jarrah with three drops of Black Proof Tint to get the very dark red. Stamens and balls were then dipped into the mix, while a brush was used on the flower edges. To soften the flowers, the colour was rubbed back with a rag dipped in stain reducer.

35 Danish oil was applied to all sections, three coats being rubbed on with a rag. The stamens were simply dipped.

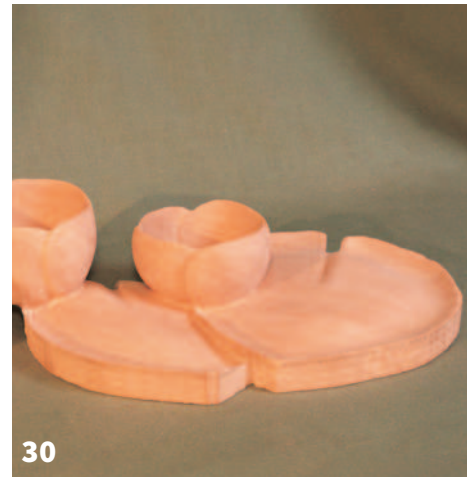
Assembly

Drill two ¼in (6mm) holes in the top of the small circle that we cut for the stand; make a template of these holes and position it on the underside of the large circular base plate. Drill holes in the base plate to match, making sure that you put tape on the drill bit to serve as a depth gauge, so that you do not cut all the way through. Dowel and glue the stand to the base in the usual way.

When the glue has hardened, position the water poppies on top of the base. When



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you are happy with their placement, take a 3in (76mm) nail, carefully insert it through the hole in one of the flowers and give it a smart tap with the hammer; repeat with the other flower. These indents are the locating marks for the drill. Remove the flowers and drill ¼in (6mm) holes where marked; check for alignment before gluing.

Place glue into the dowel holes and under the lily pads, slide the stamens through the balls and glue them in place. Apply glue to the stamens and insert them through the poppies into the base, so that the stamens serve also as dowels for the flowers. Place a suitable weight on the pads until the glue is set. ●



35

The background of the entire image is a light-colored wood grain. On the right side, there is a vertical, curved piece of wood featuring intricate carvings of flowers and swirling vines. The carvings are detailed, with visible petals and leaves.

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Nestling swan and cygnets

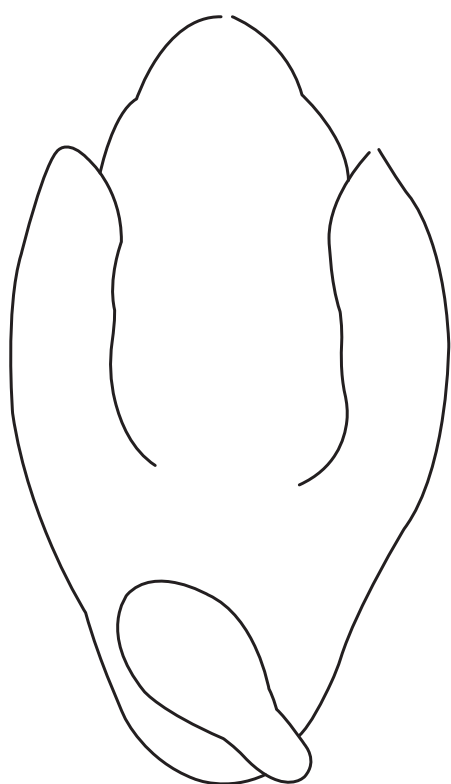
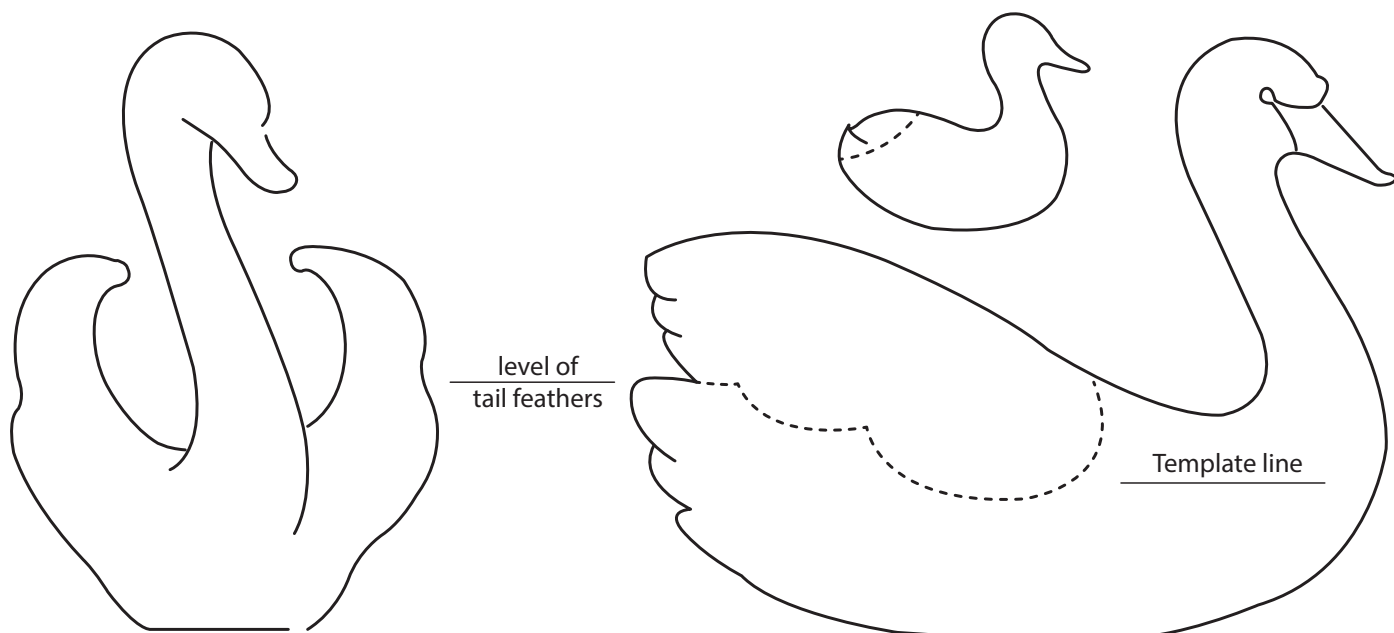
Mark Gough creates a group of nestling birds with a vintage look



As a companion article to the article 'Carving with rasps', in the last issue, and to demonstrate the technique, I came up with this charming little project of a group of nestling swans. I selected a piece of jelutong, which is a nice wood to work with and easy to shape with these tools. The only downside is that it has no discernible grain pattern, so I went for a painted finish with a vintage look. It is possible to get hold of large pieces of jelutong, but they are not always available, so here it was necessary to glue up the blank from smaller stock. If you can't get hold of jelutong, lime is another good option. The purpose of this demonstration is

to show the versatility of using rasps alongside traditional carving gouges – not as a replacement, but as an accompaniment. Ninety per cent of the shaping is done with rasps, except for the initial carving out of the hollow in the back for the cygnets.

Rasps are valuable tools to have in your workshop and, used in the correct way, can save time and effort. They are excellent for removing waste rapidly, forming the basic shape of your work and giving a suitable surface to mark out detail. I strongly recommend buying good-quality, hand-punched ones as the cheaper versions tend to dull quite quickly and can sometimes be awkward to use.



