CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN IN WOOD CARVING: BY KARL VON RYDINGSVÄRD

THOSE who have not made a study of designing have great difficulty, as a rule, in finding suitable decorations for wood carving, and home workers are frequently at a loss to know how an article intended for ornamentation in this manner should be constructed. An article published in The Craftsman of July, 1908, describes the necessary outfit for beginners’ work, and I purpose to give here some suggestions which may be of assistance to those who are working without instruction.

The construction of any article which is to be decorated with carving should be kept as simple as possible, omitting all fancy moldings, elaborate contours, panelings, etc. Whenever it is possible, glue joints should be avoided, as in our overheated houses they are very likely to open unless protected from changes of temperature by a heavy coat of varnish, which is not a suitable finish for wood carving.

Mahogany boards can be easily obtained as wide as 36 inches, and quartered oak boards 12 and 15 inches wide may also sometimes be found. If, however, the joint is necessary, German cabinetmaker’s glue, very hot, must be used, as the ordinary fish glue is not strong enough for this purpose. Anything which is constructed of wood can be decorated with carving, if it is of such a nature that doing so adds to its beauty and does not impair its usefulness. Photographs of museum pieces may be bought in many places and these, as well as the fine reproductions given in magazines, furnish great assistance in obtaining designs. When they are clear enough to show the details, working drawings may be made from them, as described further on.

The magazine stand given here is a useful and attractive piece of furniture, simple in construction and decoration but very effective. The ornament, in the Scandinavian style, requires very little modeling, the figures being characteristically crude, which renders this style particularly suitable for beginners. Oak is more appropriate for this work than mahogany, which requires a smooth, well rubbed finish and much attention to detail in order to bring out its beauty.

A full-sized working drawing on heavy paper must first be made from the small drawing here given, which is scaled at \( \frac{3}{4} \) of an inch per foot. The stock for the sides should be quite heavy, at least an inch and a half thick, but for the shelves and braces the ordinary \( \frac{7}{8} \) stock can be used. The cabinet work will present no difficulties to anyone who is accustomed to handling tools. The shelves can be made as long as desired, as the ends are heavy enough to support a greater length than is given here, although a brace might be required in the center if they were lengthened more than three feet. The ends of the shelves are set into the side pieces half an inch, and the tenons and pegs of the top and bottom shelves hold the stand together so that it is not necessary to glue it, which is an advantage if one is obliged to move frequently.

The photograph of one side gives the detail of the ornament. The strap work is easily laid out with the aid of a rule and compass. The center panel, if one is not proficient in free-hand drawing, must be enlarged by squaring. Take a fine pen and divide the panel with a horizontal and a vertical line, exactly in the middle; then subdivide the quarters in the same way. For a design with so little detail probably the 4 squares each way will be sufficient. In a drawing where more squares are required they are usually numbered down one side and across the bottom. The full-sized panel is then laid out on paper, dividing it into an equal number of squares which are marked correspondingly. Anyone who can draw at all will be able, with this assistance, to locate the lines and reproduce the design in the required size.

The interlaced design at the top and bottom may be cut a quarter of an inch
Settle with Scandinavian decoration: carved by Karl von Rydingsvärd.

Showing design on the back of same settle.

Side of a magazine stand: instruction for the making and carving of which is furnished in the accompanying article by Karl von Rydingsvärd.
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deep. The strap work is rounded slightly on the edges, after being cut down at all of the interlacing, and when this is done a large veining tool is used to make the parallel lines, which continue along the edges as moldings. It will be found impossible to make these lines even, especially where they run with the grain of the wood, but those who appreciate the work of the hand will not object to this slight irregularity.

The large panel, being bold in design, will stand a depth of half an inch and should be somewhat undercut on the lower outlines, the shadows thus produced adding much to the effectiveness of the design. When the background has been removed, the general contour of the figures and scrolls must be obtained and after this is done the details are drawn in and the finishing touches given. For this part of the work use first the large veining tool, modeling the details afterward with the flat gouges, which will be used mostly with the concave side downward. The upper ornament can be repeated on the inside and the top shelf used for bric-a-brac, if desired. The molding should also run down the edges of the side pieces and across the lower edges of the braces. The sharp edges on the moldings may be removed by rubbing them down with a piece of shark skin, which can be purchased at hardware stores and is much superior to sandpaper for this purpose, but neither should be used on other parts of the carving, as such treatment destroys the crispness of the work.

It is better to stain any article which is decorated in the antique style, as the color of the new wood is not in keeping with the work, and it takes a long time for it to darken naturally. This can be done by fuming it with ammonia or by using any of the various wood stains now on the market. The weathered oak shades are used at present rather more than the darker tones, but either method of treatment should be followed by the use of a good wax polish. There are several preparations of liquid wax which are better to use on wood carvings than the hard wax which clogs the corners when it cools and is extremely difficult to remove. It should be well rubbed in with a stiff brush and allowed to dry, after which it may be slightly polished with a soft cloth.

Wood carving is one of the pleasantest of the arts, because in it the work of the brain and imagination are balanced by effort of a purely manual nature. Dexterity gives a pleasure all its own, and at no time is this so keenly felt as when it contributes to the making of a beautiful thing. Then again, there is the satisfaction of seeing the work take tangible form before the eyes, and there is also the wholesome smell of the wood with which we work, that seems to bring us, in our studios, in touch with the out of doors. Carving is one of the most primitive of the arts—witness the little boy with his first jack knife, how he whittles—and from this reminiscence of early joy perhaps carving gains one of its chief joys.