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Spoon carving knives by Del Stubbs

Outdoors1

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Publication: Friday 9 November 2007

Description :

Spoon carving knives in the Scandinavian style

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This article provides a review of the spoon carving tool used in my earlier article ([Here](#)).

Although other tools are used to carve spoons and ladles in the Scandinavian style, there are two that are essential. The first is a sharp, straight bladed knife to whittle the spoon to shape, and the second is a curved knife (called a hook knife or spoon knife), used to carve the hollow bowl of the spoon.

Straight knives

In the past, the knife was a very common tool in Scandinavian countries. Nearly everyone had one for work or food preparation. As a result, knives were readily available for woodworking (Sundquist, 1990).

Scandinavian knives are currently available in a blizzard of sizes, styles, and materials covering virtually any price range. The design can be simple or ornate. Blades can be found in virtually any desired construction - carbon steel or stainless, single material or laminated. My preference for tool blades is carbon steel, but the Scandinavian stainless steels are also excellent.

The importance of correct blade angle and bevel

Sundquist places a high value on having an appropriate edge angle on woodworking knives. He suggests that a flat bevel of approximately 25 degrees is ideal. The flat bevel allows you to use the entire bevel to support the cut. If there is a secondary bevel on the knife, you have to turn the blade upwards to cut the wood, and the edge has very little support, making the cut less controllable.

I have found that removing the secondary bevel and flattening and straightening the bevels as recommended in Jimbo's excellent article ([found here](#)) is all that is necessary to prepare most Scandinavian knives for working green wood.

Handle Shape

There are many knife handle designs: straight; tapered; dropped in the butt; swelled at the front, back, or both ends. For examples, handles with a dropped butt allow you to tell at a touch which way the blade edge is facing. I find this to be an advantage for general outdoors use, but not necessarily for carving, where your eyes must be constantly on the work.



Scandinavian straight knives Two knives from Frosts of Sweden (bottom) and one from Ericksson (top). I like the smallest knife for carving spoons.

For carving, I tend to agree with Sundquist's comments on tapered handles: Tapered handles, oval in section, are excellent for carving. The thicker part of the handle fits well into the concave part of the hand, and gives the longer middle finger a good grip on the knife. Because the handle is narrow close to the blade, it gives you the clearance you need to carve close to the blank. The taper towards both ends of the handle lets you get a better grip with both your index finger and your little finger. This safety feature helps to keep your hand from sliding off the butt of the handle or slipping towards the blade. It is a traditional shape with soft and pleasant lines. (Wille Sundquist, 1990)."

Although I have carving knives with more ergonomic handles, I nearly always find myself picking up the knives with simple, tapered oval handles.

Spoon Knives

Scandinavians use a rather unusual knife for hollowing spoons - Sundquist calls them spoon knives. The blades are bent in varying profiles, so different spoon knives can be selected for spoons, cups, and bowls. Be sure to maintain the original bevels when sharpening these knives, or you will be spending some time at the grindstone correcting the edges!

Del Stubbs knives

A year or two ago, I was looking for a copy of Jogge Sundquist's video on carving Swedish woodenware. Del Stubbs had a few copies at the time, so I bought one (I believe the video is currently out of print). For those who are not familiar with Del Stubbs' work, he is a notable woodworker in his own right, and author of a video on woodturning (Bowl Turning with Del Stubbs).

From time to time, I have returned to Del's site to look at his fine selection of tools, books and videos about Swedish carving techniques. Del forges all of the tools himself, and the prices are extremely reasonable. You can purchase tools from Del either in a prepackaged set or individually. The spoon set consists of one of Del's handforged spoon knives (your choice of left or right handed), a handforged sloyd knife (1/ 3/4 4.3 mm or 2 1/4 or 5.5 mm), and four spoon blanks. I purchased a set with the larger sloyd knife and a left handed spoon carving knife. Sets are also

Spoon carving knives by Del Stubbs

available for the traditional art of kolrosing, a Scandinavian form of wood engraving. Historically, kolrosing was most often used to decorate spoons.



Del Stubbs spoon knife and sloyd knife

You can see from the photo above that Del pays great attention to all of the elements that make a fine tool - not just the blade materials, but the crucial procedures of sharpening and polishing. The beauty of these tools is also apparent in the finely constructed handles.

