



Carve a Bowl from a

To make this stunning piece, all you need is some 8/4 stock and

No log, no axe, no problem. Many bowl carvers (I happen to be among them) typically work with wood split green from a log and do their carving with the blank on a chopping block and a bowl horse. But this bowl can be carved from dry lumber and worked on a standard workbench. You can use just about any species of wood to make it; I used butternut for this one. You'll save yourself some trouble by selecting a clear, knot-free board with no fancy figure. If your plank is oversize, I suggest that you begin by trimming it to 2 in. thick, 6 in. wide, and 21 in. long. That said, the dimensions in the plans are easily adaptable.

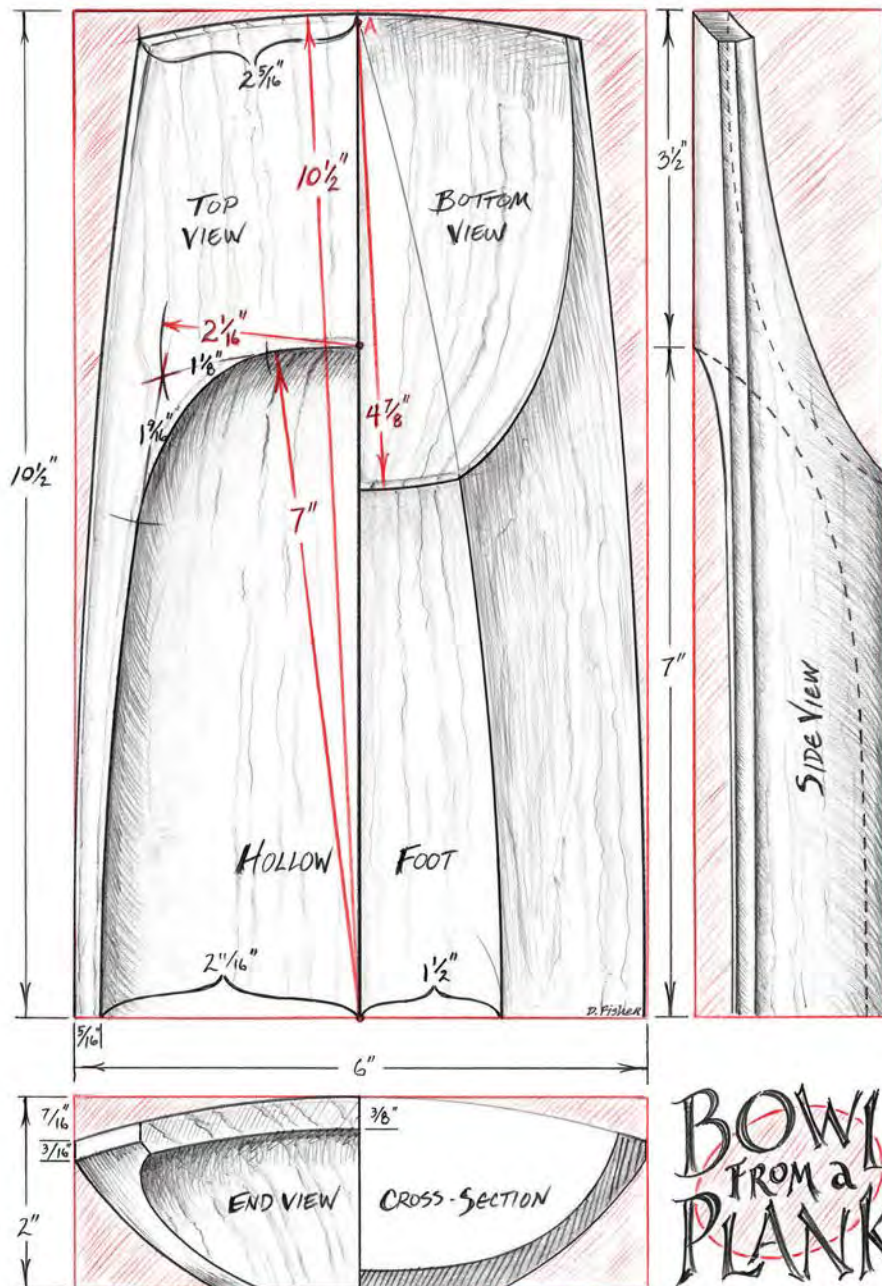
Flatten the bottom, crown the top, curve the sides

Start the bowl by flattening the bottom of the blank with a hand plane. Then strike a longitudinal centerline on the bottom from end to end. With a square, extend the centerline up both end-grain surfaces. Using your fingers as a gauge, draw a line along both sides $\frac{7}{16}$ in. down from the top. On the end grain, draw an even arc from the end of those lines up to the center of the blank. Then with a drawknife and/or a hand plane, remove the wood above those lines, giving the blank a gently arched top.

