

Greg Moody and Daddy's Rules

(Disclaimer: These "rules" are guidelines for beginning leather craftsmen to help get started in the craft of leather. Greg was kind enough to give permission to reprint these. As Greg will gladly point out, he has come by these methods after watching and working with his father Ben Moody. These "rules", in the past, have stirred some controversy among some experienced leather crafters, but are presented here for your review.)

Gregory Moody was a 55 year apprentice to his father Ben P. Moody.

In **The Leather Factory's** booklet published by Summit Press, celebrating their 25th year they said this about my father: *"Ben Moody—Leathercraft Artist/Designer. Ben has helped "The Leather Factory" and the partners from the first days providing the development of kits, photo samples, etc. of products in the company's first catalog. At one time over 70% of the art and samples of the kits sold by the company was provided by Ben."*

Ben was also the manager of the Austin Tandy store from 1960 to 65, 1992 Stohlman Award Winner and Doodle page contributor.

In addition, Ben Moody is the author of: **Just Tooling Around**—this book offers a wide variety of ideas for small stamped leather projects, mostly using pre cut leather shapes. Due to the simplicity of most of the included projects, it is well suited for camps, scouts, and beginners. Carving leather is briefly covered.

Ben Moody's Craftaid® Pattern Pack Series 1 and Series 2

(Interestingly, Ben Moody had the ability write and carve with either hand and ability to do this with both hands at the same time. Also wrote and drew backward and upside down with both hands simultaneously.)

Greg Moody came up with some **suggestions, guidelines or rules** that logically will help, especially the newcomer, to make a better leather project. Greg was only interested in helping new craftspeople to know one sure fire way to make nice projects. You can judge the physics and logic of the suggestions for yourself. If the rules help—use them, if they don't—ignore them. It's sort of like they teach math in school, learn to add and subtract first then we will teach you the more tricky stuff later.

Daddy's Rule #1—Only wet your leather once.

If you carve or stamp on it and then wet it again much of your definition will be lost to the second swelling. Wet it and store it long enough for all the pores to get equally wet. This usually involves putting it under water long enough for the bubbles to stop rising then covering in brown paper and plastic bag and storing overnight. The brown paper

reduces the chance of mold happening at some place the plastic might touch the leather. When you start tracing or stamping or carving you can cover the part you are not working on with something to keep it from drying too fast. But the real trick on large projects is to spritz the leather regularly from behind, thus not rewetting the surface but simply slowing the rate at which the surface goes from carving wet to background dry. My father often spent 20 hours straight on a leather picture in order to follow this rule. In 50 years of watching him do leather craft I never once saw him wet a piece of leather twice.

Daddy's Rule #2—Never use a bar seeder.

Also called a bar background seeder, etc. There was only one time when it was applied technically well, by Stohlman on a belt, but that took way too much time and did not serve him well because the human eye and brain work together to look for breaks in patterns—like large predators in the grass... so instead of the background “fading into the background” attention was drawn to it instead of the subject of the design.

Daddy's Rule #3—Avoid cutting straight lines in leather projects.

Do not frame your design if you can avoid it. Do not cut borders on belts... it won't be straight when you get done. Use a background tool which allows you to fade from the area around your design out to the edge of the belt or object then do a burnished crease instead.

Daddy's Rule #4—Use a wide light source placed low in front of you.

He used a 17 inch florescent placed about 3 inches off the table. This gives you the ability to see small differences in height or depth of your carving or stamping. Don't shine the light into your eyes.. it is placed so the light only shines on the leather at hand. These rules are for floral designs.

Daddy's Rule #5—Don't use a Pear Shader which has any straight lines in it.

You can not make it look good. Do not use a smooth Pear Shader. It will not pick up the finish and enhance the design. Use a crosshatch Pear Shader. This is for contrast with your decorative cuts which will be placed on top of that area.

Daddy's Rule #6—All lines are to point down stem.

Don't put any veins into a leaf which don't slant towards the bottom of the leaf. Imitate nature. You are looking to create visual flow towards the stem. There are exceptions, but the standard leaf should be angled. I see many which are 90 degrees to the stem. That breaks up the flow—not pleasing to the eye

Daddy's Rule #7—When making the seed head in a flower use a single seeder with a sunburst pattern around it.

