

# Carved cabriole leg

## – part 2

Dennis Zongker completes the cabriole leg with a carving of an acanthus leaf

In the last issue of *Woodcarving*, I described how to carve the ball-and-claw foot of the cabriole leg. We continue now with part two of this project; carving the acanthus leaf into the front knee and shaping the leg to its finished size.

When designing this cabriole leg I needed to bring in a design element that would help balance the lion's foot into the 18th

century. The goal was to fit the shape of the leg so I designed an acanthus leaf with the upper leaves having a wing shape. Carved acanthus leaves were commonly used to decorate furniture during the Queen Anne and Chippendale periods and the cabriole leg has certainly taken its place in the world of beauty and design.



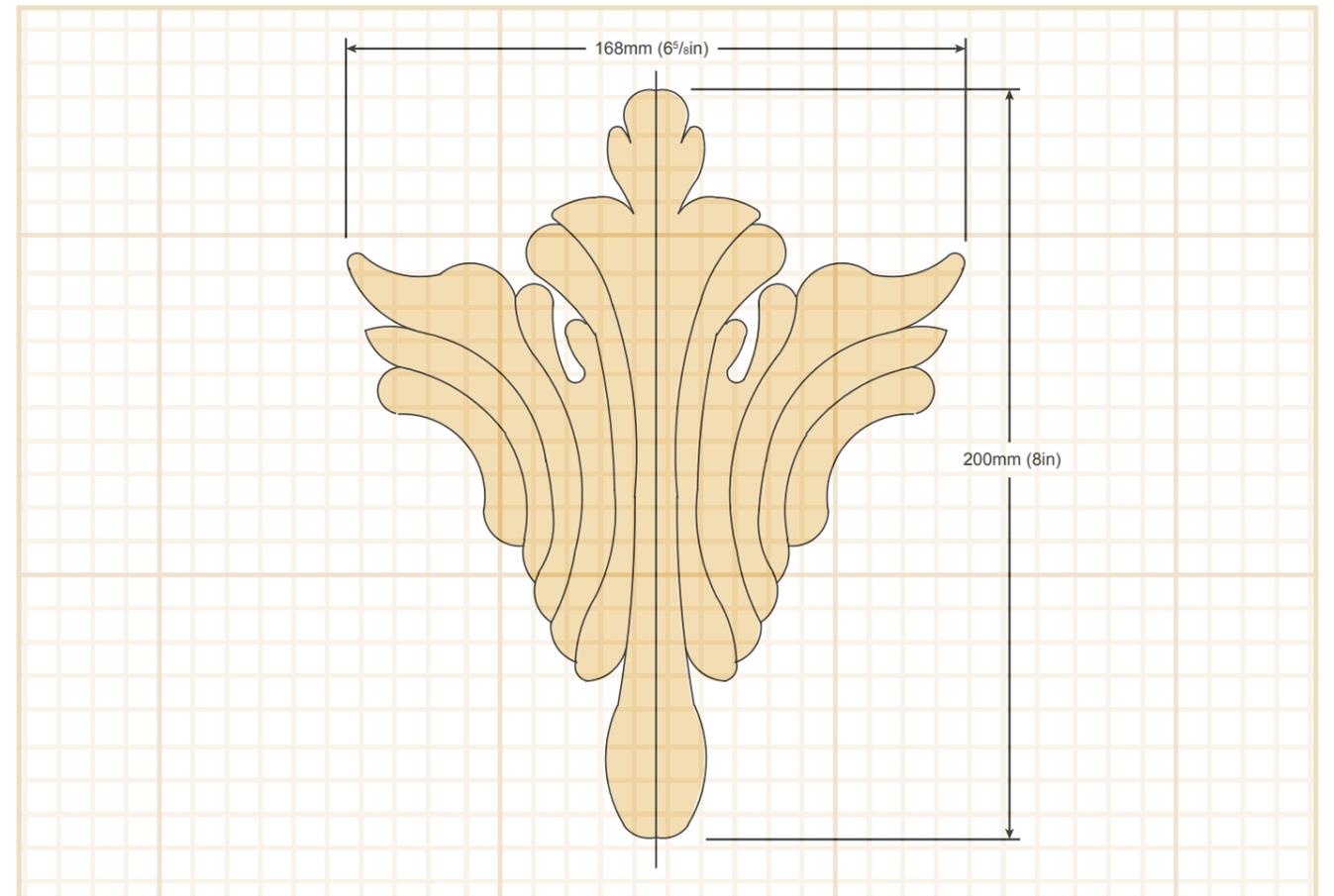
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DENNIS ZONGKER

