

ART FROM THE BARK

Carving Whimsical Cottonwood Tree Bark Houses

In-the-Round Part 2

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Instructional guide on carving whimsical cottages and houses in-the-round from Cottonwood tree bark for the James River Woodcarving Club Workshop.

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Overview

Bark Houses Part 2 covers detailing the roof shingles, chimney bricks, foundation, siding, window frames, and door decor. In addition, the walkways, steps and rocks will be carved in. After all the details are complete, the final finish will be applied.

Bark Houses Part 2

Details

Once the glue has dried, carve the details of the house and landscape. Before carving in all the details clean up the piece.

NOTE: Leave the posts for last.

Clean Up

- Since the two pieces didn't quite match when gluing them together, you'll need to carve off the glued seam to even them up and to remove any excess glue.
- Shape the chimney. Leave as much bark on the chimney as possible. When shaping the chimney, consider carving the chimney slightly twisted, curved and wider in some places than other. The top of the chimney can be carved uneven as if the bricks have been breaking and fallen off.
- Bring out the door and window frames by cutting back the wood along the frames.

Gables & Eaves



Carve the eaves of the gable providing curves and movement on each eave. Start out by keep the eaves thick and then carve them down slowly until you have your desired shape. Recess the gable's interior facing (between the eaves), but leave the facing about 1/8" to 1/4" thick for our bracing and pattern. Carve in the gable's bottom brace between each eave. Carve a pattern, like a "Y", in the interior facing of the eave and above bottom brace. Sand the gable opening and design the best you can.

Texture the background between each eave and pattern. Since it's difficult to clean up the small areas between the patterns, adding texture will help hide rough cuts in the

corners. I use either a 3 or 4 edge mini file for texturing. I also use leather working tools to provide texturing.

Roof

Before detailing the roof, use a large u-gouge to provide movement and body to the roof. Don't leave the roof flat. Although sanding is not required, I prefer to sand the roof before adding shingles to remove unwanted tool marks. I use a 400 grit Abranet mesh and sand by hand or I use a cut piece of brown Scott-Brite pad with power. If sanding with power, use a slow speed to prevent removing too much bark.

Smooth Roof Top

It's okay to leave the roof smooth instead of adding shingles or other texture. If you decide to leave the roof smooth, your earlier sanding will be sufficient. Rough cut is okay too.

Shingled Roof Top

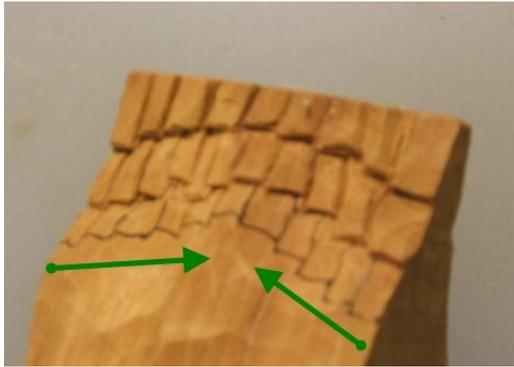
I'll be covering two ways to carve shingles on the roof, row shingles and "L" shaped individual shingles.

Row shingles:



The easiest way to carve shingles is to carve a row of shingles at a time. Use your v-tool (45 degree angle) to carve a curvy line across the top of the roof to create your first row of shingles. Use the v-tool to carve a vertical line for each shingle. Use your knife to shave off one of the edges of each shingle to give it an overlapping appearance on the other shingle. Continue this process until you reach the gray bark are of the roofline.

Individual shingles (L):



Carving each shingle individually will give the roof a more whimsical look. With this method, you carve each shingle in a shape of an “L” from each end of the house, meeting at the center. When carving the shingles from left to right, the shingle to the right is slightly lower. This method creates a shadow effect and provides an illusion of depth for the shingles. Do the opposite when

carving the shingles from right to left. Use the same technique with the gables and meeting the two roof plains in the valley. Carving in the valley is a little tricky and should be drawn out first.

Thatched Roof Top



Thatched roofs are created using power tools and with one white Scotch-Brite Radial Bristle Disc. Start at the bottom of the roofline and work up to the peak using curvy “S” movements.