Place the first one at the bottom and go up each side, then draw a light line across the top and fill in from the sides. Do any adjusting in the middle area. Then fill in the inside area.

Daddy's Rule #8—When you think you are finished with all the carving and stamping--go back and crosshatch bevel.

Crosshatch bevel all areas where the background is next to the leaves or initials etc. This really helps the background fade into the background and not be competing for the eye with the subject of the work.

Daddy's Rule #9—Decorative cuts makes or breaks your project.

This is the same as landscaping when an appraiser looks at a house. There is no neutral. It either adds to the look or it takes away. So practice with the carving knife is essential. That is why floral designs are so fitted for the beginner to use for hand muscle control training.

I suggest carving some each day. Perhaps in 10 minutes or until your hand gets tired. Always practice cutting TO A LINE DRAWN ON THE LEATHER. Later you can play with making good decorative cuts off handed, but at that point you will have much better control of the knife. In the meantime, for great project look, find a set of the Decorative Cut Stamps (two—one left and one right). These are project savers once you learn the proper angle and spacing. They look like a long skinny comma.

Do not let having these great items keep you from learning to cut decorative cuts, because the stamps will not cover anything except the basic cuts.

Daddy's Rule #10—Cut one third to one half the thickness of the leather.

Most people new to carving do not cut deep enough. Leather is only a certain thickness anyway... you need what you can use without making it weaker in order to make the best impression ... (pun)... impression in the leather to make an impression on the viewer or buyer. This also makes all the stamping easier and more fun.

Daddy's Rule #11—Learn to do some basic woodworking and metal working.

Or make friends with someone who can. There are tools which can be made easily and cheaply, which are not available commercially, which can significantly improve your enjoyment and look of your projects. My father's favorite large surface backgrounder he made from the end of a broom handle...it has random direction straight lines filed into

it... his favorite mallet... he made from an Oak axe handle...his favorite edge line burnisher was made by bending over the head of a large nail. The bookmarks show that tool mark along the edges... the chair shows the same kind of burnish line made by a wooden one of a larger size...also the end of a broom handle...since the project was bigger. These were all daily use items.

Daddy's Rule #12—Don't use Neat Lac.

And it does not make any difference whether it is sprayed, brushed or you dip your project in it. It is a brittle finish compared to what you need. At BEST, it will seal over your project to where you CAN NOT add the natural oils needed periodically to keep your projects from drying out and cracking. What would have been produced by the animal under the skin needs to be applied to your project by you. USE NEUTRAL SHOE POLISH. Applied with your fingers to get it as warm as possible, lightly brush with clean shoe brush.

Daddy's Rule #13—Proper casing of leather is of paramount importance.

Having the leather (down to pore level) even in terms of moisture is most important to those new to leather carving. Their carving hand muscles being less developed than practiced leather crafts people. I think it is irresponsible to mention things like "short casing" without saying that for new people one method is clearly more likely to produce better results. Better results equals more practice equals even better results and more satisfaction.

Daddy's Rule #14—Don't do basket weave.

Pick designs that give you a chance to improve your carving skills. Don't do designs you don't enjoy doing. If you do one, others will be asking you to do that on their belt, etc. Just because this is all that they have seen. It is like a group of people ordering food at a table—lots of people just want what they see others with. So don't do any designs you don't want to have to do in the future. Pick designs which maximize the happiness of your customers or friends and can be done in a reasonable time period. Learn to make a running leaf down the center of a belt, only background next to it and fade to the edge, and use a burnisher to put the line along the edge as compared to cutting it. If someone holds a gun to you and forces you to do basket weave then use the burnisher to place the line first then basket weave to it. Then repeat at the end to clean the stopping point of the basket weave.

There are probably ten million Sam Brown Belts and holsters out there on law enforcement people, but those are often embossed by machines. The ability to carve can set you apart from those store bought things and command higher prices and a lot more creativity and fun doing them. Anyway, most things should have an initial on them to keep them from being stolen.

