

Spooky Halloween House

Adding scenery and a sky gives a bark house a whole new look

By Bob Hershey

One of my favorite things to carve is a themed bark house. Over the years I've created houses for Christmas, July 4th, and Thanksgiving, but my favorite houses are for Halloween. Cottonwood bark lends itself especially well to an eerie Halloween look.

No two pieces of bark are the same, so any measurements, dimensions, and patterns are suggestions. Adapt the design to fit your bark. As long as you set your landmarks in well, your piece will turn out fine.

Getting Started

When I begin roughing out a piece of bark, I often wear a leather glove on my tool hand because the outer surface of the bark can cut your hand. Wearing the glove sacrifices some control, but protects my hand.

I use a large flat gouge to remove the inner bark from the back of the piece. This helps determine where the bark ends in the back. If you wait until you're done carving to remove the inner bark, it's easy to break the piece, especially in the thin sky area.





1

Set in the roof. Use a ½" (13mm) V-tool. I set the line of the roof at roughly the middle of the bark blank. Move down about ½" (13mm) and carve a parallel set of lines to set in the eaves. Then, use the same tool to set in the chimney and the edges of the sky. These landmarks help set the stage for the whole carving.



2

Rough out the roof. Clear away the excess wood around the chimney and above the line of the roof. I use a ¾" (19mm) #5 gouge. Remove the excess wood to shape the top of the chimney and to separate the sky from the house. Leave extra wood around the chimney and roof to give you room to add movement. Use a ⅛" (3mm) V-tool to refine the joint between the chimney and roofline.



3

Refine the sky. Use a knife. Keep the middle thicker, but thin the edges slightly. Leave some natural bark visible on the edges. If your blank has a cut top edge, use the knife to carve an irregular shape to add movement and break up the flatness.



4

Separate the chimney from the sky. Use a knife or ⅛" (3mm) V-tool. Keep the slope of the roof in mind as you carve a groove separating the chimney from the sky. The separation adds depth and dimension to the piece.



5

Shape the chimney. Use the knife to shape the top of the roof. Then, carve the basic outline of the curvy chimney. With a bark house, you do not want any straight lines.



6 **Rough out the house.** Use a ½" (13mm) V-tool to deepen the eaves line. Use the ¾" (19mm) #5 gouge to give the roof movement by carving some sections of the roof deeper than others to create a wavy roofline and eaves line. Then, use the same gouge and the knife to remove some of the natural bark and to thin the house under the eaves line.



7 **Carve the doors.** Draw the doors, and then outline them with a small V-tool. Carve in at an angle with a ⅛" (3mm) micro gouge to outline the doorknob. Then, cut up to the stop cut to separate the doorknob from the door. Use the knife to carve the window details at the top of the door.



8 **Rough out the pumpkin.** Draw the outline of the pumpkin and carve along the outline with a V-tool. Then, carve the house down around the pumpkin with the ¾" (19mm) #5 gouge and the knife to make the pumpkin stick out. Deepen the cuts around the stem, and round the pumpkin slightly with the knife.



9 **Add the windows.** Draw the windows, and then carve the outlines with a small V-tool. Use the knife to carve up to the stop cuts to separate the window from the frame. Repeat the process on the other window.



10 **Carve the pumpkin face.** Draw the pumpkin face, and use the knife to carve the eyes, nose, and mouth. You can use the face I've drawn or create your own face. I leave some of the natural bark showing at the bottom of the pumpkin to make it unique. Deepen the cuts to create more shadows. Use a V-tool to carve the groove texture.



11 **Refine the line of the roof.** Use a knife to undercut the eaves slightly. Shape and deepen the cuts where the house meets the peak of the roof. Refine the edges of the roof and carve grooves to give it movement.



12 **Carve the siding.** Use the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool. Make the siding random widths, and angle the grooves to give it a whimsical look. Use a 1/16" (2mm) V-tool or a stylus to extend the grooves up under the eaves. Carve a few joints in the siding with the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool.



13 **Carve the nails.** Use a 1/8" (3mm) micro gouge held at an angle. Carve up to the nails with a 5/32" (4mm) micro gouge to separate the nails from the siding. It's OK if a nail splits off; this just makes it look like the nail was pulled down below the surface of the wooden siding.



