A rose forever

'Waste not, want not' is **John Samworth's** mantra, as his latest carving shows

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN SAMWORTH

1 Have you a piece of timber left over from a previous project? I had such a piece of lime no more than 6 x 6 x 8 cm including the bark. The grain direction here is running vertically. The key for this piece is to carve into the end grain and use the natural strength of the grain to form the petals. Start by drawing with a soft pencil on the end grain, but later for clarity in the pictures, I shall use a blue pen. ➤

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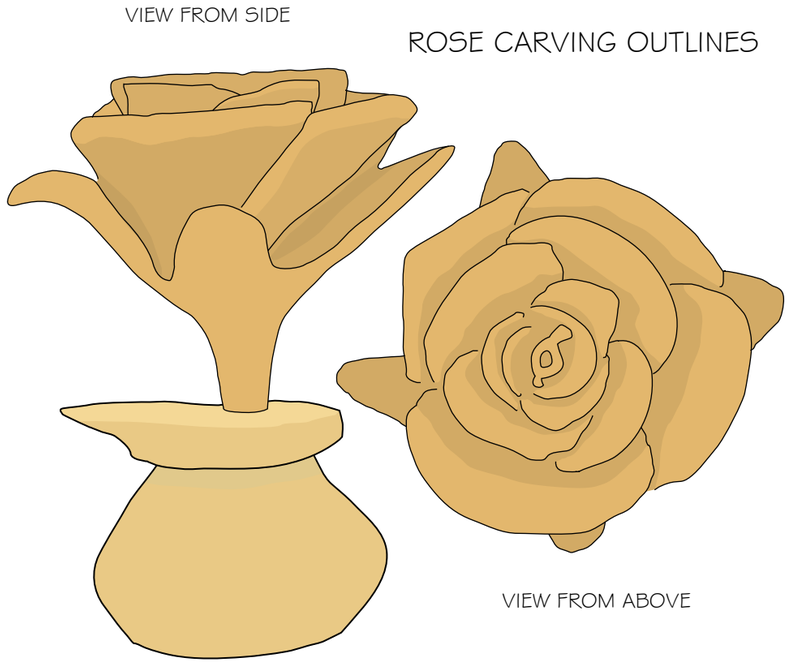
2 In the centre, draw a small shape of a number nine. Use a small flute to drill out the centre. Here I used a 3mm No.9 flute, and pushed it into the grain while twisting it around. When I withdrew the flute, it extracted a core of wood for a depth of 15mm. Because we are carving into the grain, unlike normal carving this will not split the fibres. We shall exploit this property repeatedly. Draw the first ring of petal guidelines no more than 10mm from the centre. Three small arcs are all that are required such that the end of one overlaps the start of the next. This way, the three new petals and the tail from the figure nine look like a fourth petal unfolding from the centre.

3 Here I used a small 5mm No.8 gouge to cut down vertically for about 2mm just to the outside of the drawn guideline of the nine. Next, with the same gouge, cut into this groove at a steep angle so the two cuts meet up at the bottom of the groove. The gouge will now lift out a sliver of wood to start the formation of the gaps between petals. It is crucial to use the same gouge to make both the vertical cuts. If different gouges are used to make each cut separately then, when the cuts meet, they will not match up and will either insufficiently undercut the piece to be extracted, making the extraction difficult and leaving a messy finish, or they will overcut, leaving unwanted gouge marks and weaker petals. Repeat this process to form each petal and pass over each groove to make them between 4mm and 5mm deep.

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4 Draw the next ring of guidelines no more than 15mm from the centre. Draw four arcs so the end of one overlaps the start of the next. The ring of petals should continue to form a spiral, following the direction of the figure nine in the centre. Continue with the vertical and angled cuts to form the basic outlines of the petal pattern. Each groove should be about 4mm or 5mm deep. Draw the next ring of four petals. You will need to swap your gouge for a wider and shallower sweep. Here I have moved on to a 10mm No.6 sweep, even using a No.3 sweep on the apex of the petals. This breaks up the line, giving a less geometric feel to the finished rose. Remove all the waste wood on the outside down to a depth of 10mm, leaving the outline of the rose intact. This outer ring of petals is lower than the inner rings. To the viewer's eye, it should be believable that these outer petals could fold back and embrace the flower, as in the bud stage. It is important that the viewer can see the outer petals are long enough to accomplish this, but not too long – that would look ridiculous. Draw the final four petals continuing the spiral pattern. Cut the outer petals back to a depth of 5mm using a large, No.3 gouge. Keep your edges vertical. Return to the centre petals, cut down deeper into the grooves and begin separating the petals by cutting between the arcs.


