

# ECOSSE ALIVE

Tina Norris

Sculpting in stone is hard but rewarding work — and the basics are quickly mastered, writes **Fiona Russell**

**W**ith a mallet in one hand and a pointed chisel in the other, Wendy Howard tentatively jabs at the chunk of limestone in front of her. Tapping cautiously to begin with and then with ever bigger thwacks, she falls into a rhythm, working hard for five minutes at a time then breaking off to stand back and admire her progress.

Within an hour she has formed the basic outline of a three-dimensional sculpture. Shaking out sore arm and shoulder muscles, she looks around at the seven other budding artists. Each is absorbed in the dusty and challenging process of stone carving.

"To start with you feel apprehensive about bashing away at a piece of stone. You worry that you might make some irreversible mistake," says Howard, who is on a five-week introductory carving course run by Rachan Design, near Broughton in the Borders. "But it's a slow process and the small chisel actions take a while to form a bigger picture."

Howard admits that she would not call herself "particularly creative". Her intention at the start of the course was to make a stone bowl for her garden, but as her work progressed she found her sculpture taking on a more abstract form.

"Three-quarters of the way through it suddenly came to me that the stone's patterns were more spiralling and shell-like, so my bowl turned into an ornamental mollusc. It was quite a revelation," she says.

The artist Susheila Jamieson, who holds the workshops in her cosy garden studio, starts by demonstrating the range of chiselling techniques.

"Larger, sweeping movements using more crude chisels help to form the basic shape of a sculpture," she says. "Then a claw-like chisel creates a definite shape before smaller, finer chisel work is used to add definition. It's all about trial and error, but most people pick up the technique quite quickly."



Hammer time: Jamieson says limestone is the best stone for beginners

## On a learning carve

Each workshop is for a maximum of eight students, allowing Jamieson to work with everyone on a one-to-one basis.

"Some people just want to get on with their own ideas. Once they have the basic skills they work pretty much alone," Jamieson says. "Others require more help and direction, so I spend time with them

improving their technique and advising how to shape their sculpture. People sculpt all sorts from birdbaths through to animal carvings, small and very large."

Jamieson prefers to work in harder sandstones herself, but offers softer limestones at the workshops. "People see results more quickly and don't need to work so hard. At the

beginning students are keen to see progress in what they are carving and as a craft it's tiring physically."

For Susan Reeves, who attended a one-day workshop, the six hours spent carving a spiral-shaped ornament for her garden have been exhausting but therapeutic.

"I'd expected sore muscles, but I did not expect to become so focused

on the project," says Reeves, of Galashiels. "I lost myself in the carving process for long spells throughout the day."

Howard, who lives in Rachan, has completed several stone carvings, including a fish and a lizard, and is currently working on a human head. "Because the workshop is close to where I live, I go as often

as I can. It's so totally distressing."

For Susheila Jamieson's courses, contact Rachan Design, 01899 830 443, [www.rachan.co.uk](http://www.rachan.co.uk). For other courses, try Four Winds Inspiration Centre, Edinburgh, 0131 352 2229, [www.fourwindsedinburgh.org.uk](http://www.fourwindsedinburgh.org.uk), or the artist Tom Allan, who holds workshops in Glasgow, at [www.tom-allan.co.uk](http://www.tom-allan.co.uk)

### Five things to do this week

**Rock history:** Find out about magma and volcanic vents on the East Lothian coast. Booking advised. Under-18s must be with an adult. Bring a packed lunch. **Where:** Meet at Tynninghame Links car park, near Tynninghame, East Lothian **When:** Aug 31, 2pm-4pm **Cost:** Adults £7, children £5 **Contact:** 0131 555 5488 or [www.geowalks.co.uk](http://www.geowalks.co.uk)

**Fungi for beginners:** Head off with a ranger for a wild fungi hunt. Ideal for novices. **Where:** Glen Tilt car park, near Blair Atholl **When:** Sept 1, 2pm-3pm **Cost:** £2 **Contact:** [www.athollestaterangerservice.co.uk](http://www.athollestaterangerservice.co.uk)

**Walk with Romans:** An easy walk led by Roman senators around the Trimontium site and Leaderfoot Viaduct. Under-8s must be accompanied. **Where:** Meet at Newstead Village Millennium Milestone, near Melrose, Borders **When:** Sept 1, 1.30pm-4pm **Cost:** Free **Contact:** [www.trimontium.net](http://www.trimontium.net)

**Bird in the hand:** Falconry sessions, including demonstrations, talks and the chance to fly a bird. **Where:** Tantallon Castle,

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