

THE WAND LADY:

You might remember earlier this year PAN ran a promotion offering cheaper membership for a limited time once the Facebook group reached 1000 members (It now stands at over 1400 - nice work all). As part of the promotion I offered PAN my services as a wand-maker so they could give away a custom made wand to a winner drawn from those who took up the offer.

The prize was drawn at the May 2010 committee meeting and the winner was announced as Oliver Bladesmore. (*Congratulations Oliver! Ed.*)

After several weeks of playing phone tag with Oliver (it turns out we are both very busy people) I managed to get a chance to talk with him one Saturday afternoon.

Oliver being quite new to Paganism was unsure as to what he wanted in a wand. I spoke with him about his interests and personality and started to put together some ideas. We spoke about what, if any, were his favourite trees and what style and materials he would like.

Oliver had seen some of my other designs online and liked the leather weaving style I have used before. However the wands he had seen online were quite organically shaped, following the natural twists and turns of the wood, but he wanted a clean look. I suggested I could shape the wand on my wood-turning lathe. This would give it a straight and formal style. We spoke about different woods and he was quite taken with the notion of using English Oak.

I pointed out that I often use decorative brass end pieces on my wands. Oliver liked the idea but wanted something silver. I suggested a traditional acorn finial shape on the end of the wand to match the oak theme ,which he liked the sound of.

With a picture starting to emerge in my mind of what this wand would be. I jotted down my notes and told Oliver I would do some research and send him a sketch of what I proposed to make.

I spent several days searching online (may the Gods bless the internet!), in books and meditating, looking for ideas.

I wanted something silver and clean, something sharp and bright to compliment the warm and strong earthiness of the oak wood. I wanted this wand to be powerfully masculine but still have a balancing feminine touch.



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I searched for silver acorns and finials online (those decorative bits you get on the ends of flag poles and curtain rods) and whilst there was a dazzling array of beads, trinkets and other components to choose from they were either not the right material, too small, too wildly expensive or more often too rough and uneven for the feeling I was getting for this wand. I started contemplating all sorts of wild ideas, down to learning how to electroplate a real acorn!

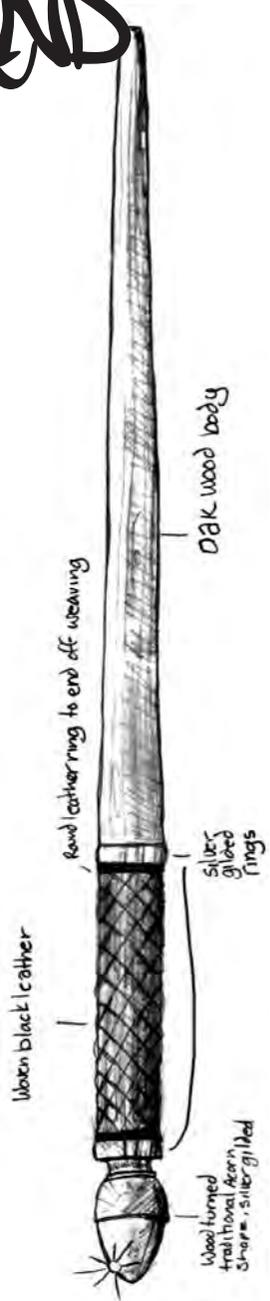
Eventually one of my searches turned up a lovely wooden finial in a very clean, traditional and stylised acorn shape. I pondered trying to source a small one of these to add to the end of the wand and somehow coating it in silver, when I realised I was having a bit of a stupid moment. I was already planning on turning the wand on my lathe, why didn't I just turn the acorn myself? That way I could make it the exact size I wanted and build it right into the wand. No separate parts necessary. Derr!

I had recently learned on another wand how to use gold leaf so the solution then became fairly obvious.

The wand will be a solid piece of turned English oak with a recessed area for the handle that I will cover with black leather woven in a maypole style weave. Two raised areas will cap each end of the leather which I will gild with silver leaf. A formal turned acorn shape will cap the end of the wand which will likewise be gilded in silver. The whole effect being very simple and elegant. Perfect!

A flurry of creative activity saw me sketching out the design which I promptly sent off to Oliver. Oliver's response was full of exclamation marks and smiles so I knew I had hit on the right design. Now I had to source the wood and get started.

