

Inlaid Imagery

Stephen Hatcher ©2016

This overview of the basic steps used in making a platter inlaid with an apple tree and serpent is not intended to show the reader how to make this specific artwork but instead to use this example to illustrate those steps necessary to complete a basic inlaid image project. Fine details of the technique are reserved for the demonstration.



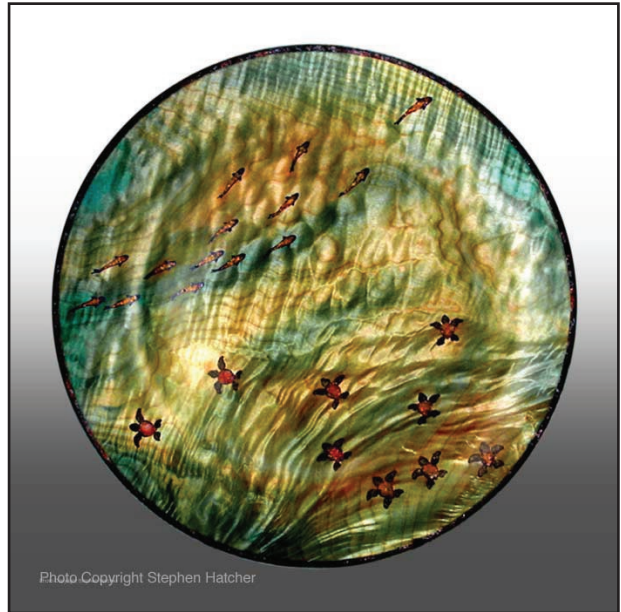
MATERIALS

I prefer big leaf maple, but I've seen excellent results with many other woods. Choose a closed cell wood that is as hard as soft maple at least. I like big leaf maple for several reasons – it grows where I live (i.e., it's cheap), is light colored, has fabulous figure that I use as part of my compositions, and has an abrasive resistance roughly equivalent to the minerals I use (Moh's scale 3-4).

In this hardness range, I like to use crystals whenever possible with the crushing and mixing techniques explained earlier. For this example, I use the following minerals:

- Tree & Rim - green calcite with black powder

Examples of Inlaid Platters, Boxes, and Vessels



- Leaves - malachite (green mineral) mixed with green calcite powder
- Apples - red dolomite mixed with green calcite powder
- Serpent - mother-of-pearl chips and azurite (blue mineral)

PROCEDURE

1. Turn a platter with gentle curves (think about making it simple to use power sanding), sand with 80 grit, then coat with dilute shellac. To make this mixture, dilute wax-free shellac with about 10 times as much denatured alcohol. You must use wax-free shellac or the inlay may not be secure. I use a spray bottle to apply this mixture and dry it quickly with compressed air.



2. Draw your image. The shellacked surface will erase without smudging. I freehand draw, but you can copy images. Just keep them simple.



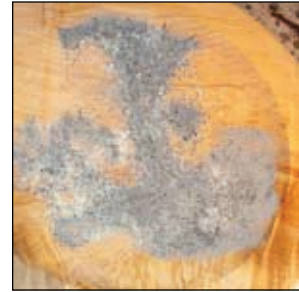
3. Carve the image about 3/16" deep using the Dremel tool and burrs. In this example, the location of the serpent crossing the tree is left blank.



4. Spray the image recess with diluted shellac again. This will prevent the CA glue used to adhere the minerals from staining the wood.



5. Place the minerals. This depends on your image and desired effects.



6. Apply very thin CA glue to the minerals until thoroughly wet. Use minimum accelerator to avoid foaming or weakening the inlay. Let the project sit at least several hours to allow the CA to cure.



7. Using 80 grit sandpaper on a firm power sanding pad, sand the inlay smooth with the wood surface. This is best started with the lathe off, then turn the work slowly for the final sanding.



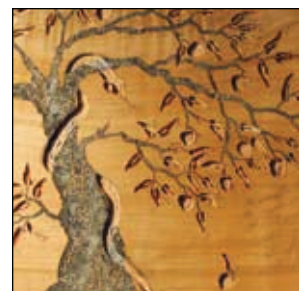
8. Pitting always occurs in the first sanding. Use fine powder and CA glue to fill these pits, and then sand starting with 120 grit.



9. Draw the inlay details as needed. In this example, apples, leaves, and a serpent are added.



10. Carve the details as with the main image. After carving, be sure to re-shellac the project to prevent CA staining.



11. Place the minerals for the details as before.



12. Sand the details smooth and touch up as before.



13. Turn the platter rim as desired.



14. Add the minerals and CA glue. I always include colors from the imagery in the rim to tie the color schemes together.



15. Finish sanding to 320 grit. If there are troublesome pits remaining, fill with gel CA, hit with accelerator, and wait until you cannot leave an impression in the gel CA glue with your fingernail. At that time, sand again with 320 grit and then 400 grit (at least). Apply your finish of choice. I like to use a little dye to accent the grain and rim (applied with an airbrush), then topcoat with lacquer. I also have used tung oil, wipe-on poly, and boiled linseed oil successfully, but lacquer makes the inlay shimmer dramatically.

