

Personalize Your Furniture



DIAMOND BEADING

A trademark of my furniture is evidence of the hand-tool work that goes into each piece. It can be as subtle as the variations of a handplaned surface, or as deliberate as hand-carved embellishments. These details catch the eye, add a pleasing effect to the overall design, and make each piece unique.

Diamond beading, curls, and rosettes are three carvings that occur frequently in my furniture, in numerous variations. Cutting these designs mechanically would require an expensive and complex tool, but carving them by hand is done easily—even if you're a novice carver—and requires only a modest investment in tools.

While you must work to the nearest $\frac{1}{2}$ in. for a mortise-and-tenon, and to even tighter tolerances for a perfect dovetail, carving is your chance to cut loose from the bonds of the ruler and marking knife. You purposely are avoiding

Three decorative carvings
that are easy to do
and require few tools

BY CHARLES
SHACKLETON



CURLS

the perfect symmetry left by a machine and are seeking the unique marks left by a carver. I hope these examples will encourage you to take up carving and add an extra dimension to your furniture making. The only limit is your imagination.

A carved surface is all about texture

Many beginners try to achieve an almost flat surface, whether with multiple strokes of the carving tool or by sanding the wood. Everyone's taste varies in how textured a carved surface should be; I think you should aim for a surface with some inconsistency but not too much. I find that running my hands over the surface is a good way to locate rough areas that need another stroke of the tool. Above all, don't touch the carved wood with sandpaper after you put down your carving tools.

The author is the owner of Charles Shackleton Furniture in Bridgewater, Vt.



ROSETTES

DIAMOND BEADING DRESSES UP MOLDINGS

A few simple tools—a block plane, a thin-kerf saw, and a ½-in. bench chisel—are all you need to form this diamond beading.



This decoration started out as a crude rendition of a berry molding. That design normally is a string of pure round beads, but my version came out in a faceted, hand-carved form. Creating this carving is an incredibly satisfying, soothing, easy, and quiet process, and it doesn't take that long. Diamond beading can add sparkle without overwhelming a design.

I use variations of the diamond, including one that looks like a row of four-sided pyramids (see the photo on the facing page). I think a furniture maker in my shop misinterpreted the original idea, or perhaps got bored, and this new version was born. That's how ideas come about: They evolve through mistakes, misinterpretations, experimentation, or just playing around.

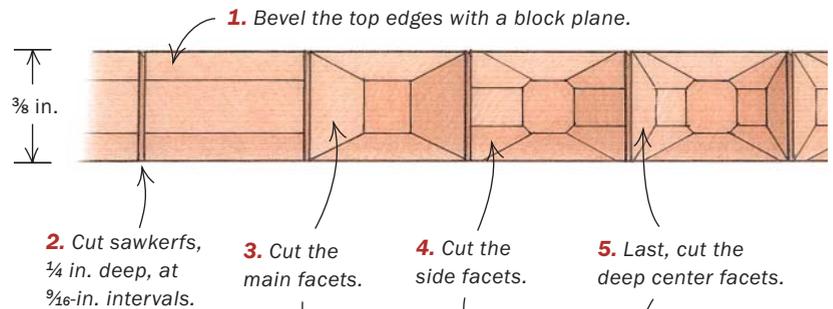
Start with a piece of wood ½ in. thick by

¾ in. wide, and slightly longer than you'll need, to allow for mitering. Bevel the two top edges with a block plane, but don't aim for perfect facets.

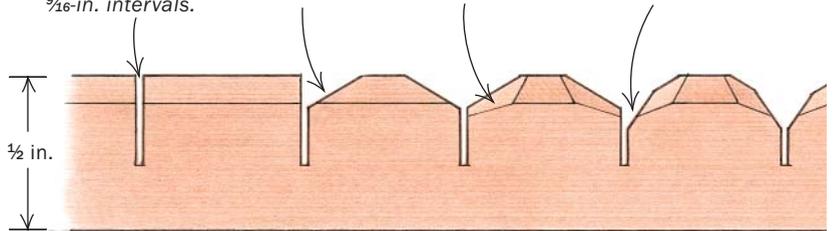
Mark the length every ⅛ in. and cut down roughly ¼ in. with a thin-kerf saw.

With a ½-in. bench chisel, remove the wood in the order shown in the illustration. Some carvers perform the first cut along the whole piece before starting the second cut, for consistency's sake, but don't strive for perfectly matching beads.

TOP VIEW



SIDE VIEW



1. BEVEL THE TOP EDGES



2. DEFINE THE BEADS

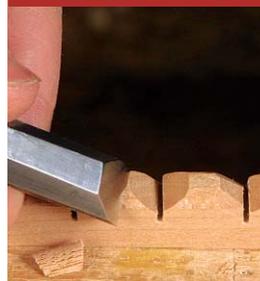


1. Use a block plane to bevel the top side of a strip of wood. Aim for a multifaceted arc rather than a smooth curve. 2. Then define each bead by making ¼-in.-deep cuts every ⅛ in., preferably with a thin-kerf saw.