Whilst I have plenty of sticks of English Oak in my wand wood collection. I don't have anything big enough or stable enough to turn on my lathe. I soon found, after searching online and ringing several timber yards, that getting hold of some good quality English Oak is going to be tricky. I can get hold of all the Tasmanian Oak or Silky Oak I like but English Oak apparently is not all that called for in Australia as many of our native timbers are so



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darn lovely. Quarantine laws prevent me from importing it unless I allow it to go through a chemical or radiation treatment first and I don't want to have that sort of energy present.

I started emailing reclaiming yards and posting on woodworking forums looking for someone who might have a piece kicking around. After all I don't actually need that much of it. One fellow in Western Australia dug out a slab from his shed that he had rescued from a felled tree himself. He warned me that it was old and rather split in places but I was convinced I could get a good piece out of it and bought it off him anyway (it didn't cost very much so I thought I would take a punt).

A new hand saw (English Oak is rather hard) and some hours on the lathe later and it became obvious that the piece has too many cracks and inclusions to turn nicely (Anyone want to buy the remnants of a small slab of English Oak, it would make a nice pentacle).

I was a bit disappointed and started eying off some of the cheaper oak antique furniture on eBay looking for a good table leg or chair to disassemble. Although the thought of doing so to a nice piece of furniture was fairly unappealing.

As I write this I am still searching for the wood I need. I think I may have to go travelling and find a willing tree and cut something green. I have been meaning to learn how to turn green wood for a while now anyway.

Wish me luck. I shall write more for the next issue and let you all know how it goes.

More of The Wand Lady's work can be found at <http://www.applegroveonline.com/wands.asp>

If you have any questions about wand-making or any other Pagan related arts or crafts projects you are working on, why not send your question to The Wand Lady, who will be happy to share her know-how in an up-coming section of the Tapestry called "Pointers from the Wand Lady" (or some such thing).

Send your enquiries to The Small Tapestry via mail:

**PO Box 1062
North Sydney NSW 2059
Australia**

or email: tapestry@paganawareness.net.au.



If you haven't done so already, join the PAN Facebook group and network with other pagans and cyberpagans via the internet. Keep up with event announcements and PAN activities around Australia.

The Wand Lady:

Since the last time I wrote I managed to finally get hold of the wood I needed. As it turned out getting old furniture on eBay was not such a crazy idea. I searched for weeks using a pre-defined set of criteria to search almost every day, and whilst there was tons of English Oak furniture it was either too nice or expensive to pull apart. Then I stumbled upon a listing for a table and chairs going very, very cheap and with one of the chairs advertised as being broken. I thought "this is it " and I grabbed it. The table was renovated and resold and the spare chairs were given to a friend who needed extra seating. This left me with one broken chair and all the wood I needed.

Incidentally I was also bidding on a damaged rocking chair which after I won the table and chairs I also accidentally won with a ridiculously low bid. It was quite a bit nicer in real life than on the advert and I found out after I took possession of it that it was also over 100 years old so I was quite relieved that I did not have to destroy it. It will become a restoration project after the wand is finished and may or may not be sold (I haven't quite convinced my self I have room for it yet :))

I carefully took the broken dining chair apart and stacked the wood up whilst I worked on the exact dimensions of the wand. My wood turning lathe's bed wasn't long enough to turn the wand all in one piece so I started thinking on how to do it in several. I thought if I turned it in separate parts I could turn the body with a peg on one end, drill a hole into the acorn and connect them together that way. This would also give me a nice crisp edge to the ring at the end of the woven section.

I had asked Oliver to send me the measurement of his forearm (a traditional length for a wand) but as he was having trouble with getting something to measure with I estimated the length based on the average length that most of my wands had been in the past and added a little extra just in case.



The cardboard template. It folds in half to check the contours against the wood.

I then took my sketch and worked out the dimensions based on that estimate and made up a cardboard template to use to help me transfer the design to the wood as I turned it.

I then prepared and mounted one of the legs of the chair on the lathe ready to turn the body of the wand. Unfortunately this preparation had made it obvious to me that I had failed to take into account the fact that the chair

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had been held together with dowels. This meant that it had been drilled into and pegged together leaving me with no single unmarred piece of wood long enough to make the body of the wand. I was rather upset by this discovery. I thought I would have to destroy the lovely rocking chair after all. I decided that as I had mounted the piece and I needed the practice I would turn the body anyway as a trial run. I hoped that the dowel would turn out to be the same timber and unnoticeable in the finished product.



