

Caid Thrones – Write up



Design

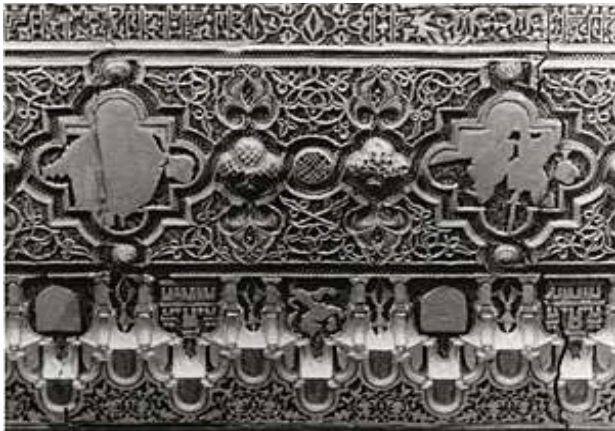
When I was contracted to build the new kingdom thrones, I had the following design criteria in mind:

- 1) The design style must be documentably period
- 2) The style should work visually with Caid's heraldry.
- 3) The style should help Caid's presence stand out amongst other kingdoms, but not so much as to look out of place.
- 4) The style should allow the use of simple forms to keep the construction/carving manageable.
- 5) During the initial discussions that took place, it was decided that the new thrones should also seat the monarchs higher than the old thrones to better project Their presence.

Romanesque and gothic designs are the tried and true design styles typically used for royal thrones in the SCA. However I wanted a little freedom to use design elements that are not strictly 'northern european' which seems to be the norm for most thrones. Medieval Spain (and parts of Portugal) have a unique blend of romaneseque, gothic and islamic architecture. This looked promising so I looked into design styles found in this region:

Mudejar Style, despite it's name is not really an architectural style in and of itself. It came about as a reinterpretation of european architectural styles (romaneseque, gothic and renaissance). Muslim craftsmen, living in christian Spain took to incorporating islamic design elements into these styles along with cheaper building materials not typically used in northern Europe (i.e. brick, tiles, plaster, ironwork). This gave rise to buildings which were sometimes striking in their originality, despite the traditional design framework they started from.

Photos used for historical reference:





For more photos, go to http://www.flickr.com/photos/herr_klaus/

Construction

Material: Quarter-sawn white oak. Chosen for its stability, durability and natural resistance to weather.

Stock preparation: I love planing wood by hand as much as the next woodworker, but I had a huge time constraint to deal with. Therefore, most of the milling was done on an electric jointer/planer with the final polishing left to a smoothing plane or card scraper.

Joinery: The thrones are basically an assembly of mortise and tenon frames with grooves cut in to capture the side and back panels. Mortise and tenon joints are a fundamental furniture joint since well before the middle ages. It also has the added virtue of being an incredibly strong joint for joining up frames. To increase the long-term integrity of these joints, they were drawbored together with hickory tree nails and glued together with hot hide glue. The benefit of hot hide glue is that it can be reactivated with moisture and heat to allow disassembly for possible repairs/refurbishing in the future. The mortise and tenons were made with a mix of hand and machine work, due to the fact that there were so many to cut.

The front stretcher was a departure from the traditional joinery used on the remainder of the throne. Traditional joinery here could have greatly increased the difficulty during assembly and disassembly, therefore steel bed rails were used here due to their simplicity and strength. This would also allow all joinery to be hidden from the audience's viewpoint.

The seat pan is a simple panel with a breadboard attached at the front to hide the end grain and two battens attached at the bottom to increase rigidity and combat future warping.

The footstools, being casework, were joined with dovetails to ensure maximum strength and durability. I prefer to hand-cut my dovetails, mainly because I like not having to settle for what a machine can cut. The plinth is fitted to the case and fastened with simple glue blocks. The tops are held on with wooden cleats to allow for expansion and contraction.

Carving

Most of the carving designs are either Caid or SCA specific. The elements that are not are based on medieval spanish architectural elements that I referenced above in Design:

HRM arms - The intent was to have these above the monarch's heads to produce a 'halo' effect.

Dolphins - Used in kingdom arms as supporters. Also a link to the time when Caid was a principality of the West Kingdom

Peerage Orders - The original intent was to have something more Caid-specific on the stretchers. However, the order badges worked better than any other idea. Also, the subtle symbology of the peerages that support the monarchy placed where they were literally supporting the monarchs was something I found oddly appealing.

Foliage - The trefoil/foilage details added to the top rails comes from one of the reference photos above. The detail was simplified to allow more basic forms and keep the carving more straightforward.

With the exception of removing the grounds, which I did with a router, all of the carving was done with traditional carving chisels and gouges. This isn't just because I'm a masochist. Traditional methods impart a character you can't achieve with modern tools. (see Appendix 1, 'Carving a Laurel Wreath' for example). Where the grounds proved to be too uncooperative to clean with a flat gouge, a card scraper was used to achieve the final finish.

Finishing

I had to find something that would give a level of protection close to varnish, but that would look somewhat period. I chose a product called Waterlox, which is a blend of varnish, boiled linseed oil and polymerized tung oil. It looks like a straight oil finish, but it builds very fast and provides good protection. After the finish was applied, it was rubbed out with an abrasive pad and paste wax, then burnished with a furniture brush.

End

Appendix 1 - Carving a Laurel Wreath

For these laurel wreaths, I went with a fairly consistent and orderly arrangement since I had two to carve. After transferring the design into the wood using carbon paper and then inking it in, the next thing to decide is the amount of relief to give the carving. For these, I went fairly shallow; about 1/8" or so.

Begin the carving by cutting in the rough outline of the design with a v-tool. Stay slightly shy of your final depth and don't try to cut in your design too precisely. The basic shape is good enough for now. After that is done, take a deep gouge (I used a #11) to excavate most of the ground around your design:



Once that is done, start setting in the design. For this it does help to have gouges in varying sweeps and widths. Find gouges that are pretty close to your actual leaf shapes. It doesn't have to be an exact match. This isn't joinery. You're better off letting the gouge define the final shape than nibbling it out right to the line. As you make push cuts along the layout lines your waste will crumble away to the waste-side.

Once the outline and leaf shapes are set in, define the hierarchies between the leaves. Once you know which leaf is on top of which, you can do the modeling with more confidence.



At this point, take the ground down to its final depth. The traditional way would be to take it down with flat gouges and measuring regularly trying to get a consistent depth. However, since I have a router that could do the job in a fraction of the time I went that route.

Now you can carefully set in again down to your final depth. Any gouge marks in the ground now will have to be taken out during final cleanup. At this stage, begin rough modeling the leaves. The hierarchies are established, so now you can begin to make these look like leaves. Before (left) and after (right):



Don't try to model and finish in one go. Get all of the rough shapes modelled in, then come back to refine the shapes slightly. Some of the faceting was taken out, and each leaf was dished out so that the concave shape would help provide some additional light-dark contrast. No need to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to make each leaf 'perfect'. It doesn't really add to the overall effect.

At this point, you still need to clean the ground up. Routers do not leave a finish-ready surface. An assortment of flat gouges (#3) and grounding tools will be useful here. White oak can reverse grain direction quite a bit, so be prepared to attack the surface in different directions. Being able to use your tools ambidextrously will be useful here. Take light cuts and stop your gouges often to keep them very sharp. Wiping the surface down with naphtha might help make the fibers more pliable.



The carving itself is finished at this point. More detail could be added like veining on the leaves, but on a project of this small size that could look overly fussy.