

The Wood Carver

by Madeleine Crouse

The carver's eye sees locked
in a block of pine: feathers,
a graceful neck, wing and bone.
The wood warms in his hands
as he turns it one way, then
another. He cuts, chisels, files
to find essential lines that will set
the bird in flight. He plays his knife
in long strokes with the grain, tightens
his grip, turns the blade to scrape
and cut against it. Know your wood,
he instructs, like human nature.
California sugar pine is free of knots.
Soft cedar will split. Tough, black
walnut cuts well with a chisel. But,
nothing equals mahogany—its
dark heavy heartwood glows
with splays of sunset-orange. All teach
when to oppose making things easy.