

Woodland Treasures

The artistic carvings of Geoff King

By Kathleen Ryan

Perhaps it's the gypsy in him that allows Geoff King to come up with so many new and exciting carved-wood jewelry designs, each bearing his distinctive medieval flair. Or maybe it's his passionate love of nature. Whatever the reason, Geoff has become one of the world's leading artists of carved jewelry.

The roots of this woodcarver sink deep into Celtic soil. Geoff's father came from a gypsy family who settled in England just before he was born. A nature and animal lover, Geoff entered London University at the age of 18 as a zoology major, hoping to become a nature reserve warden. But he dropped out after two years when he realized the course had more to do with the insides of animals than their habitat, ecology, or behavior.

In 1985, he established "Geoff King's Original Wooden Toys" in Somerset, England, earning a basket full of awards for his original designs and fine craftsmanship. He taught himself to carve in 1988, and spent the next six years making furniture, turning wood, and carving. When not working with wood, Geoff grew it.

"I started growing trees and vegetables until our small garden was completely full," he said. "We needed more land, but land in Somerset was very expensive."

So Geoff, his wife Fiona, and son Robert headed for the Scottish highlands. There they bought a 150 year-old farm house with thick stone walls sitting on two acres of lush land. Geoff eventually turned their two acres into an organic woodland garden that he playfully calls his "oasis in a desert of sheep."

Geoff suffered a series of illnesses that left him unable to work for a long period of time. Getting back to work slowly, Geoff tackled small carving projects,

such as kilt pins, jewelry, and combs. Geoff found he loved this work so much that he stuck with it.

"I am positively a passionate tree lover, so I never use new rainforest or tropical timbers," Geoff explained. "My wood is mostly British hardwoods and comes either from the off-cuts of furniture makers or musical instrument makers, from garden ornamental trees thinned in maintenance, or from re-used, recycled sources.

"I am hugely inspired by nature and often see shapes in natural forms which influence my designs," Geoff said.

Geoff's Woodland Creations are sold around the world via the Internet. A visit to his website reveals a treasure trove of jewelry and accent pieces. But his favorite thing to do is get out into nature and sell his creations at local shows.



ELVEN TREE, 1" x 3½", English walnut.



DRAGON COIL BROOCH, 3" x 2", English yew.

Jewelry



TREASURE DRAGON, ¾" x 2½" x 4¾", Scottish brown oak with Baltic Amber.



GEM-ENTWINED BROOCH, 1¼" x 2½", English yew accented with amethyst.



LIZARD, 1¼" x 2½", English walnut.



PENTICOIL, 2"-diameter, English walnut.

What is Bogwood?

Geoff King often uses bogwood for his special jewelry pieces. Bogwood is cut from trees that once grew in the moist soil of a bog or wetland. Trees growing in such conditions suffer from lack of nutrients so their growth rings are much narrower than the rings found in the same species growing under more favorable conditions.

When a tree dies and falls into a bog, the highly acidic soil and water, caused by decaying plant life, soften and preserve the wood for hundreds, even thousands of years. The distinctive tan color of bogwood results from high amounts of organic matter in the bog. The tree's submersion also leads to deposit of tiny grains of silica, which can be seen as white flecks. Bogwood is excellent for carving.

Over the past 500 years, the bogs have slowly been drained away. As the land dries up and shrinks, it forces buried bogwood to the surface. Geoff's bogwood was discovered this way.

"My roommate came across a farmer trying to burn some bogwood that got tangled in his plow," he said. Recognizing its potential value, Geoff sent a sample to The Queen's University School of Geosciences in Belfast, Ireland, for analysis. They dated the tree back to 2,976 B.C.—nearly 5,000 years old.

For more information on the history and formation of natural bogs, visit <http://tinyurl.com/7acuc>.

This dragon brooch, carved from ancient bogwood, comes with a letter of authenticity from the Queen's University of Geosciences, verifying the age of the wood.



