

Plane Talk

Supplement to 'Ingrained', Volume 10, February 1998

Knox & District Woodworkers Club Inc.

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This issue is dedicated to those of our Members who are addicted to converting shapeless pieces of wood to some recognisable form which is pleasing to the eye.

Handy Tips

1. Tear, rather than cut, sandpaper. The cut made by scissors leaves a sharp edge that tends to scratch the workpiece.
2. A dent can be removed by spraying the area with hot steam from a boiling kettle.
3. Small cracks in your work can often be saved by filling with superglue

*If your own cat
won't sit still long
enough to capture
its image in a block
of wood, Ray
Winder's step by
step photos and
plans will help you
in your way.*

TIMBER CHOICES

The size of the block required is 3" x 6" x 7" in (90 x 65 x 190mm) or 9" in (240mm) if waste holding block is included.

I have used limewood for this project as it lends itself so well to carving, being capable of holding the finest detail while also being easy to cut. Basswood from North America is very similar, and both woods can be stained to give a darker finish.

For the more ambitious, a naturally darker and more attractive wood such as cherry or walnut will repay the extra effort needed to carve it.



Bandsawn blank, marked up and ready for carving



CAT CARVING

All sides of the wooden block should be square to each other before transferring the front and side elevations to the wood. The drawing can be marked on the wood by either making templates from the plans supplied and drawing around them, or cutting the drawings out, taping them to the wood and tracing them down direct using carbon paper. A waste block is left underneath to allow the carving to be gripped in a vice.

Having marked the two profiles of the cat onto the block, they can be bandsawn around, taking care to save the waste pieces from the first cut. Either tape or tack them back in place in order to reinstate the second profile ready for bandsawing.

The bandsawn blank should now look like Pic 1. Firstly, a centre line is marked running from between the front legs, up the chest, across the face and down the back. This line provides a datum point for

marking facial and front leg details. By referring to the drawings supplied, details and measurements of the cat's body can be transferred.

The photograph shows the legs drawn, including hatching lines to denote areas of waste to be removed. Note the tail is on the cat's right hand side. With the block held in the vice, you are ready to start.