Del Stubbs Sloyd knife

For me, the handle of a carving knife must have several basic attributes to be really useful. First it must provide a secure, non-slip grip. If the knife handle does not provide a secure grip, the carver will risk cutting themselves. Second, the handle must be usable in a variety of grips. Some handles are fine when carving away from yourself, but are not comfortable when the blade faces towards you.

Del's knives satisfy both of these criteria. The handles are tapered ovals that have been finished with a matte finish that provides a non-slip grip. The shape works well with a variety of grips and holds, and the smoothed surfaces do not create hot-spots that can become blisters. As you can see from the photos, the wood handles are also very attractive.

The shape of the Del's sloyd knife is typically Scandinavian - the top of the blade is straight, and most of the edge is flat, the last 1/3 or so curves up to the point. Overall the blade is 2 ¼ inches (5.5 cm). The edges are ground very evenly in a traditional Scandinavian (or saber) grind. This type of edge not only supports the cut, but is easily maintained.



Sloyd blade in profile The curved tip allows you to cut in tight places.

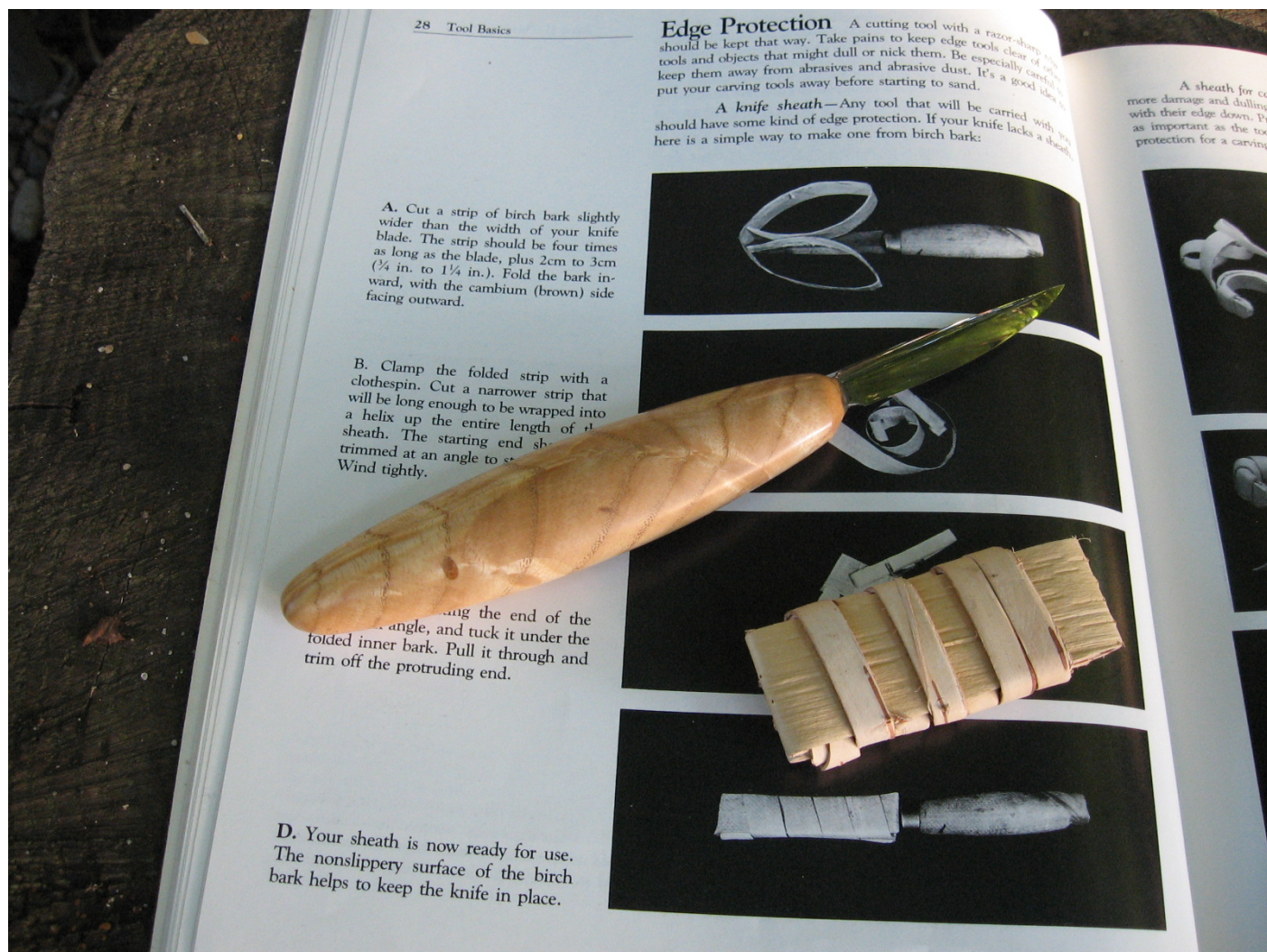
Del has selected O-1 steel for these knives. This is a simple, high carbon steel that takes and holds a very fine edge - I prefer this type of steel for most of my woodcarving tools.

