

Why not Carve a Little Guy?

By Rod Fraser



Festus and Virgil

Although my friend, Don, claims his birds are a work of art, and my brother-in-law favours relief carving, I often wonder why they don't turn their minds to something that might be a little different—carving little people.

Most of my figures are 4 inches in height and no more than 1¼ inches square. I buy the wood—in one foot lengths—from Heinecke Wood Products. It is shipped promptly in boxes of 24 pieces (more or less), allowing easy storage on a shelf in your

basement. Even including delivery, I estimate my wood cost for each carving at no more than \$1.75.

It is worth noting that the folks at Heinecke are old fashioned. They'll send you an email asking for payment when you receive the goods. And don't bother with a credit card. A cheque or money order is their preferred method of payment.

Four inch figures are big enough to allow you to carve a decent caricature in some detail, and small enough so your living room (or den) won't be overrun with a host of large, unwieldy carvings.



The Farmer and the Townie

Your little guys will fit easily in a tool box—and when they accumulate, on a shelf in your den. After I build up an inventory, I usually sell them at shows

or at the park during the summer. They'll fetch \$10 a piece (or more), which should cover your material costs and painting supplies.



I've never bothered with cut outs, patterns or rough outs. I don't think they're necessary! When carving little people, you soon realize the pattern is largely intuitive: there are two legs, a body, arms and a head. Keep the basic anatomy in mind and you're likely to whittle a convincing figure.



Billy-Bob McGillivray

When you've completed the basic figure (more

about that in a bit), you'll have lots of opportunity to be creative. Consider some wavy hair, a fedora or a bald pate? Perhaps a top coat and vest? A tie? Maybe a beard? You're only limited by your imagination.

You can carve your guy with arms in pockets or at the side. Or extend one arm and give him an walking stick. There are all kinds of options to give your character some flair.

Experienced carvers with an eye for detail can add belt buckles, a sheriff's badge, big teeth or a zany hat. For those who believe 'less is more', you can still carve a charming figure, by following Harley Refsal's advice, set out below,

I try to refrain from carving in too many details. I once read an ancient Chinese saying: 'The greatest carver makes the fewest cuts'... I continually enjoy the challenge of moving in that direction—the difficult art of simplification.

... Harley Refsal



To get started, you'll need a pencil, ruler, two knives and one or two gouges. Then with your tools laid out in front of you, draw a centre line (from top to

bottom) on each of the four sides of a 4 inch piece of wood. It'll keep everything symmetrical as you progress with your carving.

Mark with a pencil where the shoes, arms and head will be. This gives you a starting point. As a general rule, I cut a notch for the feet a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the bottom and another V-cut for the neck $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the top. The hands generally end $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the bottom of our 4 inch piece of wood.



Carver Ready for Surgery

Then I separate the legs, define the buttocks, and shape the head for a hat, cap or hair. Once I see the body and head take form, I cut in arms and round the body just so. Before long, you are ready to add a few accoutrements—turning your little guy

into a farmer, city dude or hiker.

I don't have the space to detail all the steps to carve an authentic little guy, but if you click on Doug *Linker's* carving video below, it does just that. It's entitled [Woodcarving How To: Carve a Little Man Start to Finish](#).



Many of these small figures are carved in the 'flat plane' style, popularized by Harley Refsal. The figures are primarily whittled with a knife, and perhaps one or two gouges. Tool marks are left in the carving and very little (if any) rounding or sanding is done.



Seamus Flanagan

The rough angular shape of these clean cuts adds

to the charm and individuality of your carvings. You should give it a try. You have nothing to lose but your sandpaper.



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