There are huge numbers of ways to save time AND look better while doing it.

Daddy's Rule #15—Learn how to lace properly.

First people need to know that any items which are going to be stitched or laced need to be glued with contact cement first. This keeps the holes aligned when you punch them. The glue job should be good enough that the sewing or lacing is strictly eyewash. It is the same as on old fashioned shoes—when the soles wear through the stitching on the bottom of the soles does not fall off the shoes.

It should be mentioned that the round holes shown on most lacing instructions being used with flat lace means they are using a kit. For good looking projects people should practice doing their own hole punching so that the holes and lace match up... Also, the holes being there from the start of the project mean they will catch whatever finish you apply. Where punching your own will be done after the finish is applied. And those open holes are just a place for dirt to accumulate.

The idea of breaking a lace during lacing is so wild a thought that I will have to qualify when this might be possible during proper stitching—only if the dog or a child grabs the lace and pulls on it. Otherwise, it means you did not test your lace before starting which would normally be done when you are putting neutral shoe paste on it for ease of sliding through the holes And since you will not have a way to keep it oiled normally from underneath.

Always test your lace before starting and at some point, if you want to make the next higher step, then do what the pro braiders do and skive the edges off. This is how they get those Turks Head knots to look so clean. You can't see the edges of the lace. There are tools for this, but I have seen Tom Hall tape a razor to his hand while I pulled on the lace. It did a great job, but takes practice—like everything in these rules.

The idea of leaving those ends UP is silly. You are going to have real trouble not having a bulge on the top that way. Leave the ends inside the two pieces of leather—invisible and easy.

The idea of having two start/stop procedures just because a lace is broken is a waste of time and energy. Lace should just be “laid up” as one is lacing. No pulling except to take up the space between the lace and since the project is already GLUED, all you need to do is estimate how far it is to the inside of the hole and skive the old and new lace top and bottoms to fit each other. A drop of contact cement, mash and continue lacing. No chance of anyone seeing the stop and stop points and it does not need any strength.

Edges should be treated the same as belt edges. At the very least use a number one or two edge beveler on them. Hold your work so that you are looking at the decorated side.

There is a front and back to double loop lacing. The corners should have a small amount rounded off and two stitches put into the corner hole.

When punching your own holes you put the corner holes in first, then start out from each hole towards the next ones—both directions. Leave some amount before they meet to switch to a single punch from the four-prong you are using and use it to stretch out or close up the spacing so it is least visible to the eye. You can't do that next to a corner or it will show.

Use a Hook and Eye needle because they are cheap and can last 10 years....and the physics of the lace making the turn in the hole as compared to all other methods of keeping the lace and needle together works best. The trick to a long lasting hook and eye is to skive the end of the lace which is going under the hook and use the back of a wooden handle to gently press it down—no hitting. It is only keeping the end down. The hole is holding the lace.

The trick to fast fun lacing is that as soon as you put the needle through the hole to the other side you pull holding at the hole. And when you have pulled about 7 inches through the hole you move the needle to between your first and second fingers FLIPPED to be in the direction which it will next enter the hole or lace cross. And use your thumb and that same first finger to pull the rest of the lace through the hole. You can do an entire project without once having to run your hand down and straighten your lace out.

So when you get through Laying up all your lace with no tension and have executed the ending, you take it and place it on the workbench and gently tap it with a mallet to flatten it.

Using these methods I have regularly laced up billfolds in less than 30 minutes while watching TV. I would glance down to check for hole or cross and its back to watching TV. Only splicing or ending need more than that amount of attention—once you get the flip holding of the lace trick. When you get through apply neutral shoe paste and lightly brush in all directions with clean shoe brush.

Daddy's Rule #16—Don't cut a stitching groove.

Lots of people are going to faint when I say this (nothing new about that), but seriously consider not cutting a groove. You are weakening the leather and making a place for dirt to catch in it. The only exception would be if you have something like a flat belt used in old machinery which had to have the stitching below surface level. How often do we make something like that?