Carving a Knotwork Brooch

By Geoff King



This beautiful brooch is easy to carve and can be completed in just four hours. I used yew wood for this project. Yew has a lovely color and grain pattern, and it's tough enough to support the detail. Any close-grained hardwood would work just as well.

To get started, use graphite paper and a stylus to trace the pattern onto a piece of $\frac{3}{8}$ "-thick wood. Apply the oil finish after the carving is complete and the pin back is secured. Be sure the pin is secured first; the epoxy will not stick to an oily surface. Let the brooch soak overnight in a container filled with tung oil.



1 **Cut the spaces.** Drill a $\frac{1}{16}$ "-diameter blade-entry hole in each negative space. Feed a #2 scroll saw blade through the holes and cut the frets.



2 **Cut the perimeter.** Cut along the outside line, then smooth all the edges with a small jeweler's file. Be careful not to create any gouges or irregularities.



3 **Outline the crossover points.** Mark the areas where the knotwork passes over or under another section. Make vertical cuts on these lines with a gouge.



4 **Define the crossovers.** Shave wood from the outside edges inward, up to the stop cuts at each of the crossover points made in step 3. Do not cut beyond the stop cuts.



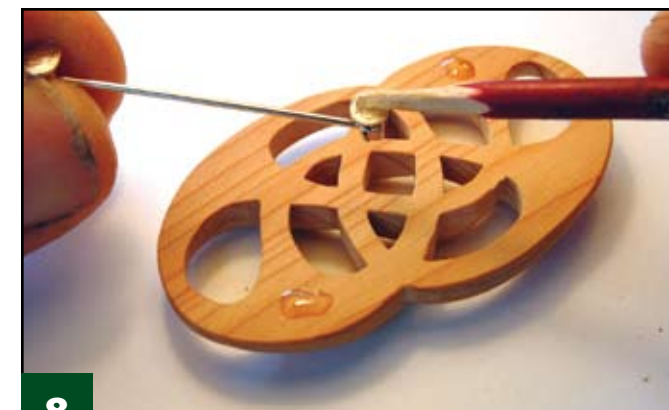
5 **Round the inner and outer edges.** Use a detail knife to create smooth, round edges on the whole piece.



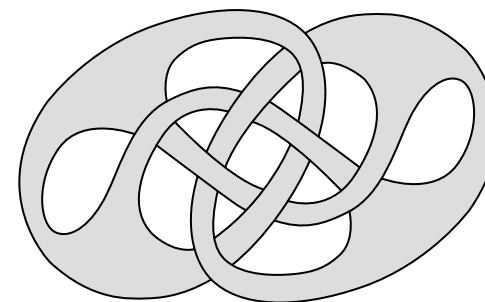
6 **Remove the knife marks.** Use a small file to smooth the edges. A small riffler works well in the corners.



7 **Finish smoothing the brooch.** Sand the entire piece with 240-grit silicon carbide sandpaper. Then rub the piece down with extra-fine synthetic steel wool.



8 **Attach the pin brackets.** Score the back of both pin brackets and the wood where the brackets will be located. Use 5-minute epoxy to attach the brackets.



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materials & tools

MATERIALS:

- $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 2" x $2\frac{1}{2}$ " yew or close-grained hardwood of choice
- Graphite paper
- Silicon carbide sandpaper, 240 grit
- Extra fine synthetic steel wool
- 2-part, 5-minute epoxy
- Sterling or silver-plated brooch pin (available from jewelry suppliers)
- Tung oil or oil finish of choice

TOOLS:

- Stylus, pen or pencil
- Drill press with $\frac{1}{16}$ "-diameter drill bit
- Scroll saw with #2 blade
- $\frac{1}{4}$ " #3 fishtail gouge
- Detail knife of choice (I use a Flexcut)
- Small metal file
- Small, fine, triangular riffler



About the Artist

Geoff King's finely-carved jewelry and accessories also come as one-of-a-kind, custom made pieces. His finished jewelry ranges between \$30 and \$400. For more samples of his work, visit his website at www.woodlandtreasures.co.uk/.