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5 Each petal is defined separately, the overlap of the final four petals has been marked out with small stop-cuts and you can still see the original guidelines on top of the petals. These guidelines indicate that the central petals are all exactly the same height and the petal edges are still square. For added interest, carve the outer petals differently. To the top left of picture five this petal will arch up and out but the edge will roll back under itself. Mark the high point. To the top right this petal was drawn as a V shape to allow each edge to roll back under itself. The two bottom petals are kept simple with the high point at the outside edge. Begin to carve from the outside edge down into the centre. You need to achieve an inner groove to a depth of 10mm below the adjacent petal. Keep each petal separate by observing the stop-cuts between each.

6 Invert a flat gouge and start to form the petal rolls. Make your first cut along the petal's edge, parallel to the height marking and at a 45° angle. The second and third cuts are also along the petal edge, parallel to the height markings but at 20° and 70° respectively, rounding the petal's edge. This will create space to work in for the next stage. At this stage leave the high point mark on the wood.

7 Undercut the rose. Here I find a flute is easiest, cutting circular around the base. I want to keep the base clean of gouge marks because the sepals still have to be formed. Keep the base round. In the picture, I have cut a cardboard gauge about 32mm in diameter to check that the base is round. The final piece will be about 25mm but this leaves enough wood into which you can still carve the delicate petal curves and sepals.


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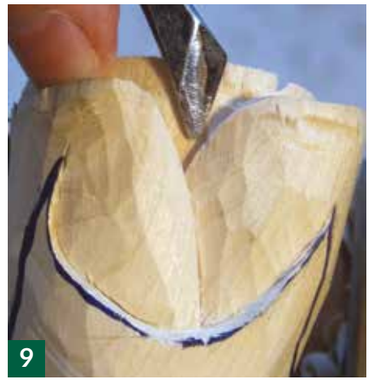
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8 The sepals are carved, attached to the underside of the outer petals. They may also be carved as separate parts, floating on their own. The first option is simpler, producing a stronger piece. I shall demonstrate the attached sepals but use heavy undercuts to define them. Draw the outline of the sepal on the underside of the petal and use stop-cuts to protect their shape.

9 When defining the separation between petals, use a skew chisel with a sharp angled point to get into the corners.

10 *Top Tip:* On the side of the rose we are no longer carving into the end grain, thus if a gouge is driven too deep straight into the wood, this will split the fibres, causing week edges to snap off later. A vertical cut is made in the first picture with a 5mm No.3 gouge. This is the type of cut that will split the fibres and is a slow technique if you have to keep swapping gouges to match the sweep of the outline. In the second picture, the corner of the gouge is being used like a knife to form a shallow stop-cut with a second angled sweep to form a V groove as the stop-cut. In the third picture a V-gouge is used to form the stop-cut. I prefer the second technique as, simply for me, it is quicker because I can use one gouge and I shall continue to use this gouge in the next stage to trim away the waste to a depth of at least 2mm. ➤

11 Before carving the definition between petals, mark which petal folds under which to keep the spiral pattern consistent with the top view. Cut stop-cuts and remove the waste wood.

12 Use a No.3 gouge to remove waste wood, undercutting the top of the petal but leaving sufficient wood to form a lip. Undercut the sepals and the overlap between petals.

13 Use an inverted shallow gouge to tidy the petal lip, creating a graceful, natural sweep in the petal. Now is the time to make a final pass around each petal, to ensure the depth between each petal casts a deep shadow and the lips are brought to a clean edge.

14 Tidy up as much as you can at this stage while the rose is still attached to its base. Use what you are more comfortable using – gouge, abrasive, rotary bit or scraper. Separate the rose from the base and tidy up the saw cut. At this stage holding the rose is difficult. Mechanical fixing is too harsh and can fracture the petals. I find holding the piece in hand and using a knife is the best option.

15 Drill a hole in the base, 6mm in diameter and about 10mm in depth. Form a simple stem from any offcut and insert into the base of the rose. A finish is essential to keep the wood clean. This is a matter of preference, but I recommend using oils, either Danish or a wax oil blend. Being liquid, the oil will penetrate into all the depths of the rose and any excess will slowly be absorbed, emphasising the shadows which define the petals. ■


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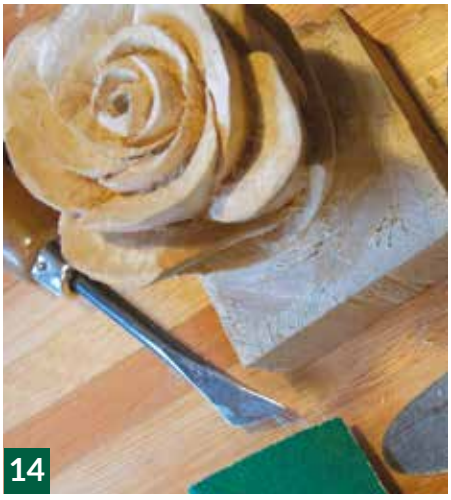
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A beautiful bouquet featuring finished carved roses