As you can see from the photographs, the fit and finish of Del's knife is exceptional. The wooden handle is smooth and well finished, and the blade has been polished to a mirror finish. The transition from the wooden handle to the metal blade is seamless and smooth. The knife is delivered with a razor edge, so you can get carving right away. Del includes a flyer on how to maintain this fine edge.



Stubbs sloyd knife - back of blade The back of this knife has been nicely rounded so you can grasp further up the blade while carving - a nice detail!

Del also provides a sheath with this knife. The sheath is made from birch bark in a traditional Scandinavian style - similar to the ones shown in the books by Sundquist and Ljungberg. This sheath is attractive and provides protection for both the blade and the user.



Del Stubbs straight knife and sheath Del includes a nicely made traditional birchbark sheath with these knives

Spoon knife

This is how Del describes his spoon knives: These knives I completely hand make, from start to finish, and every possible aspect of them I have thought through - from handle and blade shape, to the steel, and the tempering methods. They, of course, have uses beyond spoon carving. The edges come perfectly sharp and the blades highly polished - so that the knife glides through the wood, and so that sharpening is a breeze. The back of the blades are rounded and polished for comfort when pushing with a finger. I shape the handles from our 25 year collection of beautiful hardwoods. The steel: I have chosen L.J. Starrett '01' high carbon tool steel. It costs about twice what normal high carbon steel costs, it's the very best that I can buy. The hollow ground bevel (25°) and the hardness RC60-61 make these tools suitable for carving any wood from pine to maple.

The handles of the Stubbs spoon knives are identical to those of the sloyd knives. As I have already noted, the finish resists slipping in the hand, and the oval shape is usable in a variety of grips. This is especially useful if you decide to get only one spoon knife. I find myself turning the blade of my knife in a variety of ways to carve the bowl of a spoon - I also use this tool for tighter curves in the spoon handles.



Del Stubbs left handed spoon knife back of blade

As notes for Del's straight blades, the Stubbs spoon knives are made from high quality materials and finely hardened, tempered, and polished. The edge on mine was razor sharp, and the bevel was polished to a nice mirror finish. Since the bevel is cut onto the outside of the blade, you can cut a very tight curve with this tool. The back of the spoon knife is also rounded and polished, which allows you to use the opposite thumb to push the blade - this two handed grip enhances both the amount of force you can apply to the cut and provides greater control.



Dell Stubbs spoon knife, edge up The white spots on the edge are tiny basswood shavings

As you can see on the photos, the overall fit and finish on these tools is excellent.

Del also provides an innovative sheath for the spoon knife. The sheath is a block of foam with the shape of the blade cut into it. The blade fits in neatly (edge down) and an elastic cord holds the cloth cover over the back of the blade, securing it in place. This clever design uses modern materials in a simple but functional form that protects the blade and the user.



Stubbs spoon knife with sheath This simple sheath provides good protection for the blade and carver.

Conclusions:

There is a point where craftsmanship surpasses the simple execution of a design. This is the point where form and function merge, simplicity is transformed into elegance, and tool becomes art. Del Stubbs' work has clearly reached this point. His tools are not only elegantly functional, but have a beauty missing from many modern tools. These tools are a pleasure to behold, and truly a joy to use.

Website

[Dell Stubbs](#)

In addition to his catalog of fine tools, Del's website has lots of great information on Scandinavian spoon carving. There are webpages showing some fine example spoons, spoon carving techniques, carving grips, how to select a natural crook for spoon carving, and even one on making your own birchbark knife sheath. Del is planning on adding some links to videos showing various carving techniques as well. There are also links to other pages showing spoon carving from other cultures. Del's dvd of wooden bowl turning is available from Amazon.com and fine woodworking suppliers.