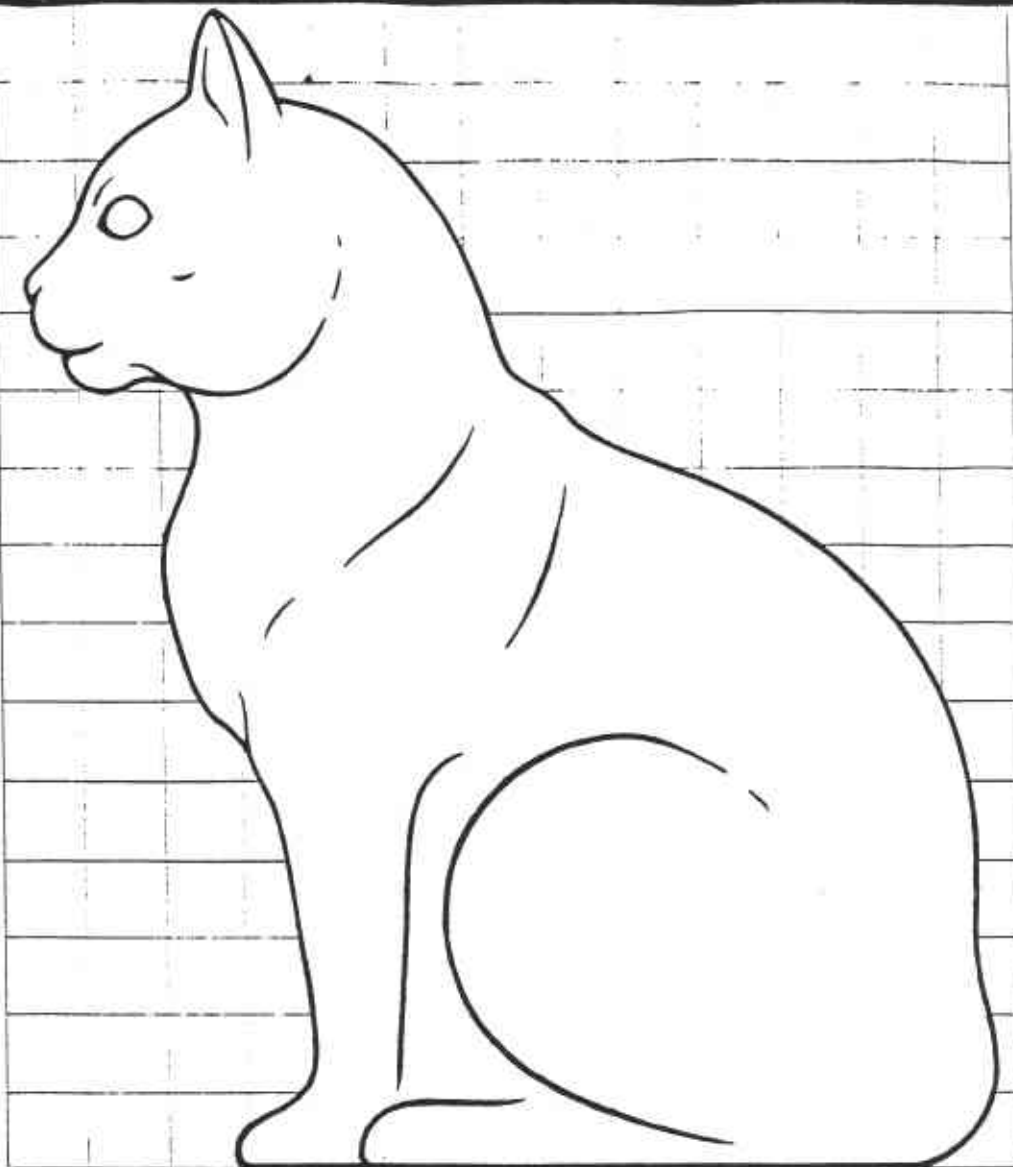
As the wood for this project is lime, which is relatively soft, the carving can be done without a mallet. I used the 13mm fishtail chisel for removing the waste, see Pic 2. This happens to be a favourite tool of mine, but a larger size might be more appropriate. A line of vertical cuts has to be made following the line of the back leg. Then,



Remove waste with a fishtail chisel

TOOLS REQUIRED

For this woodcarving chisels are required to this project, with sizes as follows: 13mm fishtail chisel, 10mm and other chisel sizes. These are appropriate for convenient use. They are excellent for fine detail and getting into difficult areas. A small rasp can be useful for final smoothing and removing chisel marks prior to working through the profiles of abrasives. A small rasp can be used for final smoothing and removing chisel marks prior to working through the profiles of abrasives. A small rasp can be used for final smoothing and removing chisel marks prior to working through the profiles of abrasives.



Side elevation

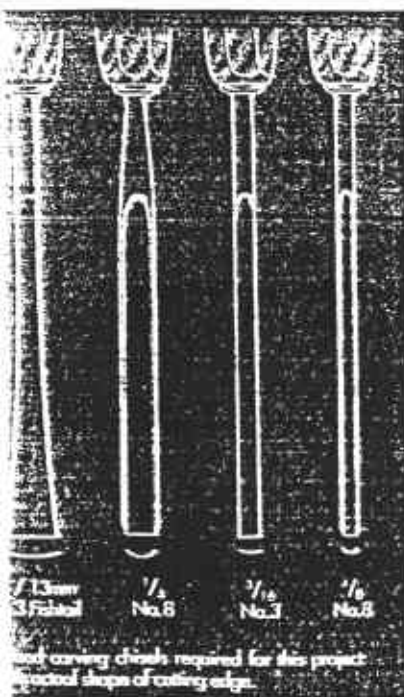
13mm fishtail chisel. The 'corners' at the back of the cheeks and the side of the neck can also be rounded off up to the base of the ear, see Pic 4. In Pic 5, the initial shaping of the face has begun using the 10mm No 8 chisel working back from the muzzle.

