

Design Resource

Coconut Shell, Kerala

The Art of Crafting Coconut

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/coconut-shell-kerala>

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Introduction

Alleppy located in Kerala is well known as the land of coconuts. Traditionally, crafting objects out of coconut shell to make household objects was practiced by coconut farmers. They would scoop out the copra by making a precise hole at the top of the Shell. The art of making useful products from coconut shell is practiced in Alleppy. The proficient craftsmen in Kerala are from 'Vishwakarma community. The fascinating handmade designs of coconut shell products are very well recognized all over the world. Coconut shell has been used to make bowls or serving-spoons by cutting, smoothening and carving the coconut shells. The products made of coconut are bowls, vases, teapots, ice-cream cups, pen stand, lampshade, etc.



The design markings are made on the coconut log.



The husk on the coconut shell is removed by using sand-er disc.

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The outer surface of the coconut shell is being polished.



The wooden log is placed on the lathe machine for initial carving.

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Beautifully carved pillars are kept for further works to be done in order to achieve better designs.



The soap dish is made of coconut shell.

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The shell is coated with wax and it is polished for shine.



Ladles made out of coconut shell.



The raw coconut shell is refined and smoothed.



The carved pillars are transported to give the finishing touch.

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The closer perspective of the interior coconut-wood works in the local houses.



The beautiful traditional houses of Kerala have.

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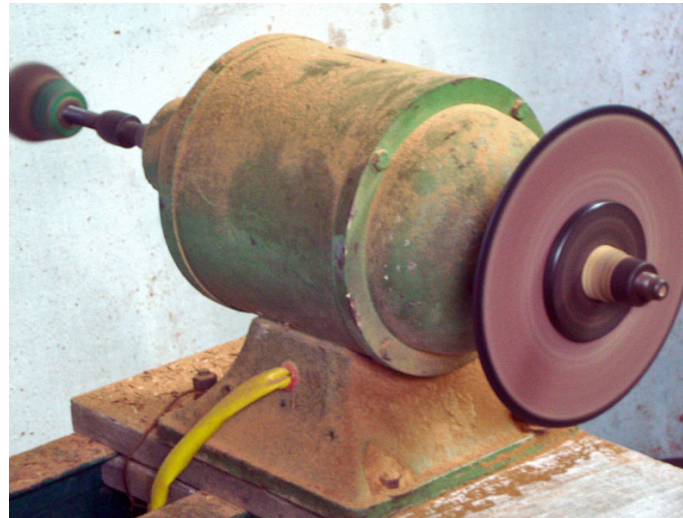
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Shell-Tools And Raw Materials

Few basic tools used for making the products from coconut shells are flat files, rounded files and triangular files. Triangular files are used to shape the coconut shell. Hack-saw and bow blades are used to cut the shell and Chisels are used to carve the unwanted portions. The surface of the article is smoothed by rubbing with sand paper. Verniercaliper is used to measure the inner and outer dimensions of the article during the making process. Currently, more refined tools are being used. Earlier hand lathes were used and currently machine lathes are used, thus greatly enlarging the scope of coconut craft. The machine drill has made precision drilling potential, thus enabling a perfect and well-finished product.



A multipurpose machine used for buffering and sanding. The artisan is fitting the buffering components to the machine.

