

What's Your

Readers, editors, contributors sign their work in distinctive ways

BY CHARLIE REINA

You've spent weeks, months even, making that fine piece of furniture. You take pride in your work and want the world—or maybe just future clients—to know who made it. So how do you sign your work for posterity?

We put that question to members of our online discussion group, Knots (www.finewoodworking.com), along with some frequent contributors and *FWW* editors, and found that woodworkers use signing techniques as varied and personal as their names, and often as creative as their best work. Some go the clean-and-simple route. Some leave their mark with subtle bits of flair, while others get bold and brassy.

Here are some of the best examples and signing techniques that came up most often. Take your pick, or join our online forum and weigh in.

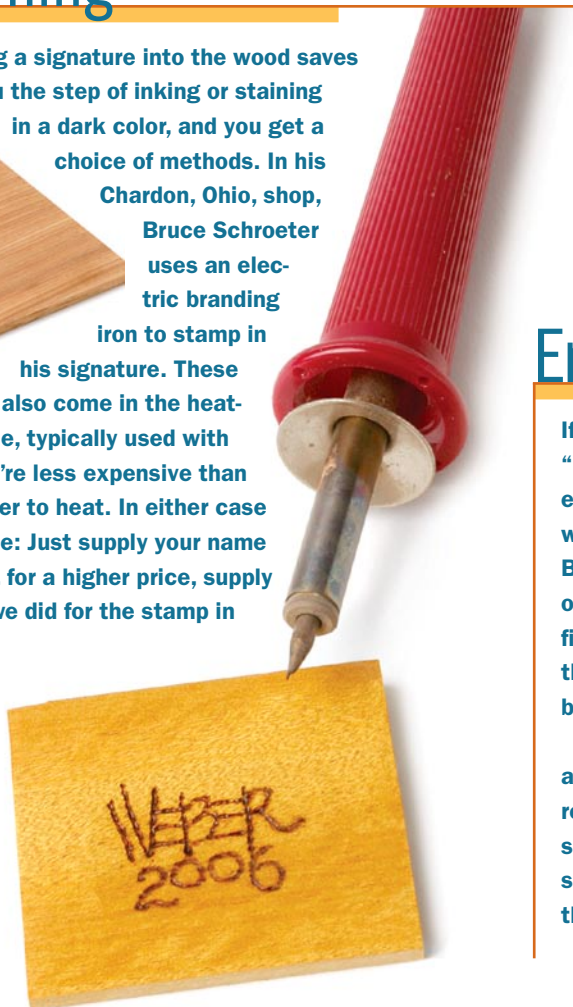
Charlie Reina is an associate editor.

Wood burning

Burning a signature into the wood saves you the step of inking or staining in a dark color, and you get a choice of methods. In his Chardon, Ohio, shop, Bruce Schroeter uses an electric branding iron to stamp in his signature. These

irons also come in the heat-by-flame style, typically used with a propane torch. They're less expensive than plug-ins but take longer to heat. In either case you get another choice: Just supply your name (as Schroeter did); or, for a higher price, supply your own design (as we did for the stamp in the top photo.)

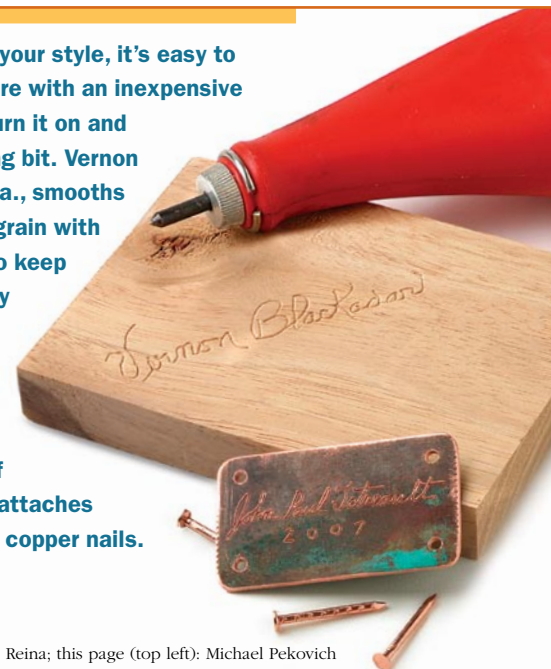
Paul Weber of Tinton Falls, N.J., uses a standard, plug-in wood-burning tool. Its advantage? It allows you to restyle your signature for each piece.



Engraving

If block letters aren't your style, it's easy to "handwrite" a signature with an inexpensive engraving tool. Just turn it on and write with the vibrating bit. Vernon Blackadar of Lithia, Fla., smooths out any coarse wood grain with fine sandpaper first, to keep the bit from constantly bouncing off course.

FWW assistant art director John Tetreault engraves his signature on pieces of salvaged copper, and attaches them to his work with copper nails.



Sign?

Carving



Dennis Soden of Leawood, Kan., uses carving tools to produce his name and the year in letters 1 in. to 2 in. tall. Matt Mulka of Mokena, Ill. (not shown), uses chisels for letters twice that size. Like many of those who sign their work, Soden creates the letter characters on his computer, which gives him a choice of fonts. Then he prints the characters and traces them onto the wood with carbon paper. For more on letter carving, see “The ABCs of Letter Carving,” *FWW* #187, pp. 84-87.

Inlaying

If a quick ink-on-wood scrawl is at the low end of signing techniques, inlaying is at the high end. It typically involves more work, more precision, and sometimes more cost. You can get fancy with the size and shape of the inlay and use a router and template to clear the way.

