

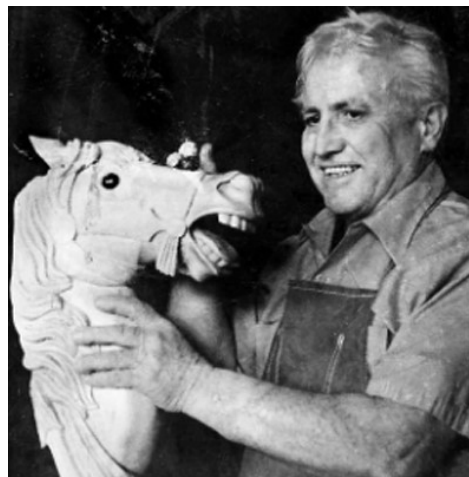
DOMINIC MICALIZZI

Craftsman Extraordinaire

By Herb Kean

Photographs by Bob Garay

In every organization there is always someone special. Dominic was a superb cabinetmaker and one of the best restorers going. But this article is going to show a talent that very, very few have: The ability to make highly difficult tools portraying the antique vintage in wood, metal, and ivory. I know quite a few excellent woodworkers. I also know quite a few excellent metal workers. But I can count on one hand the number of craftsmen that are excellent in both wood and metal working. Dominic was one of those special people. Not only could he produce a tool that he designed in rare woods and brass, but he was able to do scrimshaw in ivory.



Dominc with a carousel horse head he carved from solid wood.



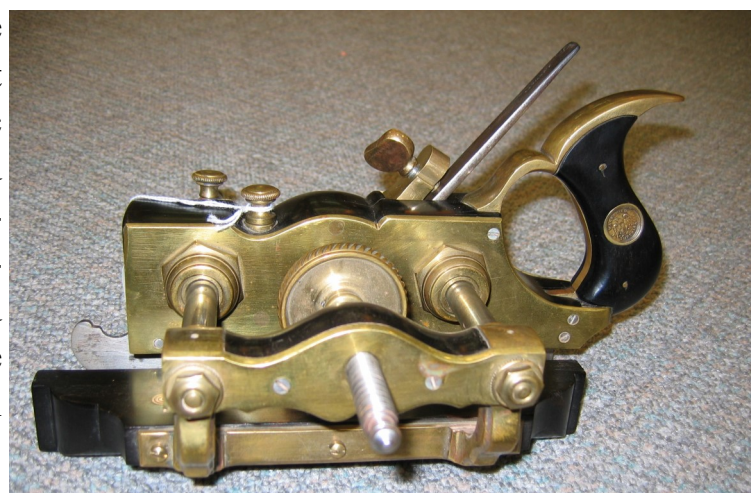
Ivory Ultimatum brace with scrimshaw and carving.

Now, I have to narrow down the number of people I know of that could work in all three materials: ONE! At the end of this article, we will show Bob's photos of Dominic's tools. Most are still in the possession of his brother Dave, who has them in safe keeping. Some were sold in our auction as outright donations or on consignment. One made it into Sandor Nagy-szalanczy's book Tools Rare and Ingenious. Unfortunately, it was not credited to Dominic Micalizzi as the contemporary maker. It was an ivory plow plane and case that Dave gave



Ivory plow plane made by Dominic. The combination of ivory and brass is spectacular. This plane was donated by his family to CRAFTS to develop the Micalizzi Endowment. Sold in our CRAFTS Auction the proceeds has been used to help students entering trades and Crafts educational endeavors.

us to use the money to start the Dominic Micalizzi fund — to help promote wood-working and our club. The fund is still active today. This wouldn't be one of my articles if



Dominic's Ultimatum plow plane. Made of ebony with solid brass. Unequaled craftsmanship & creativity.

there wasn't a story of some kind attached to it. This story is how I met Dominic: It was a blazing hot summer day, the kind that should kill any flea market — but doesn't. I was standing under my beach umbrella at the now defunct Lion's Flea Market in Chester, NJ. It was a real flea market, not the tube socks and T-shirt markets of today. There were treasures everywhere. It was many years ago, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. I was waiting on a customer when out of



Wooden gem brace made by Dominic. The painted highlights and placement of precious gems shows off his artistic genius.

