

Carve Spoons from Pre-bent Blanks

Steam, a vise, and a handful of edge tools make the process fast and fun

BY CURTIS BUCHANAN

Late one night in 1990 I got a call from Drew Langsner. He was in a panic. The Swedish spoon carver Wille Sundqvist was arriving on a flight from overseas to teach at Country Workshops, the school on Drew's farm in North Carolina, and Drew had driven to the wrong airport to meet him. The airport where Wille was waiting was only 30 minutes from me, and I left right away to pick him up. It was wonderful meeting Wille and having him spend the night at our house before Drew came to get him the next day. And not long after that chance encounter, Wille sent me a copy of his book *Swedish Carving Techniques*; it was from that book that I learned how to carve a spoon.

For many years afterward I carved spoons the traditional way. I liked the minimalism of using just the hatchet, hook knife, and sloyd knife, and I liked not being tied to my workbench. I also enjoyed spending time walking around the forest looking for spoon stock: branches with the perfect natural crook to



A BENT BLANK



The bent blank starts out flat. Instead of searching in the woods for naturally bent spoon stock, as he used to do, Buchanan splits and shaves a chunk of green sugar maple and steam-bends it to create a curved blank.



Drawing it down. Working the radial planes with a drawknife, Buchanan flattens both wide faces of the blank, bringing it down to a thickness of $\frac{9}{16}$ in.



Steam bends the blank. After an hour in Buchanan's rough-and-ready steambox, the spoon blank is ready to bend.



Bending form in the vise. A steel strap screwed to the bending form and bolted to a long wooden handle helps ensure successful bends. The blank remains on the form for two days.

BEGIN WITH THE BOWL



Trace a paper pattern.

Buchanan has a folder full of spoon patterns scissored from paper; he traces one on the bent blank to start the spoon.

Start scooping. With the blank in a vise, Buchanan uses a deep gooseneck gouge and works mostly across the grain to hollow out the spoon's bowl.

Smoothing the scoop. A gouge with a flatter radius helps blend in the initial tool marks as you smooth the spoon's bowl.



To the bandsaw. Once the bowl is shaped, saw along the spoon's outlines. Leaving a few inches of extra material beyond the end of the handle will make it easier to grip in the vise while you carve.

SHAPE THE BACK AND HANDLE



Beneath the bowl. Buchanan uses a drawknife to shape the back of the bowl, echoing its curve and bringing the rim to a narrow bevel.

A ruff at the neck. To shape the neck Buchanan makes a series of drawknife cuts from one direction, then finishes with a series from the opposite direction.



Spokeshave for fine smoothing. Having completed the majority of shaping with the drawknife, Buchanan follows up with a spokeshave set for a fine cut to smooth the convex surfaces.



On to the handle. After rough shaping the handle with a drawknife, use a spokeshave to attain the finished form.

FINE-TUNING THE SPOON

Off with the end. Once the bowl and handle are otherwise completely shaped, zip off the waste at the end of the handle.



Next, it's knife work. Following up on the spokeshave, Buchanan refines the neck and other areas with a sloyd knife.



Definition at the end of the handle. Using a sloyd knife, Buchanan creates a finial at the butt of the handle with a pair of V-notches, smoothing slices across the end grain, and chamfers at the edges.

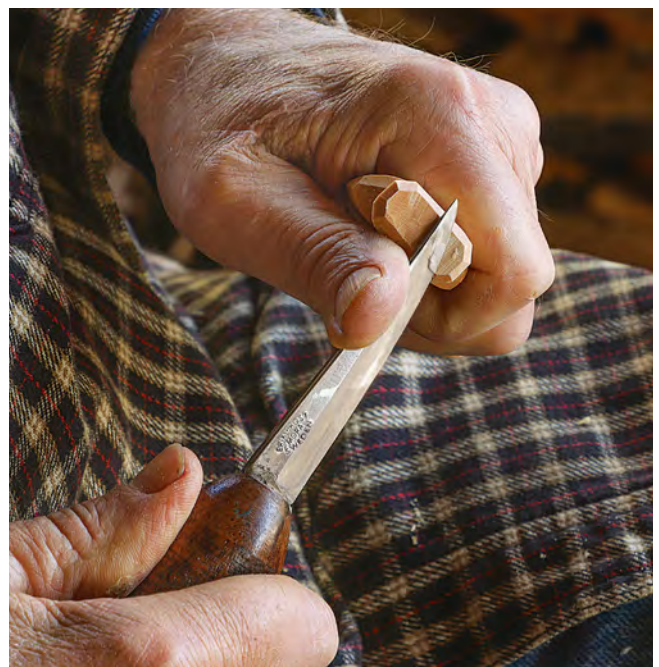
3 in. or so wide. After cutting the blank to 10 in. or 12 in. long, I put it in the steambox for an hour, then bend it on a simple form. I'll leave this blank on the form for a couple of days. To get started carving today's spoon, I find the blank I bent two days before and take it off its form.

I've made spoons in a wide variety of shapes, and I keep paper patterns of the various shapes. So now I select a pattern and trace its outline onto the blank. Before doing anything else, I clamp the blank in a vise that sits up above my bench at a comfortable height and carve the spoon's bowl with a gooseneck gouge. After the bowl has been roughed out, I come back with a flatter gouge for the finish cuts.

Now I rough saw the spoon's perimeter shape at the bandsaw. I leave a few inches of waste at the end of the handle for the time being to provide extra purchase for the vise during carving. Clamping the spoon with the inside of the bowl facing down, I carve the outside of the bowl with a drawknife and finish it up with a spokeshave. The handle is then shaped with the drawknife and spokeshave. Often, I'll set the spoon aside at this point and pick it up again that evening—in front of a fire in the winter, or on the porch in the summer—to put the finishing touches on it with a sloyd knife. Back in the shop the next day, I apply milk paint on the handle, and after that dries, I rub the whole spoon with tung oil. Placing the spoon in my 140° light-bulb kiln dries the oil and sets the bend.

I've always tried to keep the fun factor high in my shop, but starting each day with spoon carving before turning to chairmaking has set a new standard. □

Curtis Buchanan makes chairs and spoons in Jonesborough, Tenn.



FINISHING UP

Milk paint on the handle. Buchanan applies two colors of milk paint, one on top of the other. Painter's tape wrapped around the neck creates a clean line where the painted portion ends.



Fine abrasion. Using 400-grit sandpaper, Buchanan rubs the surface until the undercoat of milk paint shows through the top coat. Then he burnishes the surface with 0000 steel wool.

Last step. Once the tape is removed, Buchanan treats the whole spoon with several coats of 100% pure tung oil. He puts the spoon in his small light-bulb kiln to dry the tung oil and completely set the bend.

