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ALPHABETS



FOR
THE

LEATHER
CRAFTER



THE STORY OF LEATHER

Leather is one of mankind's oldest natural resources; it's a foremost gift to man from Mother Nature.

Without it man might not have survived. There is vivid evidence of its outstanding importance dating back across the centuries of civilization — back beyond the era of domination of the Romans. Modern archaeology has uncovered leather articles and artifacts in an excellent state of preservation from cultures dating back over 33 centuries.

Man's dependency and appreciation of leather coupled with his instinctive drive to create beauty led him to use leather as a medium of utility and adornment. From the fashioning of crude protective footwear to the creation of unbelievably beautiful articles, human beings have reaped a great harvest of benefit and pleasure from leather.

Quality of genuine leather is not determined by surface appearance alone. More important to the finished product is the inner structure of the leather. Animals exposed to radical changes in weather and adverse environment develop inner structural strength and consistency.

The natural range markings on the surface of leather are the best proof that it is real leather. A large part of the pride and fulfillment we derive from carving and stamping leather comes from our utilization of the natural markings into interesting elements of the design.

As a modern leather worker you derive pleasure and profit from a rich heritage. No other activity offers the advantages and creative fulfillment available through leather work.

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ALPHABETS

**WITH
3
NEW
STYLES**

FOR THE

LEATHER GRAFTER



DISTRIBUTED BY:
TANDY LEATHER FACTORY
Fort Worth, TX 76105
www.tandy Leather Factory.com

Tooling by Tony Laier. Alphabet selection by
Gene Nolan and Tony Laier.

INTRODUCTION TO LEATHERWORK

Within the pages of this book, you'll find an "open sesame" to a fascinating art that dates back to prehistoric man. . .the art of decorating leather. It can be your "open sesame" to an enjoyable lifetime hobby. . .a rewarding, satisfying career!

Archaeologists have found leather pieces. . .partially preserved leather cloaks and flagons scattered wherever ancient man roamed.

Beautifully decorated leather thongs have been unearthed from the tombs of Egypt. And the prized shields worn by Roman centurions were of decorated leather.

Indeed, if you were to open the Bible to the Book of Genesis, Chapter III, Verse 21, you would find the first literary reference to leather: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skin and clothed them."

Eons ago, man the hunter, found the animals he killed for food could provide him and his family with sandals and garments by simply curing and fashioning the skins.

From the hides the cavemen used for clothing to the pressurized leather suits worn by today's spacemen, and the gauntlets worn by nuclear scientists to protect their hands from burns, leather has fulfilled the need

For centuries, leather has continued to serve mankind. During the Middle Ages however, only the wealthy could afford boots, capes, saddles, decorated chairs, etc. made of leather. Leather workmanship was limited to a very narrow section of society. A secretive lot, Leather Guildsmen closely guarded knowledge of their art which they handed down from father to son.

When Cortez conquered Mexico in the early 16th Century, leather artistry came boldly into the New World.

The Conquistadores brought horses and with them came the need for saddles and other horse gear. Spain had long been a leader in leather artistry and the skilled craftsmen who came over to the New Land coupled their vast knowledge with the inspiration they gleaned from the beautiful floral patterns to be found all about them. Thus came the transition from basic geometric designs dating back to medieval times to the floral patterns of modern artistry.

Today, anyone can enjoy leatherwork, the art of creating beautiful and useful articles of leather.

Leather is flexible. . .fun to work with. Learn to know leather and how to use a few basic tools, and you'll soon enjoy a whole new fascinating world of exciting satisfying leisure time activity. One project leads to another. . .and you learn how to become more proficient while you enjoy the stimulating challenge and satisfaction of seeing and using your finished items.

Enjoy leatherwork as a hobby. . .enjoy it as a rewarding, satisfying career!

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PREFACE TO LEATHERWORK

Leather is unique. . .different than any cloth put together by man. . .for it is the actual skin of an animal that grew as the animal grew. To change this skin into leather, the skin must be tanned. Various methods of tanning produce leather for different purposes.

Leather for CARVING must be of "vegetable" tannage. This tannage absorbs moisture readily. . .allowing you to mold and form the leather easily. . .and carve, stamp and dye or add high gloss to your leather projects. The skins of bovine animals (cows, oxen, etc.) provide most of the leather for Carving. This leather is commonly called "STRAP" leather.

The complete hide of the animal is known as a skin. It may be left whole or cut into sections: sides, bellies and backs.

SIDES and SKINS, usually sold by the square foot, are measured by special machines at the tanneries. The number of square feet is usually marked on the underside of the hide with a crayon or chalk. Fractions of a foot are always in FOURTHS (For example: $12^1 = 12\frac{1}{4}$ sq. ft.; $12^2 = 12\frac{2}{4}$ sq. ft.; $12^3 = 12\frac{3}{4}$ sq. ft.)



A skin is a full hide as it comes from the animal. Smaller animals (calf, goat, sheep, pig) are usually tanned as a skin or full hide.

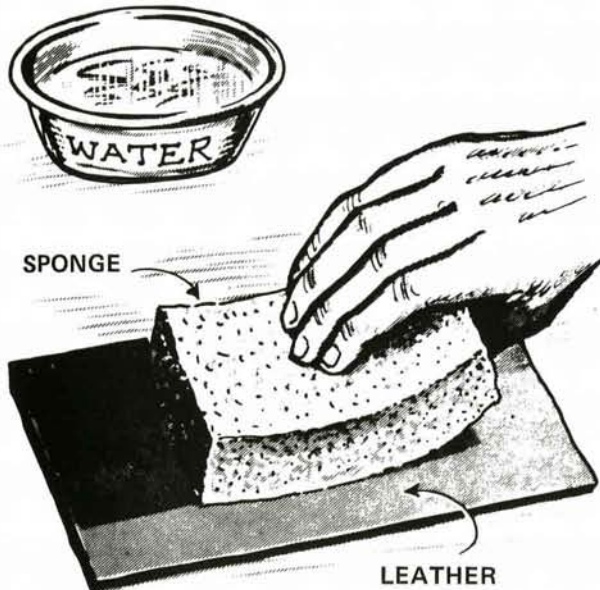


For easier handling during tanning, large animal hides are usually cut in half at the backbone. Thus, a side of leather is just that! It is one side or one half of a hide.

PREPARING THE LEATHER FOR CARVING

Before you can carve leather you have to moisten it. You can use water or a commercial preparation. When you wet the leather the fibers will swell and soften. Vegetable tanned leather when properly moistened, is like modeling clay. You can mold it . . . model and shape it.

