

Oak leaves and acorns

Dennis Zongker carves elliptical oak leaves and acorns for furniture panels



Five oak leaf

Things you will need...

Tools:

Swiss carving gouges:

- No.2, 8mm
- No.2, 5mm
- No.2, 7mm
- No.2, 10mm
- No.2, 20mm
- No.3, 12mm fishtail
- No.3, 16mm fishtail
- No.4, 5mm
- No.4, 8mm
- No.5, 8mm
- No.5, 12mm fishtail
- No.7, 6mm
- No.7, 8mm
- No.8, 3mm
- No.8, 4mm
- No.8, 7mm
- No.8, 18mm
- No.15, 3mm 'V'-tool

Other tools:

- Bandsaw
- Mallet
- Detail riffler files
- Poster board
- 150 grit abrasive

Wood:

- Mahogany

Seven oak leaf

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DENNIS ZONGKER

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 his website. [Web: www.zongkers.com](http://www.zongkers.com)

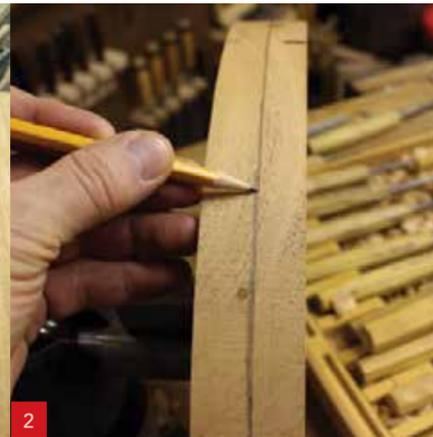


Many 18th century furniture makers used a wide variety of hand carved embellishments to enhance and add visual interest to their pieces. For this French Renaissance style two-sided buffet, designing and carving elliptical centre panels with oak leaves and acorns was a nice and elegant touch. There are two different panel designs; one has a five oak leaves with three acorns with one folded wrap leaf, the other panel design has seven oak leaves with only two acorns. To balance the proportion of the buffet the panels were carved in pairs, lefts and rights. The buffet and the eight carved panels are out of genuine mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*) hardwood. The size of each elliptical carved panel is 25 x 225 x 320mm.

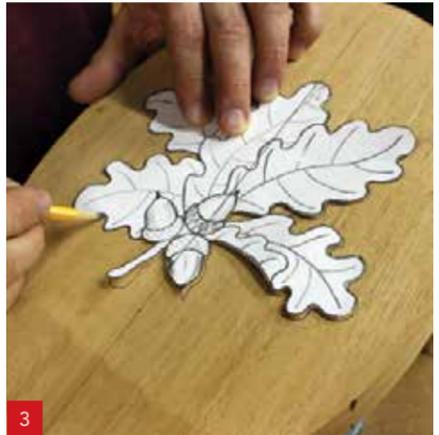
1 To cut out the eight elliptical panels make a drawing template from poster board, which is thicker than a piece of paper, for the pencil to follow around when transferring the pattern onto the wood. Once it is drawn onto the wood, use a bandsaw to cut out all eight panels. Keep the blade to the outside edge of the pencil line



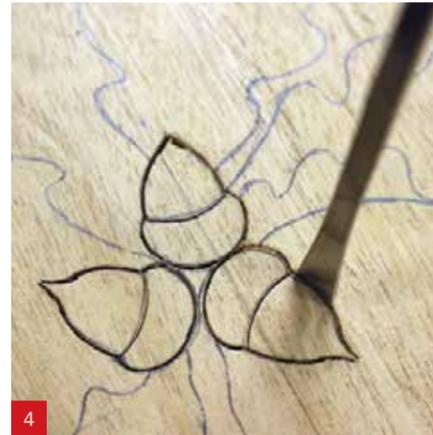
2 To mark the thickness of the carving measure on the side of the panel 17mm from the face. Then, use your fingers as a guide to draw a line around the entire circumference of the panel with a pencil, this will give you a thickness guide



3 Next, make two copies of the acorn and leaf template, then use one to draw the outer edge of the leaves and acorns onto the elliptical panel. To draw in the centre section of the template you can either free hand draw, or with the second template cut out around each leaf and acorn and draw around each one individually



4 The acorns are to be the highest point of the piece so you will need to start carving there. First match up your carving knives to the acorns. Then, stab cut into the wood using a small mallet and lightly tap into the wood approximately 2.4mm



5 Relief cut up to the stab cuts using a No.5, 8mm carving gouge, removing the waste wood. Repeat these two steps until you have carved around the three acorns approximately 9.5mm deep into the panel

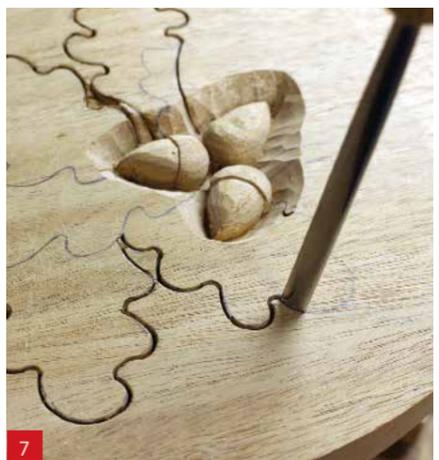


“... match up your carving knives to the acorns.”

