

# Carve a rosette

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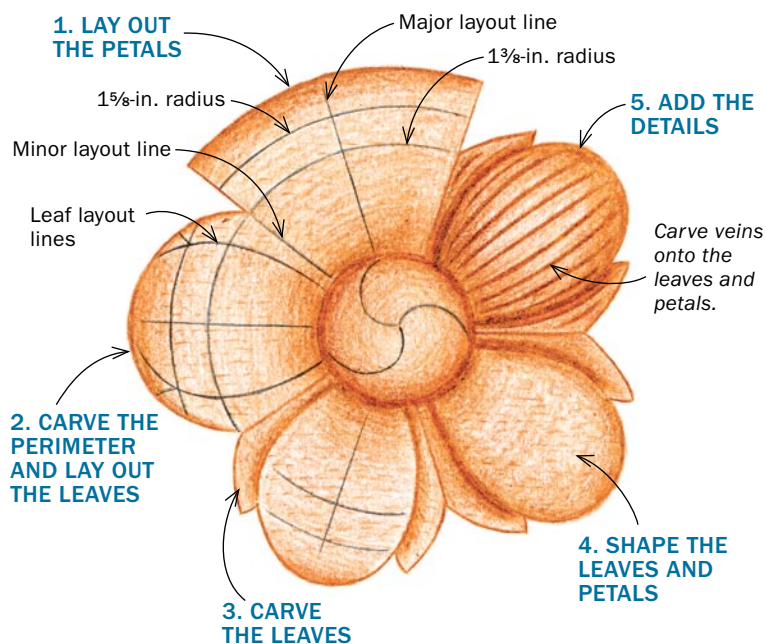
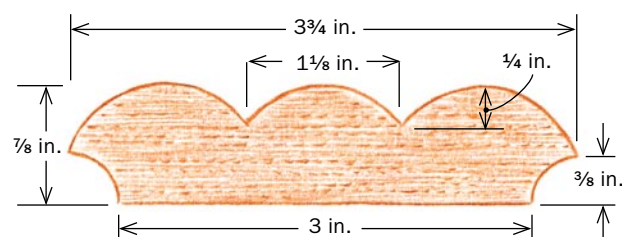
BY TONY KUBALAK

To many furniture makers, carving is intimidating and frightening. A great way to overcome these fears is to carve an applied rosette: It requires only a small amount of wood; it's independent of the piece it eventually will reside on; and it has a small number of elements that are repeated multiple times. Rosettes come in many variations, and although small in size, they significantly refine a high chest or a clock case. I'll cover one style here and two more (see p. 100) on [FineWoodworking.com](http://FineWoodworking.com).

When I became interested in building period furniture, I didn't think that I'd be able to tackle the carving. I assumed that you had to be an artist and I didn't consider myself one. I've since learned that carving is as much science as art, a process taken in logical, repeatable steps. That said, carving is a skill that you can continue to hone for a lifetime.

## Turn a blank on the lathe and lay out the design

Start with a blank that's approximately  $\frac{7}{8}$  in. thick by  $3\frac{3}{8}$  in. square. After cutting out a rough circle on the bandsaw, screw the blank to a screw chuck that already has a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in.-thick disk of wood attached to it. You need to include this other piece of wood because you will undercut the back of the rosette and you don't want the turning tool hitting the



## 1. Lay out the turned blank



**Lay out a backer board.** After turning the blank, lay out the 10 divisions on a plywood square. Score the lines with a knife and then darken them with a pencil.



**Lay out the blank.** Attach the blank to the backer board. Extend the lines onto the blank and use a compass to draw two circles.



**Draw the petals.** Starting where a line crosses the inner circle, draw two arcs out to where the next line meets the perimeter.



## 2. Carve the perimeter

### **Define the petals.**

Use a V-tool to cut into the perimeter and then a #7 sweep gouge (shown) to profile the edge of the petals.



### **Finish the perimeter.**

Draw a pair of arcs either side of every other line to lay out the leaves. Then cut notches in each edge of the petals to define the tips of the leaves.



## 3. Carve the leaves

### **Relieve the petals.**

Make vertical "stop" cuts and then angled "relief" cuts (shown) to create V-shaped channels around the petals.



## 4. Shape the leaves and petals

**Round over and smooth the petals.** Use an inverted gouge to round over the sides of the petals and bring them down to the adjacent groove. Use a fine file to smooth the facets into a continuous surface.



**Undercut the back.** To give the edges of the rosette a crisper, lighter look, carve away some wood near the edge of the back and deepen the V between the leaves. Lay out a rough circle to guide your cuts.

chuck. Use a gouge or a scraper to turn the profile shown in the top drawing on p. 96. This rosette is one element repeated five times, so divide the disk into five equal sections.

