

WHICH TO USE ... THE KNIFE OR SAW?

by Mike Flower

When I got my first veneers I noticed that they were of different thicknesses and puzzled me. I also wondered how I should get started, what should I use as a tool, a knife or a fret saw. Most of the best picture seemed to be done in England with the Knife. The fretsaw seemed to be much faster, so why bother with the knife?

Although there are people who work exclusively with the knife, the use of the saw can save a lot of time. Fretsaws are not new, they were invented in 1562. In Europe most of the veneers are cut 1/40 inch (0.65 to 0.7mm) in thickness. But in USA, Australia, Canada and other countries veneers are cut 1/28 inch (0.9mm) thick. So the thinner veneers come from Europe and the thicker from the new world. The thinner veneers are easier to cut with the knife and as a result advanced knife-cutting techniques have evolved. The thicker veneers are easy to cut quickly with a saw. For these reasons the craft has developed along two different paths. In the *Marquetry Manual*, William A. Lincoln says "those using the thinner veneers in Europe have both perfected both knife-cutting and fretsawing as taught by the Marquetry Society, and those who have access mainly to the thicker veneers, use the fretsawing techniques taught by the Marquetry Society of America"

I am very pleased that in Canada we continue to encourage people to learn both tools. From a personal point of view I use the saw whenever practical because it is faster and the cutting is less likely to follow the grain.

When the veneer is very thin or fragile I put scotch tape on both sides and use the window method to cut the veneer. If for some reason the veneer disintegrates when using the saw I can always use the window created by the saw, tape a new piece of veneer underneath the work and finish the work with the knife.

When it comes to cutting straight lines, I much prefer the use of the knife. I have trouble keeping the saw straight. Sometimes I use the straight edge of a ruler to help with lines, starting at the far point, and making small step cuts, working backwards to the near point. The knife is naturally essential for the stringers and cutting the backing the board, I can't imagine not using the knife sometime during a piece of work So for cutting landscape, terrain, trees etc. I use the saw, for structures, walls masts etc., I use the knife. When I look at some of my earlier pictures some of the lines are too straight. Maybe I should use the saw more often no matter how thick the veneer.

Just remember there is no right or wrong way to do marquetry only the way that works for you. Happy cutting...