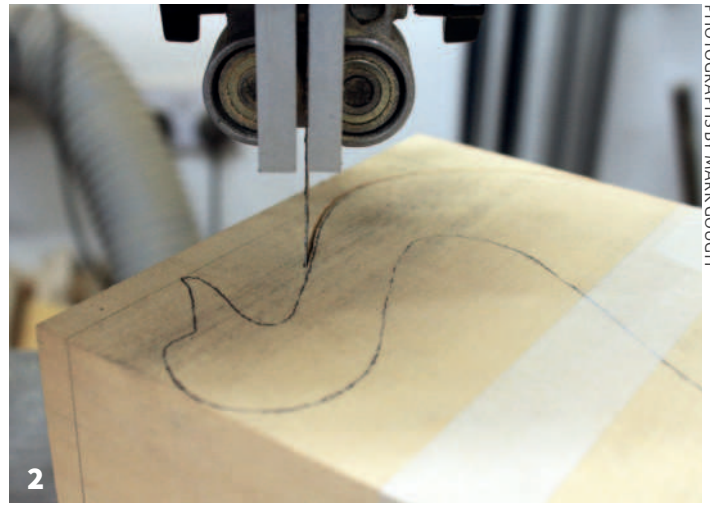
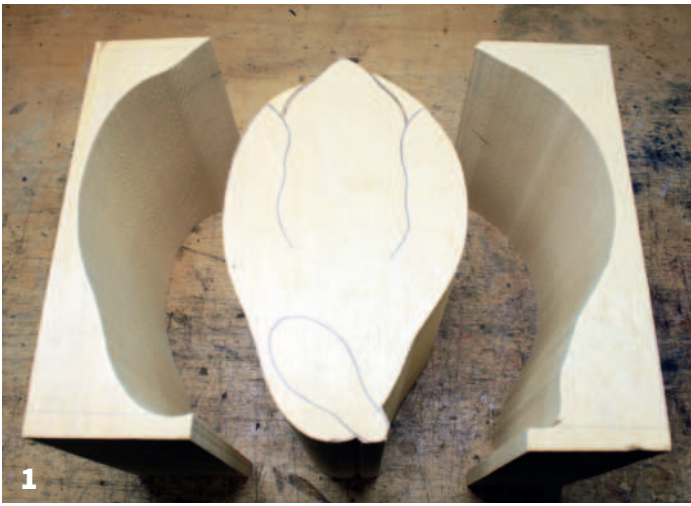
Things you will need

Materials

- Jelutong blank, L275mm x W125mm x H150mm
- Double-sided tape and masking tape
- 80, 120 and 180 grit sandpaper
- Titanium white, light brown and light grey acrylic paint
- Satin acrylic varnish
- Clear paste wax

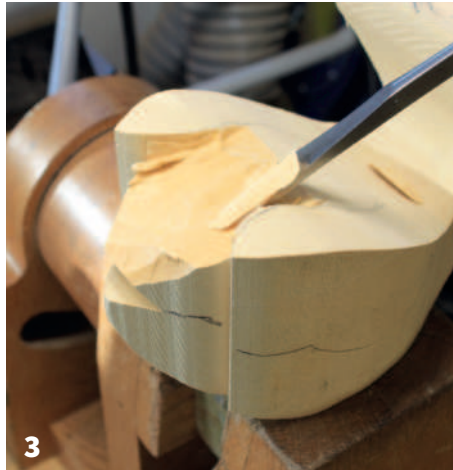
Tools and equipment

- PPE & RPE
- Bandsaw
- Rotary power unit
- 22mm shallow fishtail gouge
- 16mm deep spoon bent gouge
- Saw rasp
- Coarse half-round rasp
- Coarse round rasp
- Medium half-round rasp
- Set of needle rasps
- Fine flame burr and small round carbide burr



1 Mark out the plan on the top of the blank then cut off the end section to use for the cygnets. Using a bandsaw, cut out the shape in one continuous cut on each side then stick the pieces back together with double-sided tape and secure by wrapping masking tape around the centre of whole block.

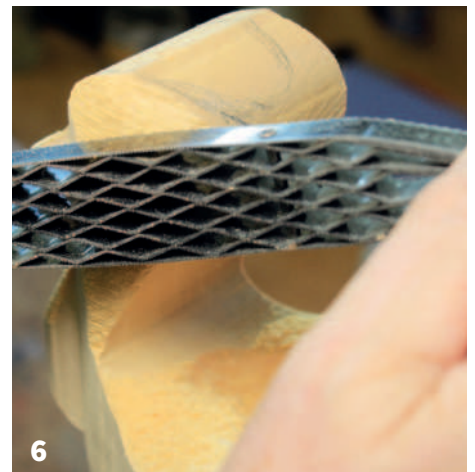
2 Square a pencil line all around the block in line with the tip of the beak, then line up the side-view pattern and mark the profile on one side. Cut this out carefully on the bandsaw. Discard the small pieces of offcuts – if you can salvage the larger piece from the back, this can be used for one of the cygnets.



3 Glue a clamping block to the underside of the work and secure in a vice. Steps 3 to 5 are the only time that you will need to use carving gouges. Start with a shallow, 22mm fishtail gouge, and hollow out the back down to the level of the tail feathers (see plan).

4 Make a cardboard template using the dotted line on the plans and carve out the waste using the 22mm fishtail to seat the rear cygnet.

5 Finally, hollow out the lower level with a 12mm deep bent spoon gouge. These steps can also be done successfully with a spoon carving gouge if you own one.



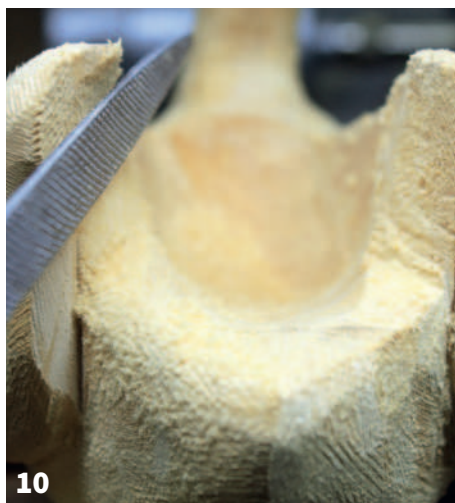
Head and neck

6 Using a coarse rasp, or ideally a saw rasp, round over the back of the head and the sides of the upper neck.

7 Draw in the neckline and shape all round with coarse half-round and round rasps. Carefully cut in under the beak with the tip of the round rasp.

8 Position the work diagonally in the vice and shape the sides from the bottom upwards with the half-round rasp and round over the front of the neck and back of the feathers. Repeat for the other side.

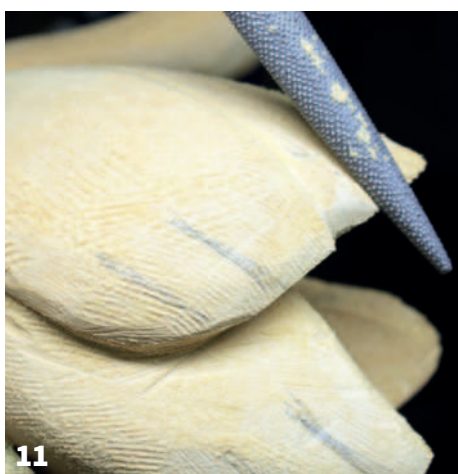




9 Take the half-round rasp and cut in the lines of the feathers with the edge of the tool. The easiest method is to start at one end and use a gentle sawing action to get started, then follow the line round.