Now the layout of the handles and the hollow can begin. Mark a lateral centerline across the blank's curved upper surface, and



Board



**BOWL
FROM A
PLANK**

a few common hand tools

BY DAVID FISHER

carry this line down the sides and across the bottom. With your pencil compass set for a $10\frac{1}{2}$ -in. radius, place its point at the intersection of the centerlines on top and strike an arc across each end of the bowl blank. These arcs represent the ends of the handles. Reset the compass to 7 in. and then strike two more arcs from the blank's center point. These represent the ends of the hollow.

You're now ready to define the curved sides of the bowl. Set the compass to $2\frac{3}{16}$ in. and place its point at the center of the handle arc at one end of the bowl. Strike tick marks across the handle arc to both sides. Repeat on the other end of the blank.

Set the compass to a 3-in. radius, place its point at the blank's center point, and strike tick marks across the lateral centerline. These tick marks give you three points on each side of the bowl, one representing the widest point of the bowl and two representing the corners. Connect these three points using a pencil and a drawing bow. You can buy a drawing bow or just make one from a slat of wood or a metal rule and a length of string or tape. Adjust the flex of the bow until it creates an arc that passes through all three points. This arc is the outside edge of the bowl.

Now mark the side of the hollow in the same way. With your compass set to $2\frac{1}{16}$ in. and its point at the center of the blank,

Crown the top



Initial layout. After flattening the bottom of the blank with a hand plane, draw a longitudinal centerline on the bottom, and carry that line up the end-grain surfaces. Then, as shown at far left, draw a line along the side $\frac{1}{16}$ in. from the top using your finger as a gauge. Next, draw a freehand curve on each end-grain face to connect the side lines to the top center of the blank (left).



Rough in the curve. Using a drawknife—or a hand plane set to take thick shavings if you prefer—crown the top surface of the blank from end to end.

strike tick marks across both sides of the lateral centerline. Reset the compass to a $2\frac{1}{16}$ -in. radius and make tick marks across the arcs at the ends of the hollow. Connect those marks with the drawing bow and a pencil to create the side borders of the hollow.

Round the corners of the hollow next, either drawing by hand or using a portion of a French curve. The corner curves should merge with the arcs of the sides and ends seamlessly. You can make marks on the French curve itself to be sure you're using the same portion to round each of the four corners.

Go to the gouges

To carve the hollow, you'll need one or two bent gouges (sometimes called long-bents). I recommend an 8/30 (#8 sweep 30mm wide) and a 5/25, but a similar combination could work just as well. If you can only have one, go with the #8.

Secure the bowl blank on the workbench and begin hollowing by making an initial trench across the center of the bowl using the



Complete the crown. After roughing in the curve, smooth it with a finely set hand plane or spokeshave.

#8 bent gouge and a mallet. This will only be maybe $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep at the center. Then, working with the grain (perpendicular to the trench), make a series of side-by-side cuts into the trench starting from 2 or 3 in. back. These chips will release when they meet the trench. Do this from both directions, then repeat the procedure. Each time, the cross-grain trench will get deeper and the end cuts will get deeper and will start closer to the ends of the hollow. When you begin to wonder how much wood is left under that trench, take a moment to measure using a straightedge along the top and a rule extending down into the center of the hollow. Stop when you get close to $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. You want to leave about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. of wood at the bottom center when the hollow is finished. As you shape the hollow, keep in mind that it should be steep at the edges and transition to a shallow central area.

When nearing the final surface, put the mallet aside and switch to paring cuts, using your body weight to propel the gouge in smooth movements, raising or lowering the handle to control the depth of cut. The #5 gouge, with its flatter curve, will leave a more subtle surface, especially in the flatter central areas along the length of the hollow. Work with the grain from both ends, being careful to take light cuts where the grain direction merges across the center. I prefer to leave the surface straight from the gouge, but if you'd like to scrape or sand the surface smooth, that's an option.

Lay out the handles and the hollow



Scribing from the center. Draw crossing centerlines on the newly crowned top surface, then strike arcs with a compass placed at the center point and set to a $10\frac{1}{2}$ -in. radius for the ends of the handles and a 7-in. radius (as shown above) for the ends of the hollow.



Define the widths. Set the compass at $2\frac{5}{16}$ in., place its point on the centerline, and strike two short arcs across the handle curve (left). Repeat the process with the compass set at $2\frac{1}{16}$ in. and its point placed where the end curve of the hollow crosses the centerline. Last, with your compass point at the intersection of the centerlines, draw arcs with the compass set at 3 in. and $2\frac{1}{16}$ in. These will mark the widest points of the bowl and the hollow.



Drawing bow sets the side curves. To lay out the sides of the bowl and the hollow, line up a drawing bow with the end and middle tick marks.



Curves into the corners. You can use a French curve to round the corners of the hollow.

Carve the hollow



Trench work. Begin the excavation of the hollow by carving a lateral trench about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep with a #8 gouge and a mallet.



Carving toward the trench. Still using the #8 gouge but now carving with the grain, make a series of short side-by-side cuts that end in the trench. Lengthen and deepen these until you've reached the bottom of the trench.



