
Carving Rubber Stamps with Christine Schmidt

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

- I'm going to show you how to carve your own stamp to make a cute little air mail stationary set. This is a good project for beginners because we're going to carve a simple shape and we're going to carve text.

Chapter 2 - Making the Stamp

Materials

- To carve your own stamp, you'll need a soft rubber block, there are a couple of different brand names. Speedball makes one called Speedy-Carve. This particular one is the more generic brand, and it's called Soft-Kut. You'll need a linoleum cutter knife. These things are so handy, because the tiny little blades called gouges fit inside the handle. You actually just unscrew the neck and load whichever blade you would like to use in there and tighten it. You will also need a template or your own drawing, whatever you like, and a pencil. Any pencil will do. You just wanna make sure there's a lot of good graphite in there. Some scrap paper. A water-based stamp ink pad. And just a moistened sponge or wet paper towel for cleanup. And if you'd like to later mount the stamp, like this guy, you would just need a wood block or even a block you stole from your kids and some Super Glue.

How to use carving tools

- This linoleum carving tool is just about 10 bucks at the art store, and it comes with a bunch of little blades. You choose your blade, also called a gouge, according to what kind of line you want. Do you want a little skinny line, or do you want a big fat line? For a really skinny line, you want to use the blade with the smallest little gouge. That's going to be used for all of your detail work. When you want to efficiently clear out larger areas, you would use a gouge that has the widest angle. It's a lot more efficient that way. When I'm beginning a stamp, I like to go over my design first with the skinniest little blade. So I'm going to load that in the knife now. You just loosen the neck of the linoleum coating tool, stick your blade in there, and tighten. The one important thing to remember about using these blades is you should always push away from your body. It is super dangerous, you will get stabbed, I've done it a million times. And you kind of want to hold the blade at less than a 45 degree angle. Here we're just taking away the top layer of the rubber block, because the top layer is a part that's going to hold the ink. When you're doing curved lines, it's actually better to rotate the block instead of the knife. You just get more hand control that way. I'm just slowly turning to get a good circle. So we're actually working in reverse. It's kind of opposite day. We're taking away what we don't want to print because the top layer of the block is the part that's actually going to receive the ink and make the impression.

Transfer design

- To transfer your design to the rubber block, you just take your pencil and trace the design. You wanna go over it a couple of times because you really want the paper to be loaded with graphite. If you are using your own drawing, just remember that you should always reverse the text. Because we're actually carving it as a mirror image. And I'm just gonna trace these shapes for the border of

the air mail envelope. Now that I've finished tracing my design, I'm ready to transfer it to the block. You want to make sure that your block is bigger than your design. Otherwise, it won't fit on there. Turn your traced drawing down and place it on the face of your rubber block. And just take the side of your thumb nail. Just rub it back and forth. This transfers the graphite from the piece of paper to the rubber block. Just like magic. So you want to keep one of your hands pressed down on the traced image. And just kind of peel back with your other hand to make sure that the drawing has transferred correctly. And that looks amazing and we are ready to carve.

Carve design

- Because I'm using a small block, I actually want to keep it stationary with my non-dominant hand. And with my dominant hand, I'm gonna take my tiny little blade and get these little details. Just pushing away from my body. And again, we're carving away what we do not want to see printed. Alright. You can really use any text that you would like. I wouldn't go much smaller than this. It'd be a real challenge to get text that's, you know, smaller than half an inch, you'd have to be a master. You could do any kind of font you like. You could do cursive You could do even just a font that you printed out on your computer. Now that I've finished up all my detail work, I'm gonna load the larger blade so I can clear out bigger areas more efficiently. And now I'm just gonna outline my design. See what a big chunk that is? Ugh, it's so satisfying. The stuff is like carving butter. These blades are disposable. When your blade eventually gets dull, you just go to the art store and buy the exact size that you need. It takes a lot of carving to dull these blades on a soft surface though. I am taking away the outer perimeter of the little border. Now that I've completely carved away my motif, I'm ready to cut these into two individual stamps. So I'm gonna load this scary looking blade, which is gonna do the trick for me. I'm just gonna follow the outer perimeter that I carved with that larger blade to give us a really crisp line. And the cool thing about this project is I did the border kind of small. It's a repeated pattern on the air mail border. So you can use it many times for a really large envelope or just couple of times if you want to do a tiny envelope or maybe a greeting card. So I'm just gonna peel these away from the block. Go over it a couple of times if you need to. Nobody's watching you. (laughs) Okay. Now, here are two stamps.

