



Customize your gnome easily by shifting the direction of the beard and mustache flow, the type of hat he's wearing and the color scheme.

Christmas Gnome

A six-minute carving project to brighten the holidays

By Jan Oegema

I love woodcarving and I love teaching it. It's my passion to get as many people interested in it as I can. One of my favorite teaching projects is this Christmas gnome. Once you learn the basic steps, you'll be able to make a gnome in under ten minutes!

Throughout the demonstration, I use terms to describe cuts that may not be familiar to all carvers.

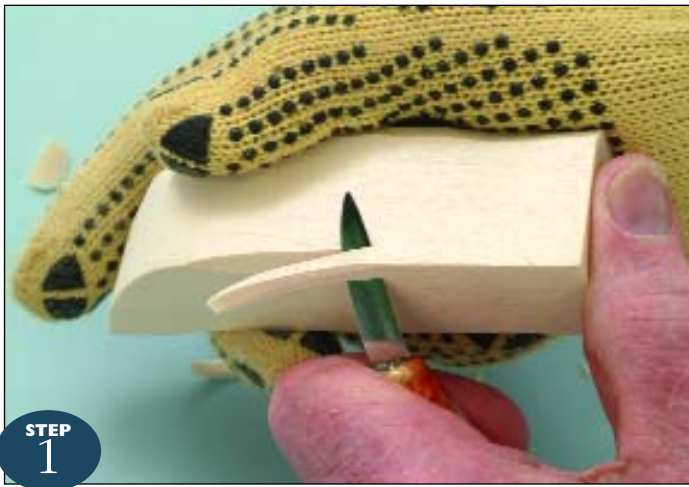
Many of my students have never carved before, and I've found that using words that create a visual image help communicate how a cut should be made. The wonderful staff at Fox Chapel came up with this idea to show an illustrated glossary of the words I use. For best success, you should practice making each cut before you tackle the gnome.

I also use visual imagery to describe where to position lines. The first uses a clock face and helps eliminate the need to use a measure distance between lines or angles. You might



In under ten minutes, you can make this charming Christmas gnome with simple tools.

see an instruction to position a line at 1 o'clock or 8 o'clock. The second visual image I use describes cut lines to make the eyes. An instruction might be to "angle the line from the corner up five parts and down three." It means that if the eye is divided into eight parts, the line angles up to the imaginary fifth line before turning down for the remaining three parts.



STEP 1

Clean off corners with the knife. Use a flat-plane carving cut.



STEP 2

Decide which way you want the hat to go. Yours can go to one side or the other or, as shown here, to the back. Use your pencil to make starting and stopping points dots. By bringing a line from one dot, over the top of the carving and down to the other dot, you'll create your first cutting line.

CUTS FOR CARVING THE GNOME

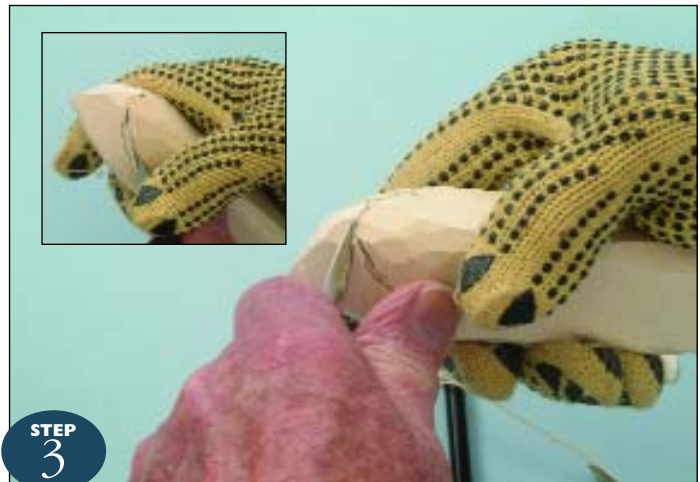
FLAT-PLANE CUT Lay the knife at a 45-degree angle to the wood, go in as far as you can with one push, then take the knife out, position it at the top and press in and take the cut out.

