

Painting Softly

The WOOD BEE CARVER applies a soft painted finish on his carvings using a combination of artist oil paint and boiled linseed oil. This painting method is adapted from a method developed by the late John Heatwole, a woodcarver from Virginia who wrote an article entitled "Painted Carvings" in the March/April 1987 issue of *Fine Woodworking*.

Boiled Linseed Oil contains a chemical dryer that allows the mixture with artist oil paints when applied to a wood carving to dry within a few days. The genius of this method is to apply a base coat over the entire carving if it is a small carving or if it is a large carving, apply the base coat over sections that are to be painted in sequence. The base coat is a combination of *RAW SIENNA* and *BOILED LINSEED OIL* mixed thoroughly together until it looks like honey in color and a thin consistency of honey.

The amount of each is a trial and error experiment; for example, combine two table spoons of Boiled Linseed Oil and a 3/4 inch strip of Raw Sienna squeezed out of the tube of artist oil paint. Mix with a palette knife by squashing the paint into the boiled linseed oil until all the lumps are squashed away. Then take a small stiff bristled artist paint brush to mix the mixture together into a finer consistency. If too thin, add a little more Raw Sienna oil paint from the tube or if not thin enough, add a few drops of Boiled Linseed Oil and mix thoroughly. This suggested amount will cover a carving three inches wide and twelve inches tall or it will cover six smaller carvings which once again is simply trial and error.



(Photo contains carving ready to be painted, Boiled Linseed Oil, Raw Sienna in tube, brushes and mixture of Raw Sienna and Boiled Linseed Oil with pallet knife in mixing tray.)

Once the mixture is ready to apply to the carving, this base coat is brushed on very liberally covering the entire carving. Let stand a few minutes and then blot off the excess oil mixture with a Kleenex tissue. **Since Boiled Linseed Oil in rags or paper tissue can spontaneously combust, dispose of the blotting paper into a can of water with a lid.** Use a small artist brush to dry brush in the crevices to remove the excess base coat mixture.



(Photo contains base coat of Raw Sienna and Boiled Linseed Oil applied to half of basswood carving for comparison between base coat and bare wood.)

Clean brushes in mineral spirits between applications wiping them with a Kleenex tissue. While the base coat is still wet, mix up the first primary color for the hair and beard in our example. Squeeze a very small dab of Zinc White or Mixing White onto a plastic lid followed by a few drops of Boiled Linseed Oil and mix thoroughly with a palette knife. This mixture needs to be very thin offering a translucent color that when applied on top of the Raw Sienna base coat it allows the grain of the wood to show through. In other words, this style of painting is more a staining of color than an opaque finish of color.

Apply the Zinc White or Mixing White and Boiled Linseed Oil mixture with a fine artist brush like a 2/0 or 18/0 liner sable brush to flow the paint from the brush onto the wood rather than scrubbing back and forth with the brush. With a liner brush one can drag the bristles along the edge where the hair meets the head and face and the beard's edge alongside the shirt without painting the neighboring areas.



(Photo contains container of mineral spirit for cleaning of brush, carving covered with base coat, mixture of White and BLO on plastic lid pallet, pallet knife and brushes.)

Working from head to toe, next comes the pipe which is painted/stained with a Burnt Sienna and Boiled Linseed Oil thinned and the pipe ashes are a Gray or White and Black paint mixed with Boiled Linseed Oil. Always keep in mind a thin or translucent stain is what we are after.

Paint the knife blade with the Gray paint and the knife handle with the Burnt Sienna paint. The small Santa carving is stained with Burnt Umber mixed with Boiled Linseed Oil to give the appearance of it being wood. The shirt is painted with Cadmium Red Deep Hue and Burnt Sienna mixed with Boiled Linseed Oil. The bib overalls are painted with Sap Green and Burnt Umber mixed with Boiled Linseed Oil.



(Photo contains Santa ready to have his trousers painted with Sap Green, Burnt Umber and BLO mixture in the plastic lid pallet.)

On those areas with more painted surface, the shirt and overalls, after the paint is applied, take a small flat bristle brush and dry brush off the excess paint that pools in low areas which at the same time will spread the color evenly in a softening manner. The tree trunk and the shoes are painted with Ivory Black oil paint mixed with Boiled Linseed Oil.



The face and hands receive only the Raw Sienna base coat for the effect of showing that this carving is of wood. Since this is more staining rather than painting, there is no attempt to paint in shadows or highlights. Once paint is dry a coat of Deft is applied to finish.

There are two advantages of the base coat of Raw Sienna and Boiled Linseed Oil, one being that it creates a patina or antiquing from the inside out and second, the base coat has already begun to soak into the wood so that when the next color is added on top of the base coat there is very little bleeding of colors into each other.

Painting one's carvings, like every other aspect of the carving experience, is a *trial and error method of learning by doing*, trying this and then trying that to see what works best. The one rule we go by is, "The only right way is if it works for you."

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