

The HABA Letter –February Edition

Charles Heathcock told me that a couple people worked on their knives until around 7:00 PM.

Charles and Sharon Heathcock, Sharon's folks, and Lee Oates all deserve a Special Thanks for making the February HABA meeting so successful and memorable.

NEW MEMBERS

Please help me welcome the following new members to the Houston Area Blacksmith's Association.

John Korb of Giddings, TX

David Hoffman of La Porte, TX
Karl Schuler of Corpus Christi, TX
Don and Ken Rigali of Conroe, TX
Ray Warner of Spring, TX
Raymond Kovar of Snook, TX

HIGH-RELIEF CHASING

By Dave Koenig
Part 1 of 4

Summary of Subjects

Part 1 – High-Relief Chasing, Chasing vs Repoussé and Tools

Part 2 – Consumables, Chasing Metals, Chasing Theory

Part 3 – The Chasing Process

Part 4 – More Than Chasing, Visitors.

aspect of the craft in a reflective classroom setting and with an instructor who knows how to teach.

This article is about that rare opportunity for a person to get away from the daily grind and pressures to focus primarily on a common passion, forming metals with hammers.

Eight blacksmiths gathered in the jewelry studio of the John C. Campbell Folk School the

second week of January. The occasion was to attend a weeklong class of High-Relief Chasing. Kirsten Skiles did the instructing with an introduction from her husband Bill Fiorini and the watchfulness of their son Ian.



Blacksmithing is a craft like any other. It requires practice, practice, and practice to increase proficiency and personal satisfaction. For most of us practice comes at our own forges and at the regular meetings of area smithing organizations. Every once in a while things come together. There is an opportunity to really study some

John C. Campbell Studios
L to R: Clay, Jewelry and Wood Carving

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The High-Relief Chasing students were Dave Koenig of Texas, Doug Hendrickson of Missouri, Dorothy Stiegler of California, Heather McClarty of California, Janice Koza of Illinois, Lou Mueller of Missouri, Patricia Trudeau of California and Ty Stiegler of California. Altogether there were about sixty more students at the Folk School learning Blacksmithing, Enameling, Fiddle, Marquetry, Multi-Media, Watercolor, Woodcarving and Woodturning.

HIGH-RELIEF CHASING

High-relief chasing is a craft that began in Japan. The chased work, taken to its highest artistic level, found its way onto the clothing and weapons of Samurai warriors.

The art form of high-relief chasing reached another pinnacle in Italy and France during the 16th and 17th centuries. Elaborate chasings are found on armor of that time.

CHASING VS REPOUSSÉ

Chasing and repoussé are two terms that are usually used interchangeably. For the sake of this article chasing refers to forming metal from the front and repoussé refers to forming metal from the back. In the case of high-relief chasing the vast majority of the work is done from the front and some repoussé is done from the back.

At the risk of simplifying too much, a chased piece of work is usually much more detailed than one repousséd. Another way to tell which part of a piece is chased and which is

not is to identify the side on which the tool marks show. If a piece of work is chased the tool marks and detail are on the front.

Chasing tools look like chisels and punches to the casual observer. There is one big difference however. Chasing tools do not have a cutting edge. Chasing tools push metal from place to place rather than remove it. (The Eisenhower's craft is the one that forms metal by removing it with cutting tools.)

The tools and materials needed to begin chasing are rather simple. Some of the tools

and consumables you already have and the rest you can make or purchase. The tools are the pitch pot, chasing tools, grinder, hammers, pliers stump and torch. The consumable materials are pitch, sheet steel or bronze and gas for the torch.

