

LEVELS OF
SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN WOODCARVING

A REPORT FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE NORTH ARKANSAS
WOODCARVERS CLUB, INC.

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to identify skill level development as it relates to woodcarving. The generally accepted terms of 1) beginning, 2) intermediate, 3) advanced and 4) master were used to group and identify levels of woodcarving skill development.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

According to the American Heritage Dictionary the skill level classifications used for this study are defined as follows:

Beginner: 1.* One who begins something, or 2. One who is just starting to learn or do something.

Intermediate: Lying or occurring between two extremes or in the middle position or state. o

Advanced: 1.* Highly developed or complex.
2. At a higher level than others.

Master: A workman qualified to teach apprentices and to carry on his craft independently.

PROCEDURES USED

Discussions with members of the North Arkansas Woodcarvers Organization were used to gather data. Respondents were asked to identify the wood carving skills a person should have in order to be identified as: 1) an intermediate woodcarver, 2) an advanced woodcarver, and 3) a master woodcarver. Individuals with skill levels below the intermediate level were identified as a beginner. In most cases, discussions oo were on a one-to-one basis. However, several one-to-~~two~~ discussions were held. oo Agreement between respondents was not sought. The writer tape recorded the opinions of each respondent and those opinions were used in the findings of the study.

RESPONDENTS

A special note of thanks to the following members of the North Arkansas Woodcarvers Organization who gave of their time and knowledge to the compilation of data in this study.

Peter Banning
Len Dillon
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Tom Webster

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Jack Runyan
Ron Wells

*Refers to separate definition sequences

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are grouped according to the classifications (beginner, intermediate, advanced, master) used during interviewing respondents. Findings are not necessarily identified in sequential developmental order. They are presented merely as the opinions of the respondents based on their own experiences. No attempt was made to rank responses in order of importance.

Beginning Woodcarver

Individuals just learning how to carve wood and identified as beginners by fellow carvers until they were able to demonstrate the following skills or knowledge.

1. Able to sharpen a knife, gouge, chisel and v-tool.
2. A working knowledge of tools, i.e., what type of cuts you can make with various carving tools.
3. Aware of the different styles of carving, e.g. relief, realistic, chip, flat plane, caricatures.
4. Carving in the round.
5. Aware of safety techniques to be used when using woodcarving tools.
6. Basic trial and error painting (finishing) skills.
7. A feel for proportions.
8. Capable of stylized carving.
9. Able to carve a simple face.
10. Can follow carving patterns prepared by other people.
11. Able to carve at a level that is not complicated or involved.

Intermediate Woodcarver

Respondents were asked to identify those skills/knowledges that an intermediate woodcarver should possess. Identification of those skills and/or knowledges needed for upward mobility indicate what needs to be mastered during a given classification of carving growth.

Intermediate Woodcarvers should be able to demonstrate the following skills and/or knowledge:

1. Capable of carving a detailed male or female face.
2. Is knowledgeable regarding body proportions (human, animal, bird, fish).
3. Familiar with the use of various power equipment for sharpening carving and/or finishing a project.
4. Able to skillfully use a wood burner.
5. Able to show signs of originality in their carvings.
6. Recognizes the need to clean up a carving (knife marks, rough cuts, splinters, etc.) before finishing.
7. Capable of carving a complete figure (man, woman, animal, bird, fish, etc.)
8. Shows interest in a specific type of carving (relief, realistic, chip, flat plane, caricatures).
9. Capable of making rough drawings or sketches of carving projects.
10. Able to finish/paint completed projects. Included is the proper displaying of a project for viewing by others.

Advanced Woodcarver

Possession of the following skills and/or erudition were identified by respondents as characteristic of an individual viewed as being an advanced woodcarver.

1. Originality is one of the key factors in being identified as an advanced wood carver.
2. Capable of designing, sketching, drawing his/her own patterns to carve.
3. Able to reproduce what they see.

4. Uses painting or finishing a carving as a means of enhancement.
5. Knows and understands proportions.
6. Does not need instructions to design, carve and finish a carving.
7. Is able to carve a piece of wood without a pattern or picture.
8. Skilled in the use of power tools for carving (including wood burning).
9. Capable of changing the features of a carving.
10. Is able to use a variety of carving techniques to accomplish the same objective.
11. Willing to share wood carving and finishing techniques with others.
12. All finished carvings include fine detail.

Master Wood Carver

There was a general consensus among respondents that the term Master Wood Carver is slowly entering the history books. Originally the word "Master" implied a long term apprenticeship under a person identified as a master carver. Apprentices underwent long periods of specialize training with very low reimbursement for their efforts. In brief, they learned a trade as a subordinate and were indentured for a long period of time.

The term "Master Carver" is still used in some circles. It is now used to identify a person as being one of the top carvers in a geographical area. Today, experienced wood carvers are usually viewed a being master carvers. The two classifications advanced and master, are intertwined. One prevailing characteristic of an advanced, or master wood carver is that they are excellent teachers. The carving skills required for both classifications are basically the same.

FINAL COMMENTS

During the interviewing process, respondents offered many valid comments regarding the skill development of wood carvers. Many of the comments must be viewed carefully for they pertain to individual differences. These human differences must be taken into consideration when attempting to classify individuals into certain groups.

Other comments pertained to wood carving organizations. The following listing of final comments is divided into two parts: 1. Individual differences, and 2. Organizations. Final comments (in each grouping) are not presented in a specific order.

Individual Differences

1. Some individuals progress at a faster rate than others.
2. Woodcarvers can be at different levels of carving skill, e.g., can do some intermediate work, yet is really a beginner with regards to other skills.
3. Each person must attempt harder more difficult carvings in order to improve his/her skills.
4. Individuals must be able to progress at their own rate of speed. time limits must not be imposed.
5. We are not competing against each other. We are competing against ourselves.
6. It is not necessary to participate in shows to be an advanced carver. The winning of ribbons is not a necessary requirement for skill development.
7. Should be able to take beginners classes over if he/she feels a need to do so in order to improve ones skills.
8. Learning to use a band saw is an absolute if one wants to progress as a wood carver.

Organization

1. Sketching classes should be offered to the membership.
2. A carving club should be a learning organization.
3. Club members should be able to take any carving class offered by the organization regardless of the individual skill development.
4. An organization should not try to force people into carving certain things. People should be able to carve what they want and not conform to the dictates of an organization (e.g., we are not a good carving club because none of our members carve birds).