

A Bread Proofing Bowl

At the request of Justin Cherry, the new Baker/Chef at Historic Camden, I began to make a very large bread-proofing bowl. First, an appropriately sized log of appropriate wood was sought. That is, a log of at least 24" in diameter and 48" long. The wood required was one that would not impart any flavor to the bread dough.

Therefore, all Oaks and Pines were not appropriate. I asked Jack McKittrick of McKittrick Lumber if he could locate a log for me and it was his nephew, Daniel, who is also in the lumber business, that found a soft Maple that was more than big enough.



After getting the log to my shop and unloaded, the first task was to cut the log in half. I have a large chainsaw that made short work of the task.



Then it was simply removing a large portion of the material in the middle. "Simply" in no way implies easy. I began with a smaller chainsaw cutting along the length of the log and the chopping the best I could to remove the waste.

At this point Woodworkers Guild members Taylor Noll and Will Bovie jumped in to begin hours of chiseling and chopping removing more material. It was very slow going for quite a while.



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I purchased a special wood grinding attachment for my grinder and that tool aided in the clean-up of the tear outs that are inevitable when chiseling on a curve. Sanding began with 16(!) grit and ended with 150. I flipped the bowl over and cleaned up the outside and tapered the ends to a more “bowl” shape.

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I cut the legs from hard Maple and fashioned horizontal supports to stretch between them with slots for heavy leather straps that would cradle the irregular bottom of the bowl. The bowl at this point weighed 212 lbs.

Next was the cover which the baker uses as a work surface as well as a dough cover. I acquired some hard maple from McKittrick's. After flattening and thickening I glued up the blank. Once the glue dried, I hand planned the surface smooth and then sanded to 150 grit. All surfaces that food would touch received a couple of coats of Mineral Oil. The stand and the bottom of the bowl were coated with Linseed Oil.



The Baker's trial use was a 40-loaf batch which he estimated at more than 70 lbs. He also said he put his weight behind pushing down on the dough to kneed it and said he didn't hear a sound, not a creak or pop.