### Things you will need...

- |            |                          |
|------------|--------------------------|
| No.2, 12mm | No.7, 16mm               |
| No.2, 14mm | No.7, 10mm               |
| No.2, 20mm | No.8, 3mm                |
| No.3, 5mm  | No.8, 4mm                |
| No.3, 8mm  | No.8, 7mm                |
| No.3, 12mm | No.8, 18mm               |
| No.3, 16mm | Medium wood rasp         |
| No.3, 25mm | Fine rasp                |
| No.5, 8mm  | Fine-tipped needle files |
| No.5, 12mm | Detail riffler files     |
| No.5, 16mm | 150 grit sponge block    |
| No.6, 5mm  | <b>Wood:</b>             |
| No.6, 12mm | Mahogany ( <i>Khaya</i>  |
| No.7, 4mm  | <i>ivorensis</i> )       |
| No.7, 6mm  |                          |

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dennis Zongker has been a professional custom furniture maker for over 28 years and is co-owner of Zongkers Custom Furniture in Omaha, Nebraska. He teaches woodcarving and marquetry classes at Midwest Woodworkers. To see more of Dennis' work, visit [www.zongkers.com](http://www.zongkers.com)



**1** Print a photocopy of the acanthus leaf scaled to the size needed to fit the right proportion onto the corner of the cabriole leg. Cut out the centre of the leaf and the remaining five sections to the left or right of the template. These cutout pieces can be used on either side by flipping them over. To draw the acanthus leaf onto the wood, place the centre cutout template equally centred onto the front corner of the cabriole leg with the top of the template 50mm down from the top of the leg. Hold down the template and trace around the outside. Place each of the five remaining paper templates and outline around each one on both sides of the acanthus leaf

**2** Start by stab cutting around all the outside edges using various carving gouges. Stab cut at a 90° angle approximately 3mm deep around the entire outside edge of the acanthus leaf

**3** Starting 6mm away from the outer edges of the entire acanthus leaf, keep the gouges at a 35° angle and remove the waste wood. Repeat steps 2 and 3 until you have cut in 10mm deep

**4** Remove the waste wood around the leaf using a mallet and a No.8, 18mm gouge. Start at the outer edges where the aprons and the inside corners of the legs are located and carve towards the leaf on both sides of the legs. Carve these depth cuts 25mm from each other. These cuts will give you the depth needed to be equal to the thickness of the acanthus leaf



5

**5** Use a mallet and a No.3, 25mm carving gouge to remove the remainder of the waste wood between the depth cuts. As you get closer to the acanthus leaf, tap your mallet lighter so that you do not carve into the edges



7

**6** Flatten the leg around the acanthus leaf and lower ankle section of the cabriole leg using the No.3, 25mm carving gouge



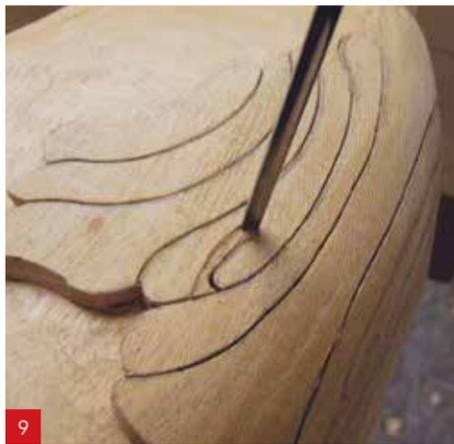
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**7** Use a medium wood rasp to smooth out all of the carving marks. Blend together below the acanthus leaf and ankle of the leg



8

**8** To give the leg its final size and shape, use a finer rasp to smooth out all the coarse cuts that are in the wood on both sides, back and front of the leg



9

**9** Follow the pencil lines that make up the acanthus leaf by using various carving gouges. Use a mallet and stab cut into the wood at a 90° angle going about 1.5mm deep into the wood. On the smaller eye of the leaf use a No.8, 3mm and a No.8, 7mm carving gouge, making sure you tap lighter than before



