

Sheila Landry Designs

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Designing With Stencils By Sheila Bergner-Landry

Introduction

There are many things that inspire us in designing. Sometimes it is as simple as seeing the way the sun sets behind the hills and trees that motivate us to recapture its beauty in some form of 'art' so that we may relive not only the moment, but the wonderful feelings that we felt experiencing it first-hand have stirred up in our souls. Sometimes we wish to immortalize a certain person, event or place in our life for whatever reason. Designing is filled with emotion. There are so many feelings and thoughts that we can relate to pictures, plaques, boxes and many other types of woodworking.

How many of us have looked at the scroll sawn trout clock sitting on Dad's desk and remembered the many summer hours spent together hunting that ever-elusive catch? Or how many times have we seen the jewelry box on our Mom's dresser that we made her with the morning glories scrolled into the lid and thought of the warm, spring days where we were working side by side with Mom in the garden? Whether these things were part of our lives, or only part of the daydreams we have, they are pleasant emotions which are stirred up and brought to the surface sometimes by seeing things that are reminders of them. I think that this applies not only to scroll sawing, but to most forms of art in general.

I have many customers who request special patterns to commemorate certain events in their lives. Sometimes it is an anniversary or birthday. Sometimes it is a gift in which the giver wants to make something special that they know the recipient has an interest in. In my many years of designing, I have had literally hundreds of requests for designing specific patterns for others. I do enjoy doing these special orders tremendously, as it gives me a chance to know a little bit more about my customers and sometimes even make a new friend.

I am seeing, however, that more and more people want to try their own hand at giving designing a try. In listening to my customers when they are explaining their requests to me, I realize that most of them have very specific ideas of what they want done and how they want their finished project to look. I believe that many of them are very capable of designing their own patterns, and I have seen in the past that once people see how easy it is to do, they are very willing to experiment and make things to their own specifications. I have received many photos of projects of my designs that customers have modified to their own needs and tastes, and I love to see how they expanded on my own thoughts and ideas. It shocks me that sometimes the customer sends notes with the pictures of their work in which they actually apologize for modifying the pattern! To me, there is no need to do such a thing. I love to see how people expand on my ideas and it only inspires me to go in other directions for future designs. The old saying that 'two heads are better than one' certainly applies to this situation, I

think. Many people will take elements from more than one pattern and blend them into a pattern that is very beautiful and imaginative and to me it is great to see the result.

What if I can't draw?

Unfortunately, as creative as people are with their own ideas for making their own designs, many don't have confidence in their ability to draw on paper what they are trying to accomplish. I have taught both scroll sawing and painting for several years and it never ceases to amaze me how such talented artists and woodworkers are so fearful of one little word – Free-handing! (We jokingly call it the 'f' word) As soon as I suggest doing something 'free-handed', my most common response from people is 'Oh, no! I can't draw!' The sad thing is that they really believe that and although I feel that most people would do fine, it isn't always easy to convince others of their own ability.

One answer to that problem is the use of guides to get them started and also to sometime enable them to make up a design entirely on their own. I found that the use of stencils is quite helpful in instances such as this. There is a great variety of designs and types of stencils that are very adaptable to woodworking and scroll sawing and by using some very simple techniques, the use of stencils opens a whole new world of possibilities for the woodworker.

Stencils can be used for creating border patterns, corner motifs, and even for the main subject matter of your project. There are several different types of stencils available, from silhouette stencils to continuous line stencils to corner block motifs. With a little imagination, you could adapt stencil designs into many different types of scroll sawing projects.

A Word about Copyrights

Before we get into the actual discussion of creating patterns using stencils, let's have a word or two about copyrights. This has become a very hot issue lately. With the vast amount of information available to us on the internet, as well as our ability to download things from web sites such as pictures and graphics, many designers are being hurt tremendously by the few people who abuse this ability and misrepresent other's designs and graphics as their own and sell them for their own profit. Whenever using another source for your designing, please be aware that it is both illegal and immoral for you to claim the design as your own creation. The stencils I am using in this article and the subsequent projects are from **The Stencil Company**, (www.quiltingstencils.com) and are used with their permission and encouragement. Please refer to the buyer's guide for their contact information, as they have hundreds of wonderful designs which you can apply to your woodworking designs. If you have any questions regarding copyright, just give them a call and let them know how you are using their products and they will be happy to discuss things with you. This company (and most companies like themselves) encourages you to use their products for crafting and designing. However, it is only right to give credit where credit is due and reference their products when necessary and not claim them as your own designs. With that said, let get on to working with stencils!

