



Jögge Sundqvist

SLÖJD IN WOOD





Ladder made of crooked birch and pine using shrink technique. Part of the public artwork "Blå Hulken John," Vegaskolan Vännäs, Sweden.



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WHAT DOES SLÖJD MEAN?

There are many different ways of working and joining wood. In this book I will tell you how to work wood using hand tools. I'm dedicated to slöjd because of the tool marks and carved bevels, the worn colors, the idiosyncratic design and the self-confidence of the unschooled folk art expression.

Slöjd is part of the self-sufficient household, how people survived before industrialization. Slöjd is the work method farmers used when they made tools for house building, farming and fishing, and objects for their household needs. For thousands of years, the knowledge of the material has deepened, and the use of the tools has evolved along with the understanding of how function, composition and form combine to make objects strong and useful.



The word slöjd derives from the word stem slög, which dates to the 9th century. Slög means ingenious, clever and artful. It reflects the farmers' struggle for survival and how it made them skilled in using the natural materials surrounding the farm: wood, flax, hide, fur, horn and metal. I have picked up a dialect expression from my home county, Västerbotten, that has become a personal motto. We say Int' oslög, "not uncrafty," about a person who is handy and practical.

*"I am sharpening
my knives on my
mistakes."*

Tom Waits

In slöjd, choice of material and work methods are deeply connected to quality and expression. To get strong, durable objects, the material must be carefully chosen so the fiber direction follows the form. This traditional knowledge makes it easy to split and work the wood with edge tools. Slöjd also gives you the satisfaction of making functional objects with simple tools. When a wooden spoon you made yourself feels smooth in your mouth, you have completed the circle of being both producer and consumer.

My intention with this book is to give an inspiring and instructive introduction to working with wood the slöjd way: using a simple set of tools without electricity. There are many advantages to this. You can make the most wonderful slöjd in the kitchen, on the train or in your summer cottage. Simple hand tools make you flexible, free and versatile. And the financial investment compared to power tools is very low.

Traditional slöjd knowledge is vast, and requires many years of experience before you can easily make your ideas come to life. It also takes time to master the knife grips, the essentials of sharpening and the specific working knowledge of individual wood species.

As you work with slöjd, the learning enters your body. Through repetition, you will gain muscle memory for different tool grips. The ergonomic relationship between your body and the power needed for efficient use emerges over time. "Making is thinking," said Richard Sennet, professor of sociology. In slöjd, the process never ends.

Because slöjd is inherently sustainable, it feels genuine and authentic. In an increasingly complex and global society, it is important for an individual to experience an integrated work process from raw material to finished product.

People from all walks of life benefit from the interaction between mind and hand. Slöjd affects us by satisfying the body and in turn, the soul. There is a kind of practical contemplation where there is time for thought – a certain focused calm, which is an antidote to today's media-centered society.

I think we can use the knowledge of slöjd to find that brilliant combination of a small-scale approach to a sustainable society that doesn't exclude the necessities of modern technology. Traditional slöjd is a survival kit for the future.

Each chapter in this book describes one or more projects that guide your entry with a gentle hand into the world of slöjd. The projects are

WHY SLÖJD? 6 GOOD REASONS	6 PRINCIPLES OF SLÖJD
Creates lasting, functional and deeply personal objects.	Practice with patience; repetition is the mother of knowledge. Slöjd means taking small risks, which increases your working knowledge and produces more opportunities for creativity and problem solving.
Gives you a strong back with little expense.	Avoid big mistakes by following good advice.
It's a sustainable use of resources.	Work in peace and quiet, focused and mindful of how you are working. Have fun!
Restricting oneself to hand tools grants you more creative freedom – a beneficial paradox.	Be sharp. This applies to your tools as well as to your brain.
Green wood is easy to work.	Dispose of oily rags properly.
Making and using your own objects means taking part in the entire process.	Ask permission from the property owner before you take material.

designed so that you will learn, step by step, more advanced slöjd methods with each successive chapter. Gradually, you will develop the slöjd methods that are right for you. Any tradition is made up of many voices, all of them unique.

It is also possible that you will find new ways of doing things that no one has thought of before. All tradition is change.

It is difficult to describe handwork in writing. How should the body interact with the tools and the wood for maximum strength and control? What should the tools look like and how should they be positioned during use? How do you know what material is good to work with? The final result and design choices are the sum of many years of experience. Decisions evolve from very deliberate choices into more intuitive ones that your body executes automatically. The best way to learn is to work with an experienced woodworker while he or she makes an object, and let him or her talk about the process as it unfolds.

