

The travisher is the best tool for hollowing seats

BY FABIAN FISCHER

To make a seat comfy you can add padding and upholstery, but that won't work for the kinds of chairs and stools I make (see pp. 56–63). To make curvy wood seats that fit the body and please the eye in all sorts of woods, I turn to the travisher, a traditional chairmaking tool. It is basically a big wooden spokeshave with a curved sole that lets you take fine or heavy cuts depending on how you hold it. If the blade is sharpened well, the chips come away in bunches, making it possible to hollow a seat in a half hour. The process is very tactile and pleasurable, and you get a pile of beautiful shavings instead of a noseful of dust.

Secrets of success

Like the adze and scorp, the travisher is best used across the grain, whether perpendicular to it or diagonal, and usually is pushed toward the deepest area in the center of the seat.

The tool doesn't respond well to force, so hold it lightly in your fingertips. Push the travisher away from you, letting it ride on the tip of the sole, and make some strokes toward you without letting the blade cut at all. Now as you make more strokes, angle the travisher slightly downward until the blade catches. I recommend light



Work fast or work precise. Hold the travisher lightly in your fingers, with the front of the sole touching the workpiece. Then lever it up or down to take heavy cuts (opposite) or very light cuts (left) with better control and a smoother surface. Work across the grain.

TWO TO CHOOSE FROM

Fischer tried a number of new models of travishers and these two stood out. Both feel great in the hands and are easy to control. And both have quality blades, lapped to a mirror polish on the all-important back side, which is hard to do without some experience.

MURSELL TRAVISHER
\$140
travisher.com

The less expensive of the two is made by James Mursell in England. The blade adjusts easily with two set screws, letting you get set up for deep and fine cuts. Start with the blade sticking out about $\frac{1}{16}$ in., then keep extending it until you are happy with the cutting action. This is a great tool for beginners who will be doing all of their hollowing with one tool.



CLAIRE MINIHAN TRAVISHER, STANDARD SWEEP
\$245
cminihanwoodworks.blogspot.com

If you plan to build a lot of stools and chairs in the future, consider investing in a travisher made by Claire Minihan, based on a design by chairmaker Peter Galbert. The blade is not adjustable, but you get all of the adjustability you need by tilting the tool forward and back. It can't take as heavy a cut as the Mursell, but when you take very fine cuts, it leaves an almost finished surface. Also it has a curved brass plate on the sole to prevent wear. It is available in two different curves (called "sweeps"), with the deeper standard sweep being the most versatile.



TUNE-UP TIPS

To put a razor edge on the travisher blade, all you need is a 3/4-in.- to 1-in.-dia. dowel and a few grits of wet-or-dry sandpaper. The dowel is slotted so you can wrap the sandpaper around it.

Hone with a dowel.

Keep the dowel flat on the bevel and slide it from side to side. Start with 600-grit sandpaper, then move on to 1,500 and 2,500 grit, removing the burr after each grit.



cuts at first, moving the tool rapidly and lightly across the work. Once you get the hang of it, you'll be able to take heavier cuts with more force. When you reach the back of the hollow and want the tool to stop cutting, you just angle it upward again.

How to sharpen the curved blade

It's not hard to sharpen a travisher blade. I use a fat dowel and wet-or-dry sandpaper (600, 1,500, and 2,500 grit) for the bevel, and my waterstones (1,000 and 6,000 grit) to remove the burr created while honing. It also helps to color the bevel with a felt-tipped marker so you can track your progress easily.

I work up through the grits, honing the bevel, then removing the burr with each grit. My last sandpaper grit on the bevel is 2,500. After removing the burr, I then hone the bevel quickly with honing paste on a piece of leather wrapped around the dowel. The back gets one last pass on the waterstone and I'm done. The blade cuts like butter. □

Fabian Fischer makes hand-shaped chairs and stools in Freiburg, Germany.



Remove the burr on waterstones. With the back of the blade flat on your waterstone, move it back and forth in a curved motion. Then go back to the bevel with finer sandpaper, remove the burr on a finer waterstone, and so on.



Grind as needed. Angle your drill-press table and add a sanding drum with medium-grit paper. Slide the blade side to side to get an even bevel.



Set the blade and test the cut.

Reinsert the blade (above) and tighten it in place. Start with the Mursell's adjustable blade sticking out about 3/16 in. from the sole, and then take some test cuts in scrap (left) to check your setup.

