AUSTRALIAN
Wood
REVIEW
122

ROSS THOMPSON
What it takes to be a high-end maker

TERMS AND TECHNICALITIES
How to buy the wood you need

PROJECTS

FOLDABLE & FLAT PACK
Dane Sampson's three-piece rocker

HALL TABLE ELEGANCE
Sliding dovetails and bevels for a modern look

ON TEST

FELDER K740P PANEL SAW
Features and options galore

ROUTER PLANE REVOLUTION
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Editor's Letter

I've always enjoyed knowing how discipline and technique can foster creativity. When Ross Thompson talks about hours spent in the shed honing skills, he draws a parallel with learning music, 'You practise for hours learning the technique of scales and metronomic timing, all to be able to improvise in the moment to express yourself. There could not be a more apt way of describing how I go about my work when creating – letting the build unveil itself with the skills I have practised and perfected over long hours.' Read from p.36 how music and woodworking came together in Ross's journey to becoming a maker of high-end furniture.

By the board or buy the pack

Recent years have seen timber prices rise. You have to calculate your needs from a material supplied in sections and sizes that depend literally on the tree it's cut from. To account for variations there are industry conventions and tolerances to be aware of. From p.28, Damion Fauser looks at standards, gradings and ordering systems – understanding these will help you get the section sizes you need.

In another article, David Luckensmeyer writes about ordering and buying timber in volumes – there's jargon and processes to know about here as well, see p.62.

The message in the medium

More and more we need to talk about using less. It's second nature for woodworkers to saw and mark out wood to get the most out of each piece, however environmental concerns make us re-evaluate the concept of 'waste'. When we spoke, Tasmanian born but London based designer Brodie Neill told me how he once took a suitcase of ocean garbage plastic back home with him on a plane to later experiment with. As you will see from p.56, his use of reclaimed wood, metal and plastic takes recycling to another level.

Travels with woodworking

Adelaide woodworker Dane Sampson is another who takes his work on board. In his non-woodworking life, Dane is an Olympic rifle shooting athlete currently aiming to qualify for the Paris Games. He once took a rocking chair on the plane with him – designed and made in Adelaide, flat packed and bubble-wrapped for delivery to Sweden. Turn to p.44 to see how.

Another way to 'veneer'

Interest and appreciation of straw marquetry as a decorative art form for woodwork has grown in recent times. This issue, Melbourne based designer maker Laura Inguaggiato shows how to apply your own straw marquetry patterns to wood. It's easy to do she advises, but it's yet another art that takes time to master.

Maker of the Year 2024, presented by Carbatec

Now in its fifth year, Maker of the Year Awards have grown to be much more than a competition for fine woodworkers. Your work is published on our website from the time it is entered, and many entries appear also on our Facebook and Instagram pages. Wood Review now has well over 500,000 social media followers, so the potential for networking and exposure is real.

Along the way, we also feature selected entrants on our website – the earlier entries arrive, the more scope there is for this. For information and to enter, head to www.woodreview.com.au/moty

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Ross Thompson in his Geelong, Victoria workshop

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Felder K740P Panel Saw

Reviewed by Damion Fauser

1. Based on Felder's 700 series, the K740 range has a larger saw unit, a double trunnion capable of running blades from 300–400mm to give a maximum cutting height of 140mm.

1

Prominent manufacturer Felder have a long history of making high-end panel saws and they recently expanded their stable with the addition of the K740 family. Fundamentally based on the existing K700 family in terms of physical stature and rip/crosscut capacity, the K740 range features a larger saw unit and a double trunnion capable of running blades from 300–400mm and therefore able to achieve a maximum cutting height of 140mm. This was the key factor in me adding the K740P to my workshop earlier this year.

There are three models to choose from in the family. The K740 is smaller with a shorter sliding table carriage (cutting length from 1300–2500mm), the K740P runs slightly longer sliding table carriages (cutting length 2050–2500mm) and a larger outrigger assembly, and finally the K740S has a larger cabinet and even larger sliding tables for a cutting length range of 2500–3700mm.

All units have a rip capacity of 800–1250mm depending on the specification ordered. As I already have a K700S with a longer sliding table I selected the K740P with a shorter table and smaller cabinet, creating for me a saw capable of making large accurate cuts yet requiring significantly less shop footprint.

Standard on all variants is the tilt-away overhead guard with dust collection capability. This unit provides an exceptional level of safety, is easily height adjustable and conveniently swings away on a rigid boom when required. Dust is collected at the top of this assembly via an 80mm port, which combined with the 120mm port at the base of the main cabinet means the work area is kept reasonably clean and clear.