3. CUT MAIN FACETS



4. CUT SIDE FACETS



5. CUT DEEP FACETS



3. Using a ½-in. bench chisel, start the first cut a little over a third of the way onto the top of the bead, angled at about 30° toward the sawkerf. 4. Cut the two side facets with the chisel angled to each side of the bead. 5. Lift the chisel to about 60° and cut the final facet about halfway down the first cut.

Watch it on the Web

To see the author demonstrate his carving techniques, go to www.finewoodworking.com.

CURLS ADD DIMENSION



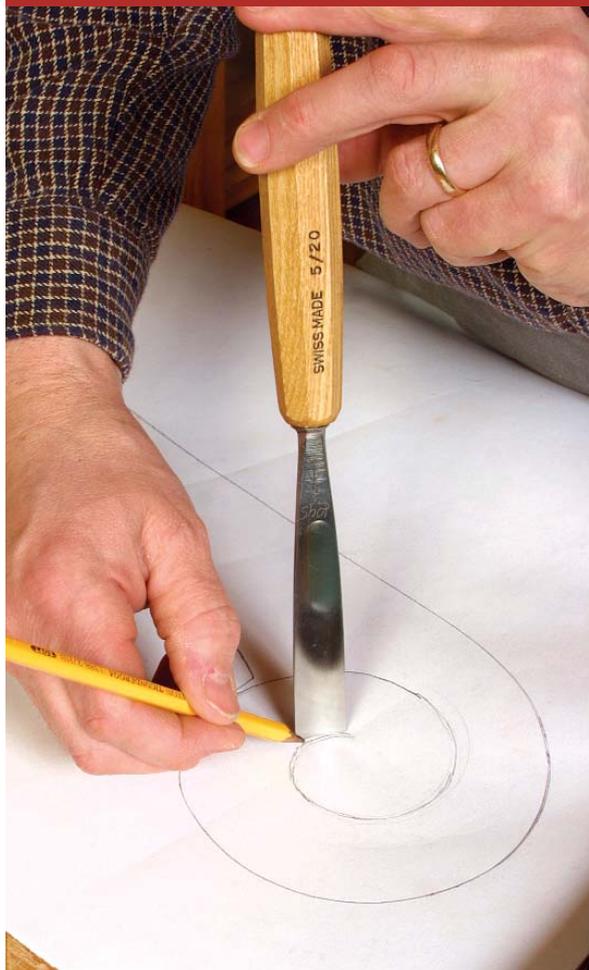
Originally came up with this design for the arm of an upholstered dining chair. It gave the chair a look similar to the ram's horn curl on the top of a Greek Ionic column. Even though this chair was nearly twice the price of one of my side chairs, it sold well. It was almost as if the carving let the customer know how much handwork had gone into each piece.

With carving in general, you can use the profile of a tool to design the carving rather than designing the carving and then buying tools to execute it. Once you have a rough sketch of the carving, walk the gouge along the line, tracing the path with a pencil. Then cut along the line with a knife, lay the template on the wood, and trace the line onto the wood.

First define the outline of the curl by driving the gouge straight down into the wood with a mallet. Chisel away the waste, working from the outside of the curl toward the center. When cutting across or against the grain, take lighter cuts to avoid going too deep. The center of the curl can be slightly hollowed to avoid leaving a flat spot on the carving.

Deepen the outline until you reach a depth you find pleasing. The depth should be roughly uniform over most of the curl but gradually taper until it disappears in the center. When you remove wood where the curl joins the rest of the piece, try to have a slightly irregular transition from the smooth surface to the carved area. This will add to the pleasing hand-crafted appearance of the piece.

1. DESIGN WITH TOOLS IN MIND



2. DEFINE THE CURL



1. Use the sweep of a gouge you already own to draw the final shape of the curl. Then transfer the design to the workpiece by cutting around the curl with a knife and tracing the design with a pencil onto the wood. **2.** Use a mallet to drive the gouge into the wood following the line of the curl. Don't try to cut down to the final depth at this stage.

Buy your carving tools as you need them

Resist the urge to buy an economical starter set of carving tools. You will end up hardly using some of them, while those you do use will cut poorly and never hold an edge. Instead, purchase top-of-the-line tools as you need them. I prefer the Pfeil brand (www.woodcarvingsupplies.com). The first number on the handle refers to the sweep, or curve, of the gouge, while the second number is the width of the tool in millimeters. Besides the sharpening stones you use with your bench chisels, you will need a leather strop and some honing compound. A few quick strokes on the strop will keep your tools cutting cleanly and effortlessly and will lengthen the time between each honing of a fresh edge.

