

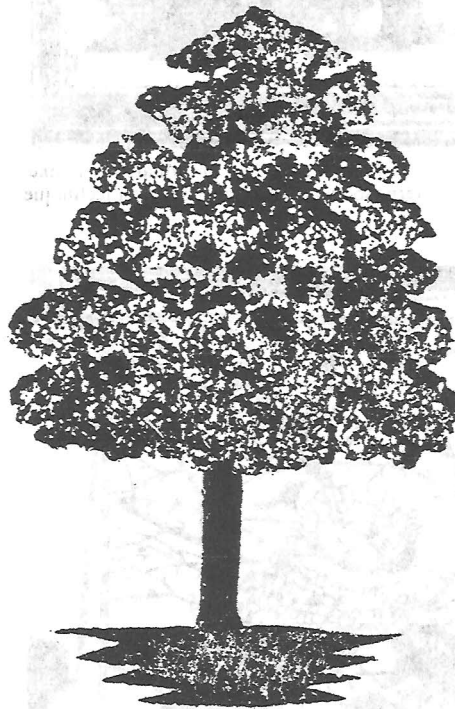
13. Fragmentation. Metal, bone and other inlays

Veneer cannot easily depict breaking waves. Sometimes in the hands of the inexperienced waves look like wood. Veneer has a hard time looking like a gorgeously colored red and yellow maple tree in autumn. Realism is not easy to create with veneers. When badly done realism in the extreme can downgrade a picture. Done well of course, as in many examples in this book, it is admirable.

There is a special technique beginners and pros alike can follow in making things look realistic. If used sparingly in a picture it makes remarkably good ocean waves, colorful autumn trees, stone walls, shrubbery and other multi-colored objects. The technique is called fragmentation. It utilizes colored veneers. They are cut into tiny fragments and packed with glue into a predetermined shape. The form for shaping this mass of veneer fragments and glue is a window cut in the piece of veneer being used as background in a picture.

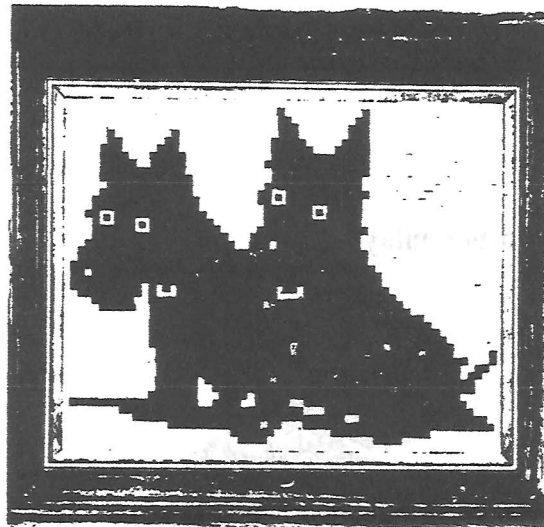
Cutting very small squares of chosen veneer and arranging them this way and that according to color effect desired seems to be the best way to imitate autumn foliage. (13-1) The same tiny squares arranged in more formal patterns make a mosaic pattern like the Scotties. (13-2) A mixture of squares, diamonds and bits and pieces can be worked into a patterned subject like the owl. (13-3) Breaking waves are made up of longer strips and splinters. Even shavings cut from the edge of scrap veneers are useful in fragmentation. Imitating grass is one use.

To develop a fragmented object in a veneer picture choose several pieces of



13-1. Realistic tree composed of tiny fragments packed solid with white glue in shaped window

veneer of different but appropriate color. The edge of the forest in autumn, for example, made use of red, green, yellow, brown and black veneers. To experiment with the technique cut a few pieces of each veneer color into manageable strips or squares. Put clear tape on front and back to prevent split-



13-2. Veneer squares laid in formal mosaic-like patterns show another fragmentation technique



13-3. Fragmented owl demonstrates skillful control in assembling small fragments of veneer

ting and splintering while you are cutting into thin strips. Develop a practical but simple means of cutting veneers into long strips of uniform width. (13-4)

Use your craft knife to help you peel the clear tape off the cut strips. You may break a few. Have some replacements on hand. Now cut the strips into tiny squares about the width of veneer thickness. Cut with craft knife or single-edge razor blade. (13-5) This cutting operation is a little more like chopping than actually cutting. Just pressure the cutting tool through the veneer. Have a few plastic pill bottles or parts boxes ready to store the cut pieces. Keep colors separate for the present.

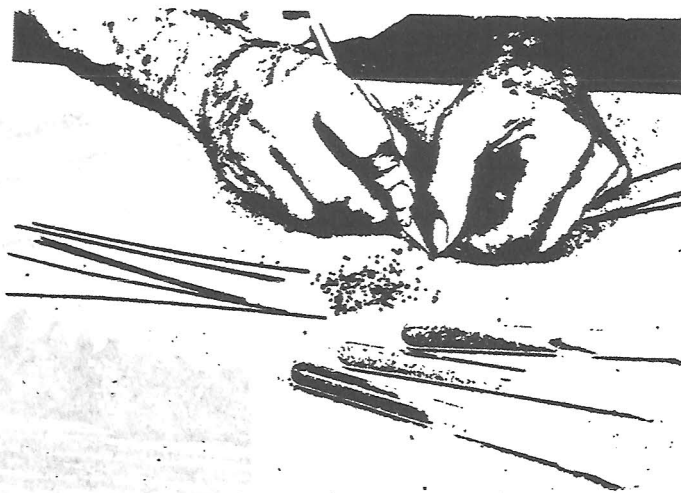
Autumn trees. The edge of the forest enclosing the corn field needs a lot of little fragments, but when you have cut enough veneer in different colors to form just two trees, one at each end of the forest, you should start making the tree at the right. As with other marquetry methods you first cut a tree-shape window in chosen background veneer. Working with one tree at a time you have the opportunity to frame the tree with black or dark brown fragments to form a shadow outline. Without shadow the trees would not look like trees, but more like a multi-colored fence or some such thing. Now you will appreciate the earlier instruction to keep fragments separated by color.