Make corrections

- So before we stamp on our final product, we want to just proof it. So I'm pressing this evenly, the face of the stamp, onto my ink pad. And I'm going to press firmly and evenly onto my paper. Now you just want to really carefully examine the impression you've made. Is there anything in there that you don't want? I don't love this little piece of the R, so I'm actually going to carve that out. So with my detail blade, I'm just going to take out that little chunk of the R I'm not liking. And then I'm going to proof, or test print it again. Alright, and I'm just checking to make sure there's a nice, even coat of ink on there. Pressing firmly, evenly. Yes, this looks great. Now I'm ready to proof the border stamp. Same gig, press, press, press. Press, press, press. Ooh, straight out the gate that looks great. So if your stamp doesn't look exactly how you like, you could always go in and clear out more area with your detail tool, or if you've carved away too much, this is a great chance to practice your new skill and start carving again. It happens so quickly, you'll do it in a jiff. I like to use water-based ink when I'm proofing, or test printing, because it's just the easiest to clean up. And it makes a clear impression. Once you're happy with your proofs and your stamps, pull out your good paper and get crackin'.

Mount the stamp

- If you would like to, you can mount your stamp to a block. The block has a few advantages. It distributes the pressure evenly so you get a more clear impression more often and it's easier to find and it looks so pro. So you would just do that with your wood mount and some super glue. Just a little dab on the back there. Make sure it runs all over your fingers, and I'm actually going to place this on the corner of my block, that way it's just easier to align when I'm printing. Ideally you have a block that's just a little bit bigger than your stamp. Not the case here. I made one earlier with a smaller block and I mounted them on opposing sides. I use these two together a lot so this is just easier for me to grab in my box of stamps.

Chapter 3 - Project

Stamping

- Let's make this air mail envelope. I'm going to start with my border stamp that I've aligned the bottom of the block. And that's just easier to see where exactly I'm printing. I've actually put a piece of scrap underneath my envelope because the border is going to go off of the envelope, and I don't want to mess up my work surface. So I've pressed my stamp onto my stamp pad, and I'm just checking it each time to make sure there's an even coating of ink. And I'm going to press firmly onto my paper. Looking fly. And I'm just going to really closely get my eye down there at the stamp level so I make sure these are aligning right where I'd like them to go. And as you can see here, it's kind of running off the envelope, but my scrap paper is taking the ink. Just going to rotate the envelope to complete the border. And you'll see I'm pressing down twice on the ink pad just to ensure a good top coat there. Okay. Now, my border is complete. And I'm ready for the text stamp. Now, this one I really want to make sure that the ink is coating the surface evenly, so I'm definitely going to try it real quickly on my scrap paper. Looks good. You know, ink jet printers sitting on your desk make perfect prints all the time. This is a lot more fun, and there's so much more character to something that you've printed by hand. Boom. Look at that. Good to go.

Clean up

- You just spent all this time making this beautiful stamp. You really want to take care of it. You want to clear off the ink from the top of the surface with just a moist sponge or here I'm just using a wet paper towel. If you can't get into the little tiny crevices there, just use a soft toothbrush, maybe with a little bit of dish soap. Give it a little scrub. You don't want to affect the surface of the stamp, but also don't use anything that's abrasive. I don't want to run this under running water because I've mounted it to wood block. If they were just the loose rubber bits that would be fine. I would just stick it in a cup of hot sudsy water, but because this is mounted, the wood would warp if it was under running water. After your stamp is dry and clean, you just want to keep it out of direct sunlight because that will make the rubber a little bit brittle. You want these stamps to last a long time so just take care of them. Eventually we won't be sending air mail anymore. We'll be sending space messages, but at least you'll still have your stamp.