Roughing the wood. The dreaded dowel is visible in the middle of the wood.



The sanded wand body ready to be finished and parted off.

Once I had turned, sanded and finished the wand body it became clear that this was not to be. The dowel was of a totally different and much darker wood. It did however look rather interesting and I contemplated contacting Oliver and seeing if he minded if I used it after all.

I decided to leave it for a few days so I could mull things over. In the mean time I worked on the acorn section and experimented with different finishing options.

I usually use a mixture of almond oil, wheat germ oil, sandalwood oil and beeswax to finish my wands but this was a bit soft for the high speeds on the lathe so I sourced some carnuba wax (the hardest natural wax available. It is used in wood and car polishes) and added that to the mix. I was quite pleased with the result so I used it to finish the acorn. I was happy I didn't have to resort to nasty chemicals to produce a nice finish.



The finished wand body test

I spent a while looking at the two pieces of the wand trying to work out what to do and checking my wood stock to see what pieces I had left.

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Eventually I decided I could not live with the dowel and that I would just have to redo the body of the wand. I figured out if I made the wand in not two but four pieces I had enough wood of the right dimensions. The four pieces would be: the acorn incorporating the first ring, the handle, the ring at the other end of the handle and the shaft of the wand.

The practical upshot of this decision was that by doing this I could get the same crisp ring edge on both ends of the handle. Making the handle as a totally separate piece would also make it easier to start and finish off the leather weave on the handle as I would have good access to get the leather to sit nice and flush with the edges. I would also be able to shorten the wand if necessary by removing wood from the section where the wand shaft meets the ring at the end of the handle and it would not be noticeable. Lastly I would be able to apply the silver gild to the separate pieces a lot more neatly and fit them together crisply than if I had to do it all in one piece.

I should have considered all this to begin with so I was rather glad that the original idea had been thwarted. This new plan would be more complex but give a much neater result.

I had recently found myself with a bit of extra spare time and work on the wand came along in leaps and bounds. The shaft of the wand had to be turned twice as the first one broke during the final parting off stage. A heart breaking moment as for a day or two I thought I would no longer have enough wood to complete the wand until I found a piece that had fallen down the back of the wood pile. Joy! I soon finished the lathe work and had my four pieces ready for silver gilding and leather working.

I was relieved to have the four pieces done, to have squeaked out enough wood from my stash and to have the wood finish so nicely. The wand was starting to feel tangible and real.



The four pieces.

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Or regular mail: PO Box 1062 North Sydney NSW 2059 Australia



The Wand Lady:

In my last instalment I left at the point where the wood work was completed. I had a pile of nicely shaped wood parts and needed to bring the details together. With some extra free time on my hands I threw myself into it and began working on several tasks at once.

I researched gilding techniques and knew that I was supposed to paint black or blue under silver gild as an undercoat. So the first thing I did was rig up a cardboard box with some old bamboo skewers stuck into a block of wood as a makeshift paint cupboard. Then I gave the acorn and the ring 3 light coats of matte black acrylic paint as a base (see picture 11).

In between coats I got started with the leather weaving on the handle. If you look at the photos it appears to be a much more complex task than it really was. However the essential pattern of the weaving is fairly simple and is the same as that of a basic maypole dance, under, over, under, over, etc. The thing to remember is to make sure you have an even number of strands or it all goes to heck really fast. Tighten in sections as you go because it is really difficult to do it later.

The leather was lightly glued in place at the top with as little glue as possible. The strands needed to be able to flex and I didn't want them stuck so severely to the wood that the start of the weave would look stiff and different to the rest.

Pictures 1-8 give a good idea of the method.

Once the weaving was done I turned my attention to the gilding. I had gilded before on a tiny scale (four 24k gold pomegranate seeds, but that's another story) and found it to be a fiddly and difficult job. I thought that was primarily because of the scale of my previous attempt but alas! It seemed that it was the very nature of the task, as the acorn and ring proved to be just as troublesome.

First I had to source the silver gild. Most big art or craft shops carry the faux stuff but I wanted to use real silver, which is harder to get. I prepared myself to travel out to the place I had previously got the gold gild from (Wills Quills in Chatswood). After looking at the awful weather, I took a chance, called my local art supply and they miraculously had one book of leaves left over from an old order. I bolted down to the store and grabbed it, grateful I didn't have to trek too far out in the cold.

