# Painting Fake Wood Grain
By Jim Scott - October 2014

For CAT Theatre's performance of *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure* (October 24-November 8, 2014), we needed three "wooden" boxes to contain Holmes's notes on file cards. I started with standard black-and-white speckled boxes.

I began by priming the outsides of the boxes and lids. Then I painted them with light brown acrylic paint. After that I painted the grain using dark brown acrylic paint.
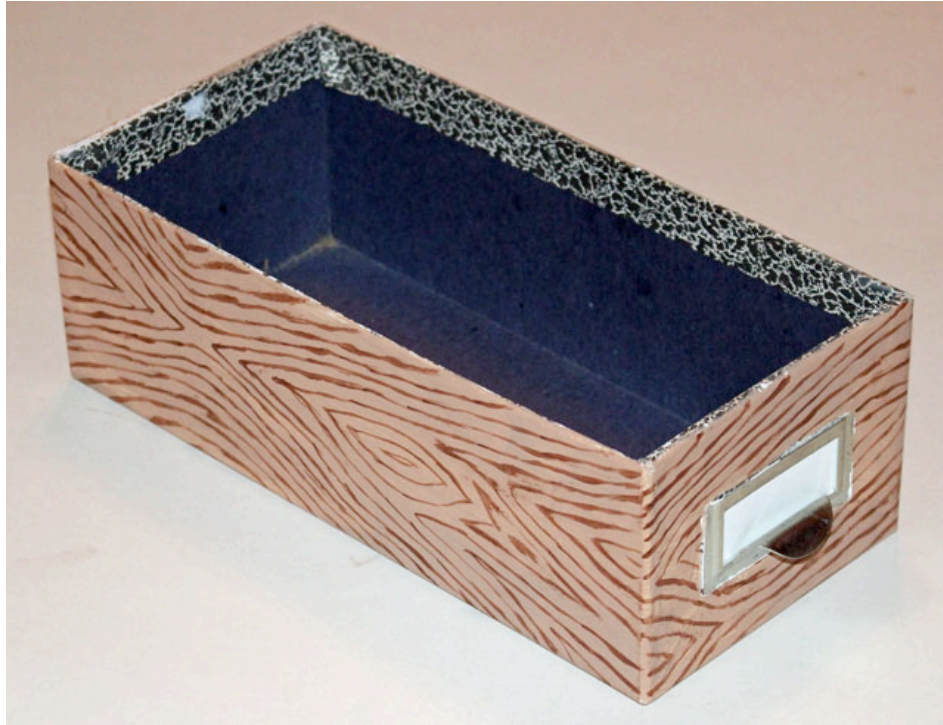
Having done that, I decided that the light brown I had chosen was too light; there was too much contrast between the background and the grain lines. So I darkened the whole thing by spraying it with a sepia spray transparent dye (not paint!).


The result looked a bit more like real wood, at least from a distance (and isn't that how all props should be judged?).

Finally, let's discuss how to paint the grain lines. Use a tiny, pointed paint brush called a "liner brush". Painting long fine lines is difficult, and you'll probably find yourself having to dip the brush into the paint every few inches. This is the most time-consuming part of the project.

An acceptable simulation of wood grain can be constructed from two elements.

(1) The first element of grain lines is straight, parallel lines, about 1/4 inch apart, running the length of the surface being painted.
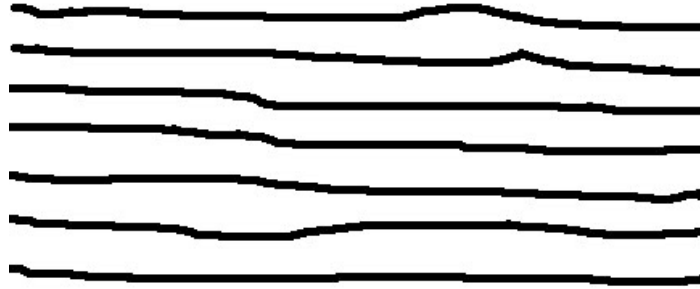
(2) The second element is a closed loop that might be described as an "eye" shape, or an almond shape that's pointed on both ends.

Wood grain lines never intersect, so when an eye loop is introduced, the long lines, instead of being straight and parallel, will now curve outward as they pass the eye loop. Where they curve outward, they will also be closer together.
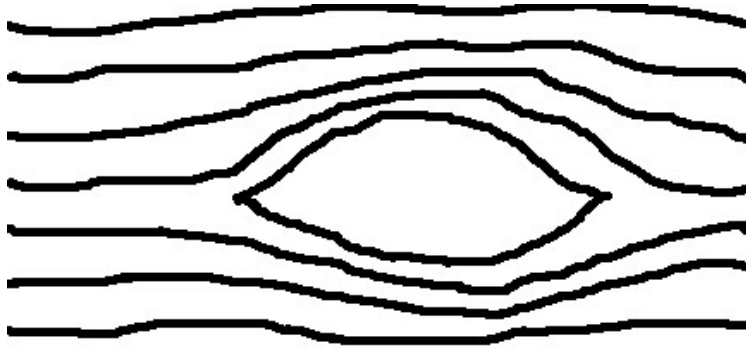
Fill in the eye loop with progressively smaller eye loops.
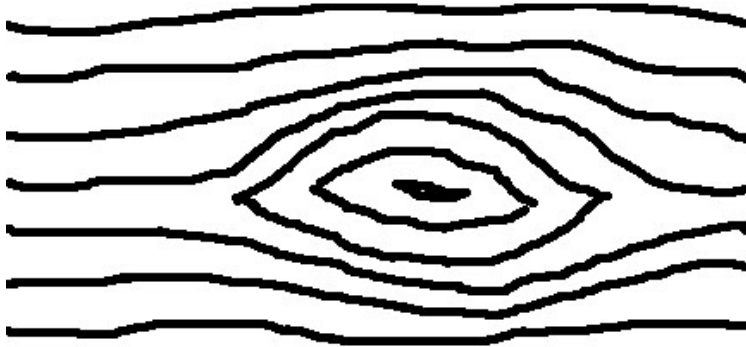
Feel free to introduce asymmetries. For example, an eye loop can be elongated at one or both ends so that it extends beyond the end of the surface being painted.

All lines should either extend off of the surface or form closed loops. They should be as smooth as you can make them, given the limitations of painting with a handheld brush.

Perhaps the best way of starting a surface is to decide where the eye loops are going to be, how big they'll be, and whether they'll be stretched in one or more directions. Paint the eye loops, then paint the long lines to be roughly straight and parallel, but flowing smoothly around the eye loops.

Use your imagination, and have fun with it.