10 Use the half round and round rasps to shape the inside wall of the feathers and smooth over the edges. Use the tip to access the smaller awkward areas.

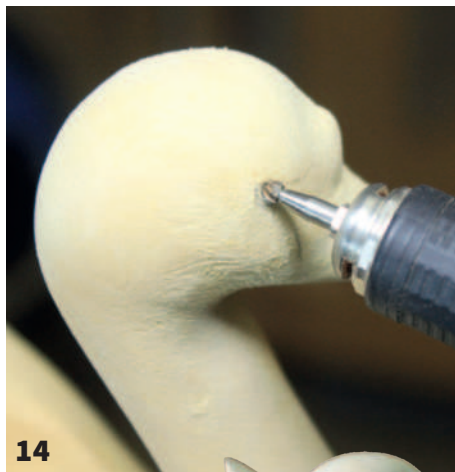
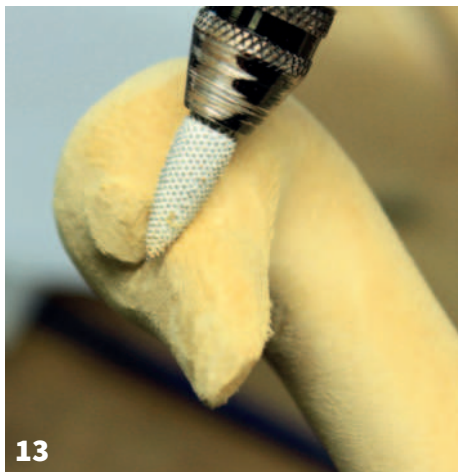
11 To give the impression of overlapping feathers, use a small medium rasp and undercut the lines on each side of the wings and tail.



12 Round over the front of the head and beak with the tip of the medium half-round rasp. A smaller needle rasp will also be useful here.

13 An alternative method of shaping the head and beak is with a rotary power unit and fine flame burr. These essentially use the same cutting technique as a rasp but allow you to access smaller areas. Wearing dust protection is strongly advised.

14 Cut off the clamping block and smooth over the underside, blending it into the sides, front and back. Sand the whole piece down with 80 grit sandpaper and cut the eyes in with a small, round carbide rotary burr, then re-sand with 120 and 180 grit.



15 The cygnets are shaped in the same way. Fix a small piece of scrap wood to the underneath to hold in the vice and shape the whole thing with the medium rasp and needle rasps. One of the cygnets has a hollow scooped out of the back so the other one nestles neatly on top (see plans).

Finishing off

16 The swans are finished off in a rustic vintage style with acrylic paints. Give all three pieces one coat of Titanium white directly on to the unsealed surface, this will raise the grain slightly. For the large swan, paint a second coat of white in random patches. When dry, cut back with 180 grit paper and sand through to bare wood on the high spots and edges of the feathers. The cygnets are painted over with light brown then grey and sanded in the same way. Finish off with two coats of acrylic satin varnish and one coat of clear paste wax. Buff up to a light sheen. ●

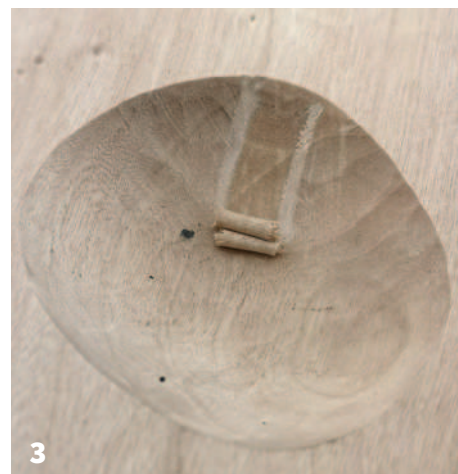




Nosing ahead

*This issue, Nic Westermann
tackles an easier project*

This time I won't be dissecting my failure to effectively sharpen the V-tool that I touched on briefly in the last issue. When I looked at it more closely I realised I needed a better pair of glasses to see accurately what was happening at the very root of the V. The glasses have since arrived, but in the meantime for this issue I took on a simpler project, a straight 12mm Pfeil chisel sent in by Vivien, who had modified it to a bull nose for letter carving. This had been done by hand, starting with a coarse diamond stone to reset the bevels, and while it was generally sharp along its edge and had a pleasing and even curve, it did not cut well.



1 Close-up of bevels as they came. Notice how the edge, although well polished, has more acute bevels at the corners, whereas the back of the bevel is untouched and still has the straight factory grind intact **2& 3** First cuts – notice the torn grain at the corners and the ragged edge to the cuts that were made along the grain **4** The shallow bevel angle in the middle of the chisel **5** The much steeper bevel at the corners **6** Measuring the bevel angle

The problem was that the new edge profile had been formed by steepening the bevels to bring the edge back to form the curve. This works, but it means that the bevel angle of the tool varied along its length. You can see from the two pictures the difference in biting point between the middle and the corner of the chisel.

The corners of the tool weren't sharp but it was pointless addressing this without first cutting the bevels to the correct form – just forming an edge by following the bevel form that was set would have made the variation in bevel angle more pronounced.

My simple two-step approach to sharpening is to first cut the bevels to the correct form, then simply to refine the grind to form a sharp edge.

