

Carve Your Daily Bowl

Pleasure in the making
and the using

BY DAVID FISHER



START BY CUTTING UP A LOG



Split it. Find an 8- to 10-in.-dia. log and thwack it right through the pith. A log this size will provide stock for two of these bowls.

With just a handful of tools, you can carve a bowl to use each day. I love the simple ritual of eating cereal from mine, and even of washing it afterward. This small round bowl doesn't require a big log and can be a rewarding project if you are just starting out as a carver, but it also offers subtle challenges for more experienced carvers. Although most bowls I carve are not round, for a cereal or ice cream bowl, round works best. Of course, round bowls can be turned on a lathe and usually are, but you can carve them too. The process is a joy and offers many design possibilities.

I find a nice size for an eating bowl to be about 7 in. dia. by 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. high. The ideal log for a bowl that size will be about 8 in. dia. with the pith located approximately in the center. Choose a tree species that is tight-grained and won't impart a particular taste or smell to your corn flakes. Softer species such as basswood are easy to carve, but more absorbent. Harder woods require a little more elbow grease, but will take a burnished surface from the tool and hold up better in use. Some ideal species are black cherry, tulip poplar, maple, birch, aspen, and various fruitwoods. Start with a fresh green log if you can; it will be a pleasure to carve.

You don't need an adze to hollow the bowl. For a bowl of this size, a gouge and mallet will do the job. If you do plan to hollow with an adze, I recommend crosscutting the log to a length that allows for two bowls. This will make it much easier and safer to



Mark the top and bottom of the bowl. With the half log shimmed so it's stable, use a compass to strike a pair of lines to indicate the base and rim of the bowl.



Chop and clean up. Split along both layout lines, then hew the surfaces flat and clean with your ax.

Smooth both faces. Use a handplane to flatten and smooth the hewn surfaces further.



LAY OUT THE BASIC SHAPE OF THE BOWL



Mark the first centerline. Strike a centerline from end to end on the blank's top face, and use a square to carry it down both ends.



Next, draw two intersecting arcs. To find the perpendicular centerline, use a compass to draw a pair of intersecting arcs.



Split the arcs. Strike a straight line across the points where the arcs intersect. The intersection of the two straight lines is your center.



Mark the top rim of the bowl. Two circles— $7\frac{1}{4}$ in. and $6\frac{3}{8}$ in.—establish the inside and outside of the bowl's rim.

hold or secure the blank for the adze work. The two bowls can then be separated after hollowing. For hollowing with a gouge and mallet, crosscut the log to a length of around $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.

Split the log and then lay out the bowl

Split the log in half and lay the split side down on your workbench. If the piece rocks, wedge it so it's stable. Use a compass to strike a line parallel to the benchtop about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. above the pith. Do this on both ends of the log. Now reset the compass and strike a line $2\frac{3}{8}$ in. above the first line. Beginning with an ax, and finishing with a plane or drawknife, hew and shave away the wood above and below the marked lines.

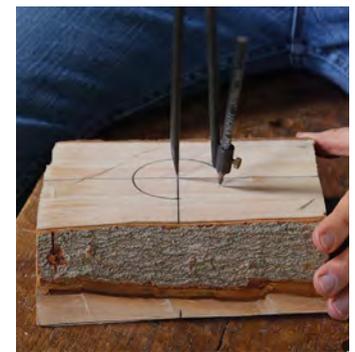
Mark centerlines and perpendicular crosslines on the top and bottom of the blank. Then, on the top of the blank, strike two circles from the center point to establish the sidewall thickness. On the bottom of the blank, strike a smaller circle for the foot.

Start the hollowing process

Secure the blank and hollow it with a long bent gouge, preferably one with a relatively steep sweep like a #7 or #8, 1 in. wide. It's important to use a bent gouge, as a straight gouge will not



Find center on the bottom. Connect the lines on the end grain for the first centerline, then use a ruler and two squares at tick marks for the perpendicular centerline.



Use the center point to draw the foot. With the centerlines drawn, put the point of the compass at their intersection and draw a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -in. circle for the foot.

START HOLLOWING OUT THE INTERIOR OF THE BOWL



Mini bowl in the middle. Using a bent gouge, begin hollowing by creating a tiny bowl shape at the center, knocking the gouge in from all angles to the middle.



The bowl expands. Work your way out from the middle in rings, driving the gouge with a mallet and expanding the hollow gradually.



Depth check. When you think you are nearing final depth, you can use a straightedge and ruler to confirm your suspicions.



Right to the rim. On the last passes, cut to the inner pencil line. Concentrate on creating a full U shape rather than a V shape.

SHAPE THE OUTSIDE NEXT



Clip the corners. To begin shaping the outside of the bowl, Fisher chops away the four corners, leaving a diamond-shaped flat at the center.



Four more facets. Next he hews off the corners created by the first four flats.

be able to negotiate the steepness of the hollow. Start hollowing by carving a tiny bowl shape in the center, working toward the center point with the gouge from all around. Repeat the procedure, progressively making the hollow wider and deeper. As you near the line representing the edge of the hollow, concentrate on making the interior a full U shape with nice curves rather than a V shape. The gouge will need to enter nearly vertically at the rim. Lower the handle of the gouge steadily as it moves forward through the cut to the center.