Chimney



Each brick on the chimney can be carved one at a time or a row at a time. I usually combine both these methods to speed up carving the chimney bricks. Draw lines for each row from the top of the chimney down to the roof. Don't make your lines exactly straight. Make some of the lines appear that the bricks have shifted. Drawing the lines will help you gauge the thickness your brick rows from top to bottom. The rows shouldn't be exactly the same height, but this method will prevent you from carving rows

that are extremely larger or extremely smaller than the rest of the rows. I use a miniature v-tool to carve each brick. I normally start carving the bricks from the bottom of the chimney and work my way to the top, one row at a time. When carving the individual bricks, inset some of the bricks, carve some at an angle like they are

slipping, and carve some sticking out further than the other bricks. Vary the sizes and shapes of the bricks. After all of the bricks are carved in, drill a hole in the top of the chimney with a round bur. When using the bur, keep the bur moving. Don't try pushing the bur into the chimney like a drill bit, because the bur will grab and kick back. The hole doesn't need to be too deep. You can also create the hole with a u-gouge or spoon. Once a hole has been created use a butane torch to burn the bark in the hole. Matches and fireplace lights can work, but not quite as good. Be close to water in case the bark catches fire. Tap out any burning chars. Black shoe polish will be used later to touch up any areas that did not turn black.

Windows



To add a shadow to the window grids, begin carving from the center of each grid to the main frame slightly deepening the cut on the side of the frame. This technique will provide shadows for the windows.

Siding



Carve each vertical siding panel with curves and varied widths. Use a stylist pen with a small head to create the nail holes. Stagger the nail holes so that not all the boards have nails. If every board has nails in it, the piece will get too busy and distract from the overall piece. You can also use the stylist to press in the line for the siding in hard to reach areas. If you notice that part of your house is a lot lower than most of the rest, you can carve in a brick foundation on the low end to help even it up.

Walkways and Steps



Draw the location and width of the steps. Use a v-tool (45 degree angle) to carve the walkway and steps around the foundation of the house. After making the v-cut, carve the exterior corner of the step into a curve so that the steps are viewable at different angles. The steps should be different sizes and should be larger than normal for the house.

Rocks

When carving the boulders/rocks, make them big and rugged. Avoid layering rocks like blocks. For a rugged look, the rocks should be different sizes with some deeper than others. I like to use leather tools to help provide a rugged surface for the rocks. You can also use an electric etcher to create the rugged surface too. Undercut the rocks to give them depth. Instead of rocks, you can incorporate blocks into your carving .

Posts

Because the posts are so narrow, carve the posts last. Use an extremely thin knife to



remove the bark between the corner of the house and the post. Carve away from the house so your post sticks out as far away from the house as possible. Like



everything else is should be crooked.

Finish

I use "Meltonian" Boot & Shoe Cream Shoe Polish to finish my houses. You can usually find the shoe polish at shoe repair store.

Applying Polish

I put a coat of #1 "Neutral" shoe polish on the carved portion of the bark. The shoe polish looks white until it is applied and worked in. Depending on the area that I have to cover, I use a small, medium, or large stiff bristle paint brush. I use the small brush to get into tight areas. Don't put too much polish on at one time. Make sure that all the white is worked in. You shouldn't be able to see any white when it is worked in

good enough. I avoid putting any polish on the outside layer of the bark. I prefer leaving the outside bark natural.

Buffing

Once the polish has had a little time to dry, I buff it with a large shoe brush. For hard to reach places I use a ladies knee high nylon stocking. I slide it over my hand and buff gently. I usually put another coat (total of 2 coats) of neutral polish and buff again.

Antiquing

Antiquing is a little more difficult. I use the #2 "Black" shoe polish to antique portions of the houses like the shingles, rocks, windows, etc. You have to be careful with the black. You want to use a small brush and only do a small section at a time. After adding a small amount of black, work it in with a toothbrush. Don't let the black set on the piece long or you won't be able to get it off (without carving it off). You should practice this technique before applying to your main piece.

Trees

On my trees, I apply #110 Olive Green and work it in with a tooth brush. The green is easier to work with than the black. Buff one more time and you're done.

DONE