14 **Carve the chimney.** Draw rows of bricks onto the chimney and carve along the lines with a 1/8" (3mm) V-tool. Then, divide the rows into individual bricks. Leave the top row intact to make it look like a cap. Hollow the top of the chimney slightly with a 1/8" (3mm) #11 veiner. Clean up the chimney with a knife.

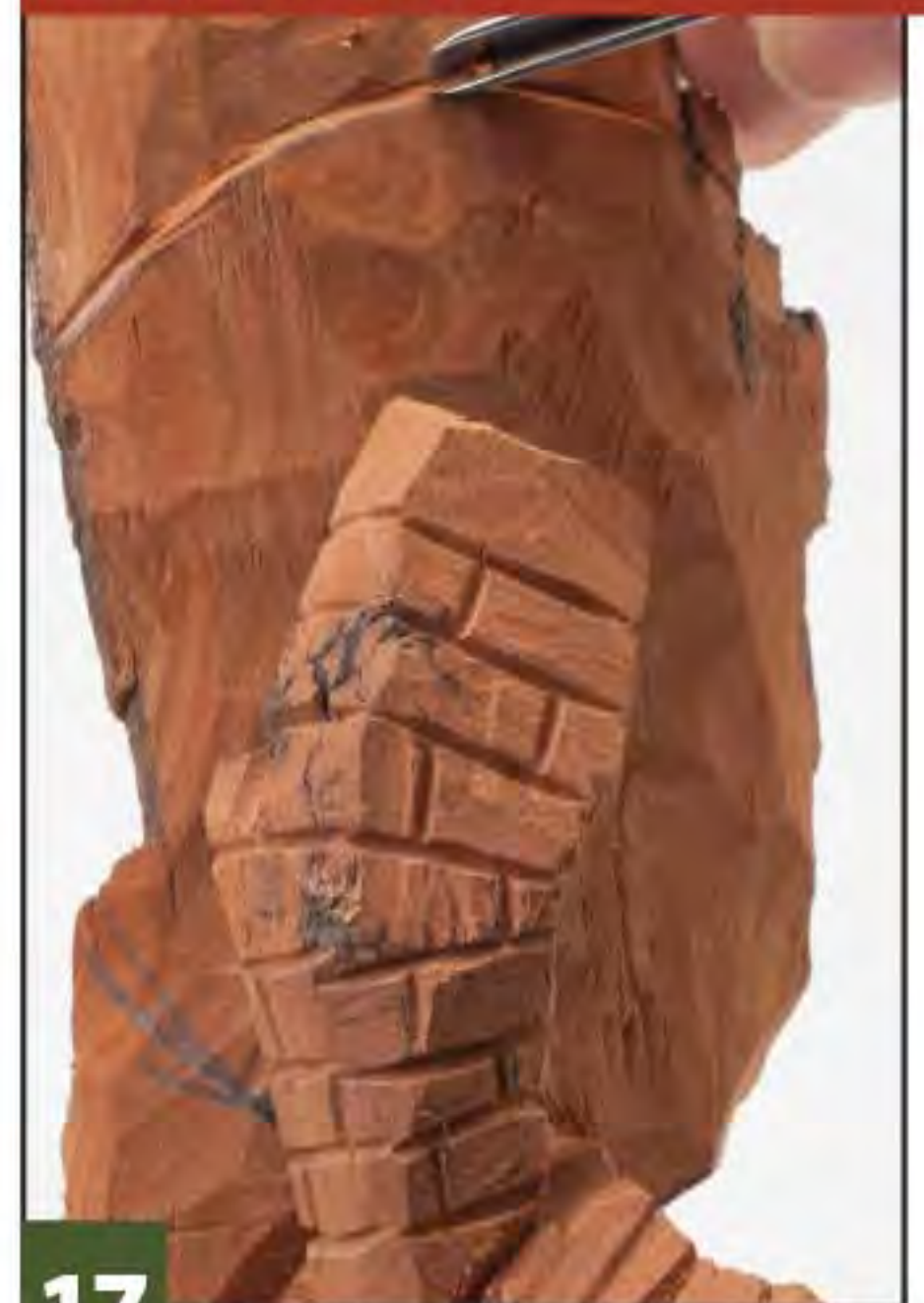


15 **Carve the shingles.** Draw rows of shingles, and then carve along the lines with the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool turned on its side. This gives the shingles a slight undercut so each row fits under the row above it. Use a 5/8" (16mm) #7 gouge to help tuck the row farther under the one above it.