The head is the most important part of the carving, and as you start to define the face, it will be necessary to refer to the drawing of the top view of the cat and Pic 6 to gauge the shape required. Again, study the finished cat to check the form.

After rounding off the muzzle, a scalpel is used to define the 'V' of the nose and mouth. Note the raised area that stretches back from the tip of the nose to fan out on the forehead; the 4mm No 8 chisel was used to define this. Once you



Picture 3. Initial cuts defining legs and tail
Pictures 4 and 5. Starting the face and ears



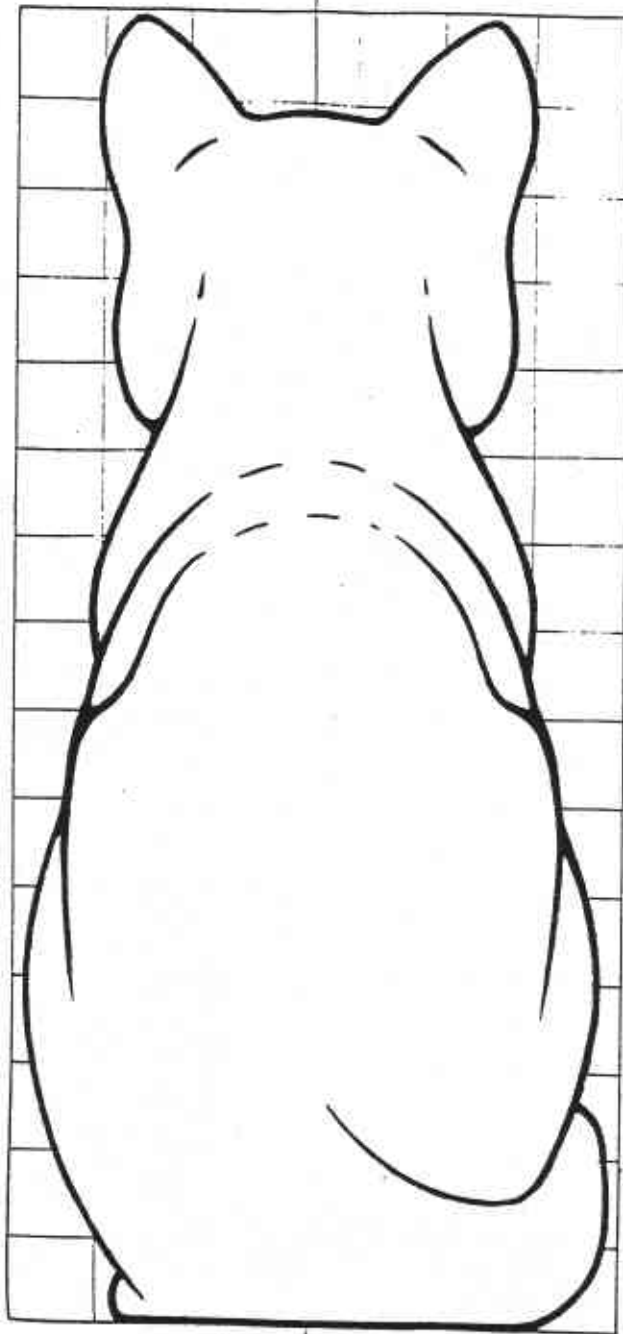
working back across the grain from the front leg, the waste wood should be quickly removed. Do this a little at a time to avoid cutting too deeply.

Picture 3 shows the opposite side with the waste removed in the same way. Note the tail has also been roughly defined. You are now ready to start carving the head, having marked the line of the cheeks, edge of the ears, nose, mouth and muzzle area.

The first cuts should be made under the cheeks following the curve of the marked line using the 7mm No 8 chisel. It may be useful to look at the finished cat to determine how deep to cut, but obviously at the roughing out stage it is always better to be cautious and leave plenty of waste wood.



