



## Decorative chip carving

HAND-CARVED BOWL  
DESERVES A HAND-CARVED  
NECKLACE

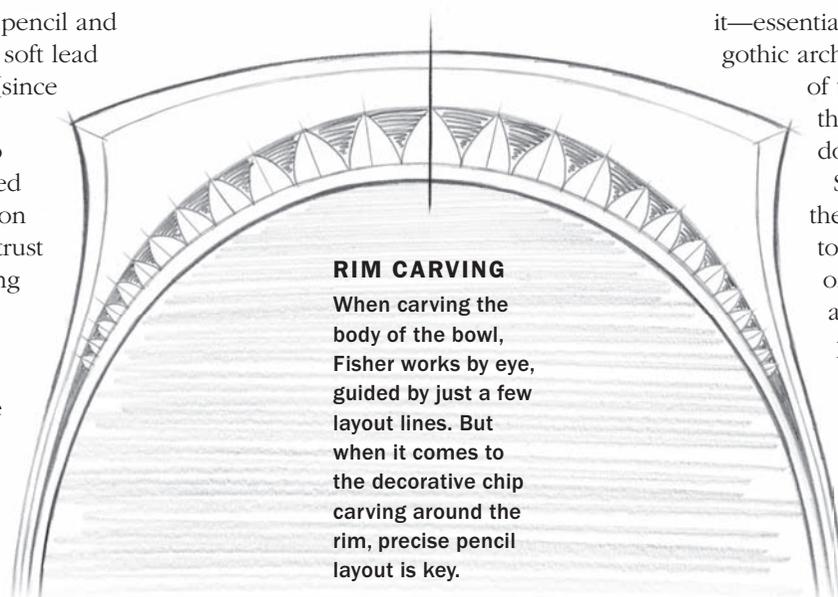
BY DAVID FISHER

**W**hen I carve a bowl, I'm striving to give it graceful lines and pleasing curves. I often enhance the overall curves with decorative carving, fine detail picked out in patterns of light and shadow, which can be a delightful counterpoint to the smooth shape of the bowl. Many times I'll do a carving on the rim, a kind of necklace for the bowl. I'll show you how I lay out and carve one of these.

With this design, much of the challenge is in the layout. You'll be working on a compound-curved surface, and the band of carving tapers as it curves, so the primary chip-carved elements—triangles with curved sides—are graduated in size. A careful, clean layout is fundamental to the success of the carving.

The work begins with a pencil and a pair of dividers. Using a soft lead pencil and light pressure (since you'll want to erase these lines later), sketch the two lines that define the tapered band. Position your hand on the inside of the arc, and trust your eye. The natural swing of your wrist will facilitate drawing fair curves. Look carefully and critically, making adjustments to the lines. Your eye can see very subtle differences.

Once you're happy with the band, it's time to lay out the elements within



### RIM CARVING

When carving the body of the bowl, Fisher works by eye, guided by just a few layout lines. But when it comes to the decorative chip carving around the rim, precise pencil layout is key.

it—essentially a graduated series of gothic arches rising from the inner line of the band to the outer one. As the band's width decreases, so does the height of the arches.

Starting at the centerline of the handle, set a pair of dividers to the width of the band. Swing one leg over to the outer line, and press down to make a prick mark. With a pencil, make a tick mark at the same point. Holding that position, swing the other leg down to a point on the inner line straight across the band. Since the band tapers, the dividers' span