The process of moistening the leather is known as CASING. This is accomplished by simply rubbing a DAMP (not soaking wet) sponge over the flesh side as evenly as possible. Then, turn the leather over and dampen the grain side (carving surface). (Note: When working with thinner leather, it is a good idea to adhere your leather to cardboard or heavy wrapping paper. In this situation you would only dampen the grain side.) When the leather begins to return to its natural color, begin carving.



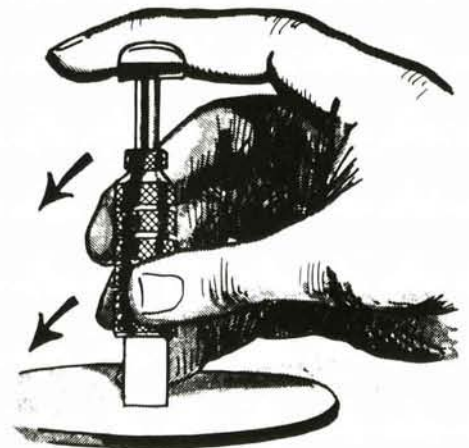
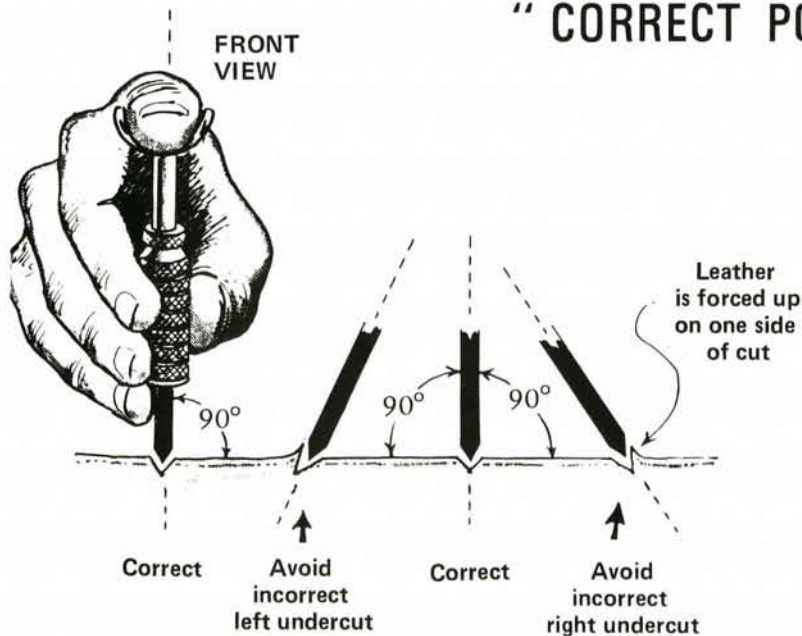
The best way to achieve the proper moisture content is through practice. Your sharp swivel knife blade will cut easily and smoothly and your stamping tools will imprint clearly and firmly into the leather ONLY when you have moistened the leather to the proper degree. A good way to check the moisture content as you are carving and stamping is to place the leather against your cheek. If it feels cool, the moisture content is good. If there is no coolness, the leather is too dry. If some areas begin to dry as you are working, wipe your sponge over these areas to maintain the proper moisture content.

If your leather is too wet when you make the cut, the edges of the cut will look swollen. If properly cased the cut will be sharp and smooth.

DO NOT let any metal touch the moist leather or it will leave a stain which will be almost impossible to remove. (Plated metals are excluded.)

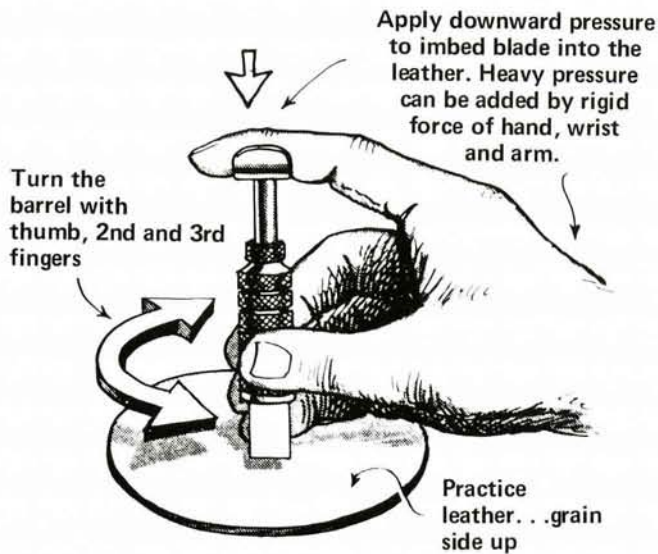
HOW TO HOLD THE SWIVEL KNIFE

" CORRECT POSITIONS "

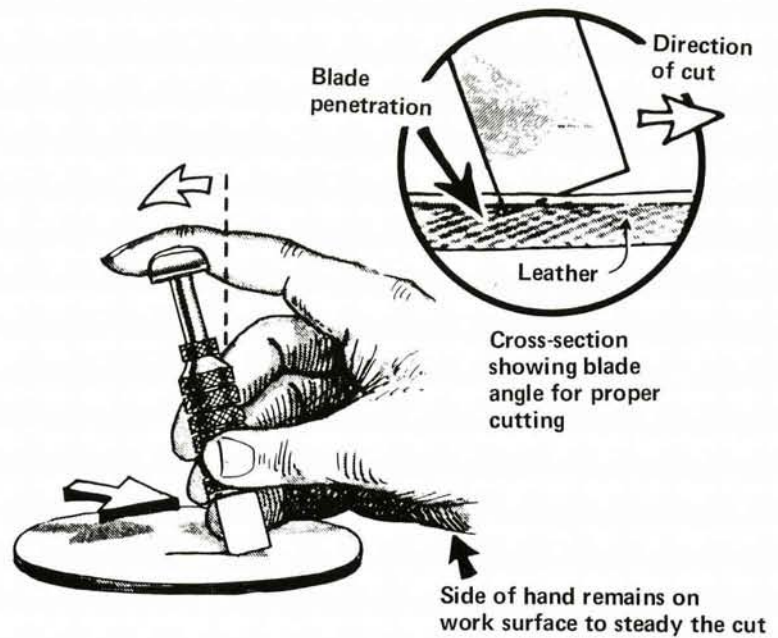


Place your index finger in the yoke and your thumb at the lower part of the barrel of the swivel knife. Next place your little finger against the side of the blade and 2nd and 3rd fingers on the other side of the barrel as shown. Now move the index finger forward till the first joint rests in the yoke. Tilt the knife slightly forward and you are ready to start your cut.

