

how they did it

How to carve butterflies

A WELL-TURNED SHAPE MUST PRECEDE THE CARVING

BY JONATHAN BINZEN

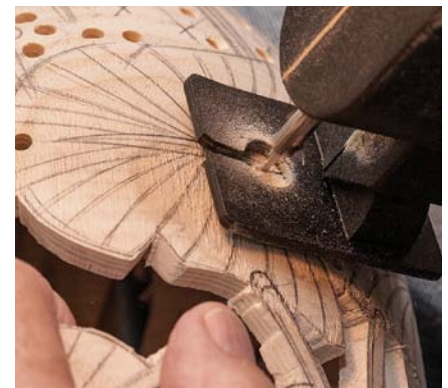
A good carved vessel, Ron Layport says, must start with a good turned form: “The lines have to be pure, the curves have to be unquestioned by the eye.” If the underlying form is unsound, he says, the carving will not conceal that fact. Layport works from the green log, aligning the lathe’s centers with the pith of the log to limit distortion in drying. He turns the vessel walls to a uniform thickness—typically between $\frac{1}{4}$ in. and $\frac{5}{16}$ in.—then lets the piece dry for several weeks or months before carving. When the carving is complete, he colors the piece with bleaches, dyes, and pigments, working with multiple brushes and colors to build up a subtle, complex blend of hues on the surface (see the back cover).



Drawing on the dry vessel. Layport works out the design right on the turned form. For this one he drew and cut out several paper templates of butterflies and traced them around the vessel.



Drill holes for access. To prepare for sawing out the shapes, Layport drills access holes big enough to fit his jigsaw blade.



Leave the lines. Depending on the size and design of the carving, Layport uses either a standard jigsaw or this lightweight gourd saw to cut out the waste.



The rotary arrives. After sawing, Layport shapes the piece using rotary-tool cutters, burrs, and sanding attachments. He also uses files and rifflers.



Coming to life. The butterflies gradually emerge from the walls of the vessel. A few more weeks of work and the piece will be ready for color.

Photos: Mark May