

Fiddlehead Fern House Sign



Introduction:

This project is in 2 halves: designing and carving a stylised fiddlehead fern, and lettering a house sign: 'Springfield'.

A point I'd really like to get over is how long it took to work it all out!

First I found my piece of wood, luckily something quite interesting with a knotty corner and wavy edge - rather than the simple rectangle that you see for most signs. Then it was thumbnail sketches: figuring out how I might carve a fern in a stylised way - one that would fit carving tools; combining that with the letters and how all might work together. Then drawing out on the wood; tracing for a working drawing; arranging the letters... A lot of work, certainly more than the actual carving itself!

But that's not uncommon. It's really important to understand that *carving is a way of getting your ideas, your vision, permanently into the wood*. You don't have a delete button or eraser, especially in this sort of surface work where not a lot of wood is to be removed and each cut counts.

So you need to be prepared to spend time on your preparation and, if you get that right, the carving follows in a straight-forward manner.



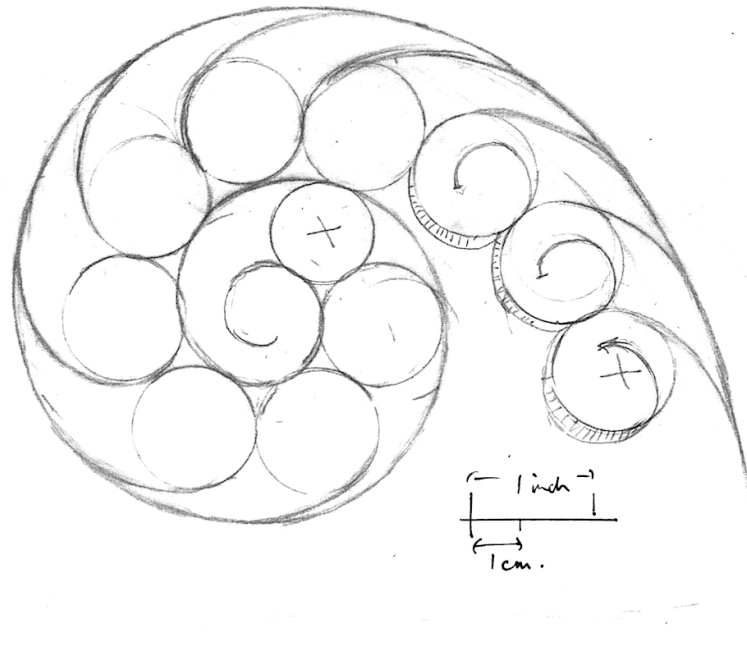
The Fern:

You can use this design for all sorts of decorative work. You could take all or parts of it; make a left and right handed ('mirrored') on 2 sides of a frame; take just the fiddlehead turnover part, enlarge and put florets where the volutes are...

Fiddlehead:

Below is my working drawing for the fiddlehead part, rather scruffy I'm afraid. There's a scale if you'd like to work at my size. The more central 'X' is a smaller circle; the 'X' to the right is the orphan volute and I've indicated where the crescent cut is needed to bring it back home. Look to the photo above as well as the workshop videos.

However, rather than copy mine, I strongly recommend that you create your own fiddlehead using the lay out method I show you in the video. The main reason for doing this is to match the tools you have to the repeated curves you want to cut. Do a trial run as I did in a spare piece of wood. As you see in the video drawing is one thing, reality is another! and I made a lot of changes.



Tools for the Fiddlehead:

At the size of the drawing above I used

- 60deg. V tool x 3/8in. (10mm)
- Gouge: #9 x 1in. (26mm) - for circle.
- Narrower alternative for circles: #6 x 1/2in. (14mm) - and scooping the volutes
- Gouge: #5 x 3/4in. (20mm) - out to edge
- Gouge: 7 x 3/8in. (10mm) - winding into the volute

Fern Fronds:

I am not giving you a drawing for these. You can see the layout in the photo at the top and draw them out to suit your wood etc.

Couple of points:

- The fronds don't go in the same direction; they converge a little as they leave the stem, going with the flow and making the design more interesting.
- There's a virtual line through the free points; you want to put this in before you start your drawing.
- They don't all have to be exactly the same but they should look harmonious and be carved consistently.

Tools for the Fronds:

- 60deg. V tool x 3/8in. (10mm) - outline
- Gouge: #6 x 5/8in. (10mm) - fluting the fronds
- Gouge: #9 x 1/8in. (3mm) - little thumbnails to the edge
- Gouge: #3 x 1/2in. (12mm) or any flat gouge with a sharp corner - cleaning up

The Lettering:

The style of lettering is called 'Stonehenge' - chosen by my friend, the client. It's a sort of bastard Celtic Uncial, which we've seen on Woodcarving Workshops when I carved the [Ard na Mara sign](#), so have a look at that one too.

You can download the font for free here: <https://www.dafont.com/stonehenge.font>

Springfield

I think it carves quite readily and straight forwardly, though some of the letter shapes are not as 'family-orientated' as they could be. Do feel that you can alter any letters in the alphabet to your own aesthetic.

In the videos, you'll also notice that a didn't cast the letters in a straight line. There's no rule that says you should!

Scale: Height of my letter 'i' : 1 3/4in. (45mm); letter 'S' : 3 1/4in. (82mm)

And at this size...

Tools for the Lettering:

- Chisel: #1 x 1, 1 1/4, 1/ 1/2in. (25, 35, 40mm)
- Fishtail chisel x 1/2in. (14mm)
- Skew chisels x 3/8in. (10mm)
- Gouge: #4 x 3/4in. (20mm)
- Gouge: #5 x 5/8, 3/4, 1 1/8in. (16, 20, 30, mm)
- Gouge: #6 x 3/8, 1/2, 7/16, 7/8, 1in. (10, 14, 18, 22, 25mm)
- Gouge: #9 x 1/8in. (3mm)

Of course, your sign will have a different name to mine! - but this should give you an idea of what you might need.

I hope you remember that you can make lots of carving tools do different jobs and you should be able to find other tools that can be manipulate to give the same cuts as the ones I'm listing above.

If unsure, incise a trial letter in some scrap wood.

Finish:

In the end I painted the sign but I left the Oak untreated. The effect of sunlight on Oak is to bleach it a wonderful grey colour and it's a great wood for outdoors, so I thought we'd go with that.

The letters I painted with exterior paint - no different to painting anything against the weather. There are videos showing the painting of letters on Woodcarving Workshops and I will have put links to a couple of these in the copy below the final video in the project.

That's it!

Good luck with your carving. Don't forget the importance of preparation and give it its full amount of time, whatever project you take on.

Best wishes

Chris