

Carved Hollow Forms for Beginners

By Chris Wright

This article describes the basic process to add pre-planned carvings to hollow form turnings. This can add a new dimension to your work, creating relief carved aspects to the overall design & giving you more flexibility in designs which can include burning, texturing, carving and more.

Here are a few of the bits I use for my standard “Dremel” rotary type tool. Most of us have a Dremel for other purposes, and it is a good, inexpensive way to explore carving. For more advanced carvers, there are a number of higher speed carvers available that will give you more flexibility and accuracy, namely when piercing comes into play.



We begin with a hollow form that has been turned in preparation for the carving feature. The lines drawn on the form indicate the areas to be relief carved and will form the “outer form” in this piece. When complete, this piece should look as though a second piece is trying to overtake or absorb the first “inner” piece.



Here in the top view you can see how this piece was turned in preparation for the relief carving. I purposely left the lower $\frac{3}{4}$ of the body an additional $\frac{1}{4}$ ” or so thick. This will give us a guideline to follow for the thickness of the relieved areas to help maintain consistency.



The first cuts...I start by using the rounded head bit (small or large will depend on the area I am carving) and carve a trough around the area to be carved. This allows me to set the depth for the rest of the area. Notice at the top of this area that the relieved portion is now starting to blend into the top part of the piece. Knowing how deep to carve couldn't be easier.



With the depth trough cut into a number of areas, continue through the rest of the section maintaining the cut depth set by the outer trough. At the point where the relief meets the upper section of the "inner" piece, I leave this slightly proud, almost a small ridge. By leaving it proud, I can blend it in more precisely with the sanding barrels.



Here is the area carved and sanded with the barrel sanders. It is still a bit rough and yes, a good deal of hand sanding is ahead. There is a neat little sander made by Proxxon called the pen sander that works very well. Look to the end of this article for a photo and a link to the store where I purchased mine (best price on the web I could find).



At this point, I change over to the pyramid bit and using the very tip, undercut the newly relieved area. This will cause a natural shadow under the "vines" and enhance the illusion that they are a separate entity.



With the carving, blending and undercutting complete, break out the sand paper (or mini sander) and smooth out the areas, blending them in more and such. Usually I will do all of the carving first, then all of the blending, then all of the sanding in stages, but for the purpose of this article, I did everything one area.



Once the relief carving stages are complete, play with other enhancements to further the illusion of two separate pieces. Maybe burning hatch marks into the vines to give them a different texture, maybe use the Dremel to “pock mark” the surface of the inner piece to texture it. You could also color one or the other, or even both different colors. The possibilities are endless, just use your imagination and have fun!

This is the Proxxon Pen Sander. I learned of this neat tool from Art Liestman during his demo at the 2003 AAW symposium. I purchased mine with the 12v to 110 converter from MiniCraft.

<http://www.minicrafttools.com/sanders.html>

