



## Woodworking Virtual Gallery

Woodworking and the use of wood is an important part of aboriginal culture. Not only does it represent the use of an abundant resource, but also reflects the cultural beliefs about the world around them.

What symbols or images can you see here? (For example, the adze handle has an animal carved on it.) What do you think they might mean?

Because wood does not preserve well in the archaeological record, wooden tools are rare finds. We learn from the people themselves how woodworking has been done by their ancestors. What parts of these tools would be preserved in an archaeological site? (What parts are made from metal or stone?)

Some carvers will marker their tools with their names. Perhaps a creative carver decided to carve his or her animal or clan figure on his or her tools. Organic materials generally do not preserve well in archaeological sites. Some bone and shell preserves in midden sites, but wood, basketry and other things made from plants usually do not. Archaeologists generally find only the stone or metal portions of tools.

### Splitting wood into planks

As wood was an abundant resource on the Northwest Coast, the aboriginal people developed complex and efficient techniques of woodworking. Small wooden pegs were inserted into a groove in a log and struck with a maul until the log split. Do you think it would have taken a lot of time and energy to split logs into planks? What might people do with the planks? What would they build?

Sometimes planks were removed from standing trees without felling the tree. See Hillary Stewart's book 'Cedar' for an illustration of this. The planks would be used for building houses and other buildings. Canoes were not made from planks, but hollowed or dug out and formed with steam.

### Hafted Maul

A 'composite' tool made of different materials. These mauls were used like a hammer to split logs and planks.

### D-Adze

Used for planing or smoothing wood planks. The handle is made of carved wood and the blade is metal. Before the arrival of Europeans the blades of adzes were made of stone. Why do you think the people would adopt the new style of adze blades?

Metal adze blades were sharper and retained their edge longer than a stone adze blade. They were more resistant to shattering under repeated impact.

### Bailer

Used to remove water from a canoe during trips. The form makes it very easy to scoop water quickly. It is made from folded cedar bark, a stick and some string. If you were out canoeing you might need something like this, what would you use?

### Crooked knife

Common composite carving tool. A crooked knife has a curved metal blade hafted onto a wooden handle. How do you think they were used? What types of objects were carved with a crooked knife? Look in a specialty tool catalogue like Lee Valley. Can you find a similar tool? What does this tell about the efficiency of the design?

Crooked knives were used (and still are used) by carvers to hollow out a cavity. A crooked knife would be used in making bowls and masks, hollowing out the inside. Lee Valley sells 'Haida carving knives that are similar to this one. Efficient designs persist, continuing into the present, while less well designed objects become obsolete.

### Hand Adze

Wooden handle lashed to metal blade. When you think of archaeology what do you think is usually the only part of the tool that is usually preserved? If you found only that part, could you imagine the rest of the tool? What mistakes might you make? ("I thought it might be \_\_\_ instead.")

The metal blade would be preserved. The metal bit indicates the tool was made after contact with Euro-Canadian traders.

### Animal shaped D-Adze

Used for planing or smoothing wood planks. Do you think this tool is more modern? Why?

Note the adze blade was originally made to fit an axe.

### Hand Maul

Hand mauls were used much the same way that hafted mauls were used, basically like a hammer. But because they are held by hand much more fine, finishing work can be done with a hand maul. These tools were made by pecking and grinding, until the desired shape was achieved. Do you think it would take a long time to make these tools? Do you think they were valued by the woodworker? Do you think a woodworker made his or her own hand mauls, or might there have been specialists who made them? If so, what would this tell us about the economy?

Yes, they took a very long time to make. In fact, there is some evidence that a few families may have specialized in making these tools. Because they took so much effort to make, they were valued by both the maker and the user. When societies have specialists craftspeople, it generally indicates a more complex social stratification.

### Elbow Adze

Used also for smoothing planks of wood. How is this adze different from other types of adzes?

A person using an elbow adze uses their whole arm in carving. The swinging chopping motion is used to rough out a form before more fine finishing work is done.

### Cedar Bentwood Box

Made from one plank of wood, steamed, bent, and painted. On top of the box are small wood carving tools for fine, detail carving. Can you tell what animal form is painted on this box?

The animal form painted on the box may be one of several types of animals. Northwest coast art is highly stylized, developing artistic conventions over a very long tradition. The upper half of the box is the head of the animal. The black formlines were painted first, forming the eyes and upper lip. The red secondary lines fill in detail.

### Engraving and Incising Tools

Engraving awl can be used to drill holes in wood. Incising tools used for relief carving. Because bone and ivory are not always preserved in sites, they are found in the archaeological record less often than stone tools. Yet we know that for the fine work necessary for carved wooden bowls, masks and other ceremonial objects, these types of tools were used often.

### Carving Knife

Carved by Henry Hunt. Wood carving knives of the distant past were also made from stone blades. Do you think that carving is easier with stone or metal blades? What is the figure carved on the handle?

It is easier to carve with a metal blade. The figure carved on the handle is a fish.

### Bone Chisel

Using a small hand maul, the carver would tap the end of the chisel and carve out grooves from the wood. Different sized chisels would produce different sized grooves. The end on the right side of the picture is the cutting end.

### Ray Wesley Tsimshian Beaver Carved Bowl

This ceremonial bowl used for feasting and potlatch was carved by Ray Wesley, a Tsimshian artist. Look again at the different tools and try to figure out which tools were used to manufacture and decorate this bowl.

What clues do you see that will help you identify this animal as a beaver?

The elbow adze and hand adze would have been used to rough out the shape.

The cavity would have been hollowed out using the crooked knife. The straight knife, chisels and gouges would have been used to finish the carved detail.

### Birchwood Mask

Trimmed with ermine and human hair. Carved and painted by Ken Mowatt.

What tools were used to carve this mask? Ermine are small weasels that change their color in winter. Do you think these are winter or summer pelts?

Why do you think they are on a mask?

The same tools were used to carve both the mask and the beaver bowl.

These are winter pelts. Ermine, like mink, have fine beautiful fur. The ermine pelts are a symbol of wealth and rank.