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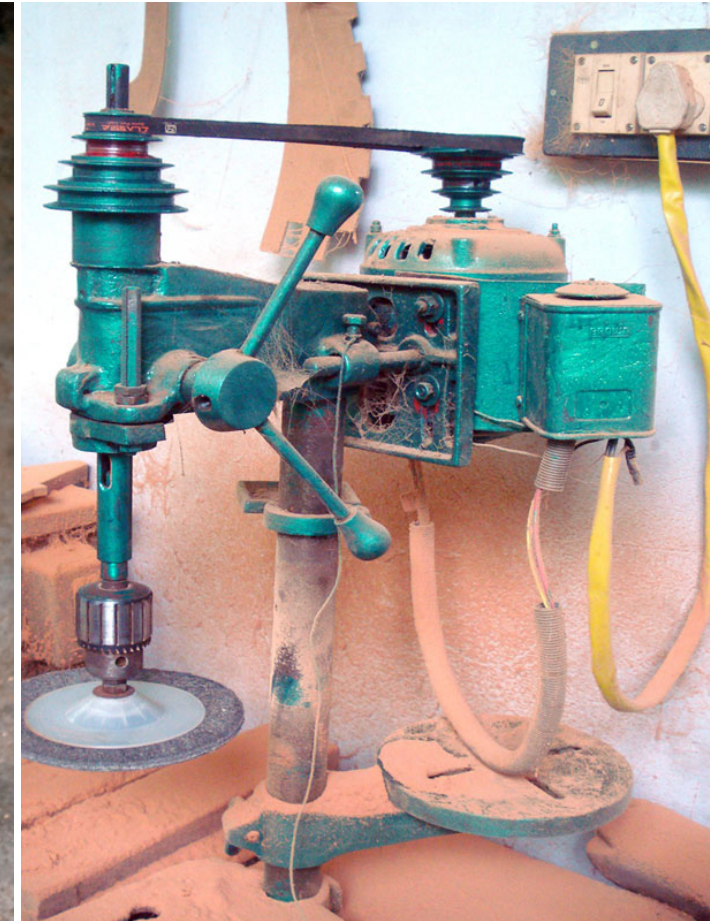
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Tool used to remove the coconut husk.



The sand disc helps in removing the husk from the coconut shell.

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Another type of sanding machine used to smoothen the shell surface.



A buffing machine helps to smoothen the surface of the coconut shell.

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The brush helps in cleaning the inner part of the shell.



Different type of tools and instruments used for making coconut shell product.

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Wood-Tools And Raw Materials

There are few basic tools which are used in coconut wood crafts- flat files, rounded files and triangular files are used to shape the material. Hack-saw and bow-blades are used to cut the shell and Chisels are used to carve the unwanted portions. The surface of the article is smoothened by rubbing with sand paper. Vernier caliper is used to measure the inner and outer dimensions of the article during making process.



The lathe machine is used for wood carving/smoothening purpose.



The log of coconut wood is laid on the lathe for carving.

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The motorised lathe.



The saw machine is used to cut coconut-wood.

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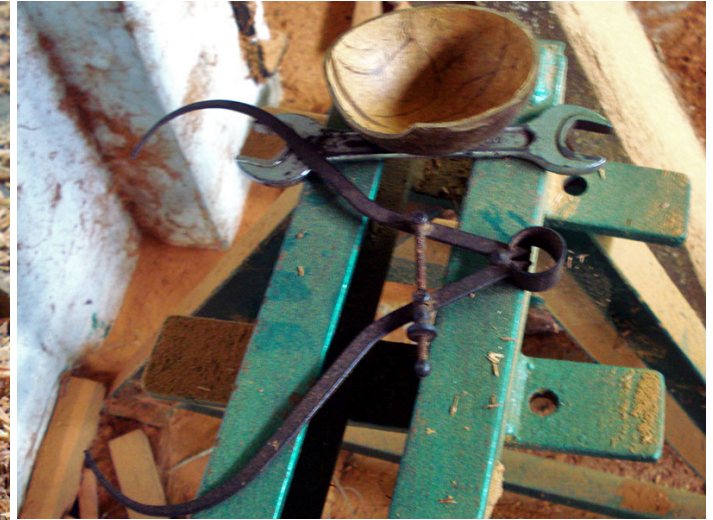
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A combination of two tools - filer and chisel is used for carving the wood.



The divider is used for measuring diameter of the wood.



A combination of tools used for carving the wood.

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Shell-Making Process

The making process involves various steps. The ripe/matured coconuts are collected which are grown in and around farms or sometimes coconuts are purchased from the farmers. The skilled artisan selects the proper well shaped coconut shell according to the required pattern of the article to be carved. The collected coconuts are scraped out and the surface of the shell is cleaned to make it smooth. The shell is then cut into desired shape and size of the article to be prepared. The stencils are made and the shape is cut out with the help of bow blades. Once the shape is cut, the edges are smoothed by filing process. This process is done repeatedly until the finish is adequate. Drilling is done to make the small holes if required and then the different parts are made separately and stick using strong adhesive fevikwik/fevicol. Then the article is carved and designs are engraved. Finally the polishing is done using bee-wax and it is coated with synthetic varnish to create the glossy texture. The finished product is dried under the sunlight.