16 **Refine the shingles.** Use the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool to separate the rows into individual shingles, and then use the knife to taper the edges of each shingle down into the groove. Use the tip of the knife to soften and curve the bottom edges of each shingle and to remove some of the bottom corners from the shingles to make them look old and worn.

HOUSE: DETAILING THE BACKGROUND



17 **Draw the moon.** Use a compass to draw the big full moon to make it as symmetrical as possible. Carve along the line with the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool. Then, turn the V-tool on its side and reduce the thickness of the background to make the moon stick out.



18 **Add the witch.** Use graphite transfer paper to trace the witch pattern onto the moon. Carve a slight groove around the outline of the witch with the 1/8" (3mm) V-tool. Add bats above the witch using the same technique, if desired.



19 **Burn the details.** Use a rounded spear shader to burn along the outline of the witch and any bats. Use a large spear shader to burn around the opening to the chimney to make it look like the chimney is well-used. Carve off any remaining pencil marks from the moon, which will be painted a light color.



HOUSE: PAINTING THE PROJECT

I use oil paints because that's what I use for most of my pieces, but acrylic paints will work as well. I thin the oil paints with Minwax natural stain. I've found that oil paints dry quickly on dry bark.

TIP

CLEANING UP

Keep a knife, V-tool, and gouge handy while painting. If you see a rough spot that needs attention, sand it. They also work to remove painting mistakes.



20 **Paint the dark parts.** Paint the windows so it looks dark inside. I use Payne's grey (which is a dark grey) but you could use heavily thinned black. Then, paint the witch and the insides of the pumpkin's eyes and mouth black.



21 **Paint the house.** Use a reddish-brown color to paint the window and door trim. In some of the photos, you can see how the Payne's grey is soaking into the bark, which gives the windows a slight reddish tinge. Paint the doorknob gold. Paint the chimney brick red. Paint the pumpkin orange. Paint the nail heads silver. Paint the pumpkin stem green.



22 **Paint the roof.** Thin the green heavily and paint the roof. The goal is to recreate an old moss-covered roof. Paint the area up under the eaves as well. Mix white with buff titanium and paint the chimney cap.



23 **Paint eyes onto the window.** Use the pattern as a guide to carefully paint eyes in the window looking up at the witch. I mix an off-white, such as buff titanium, with white. Leave the paint relatively thick so it shows up against the dark windows. Let the white dry, and then add the black pupils.



24 **Add the cobweb.** Use the relatively thick white mixture to paint the cobweb in the corner of the other window.



25 **Paint the moon.** Thin the off-white mixture and paint the moon. Blend a bit of silver into the white to give it a slight glow. Add a little cadmium yellow deep along the edges of the moon and blend it in.



26 **Paint the background sky.** Thin Payne's grey heavily and apply it to the night sky. You can add a bit of ultramarine blue to the mixture if desired. Add a second, slightly thicker, coat to add depth.

Bark House Gallery



27 Paint the mortar between the bricks. Use the off-white mixture and a small brush to paint the mortar lines between the chimney bricks.



Finishing the Project

Allow the paint to dry thoroughly, and then seal it with three or four light coats of Deft semi-gloss finish. Buff the finish with a brown paper bag, and remove the dust. Then, apply a mixture of 60% natural Watco Danish oil wax and 40% dark walnut Watco Danish oil wax to the piece. Let the wax dry, and then buff it to a nice warm gloss.

