

how they did it

Man or machine?

BY ANISSA KAPSALES

Upon first seeing Duncan Gowdy's carved work (back cover) it would be easy to assume the fine lines, consistent depths, and repetitive shapes were made with a CNC machine. But a closer look reveals the subtle facets, tool marks, variation, and character that can only be the product of a skilled hand. Gowdy's adept carving and an interesting medley of finishes combine to yield these unique pieces.



Layout

Transfer the image. The patterns are derived from photographs that Gowdy shoots. He uses a computer and projector to cast the image onto the workpiece, and then pencils in the lines.



Sea-foam imprint. The tidal carving on the ash sideboard (pictured on the back cover) depicts the pattern left by a receding wave.

Carving

Rough-carve and then refine. If the area is large enough, Gowdy uses an angle grinder with a 2-in. coarse, carbide wheel (right). Once the rough carving is complete, Gowdy moves to a more controlled carving with gouges (far right), keeping his tools sharp so the tool marks are subtle.



Sources of Supply

2-IN. TUNGSTEN
COARSE CARBIDE DISK
www.woodcraft.com

KLEAN-STRIP
WOOD BLEACH,
JAPAN COLORS,
WIPE-ON GEL STAIN,
BEHLEN WHITE
PICKLING STAIN
www.woodworker.com

CLEARTHANE
www.olddads.com



1

Finishing

Bleach everything, then bring it back to life. The first step is to bleach the whole surface with three to five applications of Klean-Strip (a two-part bleach). Then the bleach is neutralized with a wash of two parts water and one part white vinegar. After drying the wood for at least a day, two applications of Behlen white pickling stain are brushed on (1) and wiped off. Gowdy tints the stain with a tiny amount of two Japan colors, Raw Umber and French Yellow Ochre, just to knock off the brightness. Then he carefully applies two coats of black wipe-on gel stain to the uncarved, flat areas (2), wiping off the excess (3) and letting it dry overnight between coats. Finally, he wipes on three coats of satin Clearthane polyurethane (4).



2



3



4



Reversing the process

To create the stark silhouette of the tree branches on the wall cabinet (shown on the back cover), Gowdy colored the recessed areas instead of the flats.



Gouges do the grunt work. Because the carved areas in this design are too narrow for a grinder, Gowdy removes all of the material with hand gouges (above). After he bleaches the wood and applies two coats of the tinted white pickling stain, Gowdy again brushes on gel stain, but this time in the carved areas rather than on the flats (center). He works on small sections, brushing on the gel stain and wiping it off as he goes (bottom). He then applies Clearthane over everything, again working in sections.