Periodically check the thickness of the bottom, placing a straightedge across the rim and measuring the depth. Stop at a measurement of 2 in., leaving $\frac{3}{8}$ in. of thickness at the lowest point. This will be reduced a bit further after drying when you flatten the bottom and refine the hollow. Make final cuts as clean as possible, leaving less to remove when the bowl is dry and harder to carve.

Shape the exterior

You can hew the exterior of the bowl with an ax or chunk away material with a chisel and mallet. Either way, work methodically,

replacing high points and corners with facets. As the bulk of the wood is removed, begin to form a full round shape between the foot and the rim. Make it sympathetic with the shape of the inner hollow by gauging the thickness with your fingers. The outer surface can be refined and faired with a spokeshave as well.

At this point set the bowl aside out of sun and breeze for a week or two. Now that you've removed the mass surrounding it, the bowl can move as it dries—and it will. Wonderful. It will do so evenly on both sides of the pith and the sides will dip down a bit, making it all the easier to drink the milk from your cereal.

Let it dry, and then start refining the shape

After drying, flatten the bottom of the bowl with a block plane. Redraw the circle afterward with a compass if you wish. You can clean up any unwanted bit of wonkiness of the upper rim as well.

Refine the walls of the hollow with a bent gouge, ideally of a shallower sweep that will leave a cleanly sliced, subtly textured surface. Use paring cuts, propelling the gouge by securing its handle against your shoulder/chest and using your body weight to advantage.



Around the rim. Being careful not to work against the grain, hew away the excess around the rim.



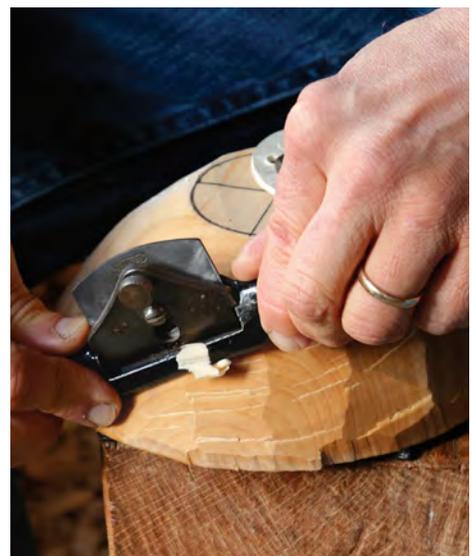
Refine the outside. After roughly trimming the rim, continue shaping the outside by introducing more facets.



Hew to the line. Choking up on the ax for more control and taking smaller swings, Fisher cuts right to the line. A folded towel steadies the bowl and protects the rim.



Check the thickness. To help guide the outside shaping, check the wall thickness with your fingers periodically.



Shave it smooth. After finishing up with the ax, fair the facets to a continuous, smooth curve with a spokeshave.

LET IT DRY, THEN DO THE FINISH WORK

After doing 90% of the shaping with the wood green, set the bowl aside to dry for several weeks before doing the final shaping on the inside and outside.



First the foot. Invert the dried bowl and shim it steady. Then use a block plane to flatten the foot. Leave tick marks beyond the flat before planing, then use them to reestablish the centerpoint to strike a fresh circle.



Finish the inside. With a bent gouge, use paring cuts to create a smooth, fair interior surface. Rubber pads help protect and stabilize the bowl.



Lay out the lip. Using your finger as a fence, draw one line on the outside of the bowl $\frac{1}{2}$ in. below the rim, and draw a second line on top of the rim $\frac{1}{8}$ in. from the inside edge.



Knife slices a chamfer. Cut to the lines with a knife to create the chamfered “drinking lip.” As the knife rotates upward use your index finger as a safety stop against the bowl.

Finish up with flutes

There are endless options for the exterior. For this bowl I've chosen carved flutes, which feel great in the hand, and a “drinking lip” around the rim.

The lip starts with a chamfer around the rim made with a spokeshave or a knife. Later I hollow it with a medium gouge. To make the flutes, lay out the spacing with dividers, then sketch pencil lines for the ridges between flutes. Use a medium-sweep gouge to carve the flutes, with the bowl positioned upside down. The cut will widen and deepen as it approaches the rim. Try to keep the ridges between flutes in line, but cut yourself a break and celebrate the variations of the handwork.

Protect your bowl with some flax seed oil, walnut oil, or tung oil. Then it's time to savor your daily cereal or ice cream. □



Spokeshave for backup. A spokeshave can be used to cut the chamfer as well; it can be helpful if the grain makes knifework difficult.



Flute layout. 1. Set a pair of dividers to just narrower than the width of a medium-sweep gouge like a #5. 2. Walk the dividers around one quadrant of the bowl at the rim, adjusting and re-walking until the last step lands right on the crossline. Reset the dividers to take the same number of steps going around a quarter of the foot. 3. Then draw pencil lines by eye to connect the divider dimples at the rim and the foot.



Fluting. Carve the flutes with the bowl upside down and secured with a holdfast. The flutes will widen and deepen as you carve from foot to rim. Some variation is inevitable and adds to the appeal of the piece.



The chamfer gets scooped. Fisher uses a medium-sweep gouge to make the rim chamfer slightly concave.



Carve off the corner. A quick trip around the rim with a knife softens the hard edge.



Other embellishments. Fluting is just one option for decorating the bowl's exterior. For information on other alternatives that Fisher uses, go to Finewoodworking.com/283.