

# WOODCARVING 101

*Woodcarving 101 presents a short introduction to woodcarving. This guide covers safety, knife strokes, carving styles, and finishing techniques.*

## **Carving safety**

A few techniques to make carving a safe past time:

- ‡ Never carve *toward* the hand used to hold the wood.
- ‡ Brace your carving wood and keep your hands out of the path of the tools at all times.
- ‡ Always push the tool you are using *away* from your body.
- ‡ Carve with the grain of the wood for ease and for the cleanest cuts.
- ‡ Turn the wood as you carve to angle that is comfortable to work.
- ‡ Keep a razor-sharp edge on your tools.

*See our Carving Safety and Shop Safety handouts for more safety tips.*

## **Getting started**

To get started carving:

1. Sketch or transfer the pattern onto the wood.
2. If appropriate, cut the blank out of the board.
3. Where applicable, draw centerlines on the face and sides of the blank.
4. Block out, or rough out, the features of the project by making a Stop Cut, or Outline Cut, along the pattern lines to keep the wood from splintering away from areas where it should remain.

### **STOP CUT**

*Use a knife to make a vertical incision in the surface approximately  $\frac{1}{8}$ " deep along the pattern lines.*



5. Use an Angle Cut back to the Stop Cut, removing a slice. This creates definition of a feature.

6. Where appropriate, make Angle Cuts on each side of a Stop cut to remove a V-shaped groove along the pattern lines.

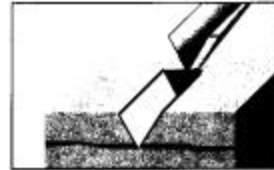


#### ANGLE CUT

*Hold the knife at a slight angle, and slice out a small amount of wood next to the stop cut.*

#### OUTLINE CUT

*Use a V-parting tool to remove a small trough of wood along the lines of your pattern.*



7. Contour the sharp corners of the Angle or Outline Cuts on both sides using a chisel or knife.



#### CONTOUR CUT

*Use a chisel or a knife to remove the sharp angle left from Angle or Outline cuts.*

8. Widen and soften the contoured edges with additional contour and/or relief carving.
9. Use a gouge to remove background areas. This is generally done to the lowest areas of a finished relief carving.

## Carving styles

### Relief Carving

Relief carving is the technique of that involves digging into the wood. The woodcarver works through stages of drawing out the design, setting it in with a V-section trench making decisions as to the levels, and then lowering the various areas of waste. Generally, relief carvings are only meant to be view from the front.



*A relief carving showing an uncharacteristic strap work motif.*

Use a gouge to remove wood in the background areas. Gingerly push the tool, with the grain of the wood. Push it up to an Outline or Stop cut. Remove small curls of wood, using many strokes and working down to the desired level. Do not force the gouge—sharp tools require only light pressure.



**Detailing.** Use a gouge and/or V-tools for tiny areas. Carefully remove small amounts of wood until the desired effect is achieved.

## Chip carving

Chip carving is a technique for decorating the surface of a carving by chipping out the little triangular pockets and crescent slices. A general carving knife is the only tool necessary, though chip carving knives are made for making these chip cuts.



### STOP CUTS

*Make stop cuts around the inside of the triangle and from the center to the corners.*

*Make the center cuts deeper, tapering to shallow at the corners.*



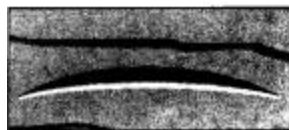
### SLICE CUTS

*Slice out a chip on each side of the triangle, with the center being the deepest. The result resembles an inverted pyramid.*



### CRESCENTS

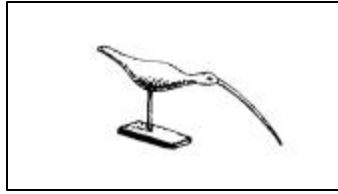
*Make stop cuts along the edges and center of the crescent.*



*Slice out two wedges with the deepest level at the center.*

## Carving-in-the-Round

Carving-in-the-Round, or sculpting, is used to carve caricatures and three-dimensional carvings. Paring cuts to shape the project, while the combination of stop cuts and angle (cutback) cuts are used to form the project's features. Small projects can be completed with only a knife. Large projects require chisels, gouges, and V-tools. The beginning carver usually concentrates on the small projects until the concepts and techniques are mastered.



## Finishing a project

Finishing is the act of enhancing the appearance of a project by scraping, rubbing with sandpaper, painting, waxing, and/or burnishing. The project should be smoothed and cleaned up before finish is applied. A good clean-up removes tool marks, "fuzzies", and small chips.

### Staining

Staining a project adds a natural look to a project and highlights the grain of the wood and the details of the project.

1. Use and apply the stain as directed on the product's label.
2. Wipe the stain off with a soft cloth.
3. Let the stain remain heavier in the recessed areas of your carving.
4. Staining may be done after painting for an antiqued look.

### Painting

Painting provides color to the carving. Acrylics or oils may be used.

1. Use a brush in a size appropriate to the area being painted.
2. Use paints on raw or stained wood.
3. Use as many coats as needed to get the covering you desired.
4. If you use acrylics, use a series of washes to obtain the color as desired. A wash is made by adding water to the paint until it is of an ink-like consistency.
5. Washes of different colors may overlap to create blended effects.

*See our handouts on finishing and cleaning up a project for more details.*

## Sealing

Sealing the project is used for two reasons:

1. When using acrylics, spray the project with a quick drying lacquer to prevent the grain from rising during the application of the washes.
2. When the painting is completed, apply several light coats of acrylic sealer. This protects the paint.
3. When the project is not to be painted or stained, apply light coats of sealer to prevent discoloration when the project is handled.
4. When the project is stained or painted, it can be sealed with the application of a good wax.

## **Related resources**

For additional information on carving techniques, visit other pages on our website, or purchase a beginning level carving book. We recommend the following:

1. *Woodcarving Basics*, Alan & Gill Bridgewater, 1996, Sterling Publishing Company.
2. *Basic Woodcarving for Beginners*, Joe Welnack, 1991, published by Joe and Vickie Welnak
3. *First Projects for Woodcarvers*, Larry Green & Mike Altman, 1996, Schiffer Publishing, LTD
4. *Whittling Simplified: Everything You Need to Know*, Herb Reinecke, 1985, Almar Press

See your local carving supplier for additional titles.

Join the National Woodcarvers Association and receive *Chip Chats*, the NWCA's magazine.

Visit the NWCA at- <http://chipchats.org/>

## NOTES

**Credit:** This guide was based upon a project idea *Woodcarving* by Walnut Hollow, 1996, Walnut Hollow Farm, Inc. Dodgeville, WI 53533.

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