Once the undercoat was thoroughly dry I thinly coated the two pieces in a special gilding glue and set it to dry.

When the glue had dried to a hard tacky surface I began carefully adhering the gild. All seemed to be going well until I noticed the gild had a tendency to crack around dramatic changes in surface direction and was showing the black undercoat (13).

I really needed to fix this so I painted the cracked areas with a small amount of the gild mix, left it to dry and attempted to gild over the top. Disaster! The patched areas all had a sticky

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THE HANDLE



1 Equipment for the handle weave.



2 Make a paper template of handle circumference. Add a few extra mm if leather is thick.



3 Divide template into an even number of strands.



4 Use template to cut leather into strips, leaving them joined at the top. Make strips 2-3 times longer than the handle.



5 Attach to top of handle.



6 A pair at a time, loosely work strands over & under. Use a rubber band to hold them in place. Do a small section at a time, tightening as you progress



7 Tightened section.



8 The completed handle

THE GILDING



11 Equipment for gilding.



12 Gilding the ring section.



13 Nasty black cracks on the acorn.

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14 Acorn redone.

edge to them and bits of dust and gunk kept marring the surface. I desperately tried to clean up the mess but there was no way to rescue the job. I couldn't wipe the dusty bits off without also wiping off the gild and I couldn't gild over the top as the gritty surface would make it look lumpy and odd. There was nothing for it, I had to strip back and start the gilding again.

Thankfully I still had plenty of gild left. I wiped off all the gild and the black paint with isopropyl alcohol. Then refinished the wood and painted it again. This time I used a silver coloured base coat in the hopes that any imperfections would not show (14).

This time it worked. The silver was not as rich looking as it was with the darker base, but there were no visible cracks. A few coats of a protective varnish over the gild and I had all the pieces finished ready to assemble (15).

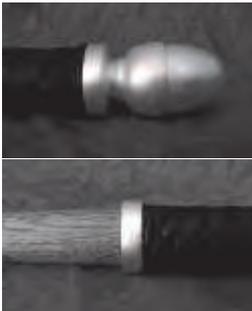


15 All sections done.

The next stage was to glue it together, make a pouch and attend to the finishing touches. I was very pleased with how the pieces looked but was worried that they would not look right when finally joined.

There was an awful moment when I discovered the wand had been knocked as the glue was drying and I was worried that the pieces had come out of alignment. If that glue was dry I would have had to cut it apart to realign it. Thankfully the glue was not yet hardened and I was able to gently nudge it all straight again.

These moments at the end of the creation of a wand are the most nerve wracking. Early on you can compensate for mistakes but if you stuff up at the end you face having to start from scratch.



Whilst the glue dried I had a rummage through my sewing box. I like to supply a small jar of wand wax and sew a matching pouch for the wands I make. It is a lovely unexpected extra for the recipient. It makes me feel like once the wand has a pouch it is truly finished, a real object ready to go and be loved and cared for by it's new owner.

An old scrap of silvery quilted fabric teamed up with a black cotton lining and black button made a perfectly matched pouch. All that remained was a last polish of the wood, a check over for any defects or marks and a photo session.

I am as you would imagine a very visual person and having photographs of the wands helps me to remember the processes, stories, discoveries and joy behind the making of each one.

Even though they are never really mine I feel if I at least keep a photo then I can hold on to what I love about them.



16 The finished wand.

All the work and excitement was over, it was time to let my latest creation go to it's new home. I contacted Oliver and we managed to squeeze a time into our busy lives for him to visit me to collect it. We chatted, we drank cups of tea. I regaled him with stories of the wands progress and I handed the wand over. And you can see, the huge smile on his face in the photo we took is just exactly why it is I do this.



Oliver's smile says it all!

Thank you Oliver for giving me a reason to make this wand. I hope you get many, many years of joy from it. I thoroughly enjoyed making this wand and I hope that the Small Tapestry readers enjoyed following along as I created it. It's a cliché I know, but each wand I make truly is as unique as it's owner and is a combination of research, skill, serendipity and pure magic. I can't wait to see what the next one will be.

P.S I recently bought an antique Victorian silver cane topper in the shape of a horses hoof at a market. A striking wand handle end for a horse person perhaps?

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