

TABLETOP ARTISTRY

Power carving adds style to classical-looking furniture

By Bill Janney

I did not have to look far to find a power-carving project that would be a nice change of pace from the gunstocks I customize. My father, Ben Janney, made this mahogany Queen Anne Handkerchief Table for my wife and I several years ago. It is one of several pieces of furniture he has made for our home. Since this would be my first tabletop carving, I knew I had to be prepared before putting a chisel to the 23"-square wing.

Getting Started

I found a flowering leaf scroll pattern in *Crafttool Tech-Tips* by Al Stohlman. After photocopying the pattern in black and white, I transferred the pattern to Applique Film, a frosted



Ben Janney, at left, made this table for his daughter-in-law and son, Bill Janney, who carved a flowering leaf scroll pattern on one of the table's wings.

Materials & Tools

MATERIALS:

Applique Film
Pencil
Olympic Interior Oil Based Wood Stain - Special Walnut
Inexpensive, soft bristle brush
Inexpensive artist's brush
Old, all cotton T-shirt

TOOLS:

GraverMax power chisel and high-speed drill
No. 2 round carbide burr
1/8" 60-degree V tool
X-acto® knife
2 1/2-power magnifier
Safety glasses
Dust mask

stencil material with a sticky back that peels and adheres to wood. I decided to practice carving the pattern on a similarly shaped piece of mahogany, rotating the practice wood, and later the actual tabletop wing, on top of a lazy Susan, which enables me to easily rotate the workpiece to carve different sections.

Carving at various depths, I did half of this project on the practice board. As a result, I knew to set my GraverMax power-carving chisel at 1,200 pulses or impacts per minute with its power source, an air compressor, set at about 20 PSI. With this power-carving system, the chisels I use

operate like little jackhammers, with the strength of the impact power regulated by a foot pedal. All I do is hold and guide the chisel and the power generates a reciprocating action. The tool is fun to use and also physically easy to handle without fear of repetitive stress injury issues.

Always wear safety glasses and a mask when using this kind of power equipment. The GraverMax system also offers ultra high-speed rotary handpieces, and I strongly recommend using a dust collector and wearing a double-filter mask because dust is a byproduct of high-speed power carving.

This type of project can be carved even if you do not have a GRS Tools' GraverMax. The same company's System 3 is a simpler and less expensive power unit. A lightweight, air-impact tool, the System 3 handpiece is a piston-and-port design, which self-oscillates using normal compressed air. Other alternatives to complete this project range from using a Foredom flexible shaft with attachments to hand tools such as palm chisels for the outlining and a nail you would push for the stippling. Regardless of which option you choose, try to do half of the project on a practice board.

Carving Suggestions

I picked a spot on the right side of the pattern, toward the middle, to begin carving on the actual tabletop. From my practice work, I knew this would be a comfortable place to start carving. When using this chisel, depending on whether I make a right- or left-hand curve, I keep my artwork to the right or left side of the chisel—outside of the pattern. When carving a centerline, I try to keep the chisel in the middle of the centerline. For this project, I began carving about $\frac{1}{32}$ " deep with a $\frac{1}{8}$ " 60-degree V tool. Some portions of the carving had a final depth of about $\frac{1}{16}$ ". Know the depth of the V tool and try to carve accordingly. With practice, you will be able to carve at specific depths with each chisel.

When I carve against the grain, I have to cut slower so I don't lift or tear out extra wood off the tabletop. The key to using this tool is to concentrate and not get in a hurry to finish carving. If you think your attention is wandering, shut off the machine and take a break. One nice aspect of this project is the mahogany is softer than walnut, so it cuts easier and it doesn't splinter as easily.

Finishing Tips

There was no need for me to use sandpaper on the tabletop, but I did add a little dark stain—Olympic Interior Oil Based Wood Stain - Special Walnut. See Steps 14 and 15 for the details.

