

Four Frogs and a Lily (Pad) Method

The red-eyed tree frog (*Agalychnis callidryas*) makes for a fun and not too complex marquetry project using the pad method. I was able to produce four frogs from one pad assembly using 13 different species of veneer. It was cut with a scroll saw at 90 degrees. Each 8.5 x 11-inch frog motif consisted of 52 individual cut pieces not including the frames, for a total of 208 pieces. Figure 1.

The link below will send you to a 30-minute video demonstration that explains how to create a marquetry project using the pad method. It is similar to the approach that I used to produce this project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8-EVZswU9M>

I found my design from a wildlife conservation calendar* of which I traced, making a few artistic adjustments along the way involving light source, veneer tone, wood grain pattern, size of pieces, and then made multiple enlarged black and white copies on white paper for a pattern to cut and extras for numbering and tracking pieces. As mentioned, the project was not too complicated because that was my intention. For the final sketch, I considered the size and number of pieces weighed against providing enough detail for the frog to be enjoyable to look at. My goal was to balance artistry with practicality to make certain that the final product depicts a close approximation and sensibility of the original.

From a creative and artistic perspective, in my opinion, the frog's bulging eyes are the most distinguishable body part, of which creates a comparably huge reflection of light across the cornea. The unique, large pupil and its shape is also notable and makes for simple cutting. The frog's skin color, on the other hand, can be challenging for the marquetarian. There may be a tendency to lean towards using dyed veneers to depict the frog's actual, vibrant color. I prefer not to use dyed veneers because they are unnatural and conflict with the beauty of natural wood and tone. However, for this project, I decided to experiment with dyed woods for a few select body parts to remind the viewer that we are dealing with a unique and brightly colored creature of nature, but also kept one picture using all undyed veneer in various selected tones for comparison purposes.

Once the packet is prepared and ready for cutting, I do not cut an entire project in one sitting; instead, I split my work into about one-hour sessions at a time to reduce fatigue, eye strain and ultimately mistakes! I find that multiple breaks from the saw renews my energy and help keep my mind and dexterity fresh for the next session. The cutting portion of this project took just two sessions.

Sand (salt) shading is a must for me. It really makes the picture pop and provides the illusion of three dimensions. I currently use a portable butane camp stove with an old six-inch skillet and salt (Figure 2). Salt seems to work just as good as sand, is inexpensive and easily found in small quantities. The stove takes about five minutes to come up to temperature. After all the pieces are cut, I first assemble the project on transfer tape with the glue side up, marking with pencil where I want to shade the pieces (based on my initial design), and its numbered code. I then transfer each piece to a staging tray where they await shading. Then, using long tweezers, pieces are placed in the heated salt for a quick shading. It is a fast operation taking about eight to ten

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seconds per piece. Once all the pieces are shaded, each is cleaned of salt particles and placed back in the original design, glued to a substrate and finished. I use several coats of wipe-on poly sanding with 400-grit between each coat.

I originally used an old electric hot plate I found at a Goodwill store for shading, but the built-in thermostat kept cycling the burner off, never allowing the salt to obtain temperature hot enough to burn the veneer pieces. I then tried our kitchen propane stove. It worked, but you can imagine the hassle of working around the family kitchen with hot salt and smoking veneer. I then landed on a butane camp stove found on Amazon. It works wonderfully in my shop (I open the windows for ventilation) and serves a dual purpose for cooking outdoors when we get the chance.

Give the pad method a try. It's not too complicated and you can produce multiple projects with one project. It's exciting and interesting to experiment with various veneer types to determine what works and what may not – something to consider for your next project.

**Copyright issues are not a concern since I do not sell my marquetry.*



Figure 1

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Figure 2