You are going to fill the window with fragments, working from the back of the background veneer. Turn the veneer over for a moment while you lay veneer tape on the front side of background veneer to cover and seal off the window so that no fragments can fall through. It's a good idea to cut a second window, this one at the opposite end of the forest, and cover it with tape on the face side. With two cutout windows, far separated, you will be able to work on the second window without waiting for the first to dry.

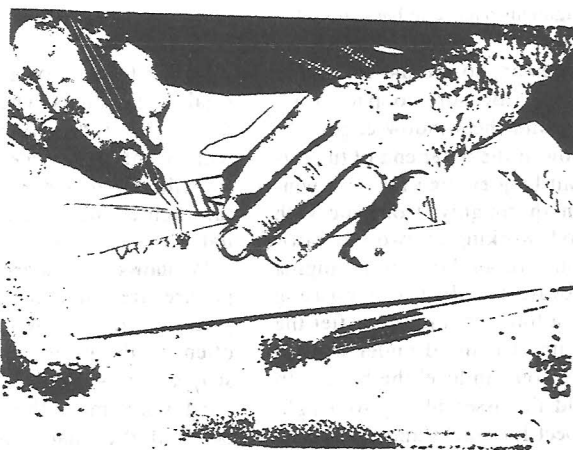
Turn the background over again to work from the back. Sprinkle a bit of dark veneer against each side edge of the window to create shadow. Now sprinkle one or two chosen colors next to the shadow. Keep filling window opening. Push and shift little



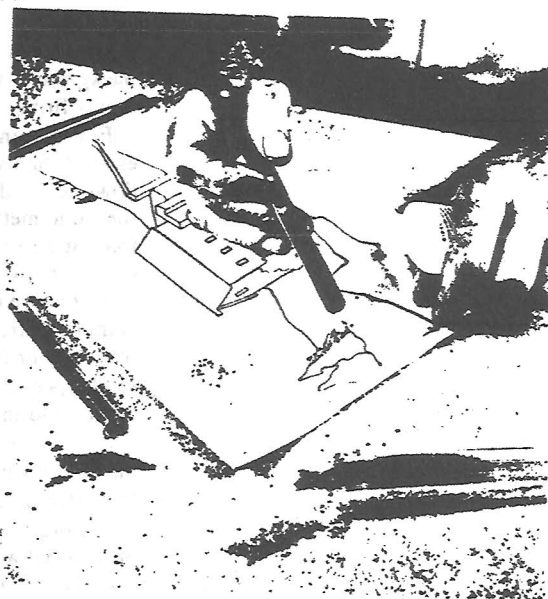
13-4. Two veneer scraps held against stop board control width of thin veneer strips being cut



13-5. Cutting strips into tiny squares. Hold a few under thumb. Thumbnail acts as knife guide



13-6. Tweezers help in arranging fragments where colors are needed to simulate an autumn tree



13-7. Tree-shaped window in background veneer is filled tight with fragments, packed with glue

fragments around with tweezers to create a multi-colored autumn tree. (13-6) Build the fragments above the surface of background. This is the back of the picture and later will be sanded flat as necessary.

Squeeze white glue over the mass of fragments. Wait a couple of minutes to allow the

glue to tack. Then use a spatula or a flexible steel rule to press glue into the mass. (13-7) Waiting for tack allows the mass to solidify somewhat. Don't stir the pieces around and destroy your color arrangement. As tack continues to develop press harder to form a compact mass and to fill the window tightly. Add



13-8. Colorful autumn trees are formed one at a time of veneer fragments packed in background

fragments as necessary to mound above the background veneer. Be sure to pack fragments firmly around the window edges.

Fill the window at the other end of the forest and then wait long enough for both windows to harden thoroughly. Continue with the same method, working on two separated trees at a session. For guidance in arranging colors try to locate in advance a pleasing color picture of a forest in autumn. After the completed tree line has dried under weights for a day or two you can level the back with sandpaper. Hold the assembly up to a light source and inspect for cracks and tiny holes. Fill from the back. For this purpose make a mix of veneer sawdust and white glue. Allow patches to dry, then sand again. After mounting the completed marquetry picture on a panel apply several coats of clear varnish. Polyurethane varnish is especially good in accentuating the lively colors used for the fragmented forest. (13-8)

Fragmented shading. Often veneer pictures contain elements that could contribute more reality if they blended into their neighbors. The technique of fragmentation can be used to accomplish blending and shading. By experiment you will be able to work out the technical requirements of shading. The

principle to work on is to make smaller and smaller fragments. The smaller you use, the more subtle is the shading. With practice you will invent some tricks of combining colors so skillfully that dark areas of shadow will turn lighter and lighter so gradually as to imitate an artist's brush.

Windows and doors. Tiny elements in a picture are sometimes made with a single piece of veneer. Windows and doors are often made in that way. Irregular small shapes are even harder to make than small windows. Some of these elements would look better if they had more textural character than conveyed by a one-color piece. Fragmentation could be the best solution. It certainly would be easier than fitting irregular shapes and tiny squares. For some of these tiny elements very small fragments, virtually bits of shavings and even a mix of sawdust from colored veneers, can be packed into the openings and secured with white glue.

Many other opportunities are waiting for a practical technique such as fragmentation. Experimentation with this method could solve some special problems which to now have not easily been overcome with standard techniques.