HOW TO USE YOUR SWIVEL KNIFE

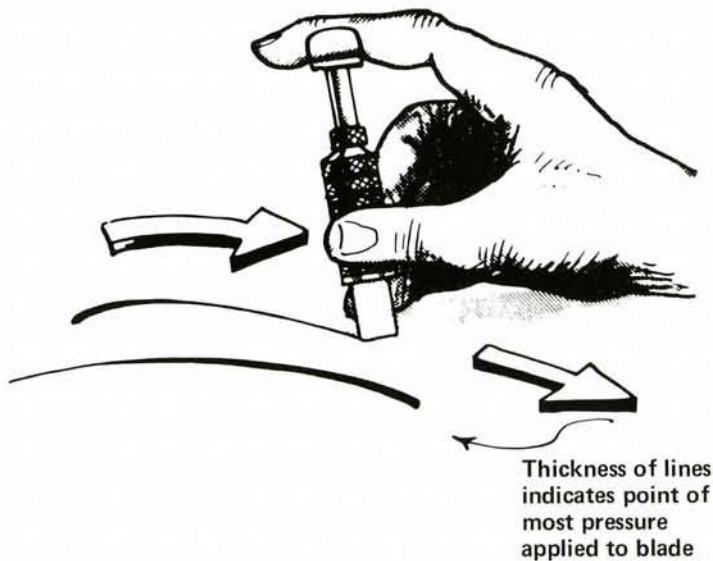


The swivel knife is the most important tool in leather carving. If you have a bad cut with the swivel knife, the out-come of your tooling will also be bad. So follow the pictures shown here and practice your cutting on many pieces of scrap leather until you get the feel of it. Again be sure your leather has the right dampness.

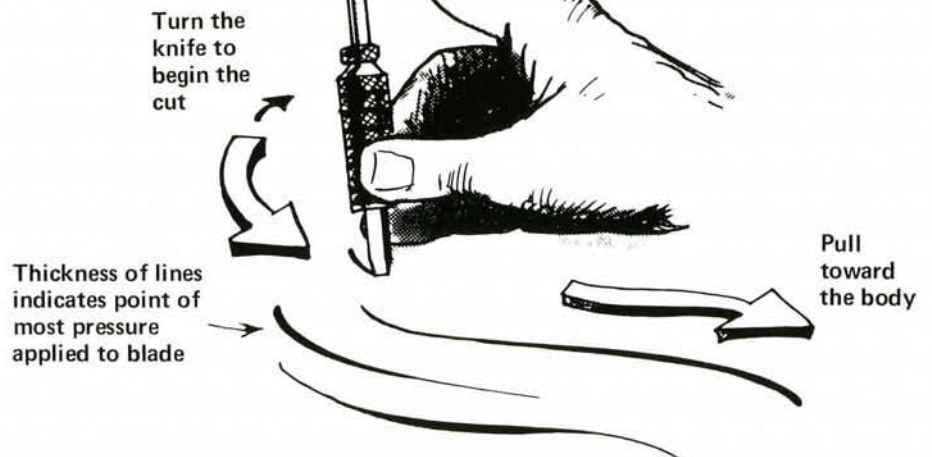


Do not place the blade edge on a hard surface, like metal, as you will damage the cutting edge.

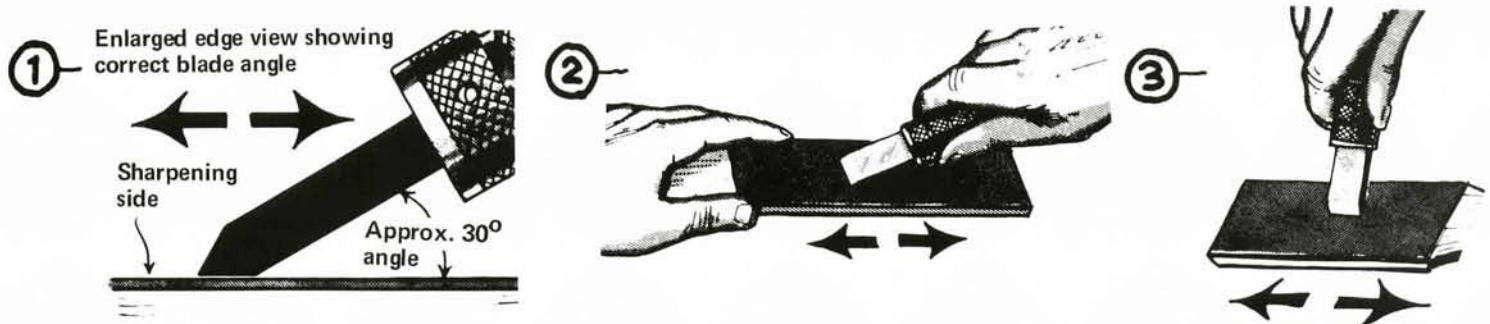
Once you have learned how to master the control of the swivel knife you will find great rewards in your leather carving. To achieve control of your swivel knife it takes a lot of concentrated practice and being able to relax in doing this. Don't try too hard but let the knife flow effortlessly. Do not be afraid of cutting through the leather, the deeper the cut, the more your carving will stand out. The depth of your cut should be one half the thickness of the leather.



Use your free hand to hold and turn the leather so you are always pulling the knife toward the body. Practice cutting freely as hesitation makes ragged cuts.



HOW TO SHARPEN THE SWIVEL KNIFE



Due to the importance the Swivel Knife plays in leather carving, it is also very important to keep it sharp and well polished.

There are two generally accepted methods of sharpening the blade. A back and forth motion (fig. 2) or a left to right motion (fig. 3). Use the method that works best for you.

No matter which method you use, it is very important to maintain a 30° angle on the blade (fig. 1). If you find this difficult to do by hand and eye, a sharpening kit can be purchased that will hold the blade at the proper angle.

All sharpening should be done on a fine oil stone.

The final step is stropping (polishing). This can be done on a piece of leather impregnated with jewelers rouge. Stropping the blade polishes the sides and keeps the blade cutting smoothly, reducing "drag". Hold the knife at the same angle as you did for sharpening and pull the knife in one direction only. Polish both sides. NEVER push the blade when stropping; this destroys the fine cutting edge. Strop the blade often as you work to keep it cutting smoothly with no drag.

RIGHT

Cutting edge

Cutting edge

WRONG

Cutting edge

Cutting edge

SWIVEL KNIFE CUTTING EXERCISES

Small arrows indicate the direction of cuts



Cutting Circles

Cutting flowing lines



Cutting Figure Eights

Make cuts with one long, flowing motion. Turn leather when necessary to aid in smooth cutting.

