



WOODCARVING

An Introduction

Courtesy of the Alamo Area Woodcarvers

Alamo Area Woodcarvers

The Alamo Area Woodcarvers, founded in 1974, is a club whose membership consists of a variety of persons who enjoy woodcarving or an appreciation of working with wood.

The club's objectives include fostering a woodcarving fellowship; exchange and sharing of ideas, techniques and patterns; and promoting increased skills of all members. The club is dedicated to developing and perpetuating an interest in and appreciation of the art form. Members often display their work in woodcarving shows and art galleries throughout San Antonio and Texas. Some woodcarving shows are entered by the club and members are encouraged to display their carvings.

Visitors are not only welcome, but encouraged to stop by the club meetings and ask questions or just watch what is happening.

Introduction to Woodcarving

The term 'woodcarving' covers all methods of shaping and cutting wood to form an object that pleases that individual's taste. Various styles and types of woodcarving include **realistic, stylized, caricature**, etc., and **in-the round, shallow or deep relief, chip carving, chainsaw carving, whittling**, and many more. Woodcarving may be accomplished with hand tools (typically knives and gouges) or with power tools (typically rotary equipment). This introduction is confined to **in-the-round** carving by hand. Most often (but not always) **in-the-round** carving is done with a project small enough to be held in the hand.

As carving is done with sharp instruments, a word about **SAFETY** is in order. Carving toward your hands is a frequent event. Sharp instruments and hands are not compatible; therefore, we recommend the wear of safety gloves and thumb or finger guards, used by most carvers, whenever you carve. These items are available at any well stocked woodworking or woodcarving outlet and are much less expensive than a trip to the emergency room.

Cutting is accomplished with a sharp pocket knife, 'Exacto' knife, or a knife or gouge of your own make or choice. You will find that various gouges may be helpful. As you progress, you will soon develop a preference for a particular style or type of tool. We suggest you not purchase many expensive tools until you have recognized your preferences and desire to learn woodcarving. It is also a good idea to purchase individual tools when, during the course of your carving, you recognize a need for a particular tool to facilitate your carving.

Patterns

Patterns are very helpful to get started.

Patterns may be found in woodcarving books and magazines, on the Internet, and through your fellow club members. Patterns may be transferred to a block of wood by freehand drawing, the use of transfer paper (graphite paper), or in many cases you can photocopy a pattern and adhere it directly to the wood. The pattern may also be transferred to cardboard or sheet plastic which may then be used as a template.

Give your pattern considerable thought before diving into the wood. This will allow you to obtain a mental image of the finished work, make decisions as to wood grain direction and even the type of wood you may want to use. Attention to detail produces a good looking carving you will be proud to show off.

Bandsawn Blanks

Blanks are typically produced by tracing or gluing the front and side views of a pattern to a square or rectangular piece of wood. Carefully saw the outline of the front view, saving all the waste pieces. When the front view is cut out, replace the wood which was cut off and apply tape (masking tape, scotch tape – your choice) around the block to hold them in the place from where they were taken. Now carefully cut the outline of the side view of the pattern. When this is done, remove all excess wood and you have your blank to begin carving.

Save your patterns for future use. After first using your patterns you may find it helpful to alter the pattern to facilitate your style of carving or to improve the pattern for future use.

Roughouts

Roughouts are another source for woodcarvers – beginners or advanced. A roughout is already shaped by a duplicator to the basic form of the carving. This typically will save a considerable amount of time to the finished carving. There are many vendors who sell roughouts. Roughouts can be purchased for just about any subject, animals, humans, mythical, or caricatures. You can also have your own made usually in a minimum quantity of six.

Sharpening

Sharp cutting tools are essential to enjoyable carving.

Learning to sharpen your tools is very important to being able to enjoy woodcarving. Numerous books and articles are dedicated to this skill. Ask your fellow club members about the techniques they use and the equipment they have (hand or power). As you learn more about carving you will notice that most carvers develop their own style of sharpening to achieve the best results.