Tips

Adapting Blades

I prefer to adapt my own blades for the GraverMax system using Flexcut tools, which come in the angles I prefer and are very sharp. To do so, I remove the handles of $\frac{1}{8}$ " 60- and 70-degree V tools. I then grind the shank ends to fit the quick-change holder.



STEP 1
Photocopy the pattern onto Applique Film. Using a ruler, center the pattern over the end of the tabletop wing.



STEP 2
Peel and cut off part of the backing on the stencil before applying the rest of the stencil to the tabletop. Work any air bubbles out as the rest of the pattern is applied and rubbed onto the tabletop. Examine the pattern closely. Depending on the quality of the photocopied pattern, use a pencil to add a few lines.



STEP 3
Using a $\frac{1}{8}$ " 60-degree V tool, begin carving on the right side of the pattern, toward the middle, at a depth of $\frac{1}{32}$ ". Use this tool for all of the initial outlining of the pattern.



Proceed to portions of the pattern's outer perimeter as you continue the initial outlining of the pattern. When making a right- or left-handed curve, stay just to the outside of the pattern.



Finish outlining the right side perimeter of the pattern before proceeding to outline the left side perimeter. Once the outer perimeter of the pattern has been outlined, examine the piece to see if more outlines are needed. If not, peel the outer perimeter of the stencil off the tabletop, leaving the inner part of the pattern on the wood.



Using the same $\frac{1}{8}$ " 60-degree V tool on the outer perimeter, carve a little deeper, about $\frac{3}{32}$ " deep. This is about three-quarters of the depth of the chisel. When carving deep, do not cut deeper than the side walls of the chisel. Some of these cuts are short but will enhance the detailed look of the carving.



For the longer curves, it is important to keep them flowing by carving in a clean sweep. This type of carving should be practiced until you believe you are comfortable enough to do this on an actual project.



Continue carving on the left side of the pattern. Once the outline is complete, take a break. Be sure to stand up and walk around.



Using the same $\frac{1}{8}$ " 60-degree V tool, only carve about $\frac{1}{32}$ " deep to begin and finish outlining the center sections where the black areas of the pattern are located. These center areas will be stippled later.



Using a rotary drill with a no. 2 carbide bur, begin to stipple areas between the leaves. You are basically adding little dots close to one another on the wood. This not only adds extra texture but also gives the tabletop a darker outline and reduces space not carved. Stippling within the flowers' petals not only adds texture, but also gives the piece more definition and depth. Use an inexpensive soft bristle brush to occasionally dust off the tabletop after you've been stippling for a while.



Using the 1/8" 60-degree V tool, continue to add accent lines throughout the piece. Examine your work closely, and you'll probably find a few areas that need to be carved a little deeper. Using an X-acto knife, remove the rest of the pattern, first peeling it from the center, then the left side and finally from the right side.



Brush off the dust after removing the stencil. Using the 1/8" 60-degree V tool, further define some places on the inner leaves by carving another 1/32" deep.



Continue using the 1/8" 60-degree V tool to outline around the stippling. This is an especially good time to use a 2 1/2-power magnifier for a better look at your workpiece.



The tabletop is ready for staining with Olympic Interior Oil Based Wood Stain - Special Walnut. The pigment in the stain settles to the bottom of the can, which is where you want it. Using an inexpensive artist's brush and a circular motion, apply the stain, being sure to work it into the crevices.



Using an old cotton T-shirt, wipe off the stain. Then use a brush to wipe a bit more stain out of the crevices so it doesn't puddle. Thoroughly wipe off the tabletop wing and let the stain dry for about two hours before attaching to the rest of the table.



About the Author

A retired electrician, Bill Janney has a full-time gunstock carving business. Bill has two videos on gunstock carving and teaches carving around the United States. His most recent contribution to Wood Carving Illustrated is "Classic Roses," Issue no. 25, Spring 2004. Bill lives in Middletown, Ohio.

A schedule of his classes and other information is on his website, www.billjanney.com. Bill also may be reached by email, billjanney@riva.net or at 937-787-4836.

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