The motor comes standard at 5.5kw and I have this motor with the Star-Delta soft start mechanism. This creates a softer, more controlled ramp up to maximum rpm, which is 4000 unless you choose to upgrade to the infinitely variable adjustable speed which can top out at 6000rpm. I wouldn't see this as a necessity in a woodworking scenario, rather a handy feature for those working with other materials such as non-ferrous metals or composites.

You can also to upgrade to a 7.30kw motor. I recently cut through some 130mm spotted gum and, with a fresh and clean blade, was able to quickly and effortlessly produce super clean cuts. The electric braking system

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brings the blade to a complete stop in a satisfactorily fast manner.

Tooling changes are quick and easy with the supplied tooling. This is conveniently stored on a magnetic tool rack which is revealed when the table is slid away to reveal the interior of the cabinet. A selection of riving knives is supplied when changing to blades with different diameters, and the primary flange for securing the blade is significantly larger than on smaller saws, creating more security and stability to the spinning tooling in operation.

The control switches are easy to read and easy to access, with one set on the front face of the main cabinet (along with an emergency bump-stop switch) and a second set located at the lead end of the sliding table for a remote start capability when working with larger panels.

One little quirk to be aware of with this system is that the wiring runs through the channels in the sliding table mechanism and built up debris can short the system, preventing the saw from starting, so the user must pay attention to regular cleaning of the sliding saw carriage rails. I don't see this as a significant drawback as this is required maintenance on any sliding tablesaw in any case.

Optional electric and digital controls are available for the blade height and tilt, and the rip fence. I opted for the K2 package, which includes the electric blade height and tilt with digital display. This is a remarkable capability that I'm using more and more often.

Blade height and tilt are both adjusted quickly with the primary switches, and fine adjustment fidelity is in 0.1mm/0.1° increments with the fine adjustment switches. For the first few weeks I verified the settings with digital calipers, but am now so confident in the accuracy of the settings that I rarely check now. Adjusting the calibration to account for blades of differing diameter, or for when your blade goes off for sharpening and comes back ever so slightly smaller, is quick and easy.

Like the rest of the Felder stable, this saw can be seriously upgraded with a long list of accessories that can transform this machine from a beautifully capable saw into a truly magnificent workshop capability. Dado shaft, scribing blade, larger and more capable outriggers for panel and

2. Control switches include an emergency bump-stop and are easy to see and access.
3. Remote start controls are also situated at the lead end of the table when working with larger panels.
4. Blade height and tilt are both adjusted quickly with the primary switches, and fine adjustment fidelity is in 0.1mm/0.1° increments with the fine adjustment switches.
5. The precision pin-index mitre system allows for extremely accurate angle cutting from -45 to +45°.
6. The aluminium extrusion high-low fence adjusts smoothly and locks solidly on the solid round bar. It can be upgraded with a fine adjust mechanism and digital readout.

cross-cutting, digital control on the outrigger fence, precision index mitre stop on the outrigger for effortless and accurate mitre cuts, and so much more.

The K740 as a basic unit starts at $22,000 plus options, delivery and installation from Felder. Delivery and set-up charges are an extra as well. This is a fantastic addition to the Felder stable of saws, providing a bridge between the capability and quality of the existing 700-series and the cutting capacity of the larger Kappa machines. These are serious machines with serious capabilities for serious shops.

Review machine supplied by the author Damion Fauser @damionfauser is a furniture designer maker and woodwork teacher in Brisbane. Learn more at http://damionfauser.com/
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Fiddes Hard Wax Oil

Reviewed by David Luckensmeyer

Fiddes hardwax oil applies easily, dries exceptionally quickly, seems harder than other products I've used recently, and looks and feels beautiful. I used Fiddes for my last furniture project and was pleased with the outcome.

According to the Fiddes Australia website, this product contains a 'blend of natural oils and waxes'. Like most hardwax oils, this version is best applied with a short nap microfibre roller. Just keep in mind that the shortest nap provides the best results.

The application guidelines are straightforward. Prepare the surface to be finished in the usual way, but avoid sanding beyond P180 as this can adversely affect adherence and durability. The microfibre roller does an excellent job of applying an even, thin coat. Hardwax oil coats are generally textured upon drying and need to be denibbed before applying a second. A maroon pad works well, although I used P1000 sandpaper. Make sure you clean the surface carefully.

