Leather Owl Phone Holster

by **MikaelaHolmes** on November 18, 2015

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Costume and experimental fashion designer and artist. Maker of clothing and accessories for time traveling cyborg superheroes, and lucid dreamers. Interested in fusing couture design and leather work with wearable tech, (especially lighting) and mimicking natural forms with synthetic materials. I am a part time Artist in Residence at the Autodesk Pier 9 studio, and an in-house content creator for the Instructables Design Studio.

Intro: Leather Owl Phone Holster

I wear a backpack most of the time, I don't like keeping things in my pockets and I'm always annoyed at how inconvenient it is to access my phone, so I decided to make a little leather phone holster that attaches to my backpack strap. While I was at it, I figured, why not make it look like an owl! It's hard not to love a cute owl, and it also seemed like an appropriate form for a case that holds my means of sending and receiving messages. Now I have my very own version of Hedwig sitting on my shoulder waiting to deliver owl post.

My design uses the form of the owl functionally. Its head is the flap closure, with snaps for eyes, it's wings fold around the back of my backpack strap to keep it in place, and it's claws hold your ear buds when you're not using them. It also has a smaller pocket in the front to hold metro cards, credit cards or other things I need to access quickly.

This project would be a great DIY gift and is really quite easy to make. I've even provided the pattern I created, which could be easily modified to fit any phone, or altered to look like a different animal. If you have access to a laser cutter, creating this holster would be especially easy, though a laser cut version will have a bit of a different look than you see here. Either way, it's a fun practical project, perfect for a beginning leather worker.

Step 1: Supplies

Materials:

- Your phone
- Your backpack
- A pattern - or use mine
- Leather - I used a milled veg tanned leather about 2-4 oz but you could also use a pre-finished chrome tanned leather. If you do want to use this kind of leather you will not be able to tool the details into the leather in the same way, and you will have to add the details with stitching or laser cutting.
- Five line 20 snaps
- A few small quick set rivets
- A D ring
- Thick thread
- Gum Tragacanth for burnishing
- Leather glue or fabric glue (something that dries flexible)
- Leather dye and finish if you are using veg tanned leather

Tools:

- Hole punch
- Xacto knife
- Leather scissors
- Diamond stitching chisel
- Awl
- Swivel knife
- Mallet
- Wooden burnishing tool
- Textured beveling stamp
- Ball point modeling stylus
- Sponge and daubers
- Hard surface like a quartz slab and poundo board
- Hammer
- Paper, pencil and ruler

Step 2: Patternmaking

This was a very simple pattern to create, I basically just used my phone as a base to create the right sized pocket and then added details. I chose to create my pattern in Illustrator but you could easily pattern on paper if you prefer.

First I measured my phone, and used its length, width and thickness to create the basic shape of my pocket.

The pocket needs to be big enough to fit your phone, therefore each side of the two sided pocket should measure as follows:

- Width of phone pattern = width of phone + thickness of phone + 1/8" ease
- Length of phone pattern = length of phone + 1/2 thickness of phone + 1/8" ease

I made the bottom edges of my pocket curved like the corners of my phone, then I added a 3/16" seam allowance around the sides and bottom of the pocket.

I made the flap that folds over to close the pocket at the top into the shape of an owl's head, and cut out a section along the top fold to allow the headphones to plug into the phone even when the flap is closed. I also added wings to the sides which snap around the back of the backpack strap.

I created a separate pattern piece for a small pocket on the front of the case to hold IDs or credit cards, and an extension on the bottom of this piece designed to look like the owl's claws which wrap around and snap to the back so they can hold your headphones. I also drew two short straps to attach the case to a ring on the backpack strap.