If you are looking for deep knowledge of the qualities of different wood species and more advanced joinery, I recommend other publications or Internet resources (you'll find some listed in the bibliography). For those who are experienced woodworkers, I am sure you will find in this book helpful work methods or design ideas that I have developed during my 30+ years of working in the slöjd tradition.

But this book is primarily meant as a primer on woodworking with hand tools; it is not for those of you who want to work with machines. Machines generally speed up production, but they often limit design choices. Woodworking using modern machines is not slöjd.

Many concepts and vocabulary words are probably new to the reader. A glossary at the end of the book explains technical terms and those with regional differences due to dialect. There you will also find a list of vendors for materials and tools. A bibliography is included if you want to develop your knowledge of our diverse Scandinavian slöjd tradition. I recommend

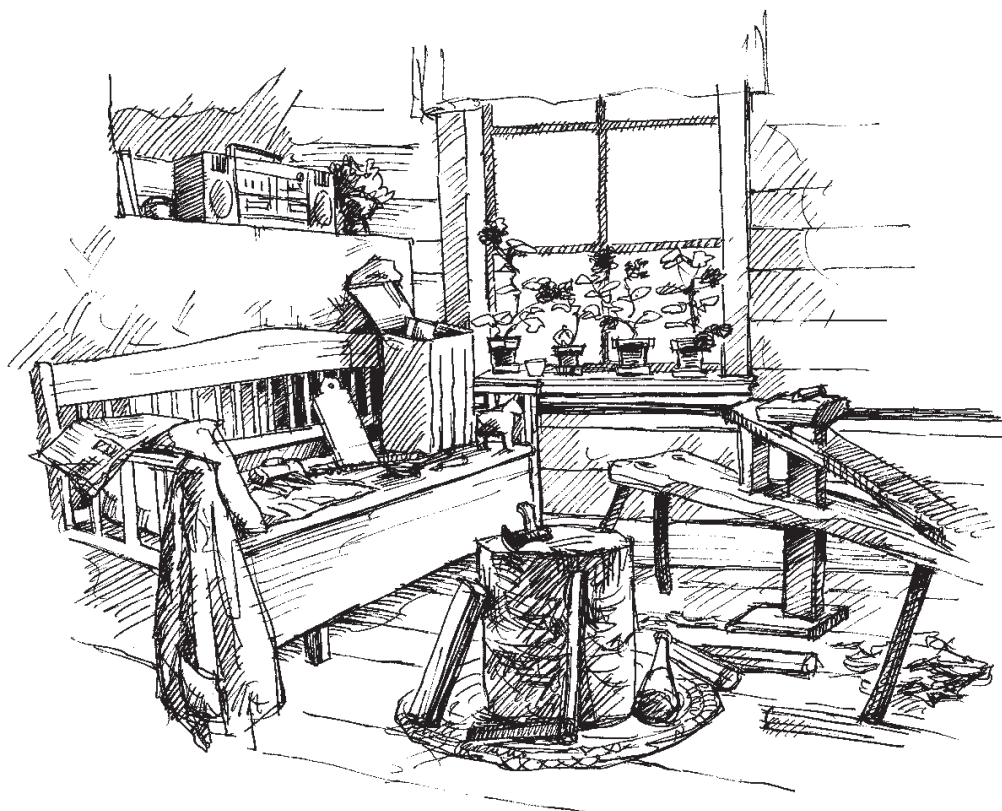
reading the chapter, Materials and Tools (see page 42), before you start any project. “Material” refers to the raw material and its qualities, while a “blank” is the piece of wood taken from the material. The blank will be further processed and made into the desired object.

I have been making objects in the slöjd tradition since I was a child. In 1985, I started producing and selling my work. When I switched to a full-time basis, in 1998, I began an inventory of all the slöjd objects I make. The inventory contains more than 4,000 objects, from butter knives to large public sculptures. The more experienced I become, the more respect I gain for other woodworkers who have inspired me over the years. I extend a special thank you to my father, Wille Sundqvist, who taught me to carve and who has passed on his passion for woodworking traditions. And to my mother, Margareta “Maxan” Sundqvist, who has given me a desire to express form and color. Wille has written the book “Tälja med kniv och yxa” (“Swedish Carving Techniques”) that deals with tools and fundamental techniques in an extensive way.