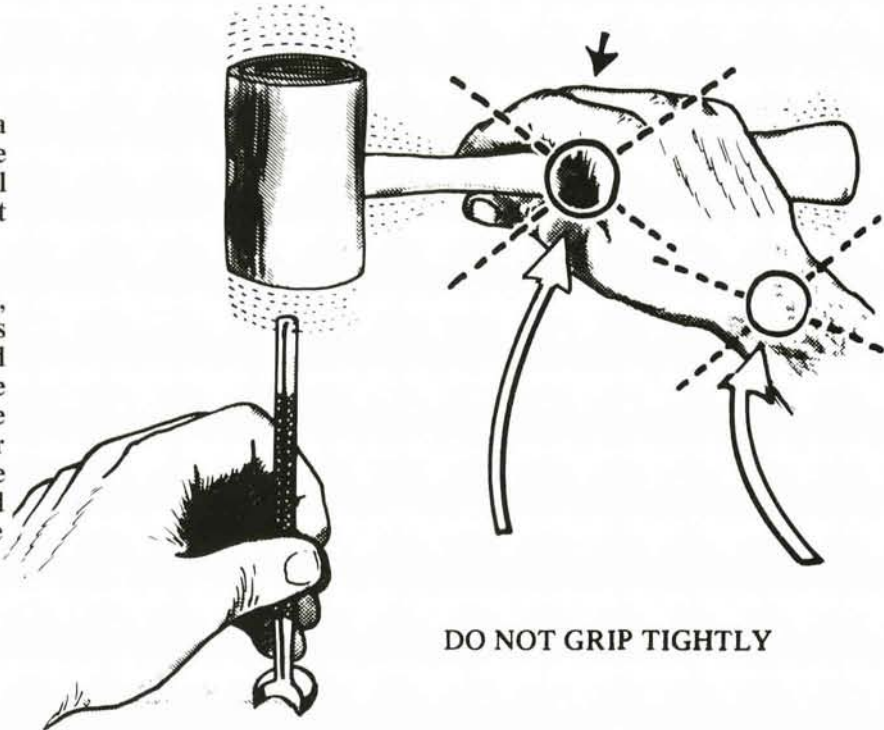
Make cutting strokes towards your body . . . for maximum control. Do not double-cut any of the lines.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR OTHER LEATHER WORKING TOOLS

THE MALLET

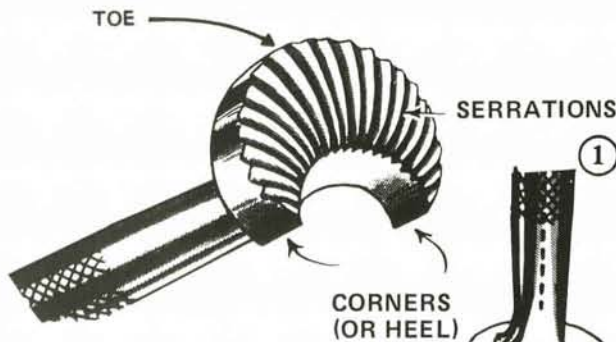
The MALLET is used to strike the top of a stamping tool to make an impression in the leather. CAUTION: Never strike a stamping tool with a metal hammer. This will cause permanent damage to the tool.

Hold the stamping tool in an upright position, then strike with the mallet. The Mallet is held as shown in the illustration. Hold arm and hand steady by resting elbow on work surface. Use fingers as a pivot for light impressions and use the wrist as a pivot for deeper ones. Heavier strokes are made by using arm force. Note, the handle should be held securely, but in a relaxed manner. In any case . . . hold the mallet in the most comfortable position for you.



DO NOT GRIP TIGHTLY

THE CAMOUFLAGE



The CAMOUFLAGE tool's purpose is to texture certain areas of a pattern so as to add to its beauty and the flow of the design. There are many varieties, sizes and shapes of this stamping tool. The drawings show the impressions made by the tool when held in varying positions and struck by the Mallet.



FULL IMPRESSION

This is a full impression of the stamp. Hold the tool straight up and down then strike sharply with the mallet so that all lines are equal in depth.



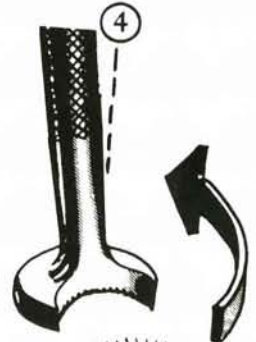
LEFT CORNER IMPRESSION

Lean the tool to the left. Hold securely with hand so tool does not slip when struck with the mallet. Impressions on right side should "fade" to nothing.



RIGHT CORNER IMPRESSION

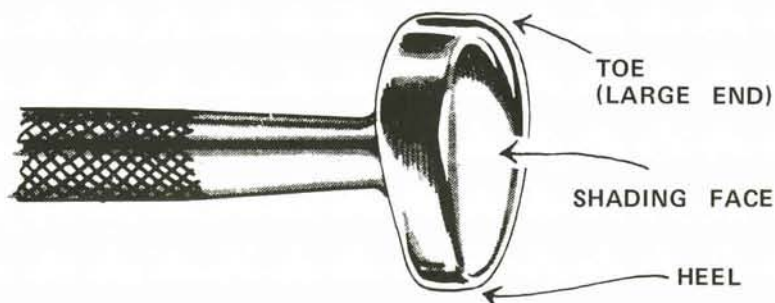
Leaning the tool to the right fades the left corner impressions and firmly imprints the right corner of the tool. Hold tool firmly.



TOE IMPRESSION

Here the tool is tipped forward on the toe so that the corners do not dig in. The tool is usually tapped lightly in this position.