Finally I added simple line details and sewing lines to each piece.
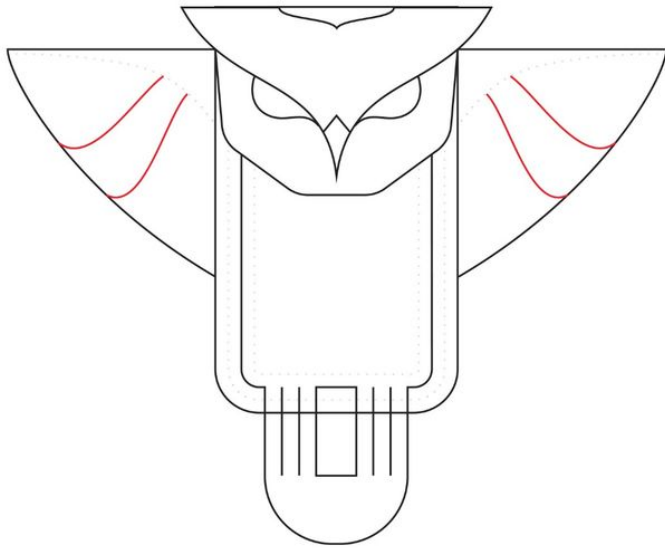
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Phone Owl Pattern.ai (1 MB)
[NOTE: When saving, if you see .tmp as the file ext, rename it to 'Phone Owl Pattern.ai']

Phone Owl Pattern.pdf (873 KB)
[NOTE: When saving, if you see .tmp as the file ext, rename it to 'Phone Owl Pattern.pdf']

Step 3: Tracing the Pattern

Once I had my pattern created in Illustrator, I printed it out, and then roughly cut out each piece.

I cased my veg tanned leather by wetting it evenly with a sponge, then arranged my pattern pieces on top of the leather and taped them down.

Then I used a ball point modeling stylus to trace the cut lines, holes, sewing lines and detail lines through the paper onto the damp leather.

Step 4: Tooling the Details

To create the details on the owl, I used a two different leather tools to carve and texture the lines I had already traced onto my leather. It is best to do this over a hard base with a slightly softer surface on top. I use a combination of quartz slab and poundo board for this. The leather also needs to be wet throughout this process so I always keep a sponge and water nearby, to re-case my leather when it starts to dry out.

The first tool I used was a swivel knife. This is a carving tool that allows you to cut grooves into your leather where you want to define lines or the edges of pattern elements. You hold the knife with your thumb and middle finger while your index finger rests in the saddle at the top. Push down on the knife with your index finger while pulling it forward and guiding it around curves with other two fingers. The action takes a some getting used to, but with a little practice it becomes fairly simple.

Next I stamped with a textured beveling tool by tapping it down with a mallet along the edges of the carved lines adding depth and texture to my design.
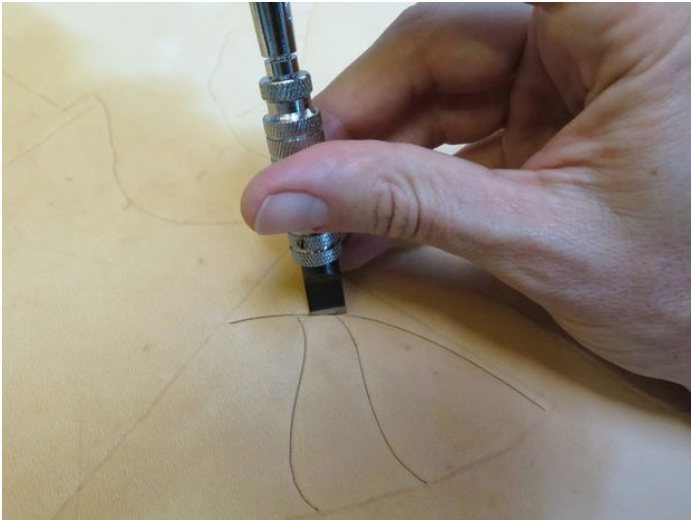
Step 5: Punching the Sewing Holes

Before cutting out the pieces, I also punched the sewing holes into the leather with my diamond stitching chisel.

This also needs to be done over a quartz and poundo board when the leather is damp. I used a hammer to pound the chisel into the leather following the stitching lines I had traced. To go around curves I switched out the chisel head for one with fewer prongs.

