

A Note From A Wood Tinker

An amateur, rookie, greenhorn, tenderfoot... that's me with only about a year of carving and whittling experience. Eager to learn and over-eager to tell everyone what I've discovered. Let me start with the best book that I've found for a beginning woodcarver: Everett Ellenwood's "The Complete Book of Woodcarving - Everything You Need to Know to Master the Craft." (If you old timers don't agree, then write a review of your pick and send it to Rodney or Peter.)

Of course, the tagline "everything you need to know to master the craft," is an extravagant exaggeration, but Ellenwood provides as excellent of a foundation as one may acquire from a book. He presents in ten chapters:

- (1) History
- (2) Carving Types
- (3) Wood
- (4) Tools
- (5) Accessories
- (6) Sharpening
- (7) Lessons in Tool Use
- (8) Getting Started (Hints)
- (9) Painting & Finishing
- (10) Projects

Over 250 pages (sized 8 1/2 x 11 inches) with drawings, charts, and hundreds of color photographs in this softcover that was published in 2008 by Fox Chapel Publishing at a list price of \$27.95 (\$23.89 Amazon; \$15-21 used.) The Appleton Woodcraft store carries this too, as do many on line carving supply houses. The best deal? You can get a new remainder copy (with the old cover design) signed by the author for \$15 from his website www.ellenwoodarts.com. Better than the best deal? Our Club library has it!

Everett Ellenwood says, "...more people stop carving because of dull tools than for any other reason." So he spends 51 of his 250 pages on "Sharpening Your Tools." The book covers bench sharpening using oil, water, ceramic, Arkansas, and diamond stones as well as Al₂O₃ and SiC sandpapers. Pros and cons of different abrasives are listed, and grit sizes explained. As a basswood beginner I especially liked Ellenwood's description of using slipstones, strops, and honing compounds. He covers determining when to sharpen and provides clear step by step instructions to sharpen:

- (1) straight edged carving knives using stones and a strop;
- (2) chip carving knives;
- (3) gouges and veiners;
- (4) flat chisels;
- (5) V-tools;
- (6) microtools (like the Dockyard microtools).

However, power sharpening gets short shrift. Covered in only two pages, Ellenwood is not a power sharpening fan. Other books would be better on this topic.

All in all - a very practical instruction on sharpening that teaches a person how to maintain and repair basic carving knives, chisels and gouges.

Chapter 4 describes various carving knives, chisels, gouges, veiners, U-tools; their selection, use, storage and care with a recommendation for a basic starter set. Safety equipment is also covered. A helpful chart of chisel/gouge shapes and sizes is also included (known elsewhere as The Sheffield Chart).

Chapter 5 describes work spaces, lighting, magnifiers, dust collection, mallets, handsaws, rifflers, rasps, stamps, dental tools, brushes, and power carving, all in an introductory manner. The five page description of rotary tool carvers is an overview of a topic better covered in a book devoted to power carving. There are also brief mentions of other power tools, clamping devices, measuring equipment, and adhesives.

Chapter 8 "Getting Started" explains how to develop carving ideas using clay, drawings, photos; also, working with patterns, choosing and preparing wood. (Chapter 3 covers which woods carve best).

The Practice Chapter 7 has seven basic lessons in making knife cuts i.e. pull cut, push cut, grain, transition point, stop cut, preventing splitting, and long cuts. There are also ten lessons using palm tools and long handled tools and two exercises in chip carving.

An introduction to painting and finishing is well covered in the 21 pages of Chapter 9 including lists of the pros and cons of various finishes including varnish, shellac, lacquer, acrylics, oil, etc.

Several step by step projects are detailed including: a stylized bird using a 1 1/2 x 1 1/2 butternut blank; a basswood snowman (3 1/4 x 8 1/2 x 1 " blank); a flower relief carving (5 x 7 x 3/4"); a stylized cat (12 x 6 1/2 x 4 1/2"); and three other projects.

Take it from this would be whittler, Ellenwood provides a thorough introduction to woodcarving; the best that I have found. Check Amazon's "Look Inside" to see samples of pages from the book.