A sharp tool slides through the wood with a pleasing sound and leaving a clean curl of wood behind. Less than sharp tools tear through the wood causing crushed and splintered wood fibers instead of a clean cut. A sharp tool is usually considered a safe tool since it requires less effort to efficiently remove wood giving the carver more control over the tool.

Wood

All woods can be carved. The desired result and carving difficulty will help you make your choice of wood.

Basswood *American basswood (Tilia americana)*, is a large and rapid-growing tree of eastern and central North America. It is the northernmost basswood species which is sought after for carving. The soft, light wood has an indistinct and usually straight grain making it a good woodcarving choice.

Sugar Pine (*Pinus lambertiana*) is the tallest and largest of all pines. For products requiring large, clear pieces or high dimensional stability, sugar pine's soft, even-grained, satin-textured wood is unsurpassed in quality and value. It also is a good choice for woodcarving.

Butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), also called white walnut or oilnut, grows rapidly on well-drained soils of hillsides and stream banks in mixed hardwood forests. The soft coarse-grained wood works, stains, and finishes well. Small amounts are used for cabinetwork, furniture, and woodcarving.

Tupelo, also called Water tupelo (*Nyssa aquatica*), cottongum, sourgum, swamp tupelo, tupelo-gum, and water-gum, is a large, long-lived tree that grows in southern swamps and flood plains where its root system is periodically under water. It has a swollen base that tapers to a long, clear bole and often occurs in pure stands. A good mature tree will produce commercial timber used for furniture and woodcarving. Many champion bird carvers use Tupelo for their carving and it is most often carved using power equipment.

Walnut (*Juglans nigra*), also called eastern black walnut and American walnut, is one of the scarcest and most coveted native hardwoods. The fine straight-grained wood makes prized pieces of solid furniture, gunstocks and woodcarvings. The wood is hard and sometimes brittle, sharp tools are a must.

Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) Also known as South American Mahogany, Caoba (throughout Latin America), Acajou (in French speaking areas), and often named after the country it came from (i.e. Brazilian Mahogany, Peruvian Mahogany, etc.) The wood is reddish brown to medium red which darkens to a deep reddish-brown with time. It has straight grain with a fine even texture. Honduras Mahogany is relatively free of voids and pockets. Honduras mahogany is excellent for machining, cutting, and carving. Tools should be kept sharp, and a low sharpening angle should be used on tools.

Carving Subjects

It is up to you. You will enjoy carving objects that hold your interest. Experiment, start simple – your skills will improve as you carve and you will gain many hours of relaxation and enjoyment.

What is your pleasure?

Faces	Abstract Figures	Caricatures of:
Birds	Fish	People
Horses	Bears	Animals
Dogs	Cats	etc., etc.

If you can imagine it, you can carve it.

Ask your club members, they will be more than willing to share their experience and knowledge.

Sources

Carving tools and supplies:

Woodcraft Supply Company
13719 San Pedro Ave.
San Antonio, TX 78232
PH: 210-545-5885

sanantonio-retail@woodcraft.com

The Old Texas Woodcarver's Shop
24802 Red Oak
Magnolia, Texas 77355
(281) 356-1311

otws@sbcglobal.net

Wood and roughouts:

Moore Designs
P.O. Box 193
Kindred, ND 58051

www.roughouts.com

Heinecke Wood Products
76-27½ Ave.
Cumberland, WI 54829

www.heineckewood.com

Books & magazines:

Fox Chapel Publishing
1970 Broad St.
East Petersburg, PA 17520
PH: 800-457-9112

www.FoxChapelPublishing.com

Wildfowl Carving Magazine
Stackpole Magazines
5067 Ritter Rd.
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
PH: 877-462-2604

www.wildfowl-carving.com

Carving Magazine
P.O. Box 500
Mt. Morris, IL 61054
PH: 800-943-6887

www.carvingmagazine.com

Woodcarving Associations:

National Woodcarvers Association (NWCA)
P.O. Box 43218
Cincinnati, OH 45243
PH: 513-561-0627

www.chipchats.org

Texas Woodcarvers Guild
8107 Greenhollow Lane
Dallas, TX 75240

twg@hctc.net