Retrenchment. After you've reached the bottom of the original cross-grain trench, carve a deeper one, then continue making longer and deeper parallel cuts with the grain.

Shape the outside

With the hollow finished, begin on the exterior by shaping each of the long sides to a curve. Use a drawknife, possibly followed by a block plane or spokeshave, and keep the cut plumb at this point. Then, using your fingers as a gauge, draw a pencil line along the side, $\frac{3}{16}$ in. below the top.

Now you can lay out the underside of the bowl and the foot. Set the compass to a radius of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. and strike a circle at the center of the bottom. Where that circle intersects the lateral centerline is the widest point of the foot. Reset the compass to a $4\frac{7}{8}$ -in. radius and place the point $10\frac{3}{8}$ in. from the center. (This will be just a smidge in from the end of the blank, but I'll call it the endpoint; it's labeled A at the top of the drawing.) Strike an arc across the bottom. Repeat at the other end. With the drawing bow, draw two arcs, each connecting both endpoints with the



Steep sides. To achieve a hollow with a fairly flat bottom, be sure to create relatively vertical walls.

Refine the hollow



Depth check. When you've carved a lateral trench that feels close to full depth, check it with a straightedge and a narrow ruler. You want to leave about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. of meat below the trench.



High up at the ends. Make the final cuts at the ends of the hollow with the gouge nearly vertical to establish steep walls.



Finishing the hollow. When you're happy with the shape you've carved for the hollow, put the mallet aside and refine the surfaces with paring cuts using the flatter #5 gouge. Fisher likes the surface left by the gouge, but for a completely unfaceted surface you could follow up with sandpaper or a gooseneck scraper.

Create the side curves



Slice to a shallow curve. Using a drawknife or a hand plane, shape the sides to follow the outer curve you drew out with the drawing bow. The curved surface you create should be plumb for now.

Shape the underside



SIDE WORK

Layout underneath. First, with the compass point placed at the intersection of the centerlines, draw a 3-in.-dia. circle to establish the width of the foot. Then, as shown above, draw $4\frac{7}{8}$ -in. radius arcs across the blank at both ends to define the end-curves of the foot.



Arc of the foot. To define the side of the foot, adjust the drawing bow so it connects the center points at both ends and is just tangent to the center circle.

widest part of the foot. Next, draw a gently curved line on the end-grain surface connecting the endpoint to the lower corners of the handle.

Holding the bowl on edge in a vise, remove the wood between the outer line of the foot and the line on the side near the lip of the bowl, all the way through the end of the blank. This surface should be slightly convex in both directions to mirror the form of the hollow. You can leave the surface straight from the drawknife, or finish with a spokeshave or block plane.

More excavation underneath

A little more layout guides the shaping under the handles. Draw a line on the end grain of the bowl that is $\frac{3}{8}$ in. below, and parallel to, the curved upper surface. On the sides of the bowl, draw a curve by eye from the corner of the foot up to the lower corner of the handle. Now you're ready to carve.



End-grain arc.

The last marks needed to guide the shaping of the sides are curves drawn by eye on the end grain. The curves should connect the center point at the bottom to the lines drawn along the sides $\frac{3}{16}$ in. from the top face.



Now the fun part. After the careful layout, shaping is a breeze. Rough out the shape with a drawknife, creating a curved surface that connects the almond-shaped layout lines on the bottom and the line along the side just below the lip. After using the drawknife, you can smooth and refine the surface with a block plane or a spokeshave.



UNDER THE ENDS

Handle layout. With the sides shaped, lay out the handles by first drawing a line on the end grain $\frac{3}{8}$ in. below the top. Then, beginning at the end of that line, draw a curve that ends at the corner of the foot.



Hewing out the handle. Rough out the underside of the handle with the #8 gouge and mallet. Begin with short scoops started not far from the end of the bowl and working backward with longer cuts.



An arc at the end. Once the underside of the handle has been roughed out, use a drawknife or hand plane to shape the end to a curve.

With the bowl upside down on the bench, remove the bulk of the wood under the handles with the #8 gouge and a mallet. Next, shape the ends of the handles to an arc, trimming them to the compass lines marked on top. Then redraw the line on the end-grain surface $\frac{3}{8}$ in. below the top. Refine the area under the handles with paring cuts from the #5 gouge, leaving the surface slightly concave in both directions.

Lightly plane the foot to remove any marks and to make sure the bowl sits evenly. Finish by freshly planing the upper surface with a sharp and finely set block plane, leaving the arched top ever-so-slightly faceted. Ease the sharp corners all around the bowl by creating crisp chamfers with a knife. Take your time, and make light cuts.

If you plan on doing some decorative carving on the handles, now's the time. (See *Handwork*, pp. 76–80, for an explanation of how I carve a tree.) Then finish with a food-safe drying oil. I typically use pure refined linseed oil or a blend of linseed oil and beeswax. Now your bowl is ready to serve. □

David Fisher works wood in Greenville, Pa.



Finishing up. Shift to paring strokes at the end to refine the curves and smooth the surface.