

CHIPPENDALE-STYLE SIDE CHAIRS – PART 3

IN THE NEXT STAGE OF HIS CHAIR PROJECT,
DENNIS ZONGKER CARVES THE RAILS AND BACKS



In my previous article (see *F&C* 316) I explained how to make the back legs, rail and shoe, then how to glue the entire back section of the chair together. In this article I will explain how to hand-carve the back splat, crest rail and rear legs altogether with scrolls and a centre shell.

The joy of woodcarving is very therapeutic once I begin to hear and feel my sharp gouges shaving off each layer of wood. It is also great practice for hand and eye coordination when using a mallet or just pushing a gouge into the wood and controlling the amount of pressure needed to remove the hardwood or softwood.

One of the biggest skills of woodcarving is to hone your gouges with a slip stone and a leather strop before they start to dull. Doing this will keep you from having to re-sharpen your gouges. You will spend less time sharpening if the gouges are honed at the right time. I have never had to re-sharpen some of my most-used gouges.

For the design on the back of these two side chairs, the carvings had to be similar to the hallway table (see issues 309–314) but not the same, but just enough to make them a matching set. Since the centre apron of the hallway table has a shell with scrolled acanthus leaves flowing across the apron, I basically designed a centre shell for the top of the chairs without a border above the top of the shell. Then for the scrolls I designed two opposing scrolls coming out on the sides of the acanthus bud with the scrolls flowing to the outside corners of the chair rail. Where the back leg meets the outside corners of the chair rails, I added an opposing scroll to give the appearance of a violin.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DENNIS ZONGKER



GETTING STARTED

1 To start the carving, I used an assortment of different carving gouges and a mallet. American black walnut is a medium density hardwood so my mallet would be needed when stab cutting for depth and removing the bulk of the waste wood. First, I printed out a full scale of my design drawing of the centre shell with the scrolls. I cut the drawing into smaller sections so that I could draw the design onto the wood with a pencil. After removing the waste wood, I saved the smaller templates just in case I needed to redraw my cutting lines.

CARVING THE SCROLLS

2 Starting at the centre of the scroll, I stab cut with my carving gouges at a 90° angle, working my way around the scroll and using a variety of different gouges that match up to the radiuses. I tapped the mallet very lightly, only cutting about 1/16in deep to prevent chips or cracks. I continued this stab cutting along the entire length of the scrolls.

3 With the same gouges, I relief cut by placing the gouge approximately 1/8in away from the stab cut. Then, I pushed the gouge into the wood at a 30° angle. I repeated the stab and relief cuts a few times to reach an approximate depth of 1/4in.

4 Leaving the centre of the scroll the highest point, I then carved deeper outwards around the scroll. With a No. 2/5 and No. 2/8 gouges I made smooth cuts, shaving off the walnut in small amounts. Once this met up with the depth of the stab cuts, I re-stab cut where necessary. I continued the smooth shaving cuts and stab cuts until I had a nice flowing spiral, higher to lower to the end of the scroll.

5 To continue carving on the scrolls I had to lower the shell by stab and relief carving up to the top of the scrolls.

6 To radius the edges of the scrolls and acanthus leaf bud I used a No. 2/5 carving gouge upside down rounding the edges by shaving off small amounts of wood at a time.

CARVING THE BACK SPLAT AND ACANTHUS LEAF

7 Next, by stab and relief cutting I divided up the back splats, the high and low sections that connect the back design. Also, I shaped the acanthus leaf with several different small carving gouges.

CARVING THE SHELL

8 There will be an arch in the face of the shell, thicker at the base closest to the scrolls then thinner towards the top of the chair. I used an Auriou cabinetmakers rasp to shape in the arch. These types of rasps can remove the wood quickly and leave a fairly smooth finish on the walnut.

9 At the top of the shell, I drew in a line to show how deep to rasp in the arch. This would be a guideline to make sure I did not take off too much wood.