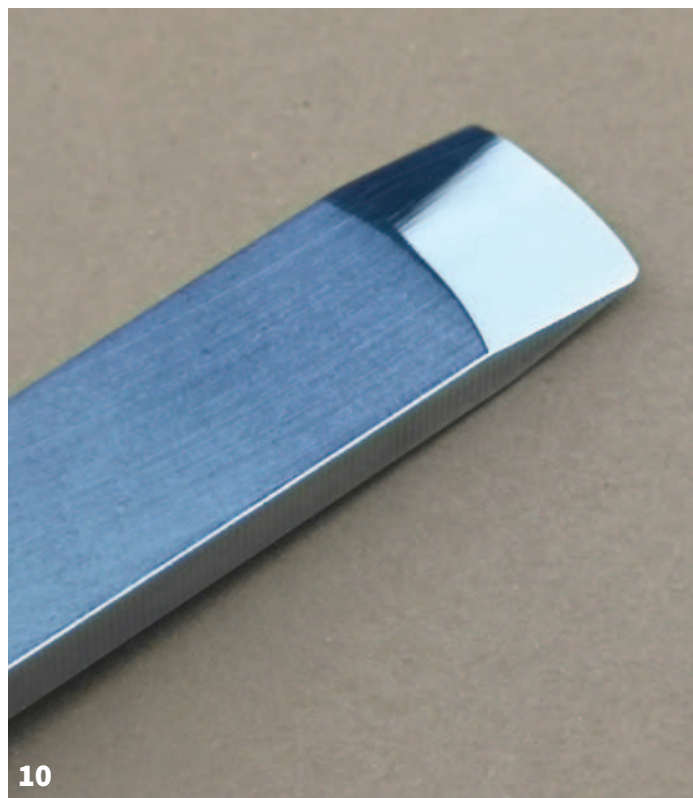
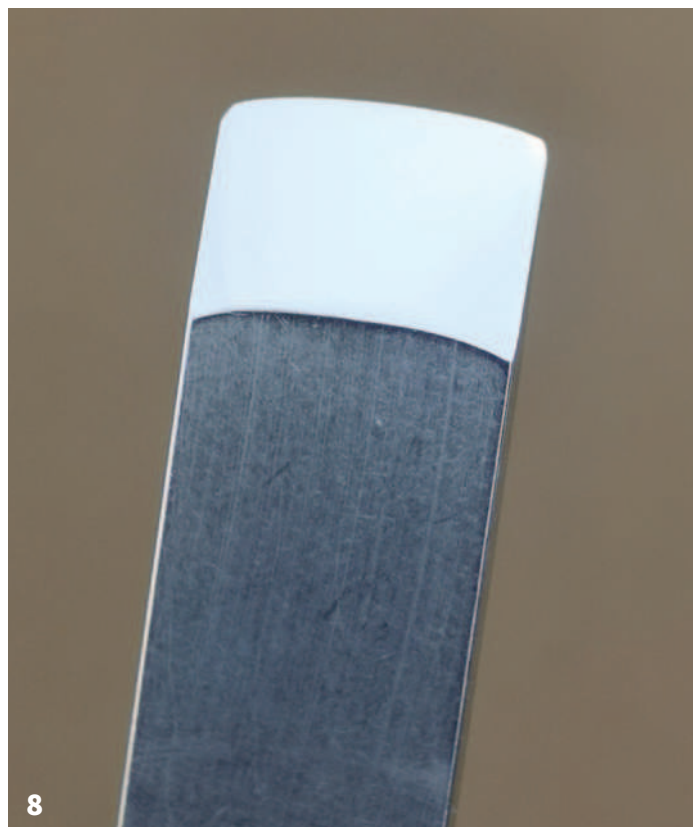
So the first job was to grind the bevels at a constant angle. Simple geometry means the back of the bevels will then be curved in the same way as the edge is. To start with the back of the bevel was dead straight.

I was, as ever, going to regrind this tool on the ProEdge. When

I measured the bevel angle though I found this to be 19° – too shallow for harder woods. In the end I decided to stick with this shallow angle as it is easy to strop or stone on a micro bevel to reinforce the edge, but much harder to make a bevel angle shallower if you later decide you want that.

The first problem was that this meant each individual bevel was 9.5°, something that the ProEdge won't cope with too easily, not with the raised platen that I like to use. But a bit of grinding on the back of the table meant I could get to 10°, giving 20° included angle, which was close enough for me.

I rough ground the chisel, grinding evenly on both sides and gently sweeping the edge from side to side to introduce the curve to the entire bevel. When I reached the corners I increased the sweep a bit further to break or dub these back. If I'm honest, if you look at the finished form very closely you can see that the corners aren't quite symmetrical, but as they were formed using the ProEdge table they were still sharp and true at 20°.



7 Rough grinding the bevels, showing the sweep needed to reshape them **8** Bevels formed at 60 grit. Notice how the curves of the front and back of the bevel match **9** Bevel marked up and ready to grind on a finer belt **10** Stropped with no obvious micro bevel

Then, to refine the edge, all I had to do was change belts and repeat the process. I went down to 1200 grit in this case. As it can be hard to see when you have gone through the scratch pattern left by the previous coarser grit, I coloured the bevel with a black marker. I tend to do this twice to be sure I have a uniform scratch pattern to work with.

A quick strop on the bench grinder running a felt wheel loaded with fine polishing compound to remove the tiny scratches from the last belt. I tried to keep this bevel as flat as possible with no obvious micro bevel visible, and we were ready to try it out.

I fully realise that this tool was destined for letter carving and so would not be used in this manner, but I wanted to show the quality of the whole edge, not just the corners.

The edge held up very well in use which impressed me, but my guess is that a micro bevel will be needed if a harder wood is to be cut. Doing this will give a chance to subtly reshape the corners as I can imagine it is a matter of personal preference exactly how rounded these need to be. Hopefully though, this is a solid foundation on which to fine tune this lovely tool.



11 A cut was taken to the left of the first, the chisel now cut cleanly right up to its comers, as can be seen by the clean edge of the chip **12** An across-the-grain cut left the surface very clean without the tear-out seen earlier. Admittedly, one edge of the chip was a bit ragged though



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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Orca within an orca

Cedric Boyns undertakes an impressive whale project



The inspiration for this carving came from a visit to Elephanta Island off the coast of Mumbai in India, where the local craftsmen carve small elephants within larger elephants, mainly in soapstone, and all done through the holes they drill into the larger elephant's body. These they sell as souvenirs.

I thought this would be an interesting project to have a go at in wood, and I needed to choose a good subject to attempt this idea of an animal within an animal. I have a love for the sea and a deep interest in marine mammals, and have been lucky enough to have done a fair amount of ocean and expedition cruising in the 10 years or so prior to the start of the Covid pandemic.

For me, there are few more thrilling experiences than to be sitting, camera in hand, on the side of a Zodiac inflatable boat in the open sea and have a large marine mammal surface very close by. I have seen orcas in these circumstances, so I felt an orca would make a good subject for this exercise as it has a fairly large body that could be hollowed without too many projections to initially get in the way. I chose to carve the dorsal fin and the flippers separately and glue them on to the body once the hollowing and inner carving procedures had been completed.