Jögge Sundqvist, August 2017

*“Go back, go
back, go back
to your woods.”*

Robbie Robertson



The kitchen as a workshop.

The kitchen as a workshop.

The satisfaction I get from slöjd is knowing how to make things and what materials to use. Wood is a pragmatic medium; if a part breaks, I can replace the piece. If it is too thick, I can take my knife and carve it down to the desired thickness. If I get an idea I can try to create it immediately. Nothing can beat the satisfaction of having made something yourself with your hewing axe and Morakniv. As with other folk cultures, slöjd is a deep cultural heritage and is an intangible part of my toolkit.

Slöjd is based on historical peasant traditions of self-sufficiency. Before the industrial era, people had to make most of the things they needed from materials that were found around their farms. As agricultural people, they had easy access to many natural materials and knew their uses. Those who did woodworking had a natural introduction as children that continued throughout their lives. The social, religious and practical aspects of survival dictated the types and forms of everyday objects. The ordinary farmer used relatively common tools; professional craftsmen such as blacksmiths or carpenters had more extensive, specialized tool kits.

Slöjd in its pure self-sufficient use is characterized by an individual using simple tools with great skill, a deep knowledge of raw materials, and the ability to solve functional problems. The resulting objects are intended for the maker's personal use.

In the slöjd tradition, knowledge accumulated over time becomes intuitive and determines the level of quality in the work. The maker's direct experiences with the tools, materials and joinery techniques are so vast and specialized in slöjd, that it is difficult to understand that knowledge today.

Makers in the slöjd tradition are their own designers, so the results are often particularly ingenious. We identify and solve problems by understanding the context in which the object is to be used: What is the desired function? Does the person using it require a customized design? What materials are available? Which production methods are best for the available timeframe? Continuous innovation appeared due to changes in requirements, when different materials were used, or when new

technology became available.

Slöjd is about quality – the best and most durable choices of material and joinery to stand up to the wear and tear of everyday use but still be pleasing to the eye.

The everyday knowledge of slöjd led some practitioners to develop their own unschooled artistic expression, which was highly individualistic. This folk art is often influenced by historical styles, but because it has evolved over hundreds of years and shaped by individuals, it has given rise to locally distinctive ways of expression.

Slöjd is an undocumented folk knowledge which has largely been lost. Today, slöjd is being recreated and developed through the handicraft movement by woodworkers, handicraft consultants and non-profit organizations. Direct support from the Swedish government has been crucial to continuing this tradition.

Slöjd is characterized by being developed within a tradition

- with responsibility and control for production from maker to user
- with hand tools and intuitive skills
- with natural slöjd materials
- with resource efficiency through recycling
- with a personal expression.

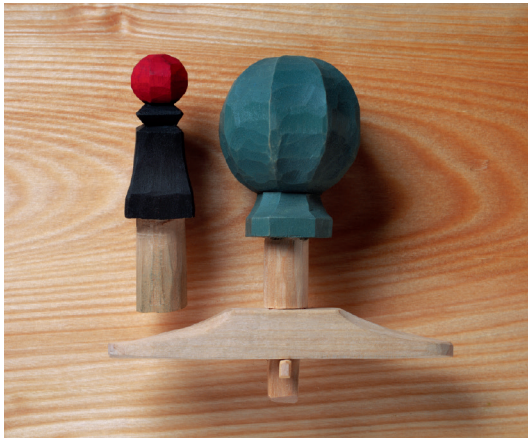
BENEFITS OF WORKING IN SLÖJD

- Making things yourself. To be both maker and user.
- Developing dexterity.
- Investigating the quality of wood and joinery.
- Owning an object made by hand with care.
- Experiencing contemplative simplicity. Peace and quiet.
- Searching for authentic expression. Folk art.
- Listening to the stories behind the tradition; the individuals, their troubles as well as their bliss.
- Gaining respect for your history.



Knobs and Latches

A beautifully carved knob is one of the small joys of everyday life. They are extremely useful on drawers, peg racks, shrink boxes, potato testers and walking sticks, and they acquire a beautiful patina over the years. Give the knob a personal touch and indulge with bevels! As with all finer carving, the knife grips are important to get a good result.

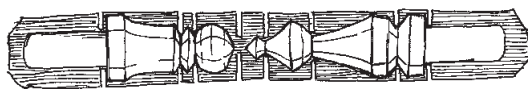


Tools Axe, Japanese saw, knife, hammer, drawknife (optional).

Material Straight-grained, dry birch (*Betula*).