Design Decisions

First of all, you need to decide what kind of project you will be making. Will it be a desk clock? A picture frame? A trinket box? The basic shape of the project will help to determine

the type of stencil you may or may not want to use, as well as whether it is a two or three dimensional project. You may want to start out simple. Following this article is a Hummingbird Welcome plaque that uses some very basic tracing techniques and application of the stencils. The designs are very stylized and easy to create with little modification. You will be able to adapt the procedure to many other aspects of woodworking and drawing.

The next project I will be doing in a future issue will be a picture frame. In this instance, we will be using a border design along with a corner motif to create a wonderful, appealing frame that can be adapted to many different sizes to suit your needs.

The final project I will be presenting will be of a small box which will use the different elements of related stencils to create a beautiful design. This project will use an overlay technique to accent the designs of the box and will also be adaptable to many other applications.

Let's Get Designing!

There are a few simple items you will need to design with stencils. Most of the items you probably already have around your shop or house. The basic items you will need will be:

- Stencil(s) of your choice*
- Fine line marker or pen*
- Several sheets of white paper*
- Tape*
- Sharp pencil with a good eraser*

-Vellum or tracing paper (I like to use vellum. It is a semi-transparent paper which is a bit thicker than regular tracing paper. It is a little more costly, but tolerates erasing very well.

-A light table or light box is not absolutely necessary, but quite helpful (see Note below).

*First of all, pick the design you want. I am going to keep it simple here for teaching purposes, although I will also show some nice examples of more advanced designs. I picked a simple shell design (**Figure 1**) (Stencil #SCL-062003 from The Stencil Company). This could be used on a mirror, a picture frame, a tissue box cover, or any other application you could think of.*

There are really two ways that you could go when designing with most stencils as your base design. One way is to do a linear type of cut out, such as the following Hummingbird and Ivy Welcome plaque project. In this instance, the design will be more stylized and you will be following the basic structure of the drawing by creating wispy lines. This is a good type of design for things like welcome or house signs and box lids that are not lined, or picture frames and other projects that do not have a backing. Even though they may look somewhat intricate, they are quite sturdy and would hold up well to handling without much support from behind.

The second type of design you could easily extract from the same stencil is more of a traditional fretwork-type design. In this case, you will be using the stencil lines as guides and create voids or cut-outs. These will be much more delicate than the previous designs, and

would probably be better used as overlays or when designing items that have some sort of backing on them, such as mirror frames.

Remember also that you don't have to use the entire stencil and can also mix and match stencils to create your own unique design. For instance, when using the border-type stencil such as I did in the following project, I figured out where the design repeated and used only that portion for the straight side of the ivy border of the project. It wasn't necessary to draw the entire stencil, as repeating the one section was sufficient. The same occurred with using the corner motif of the ivy. It was easier to just do the corner separately and repeat it on the opposite edges rather than to do it all as one piece.

For both types of designs, the first step is the same. After deciding which part of the stencil you wish to use, place it on the center of a clean sheet of paper. Use a couple of pieces of clear tape to hold it into place. Trace the design using a very fine point marker or a ball point pen. (**Figure 2**) Don't use a pencil here because it won't be dark enough for you to trace in the next step. When you are finished, remove the tape and the stencil. The result should look like **Figure 3**. You are on your way to designing!

As I stated, weather you are going to have a linear design or a fretwork-type one, up to now we the steps are the same. Let's start off with the linear design.

You first need to look at the lines of your stencil and decide how you want your finished project to look. Now you could leave the lines 'as is' and trace over them without modifying them, but I think that will not make as nice a design at all, as there are too many breaks in the lines to make it flow and look professional. When I was designing this shell, I looked at the lines and decided to keep in only the breaks that are completely necessary to hold the design together. By connecting some of these broken lines, the design flowed much better and really looked much more appealing. Remember that in this type of design, you are only removing small sections of the wood and don't really have to worry about small pieces breaking off. As you become more familiar with this process, it will be easier for you to pick and choose how you want to make your final drawing. In **Figure 4** I have marked with a pink highlighter marker where I have decided to reconnect the lines.