Things you will need

Materials

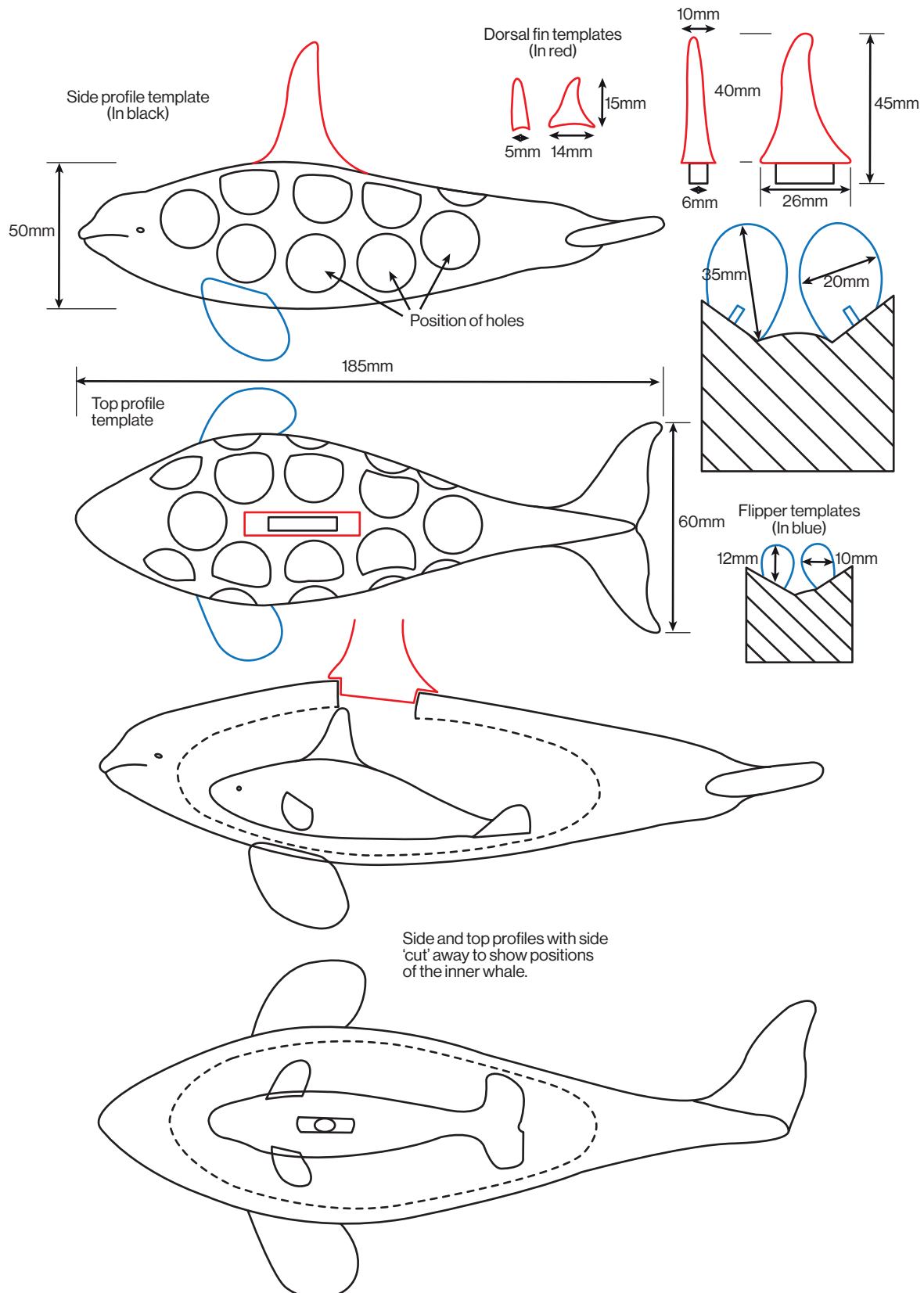
- Squared up block of lime, 185 x 60 x 50mm
- Offcuts of lime to make the dorsal fins and flippers

Tools & equipment

- Suitable PPE and dust extraction
- Templates – top and side profiles (scaled up as necessary)
- Carver's chops for work holding
- Glues: hot-melt, super and wood

- Masking tape and double-sided tape
- Abrasives – 120 to 400 grit
- Variety of homemade sanding sticks
- Pair of fine forceps
- Bandsaw with 1/4in blade (fretsaw or scroll saw)
- Pillar drill and hand drill
- Forstner drill bit – 16mm/5/8in
- Twist drills – 3, 4, 5mm
- Detail carving knife
- Riffler – 'spoon and knife'

- Small abrasive ball on rotary carver
- Carving gouges: No.1, 3mm and 6mm
- No.2 (Pfiel), 2mm, 3mm and 6mm
- No.3, 2mm, 3mm, 5mm, 6mm (fishtail), 10mm and 20mm
- No.11, 2mm veiner
- Back bent gouge, 6mm
- Spoon bent (fishtail) gouge, No.6 sweep (6mm)



◀ Carving the basic body

1 Use the templates from the drawings to draw the top and side profiles on to the block. (Note the dorsal fin and flippers are not part of these templates.)

2 Cut out the side profile first as it will be easier to remove the waste wood in one piece. Glue this waste wood back with small blobs of hot-melt glue (or masking tape if you prefer), then cut out the top profile.

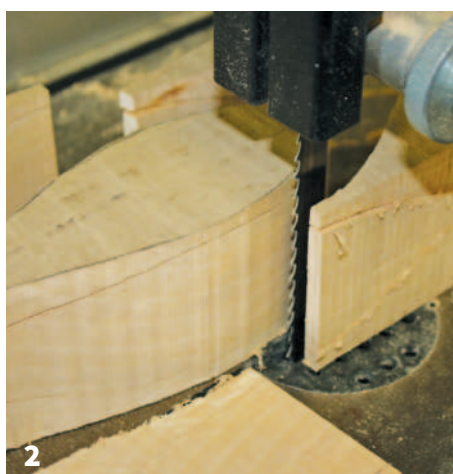
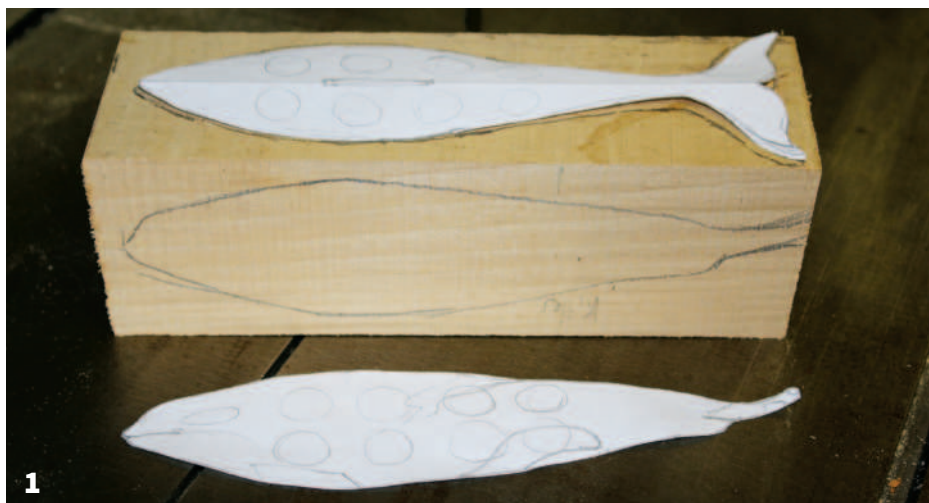
3 & 4 Remove all the waste wood, leaving the basic whale shape ready to start the carving.

5 Start to round over the edges at the head end using a suitable gouge or gouges. (I used the No.3, 6mm, 10mm and 20mm gouges.)

6 Continue to shape the body down towards the tail. I suggest that the tail flukes are not made too thin at this stage as this would increase the likelihood of them being damaged during the hollowing process.

7 Once you are happy with the basic body shape – it can be checked against the template – it is ready to start the hollowing process.

8 Before locating where the holes should be drilled for hollowing, I decided to make and fit the dorsal fin. Using the template, the fin was drawn on to the end of a waste block of lime 10mm thick. This not only allows it to be partly cut out safely with the bandsaw, but also to be more easily held for shaping with a small gouge.





9



10

9 I chose to secure it in place with a small tenon, which was formed with a carving knife once the fin had been released from the block, either with the bandsaw or with a fretsaw or scroll saw. The fin can then be sanded to 240 grit and is ready to put in place later.

10 & 11 The mortice was then cut into the top of the whale in the midline using the No.1 chisels and then the fin was tested for goodness of fit.



11



12

12 After marking the position of the two flippers so that these areas could be avoided (the flippers are made separately and put in place at the end – see Step 28), the positioning of the holes was marked. Initially this was two rows of three holes down each side of the body, with an additional hole on each side behind the head and a central hole on the top between the head and the dorsal fin. The pattern of holes is shown in the drawings.

13 These holes were drilled with the 16mm Forstner bit to an initial depth of no more than 15mm. It may be necessary to adjust the positioning of the holes as you proceed through the drilling process to try to ensure that spacing is as even as possible. I used a pillar drill, with the whale held in a V-shaped jig to stop it from rotating as drilling proceeded. Once drilling is complete, the hollowing process can begin.