The 'corners' at the top of the legs and sides of the chest can now be removed by gradually working up to the underside of the cheeks using the



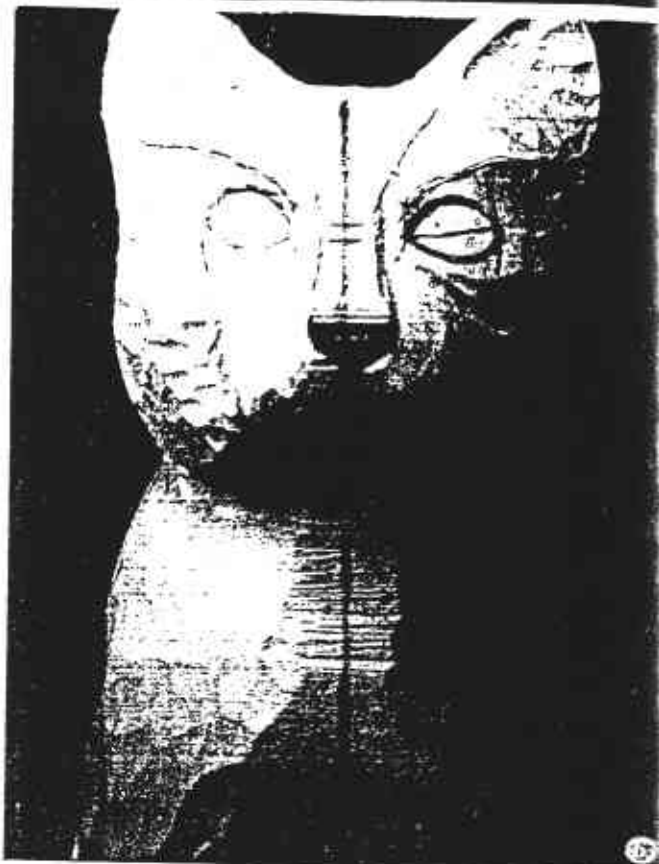
Back elevation

are happy with the general shape of the head, the eyes can be marked, but take care, as there is nothing more obvious than uneven eyes. Be prepared to spend a little time in marking them out.

The corners of the eyes should be marked by first taking measurements with callipers from the cat's face on the pattern drawing and transferring these to the wood by placing one point of the callipers on the centre line and marking each eye corner in turn. Mark the inside corner first, then the outside.

Finally, check that the eye widths and the distance apart look right before drawing in the two almond shaped eyes, noting the outer corners of the eyes are higher than the inner corners.

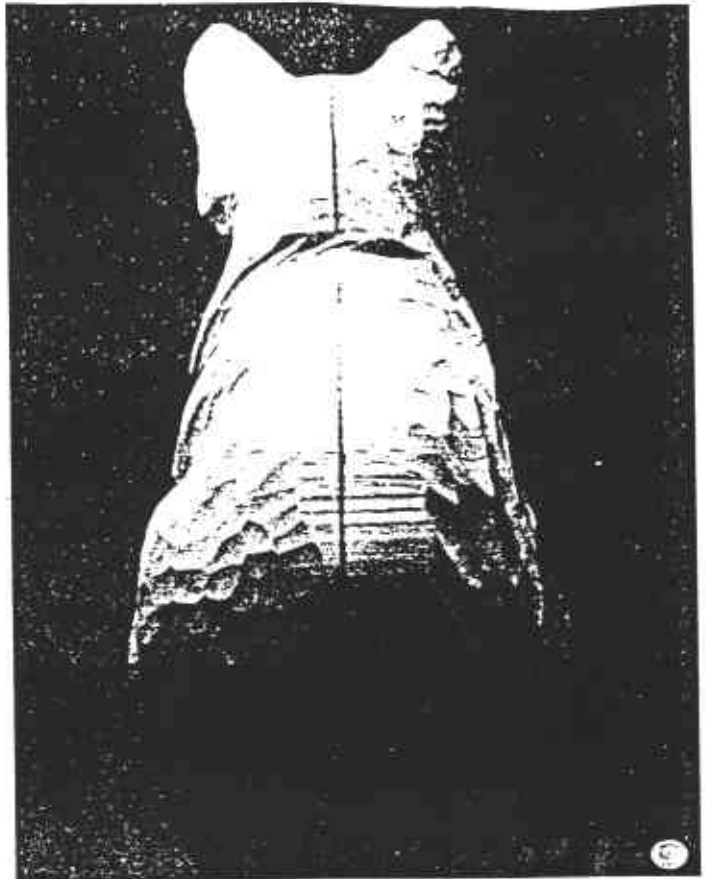
In Pic 7, the two lines sweeping back from the corners of the eyes are an aid to defining the ridges above the eye sockets. The ears will also be seen to have been defined more. The eyeballs can now be cut in, see Pic 7, using the scalpel. The first cuts follow the shape of the eyes. Now, carefully make small cuts around the