The artisan is working with the sander disc.



The husk on the coconut shell is removed using sander disc.

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Refining and polishing of the coconut shell continues.



While smoothening, much care is taken to avoid damage to surface of the coconut shell.



The inner surface of the shell is smoothened using another buffing attachment.



The circular sanding machine is used to create the curvatures.

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The shell is cut with a saw machine to give desired shape to it.



The Buffing machine is used to polish the shell.



After repeated smoothing by the sander machine the Ice-cream bowl beautifully carved out of coconut shell. coconut shell gets a glossy finish.



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Wood-Making Process

Coconut wood logs and pieces are kept in water tanks or ponds for soaking. : Proper water and Chemical treatment strengthen the wood and increase its durability. Size of the water tanks vary. Length of a typical water tank is around 15 feet and depth is around 2.5 feet to 3 feet. The width varies between 3 to 8 feet. Based on the nature of the product and its requirement the duration of water treatment is decided. Small tadpole size fishes are kept in the water tank to provide a protection from mosquitoes. Tanks are cleaned once or twice a month.



Logs are set on a turning machine.



Turning machine rotates the log for smoothing of the outer surface.

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After carving and polishing work is completed coconut-wood logs transported for getting water treatment.



Coconut-wood logs soaked in tanks or ponds for 3 to 30 days – based on the nature of the product.



The pillars are arranged for further refinement.



The log is marked at the center and cut in to two parts using a saw machine.

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The mixture of Diesel, Chlorosulphate, Pesticide and Classic-20 applied to the inner surface using brush for chemical treatment.



Chemical pesticide is applied on the outer surface of the pillar to keep termites away.



The pillar is kept for drying.



Continuous refinement and polishing happens till the product gets satisfactory look and feel.

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Shell-Products

Coconuts are a remarkable renewable resource with constituents that have many unique and superior properties. Over a period of time this craft has grown popular from merely producing decorative items to producing many contemporary lifestyle products and furniture. These products can be used for domestic purposes as well as kept for decorations. Pillars, utility items like soap dish, ladles, spoons, forks, Agarbathi stands, pen stands, grain measurement vessel, cups, teapots, wine jars, plates, artifacts etc. are made of coconut shell. All these products are natural and eco-friendly. The coconut shell also has exceptional properties, which possesses twice the density of hardwood and is also very rich in energy. The hardness of the coconut shell is comparable to lower strength aluminium alloys, making it one of the hardest organic materials produced in nature. Hence, the products made from coconut shells are durable, natural, easily available and reusable.



A variety of spoons made by combining coconut shell and coconut wood.



Eco-friendly cutlery.

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Larger spoons made by using the coconut shell and coconut wood.



Traditional puttu (Kerala dish) maker of Kerala.



An eco-friendly soap dish.



Pen stand made out of coconut shell.

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Ice-cream bowl and spoon made of coconut shell.



Fancy key chains made of coconut shell.

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Wood-Products

Every part of the coconut tree is used to craft valuable objects, which can be made into various commercial and industrial products. The chief coconut products include - copra, toddy, leaves, brooms, baskets and mats, oil, desiccated coconut, coconut cream, coconut shell, shell flour, shell charcoal, activated carbon, charcoal briquettes, coir fibre, coir dust, and fresh coconut juice. The coconut wood is mainly used for decorating the interiors and exteriors with pillars, window frames, door frames, wood panelling etc. Most of the houses in Kerala are built with coconut wood. These woods are even used for making artefacts and house-hold items. Gradually, the step/ladder railings and other furniture are also made from coconut wood.



Wooden cutleries made out of coconut wood.



Varieties of ladles and spoons prepared from coconut wood and coconut shell.

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Trendy furniture made with coconut wood.



Miniature decorative showpieces carved from coconut wood.

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Different types of incense-stick stands and pen holder made of coconut wood.



Decorative artefacts made out of coconut wood.

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The interiors of the house decorated with with designs and products made of coconut wood.



A house decorated with beautifully carved pillars and wood panelling made from coconut wood.

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