If you cut and take out enough leather to see below the dyed leather then certainly you would need to re-dye. Just another reason not to cut a trench to sew into! Good Hand

stitching; the spacing marked out by a good overstretch wheel; then sewed; and THAT same overstretch wheel run over it will produce stitching which is not very much above the surface level anyway. In 50 years of projects my father never once cut a groove to stitch into—for the above reasons.

It is not easy to find a good old overstretch wheel with nice scallops, but its use will make your hand stitching (single thread, two needles is better than machine stitching because you have a continuous thread even if it gets cut or broken in one place) or even several if they are spaced out 'properly'.

All leather which is going to be stitched or laced should be glued with contact cement first. If you follow the rules about being sure you have lightly coated the leather surfaces with contact cement (may take two light coats and allowed to tack typically 15 minutes) then once you put it together. You can press hard on it with a roller or hit it with a hammer and it is set right then, you can stitch or do anything else needed. Shoe repair shops really hit soles when they are being put on. In other words: "If you don't have a specific compelling reason TO DO something—don't do it. This is in keeping with the "keep it simple" rule.

Daddy's Rule #17—Learn how to finish leather.

These instructions are from my father—Ben P. Moody. It is the safest longest lasting expensive looking and maintainable finish we know of. He was the manager of the Austin Tandy store from 1960 to 65, 1992 Stohlman Award Winner, and Doodle page contributor.

It was from reports from people who came into that store with ruined projects that we stopped recommending any finish other than this one.

The purpose of the Carnauba Cream is to slow the penetration of the antique long enough that you can wipe off the excess, leaving some in the impressions—to accent them.

My favorite color is medium brown Fiebings Antique semi-paste. First you carve something, and then be sure it is absolutely dry. Take some shaken Carnauba Cream and use a small piece of shearling (sheep wool on the skin). Pull any loose hair from it with your fingers. You need a 2 inch diameter circle piece for Carnauba cream and one for Antique. Cut the hair to about half an inch—just need enough to get into the cuts. You use this to get it into all the carved and stamped lines. It's like using a long nap roller for painting a wall which has texture on it. You apply it in small circular motions, reasonably fast, put it all over, then lightly brush with clean shoe brush. It is important that you not leave any filled lines (those will look white), no thick cream left and no air bubbles.

LET IT DRY

We used to let dry a day, and then do the same thing, the next day then let dry overnight. This is just because if not dry between each step it does not count as two steps.

Then shake up the antique. Have an old cotton sheet torn into pieces and placed in piles you can pick up quickly—lots of them so you can wipe **IN ONE DIRECTION ONLY** the antique off the piece as soon as you get it all over the surface. Also take care not to allow any bubbles. Get it to all surface areas and into all impressions, then wipe it all off—no scrubbing. You take the sheet pieces and wipe one direction and throw it away, pick up another clean one, wipe another direction, and throw it away—repeat. Might want to wear rubber gloves or your hands will be brown for three weeks. So you keep wiping one direction then another and watch in the carved lines... wipe out any streaks in bevels you find. When through let dry overnight, then apply neutral shoe polish in small circular motion with the fingers to warm it up some. A soft round shoe polish brush will help get it into the impressions, then take a clean shoe brush and **LIGHTLY** brush in all directions to make smooth.

That is it. Reapply shoe polish every six months to a year depending on conditions. I have objects which look new 40 years later and have a warm expensive brown glow and feel. And have had that feel from the first day. Looks expensive, warm brown, not glossy, does not crack or craze in the bends of the leather, and allows reapplication of shoe polish for keeping the leather oiled over its lifetime.

The Doodle pages, samples in catalogs for both Tandy and The Leather Factory, and pictures which my father made starting in the 1950's had this finish on them. If you want a glossy cheap looking finish on your leather this is not the one to use. I am not trying to sell anything. I don't care what you use on your projects except for the empathy I have for those unwarned about the perils of mixing and matching finishes without long term testing of them. Finish companies don't even have to warn you when they change formulations.

This is the safest finish I know of and it just happens to accent my carving and be the color I want on my projects. They look like leather but have the protective cover of wax. The cost of one can of Neat Lac will pay for about a decade of Neutral Shoe polish.

Gregory B. Moody

Email: leathermang@hotmail.com