ONE WAY OF MAKING KNOBS

It is efficient to make multiple knobs on one blank. Split out a straight-grained, dry piece, around 25cm long (10"), and shape the blank in the shaving horse with the drawknife, or with a knife. Shape the blank into an octagonal cross section, even if you are making round knobs. Clean cut the ends at a 90° angle, and look out for checking. Mark where the tenon begins and saw the shoulders with a fine-toothed saw. Take care not to saw into the tenon itself! Use the octagonal bevels as reference points for depth. You can also use the saw to make relief cuts to mark the depth of the thinnest part of the knob and to

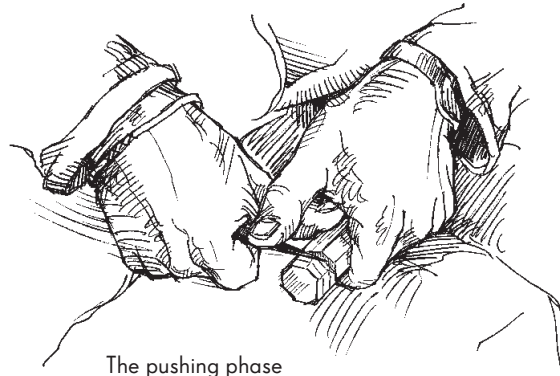


Saw cuts make good guidelines for marking different parts.

facilitate carving. To reproduce multiple knobs, the notches make good guidelines for the distance between the different parts of the knob.

Starting with octagonal-shaped blanks is a visual aid to see the form more easily.

Crossed thumb grip This is a very useful grip for carving the notches and V-shapes on a knob. You alternately carve from different directions on the work, first in a pushing phase and then a pulling phase.

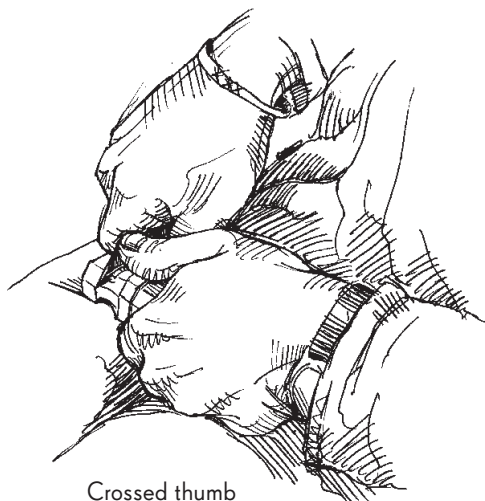


The pushing phase of the crossed thumb grip.

Pushing Grip the knife in your fingers so the back of the handle rests at the point where your fingers meet your palm. Be sure to position your index finger so it is about 1/4" above the handle. The blade edge should line up with your fingernails. Stretch out the thumb of the knife hand to rest on the blank and act as a pivot point.

Slice across the work from tip to base. From the top view, the knife moves at a 90° angle to the work. The power for this cut comes from the shoulder and elbow moving in an arc with the thumb as the pivot point.

At the same time, place the other hand's thumb

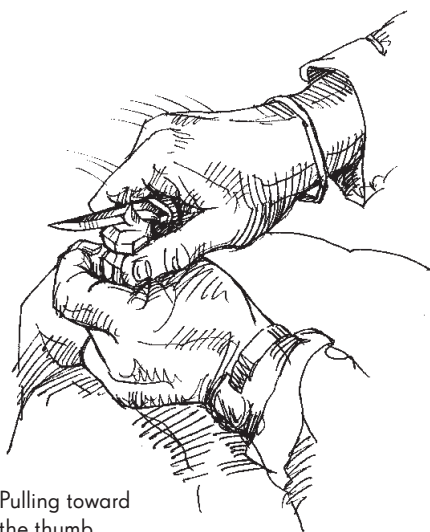


Crossed thumb
grip, pushing.

to the back of the blade to add power. It also presses the bevel into the wood for added friction and control. As in the can opener grip, the safety stop is the index finger of the knife hand meeting the blank.

Pulling When the pushing phase is complete, the knife edge is positioned next to the handle. Keeping this position and the thumb on the back of the blade, flip the knife so the edge is now facing away from you.

The elbow and shoulder have a pulling motion as the knife slices from base to tip. The non-knife thumb once again presses the knife's bevel into the wood by pushing against the back of the blade.