Place your tracing on a light table or light box or work in a bright area and secure in place so it doesn't move. Place a clean sheet of paper over the original piece and proceed to draw around the lines, connecting lines where necessary and giving a bit more thickness (approximately 1/16th of an inch), if you wish to give your design some definition (**Figure 5**). It is best to use a pencil here, as you may wish to move lines a bit here and there to round corners, straighten edges or modify the design to suit your specifications. Trace lightly at first, and when you are satisfied that things are how you want them, you can go over the lines again with the fine line marker or ink pen. It is important that your final drawing has nice, fine lines so that you are able to follow them easily with your scroll saw blade.

When I finished with the initial tracing, I didn't like the look of the rounded edges at the base of the shell (**Figure 6**). I felt it made the design look a bit clumsy for my taste. I erased some of the ends of the lines and tapered the edges to form gentle curves to make the design look a bit more elegant (**Figure 7**). I also adjusted my straight lines to be a bit nicer and made sure that the width of the lines was consistent throughout the design. **Figure 8** shows the completed drawing with all the lines cleaned up.

When you have finished the 'Master drawing' you should then photocopy it or scan it into your computer and print copies and put it in a safe place. It is then ready to modify to fit any project you can come up with later on and you don't have to redraw everything. You could resize it to your needs and change it to whatever project you are working on.

*Next we will draw the fretwork-type design. Once again, we will want to put the tracing on the light box and tape it down. This time when we trace around the design with the pencil, we will be deciding which areas we will want removed from the wood when we are cutting. I traced approximately 1/16th inch from each side of the line and let the lines be my guide to create the areas to be cut out (**Figure 9**). You could use your imagination and make the design however you want to fit your taste and need. You could mix and match designs from different stencils, use borders with coordinating corner motifs, or use the same design repeatedly to make different effects. I think the key in this type of design is to try your best to keep the line width consistent throughout the pattern. Keep in mind the type of wood you are using and what kind of design the wood will tolerate. Also keep the direction of the grain in mind as to the strength of the overall design. The fretwork type shell design was quite simple and came out very nice (**Figure 10**).*

Following are some examples of different types of designs from a simple butterfly to a more complex motif, as well as the finished shell designs. I have done all three designs using both of the above described methods so that you can see the versatility of what you can accomplish using the same basic linear drawings.

(Insert the following photos)

Figure 11 – Butterfly Stencil

Figure 12 – Butterfly Tracing

Figure 13 – Butterfly Linear Pattern

Figure 14 – Butterfly Fretwork Pattern

Figure 15 – Motif Stencil

Figure 16 – Motif Tracing

Figure 17 – Motif Linear Pattern

Figure 18 – Motif Fretwork Pattern

(These above photos should be shown side by side, in progression so that they could see how we went from a stencil to a line drawing to two kinds of patterns.) Perhaps these should be shown as side bars and I can write a short, general explanation as to the different looks you can get from the same stencil – if you don't feel it to be redundant – Sheila)

Conclusion

I hope I caught your interest just a little bit. There is a whole world of designs out there waiting to happen. Sometimes all you need is a little inspiration and a little know-how and you can be on your way to making your own designs and patterns for yourself. I hope you try some of the projects and techniques that I have shown you. You may find it to be a lot easier than you thought and open a whole new aspect to your scroll sawing. The next time you have a special project to do for someone when you can't find just the right pattern, give stencils a try and see what happens.

NOTE: Some of the light boxes or light tables on the market are very expensive. I found it is very easy to create your own light box for drawing. You could purchase a ready-made shadow box picture frame and simply replace the glass with Plexiglas (for safety) and drill a hole in the side of the frame to accept a small light kit (which is available at most hardware stores) and you are ready to go. You could also just build your own frame and do the same. This will cost substantially less than the artist's light boxes available at art and craft stores.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Sheila or Tony at 902-245-5865 or you can email us at scrollgirl@comcast.net. You may also see and purchase other patterns by Sheila Bergner-Landry and Tony Landry at www.sheilalandrydesigns and download free brochures of our designs.



































