

# The Making of a Purse

Here we'll tell the tale of how a purse is made. The example used is the Market Bag, the largest standard purse that I make, measuring 11.75 x 14 x 4.75 inches.

While the process actually begins with a wide eyed bovine critter, we'll skip the messy process of going from there to the final vegetable-tanned leather (Photo 1). The basic structural design of the purse is laid out on the leather and the required pieces are cut from the hide. The artistic or tooling design is then transferred to the cut pieces (Photo 2).



**Photo 1 (left):** The starting point veg-tanned leather.



**Photo 2 (right):** One side of the purse cut out with the design laid out on the



The next stage of the process converts the basic artistic idea into 3-D appearance in the leather. This process — known as tooling — involves cutting the design into the leather then using a variety of tools to compress and shape the leather. Holes required for lacing and sewing are also punched into the leather at this point. The result is shown in Photo 3..

**Photo 3:** One of the tooled sides of the Market Bag. Some say the process of tooling leather is a great stress relief since you cut the leather then beat it into submission!

After the tooling is complete, color is added. In this case, a combination of alcohol-based dyes and water based acrylics were used. After the dyes have dried, the leather is conditioned with neatsfoot oil, then sealed. In this case, a shiny sealant was used to give the purse a brighter appearance. The final result is shown in Photo 4.

**Photo 4:** Dyed and finished main section of the Market Bag. Different shades of brown are used to accent the 3-D effects of the compass, while primary colors add “pop” to the Bag in the smaller geometric designs.



The final stage of the process is assembly. For this bag, the process involves attaching the hardware, adding decorative lacing, then lacing six separate pieces together and attaching a shoulder strap. The following photos show the final product from a variety of angles.



**Different views of the completed Market Bag.** Clockwise: Front view showing clasp; Rear view; Side view showing the buckstitched connection between the front and rear panels; and a view of the front and bottom.