

Jode Hillman- Hucks Caines Style Mallard Decoy

In his new book, *Decoys: Sixty Great Contemporary Carvers*, author Loy Harrell shows the work of twenty carvers from New Jersey, more than triple the amount of the next closest state. Truth be told, he lists nineteen Jersey guys, but Bob White was born and raised in Trenton and although he lives in Pennsylvania now, he's as Jersey as sweet corn and salt water taffy so we're keeping him. With all those carvers from the Garden State it's easy to miss one. Personally I'd add Jode Hillman to the list to make it a lucky twenty-one for my home state.

Jode's full-time job is as a cabinet maker, a field which clearly gives him a strong background in working with wood, to say nothing of the fact that he's the third generation in his family to follow this craft. He's been carving decoys since 1999 and was trained by Sean Sutton, a pretty fair Jersey carver in his own right. For

those of you unfamiliar with Sean, or his training technique, let's just say that next to him Donald Trump looks like a Girl Scout leader.

The highly stylized Mallard drake pictured here is a modern reproduction of a classic decoy in the style of the South Carolina carver, Hucks Caines, c. 1900. Let me admit right here that I am one of the last people on earth that you'd ever want to show a reproduction decoy to. I feel if you've got the talent to carve something, you ought to do it in your own style. Having said that, I really like this decoy, it just jumped out at me the minute I saw it; it's big, well painted, and carved to a very high standard. The fact that it doesn't really look like most Mallard Drakes doesn't bother me a bit.

I remember reading an article that profiled three old New Jersey carvers in *Decoy Hunter* magazine about sixteen years ago. One of the carvers was Bill Cranmer who's now in his late eighties. He said something in the article that has stayed with me and influenced me to this day:

"Everybody knows what a duck looks like. People aren't interested in buying a decoy that looks exactly like a specific duck, they're interested in getting a decoy that shows what the carver thinks that duck looks like." Not to put too fine a point on it, I like what Jode thinks this Mallard Drake looks like; I also really appreciate the fact that he didn't try to age or antique the carving at all.

Hillman's oversized mallard measures an impressive 22 inches long by 8 inches wide and 12 inches high; and if you know decoy dimensions at all, you've probably already figured out that this carving is approaching the size of a standard goose decoy. What can I tell you except that the size really works for this incredibly graceful carving; it's just an absolute pleasure to look at.

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that most of Hillman's decoys are in the traditional Delaware River style, but with enough style to make each quite unique to his workshop. You can see more of his work on his website: www.hillmandecoys.com or you can phone him directly at (856)-478-0553.