Or you can make the process a lot easier, just by thinking circular.

Jim Howell of Portland, Ore., makes inlays out of contrasting wood. Using a 1-in. plug-cutter and tablesaw, he cuts out a disk $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick. He inscribes his floral-design signature with a wood burner or engraver, drills out the receiving hole with a Forstner bit, and glues in the disk.

Several signers inlay pennies minted the same year as the piece was made. Lane Carter of Edgemont, Ariz., epoxies in a new penny and burns in his name alongside it with an electric stencil. Mike Rylander of Mill Valley, Calif., has his

own coins minted and epoxies them into the piece. His coins have consecutive years on opposite faces to get two years from each batch. Custom coin makers typically charge about \$2.25 each for up to 300 bronze coins (\$2.75 each for silver), plus an initial die-making fee of \$210. Prices drop significantly for larger orders.



Some of our signers use Dremel-type tools to achieve varying effects, starting with a $\frac{1}{32}$ -in. ball bit for the smallest letters. Max Mayer of Steamboat Springs, Colo., opts for a squiggly “worm-line” design and rubs in a contrasting stain before sanding and finishing the wood. Michael Ochinda of San Jose, Calif. (not shown), uses a block-lettered “Hand-crafted by ...” signature.



Sand coarse wood first. Vibrating-bit engraving tools work better after coarse wood grain is sanded smooth. Wiping a contrasting stain over the signature fills the lines and brings out the words.

Writing

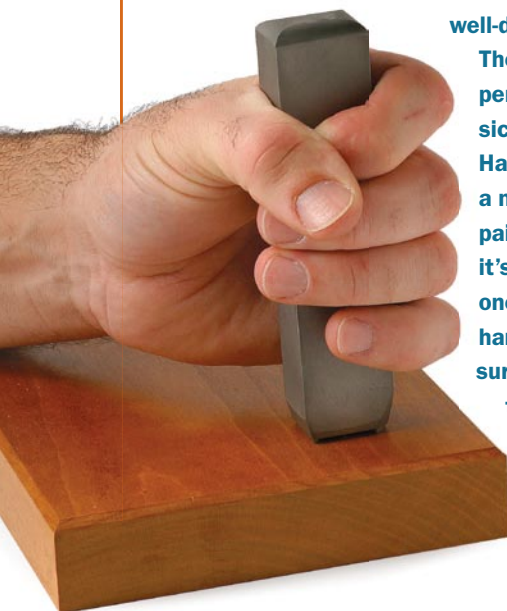


HANDWRITING ON WOOD

Taking a pen directly to your workpiece is as simple as signing gets. Rancher/woodworker David Doyel of San Jose, Calif., uses a felt-tipped pen to handwrite a version of his family's cattle brand. Our advice to ink-on-wood signers: Keep a steady hand, and don't misspell. "Erasing" with 60-grit sandpaper can take a while.

HANDWRITING ON PAPER

To reduce the chance for error, several signers put pen to paper, then paper to wood. Ken Werner of Hamilton, N.Y., made, and "signed," a plane box for his young son.



Stamping

If you've ever accidentally pounded a loose nail into the surface of a board, you know how stamping works. Just about anything metallic with a sharp, well-defined edge can be your signature "stamp."

Then again, you might want something more personalized—your name, the date, or a whimsical design like the one Aurelio Bolognesi of Hardwick, Mass., uses. For that, you can have a metal stamp made to your specs. (Bolognesi paid \$140 for his hardened steel stamp.) Then it's just a matter of one solid blow with a hammer. Just make sure to do that before the piece is assembled.



FineWoodworking.com managing editor Matt Berger was living in San Luis Obispo, Calif., when he had this rubber stamp made at a print shop. Matt supplied the design, and paid less than \$20 for the stamp and ink pad. He stamps his work in its unfinished state, then wipes on the finish.

SOURCES OF SUPPLY

BRANDING IRONS, WOOD-BURNING TOOLS, ENGRAVING TOOLS

www.woodcraft.com
www.leevalley.com
www.rockler.com

CARVING TOOLS

www.highlandwoodworking.com

STAMPING TOOLS

www.infinitystamps.com

MINTED COINS

www.wemakecoins.com
www.coinable.com

LASER PRINT ON PAPER

Mike Harris of Atlanta, Ill., shows what you can do with a computer printer and parchment paper. He glues these signature ovals onto a hidden part of his workpiece, then brushes on a polyurethane finish.

Where to sign your work

Proud as they are of the furniture they make, most of our signers opt for modesty when it comes to leaving their mark. Or maybe they just don't want anything to mar the beauty of the work. Whatever the reason, they tend to sign their work in places you have to look for.

CHAIRS

We get to see wooden chairs from just about every angle, and just about every surface is visible. But there's at least one out-of-the-way place for a signature. Kevin Rodel of Pownal, Maine, signs his Arts and Craft chairs (featured in *FWW* #190) on the inside of the seat's back rail.



FRAMES

FWW associate art director Kelly Dunton took pen to finished wood on the back of this cherry frame.



DRAWERS

Drawers give the signer an even chance of being recognized or staying anonymous. Paul Weber's wood-burnt signature can be seen only with the drawer out.



TABLES

And then there's a signature that hides in plain sight, courtesy of one of our contributing editors. Look closely at the inset photo of the box on his demilune table, which was featured in *FWW* #177. Can

you see the signature? It's inlaid in Morse code. The short and long ebony lines around the inner semi-circle are the dots and dashes. Cherry spacers separate the letters. They spell H (....) A (._) C (._.) K (._.), as in Garrett Hack.