Hollowing process

The following three photos show the basic procedure for the hollowing process (practised on a piece of rounded scrap wood).



13



14

14 Small 4 or 5mm holes are drilled at an angle around the inside perimeter of each hole with a hand drill. Be careful not to drill too far into the central wood as this will form the body of the inner whale.



15



16

15 & 16 I used a selection of small gouges to gradually cut between the drilled holes and clear around the central portion of wood. This process will gradually isolate the outer wall of the whale from the wood in the centre, which can be carefully rounded and shaped with these same gouges, working through the holes, to form the body of the inner whale.



17 This photo shows the inner structure taking shape on the actual piece. I cleared and shaped the head end first.

18 Followed by the tail end, tapering the body back towards where the tail would be crafted.

19 To produce a realistically sized tail it was necessary to carve it with the flukes turned up at the sides so it would fit into the narrowing tail region of the outer whale. The start of this process can be seen in the photo, with the side of the upturned fluke visible within the hole on the far left.



20 At this stage it was necessary to drill three more holes in the tail region through which the back of the flukes could be crafted. Along with the selection of small gouges as before, I found a small back-bent gouge useful for the initial clearing and shaping.

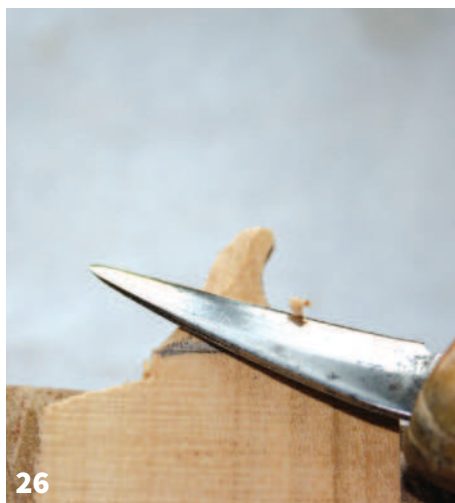
21 & 22 Once I was happy with the shaping of the inner whale, the smoothing and sanding process could start. For this I used a small ball-shaped burr along the back and a spoon riffler to work my way along the sides of the inner whale, trying to round the underside of the body slightly.



23 I then used a selection of homemade sanding sticks to smooth off all the inner surfaces, working through the grits from 150 down to 400.

24 These sticks were either made from thin, curved strips of wood or narrow strips of flexible plastic (from milk containers), on to which the strips of abrasive were attached with double-sided tape. The outside of the large whale was also given a sand at this stage to tidy up the outside, particularly where some (hopefully) slight damage will probably have occurred around the edges of the holes during drilling and hollowing. At this stage the tail flukes of the outer whale can also be reduced to their final shape and thickness and sanded.





25 The dorsal fin and flippers for the inner whale are made in the same way as those appendages needed for the outer whale. The fin is made on the end of a small block as shown.

26 It is shaped and sanded before being released from the block with a fretsaw. After testing the fit and positioning, it can be glued to the top of the inner whale with a drop of superglue. It was a little too tall for the space but conveniently was able to fit into the mortice created for the main dorsal fin, which pierced the top of the hollowing.

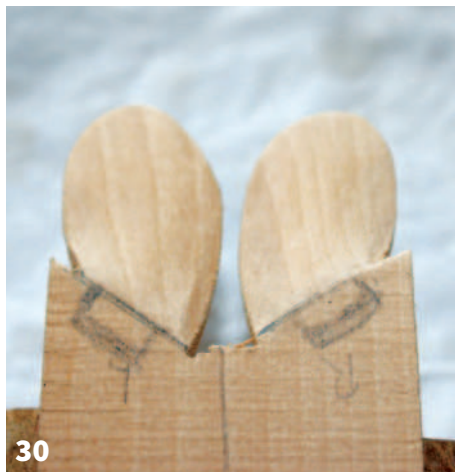
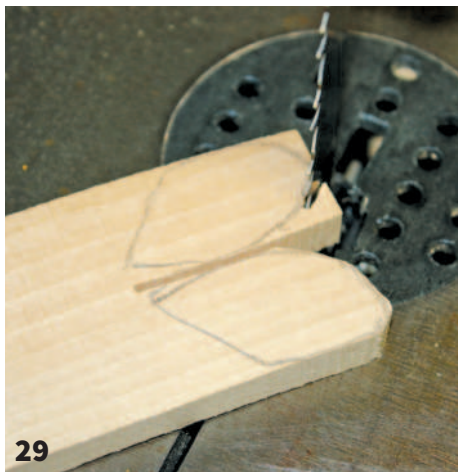


27 I used a pair of forceps to insert it through the mortice in the top of the outer whale and hold it in place until the glue had set as shown.

28 The flippers for both whales were made in the same way, first drawing them on to a suitable block.

29 Cutting part of the way round them with the bandsaw/scroll saw/fretsaw.

30 Shaping and sanding before cutting them free.



31 I had initially intended to fit them with a tenon on the flipper and a mortice in the body wall of the outer whale, but I changed this to a dowel peg so I could make adjustments to the angles they were set at prior to gluing, and to make it easier to ensure that they were set symmetrically. I drilled 3mm holes, about 5mm deep, in the flippers as shown. I then whittled tiny dowel pegs to fit the holes, from a scrap of waste beech (beech being slightly stronger than lime).

32 After checking the positioning, I drilled another 3mm hole in the body of the whale on each side to house the dowel pegs.



◀ **33** Just a slight adjustment was needed to achieve a decent fit.

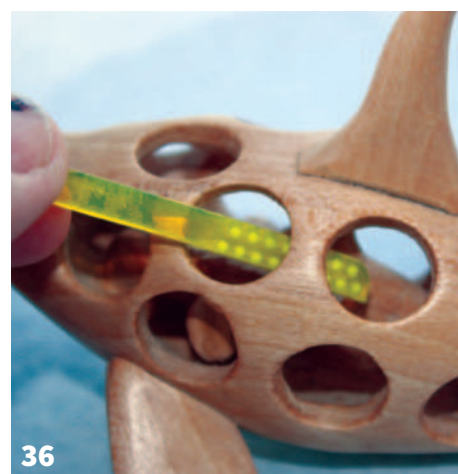
34 Once I was happy with the fit and angle, the flippers were glued in place with a suitable wood adhesive.

35 The flippers for the small inner whale were glued in place through a hole with superglue. This was quite a tricky process, and my pair of forceps came in handy again to hold them in place while the glue set. (I knew it would be wise to keep my dissection kit from my school days. I have found the forceps extremely useful over the years.)

The outer surface was finished with a good sand down to 400 grit. This will tidy up any slight damage which is likely to have occurred to the edges of the holes. I then added the eyes and the mouth.

36 Following a coat of wax polish, accessing the inner parts with a small stiff paint brush and a modified old toothbrush to polish it up.