I noticed a marked difference between sheen levels for the first and second coats. I'm using the 'satin' version although there are four sheen levels available: matt, silk, satin and gloss. Only two coats are recommended which is a point of difference as sometimes I put on three or four coats with other products.

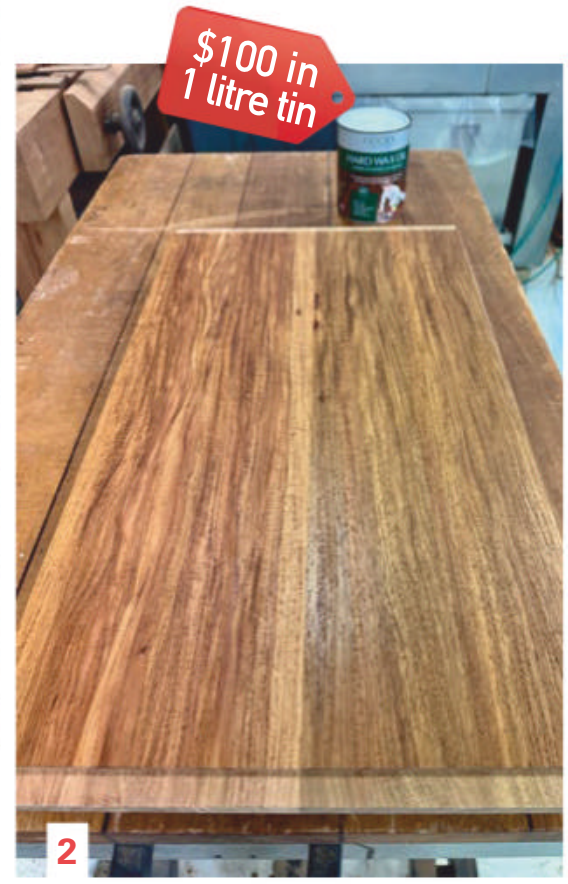
This oil is quite viscous so I decided to try brushing a coat on. It flowed beautifully off the standard brush I used. Just follow the typical advice of working quickly, applying a sparing amount of oil, and brushing with the grain. I found brushing gave a very smooth result which did not require denibbing.

This oil dries faster than average. I've used many competing products over the years and this one dries fast and hard. The four hour guideline is accurate. However, this might be why buffing is not recommended for the clear version. I gave it a try anyway and found that hard rubbing or buffing with a lint-free cloth did not work as expected. The oil becomes sticky and uneven and is difficult to wipe off.

Otherwise, I found Fiddes hardwax oil easy to work with. It has a non-offensive smell, a good coverage rate of 20–24 sqm per litre, and comes in clear and also 12 tinted versions, in many sizes from 125mL up to 20L containers.

Photos: David Luckensmeyer

Fiddes products available from https://www.fiddesaustralia.com/



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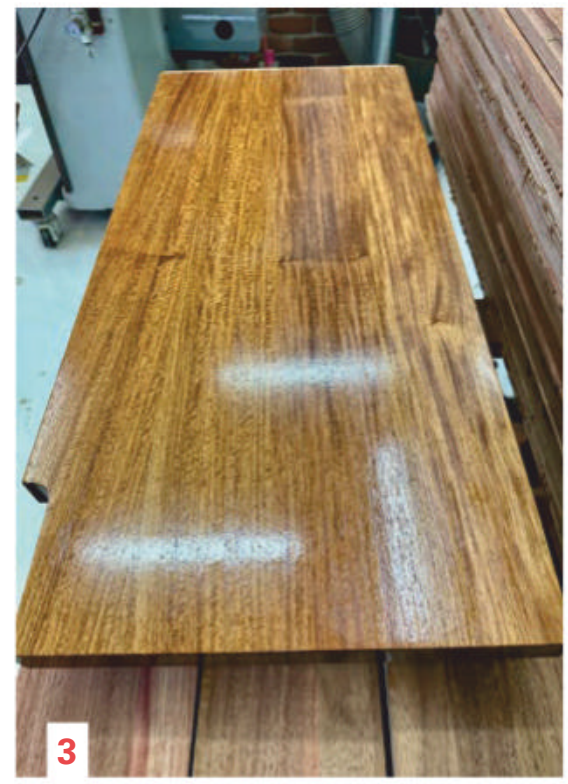

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1. Small 4mm generic microfibre rollers work well.
2. Hardwax oils soak into timber unlike polyurethane which is more of a 'film finish'.
3. The sheen level reveals itself with the application of a second coat (pictured wet).
4. This close-up shows a remarkably even and pleasing final result. The surface feels wonderful; smoothly finished but still textured.

