

BOXWOOD BUTTONS

by Vickie Roberts, Oregon, with an addendum from Gil Biggie, Nevada

Boxwood has been known as a great turning and carving wood for hundreds of years. It has an incredibly tight grain and is an excellent wood for ornamental turning, as it accepts fine details which few woods can hold. It is expensive owing to scarcity of good material. Generally speaking, a boxwood plant between the ages of 40 to 50 years old has a diameter of less than six inches. Today boxwood carvings are becoming less available, probably due to wood scarcity.

Boxwood has been used in China and Japan throughout history for many items, including utilitarian items, Netsukes, buttons, and traditional and religious carvings.



Boxwood carved owl button from here angles showing the incredible detail.



The boxwood carving samples shown in this article are in the form of buttons. These buttons are not only collectible as small works of art, but when a shank is added they are useful in competition for button awards, relating to animal life or as realistic objects.

Merman at left on a scalloped button shape. Note the openwork carving on the button below.



FINISHED FRONT & BACK
2" tall



Two mice on an umbrella.

Addendum. Thanks to Vickie Roberts of Oregon for allowing us to use her educational exhibit. These boxwood buttons are usually realistic shapes, oftentimes hollowed out with the design continued on the inside. One button depicts a mouse inside a pumpkin. Note the hollow construction of the skeleton illustrated here.

An additional appeal for competitors is the vast subject matter that can be found in boxwood carvings. One can find buttons with fables—such as the monkey and the crab—and folklore—such as the Japanese river child, Kappa. We have even found erotica of male genitalia with a face. Note, too, the fine detail of the teeth on the dragon illustrated here.

Two dealers who carry these buttons say they can no longer obtain the buttons. It appears this may be the end of getting incredible craftsmanship for incredibly low prices, always signed by the carving artist, beautifully stained and polished. Whenever you see these wonderful pieces of art, be sure to grab these future deluxe collectibles! Editor's Note: If you would like to see any image described in the article that we couldn't fit in this space, let me know.



The artist signature is shown on the skeleton button.



**KAPPA
Folklore**



**FABLE
Glass or Onyx eyes**