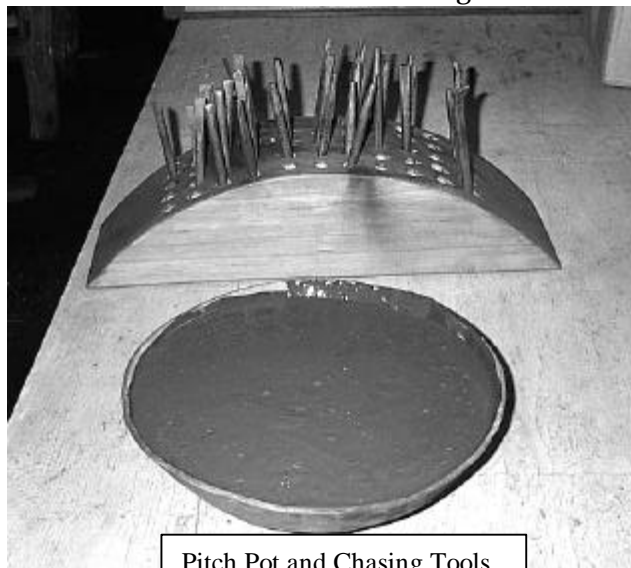
TOOLS

Pitch Pot

The pitch pot is usually a cast iron or forged pot anywhere from six to ten inches in diameter. The bottom is rounded like a wok and is placed on a sandbag or hard rubber wheel. The sandbag or wheel holds the pot at different angles for easier hammering and chasing. The bottom of the pot is generally filled with plaster of Paris or concrete to add weight and reduce the cost of filling the pot with pitch. A heavy pot is desirable.

Chasing Tools

The chasing tools come in "standard" forms like rounds, squares, ovals rectangles, triangles, tear drop and chisel shaped. Standard is a good choice of terms in that most of the work can be done with these



Pitch Pot and Chasing Tools

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simple shapes of different sizes. Chasing tools can be created at any time to do a special job.

Koka Metalsmiths sells a starter set and blank chasing tools that allow the beginner to get started and the more accomplished to add to his or her tool set. See www.kokametalsmiths.com for a description of tools and ordering information.

Ideally chasing tools should be tapered at each end and the face of each tool should be hardened and tempered to a “rosy brown”. Except for maybe a texturing tool, make sure no tool has any sharp edges. Sharp edges do not push metal. They cut it and cuts promote cracks.

Coarse and fine grit grinding mediums are very helpful to shape new chasing tools or to reshape old ones. The coarse grit is used for shaping. The finish grit of a grinding wheel or sander should be no finer than 400. If the tool gets smoother than a 400 grit it tends to slip more while chasing.

Hammers

Two ball peen hammers of about one half pound and one pound in weight would be a good start. Hammers in chasing like in smithing are a personal choice. Experiment with hammers to find the ones that work the best for the work at hand. It is not necessary to have fancy or expensive tools to do great work!

It is important to prevent repetitive motion injuries to the shoulder, elbow and wrist due to hammering. Holding the hammer loosely and keeping the

hammer-hand elbow close to the body can minimize the risk of a repetitive motion injury.

Pliers

Almost any pliers will work well. It is only needed to hold the metal being chased when it is hot.

Stump or Anvil

A wood stump or small anvil is handy to bend down the corners and sides of the sheet metal around the pattern. This is done several times to begin raising the pattern above the sheet. As the chasing increases in detail the same stump or anvil is used to straighten the background around the chased piece.

The straightening occurs after the annealing process. If it is done before the annealing process the metal may split.

Torch

The torch is a very important tool. It is used to anneal the metal, soften the pitch in the pitch pot and melt pitch to fill all the cavities of the chasing before placing the piece back in the pot. The best way to remove the residual pitch from the metal is

to burn it off with a torch.

Two kinds of torches seem to work very well. One is the atmospheric acetylene torch. It is usually referred to as a plumber’s torch. The other torch is the simple propane torch that is available at just about any hardware store. Some of these torches come with a push button igniter.



Owl on Page 2 in Progress

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The hardware store propane torch works best for warming and melting pitch and the plumber's torch with a big tip is best for annealing.

End of Part 1.

FUTURE HABA MEETINGS

April HABA Meeting – Oldenburg, TX, March 30 through April 1

All Texas Blacksmiths Are Invited!!

This is the first of two meetings at Oldenburg in 2001. This is an opportunity for any smith to meet the public, sell their work, do some tailgating and generate interest in the art and craft of blacksmithing.

The event is called Hammerfest V. Traditionally this is also a major fundraising event for HABA. Members are invited to donate things they made or tools that are no longer needed. The owner may retain up to

50% of the auction price. (Note: This auction may not be big but there will be one!)

