



Woodcarving

Wood is a tactile and versatile modelling material, carving into wood is a tradition that dates back to the very dawn of man.

Many of the skills developed for woodcarving are transferable to other carving, engraving and modelling in other materials such as stone, clay, metals, waxes and plastics.

Alec Tiranti have been supplying specialist tools to sculptors, artisans and specialists for around 130 years.

Our tools have been developed and selected for their quality and practicality, matching operators to tools as diverse as knives and chisels, to workbenches and vices.

Good tools are an important choice for any craftsman and the way a tools fits into the hand greatly influences the finished piece.

Choosing tools is a very personal issue in any craftsman's mind, the choice of tool, size, shape and weight are all key factors and can in fact have as great an influence as the type of wood being carved.

From basic starter to comprehensive sets of tools for the experienced carver Tiranti can also offer informed advice and assistance too.

Chisels come in three basic types, straight, gouge and fishtail but we also offer combination tools which give the carver properties of two or three tools in one.

Straight chisels are just that, a straight blade to cut a parallel cut across a cutting face, we also offer a Skew which allows cutting into a corner or detail.

Parting chisels are used for cutting through a piece, most typically on a lathe and allow a turned piece to be cut off neatly, these chisels are typically shaped with either a 60 or 75 degree vee.

Gouge chisels are for cutting deep into a shape typically for cutting shaped detail like flower petals or rosettes.

These tools can also be used for turning work for making shaped cuts.

Fishtail chisels are wider at the tip and then slim back towards the handle (hence the name), these chisels are ideal for shaping across a wider surface, the profile prevents the edges of the tip from "digging in" to the workpiece.

Backbends and Salmon bends are designed to assist with carving complicated relief shapes such as inward and outward curves.

Cabinet makers, joiners, model makers, pattern makers, sculptors, all of them require different profiles, types of blade to produce a desired shape, contrast or effect and Tiranti can provide all of these.

Choosing Tools is a very personal issue, it is best done by comparing tools against each other and "in person" rather than trying to choose from a catalogue or web page – although experienced woodcarvers have an advantage of course.

Issues such as handle size, balance point, blade length and general tool weight all influence choosing a tool that best suits your hand.



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The design of chisels and their handles is a definite science – some prefer larger handles, some prefer a more compact design.

Handles are often an influence to carvers and joiners in particular – too large a handle can impede the flow of a cutting stroke, I have heard many carvers say that when a handle is too large “it prevents me from following a tight line or curve!”

There are two types of handle offered by Stubai – the simple octagonal handle is designed to fit the palm of the hand as naturally as possible, while at the same time allowing even small hands to enclose and grip the handle correctly.

The “Mallet Head” wood chisel handles are larger and have a metal collar just below the striking face of the handle.

The larger diameter allows the tool to be better positioned and balanced, the overall length is increased to allow the handle to be struck with a mallet but also protect the hand.

The metal collar prevents the handle from splitting and also transfers the mallet blow down the handle and onto the tool in a uniform flow.

The chisel blade and shank are also altered to suit application, tools designed for hand use are typically slimmer and lighter in design, tools for use with a striking tool are broader and heavier to suit the percussion blows associated with heavier work.

Sharpening:

Stubai chisels and knives are sharpened at the factory to a “standard grade” – this is not considered “a finished grade”, the tools need to be finish sharpened before use.

The issue with “finished grade” sharpening is that the tools will always degrade slightly in storage and transport, so a customer is expected to give a tool a final finishing.

This is more important with the larger tools – smaller tools though should also be given a gentle rub with a stone or strop to clean any imperfections caused in transit or storage – the same is true each time you use a tool as well.

Tools should ideally be kept clean and oiled when not in use, then given a gentle sharpening prior to and regularly during use.

A tool with a dull edge is more likely to cause issues than a properly honed tool.

To use a stone it is best to oil the stone and move the tool over the surface of the stone (rather than the stone over the tool), the tool should be positioned at the correct angle, so the cutting edge sits evenly across the face of the stone and then rubbed over the stone in a “figure 8 pattern” – the backside of the tools should similarly “cleaned” to remove any roughness.



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Once the tool has been sharpened on the stone, it can then be honed using a strop. The strop is typically leather, with a layer of carborundum “dressing” applied. The method of using a strop is normally done dry – but some prefer to use oil or water (it is a personal thing). Stropping a tool is a different method, the tool should be run back and forth slowly and evenly each side against the strop on a flat and level surface – NEVER use short sharp movement. Stropping is usually the method used while using a chisel or knife, the strop maintains an edge and prolongs the tools long term use.

Never sharpen a chisel or knife on a power tool (angle grinder or bench grinder), it is too easy to overheat the tip of the tool.

Overheating the tool tip will cause the metal to either soften or harden (depending on the heat level), it also alters the character of the tool.

Tool steels are all heat treated – this heat treatment has to be cared for, sometimes it is necessary to re-heat treat the tool from time to time.

Using a tool correctly:

Tools should be used with minimum effort – don’t force a tool to cut too deeply, instead make repeated light passes across the same area.

If the tool does get stuck while making a cut – gently tap the tool handle from either side of the tool shaft – DO NOT try to tug, pull or force the tool otherwise the tool tip will get damaged or even snap the shaft altogether.

Damaged tool tips are almost ALWAYS caused by mistreatment.

Damaged handles can be replaced quite easily, although the Mallet head type handles require specialist attention to ensure the handles are fitted correctly but fitting the standard handles can be done quite easily using only basic tools and equipment.

We keep the standard Stubai octagonal hand chisel handles in stock at Tiranti, or we can fit them for you.

We would recommend applying a little epoxy adhesive to the hasp before knocking the handle onto the hasp.

We would recommend re-sharpening the tool after fitting the replacement handle.

Choosing Chip Knives depends upon application the shape of the handle and blade influence the suitability of a tool to the individual job in hand – Straight Knives are best suited to working along an outer working line, Double Edge Knives for larger detail profiles, these can cut in either direction. Slim, Bent and Skew Knives are for finer detail and working into small confined areas.

We offer Chip Knives from both Stubai and Flexcut each offer different blade shapes but the Flexcut range is a little wider and more varied.



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Draw Knives have a two handled blade for paring down long flat or curved sections like furniture legs and wheelspokes.

These knives have the advantage that the pulling force is shared evenly however it is also possible for the knife to get stuck because of the additional force being applied.

If the knife gets stuck it is important to reverse the blade instead of trying to force it up or down to release it.

Palm Chisels are smaller ball shaped handles typically between 3 and 12 mm across the blade face, designed for small/medium duty hand carving (no mallets).

At Alec Tiranti we offer a range of these smaller hand chisels from both Henry Taylor and Flexcut. Especially ideal for woodblock cutting and ultra fine detail carving, these small chisels allow very high degrees of tool control.

Flexcut tools are also available with a range of tools with an interchangeable handle, this way a pair of handles can be shared across several chisels – ideal for working away from “home”.

Cabinet Scrapers are a larger slim profiled blade to finish large flat areas prior to veneering – these scrapers are ideally suited to cleaning poorly surfaced timbers.

Adzes are a heavy duty carving tool designed to rough out larger areas, available with both flat and curved “gouge” cutting faces Adze’s have a long handle and are designed to be swung into and through cutting plane, rather more like an axe.

The cutting faces are extremely sharp and care has to be taken to prevent personal injury.

Alec Tiranti Ltd. keep a wide range of knives, scrapers, chisels and other woodcarving tools in stock at both our Thatcham and Warren St shops.

If you need any more help our staff at both Thatcham (01635 587 430) and London (0207 380 0808) are always able to offer help and advice.