I only punched sewing holes on the front pieces of the pattern at this point because I wanted to make sure the holes matches by punching the second side when all the pieces were together.

Step 6: Dying the Leather

To dye my leather waited for it to dry, then I placed it over a piece of parchment paper and used a sponge to apply an all-in-one stain using small circular motions. I ended up using Desert Tan and then applying some Acorn Brown over the top to make it bit darker. You could, of course, use any dye and finish here to color your leather.

It's a good idea to wear gloves when using leather dye, as it is basically designed to dye skin.

Step 7: Cutting Out the Pieces

When the dye on the leather was dry, I used my xacto and leather scissors to cut out each of my pattern pieces.

Then I used a hole punch to punch all the holes I had marked for the snaps and rivets.

Step 8: Snapping and Riveting

Now I added the snaps and rivets to my various pattern pieces, as you can see above. I used my snap setter and hammer on a hard surface to set the snaps firmly in place.

I added snaps to the flap and body of the pouch, to the bottom of the "claws" and corresponding back side of the pouch, and used snaps and rivets to attach the short strap to the back.
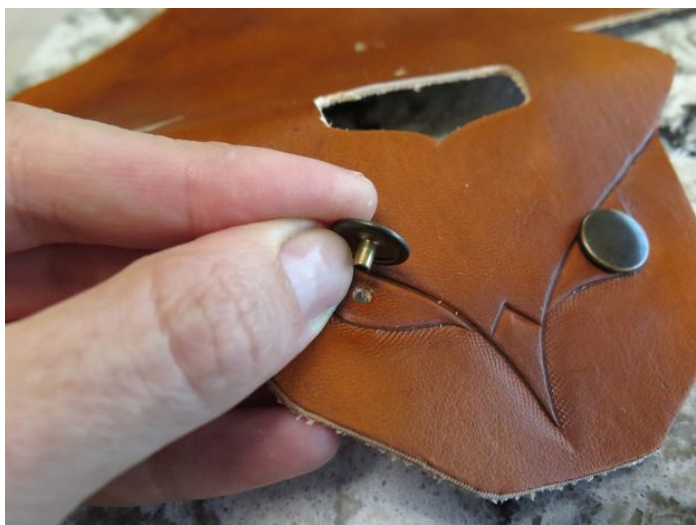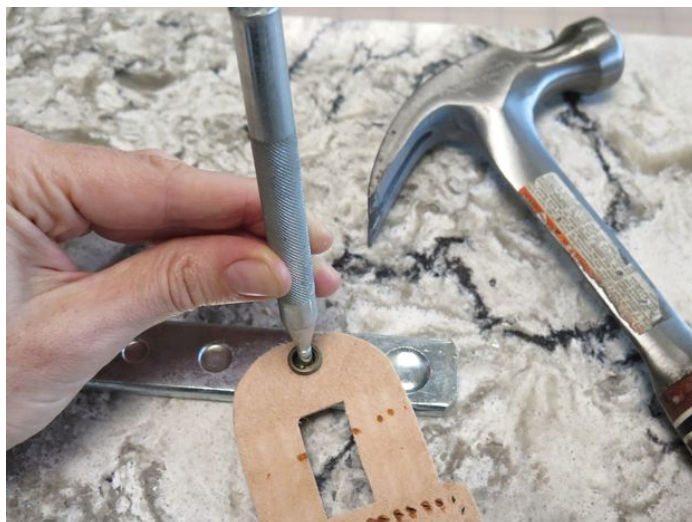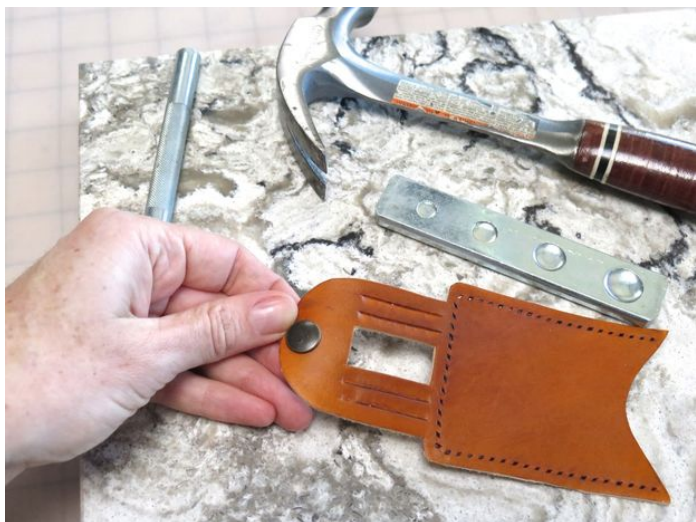
Step 9: Burnishing