Picture 6. Keep close control while shaping the face
Picture 7. Cut in the eyes using a scalpel



Picture 8. Round over the shoulders and neck with the fish tail chisel



Picture 9. Left hand side nearly complete with more work to be done on the right

Picture 10. Body shaping complete



FINISHING

Although the cat is now fully shaped, examine it carefully and, if necessary, clean up or define further any areas that you feel may need it. If you prefer a tooled finish, then you have more or less finished, but if you wish to sand the cat smooth, start with a small rasp or use 80 grit abrasive, gradually moving through finer grades to eventually finish with around 400 grit for a silky finish.

The initial smoothing can be helped by gluing the abrasive paper to a flat or shaped stick. This will prevent unwanted low spots being lowered further as can happen when only fingers are used as backing for sanding. Small pieces of paper can be folded or rolled up to reach nooks and crannies, but be careful not to remove detail on the head. It will take time and patience to obtain an entirely scratch-free surface so don't try to rush it.

Pictures 12 to 14 show the cat half way through the sanding process. The final shape is there, but there are fine scratches that still need removing.

When you are satisfied with the finish, the waste block can

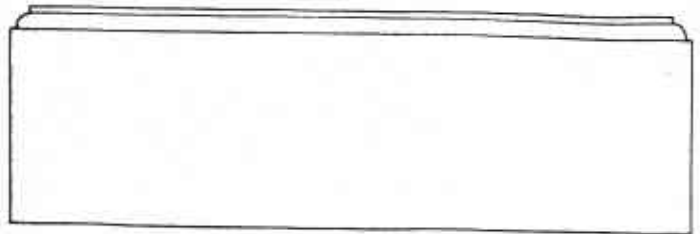
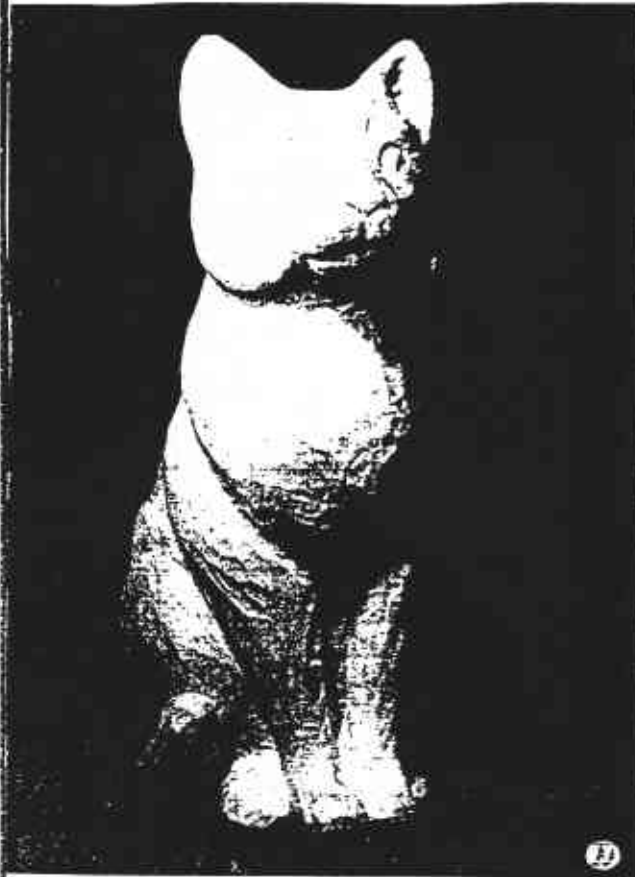
outer edges of the eyeball until it is dome shaped. Although you could go on to fine finish the head now, it might help to get the rest of the body shaped first.