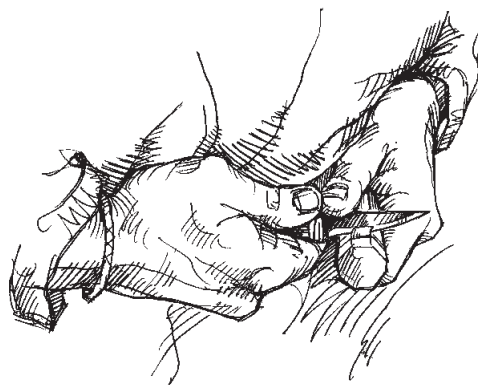
Pulling toward
the thumb.

From the top view, the knife slices across the work at a 90° angle in this phase as well. You are now back to the starting position to repeat the cycle. Remember that the blade's edge is meant to slice into the wood, not to push it away!

Sometimes the rounded part of the knife edge toward the tip works best. See a more exact description in the chapter Hangers (page 31).

Scissor grip with thumb push If you cut a concave form, there will be problems when the fibers meet in the bottom. Use the scissor grip as a starting point (see page 104). This is a safe and controlled grip with a smaller arc than the scissor grip.

Place the thumb from the hand holding the material on the back of the knife blade and push the blade forward by extending the thumb. Let the knife cut from stem to tip. Put pressure on the back of the knife with the thumb of the other hand. Press the concave bevel face toward the wood while you cut. This gives you better control when you need to clean cut. The forearms do not slide across the chest during this cut, but your chest pivots at the same time as the thumb pushes the blade.



Scissor grip with
thumb pushing.

THUMB-SKEW GRIP

When you bevel the octagons on the top, use this knife technique. In this grip, the knife handle is held where the fingers meet the palm so the knife can be pulled through the entire cut. It is particularly useful when carving sharp edges and tough end grain.

Position the knife in two angles: horizontally 45° to the work, and vertically 45° away from you. Make sure your knife thumb is completely behind the

material so you do not cut yourself. Push the work away from you with your thumb while pulling your knife hand toward your body, slicing from the base of the blade toward the tip, like peeling a potato.

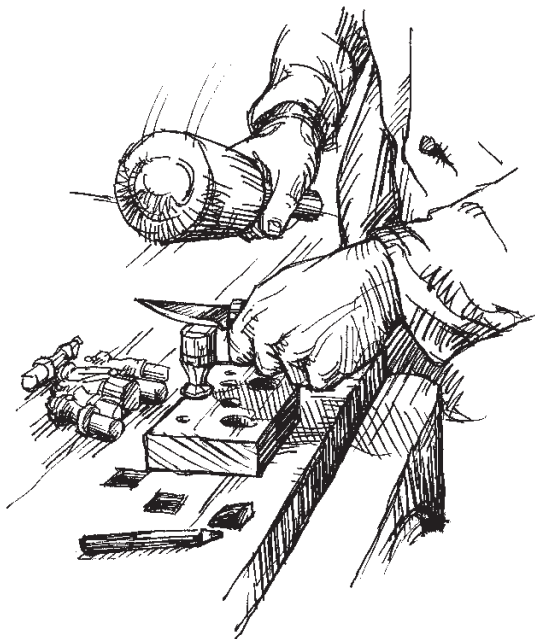
You can get a longer cut by sliding the knife past your thumb. To extend the cut even farther, move your shoulder, elbow and forearm back to provide the necessary control and power.

To make crisp chamfers, press the bevel into the work and do not change the cutting angles. By skewing the blade edge, you achieve a more acute cutting angle relative to the wood. Because you are now cutting on the bias, end grain cuts more easily.

CARVING A TENON

A strong knob has a shoulder that provides a larger contact surface. The shoulder also protects the drawer front from dirty fingers and wear.

To finish the tenon, saw off a knob from the blank when carving is complete. Draw a square on the end of the tenon 1 mm (1/16") larger than the tenon's diameter. You will split the waste away with a knife. Support the knob in a hole drilled into a piece of scrap wood.



Splitting out the square with a knife.

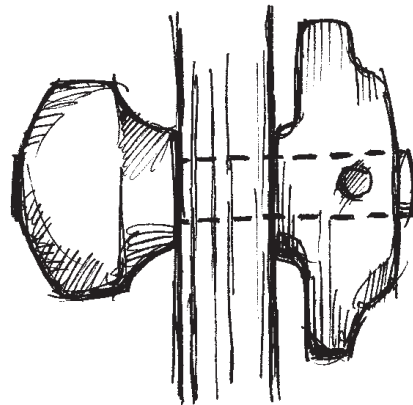
The straight-grain material makes it easy to work. You can also break away the material with the knife and the can opener grip (see page 107) into a square. Then carve the tenon so it has octagonal sides.