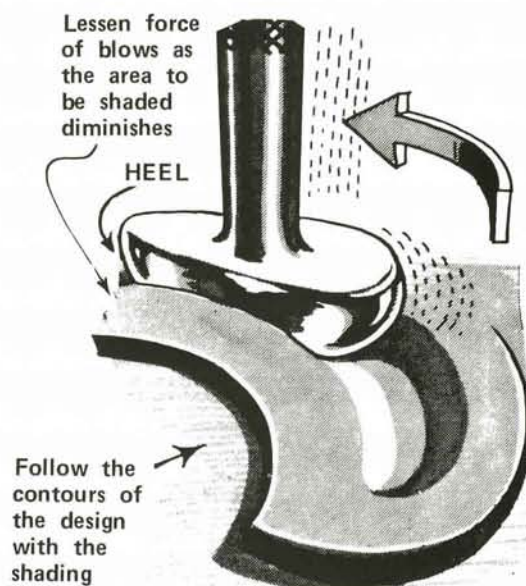
THE PEAR SHADER



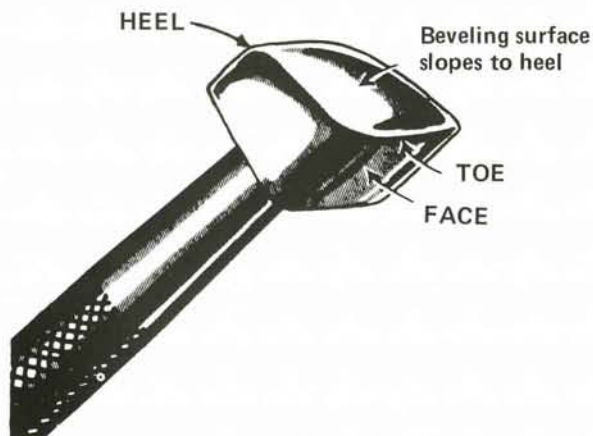
The PEAR SHADER is a pear-shaped tool for making a three dimensional and life-like effect in the design. The tool "shades" or "contours" areas outlined by the swivel knife. The shading face of the tool is rounded on all sides so that sharp or blunt edges will not mar the leather.

The shading should conform to the general shape of the design. The Shader is "walked" to depress areas away from cut lines, shaping flower petals, leaves, etc. in a realistic manner. The shading operation burnishes the leather to a rich, dark contrasting color if the moisture content of the leather is "just right". The depth of the impression and darkness of color are controlled by the force of the stroke of the mallet on the Shader tool top.

"Walking" is done by moving the Shader about 1/16" as it springs up after being hit by the Mallet. Move the tool along the surface of the leather in the direction shading is desired, using less force as the shading fades out. Again keep your hand in a comfortable, relaxed position. Note drawings.



THE BEVELER

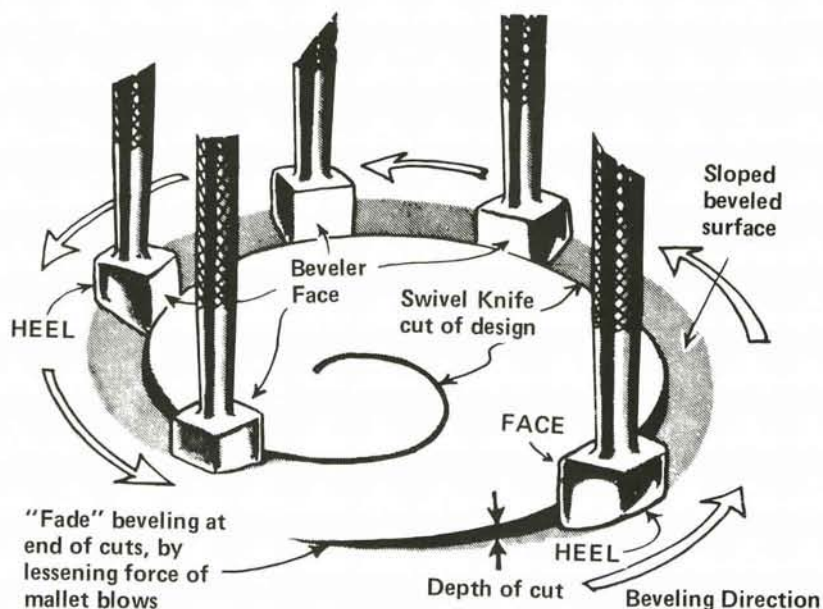


The purpose of the BEVELER is to bring the design into bold relief, creating a three-dimensional effect. Usually only one side of the swivel knife cut is beveled down. This is not a strict rule; some designs require beveling on alternate sides of a cut or sometimes on both sides.

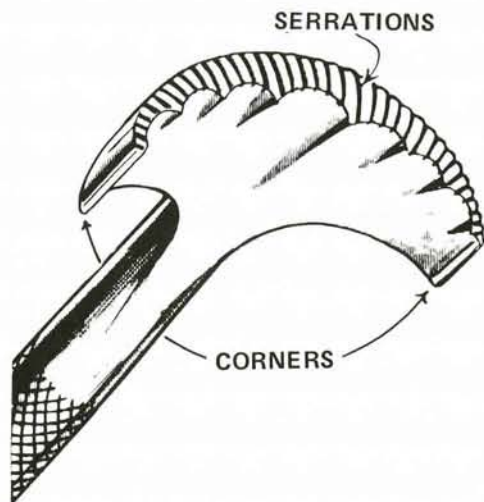
The beveling surface of the Beveler slopes toward the heel. The sloping surface helps the Beveler fade the design toward the background areas. Hold the tool straight up and down, not at a slant.

The face of the Beveler always faces the cut line of the design. For best results keep the face of the beveler toward you. Turn the leather to keep the tool in this position. The toe of the Beveler is placed directly into the cut. When the Beveler is struck with the Mallet, the action compresses the leather on one side of the cut, creating depth.

For smooth beveling, "Walking" the Beveler, as you learned with the Pear Shader, is necessary. "Choppy" beveling is caused by not moving the tool along the surface evenly between each stroke of the Mallet. Practice! Soon you will be beveling with ease!



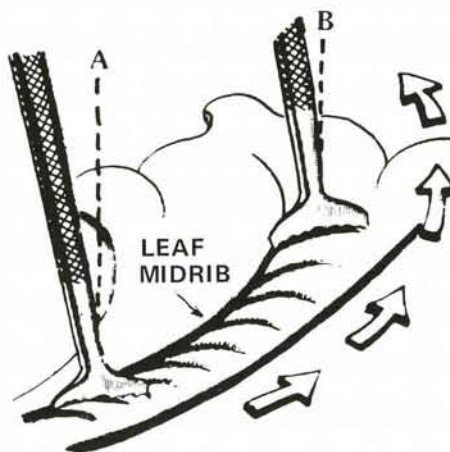
THE VEINER



The Veiner, as the name implies, is used for adding veins to leaves. It may also be used for other decorative and special effects. When the impressions are placed close together, the effect is that of bark or overlapping scales.

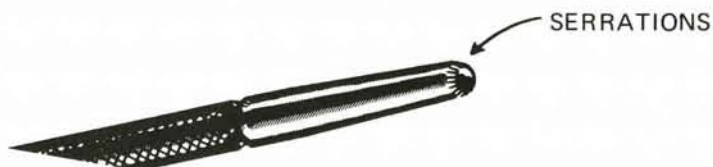


Strike the Veiner squarely with the mallet . . . at left angles to the angle of the tool, as shown



The angle of the handle of the Veiner governs the length of the tool impression. The deepest part of the impressions are made by leaning the tool to a greater degree, as illustrated.