1



2



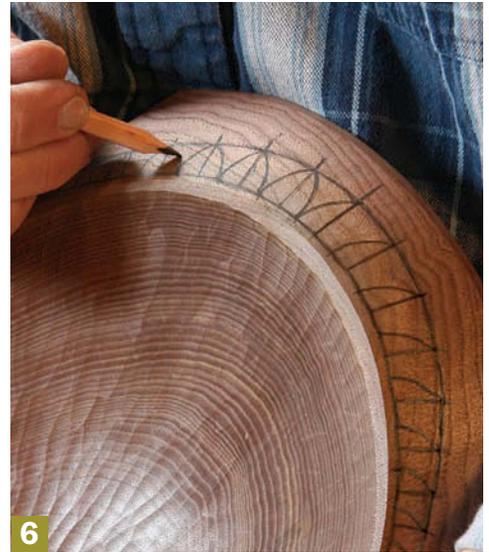
3



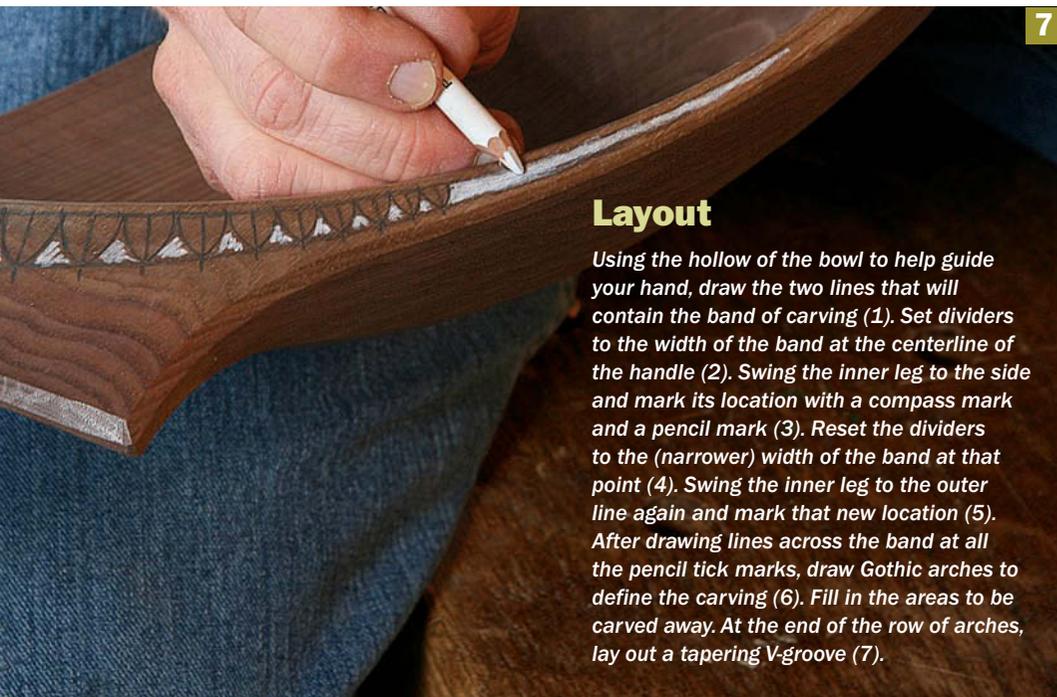
4



5



6



7

## Layout

Using the hollow of the bowl to help guide your hand, draw the two lines that will contain the band of carving (1). Set dividers to the width of the band at the centerline of the handle (2). Swing the inner leg to the side and mark its location with a compass mark and a pencil mark (3). Reset the dividers to the (narrower) width of the band at that point (4). Swing the inner leg to the outer line again and mark that new location (5). After drawing lines across the band at all the pencil tick marks, draw Gothic arches to define the carving (6). Fill in the areas to be carved away. At the end of the row of arches, lay out a tapering V-groove (7).

is now wider than the band. Adjust the dividers until the leg meets the inner line, then swing it up to the outer line and make another prick mark and another penciled tick mark. Repeat this procedure until you have a series of points marked along the outer line, getting gradually closer together as they approach the side of the bowl.

Draw a series of lines across the band—one at each tick mark—so it begins to resemble a set of curving (and tapering) railroad tracks. Trust your eye to make these cross lines perpendicular to the curve. Again working by eye, make tick marks on the band's inner line halfway between each pair of cross lines.

Then sketch Gothic arches with their feet on the inner line at the halfway tick marks and their apex on the outer line at the prick mark made by the dividers. If

## Carve the triangles

Rough in the triangular excavations in three steps. First push in the V-tool from one side (1), then from the other (2). Now make a cut from inside the bowl (3). This will release the chips from all three cuts. Create a crease along the inner corner of the triangle by pushing the skew chisel in straight (4). Then use the skew to pare along all three curving walls of the triangle (5).



1



2



3



4



5

you don't feel comfortable drawing these arches by eye, a multi-circle template or the base of a small can will come in handy. Using light or dark lead, fill in the triangular areas to be carved so you avoid errors in the heat of the moment. Now trade graphite for steel.

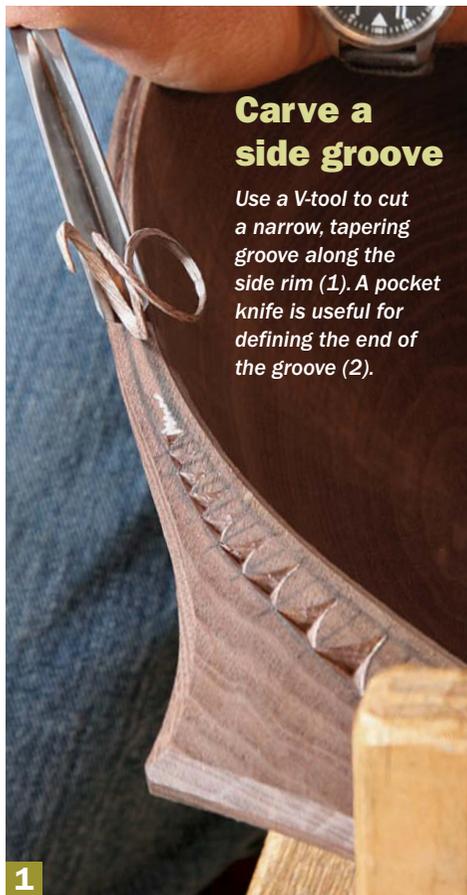
For excavating these large shapes, I use a V-tool followed by a skew chisel. I secure the bowl with holdfasts, repositioning it when necessary as the carving proceeds. I typically use the V-tool (60°, 10 mm) to remove much of the material. First cut in and downward from the outer two corners of the triangle, stopping each cut before reaching the opposite side. Then make a third cut from the inner corner. This will free the chips from all three cuts.

The rest of the work is done with a skew chisel. I find an 18 mm skew ideal, but the exact width is not critical—sharpness is. First, crease the inner corner

of the triangle by pushing the skew straight into the valley formed by the last V-tool cut. Now, beginning with the heel of the skew at the inner corner, pare one side wall of the triangle. As the cutting edge moves forward, the heel should follow the valley while the upper side of the tool should follow the curved pencil line. Stop the cut at the outer wall of the triangle. Do the opposite side wall next.

Finally, pare the outer wall of the triangle, working in whichever direction gives the cleanest cut considering the grain direction. After tidying up where necessary with the skew chisel, erase the pencil lines with a white polymer (non-abrasive) eraser (see photo, below), and you're done. As you gain confidence in this sort of carving, enjoy experimenting with different design variations. □

*David Fisher carves bowls and spoons in the shop attached to his house in northwestern Pennsylvania.*



## Carve a side groove

Use a V-tool to cut a narrow, tapering groove along the side rim (1). A pocket knife is useful for defining the end of the groove (2).

