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# Making a woodblock print (xylography): Fishermen's huts

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**Level:** beginner

**Estimated time:** 3 hours

**Author:** Julia Chausson

[www.juliachausson.com](http://www.juliachausson.com) [6]

Would you like to try woodblock printing like Paul Gauguin, Félix Vallotton, Edward Munch, Hokusai or Hiroshige? By following these simple steps you can make your first ever xylography...

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**Material :**

**Pencils:** fine charcoal pencils (diameter: 2 to 3 mm)

**Paper :** Canson® Barbizon

**Accessories:**

- Spray glue
- an MDF plate (chipboard)
- chisels (U-shaped chisels are easier to use)

- a rubber inking roller
- linocut inks
- a sheet of Plexiglas
- a spatula, a proof press or a small spoon, or a Japanese baren (a stamp covered with bamboo leaves for hand printing)

## La profondeur de champ (PDC)

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## 1. The sketch

Draw a sketch with charcoal on a paper the same size as the MDF plate. Make a black and white sketch, with flat patches and varied graphics (hatching, points, grids, arabesques, patterns, etc.) making sure to keep a balance between blacks and whites.

**Tip:** xylography makes it possible to work on shadows and light. Make the most of this! Don't hesitate to try things out, erase and start again to create a sketch you are happy with.

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## 2. Transferring the sketch onto the wood block

Once the sketch is finished, place it face-down on the wood block.

Rub the entire surface with the palm of your hand to transfer the charcoal to the wood.

Remove the paper and you will see your drawing appear on the wood. Do not hesitate to go back over your charcoal drawing to improve it, directly on the wood. When you have completed this step, use the spray glue to fix it.

### 3. Engraving the wood ? Relief printing ? Cutting out the clear areas of the image.

La profondeur de champ (PDC)

Using MDF makes it possible to carve in all directions, as with linocut. With plywood, carving follows the direction of the fibre.  
<https://www.cansonstudio.com/sites/default/files/Ed-Art-Pas-a-pas-Gravure-sur-bois-xylogravure-Cabanes-de-pecheurs-etape-3a.jpg>

You can start by practising how to handle the gouges on a test block. The type of pressure you exert with your hand (firm, hesitant, shaky...) and the way you hold the gouges will allow you to create varied carvings.

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Carve around the image you want to create.

You are carving the wood around the charcoal strokes. Hold the knob of the gouge in the palm of your hand and hold the block in place with your other hand.

Put your shoulder into your arm movement when carving. It's your block that moves.

It is not necessary to carve very deeply, hold the gouge so that the blade forms a small angle with the surface of the block.

**Tip:** Comply rigorously with your drawing in order to retain the style of your charcoal pencil strokes.

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### 4. Inking

Once the block is completely engraved, rub it with a brush to remove all dust.

Put a small amount of ink on the Plexiglas sheet and spread it with the spatula to form a 'reserve' that is the width of the inking roller. The spatula can also be used to mix colours.

With the roller, take some ink from the reserve. On a clean area of Plexiglas, spread this ink to create a thin, even film on the roller. Carefully ink your wood block, evenly in all directions. No roller marks should be visible.

**Tip:** Be careful not to overload your roller with ink as this would fill the grooves of your engraving.

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## 5. Printing by hand or with a press.

Place a sheet of Canson® Barbizon paper on the inked wood.

Using the back of a small spoon or a Japanese baren, exert pressure over the entire surface of the wood. Don't forget the edges and the corners! It is also possible to print with a letterpress or a proof press. Remove the paper...

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## 6. It's printed!

There is always a surprise in store when the paper is removed. Sometimes good and sometimes bad! This print is a first proof: the test proof.

Don't hesitate to make any corrections or improvements you think are necessary.

Certain engravers can make up to thirty proofs before being satisfied with the final result. You can of course still carve the wood. Keep in mind it is not possible to rectify mistakes made with the gouge. But sometimes we learn from our mistakes!

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## 7. Drying

The length of time necessary to dry the print will depend on the type of ink used.

This wood template makes it possible to print several copies of the image. You can change colour, once you have cleaned the dry wood block, rubbing it with towel. With wood engraving, it is necessary to engrave wood blocks per colour, so to add a colour you must engrave a second block.

(See tricks of the trade: [markers for engraving a second wood block](#) [7])

## Suggested products

### Canson® Barbizon

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### Printmaking: the various engraving techniques

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Engraving is a technique that consists of making carvings on a metal plate with a tool or a mordant (an acid). This plate will be inked then wiped and put under the press.

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### **Setting the press for engraving.**

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Setting the press is a crucial step in preparing to print. The quality of the prints will also depend on the pressure setting of the intaglio printing machine

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