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# Swivel-Head Duck Decoy



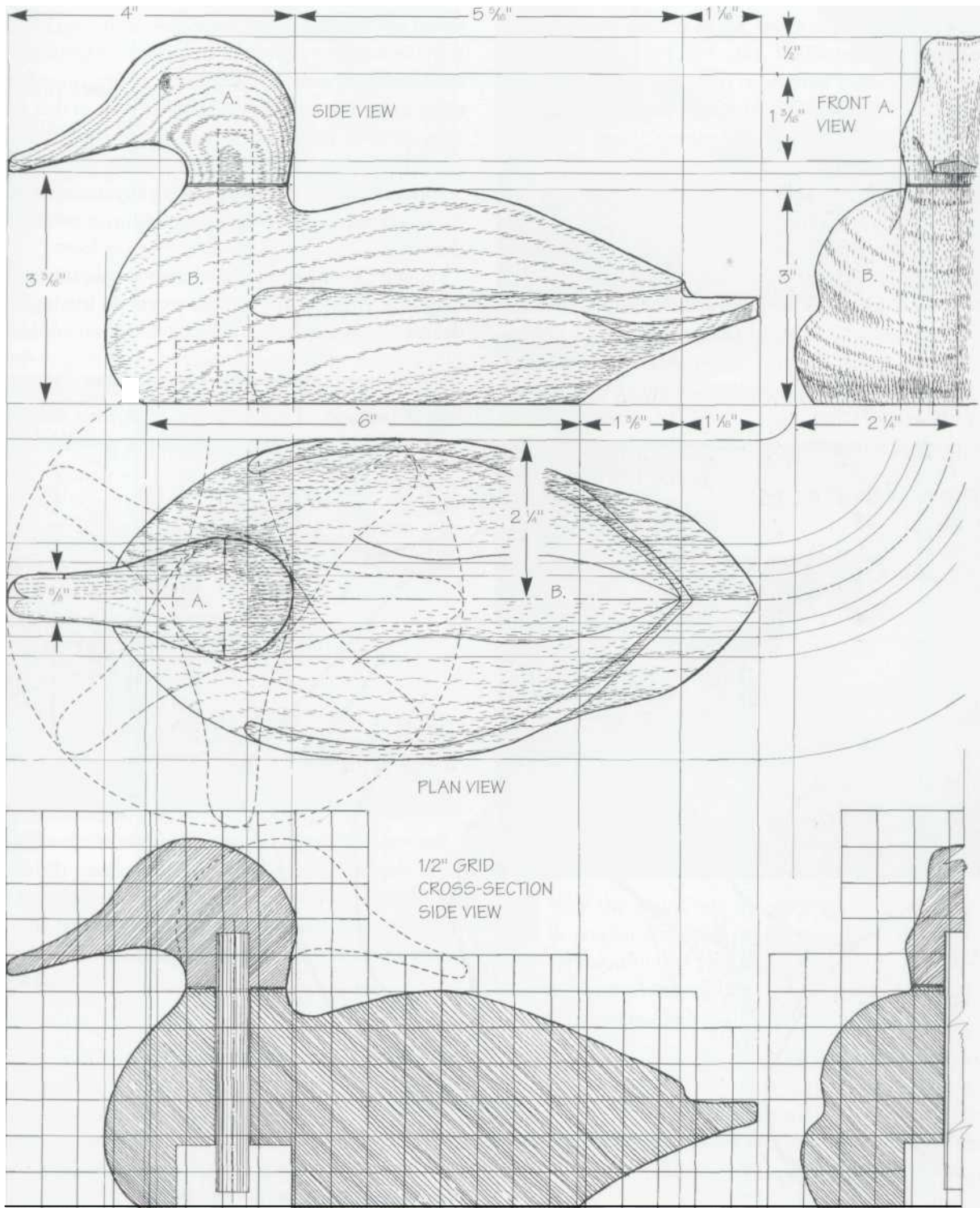
Duck decoys are no more than carved and whittled imitations of the real thing. The word *decoy* comes from the Dutch words *kooj* and *koye* meaning to lure or entice. Though old accounts suggest that decoys were first used by Native Americans, the notion was soon taken up by the white American settlers. It's a wonderfully simple idea: The carved wooden ducks are anchored out in the water, along comes a flock of ducks attracted by the decoys, they circle with a view to settling down on the water, and—Bang!—the hunter is provided with easy targets. Okay, so it's not very sporting, but when one must. . . . Though once upon a time duck decoys were swiftly carved and whittled by the hunters to their own design and then thrown in a corner for next season, they are now

considered to be extremely valuable and very collectible examples of American folk art.