THE SEEDER



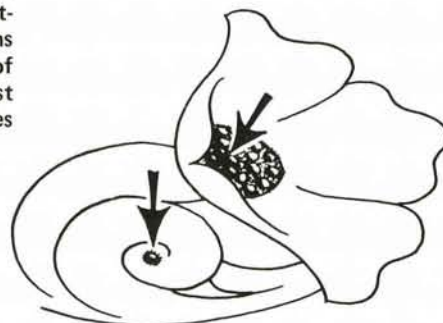
The seeder is used for making seed pods in the flower center. The moisture content of your leather should be almost dry. Hold the tool straight up and down as shown in the drawing and strike it firmly to make a clear, clean impression. **NOTE:** Be careful not to strike the tool too hard because too much force will drive it through the leather. You can learn very quickly just how hard to hit the tool by practicing on a piece of scrap leather.



Begin stamping the outer row of seeds first. Stay within the cut-line and space your impressions as close together as a string of beads. Near end of a row, adjust spacing so that last "seed" does not overlap the flower petal.

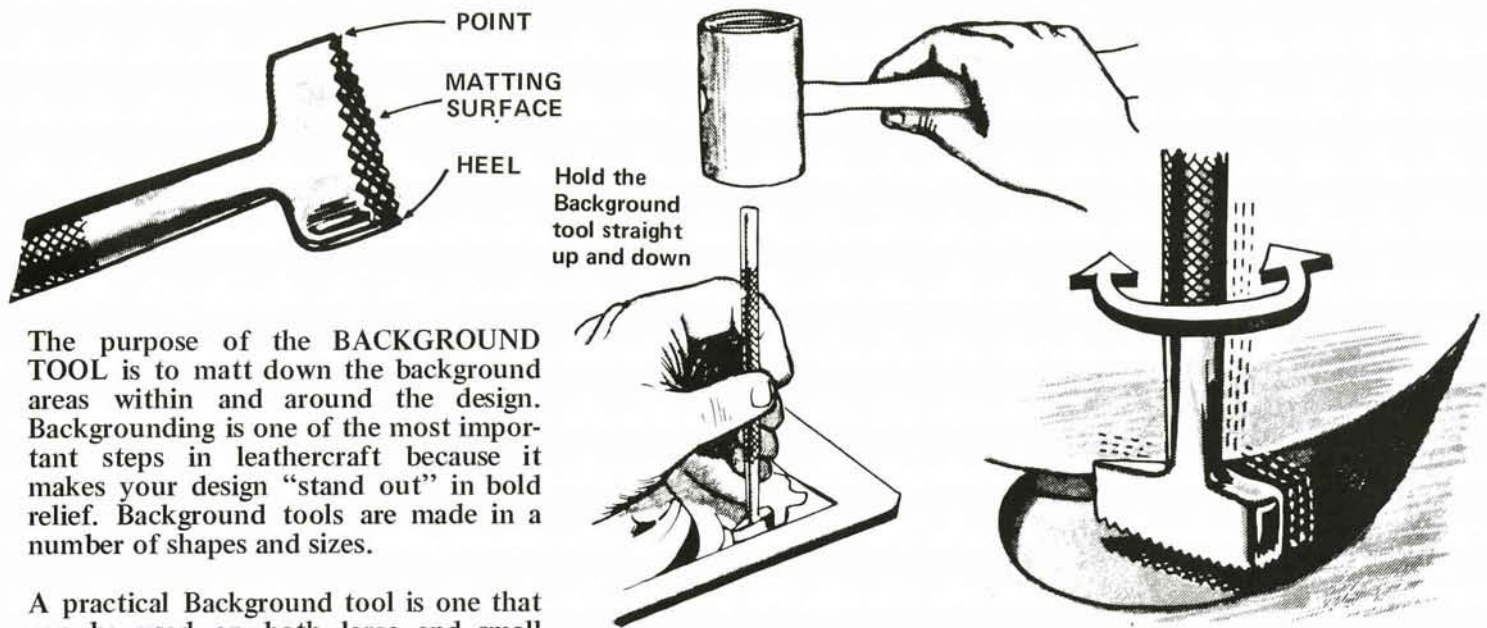


Stamp the second row of seeds as shown, stacking them close to the first row and keeping them as even as possible. Do not overlap.



Fill in remaining area. Stamp seeds carefully. Only the serrated edges should touch or overlap. Place a seed in center of scroll.

THE BACKGROUND TOOL



The purpose of the BACKGROUND TOOL is to matt down the background areas within and around the design. Backgrounding is one of the most important steps in leathercraft because it makes your design "stand out" in bold relief. Background tools are made in a number of shapes and sizes.

A practical Background tool is one that can be used on both large and small areas. A small pointed end is needed for narrow areas.

When the Backgrounder is used to cover large areas, the tool should be "walked", turn the handle in the fingers to prevent a "tool pattern" from forming.

APPLICATION OF LEATHER FINISHES

Leather finishes are applied to protect the leather and preserve the qualities and appearances of genuine leather. Before applying the finisher there are several points which you should know.

1. All tooling of the design must be completed before finisher is applied.
2. Be sure that the surface area is clean and free of any dirt, dust or other matter.
3. Remove all loose wool from sheep wool applicator so that it does not get into finish.
4. Leather finishes must be applied prior to assembly. It is difficult to get a smooth even coat over a curved structural surface.
5. It is best to use a spray finish over all colored or dyed areas that might tend to rub off with a sheepwool applicator.

METHOD OF APPLICATION FOR PLAIN, NATURAL CARVED SURFACES:

Care should be taken in applying finishes to leather to be sure that only a very light coating is applied. For best results pour some finish into a small glass or ceramic container, like a bowl, dish, etc. Soften the sheepwool applicator by rubbing into it a small amount of leather finisher. Dip applicator lightly in the finish and rub briskly on unprinted waste paper to remove excess.

Apply finisher to leather surface with a smooth circular motion. Be sure to cover the entire surface. A very light coat of finish is best. Apply it smoothly and evenly. Do not try to go back over the finished surface after the first coat is applied. If you must, wait till first coat is thoroughly dried and repeat.