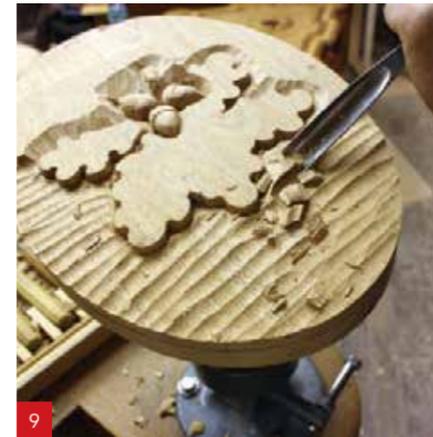
6 After you have the three acorns carved out, the next step is to shape each one. First stab cut into the separation line between the bottom nut and the top cupule with a No.2, 8mm carving gouge. Now round the bottom nut symmetrical using the same gouge (No.2, 8mm) and gradually shave into the cone shape with the lower tip. To shape the upper cupule, use a No.4, 5mm and No.2, 8mm carving gouge, leaving it slightly thicker than the lower nut section



7 Now stab cut in the outside edge of all five leaves using an assortment of different carving gouges. Use a mallet with a harder tap to go approximately 3-4mm deep



8 After you have stab cut around all five leaves, carve up to the stab cuts removing the waste material. Then, repeat steps 7 and 8 until you have reached approximately 17mm deep around the entire carving



9 To remove the remainder of the waste material around the panel face use a No.8, 18mm carving gouge cutting against the grain. Note: keep your carving gouge sharp as this will help cut the wood faster. As you get closer to the leaves tap your mallet softer to prevent hitting the leaves



10 To get the panel flat use a No.3, 16mm fishtail carving gouge to clean up the gauge marks left behind. For cleaning up around the leaves lightly stab cut around the edges, then come back with your fishtail to remove the remainder of the waste wood



11 Around the entire elliptical panel there is a 20mm radius, with a No.2, 20mm carving gouge used upside down, start shaping the edges to equal the radius. Be careful not to flatten areas by gouging too deep. When you get close to the final radius take off small shavings at a time to avoid flat spots



12 As you begin carving the leaves, the largest one is the second highest point of the carving. Work from this one and as you carve your way around, each one will overlap the other. The first step is to stab cut into each leaf then relief cut up to the stab cuts using an assortment of different carving gouges



13 When carving the leaf with the folded wrap you will need to give it a radius shape on the outside edge. Use a No.3, 12mm fishtail carving gouge to carve on the outside edge, giving it a nice sweep



14 To shape the inside of the folded leaf, use a No.5, 12mm fishtail gouge and start at the outer edges of the leaf where the leaf will be thicker, then carve deeper as you get closer to the inside fold



15 The next step is to clean out the inner fold to create shadow and depth to the leaf. Use a No.8, 3mm and No.4, 8mm carving gouges and carve a gradual sweep in the centre of the leaf. Try to undercut the fold as much as you can to create a natural flowing leaf



16 Use an assortment of different carving gouges continue to stab cut, to separate the leaves. Then carve each leaf, creating highs and lows. For the side leaf, leave the centre at its highest point and the tip and inner section of the leaf carved deeper. This will give you the shape of a natural flowing leaf



17 Use an assortment of different gouges to smooth and flatten the faces of the leaves. For example, a No.2, 20mm on the larger leaf works well for cleaning up all the gouge marks

18 Now, use an assortment of different gouges to clean up the edges and slightly undercut around all of the leaves

19 Next, use a No.2, 5mm, a No.2, 7mm and a No.2, 10mm carving gouge to clean up the bottom edges around the leaves flat to the panel

20 After you have the carving panel all cleaned up use a pencil and draw on the tops of the leaves the high points. The pencil lines should be similar to an elongated triangle. These will be used as a guide when carving the concave part of each leaf

21 To carve out the concave sections of the leaves use a No.7, 6mm and 12mm carving gouges. Try to achieve a nice even clean sweep by carving deep at the ends and shallower towards the middle of each leaf

22 To radius and blend the high points of the leaves use a No.2, 5mm carving gouge upside down to shave off just enough to give a nice even convex sweep. Be creative because you want the leaves to have a natural looking flow



23 Next, with a pencil lightly draw in the veins of the leaves by following the centre of each concave section. It is important not to have straight lines. Leaving a slight sweep brings life to each leaf. For the acorn top cupule, draw approximately 4-5 lines in two different direction crossing over each other

24 Now using a No.15, 3mm 'V'-tool carving gouge follow the pencil lines starting with the long main centre vein, then finish up with the side veins

25 When carving in the veins for the cupule try not to go too deep. Carve lightly to prevent any tear outs or chips

26 To smooth the leaves veins and edges, I use an assortment of different Riffler files. This small round file works excellent on small and hard to get to areas of your carving. Lightly sand all the leaves edges with 150 grit abrasive. Be careful not to sand too much because it can take away the detail

27 To get the flat background section of the panel smooth use a flat corner file close up to the leaves edges and a larger wood file to get the outer face and outside radius smooth

28 After all the filing and sanding is done look for any place that needs more attention, then move on to the next one