## MAKING THE DUCK

Having first studied the working drawings, and variously looked at pictures of ducks, collected magazine clippings, made sketches and drawings, and maybe even used a lump of Plasticine to make a model, take your two carefully selected blocks of wood and draw out the profiles as seen in side view. Make sure that the grain runs from head to tail through both the head and the body.

When you are happy with the imagery, use the tools of your choice to clear the waste. I used a band saw, but you can just as well use a bow saw, a straight saw and a



rasp, a large coping saw, a gouge and a drawknife, or whatever gets the job done. Next, set the two parts down on the bench—so that you can see them in plain view—and draw the top views out on the partially worked surfaces. Don't fuss around with the details, just go for the big broad shapes. Once again, when you are pleased with the imagery, use the tools of your choice to clear the waste.

When the shapes have been roughed out, then comes the fun of whittling and modeling the details. Having noticed that this is the point in the project when most raw beginners lose their cool and start to panic, I should point out that there are no hard-and-fast rules. If you want to stand up or sit down, or work out on the porch, or work in the kitchen, or whatever, then that's fine. That said, your wits and your knives need to be sharp, you do have to avoid cutting directly into end grain, and you do have to work with small controlled paring cuts.

Of course, much depends upon the wood and your strength, but I find that I tend to work either with a small thumb-braced paring cut—in much the same way as when peeling an apple—or with a thumb-pushing cut

that is managed by holding and pivoting the **knife** in one hand, while at the same time pushing against the back of the blade with the other hand. Either way, you do have to refrain from making slashing strokes.

When you come to the final modeling, start by sitting down and having a good long look at the duck. Compare it to the working drawings and any photographs that you have collected along the way. If necessary, rework selected areas until it feels right. When you reckon that the form is as good as it's going to get, use a rasp and a pack of graded sandpapers to rub the whole work down to a smooth finish. Avoid overworking any one spot; it is better to keep the rasp/sandpaper and the wood moving, all the while aiming to work on the whole form.

Finally, fit the neck dowel, run a hole down through the duck, drill out the washer recess on the underside of the base and the fixing hole on the front of the breast. Block in the imagery with watercolor **paint**, **give the whole works** a rubdown with the graded sandpapers, lay on a coat of beeswax or maybe a coat of varnish, and the duck is ready . . . not for shooting, but for showing!

## STEP-BY-STEP STAGES



If you are looking to make a strong but controlled cut, you cannot do better than go for the thumb-pushing paring approach. In action, the cut is managed by holding and pivoting the knife in one hand, while at the same time pushing against the back of the knife with the thumb of the other hand. Notice how the direction of cuts runs at a slicing angle to the run of the grain.

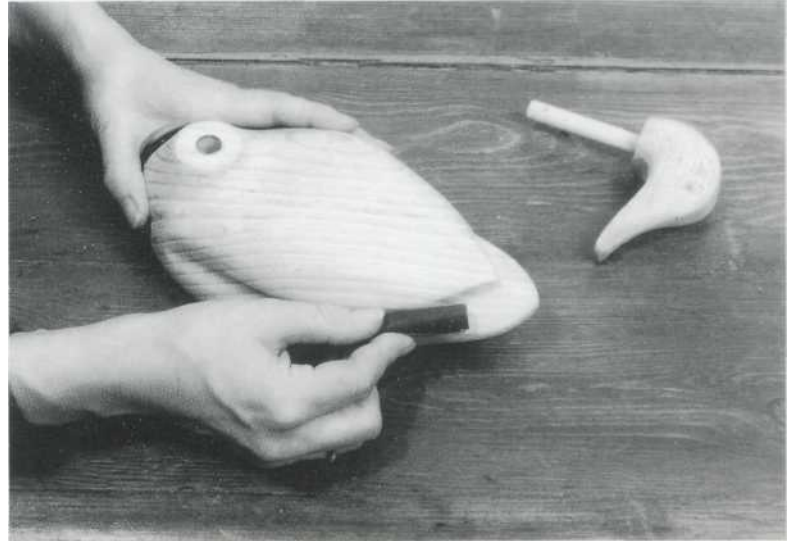
## MATERIALS LIST

A Head (1)	$1\frac{1}{4}'' \times 2\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{1}{2}''$
B Body (1)	$3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 5\frac{1}{2}'' \times 10''$
C Neck pivot (1)	$\frac{1}{2}''$ dowel $\times 4''$ long

