



# Yellow Flag Iris Pierced Relief

## Origins:

*Iris Pseudacorus*, the Yellow Flag Iris, is one of my favorite flowers.

In fact a Yellow Flag was one of my earliest forays into carving, probably my second piece, when I began in 1975. I remember sitting by a pond, sketching the flowers and working up the design back home.

Amazingly I have a picture:

The wood is Sapele, which I don't recommend, and that's a price sticker: I sold the carving from the window of my first workshop. I wonder where it is now.

I liked the look of the carving when I saw it again; I think I did well given I knew so little! I also wondered what sort of take on Yellow Iris I might have all these years later on...

And that is the genesis of this carving project.



## Introduction:

Right up front let me say that at the size I carved it, this is a pretty advanced carving. There's a lot of work, pierced work is obviously more delicate and I push the wood to its limits. Still, step by step, relax and give it a go!

If it seems to much, you can certainly carve the design smaller, or leave out the piercing and simply carve our Yellow Flag simple in relief.

Here are a few more thoughts:

## Preparation:

I hope you grasped how much time I spent getting to our working drawing! Probably about 10 hours. The design is the most important thing, carrying not-so-hot carving—but not vice versa. You mustn't sell yourself short in any design you create. Research, photos, sketches, trial designs, iterations—keep at it until you can go no further. Put your design aside and come back later to see it fresh.

### **Pierced Carving Design:**

Always think of your wood, it's strength. This consideration was one of the main reasons this design took so long to work out.

In the design notice how I run the long wood fibres along elements to gain that strength. Short fibres ('short grain') are very vulnerable to breaking, both while you are carving and during the carving's life.

Where that can't be avoided, or where long grain elements nevertheless would seem too weak, I've done what carvers call 'tying'; I tied one weak element to a stronger one for support.

### **Space:**

In priced relief carving, far more so than ordinary relief carving, the space around the forms—'negative form' if you will—is as important as the forms themselves.

There's a balance, a living balance, between space and form. The space is active. It will matter on what you hang the carving.

The frame encloses the flowers, gives you a window through which to look. The petals break the frame, a fullness that seems to burst out. The bottom of the frame is wider, implying the water level (which I carved in my original).

There are no straight lines within the carving itself. Convex and concave surfaces. All making for interest.

### **Stylization:**

What does this mean? For us it means representing or designing something—our yellow flag iris—with wood and woodcarving in mind, rather than nature. The real flower has very thin petals; we go more for fooling the eye. It's all far more complicated, in the stamens for instance; we simplify. It's wood, not clay. And so on.

The story goes: Matisse had buyer in to view his paintings.

The buyer says, 'Monsieur. That lady's legs are too long!'

Matisse replies, 'Monsieur. That is not a lady. That is a painting.'

Probably not Matisse. Could have been made up! But it's a great point to think about.

### **Wood:**

I'm using Limewood (*Tilia* sp), which turned a lovely golden yellow with waxing. A light coloured wood always shows off the balance of light and shadow best. Basswood is an alternative as is Maple and Sycamore though these woods are physically a lot harder to work.

Very fortunately I had a wide piece of wood. Indeed, it was seeing the wood that made me go for the size of the project. Impact! Big looks good and those small parts are of course more substantial than if the whole thing was smaller.

However, the chances are you won't have a single piece that size so you'll need to glue up. And that's fine; most of the wood is removed anyway and if you do your best to match the figuring the joints should be unobtrusive. Remember to alternate the annual rings across the board. Don't put a joint down the middle—always stands out—and an odd number of joints will be better than even—just one of those things.

### **Tools:**

Mostly general quite common carving tools. I'm sure there are a lot of substitutions you could make.

- Gouge #3 x 1/4, 1/2, 3/4in. (6, 14, 20mm)
- Gouge #4 x 1/4in. (6mm)
- Gouge #5 x 5/8in. (16mm)
- Gouge #6 x 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, 1in. (6, 14, 20, 25mm)
- Gouge #8 x 1in. (25mm)
- Gouge #9 x 1/4, 1/2in. (6, 14mm)
- Gouge #10 x 3/8, 1/2, 3/4in. (10, 14, 20mm)
- Shortbent Gouge #3 x 1/4, 3/8, 1/2in. (6, 10, 14mm)
- Shortbent Gouge #7 x 1/2in. (14mm)
- Shortbent Gouge #8 x 5/8in. (16mm)
- 60° V tool x, 3/8in. (10mm)
- Skew chisel x, 3/8in. (10mm)
- L & R Shortbent Skew chisels x 1/8in. (3mm) - I can recommend 'Pfeil Spoon Bent Tools', cut 2al (left) and 2ar (right) x 3mm.

### **Other tools:**

Marking Gauge, carving knife, calipers; template material; scratch stock (make); carving gloves (see WW.tv).

### **Working Drawing:**

Obviously I can't give you a full size drawing in this PDF download! What I suggest is you print the next page out and enlarge parts with your scanner/printer as I did, assuming you have one, as I did. If you don't have an enlarging scanner, then... Old school! Draw a grid over the printout and a matching grid on your bigger, final size piece of paper. Then enlarge square to square with a pencil. You don't have to be too exact but make sure you have good flowing lines. This is the one you see in the video. Enlarge to the dimensions below and the tools in the list should fit as they did for me.

### **Dimensions**

My carving was 23in (585mm) high x 17in (430mm) across x 1.5in (38mm) thick.

# Yellow Flag Iris Pierced Relief : Working Drawing by Chris Pye

