

An Introduction to Contrarian Embellishment

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I. Getting Started

A. Wood Choice – any plain, vanilla wood. Could use segmented. Off the wood pile ugly wood.

B. Wall Thickness – one sided embellishment – 5/16” to 3/8”. Two side embellishment – 7/16” to 1/2”.

C. Begin with a completely turned piece. Follow all design considerations when turning the piece. For a single side embellishment, sand only the side not being embellished. For a two sided embellishment no sanding is required.

D. For a single sided embellishment leave the tenon or glue block attached. You will put the piece back on the lathe later for cleanup and final finishing. If you are embellishing the whole piece, remove the tenon or glue block and shape the base of the piece before starting to embellish.

E. Get several pieces of 5” square flat stock to use as practice pieces to carve, burn, and color before you attempt the main piece.

II. Embellishment Design

A. Outside of the Piece. Outside of a hollow form design, outside of bowl, rim of a platter or plate.

B. Inside of a Piece. Inside of a bowl, bowl section of a plate or platter.

C. Terminology

1. Valley – the area removed by carving.
2. Ridge – the narrow area between valleys which will hold the color
3. Flat – the large flat area between valleys which will hold the color
4. Round or Kidney Shaped “Swimming Pools” – techniques to remove triangular shaped flat areas and create ridges between valleys.

III. Carving

A. Dremel Type Carver – available from Lowes or Home Depot. Best if used with the flexible shaft that is available.

B. Micro Pro Carver from Master Carver – available from MDI Woodcarvers in Maine.

C. Burrs – Start with ball burrs or spheres. Once you have mastered the technique, try other shaped burrs.

1. Dremel Burrs – ¼” and smaller. Available from Lowes, Home Depot and Amazon (other ball burrs available – make sure they are 3/32” or 1/8”).

2. Kutzall Burrs – Fine burr. ¼” or 3/8”. Available from MDI and Amazon.

3. Saburrtooth Burrs – ¼” or 3/8”. White or yellow for most wood, green for harder wood such as hickory or oak. Available from MDI and Amazon.

D. Carving

1. Initial Carving – “Doodling”. All random carving with primary burr. Carve the entire area you desire to embellish.

2. Secondary Carving – With the primary burr or a smaller one, clean any undesired flat areas or other not so cool parts.

3. Wire Brush Entire Carved Area - Soft wire welding brush available from Lowes and Home Depot. Larger soft wire brushes available from Amazon. **If you draw the wire brush across your arm and you draw blood, find a softer model!

4. Scotch Bright Entire Carved Area – Green Scotch Bright pad works well. DO NOT SAND!

IV. Burning

A. Burners – Any burner will work, some better than others. Razertip and Colwood best for pyrography but will do in a pinch. Burnmaster Hawk or Eagle from Master carver given steady, constant level of heat.

B. Hand Pieces – Razertip and Colwood tips come in two flavors, fixed and replaceable. Replaceable hand pieces are better. Burnmaster or Graeme Priddle (available from MDI) hand pieces are both replaceable.

C. Tips – Best to make your own tips. Nickle Chromium wire (available from Amazon and MDI) 16-24 gauge wire. Bend in U to fit handle and then bent forward near the nose of the tip.

D. Burning – Adjust heat to provide non-flaming burn. Two degrees hotter than the sun is too hot and defeats the purpose. The idea is to scorch the surface, remove and “fliglies” or wood fibers, and leave little carbon residue.

1. Burn the whole embellished area getting the valleys and ridges/flats.

2. Use the burner to adjust the carving as necessary.

3. Wire brush the entire burnt area.

4. Scotch bright the entire burnt area. DO NOT SAND!

V. Coloring and Finishing

A. Step One – India Ink. Comes in a variety of colors. Note – expect color change from bare wood. Test first over carved and burned practice piece. Available from Hobby Lobby and Michaels or Blick.com and Jerry’s Arterama on line.

1. Use a toothbrush to apply.
2. Avoid saturating the piece with ink and filling valleys. Work ink with toothbrush until it starts to set up.
3. Let dry several hours or overnight. Check for bare spots and recoat as necessary.

B. Step Two – Acrylic Paint. Using quality acrylic paint such as Golden's or other artist quality paint from Hobby Lobby, Michaels, Blick, or Jerry's Arterama.

1. Dry brush primary color on the piece focusing on the ridges and flats. Avoid getting paint into valleys. Dry brush till you are happy with the color or your arm falls off. Allow to dry several hours or overnight.

2. Dry brush secondary color on the piece also focusing on ridges and flats. Metallic acrylic paint is a good choice.

C. Step Three – Spray lacquer. Apply two or three light coats of spray lacquer to the embellished area. Semi-gloss or matte finish is recommended.

D. Step Four – Sand and finish any area not embellished.