37 The finished carving should look something like this. ●



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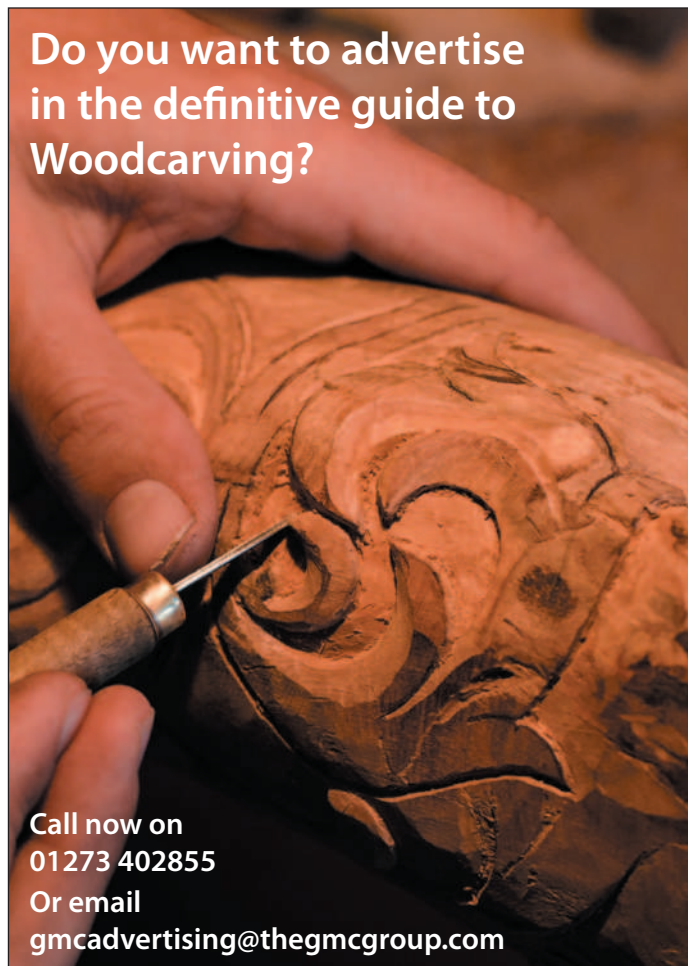
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Supporting British craft

We find out how QEST scholarships are helping carvers develop their talents

Amelia Crowley Roth is a woodcarver who came to London from Somerset to follow her dream of learning a craft like her luthier parents. She studied at City & Guilds of London Art School where she completed a BA (Hons) Fine Art followed by a PG Diploma in Historic Carving, specialising in woodcarving. During this time, she was supported by a QEST Radcliffe Trust Scholarship.

Since graduating in 2015 she has been working full time as a woodcarver completing high-end commissions, including a crozier for the Pope's presentation gift to the Archbishop of Canterbury on his visit to the UK. She also carved a chess table to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Alice in Wonderland*. She has exhibited at various events and prestigious locations, including London Craft Week, the V&A, Lincoln Cathedral and Windsor Castle.

Instagram: [@londonwoodcarving](https://www.instagram.com/londonwoodcarving)

Woodworkers and the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST)

Over the years many other woodworkers have benefitted from a QEST scholarship, including QEST Carpenters' Company Scholar Philip Walker who is using his funding to finance his training in carving techniques, gaining a greater understanding of tools, equipment and related processes.

In 2019, wood sculptor Eleanor Lakelin became a QEST Turners' Company Scholar. The Scholarship supported her ambition to develop larger scale forms. Eleanor was invited to the US to meet seminal artist Ursula Von Rydingsvard and sculptor Mark Lindquist, to explore the creative and technical challenges of her ideas. She also completed a course at the Art Academy in London to experiment with methods for figurative and abstract sculpture at scale.



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF QEST



Oak crozier carved by Amelia for the Pope to present to the Archbishop of Canterbury



Carved flamingo on the *Alice in Wonderland* commemorative table made by Amelia



Eleanor Lakelin was supported in her ambition to turn larger sculptures

Philip Walker's QEST scholarship is funding his further training



SUPPORTING
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CRAFTSMANSHIP

QEST scholarship applications

QEST offers scholarships of up to £18,000 for the training and education of talented craftspeople. For each successful scholar QEST will also fund a place on a Professional Development Programme, run in partnership with Cockpit Arts.

The scholarships are open to any UK resident, aged 18 or over, who would like to improve their craft skills.

QEST welcome applications from all talented craftspeople, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or nationality; and particularly encourage those with protected characteristics that are under-represented in the craft sector to apply.

The funding supports traditional college courses, vocational training or one-to-one training with a master craftsman, and can also cover some additional costs including transport, equipment and materials.

The latest round of applications will be open from 11 July to 15 August.

For more information about applying, visit: qest.org.uk/apply/scholarships/
Support is available for dyslexic applicants – for more information email: katy.neusten@qest.org.uk

From the community

A collection of letters and news from the woodcarving community



'Octopus' – 30cm wide from a piece of acer root. Probably the most revolting thing I have carved, but it was a request from our son to hang over a bookcase. He likes it!



ABOVE:
'Autumn' –
46x33cm
in lime



'Touchdown' – wingspan 33cm in cedar



LEFT: 'Frog
Prince' –
13cm high
in ash

Gibbons challenge

Two Grinling Gibbons articles from *Woodcarving* have been exactly what I need for some technical hints for the project I am currently working on. Following a recent visit to the tercentenary exhibition at Compton Verney, I have been inspired to attempt a version of a Gibbons coat of arms with a difference. The shield will have a relief of a Venice canal scene instead of the usual heraldry. Above it is a red squirrel, and around it will be foliage and musical instruments

(inspired by a Petworth wall panel). I will be incorporating every skill I have learned over the past 20 years, including a bit of turning.

If I succeed, I expect this to take me a year. Here are four of my better efforts, two of which have been produced during recent lockdowns and have helped to keep me sane.

Ted Hodgkins



In memory of Mike

I have been carving for over 10 years now and have achieved some nice examples, but I liked the late Mike Wood's bird carvings so much that I've chosen his fieldfare as my first bird. Such a good carver, such a loss to carving.

John Williams



Gone fishing

Here are some more of my carvings. I've just finished the bear catching salmon in oak. Please keep up the good work, I hope you are all in good health.

Regards, George Lowrey



Having a go at carving part of a serpent for the building

A man with short brown hair and sunglasses on his head is focused on carving a large piece of light-colored wood. He is wearing a dark blue t-shirt and is using a mallet and a carving tool. The background shows an indoor setting with wooden floors and walls, and some informational displays with Thai text. The overall scene is well-lit, suggesting a workshop or a museum.

Carving Countries

Will Barsley continues his tour of Thailand

In this series, William Barsley looks back on the journey that inspired his career change to become a professional woodcarver. Still in Thailand, William visits the Sanctuary of Truth, a colossal building that's covered in carvings and employs hundreds of woodcarvers. He then meets a Scottish woodcarver living in east Thailand, carving on Buddhist temples.

◀ The journey

After the delights of Chiang Mai, where I saw some incredible sites such as the elephant carvers of Bang Jang Nak, we cycled north towards the mountains and Laos. Before reaching the border, we realised the mountains and terrain we were about to face were a little extreme for us on our fully loaded touring bikes. Opting for an easier course this time, we loaded our bikes and gear on to a 'slow' boat that took two days on the river from Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang in Laos. We spent two weeks exploring Laos and meeting indigenous woodcarvers, which I will talk about in the next article. After Laos, we dropped south back into Thailand for part two of our Thai adventure, and that is the focus of this month's article.