PRESS CUT Position the blade so it is perpendicular to the wood surface and press in.

SKI SLOPE CUT Knife is in your hand at a 45-degree angle wood, push in a little bit and as you're pushing you turn it up again to make a rounded.

SWING CUT Set your knife down with the point of the knife into the wood, swing it to the left or the right. Do NOT move the tip of the knife until you're pinky or forefinger rests against the wood, depending on which way you've swung the knife.

STAB CUT (or chip carving cut) Make three cuts. A cut, stab in, at a 90-degree angle make another cut so it looks like an upside V. Come in from the bottom at a bit of an angle and remove the little piece.



STEP 3

Take the knife and align the blade straight into the line. Pull the knife straight through to the other side using a continuous motion.

Materials & Tools

MATERIALS:

1½" x 1½" x 5" basswood
Pencil

TOOLS:

Knives
⅛" gouge
1 1/8" gouge

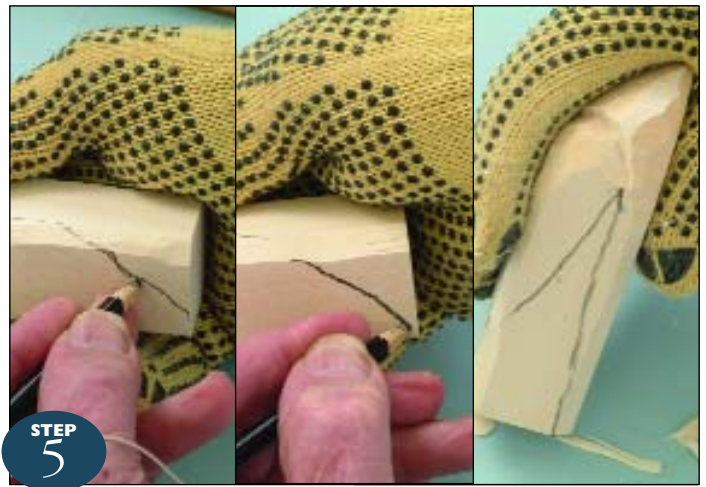
Tips

When the Knife Gets Stuck

Sometimes when you're drawing the knife through the wood, the knife gets into the grain deeply. Instead of applying more and more force to make the cut, which is both unsafe and not productive, simply turn the wood over and make your cut from the other side.



STEP 4
Start to define the face by removing wood with a press cut as shown in the photo.



STEP 5
Make three pencil lines for the beard.



STEP 6
Set the knife onto wood and pull it all the way to the very back, making a firm, deep V cut. Turn the block of wood upside and use a continuous motion to make a cut. I call it "bringing the wood to the knife." Repeat on the other side.



STEP 7
Pencil in lines for the eyes. Use the knife to make V cuts similar to what you did in Step 6.



STEP 8
Pencil in lines for the nose bridge. Here's how I figure the proportional size of the nose: A face is five eyes wide, so the nose should be the width of one eye. Use a knife blade to remove this wood with a V cut. One cut goes to 8 o'clock and one cut to 4 o'clock.

Put a pencil mark in the middle of the nose, then place two dots $\frac{1}{8}$ " on either side of this centerline. Pull the line from the dots to the bottom of the nose to the 8 o'clock position on the one side and to the 4 o'clock position on the other.



STEP 9
Set the knife into the wood straight in so you see only the back of the blade and follow the 8 o'clock line. Lay the knife onto the flat plane and clean out the cut.



STEP 10
Pencil in the “wings” of the nose. These are the edges of nostrils where they meet the cheeks.



STEP 11
Define the upper lip with three planes per side. For one side, make the first cut down to the depth of the cheek using a press cut. Reposition the knife and cut from underneath. The third cut removes the wood neatly and cleanly. Repeat for the opposite side. This will create your smile lines.



