

The Traditional Way to Hold Japanese Tools

Pictures of Walt Padgett

Carving with a Maru To (u-gouge)

This was the method of carving Walt was taught while studying *Moku Hanga* (Japanese-style wood block printmaking) at the prestigious Yoshida Studio in Japan. It gives great control while being easier on the hands than gripping the tool in a fist. The tool is pushed away from the body.

Walt is right handed, so his right hand is holding the tool and his left hand is acting as a brake, pushing back lightly while the right hand pushes forward. If you are left handed, you would hold the tool in your left hand and brake with the right.

Also note that he has cut down the handles on these tools so they fit comfortably in his hand.

If you want to do the same, cut the handle so the entire tool (blade plus handle) is the length from your longest finger to the web between your first finger and thumb:



If you are not sure what this length should be, cut the handle a little long; you can always cut more off later. Sand the cut end so it is comfortable to hold and write the size of the blade on the handle for future reference.

V-gouges and chisels would be held the same way.



Walt didn't always keep his fingers splayed out as shown in the photos above – sometimes when he was working on a small area, I noticed his fingers would come in like this:



Carving with a Sho To (knife)

Walt holds a knife in two different ways. This position worries me, because I was taught to always keep both hands on the tool; that way you cannot cut yourself. So I would keep the fingers of my free hand on the tool as well, to protect them from being cut and also to help guide the knife and act as a brake.



His right thumb, which you cannot see, is on top of the handle. He is pulling the knife *toward* him instead of pushing away.

Here Walt is holding the knife like a pencil, which is also quite acceptable and often easier when doing fine detail work. Note that now he is using his left finger to help guide the knife.



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