I used Gum Tragacanth and my wooden edge burnisher to give the edges of my leather a smooth finish. This is not a crucial step but it does give your piece a nice polished look. Simply apply the gum to the edge of your leather, then rub it vigorously in the groove of the burnisher.

Step 10: Sewing the Small Pocket

To attach the small front pocket to the main front piece, I applied leather cement to both sides around the seams, and stuck them together. Leather cement works like rubber cement, your wait for both sides to be tacky before sticking them together to get a strong bond.

With the pocket in place, I used my stitching chisel to punch all the way through both layers using the existing holes in the top layer as a guide.

Then I took a leather needle threaded with thick wax thread and stitched the two layers together using a saddle stitch.

There are two ways to do a saddle stitch: the two needles at a time method, or the one needle, two passes method. I've tried both and I prefer the one needle, two passes method. For a great description of how to use two needles see this excellent Instructable by jessyratfink.

To use the one needle, two passes method, I just threaded a single leather needle with a long strand of waxed thread and began sewing at one end of my line of sewing holes. When I got to the end of the sewing holes, I turned around and sewed back the other way, this time filling in the opposite spaces between holes, making the stitches look like one unbroken line similar to a sewing machine stitch. When I got back to the beginning I back stitched a few stitches to secure the thread before cutting it.

Step 11: Sew the Main Pocket

Now I used the same gluing, punching and sewing method to attach the two layers of the main pocket. I made sure to only apply glue to the wings and seam allowances, so the pocket itself didn't stick together.

When I was finished sewing, I had a nearly completed phone owl! Just two more small details.

Step 12: Attaching the Strap Ring

To figure out where on my backpack strap my owl should sit, I put my backpack on and marked a good place for the top of the owl, close to the top of my strap. I used my hole punch to punch a hole all the way through my backpack strap about 2 inches above this mark. Then I riveted my leather loop and D ring onto the backpack strap with a quick set rivet. On the back of the strap, I put a small leather "washer" between the rivet and the strap to stop the rivet from tearing through.

Now I could snap the little strap on the top of the owl around the D ring to connect the owl to my backpack.

You could also sew this ring on, or attach it in a number of other ways depending on the construction of your backpack strap.

Step 13: Adding the Wing Snaps

I waited until this point to add the snaps that would hold the owls wings around the back of the strap because I wanted to get the right fit for my particular backpack strap.

to do this, I folded the wings around behind the strap and then marked where they overlapped. I punched holes and set snaps onto both wings so they could close around the strap and stop the case from shifting side to side or flopping around on the strap.

Step 14: Owl Post

Now, when I'm out and about I don't have to keep stopping to take off my backpack and dig around for my phone or cards while cursing and holding up lines. It's really better for everyone. The pocket is quite unobtrusive and doesn't hinder my range of motion or feel uncomfortable. What is more, now my phone is guarded by a cute little owl friend with beady snap eyes and strong leather claws. I feel certain my communications are safe.
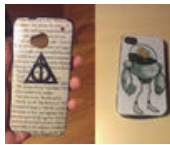

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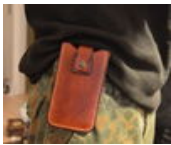
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amberrayh says: Nov 23, 2015. 11:17 AM **REPLY**
I cannot even believe how adorable this is! Great call making the feet into a little cord holder. So cute!