Size the tenon in a test hole bored in dry wood. Chamfer the end to make it fit better in the hole. Insert the slightly oversized tenon so you get pressure marks, which shows the exact size of the diameter (see also page 92). Using light cuts and the crossed thumb grip, carve away material to match the pressure marks and repeat the fitting process. Aim for a tight, squeaky fit, meaning that there is a squeaking sound when you turn the tenon in the hole. Rotate the tenon to be sure the sides are parallel.

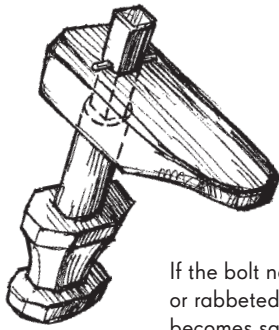
FASTENING THE KNOB

Put the knob in the hole. Mark the length of the tenon. Take it out again and saw off the excess wood. Apply glue and drive in the knob. Make a notch with a knife or a chisel in the end at a 90° angle to the fiber direction of the drawer front, lid, etc. Place a small dab of glue along the wedge and drive it firmly until it doesn't yield. Be sure to support the knob well. If the knob has a finial that can be broken, drill a hole in a waste piece of wood to protect it while driving in the wedge (see page 84).

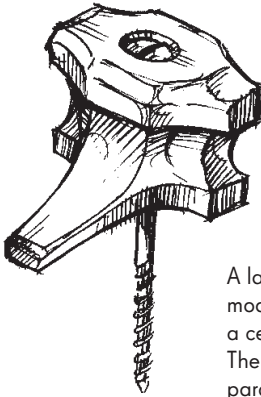
Cut off the wedge with the tip of your knife.



Bolt, latch, tenon and a crossbar for locking.



If the bolt needs to be flat or rabbeted, the tenon becomes square so it gets a shoulder and can be fastened with a small through-wedge.



A latch with a screw is a modern variation to lock a ceiling access panel. The fiber direction is parallel to the direction of the latch.

LATCHES

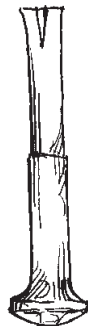
A wooden latch comes in many different forms. To work properly, it should have an elongated design so you can easily turn it, and see if it is open or closed.

A latch should be made with precision. The procedure is the same as when you make knobs. There are a lot of local and regional variations. Visit a local heritage center or a museum if possible, to draw and measure the latches you find there. They have been used for many generations and if they still work, the construction has passed its examination.

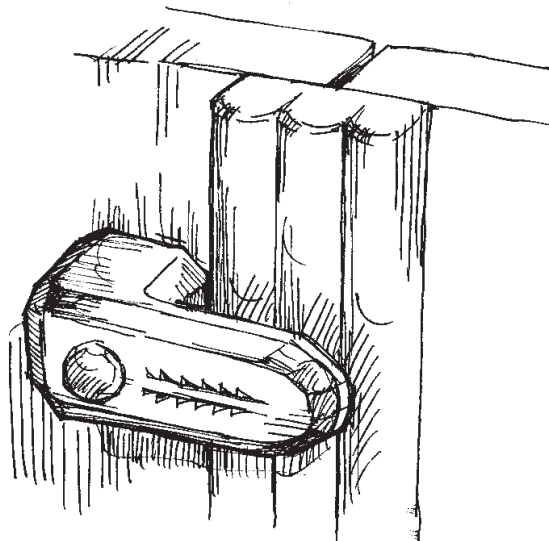
On two of the latches, or door knobs, shown here, the knob and tenon are one piece. In the first example (on page 36), the catch on the inside is fastened by driving a pin through it and the tenon. The second one (top left) is round where it goes through the door, then has a shouldered through-tenon on the inside. The catch is pinned through the tenon, bringing it up snug against the tenon shoulder.

The third example (below) is a catch to keep something such as a cupboard door closed. It only operates from one side of the door. It can be fastened to the door itself, or the door frame. The pin has a head where it goes through the catch. The tenon is wedged inside; the catch swivels on the pin. Shape the catch according to each application; in the drawing it turns into a strip attached to a door or cabinet frame.

Wedge.



Crossbar.



A rabbeted latch.