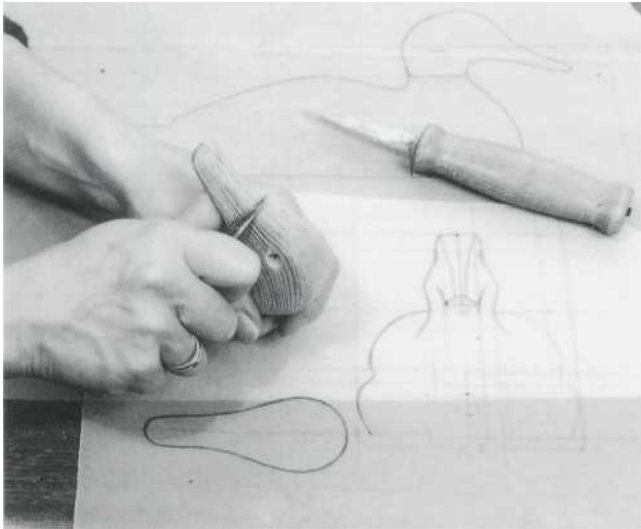
## HARDWARE AND EXTRAS

- D Glass/plastic eyes (2)
- E Plastic washers to fit the dowel (2)
- F Watercolor paint as used by artists: gold-yellow, red-brown, dark green, white, gray, blue and black

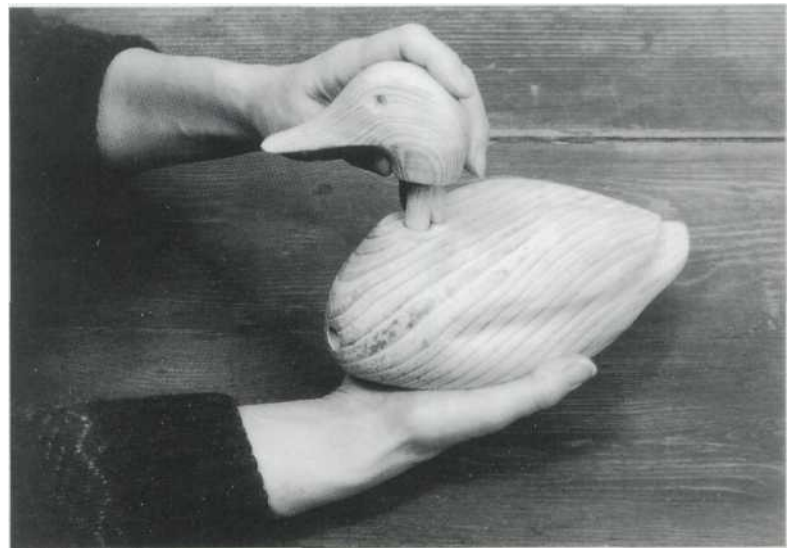
*Note that all measurements allow for a small amount of cutting waste.*



3 Use the graded abrasive papers to achieve a smooth finish. In this instance the paper is wrapped around a dowel that nicely fits the long scooped shape.



2 Use the thumb-braced paring cut to shape the characteristic cluck bill. This cut uses the thumb as a lever to increase the efficiency of the stroke. Always be ready to change knives to suit the cut—a small penknife blade for details, and a large sloyd knife when you want to move a lot of wood.



4 Slide the dowel into the neck socket and adjust the fit so that the head profile runs smoothly into the body. Be mindful that you might well need to modify the head and/or the body so that the two parts come together for a close-mating fit.



5 Now, with the washer in place, ease the pin/peg through the breast hole and push it into the dowel hole. Use plastic or leather washers to ensure a good tight-turning fit.

#### **SPECIAL TIP: SAFETY WITH A KNIFE**

The degree of safety when using a knife will depend to a great extent on your stance and concentration. Okay, so there is no denying that a knife is potentially a very dangerous tool, and it's not a tool to use when you are tired or stressed, but that said, if the knife is sharp and the wood easy to cut, then you shouldn't have problems.

If you have doubts, then have a try out on a piece of scrap wood. And don't forget . . . a good sharp knife is much safer than a blunt one that needs to be worried and bullied into action.