

Three or Four a Night: SPOON

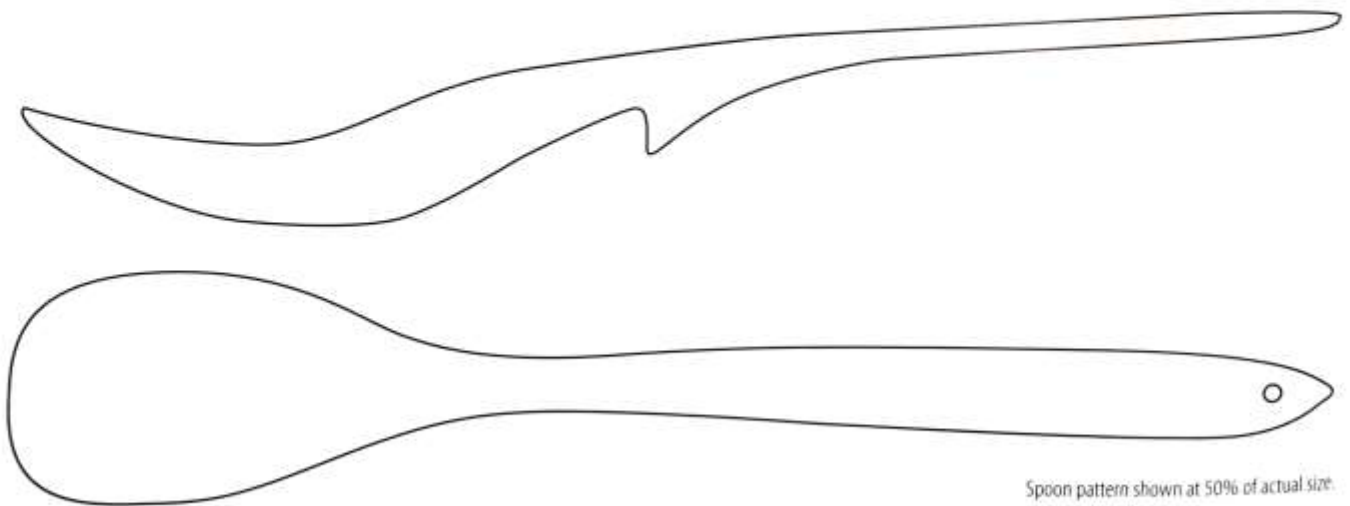
MIKE SCHELMESKE

Mike Schelmeske's love of craft comes from making something that is beautiful and graceful as well as useful. One of his heroes of utilitarian craft is Penti Miller, a Finnish immigrant living in rural Brimson, Minnesota. Mike says, "Seeing Penti's spoons changed the look of my spoons from then on. Seeing his shop and tools and how he worked was great—he was so resourceful. He was using old tools that I had only seen previously in books." This straightforward way of passing on traditional knowledge from generation to generation is a big part of the vision at North House.

This spoon is best made with winter wood, as it dries whiter because the sap is down in the roots. Working next to the woodstove is another benefit of making spoons in the winter—the shavings go right into the stove. The pattern for the spoon is inspired by the work of Penti Miller.

Materials

- ◆ Green birch log or wedge of birch
- ◆ Splitting maul
- ◆ Wooden spoon pattern
- ◆ Pencil
- ◆ Ax
- ◆ Knife
- ◆ Japanese pull saw
- ◆ 1" (25 mm) gouge
- ◆ Several sheets of newspaper
- ◆ Paper bag
- ◆ Sandpaper, from 60- to 220-grit
- ◆ Edible oil: mineral oil, flaxseed oil, boiled linseed oil, or olive oil



Spoon pattern shown at 50% of actual size.





A



B

1. Beginning with a birch log, use a splitting maul to split the log in half (A-C). Using a spoon pattern, lay out blanks on the end of the log with a pencil, much the way you would slice a pie (D). Wedge and split the log again (E).
2. Get rid of the heartwood with an ax (F).



3. Clear the bark side just enough to lay out the top profile of the spoon pattern (G-H). Trace this pattern on the bark side in order to show the concentric rings in the spoon's bowl. Center the spoon on the visible growth rings in the wood (I).

4. Square off this face with the ax until it is almost flush with the side of the spoon's bowl. Continue down the side, arriving at a parallel surface. Repeat on the opposite side (J-K).

5. Trace the side profile pattern of the spoon onto one side of the blank, placing the handle top flush with the top of the blank (L-M).





6. Chop away as much wood as possible, working from the bottom edge of the spoon. Work close to the traced lines, but not too close—leave some room for error and adjustment. The more wood you take off with the ax, the less you'll have to remove later on with a knife (N-O).

7. Draw a pencil line on the bottom side of the spoon, parallel with the spoon's hook. Make a stop cut with a Japanese pull saw, $\frac{1}{4}$ " deep, following the side profile pattern as a guide (P).

8. From the bottom, chop in at an angle to meet the previous cut made in Step 7 (Q-R). Next, shear off a bit more of the bowl's bottom (S).

9. With the ax, cut down into the bowl's top face to the pattern line, making a slight curve (T). Use lighter and more controlled chop strokes than before.



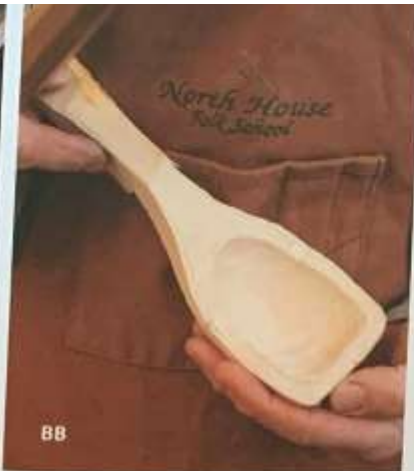
10. Retrace your top pattern, leaving marks where the bowl belongs (U).

11. Rough out the sides of the spoon with the ax, coming as close as possible to the previously traced line. Repeat on the other side (V-W).

12. Retrace any marks that have faded, and draw additional bowl lines inside the existing lines to create a lip. Also draw a line straight down the middle of the bowl from the hook. Use the ax to create a bevel on each side of this line, working your way back to the center of the hook. The rings should surround your centerline in concentric circles (X-Y).

13. Use a knife to trim up the front edge. Work from the corners to the center (Z).





14. Switch to a gouge to carve out the bowl, again working from the edges into the center. Choke up on the gouge, using your palm for adequate leverage and control. Carve a smooth curve along the inside of the bowl, making the thickness taper from the thin edges to 1/2" where the bowl joins the handle (AA-BB).

15. Next, work the outside of the bowl. Use a knife to carve to the side line, making certain to work toward the hook from both sides. When carving, use your thumb and hand for leverage. Carve out the bowl as much as possible on all sides (CC-EE).

16. Carve a seat on the base of the spoon's bowl so it will rest carefully when it is set down (FF-GG).



17. Next, work the hook and handle down in the same manner as in Step 15. Finish with the end of the spoon (HH-KK).

18. When you are satisfied with your carving, wrap the spoon in a couple of layers of newspaper and dry it in a paper bag for two weeks. When the spoon is fully dry, make any final smoothing with the knife and then sand it with sandpaper, starting with 60-grit and moving up toward 220-grit. The handle and outside of the spoon may be left unsanded if you wish. Your spoon can be finished with mineral oil, flaxseed oil, boiled linseed oil, or even olive oil (LL-MM).