IDEAS IN LEATHER COLORING

DYEING THE BACKGROUND

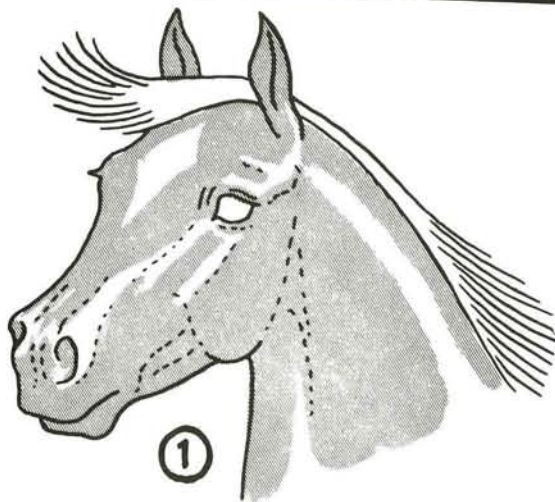


Twist the brush, as you withdraw from touching the bottle, in one simultaneous motion. This releases heavy dye overload and shapes the point. Touch brush lightly to scrap leather with a quick stroke. Any excess dye will immediately flood onto the leather. Move on to the project.

Dyeing experience will teach you to know the "feel" of the amount of dye your brush is carrying, and you'll know when it is "safe" to touch the brush to the project.



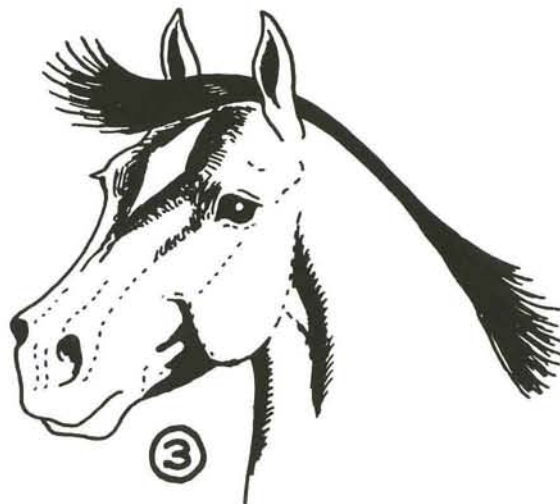
DYEING AND BLENDING TECHNIQUES



Drawing (2) is 1 part dye ... to 5 parts reducer. Due to chemical reactions and tanning agents, often times BROWN dyes will have a greenish cast when applied to leather. Add sufficient amounts of RED to the BROWN to correct this.

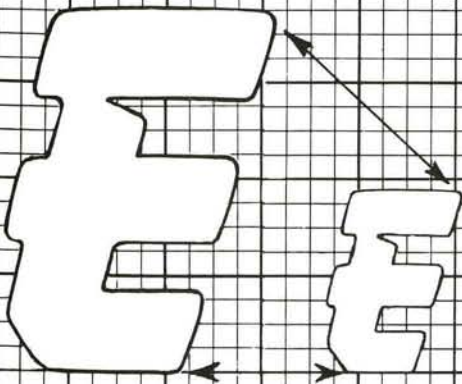


Monochrome Formula for ... Dark Brown (spirit solvent) Drawing (1) is 1 part dye ... to 10 parts reducer. Remember, mix the formulas weakly, more dye can always be added; difficult, though to remove!



Drawing (3) is full str dye. These drawings where each color is ap Use a Dry-Brush technique fading out and blen shadings. For fur information get Al Stohl book HOW TO CO LEATHER.

"ENLARGING OR REDUCING GRAPH"