Hongdui KM-18 Chisel Mallet

Reviewed by Linda Nathan

Things that arrive efficiently packed and also within their own plastic storage case instantly score points. Likewise wood and brass combinations have instant visual appeal. This is a carvers mallet, comfortable for a smaller hand to hold, but with good and modifiable heft.

Mallets come in all shapes, species, weights and sizes. I've tried ones that feel top-heavy and unbalanced, and others with handles that are uncomfortable (for me). Looks differ and some also look clunky to my eye.

I have to admit that for years I have used a large piece of hardwood dowel to tap the ends of my gouges, and it has been a workhorse. However this Hongdui tool takes it to a new level I won't be retreating from. The American oak handle bolts to a polished brass head stamped with KM, a nod to the connection this Chinese manufacturer has with US maker and designer Jonathan Katz-Moses. The beautifully machined heads are ever-so-slightly domed and can be replaced with alternate polyaldehide heads with the spanner provided.

Regrettably I have been guilty of bruising the ends of some chisels a little. The polyaldehide heads will be kinder to my tools and the volume of sound they produce compared to the brass heads will be lower too. You can work with a head of each type screwed in for convenience or to reduce the weight in your hand a little.

In use, the mallet is effective and the compact size feels neat in the hand. It's a classy addition to my kit, and a tool on the bench to admire while carving. I'm all for making-do, but for the price you get a highly effective tool that won't break the bank.

Review tool supplied by Hongdui Tools
https://hongduitools.com/

Router Plane Revolution

Three new brands of router planes are now available, all sporting innovations. Raf Nathan takes a look at new versions of a traditional and favourite tool.

A router plane is basically a small chisel held in a frame with the chisel able to be raised or lowered. A large flat base offers great support for hogging out the bottoms of joints, and for making inlays and tuning tenon cheeks. A router plane is a great tool and a favourite of mine to use.

Early router planes were called an 'old womans tooth' with a protruding blade that was wedged in a block of wood. Usually shop made by the maker, some were quite sophisticated.

Later in the 1800s metal-bodied panes appeared from manufacturers such as Stanley, Record and Preston. Record and Stanley both called their similar looking models the 071.

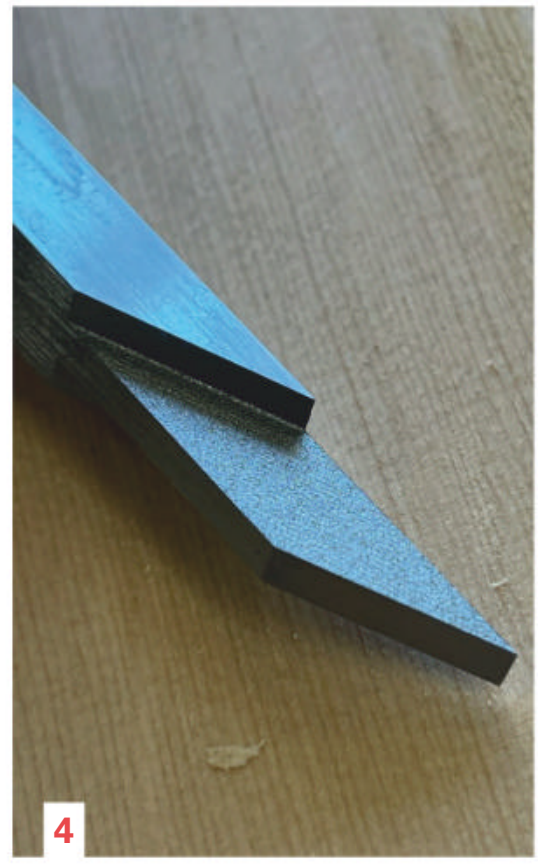
Today we have other brands of router planes such as Lie-Nielsen and Veritas, both of whom make excellent industry standard planes.

The mechanical issue with a router plane is holding the blade and allowing vertical rise and fall. The Lie-Nielsen and Veritas tools have the blade bevel-up and vertically mounted, secured in a machined way, and held with a collar and screw.

New on the market are three new router planes, all using a different system for blade holding and adjustment with two having the blade bevel-down. All plane prices quoted include a fence, except for the Cowryman.