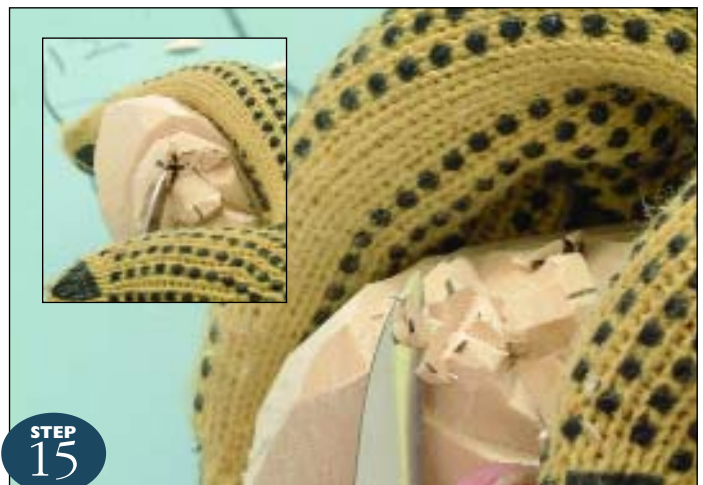
STEP 12
Continue “humanizing” the gnome with further defining cuts.



STEP 13
Use a three-step chip carving cut to begin making the eye socket. The first of the three cuts is done by laying the knife against the nose and making a press cut. Turn 90 degrees and make a second press cut. The third cut pops out the chip.



STEP 14
Now make the eyebrows. Pencil in the line. Put the blade straight into the wood) and make a swing cut across the line. Then position the knife at the one o’clock position, twist the knife and apply pressure on the knife tip as you pull the knife around the side of the wood. Repeat on the other side.



STEP 15
Simple cuts separate the eyebrows. Mark your cut lines by making an X above a the nose on the forehead, as seen in the inset photo. Two small V cuts will remove the lines of the X.



STEP 16

Make three ski slope cuts to further define the eyebrows.



STEP 17

With what I call the "miracle cut" you can make both the eye and the cheek. Lay the knife flat on the eyebrow. Start at the nose and follow the eyeline through to the outside of the eye. Turn the knife to the "second position" make a swing cut. Repeat for the other side.



STEP 18

Define the nose wings using little ski slope cuts.



STEP 19

Add nostrils by setting the knife in the middle of the nose and move $\frac{1}{16}$ " and press in. Turn the carving over and remove the wood. Repeat for the other nostril.



STEP 20

Pencil in the lines for the mustache. Use a "lazy S" shape to make one side of the mustache. Repeat for the other side.



STEP 21

Press the knife into the center and make the twist to follow the pencil lines. Lay the knife against the wood to remove it. Turn the carving around in your hand and do the same thing on the other side to complete the mustache.



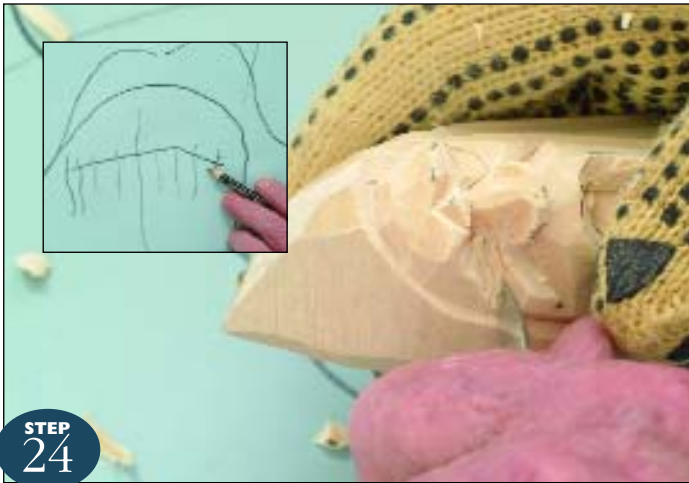
STEP 22

Relieve the mustache with a V cut in a Lazy S form.



STEP 23

Use the pencil to mark the position of the lip. Lay the knife on the nose and bring it down to the pencil mark. Twist it like a half moon. Turn the carving over and make a V cut under the lip. Go under and clean it out.