A B C D E F G

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Z & a b c d e f

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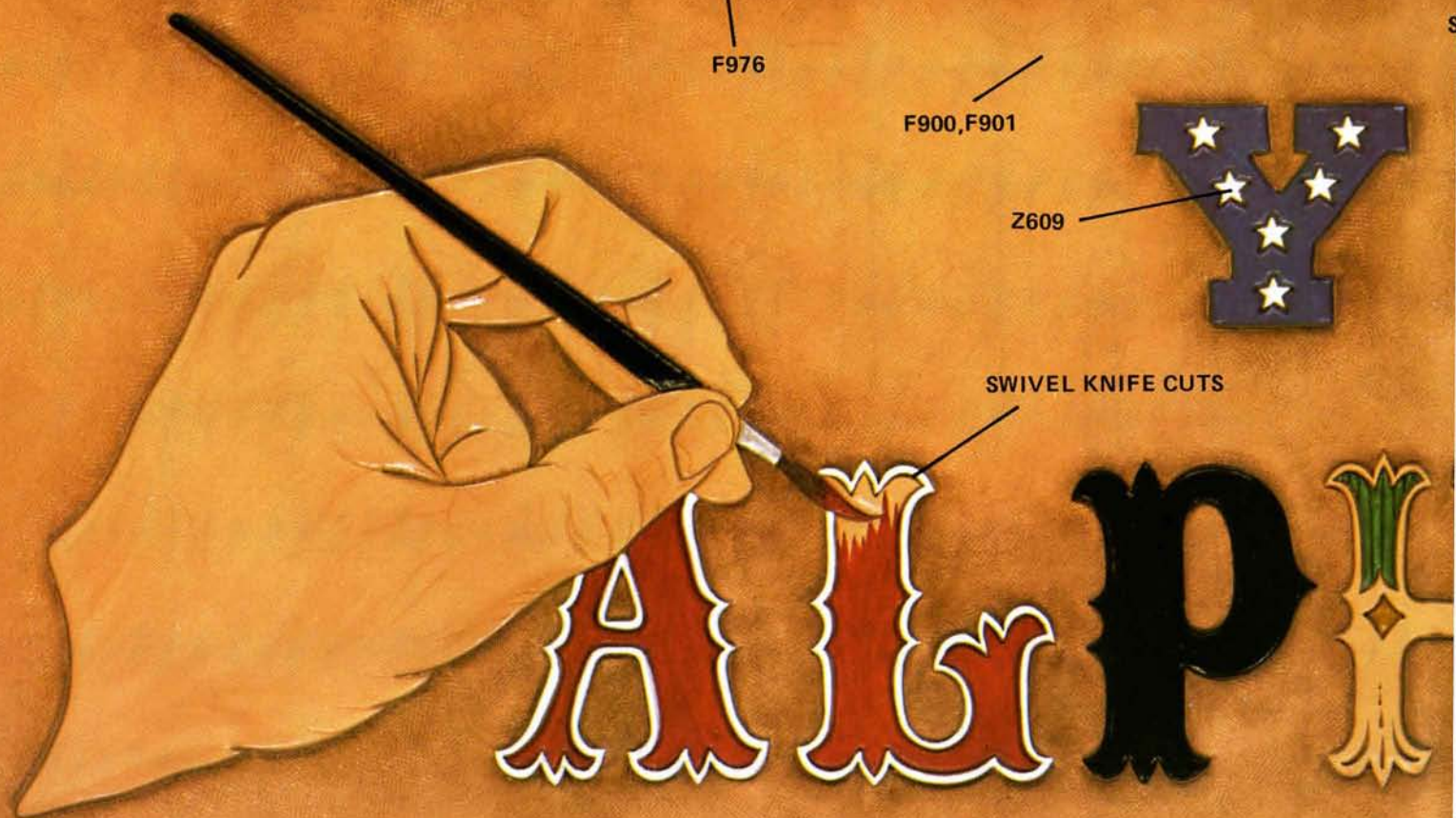
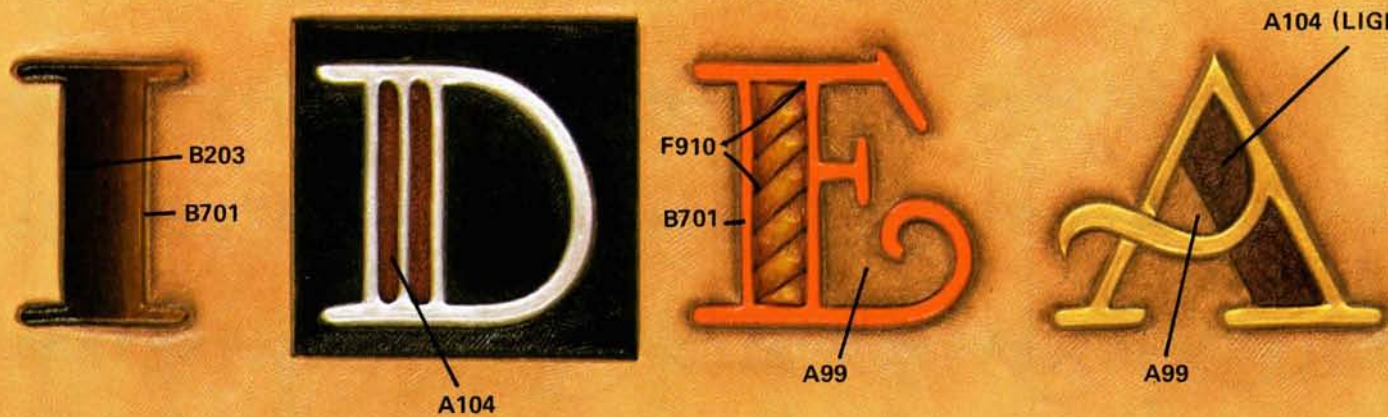
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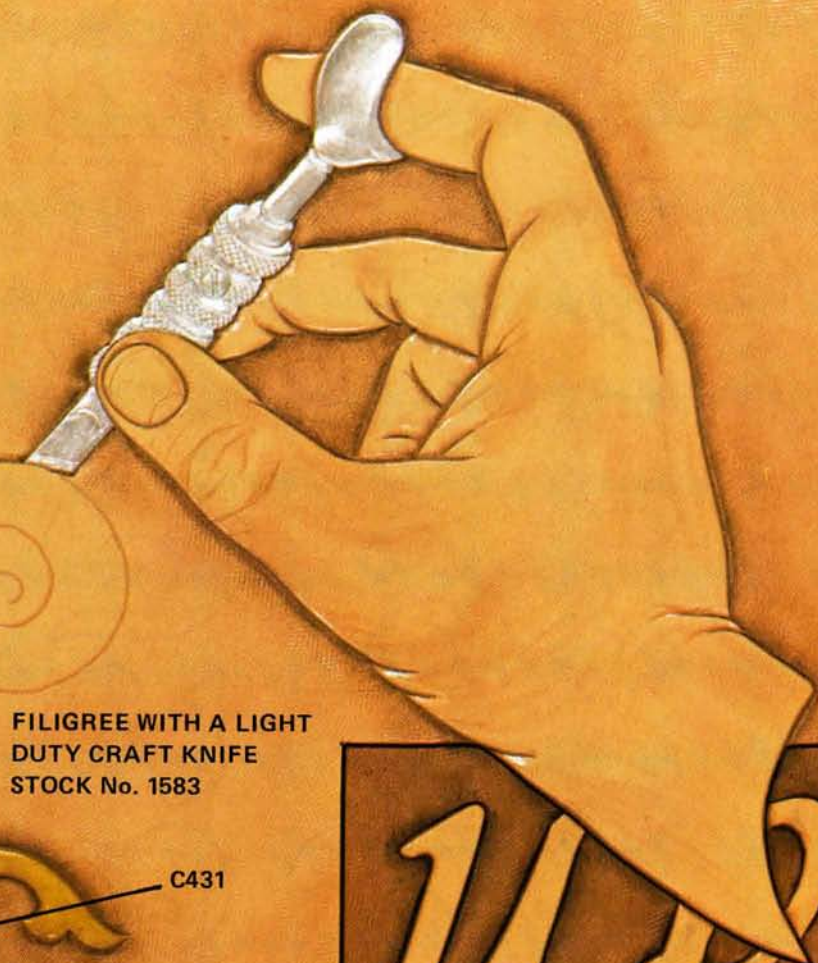
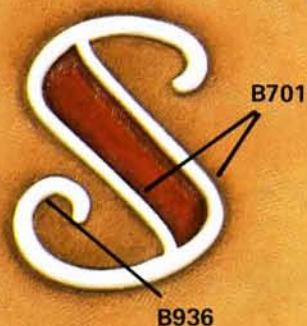
R S T U V

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

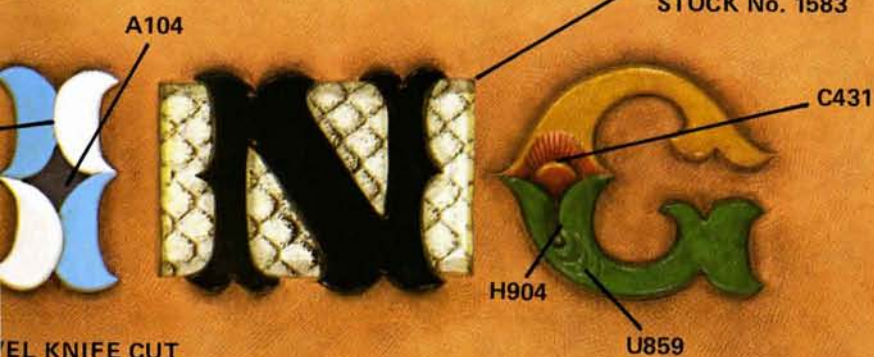
h i j k l m n o p

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FILIGREE WITH A LIGHT
DUTY CRAFT KNIFE
STOCK No. 1583



EL KNIFE CUT



A98



SWIVEL KNIFE CUTS



SWIVEL KNIFE CUTS

A B C D E F G H I J K L
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