

A Note From A Wood Tinker

One nice thing about my first year of carving and whittling experience is that I bought a brand new Flexcut knife, chisel and gouge, and they all came *pre-sharpened*. Each has a fine edge that has held up well through my basswood projects. Adopting a suggestion made in my bird carving class, a cork is used to cover the edge of each tool when not in use thereby protecting it (and me) from injury. Their edges have remained sharp, but eventually they will dull and need to be sharpened. Like many neophyte wood carvers, I look at the sharpening task with fear and dread. Surely my efforts will fall short and result in making a fabulous tool forever ruined; ...at least that is my fear.

To abate my anxiety, I have read several books on sharpening while at the same time searching for some less cherished dull tools to practice upon. The Mid-Wisconsin Chipper's Club Library has two books specifically on the topic of sharpening (and a third of note).

The first book, written in 1948 in England (revised 1976), Ian Bradley's "Sharpening Small Tools" is illustrated and has 114 pages:

- Chapter I - overview of water and oil stones, grinding wheels and wheel dressers.
- Chapter II - sharpening guides and jigs for bench stones and grinding rests.
- Chapter III - sharpening metalworking tools e.g. drill bits, reamers, dies, scrapers, cold chisels, screwdrivers, punches, shears and scissors.
- Chapter IV - sharpening woodworking tools e.g. planes, spokeshaves, chisels, gouges, saws, and auger bits.
- Chapter V - sharpening knives, razors, scissors, and drawing instruments.

This is a nice little book. Though its focus is upon small tools, it is not necessarily upon small *carving* tools. Nor does Bradley cover recent sharpening developments made in the past half century. There is nothing on diamond stones, microcarving tools like the dockyard tools, or wet slow grinders like the Tormek system. Neither does it cover the use of leather strops or abrasive pastes, sandpapers, or honing papers. Still it is a good and useful book with many drawings though limited in scope.

A second book in the Club library is Jim Watson's "Sharpening and Knife Making." This 176 page book is heavily illustrated, averaging about 2 photographs per page. Its contents:

- Chapter 1 - Tools & Supplies
- Chapter 2 - Sharpening Your Tools
- Chapter 3 - Sharpening Carving Knives
- Chapter 4 - Sharpening Your Kitchen Knives
- Chapter 5 - Reconditioning Tools and Stones
- Chapter 6 - Knife Making

This knife-centric book is very interesting, if you wish to make your own knives. However, I didn't find either of the above books as useful as the detailed description in Everett Ellenwood's "The Complete Book of Woodcarving" reviewed last month. Ellenwood spent 51 of his 250 pages on "Sharpening Your Tools," and those were woodcarving tools. Ellenwood's book is in our club library too. In addition, Ellenwood has made a 9 chapter DVD (one hour 50 minutes) teaching sharpening. The video is highly useful because it shows Ellenwood using the actual techniques discussed. The video focuses upon sharpening wood carving hand tools. The DVD is available at a list price of \$24.95 from www.thewoodcraftshop.com or from the author's website www.ellenwoodarts.com, or \$24.50 from Amazon plus shipping.

Unfortunately, Ellenwood is not a good source for learning how to use *power* tools for sharpening. *Next month* I will review two books, one by Ron Hock and another by Leonard Lee, each claiming to be a comprehensive guide to sharpening fundamentals that includes not only

bench stone systems, but an extensive description of using powered sanders, dry grinders, belt sanders and wet grinders such as the Tormek system and other powered sharpening equipment. Take it from this would be whittler, Ellenwood provides a thorough introduction to sharpening using bench stones and sandpaper.