STEP 24

To define the eyes, begin by drawing in cut lines for each eye. The inset photo shows how I segment the eye into eight sections. For the top part of the eye, make a line from the corner up five parts and down three parts to the nose. Use three stab cuts to define the upper area of the eye. For the bottom of the eye, make the line down five parts and up three parts. Again, use three stab cuts starting at the top of the eyelid to define this area.



STEP 25

Further definition is achieved by removing thin slices of wood. Lay the knife flat and make a half moon shape about 1/8" deep under the eye using a swing cut. Turn the carving upside down and repeat.

Tips

When to Strop?

When a new cut plane is lighter than previously cut planes, it's time to strop

The Case of the Missing Glove

For Steps 26 through 30, you'll notice that Jan's carving glove has disappeared. Here's what happened: The photography for this article was shot in the Fox Chapel Studios. An equipment malfunction caused a break in the shooting sequence. It gets warm under studio lights, so during the stoppage, Jan removed the glove. We noticed the missing glove a little while later.

It is recommended that you always wear a carving glove whenever you are carving.



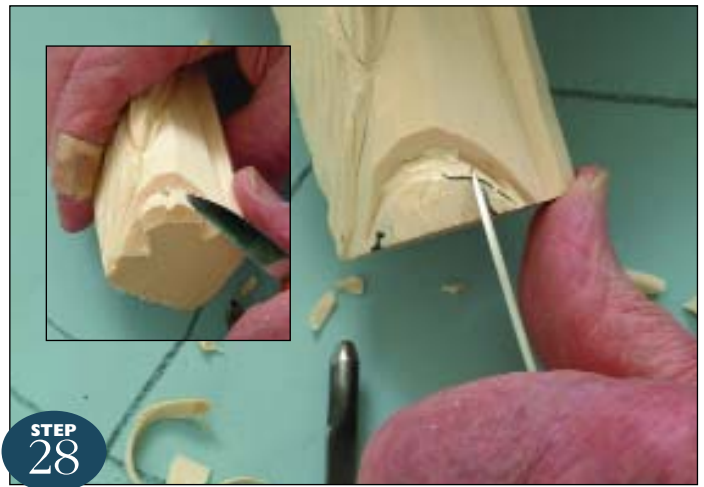
STEP 26

It's time to create the mustache and eyebrows with a 1/8" gouge. Start under the nose and face it from the right side to the middle of the nose at 1 o'clock. Use small short strokes to add hair detail to the mustache. Repeat to the left side and go to 11 o'clock. To make the eyebrows, use little cuts at 1 and 2 o'clock on the left side and at 11 and 9 o'clock on the right side.



STEP
27

To add detail for the beard, use an 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " gouge to make deep grooves. Change to the $\frac{1}{8}$ " gouge and make random grooves in between the larger ones. Don't overdo.



STEP
28

The little gnome needs some shoes. They're very easy to make. Make pencil lines wide enough for two shoes. Make a V cut on the line. Turn the carving over and remove the wood.

Pencil in lines to define two shoes and use a press cut and a regular cut to remove wood. Put a V cut in the middle of the area to make two shoes from one. Round the toe areas.



STEP
29

Pencil in lines for the cape. About $\frac{1}{4}$ " below the nose, make two dots. Then add one on the back about $\frac{1}{2}$ " below the position of the first two dots. Draw lines to connect them. Make a straight stop cut all the way around from $\frac{3}{4}$ " away. Slice a little bit away.



STEP
30

Add folds at random by making deep, clean cuts.



STEP
31

If you'd like, add a pom pom by making a few V cuts around the top of the hat.



About the Author

Jan Oegema moved to Canada in 1950 from the Netherlands. He started chipcarving on his own in 1972. In 1989, he got involved with the Bowmanville Woodchip Club, and there was no looking back. He teaches six woodcarving classes a week. He lives in Bowmanville, Ontario, Canada.

This is his first article for Wood Carving Illustrated. Jan's website is www.janscarvingstudio.com/.

Special SOURCES

Supplies and Classroom Instructions are Available from Jan's Carving Supply.

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