

## Making a Gavel

©Trevor Pope (tpope AT iafrica.com) – Feb 2012

The telephone caller needed a gavel for a present for a special occasion – a law graduation on Saturday. He was unable to source one in Gauteng, and it was now Thursday – he was running out of time. Did I know of somebody who could make one for him?

I recall that one of our club members made a lot of gavels at one stage, but at the time, I couldn't remember who. (Alistair?)

OK, perhaps I could help. What did he have in mind? He said he would drop off a sample. We agreed a price, and then he wanted a box as well. That was a lot more work, and in the time available, would be a problem. He said he would try a shop that sells decoupage supplies.

When the sample arrived, with a note, he said he wanted a dark wood. This was because the sample was painted brown – see the picture below. I cast an eye over the sample provided – it came in a presentation box marked Executive Gavel, and was bought in Israel. I suspect it was made in China. It was made from a light-coloured, lightweight wood that was spray painted a maroon/brown colour. The paint was quite brittle, as I managed to knock a few tiny chips off as I was handling the pieces in the workshop. The silver metal band was held on the handle screwing onto a threaded rod in the head. The thread was probably 6mm and had already stripped in the handle. The anvil was made from MDF, also painted. It really wasn't a functional gavel - after some active service, I expect it will look really tatty.



The only wood that I had in the right sizes and colour, without having to cut up and laminate was Transvaal Beech – Boekenhout – Faurea Saligna, which is a reddish wood with a very distinctive grain. It turns well, even if it seems to be quite abrasive. It also finishes well. Compared with the sample, it wasn't really dark enough, so I decided to stain it.

The gavel was made in three parts, the head, the handle and the anvil. I essentially reproduced the sample provided – see picture. The head and handle were dealt with as spindle turning tasks that I turned between

centres. I parted the ends down as small as I dared, and then worked off the ends by hand, which took a few minutes. The anvil was made from a square of Boekenhout, mounted onto a screw chuck, and turned to shape. The bottom was planed flat and the hole for the screw drilled into the centre. Turning the outside and top was straight forward, using light cuts to avoid tear-out. The anvil was finished with some green stick-on felt, which also hid the screw chuck hole in the bottom.

(The bottom of the sample provided was finished with felt. That's my excuse... it is actually quite functional – the felt stops it from sliding around in use. )

Using a dark stain, applied with a brush and then wiped off after a few minutes, the wood was darkened slightly. I would have preferred the natural wood, which would darken with age anyway.

For something that will be actively used, an oil finish is ideal as it remains flexible, doesn't chip and can be easily repaired with fresh coats of oil after years of use. Wood 10 isn't called an oil finish, but I think it is a fair approximation. Danish Oil would also be appropriate. Woodoc 10 was used over the stain, with two coats, rubbed down with steel wool, and then finished with Rustins Mahogany wax. The wax collected in the grooves and corners, which gave a slightly aged appearance.

Time spent was about 4 hours, so this wasn't a paying proposition. Some time was spent finding the wood, setting up, accurately copying the sample and finishing. Making a batch would be faster. I think once I had made a dozen or so, the whole process would be down to less than an hour per set.

The finish was dry enough by Saturday morning, despite the cold spell, for a final rub down and wax. The client was pleased with the outcome – I'm not sure he knew what to expect and was pleasantly surprised.

It was a challenge, as I hadn't made a gavel before. I need all the practice I can get in accurate spindle turning.