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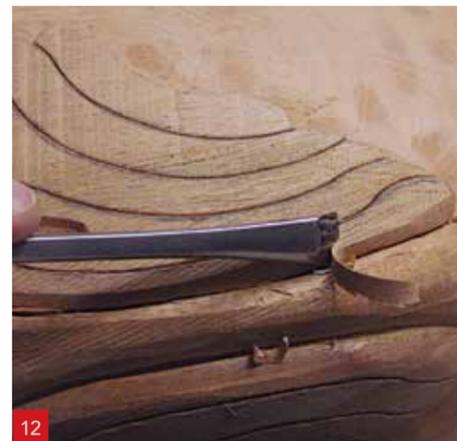
**10** Starting with the centre leaf and using the corner edge of a No.3, 12mm carving gouge, follow the stab cuts by shaving off a little at a time to separate each leaf. Gradually carve a small arch onto each edge of the leaves



11

**11** With the same No.3, 12mm carving gouge, carve in a gradual sweep into the lower face of the centre leaf

**12** Shape the centre leaf to have an arch on its face, the two opposing leaves will also have opposing arches. To radius the corners, use the No.3, 12mm gouge upside down to form the arches. Once you have carved down to the depth of the stab cut, repeat the stab cuts on both sides of the centre leaf, then repeat the carving of the radius into the edges of the centre leaf

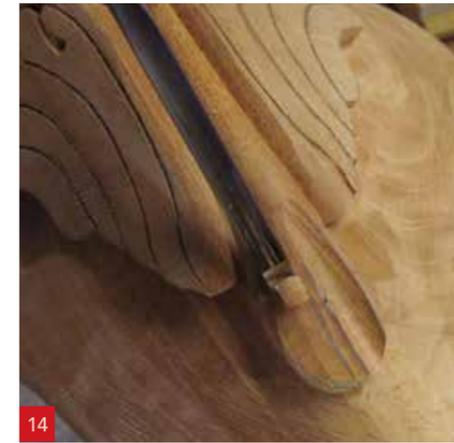


12



13

**13** Once you are satisfied with the shape of the centre leaf, you can then draw two lines spaced 3mm wide down the lower centre to form the lower stem



14

**14** To carve in the sweeps on both sides of the stem use a No.7, 6mm gouge. Start by slowly carving just above both opposing leaves with a shallow sweep. Then carve deeper as you get closer to the bottom of the stem



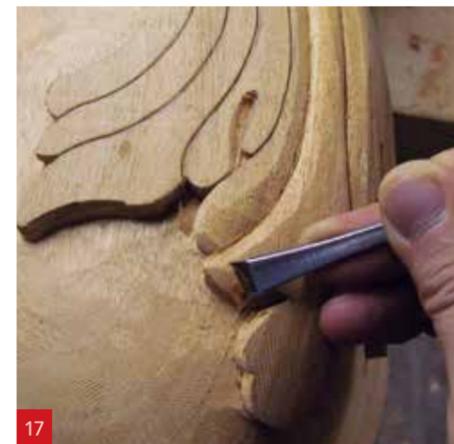
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**15** Carve into the sides of the stem with a No.8, 4mm carving gouge. This cut will give a sharper sweep at the base of the stem



16

**16** To blend the stem to the lower sweep, use a No.3, 5mm carving gouge to shave off any carving gouge lines or high and low spots. Then flip the gouge upside down and radius the outside edges of the lower leaf



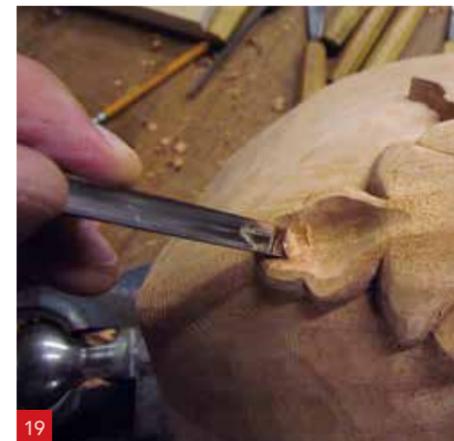
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**17** Start carving the top section of the centre acanthus leaf by arching the top edge on both side petals. Use a No.3, 12mm carving gouge upside down to shape the arch until it blends to the legs