10 Next, with a pencil I redrew in the lines of the shell. To make sure they were correct, I used my paper templates.

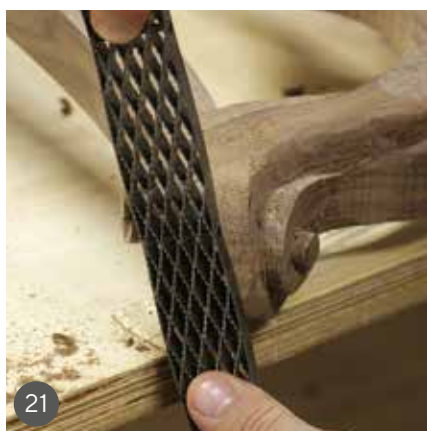
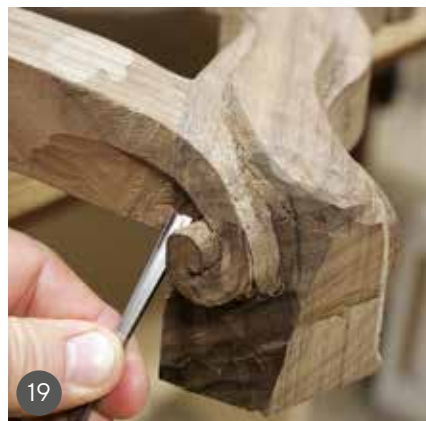
11 To carve in the concave sections of the shell, I used two different-sized carving gouges No. 9/12 and No. 9/3. With a mallet I lightly tapped the gouges, making sure I did not carve into the scrolls.

12 Then with a No. 3/12 fishtail carving gouge held upside down, I blended the concave arches together.

13 To get the shell lines deeper, I used a No. 16/3 V-tool by cutting about 1/8in deep, separating the concave and convex arches of the shell.

14 Next, I repeated step 12 with the same No. 3/12 fishtail carving gouge held upside down. I carved to where the concave arch was turned into a sharp line. I followed the arch of the shell and continued to smooth the convex sections of the shell.

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CARVING THE LARGE CREST RAIL SCROLL

15 In issue 315, the first article about these two side chairs, I described how I made a clay model of the chair back corners. I used this clay model to draw my paper templates for the upper and lower scrolls. Using this template, I drew in the carving lines for the crest rail.

16 My first step was to carve the face of the crest rail with an assortment of different gouges by following the pencil lines. I stab and relief cut as deep as the outside lines of the scrolls.

17 Starting at the centre of the scroll, I stab cut at a straight 90° angle and worked my way to the end of the scroll using a variety of different carving gouges. I used a mallet and tapped the gouge to cut approximately 1/8in deep into the wood.

18 I used a No. 5/12 Fishtail carving gouge to relief cut up to the stab cut. I kept repeating these two steps, stab and relief cutting, leaving the centre of the scroll as the highest point, then carved deeper as I moved outwards around the scroll.

19 The end grain at the ends of the crest rail can be very hard, so I needed to take care and always use the mallet to tap the gouges into the hardwood to prevent any chips or cracks. The outside scrolls will continue on the outside edges of the back legs then they will lightly fade away towards the middle of the back leg.

20 To carve off the bulk of the waste wood on the back face of the crest rails, I used a No. 5/14 carving gouge.

21 With a saw rasp I shaped the front and top section between the two scrolls for smoothing and matching up the radius. This type of rasp removes the wood at a fast pace and is far more accurate than carving gouges.

22 Next, I used a No. 3/20 Fishtail carving gouge held upside down to shape up the top and back face of the crest rail corners.

23 With an assortment of different wood files and rasps I started shaping the scrolls and centre radiuses smooth.

24 On the backside, I smoothed out the carving gouge marks with a half-round wood file.

RASPING THE BACK SPLAT AND LEGS

25 To finish up the back section of both of these side chairs, I used a larger rasp to radius both back edges to each back leg. I stopped approximately 2in from the side rails.

26 With a small smoothing rasp, I cleaned up the larger rasp cuts to balance the two stopping arches that stop at 2in above the side and back rail of the chairs.

27 On the back splat I radiused all the edges with a smaller smooth rasp.

28 The last step to finish up the back section of the chairs was to sand every part and section with 150-grit sandpaper. I wore rubber gloves to protect my fingers from the grit on the paper – after a while my fingers can get a little raw without the rubber gloves.

NEXT ISSUE

In my next article I will show how to make the cabriole legs and carve the grape design with scrolls. You can follow my work on **Instagram: @denniszongker**

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