the corner of my eye I saw a pixie of a man approaching my booth with — gasp — an ivory Ultimatum swinging in his hand. In those days there were very few sophisticated collectors. But even I could tell an ivory Ultimatum when I saw one, and by George this guy had one! I quickly dispatched my customer with a, "Pick out what you like: I'll be with you in a minute." It was a problem for me not to blurt out, "Is that for sale?" I waited for him to speak first, but it didn't seem as if that was going to happen. He started once, but got tangled up in what almost appeared as embarrassment. I couldn't stand it any longer and finally gave it my "cool" approach with, "Where dja get that?" He looked up at me (but only slightly) and said, "What do you think of it?" What did I think of it — it blew me away! I had never seen a tool of this majesty and workmanship before. It had scrimshaw all over the ivory and I didn't know what to look at first. I completely forgot about the cool approach and just went crazy with enthusiastic remarks. He never responded to any of those comments, just smiled and shifted his weight from foot to foot. Then with a twinkle in his eye that was barely detectable, he asked, "Do you think it's worth a couple hundred?" Hold everything. Is this guy trying to sell this gorgeous thing? I fig-



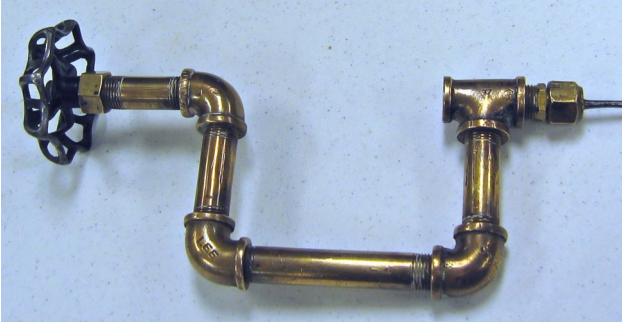
A fitting match to his plow plane is this Ultimatum brace/drill. Dominic again artistically utilizes brass and ebony in a breathtaking contrast.

ured it wouldn't hurt to ask. "Naw, I was just wondering", it came back. We talked awhile until I was sure that it wasn't for sale. He then asked me to look it over carefully, a curious request that threw me into a suspect mode. Was there something



Mother of pearl plane. Dominic enjoyed working with mother of pearl and laminated this transitional plane with the material. The cast iron base and wood he enameled antique white.

wrong with this piece? Was it a repro? How could anyone in this era do work like that? It would take a superior wood and metal worker who could also do scrimshaw. I knew of no one that fit that bill. But I looked carefully anyway. I couldn't see anything unusual except perhaps the "76" scribed into the ivory which I



Dominic had a good sense of humor. It can be seen in this brass "Plumber's Brace" he made. It actually held various bits and functioned flawlessly.

took to mean 1876. I asked him about it and he only smiled as if I had finally started down the right path. I took the smile to mean 1976, and started looking for a flaw that could prove it. I couldn't find a thing wrong with that brace with the possible exception

that it was too perfect for something 100 years old. I was about to admit to that fact when I saw a tiny American flag engraved into the ivory. An American flag on a British piece? The jig was up, and he sheepishly admitted that he made it. I stood in awe of the man. There are many stories of Dominic's prowess with



"new" antique tools. But he al-

The brace above is a boxwood ultimatum with intricate carvings on every bit of infill. It was one of the last pieces he was working on when he passed away. he never got a chance to carve the head, although he has drawn with pencil his initial designs. Also shown is a sampling of the many detailed carvings on this extraordinary brace.

ways had some small sign that said it was a repro. It was up to you to find it. He was never bothered with the morality problem of selling a repro, because he never sold one. Dominic Micalizzi was as good as or better than any 19th century toolmaker, and his work will become as collectible as the best of them. There are other craftsmen that will follow in Dom's footsteps, but to us there will never be another Dominic Micalizzi. Even if we forget his pieces, those of us who knew him will never forget the man.



Jewels inlaid design in a molding plane.



Beautiful carved rosewood brace Dominic made.



Fancy wood plane with cast brass plates added to sides & fancy carved handle.



A beautiful two types of wood brace with segmented head.