

**Workshop presented by: S.A. Neff, Jr.**  
**Techniques in Decorating Leather (with Leather)**

**Decorating a Plaquette**

Beginning with a design on tracing paper, two shapes for raised on-lays are traced onto 80 lb. Superfine cover and cut out. Both pieces are adhered to the flesh side of thinly pared goatskin using PVA. (The PVA is applied to the goatskin and NOT to the paper shape. The paper shape will therefore remain constant.) These are left to dry under a 4 oz. weight.

Using the tracing paper design again, the remaining shapes are traced onto 3 ply bristol and cut out; the cut edges must be perpendicular to the surface of the bristol. These will be used as tooling templates.

*For Tooling* The bristol templates are taped together corresponding with the design; put into position on the leather plaquette (position is verified using the tracing paper design), and are taped at the bottom (the tape will act as a hinge).

Using the template tool with medium heat, the upper-most line is tooled; first dry, then with moisture (applied with a brush). When the tooled line is deep enough that piece of the template is removed and the tooling process is continued with the next template. The template tool should be polished occasionally on a polishing board. (The area between these two tooled lines will eventually contain a flat on-lay.)

When the second line is completed that template is removed and the next line is tooled. This will be a blind-tooled line. It should be slightly deeper and darker than the previous lines. The lines can be examined at any point by simply lifting the top edge of the whole template (the taped hinge keeps it in place).

A fourth line will be tooled and this will contain a linear in-lay.

The last template is removed from the plaquette.

Returning to the raised on-lay shapes: hair-side down a border of 1/4" is allowed and the excess trimmed away. Next, notches are cut into that border at every quarter inch. When this is completed the notched border is turned-in, using PVA.

When this step is complete a tracing is made of the area not covered by the turn-ins. A fill-in piece is made from the tracing using 65-70 lb. text, and glued into position. (This insures that the surface of the raised on-lay will be perfectly flat.)

When both raised on-lay shapes are turned-in and filled-in they are placed under a 4 oz. weight.

The goatskin for the flat on-lay is lightly adhered to Japanese paper (hair side to paper) using wheat paste and weighted with a 4 oz. weight until dry.

The top tooling template is taped to a piece of 80 lb. Superfine cover, and a tracing of that shape is made and cut out. The new piece becomes a template for cutting the exact shape for the flat on-lay, albeit, very slightly larger.

The leather template is taped to the Japanese paper lined leather (template to paper) and cut out. The edges are then beveled using a small Olfa knife.

The area for the flat on-lay is scraped using a small curved scalpel knife; the scraped area should have an even surface.

The on-lay leather is pasted out (the Japanese paper keeps the thin leather from stretching). The scraped area is moistened with paste water. Then the on-lay is put in place. The Japanese paper is moistened and removed. The beveled edges are tucked into the tooled line. The on-lay should be a perfect fit. The plaquette is then weighted till the on-lay dries.

Next: a strip of plated leather is cut to match the width of the fourth tooled line. Using PVA, the strip is fitted into the tooling line (the PVA is applied with a small brush to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " sections and tapped into position very gently with a No. 11 X-acto knife. After each section is glued into position it is rubbed down with a small bone folder.

The tooling templates are cut for the upper part of the design.

A flat on-lay is made and put into position, weighted and dried.

When the flat on-lays are dry (about 15 minutes), the tooling templates are taped into position, one set on the right side, another on the left side.

The first and third lines will be tooled in gold. The second lines will have an in-lay. The tool should be heated to between medium and high. First an impression is made similar to the blind-tooled line lower on the plaquette. The impression should be polished

(this will also dry the moisture in the impression). The gold foil (23K) is laid in position and held down with the template. A section of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " should be tooled, then the tool is reheated. The tool must always remain perpendicular to the tooling surface. Otherwise the line will vary in width, and the bottom of the impression will be uneven. At least two or three layers of gold should be applied.

The linear in-lay is applied to the second lines

The tracing paper design is taped into position at the top of the plaquette. The circular raised on-lay is positioned (using the tracing paper design as a guide) and weighted. Small pieces of tape should be placed on the plaquette surface to maintain that position. The raised on-lay is removed, and then the underside is glued out with PVA; put into position; and rubbed down. The tape indicators are removed. The plaquette is weighted with a brick.

The second raised on-lay can be attached soon afterwards. The plaquette should be weighted overnight.