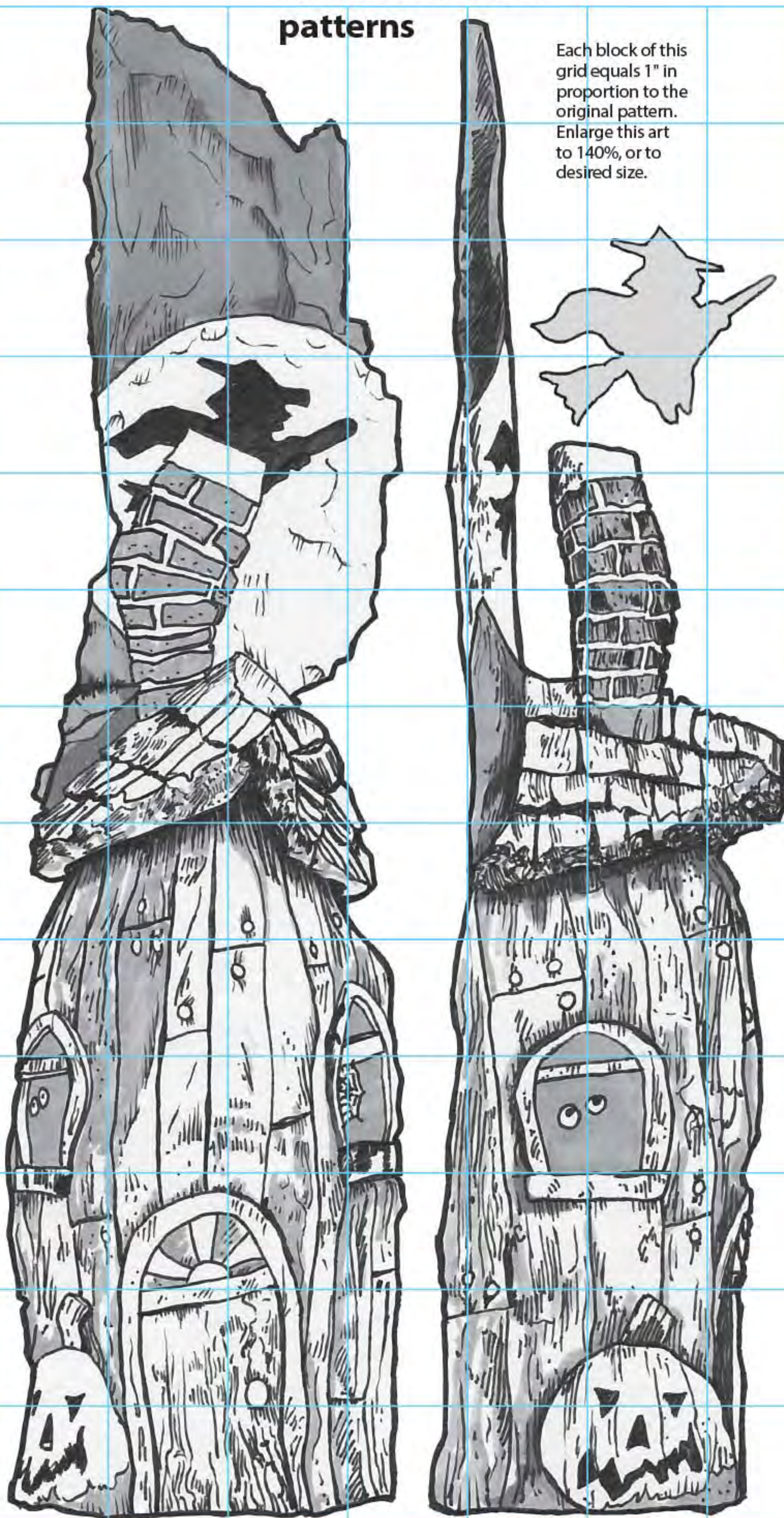
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Bob Hershey is a retired truck driver who started carving in 1982. He is a member of the Conewago Carvers and Lancaster County Woodcarvers clubs. He enters the local club shows; Artistry in Wood in Dayton, Ohio; and the Caricature Carvers of America competitions. Bob carves everything from animal caricatures to full-size figures. He lives in Lititz, Pa., with his wife, Debby.

Halloween house patterns

Each block of this grid equals 1" in proportion to the original pattern. Enlarge this art to 140%, or to desired size.



materials & tools

MATERIALS:

- Cottonwood bark, 3" (76mm) thick: 3½" x 13" (89mm x 330mm)
- Oil paints: Payne's grey, black, reddish-brown, gold, brick red, orange, silver, green, white, buff titanium, cadmium yellow deep, ultramarine blue
- Natural oil stain, such as Minwax
- Finish, such as Deft: spray semi-gloss
- Watco Danish oil wax: natural, dark walnut
- Paper bag

The author used these products for the project. Substitute your choice of brands, tools, and materials as desired.

TOOLS:

- Carving knife
- #5 gouge: ¾" (19mm)
- #7 gouge: 5/8" (16mm)
- #11 gouge: 1/8" (3mm)
- Micro gouge: 1/8" (3mm), 5/32" (4mm)
- V-tool: 1/16" (2mm) or stylus, 1/8" (3mm), 1/2" (13mm)
- Compass
- Paintbrushes: #2, #4, #8 round