You'll need a backer board to hold the rosette for carving. Lay out this board with lines radiating out from a center point at the desired spacing and extending about 3 in. beyond the blank. In this case there are five major divisions, so draw a major line every 72° marking the midpoint of the petals, with minor lines dividing the petals halfway between the major ones. Drill a hole through the center of the backer board and screw on the blank, penetrating the blank by no more than 1/2 in. Place a pencil dot at the center of the blank, and by eye, extend the backer-board lines onto the blank. Draw two circles and lay out the petals.

### **Carve the outside profile first**

You carve this rosette working your way in from the perimeter. First, carve along the arcs that define the petals. Don't do this in one cut, but use a V-tool to cut away small increments beginning at the perimeter. Then round over the edges using a #7-20mm gouge. The exact gouge is not critical, but avoid one that's too narrow; a #7 sweep gives the petals a pleasing curve.

The next step is to refine each large petal into a smaller petal with a leaf on each side. Draw an arc 1/8 in. on both sides of a minor line out to where the adjacent major line meets the perimeter. Then draw a short curve from where this new arc crosses the outer circle out to the perimeter of the leaf (see drawing, p. 96). Carve to the lines using the same V-tool and rounding technique as the petals but using a #7-6mm gouge for the short sections and the #7-20mm for the longer sections.

### **Refine the petals and leaves**

There are a couple of things to keep in mind while carving the petals and leaves. First, the leaves are lower than the petals;



## 5. Add the details



**Work on the dome.** Draw three lines that curve outward from the center of the dome, and then create grooves with stop cuts and relief cuts. Each third of the dome is further divided into two sections with another outward sweeping curve.



**Add the details.** With a small veining tool, add narrow channels to the petals, leaves, and central dome to represent the veins in the flower.

second, the pairs of leaves are divided by a ridge. To define the petals, start by making perpendicular or stop cuts along each petal's perimeter with a #3-20mm gouge. From the leaf side of this cut, make a shallow angled cut known as a relief cut that terminates at the stop cut to remove a small wedge of wood. Repeat these two cuts until the depth matches the base of the central dome where they meet, and is slightly deeper at the perimeter. Work on the adjacent sides of two petals at a time, so that the angle into the stop cut does not get too steep. Repeat until all the petals are established.

From each centerline, round over the petals down to the cuts you just made using a shallow gouge, say a #3-20mm. Use a small file to smooth the facets into a continuous surface.

The ridge line between each pair of leaves begins at the base of the central dome, divides at the inner circle, and terminates at the outer circle. The ridge should be lower than the high point on the petal, but higher than the rest of the leaves. It is this variation in depth that gives life to the carving. Use a shallow gouge, say a #3-12mm, to define the ridge.

Now that the face of the perimeter is defined, you can give the rosette a crisper, more delicate look by extending the undercut area by about  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. toward the center using a shallow gouge. Strive for a nice crisp "V" between the leaf pairs around the perimeter and crisp, thin tips for the leaves.

### Work on the central dome

The rosette's dome is carved to look like the central reproductive parts of a flower: the stamen and the stigma. I'm no botanist, so I'll just refer to the parts as leaves. With a pencil, sketch in three lines that curve out from the center and divide the dome into roughly equal thirds. Use a #7-10mm gouge to make a stop cut along each of the three curved lines, and with the same gouge make an angled relief cut. Repeat this process until the channel is about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. deep.

You now need to round the tip of each leaf at the center of the dome. With a #7-6mm gouge near the

center, connect one of the stop-cut edges with the adjacent edge formed by the angled cut. With the same gouge, step back from this line toward the center a bit and angle into it. This angle will be rather steep because there is not much room left without impacting another leaf. When completed there should be three well-defined leaves.

Use a relatively flat and narrow gouge, say a #3-8mm, to round each leaf from the high edge down to the bottom of the stop cut. Blend this cut smoothly into the outer baseline defined by the perimeter of the dome. The more refined the carving becomes, the more delicate the cuts, so a lighter hand will yield better results. Now create a small leaflet from each leaf, using a #7-4mm gouge to make a perpendicular cut followed by a relatively steep angle cut. Deepen this a bit and gently feather the line so that it disappears near the base of the dome.

### Delicate details complete the rosette

What remains is to add some detail lines. Use a #11-0.5mm veiner to add shallow veins to the petals, the leaves, and the dome leaves. Take care to avoid tearout on cross-grain cuts.

Looking at your finished rosette, you'll understand how something that appeared complex and daunting became manageable with a few types of cut repeated several times. □

### Online Extra

To learn more about Kubalak's basic steps for carving two other classic rosettes, go to [FineWoodworking.com/extras](http://FineWoodworking.com/extras).