Cowryman 038

Cowryman is a new woodworking toolmaker who offer a range of router planes in various sizes. Priced at US$119, the 038 is the premium



1. Chinese-made Cowryman 038 router plane.
2. Showing the steel block that holds the blade in the 038.
3. View from below, the flat base of stainless steel in the Cowryman.
4. The Cowryman blade is ground from a steel bar.

150mm wide base version that has a 5.6mm thick stainless steel base which is laser cut with two nicely turned ebony handles.

The blade is interesting – an 8 x 8mm square ground to a bevel at one end. The blade sits bevel-down at 45° in a block of stainless steel. This block is beautifully machined – and given the hard material, this is no mean feat to achieve.

Blade adjustment is with a threaded rod and locks with a knob. This plastic knob is the only letdown in the whole build of the plane as it is a parts bin item.

The position of the knob is good for securely locking the blade but it blocks your view when cutting. Other Cowryman planes have a locking knob at the rear however I think this position is more secure with the trade-off being reduced vision.

There is a tiny bearing under the knob to apply pressure and this works well but it can fall out when removing the blade. Remember to invert the tool when you remove the blade. There is also a grub screw that can be adjusted for extra blade locking. There are 6mm and 3mm wide blades also available.

The blade arrives ground at 28° and lapped to a razor sharp. It held its edge well in a variety of timbers during testing and was easy to re-sharpen. There is a lot of backlash in the adjustment but it is fast to move the blade. Apart from softening the sharp edges on the steel base, the plane arrives ready to use with the base flat. A fence is available as an extra.

Hongdui KM-17 Pro

American Jonathan Katz-Moses partnered with Chinese toolmaker Hongdui to create this premium router plane which currently sells for US$209. When it came out a couple of years ago there was a bit of an

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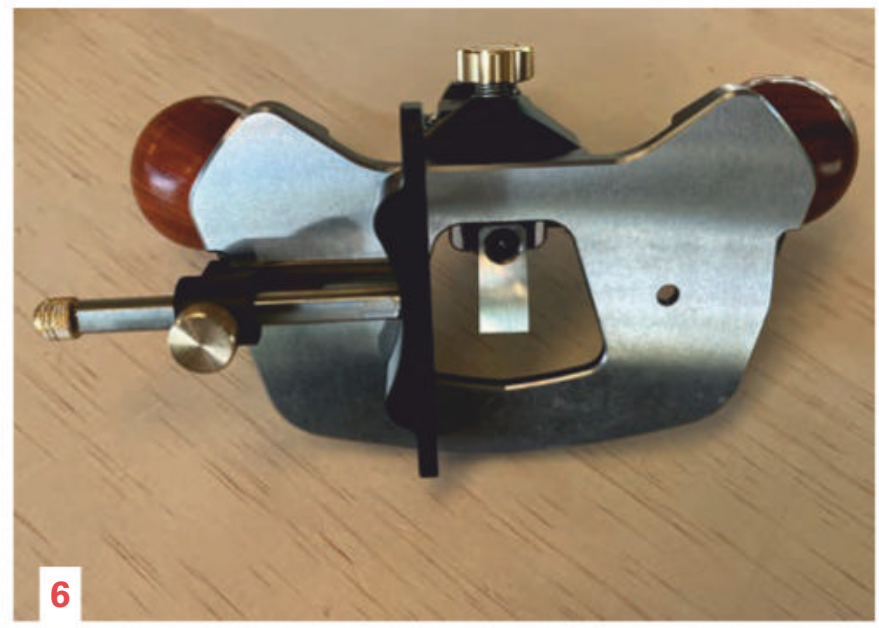