Camping and RV Parking are available on the grounds. There is electricity, water and even a portable shower with hot and cold running water available!

It's a great gathering of smiths and people interested in smithing!

For more detailed information: Call Frank Walters: 713-896-7566

TOMBALL MUSEUM RECEIVES NEW STAND

Rogers Collins completed a promised information stand for the Tomball Museum. The stand is very well crafted! Jean Alexander, Executive Director of the Tomball Museum, accepted the gift.

COMING EVENTS 2001

THESIS SHOW INVITATION FROM FRANCES TRAHAN

All HABA Members and their families are invited to Frances Trahan's Jewelry Thesis Show opening and reception in the Blaffer Gallery on the University of Houston main



Jean Alexander Receiving the
Rogers Collins Stand

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campus on the evening of May 11. The show will run through May 20. The thesis show is a requirement to complete a Masters of Fine Arts degree.

More specifics will be made available in coming newsletters. Mark your calendars. This will be good!



Ironfest Conference Schedule Revised

Workshops

Thursday, May 31, 2001 – 9 AM - 5 PM

Demonstrations

Friday, June 1, 2001 - 9 AM - 5 PM
Wendel Broussard, Jeff Mohr

Saturday, June 2, 2001 - 9 AM - 5 PM
Wendel Broussard, Jeff Mohr,

Frank Turley, Mike Boone

Auction

Saturday, June 2, 2001 - 7 PM

Demonstrations

Sunday, June 3, 2001 - 9 AM - 12 noon
Frank Turley, Mike Boone

We're looking forward to seeing you at IronFest!
David W. Wilson, Chairman

WANTED

Dave Koenig, Coordinator for the Public Demonstration Area at IronFest, Is Looking for a Few Good Demonstrators.

IronFest will have a free blacksmithing demonstration area for the public. This public demonstration area is multi-purpose. It is a place to talk to the public about IronFest, that is describe what the national demonstrators are doing, invite them to visit the Vendors and the Iron Gallery and the IronFest Auction, and most importantly to show the public that quality work can be accomplished with simple tools.

Blacksmiths who intend to register for IronFest are invited to donate an hour of their time during the Conference to demonstrate for the public. All demonstrations will be 'acoustic': ...forge, hammer, anvil, and hand tools. The public demonstration site is intentionally being

kept 'low-tech' for several reasons. A couple reasons are for public safety and to keep the site simple.

Each public demonstrator will know his or her demonstration time at least a week or two before the big event. A schedule will be worked-out for the convenience each demonstrator.

There will only be one public demonstration area. Each demonstrator who volunteers is encouraged to bring personal hand tools that feel the best or are specific for the demonstration. A blower forge and bellows forge should be available for your use. The site will also have an anvil, swage block, post vise, stock in common sizes and basic

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hand tools. Special stock requirements will be provided.

IronFest, please contact Dave Koenig at:
76021.3660@compuserve.com or 281-855-2869.

Please Note! No forge welding will be permitted at the public demonstration site.

If you are interested or know of someone who may be interested in demonstrating at

THE HABA WEB SITE

**IT'S A GREAT PLACE! IT'S AVAILABLE TO YOU! TAKE A LOOK!
BRING SOME WORK TO THE FEBRUARY MEETING. WE WILL TAKE
SOME PICTURES AND SHOW YOUR WORK IN THE GALLERY.**

CLAY SPENCER TREADLE HAMMER TOOL WORKSHOP APRIL 20 – 22, 2001

The workshop will be at Pheil Forges, 200 Post Oak Drive, Llano, Texas. (915)-247-1370, e-mail bpheil@tstar.net. If you have a hammer, this is a great opportunity!

THE FINE PRINT

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TO MAKE LIFE SIMPLER

**Observe the following guidelines
for lifting heavy objects.**

- ?? Use the legs not he back for lifting.
- ?? Keep the body erect.
- ?? Be sure footing is secure.
- ?? Keep the object close to the body.
- ?? Get help if the object is heavy or awkward.
- ?? Avoid lifting and turning at the same time.
- ?? Avoid jerking when pulling or lifting.
- ?? Take advantage of skids, bars, jacks, blocking