Notable woodcarvers

Thailand's Scottish woodcarver – Douglas Hastings

During this trip I kept a blog and asked readers for recommendations of places to visit or carvers to meet. I received an email from Douglas Hastings, a Scottish woodcarver who spent half the year living and carving in Thailand and the other half of the year in the UK. Douglas kindly invited me to stop by his home and workshop in the east of Thailand. As the majority of carvers I met on this trip originated from the country that I was researching, it was fascinating to meet a carver from the UK carving in Thailand. I gratefully accepted the invite and spent a wonderful three days getting to know Douglas and hearing the inspiring tale of how he ended up carving in local Buddhist temples. It is a pleasure and honour to share his story with you.

Douglas discovered woodcarving at an early age out of a combination of fun and necessity. Growing up with not a lot of money, he took to making his own toys, such as small wooden boats that he would sail down the nearby river. His practical nature continued into later life as he joined the navy and subsequently trained as a heavy-duty engineer working all over the world. Moving to Thailand later in life, Douglas decided to build his own home – a beautiful property nestled in a rural village near Udon Thani surrounded by rice paddies, cassava plantations and miles of sugarcane plantations. Soon after moving, the head monk of the nearby Forest Temple invited Douglas to carve a series of eight Buddhas in his new temple – one for each day of the week (there are two Buddhas for Wednesday; morning and evening). The figures were to be carved on eight gigantic trees that acted as supporting pillars inside the temple. Eager to continue carving as part of his Buddhist practice and excited to have the opportunity to carve larger pieces, Douglas quickly agreed. He used a combination of power and hand tools to rough out and prepare the carvings.

Impressed by his work on the inside of the temple, the monk asked Douglas to carve a series of sculptures to be placed on the roof. After some discussion, he realised they were to be a set of eight Nagas, a serpent/dragon-like creature that often sits atop temples to ward off evil spirits. Excited to have the opportunity to carve these huge Nagas, Douglas set to work. The first Naga took him two months to complete and was carved in three sections; head, body and tail. It then took him roughly two to three weeks to complete each remaining Naga, having become familiar with the process. They are an impressive sight, each covered with hundreds of scales and fixed to the roof with large bolts, giving the impression that they are flying. The Nagas are carved from beautiful teak wood, supplied to him by the temple.

While I was staying, Douglas kindly invited me to help carve out the initial stages of a Buddha in the Forest Temple. This was my first experience of carving on a full-sized tree so Douglas showed me a few tricks of the trade and the methods he uses to begin his carvings. It was a brilliant morning spent carving in the temple and one of my highlights of the trip so far. It was a genuine pleasure getting to know Douglas and I'm glad to be able to share his story with you. I am continually amazed by the diversity of carvers I've met and the different ways in which woodcarving is a part of their life.



1 The Forest Temple with carved Nagas **2** Douglas with one of his carved Nagas **3** Douglas carving one of the eight Buddhas **4** A Buddha relief carving by Douglas



5



6



7

5 Walking around the outside of the Sanctuary of Truth, which is positioned right next to the sea **6** Decoration and sculpture is everywhere to be seen in the Sanctuary of Truth **7** Gigantic four-sided head

The Sanctuary of Truth

I heard many times about a must-see place for carving called the Sanctuary of Truth, located in Pattaya, about two hours south of Bangkok. The Sanctuary was commissioned by Thai businessman and millionaire Lek Viriyaphant and is described by many as a visionary environment that combines ancient Thai, Khmer, Chinese and Indian religious iconography all under one roof. The Lonely Planet website describes it as being part art installation, part religious shrine and part cultural monument. Construction began back in 1981 and is not expected to be finished until 2050.

At 105m high and 100m wide, the Sanctuary is a colossal monument and, as such, it is estimated that up to 250 people, mostly woodcarvers, continue to work on this project. One of many driving forces for Viriyaphant to commission the building was to ensure the preservation of ancient building techniques, in this case handcrafted woodwork. It's said that the Sanctuary was

originally built without using a single nail, instead employing a combination of joints such as tongue and groove, dovetail, finger and butterfly. Although these are still the dominant technique of construction, nails have been added here and there over the years to ensure safety and provide extra support.

The carving workshop, which sits alongside the Sanctuary, is a hive of activity and an absolute joy to see in action. I discovered that many of the carvers came from Myanmar (Burma), where carving is still an important part of the culture. Many of the carvers were related and, in many cases, would arrive at the Sanctuary with very little experience in carving or construction, taking the opportunity to learn how to carve 'on the job'. The wood that was predominantly being used was mai daeng (redwood or pyinkado), a very hard wood with a beautiful reddish colour.

There are a number of halls in the Sanctuary, each with their own unique symbolism. As a very basic overview, the first hall depicts



8 Carvers at the Sanctuary of Truth showing me their techniques **9** Trying not to mess up their hard work! **10** Designs sketched on to a pillar with chalk and ready for carving **11** Statues being repaired **12** The Sanctuary of Truth roof

the universe through the four elements and their associated Hindu gods (Shiva, the god of earth and fire, Vishnu, the god of water and Brahma, the god of sky or wind). The second depicts the sun, moon, stars. The third represents parental love, depicted by a family statue where rubbing the knee of the mother is said to bring fertility. The fourth hall is known as the 'world supporter', symbolising love, kindness, sacrifice and sharing.

The four middle spires are said to represent four elements that, according to eastern philosophy, will together result in an ideal world. These are depicted by: a woman holding a book said to represent the continuation of immortal philosophy; a man holding a lotus flower representing the establishment of religion; a person holding a child and leading an elderly person representing

the life bestowed upon humans; and a woman holding a pigeon in her hand with a bundle of rice representing peace, wealth and balance in the world.

All in all I think we spent six hours wandering around the Sanctuary, though the time flew by. I was in awe, not only of the carvers' skills but of the huge amount of time already spent on the project – and yet to come. Just knowing that I could come back in 30 years and see it still being made is an incredible thought. And I hope to do just that.

Next time, William meets indigenous woodcarvers in Laos and discovers the Backstreet Academy, an innovative organisation offering unique experiences such as woodcarving. ●

Next issue

WC188 on sale 30th June 2022

Guest Editor Kevin Alviti makes a rustic butter press



Steve Bisco carves a traditional Green Man in a Gothic style and Zoë Gertner completes her watering can carving

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Thai Royal Barges, Bangkok

We admire the carvings on the boats displayed in Thailand's National Museum of Royal Barges



The Royal Barge Procession is an important religious and royal ceremony that has been used to commemorate significant events in Thailand since the 14th century. The Procession is a large-scale, spectacular event involving 51 historic barges; the Royal Barge, which was built in 1994; and 2,082 oarsmen. The Procession's route starts from the Wasukri Royal Landing Place in Khet Dusit, Bangkok and travels 2km along the Chao Phraya River to Wat Arun (the Temple of the Dawn), where the king delivers new robes to the monks.

The intricately carved and gilded wooden barges are fine

examples of traditional Thai craftsmanship; in fact, the Royal Barge Procession was revived in 1959 by King Bhumibol to preserve this important part of Thai cultural heritage. He had the barges restored and established the National Museum to house them.

The figureheads and other decorations on the barges depict animals, mythical creatures and Hindu and Buddhist figures. Each barge includes a roofed enclosure where the royal family would sit. Eight of the barges are on display in the museum, alongside exhibits about how the boats were made.



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