The sharp corners of the shoulders and neck can now be rounded over with the fish-tail chisel, see Pic 8. The 7mm No 8 chisel is used to define the ridges that sweep down from the back of the neck and over the shoulders, helping to give a little more fullness and interest to the body shape.

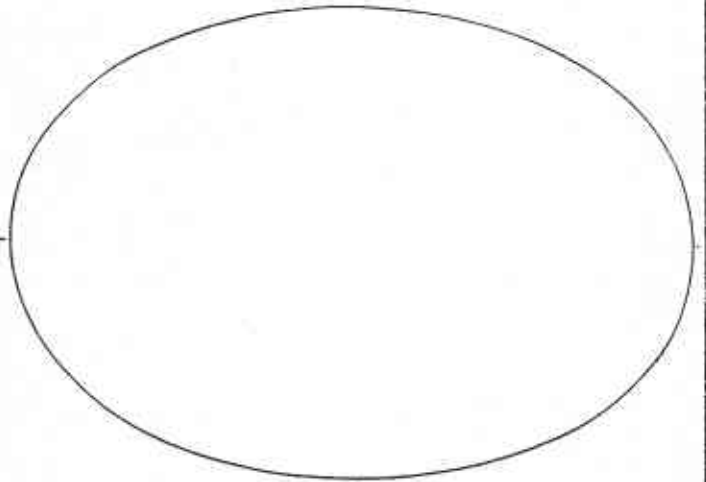
Picture 9 shows the carved left hand side of the cat as viewed from behind, with the right hand side rough and needing more detail.

Picture 10 shows the shaping of the body completed on the other side, and the tail and back leg well defined.

In Pic 11, the front legs are shaped and have a hollow between them which is formed with a 4mm No 8 chisel. The tip of the tail projects forward slightly from the back leg and will require some careful work with the 4mm No 8 and the 5mm No 5 chisels to remove the waste behind it. The 5mm No 5 is also used to finally define the features of the face.



Side elevation showing top edge moulding



Template for cat base - top elevation

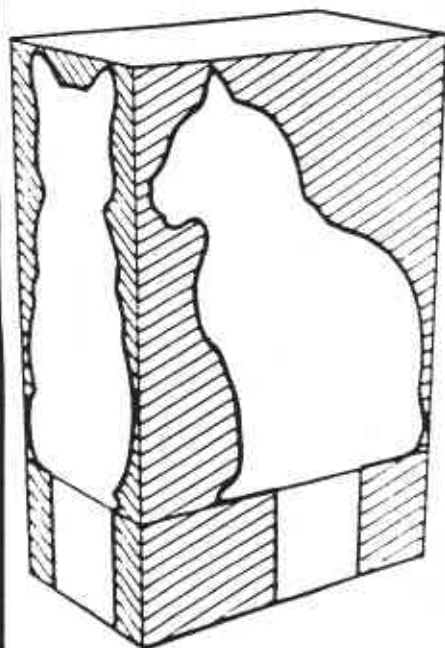
be carefully sawn off and the bottom sanded flat.

Now seal the wood using several coats of sanding sealer or varnish. I find varnish perfectly acceptable if it is thinned 60/40 with white spirit and wiped on and off with a cloth between coats to avoid heavy build up.

Sand lightly between coats, finishing with a wax polish

applied with fine wire wool.

The base is made from American black walnut. After routing a small moulding around the top edge to soften it, a hole was drilled through the base to allow the cat to be fixed to it with a long countersunk screw. The underneath of the base can finally be covered with felt to protect table surfaces and hide the screw.



*Picture 11. Shape the front legs, hollowing out with a No 8 chisel
Pictures 12-14. Sanding through to completion
Picture 15. Completed carving, ready for finishing*

