

## **Carving & Tooling Leather**

We can make a wide variety of items from leather. In some cases it is also desirable to “decorate” the leather. There are a number of ways to decorate leather. Leather can be stamped, carved and tooled, branded, stained and dyed and more. In this lesson, we will explore decorating leather by carving and tooling.

### **Why carve and tool leather instead of stamp?**

In general, stamping leather is faster and easier than carving and tooling. However there are some drawbacks to stamping. Stamping does not provide as much detail and dimension as carving and tooling. Also each design requires a separate stamp, which is limiting and expensive. Using a basic tool set, a leather crafter can carve and tool any design they wish. Patterns are abundant and relatively cheap.

### **How do I carve and tool?**

As with stamping, the first step to carving and tooling leather is to prepare it by casing it. Casing leather is the process of soaking the leather in warm water for at least 1 hour and up to 24 hours. This allows the leather to absorb water all the way through. Leather must be cased in order to make it malleable or able to be shaped and manipulated. Once the leather is fully cased, it is then allowed to partially dry at room temperature for anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour, depending on temperature, humidity and thickness of the leather. The surface of the leather should be slightly damp and water should not readily squeeze out of the leather when touched in order for the leather to be ready for working.

Practice using your carving knife and tools on a piece of cased scrap leather. Pick a pattern for your first project. It should be small and easy to carve and tool. You will need to transfer your pattern to the cased leather. Paper patterns are transferred using tracing paper and a pencil or stylus. Other patterns are transferred using a rubbing technique. Once your pattern is transferred, you are then ready to begin carving. Knife cuts must be uniform throughout the cut and be a minimum of one third the depth of the leather and no more than one half the depth of the leather. Once your design has been carved it is ready to be tooled. Each pattern design will have instructions regarding which tools are required for that design and in which order they are to be used. The use of each tool will also vary both by the tool and by the use in the design. Some tools are tapped while held steady in place, others are tapped and moved while being tapped. Some require light to medium steady tapping, others a single medium to hard tap. Practice carving and tooling (using the tools your design requires) on scrap leather until you are comfortable with your technique before beginning carving and tooling your actual project.

When you are ready to begin your project, pick your design, transfer it to the case leather, then carve and tool. When you complete your design on your project, allow it to dry completely at room temperature before applying stains or other finishes.

## **Your Carving & Tooling Assignment**

You will need the following tools/supplies to complete this assignment:

Leather mallet

Carving knife and basic set of tools

Marble/granite slab (unless working on a marble or granite countertop)

Practice leather

Carving and tooling project items (coaster rounds)

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Carve and tool a simple design on at least two and up to four coaster rounds.

Once the stamped designs are finished on each project, allow to dry at room temperature completely and bring to the next project meeting. These projects will be fully completed at a later project meeting.