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Check!

Jesse Reeves takes a look at this fine chess set carved by Steve McDonough



Chess enthusiast, Steve McDonough of Mason, Ohio, in the United States, has finished his largest and most ambitious woodworking project – truly a king-sized work!

Three years in the making, the set is totally hand-carved with pawns 115mm (4½in) high, and the kings at 190mm (7½in) high. The cherry table is 760mm (30in) tall, and the top of the table is 1195mm (47in) square. The set is for sale with a price tag of £10,330 (US \$18,000).

Perhaps more impressive than the dimensions of the set is the amount of time McDonough needed to complete it. All in all, the carver spent 2,000 hours on the project; that comes to 83 full days of cutting, shaping and carving the 32 pieces and the table on which they sit.

An average piece – a pawn for instance – took 25 hours to complete. Bigger pieces such as the kings and queens, took anywhere from 40 to 50 hours.

McDonough said he first sketched the idea of a wooden chess set some 20 years ago, and he carved that one during idle hours on the job. As the years passed, McDonough said he was ready to have a go at a large project, and decided to take

the original chess set idea and give it a furniture-sized status.

Deciding not to compromise, his choice of woods also added to the difficulty and time requirements. McDonough decided on oak for the white pieces and walnut for the dark ones – much harder woods than normal carving selections, usually tupelo and basswood – chosen for their softness. However, he said oak and walnut are better looking because of their grain, and

the extra effort was worth the finished look. The game squares are in oak and walnut as well.

"Oak and walnut are better looking," McDonough enthused. "Beautiful woods – more character."

Due to the time invested, McDonough said this project might be a once-in-a-lifetime deal.

"It's just too big a project," he commented. "With this, you can't get anything else done. You get on pawn number 15 and you get tired."

But McDonough isn't out of the woods yet. He lays hardwood flooring for a living, restores antiques on the side and still carves as a pastime. His hobby carving now consists of projects for wife Toni and daughter Lyndi, who will soon be the recipient of a cedar chest. Not surprisingly, he has a couple of "back burner" projects including a bar for his home. It will be, as he puts it, "heavily carved."