18

**18** To carve the top bud, start with a stab cut into both sides and shape the small petals using a No.6, 5mm carving gouge upside down. Then radius the edges around the top bud with the same gouge upside down



19

**19** Hollow out the bud using a No.7, 6mm gouge. Angle your gouge to a 60° angle and cut straight into the wood. You can change directions to blend the centre of the stem into the hollowed-out bud. Carve around the edges leaving a small 3mm ring. This will give the bud edges good detail while keeping the carving durable on a piece of furniture



20

**20** Use a No.3, 16mm carving gouge to carve a gradual slope from just below the mid-section to the lower tip of the five leaves on both sides

**Top tips**

1. When carving furniture, always take care not to go too thin on any section on the carving. You can still carve good detail without going too thin, which will keep the carving durable on a piece of furniture

→ **21** Next, re-stab cut into the same cut lines. Then, use No.3, 12mm and No.5, 12mm carving gouges turned upside down to carve the arches into the lower section of the leaves



**22** For the very tips of the leaves use No.3, 8mm and No.5, 8mm carving gouges to round and clean up the edges



**23** On the upper part of the wing/leaf use a No.3, 12mm carving gouge upside down to radius the top closest to the centre. Then flip the gouge back over to carve the concave section of the wing



**24** To carve the detail into the eyes of the acanthus leaf, start by stab cutting the smaller inside radius with a No.8, 3mm carving gouge. Then, on the larger radius just above the eye, use a No.8, 7mm gouge and on the two straight sections use No.3, 12mm and No.5, 8mm carving gouges. Repeat the stab and relief cuts to remove the waste wood until you have reached around 6mm deep



**“Repeat the stab and relief cuts to remove the waste wood”**

**25** Use a fine-tipped needle file to help clean out the waste wood in the smaller areas



**26** Next, use a No.3, 5mm carving gouge turned upside down to shape and radius the outside edges



**27** On the outer ends separate the leaves from each other as you did in step 10 by using a No.3, 12mm carving gouge upside down and carving arches on the faces of the last two remaining leaves on both sides. Then with a No.5, 8mm carving gouge, radius and clean up the top and bottom ends of the leaves



**Top tips**

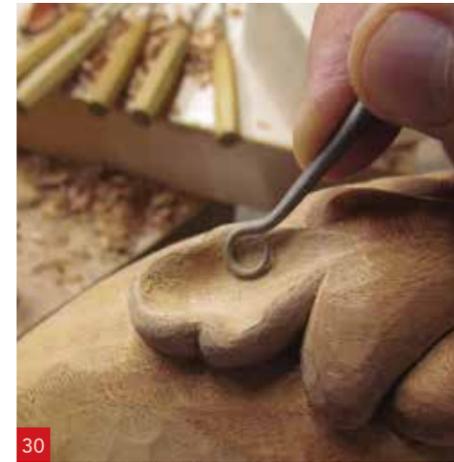
**2.** By using needle files or detail riffler files you can carve into the smaller areas, such as the eyes of the acanthus leaf and edges of the leaves; this will help to create a feeling of shadow by going deeper into the wood



**28** On the very last leaf, carve a concave cove into the outer edge of the leaf using a No.5, 8mm carving gouge



**29** Clean up all the carving gouge marks left on the leg itself. Use No.2, 14mm and No.2, 20mm carving gouges to shave the wood as flat and clean as possible



**30** Use an assortment of detail riffler files to clean up all the carving gouge marks in the acanthus leaf. This is a great way to smooth the carving and also gives the project crisper details



**31** After all the carving marks have been cleaned up, sand the entire leg, foot and acanthus leaf with a 150-grit sponge block. I only sand enough to smooth and blend the wood evenly, this way I do not remove any detail, leaving the carving clean and crisp

**32** Here is the completed coffee table showing the corner view of the top edge and carved acanthus leaf on the cabriole leg. To give the coffee table and carving a deep rich look, I used an alkaline dye wood toner then applied a dark reddish brown stain. Then used a pre-catalysed lacquer finish for the clear coat to protect the wood