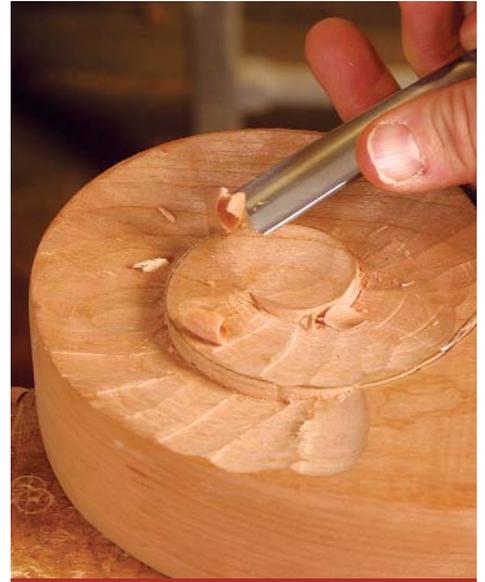


Maintain a sharp edge. Hone the blade on a leather strop to maintain the perfect edge needed for effortless, clean carving.



3. RELIEVE THE CUT

Work your way around the curl, driving the gouge in from close to the edge up to the previously cut outline.



4. RECESS THE CENTER

To avoid leaving a flat section of wood that will detract from the carving, slightly recess the center of the curl.



5. AIM FOR A TEXTURE

This one gouge carved the curl from start to finish. The sharp edges of the curl can be sanded slightly, but the scalloped pattern left by the gouge should not be touched.

ROSETTES ADD ELEGANCE



A lot of design originates from natural forms (evidence suggests that the Corinthian column evolved from the stem of the giant hogweed, or its Greek counterpart). Go for a hike and see what inspires you. There might be an idea hiding in a bush right outside your shop.

This rosette design may have originated as a dogwood flower or perhaps as a wild rose, but despite its intricate appearance, it is no more difficult to create than the previous two carvings.

This carving is deceptively simple because the majority of the profile is cut either on the lathe or using a cutterhead

mounted in a drill press. The former method offers more flexibility in terms of design and size, but if you don't possess turning skills, the drill press can produce blanks very quickly.

Once the blank has been cut or turned, divide it into four quadrants by drawing curved lines from the midpoint to the edge. At the edge, remove four triangles of waste by pushing down on the gouge and at the same time angling it toward the rim. Then use the smaller of the two gouges to cut the curving line from the center to each triangle. Don't make the line too pronounced; an oil finish will enhance the line when penetrating the cut wood. Last, with a sharp scribe or the edge of a chisel, scratch in the vein running down the middle of each leaf.

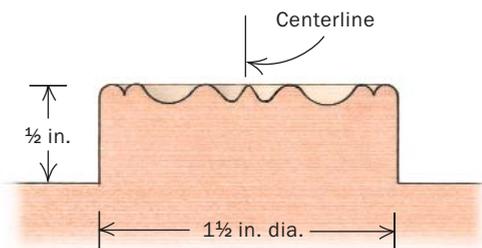
When mounted in shallow holes, the rosettes appear carved into the solid wood of the workpiece. I have used both large and small rosettes on the legs of coffee tables, as centers for drawer pulls on bedside tables, and to adorn kitchen dressers and mirror frames.

1. TURN ROSETTE BLANKS



Rosette blanks turned on a lathe have a limitless number of profile and size possibilities.

ROSETTE PROFILE



A drill-press option for cutting rosettes



If you don't own a lathe, mount a rosette cutter (www.mlcswoodworking.com) in a drill press. Use a fly cutter with the center bit removed to cut the outside of the rosette block, removing it from the blank.



Highlighting a leg. By inserting the rosette into a perfectly matched hole, it appears that the leg itself was carved.

2. MOUNT THE TURNINGS FOR CARVING

A carving's three dimensions are best illuminated with a bright light shining from one side. Here, Shackleton has prepared several blanks with double-faced tape on the lathe and mounted them on a piece of scrap board to ready them for carving.



3. DRAW IN THE FLOWER PETALS

Divide the face of the turning into four parts by drawing the curved outline of the petals.



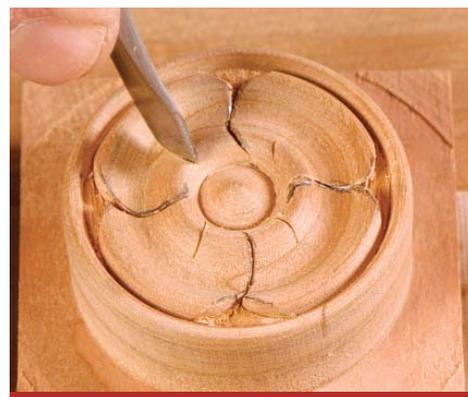
4. CARVE THE PETAL CORNERS

Angle the gouge down and outward to cut away a small triangle of waste, which defines the corners of the petals.



5. DEFINE WHERE THE PETALS MEET

Push the curve of the gouge into the wood enough to show the edges of the petals.



6. ADD THE VEINS

Use the edge of a chisel to scribe the thin vein in the center of each petal.