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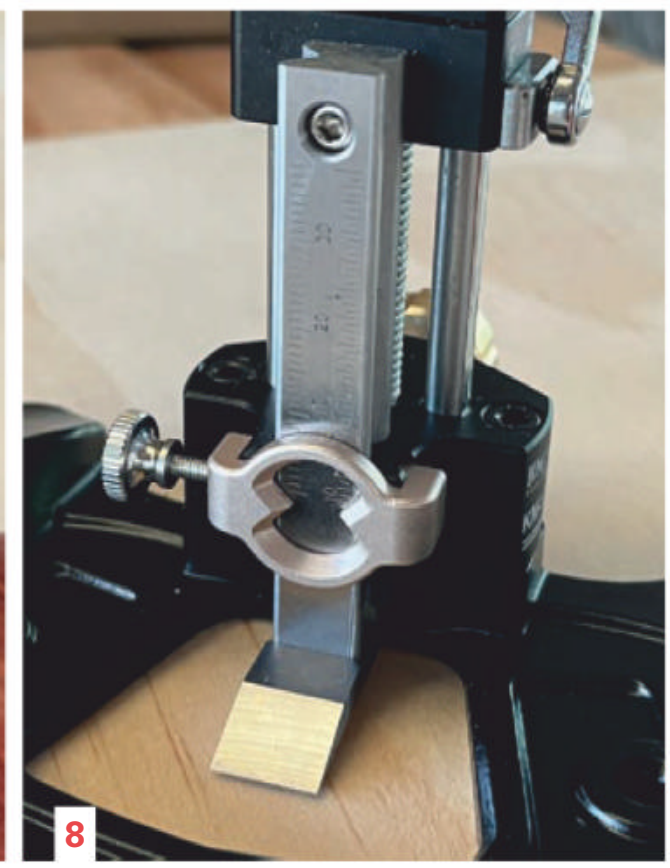

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5. Hongdui KM-17 Pro router plane.

6. Showing the fence and flatness of the KM-17 base.

7. The KM-17 has its own unique blade holding and adjustment mechanism.

8. The depth gauge works very well.

internet storm wherein it was said that it was a straight up rip-off of the Veritas design. And Katz-Moses copped a bit of flack.

Can I say that it is not a copy of the Veritas? It certainly is based on it, as the angled wood handles are identical and the fence is similar. As far as I can tell, angled handles on router planes were an innovation introduced by Veritas. More importantly, the KM-17 has is its own unique and very good blade holding and height adjustment mechanism. This is an original and good design.

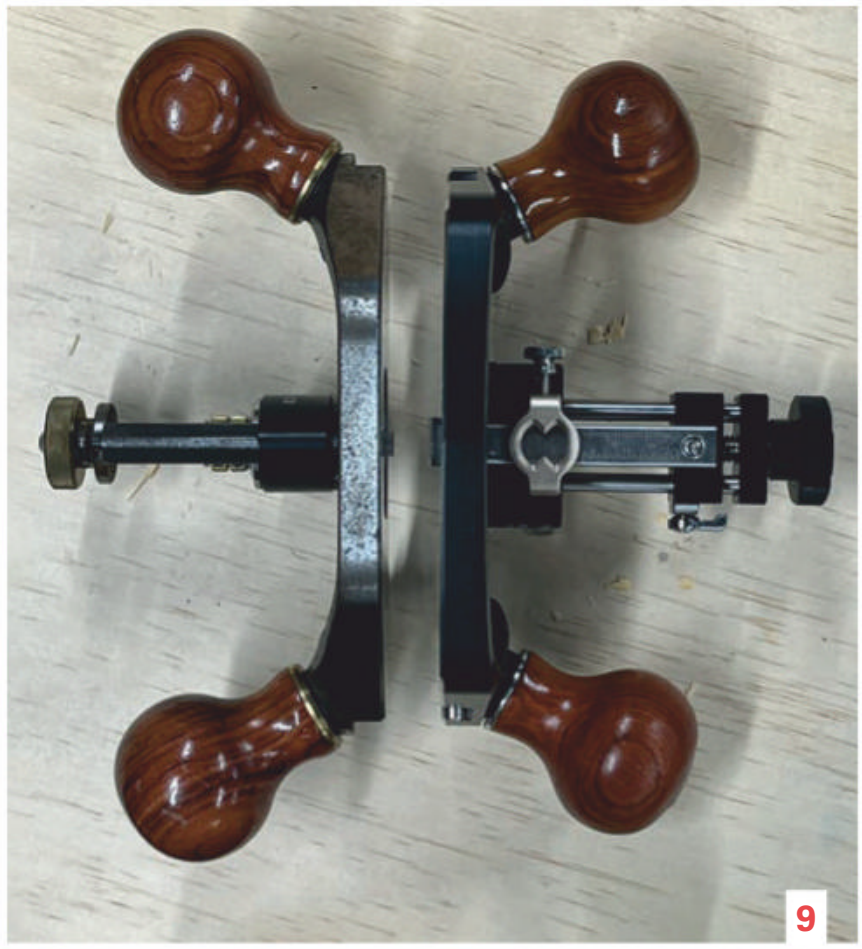
The base is made with what Hongdui call 'die steel' and it is beautifully machined and perfectly flat.

The plane comes standard with two 4.3mm thick removable blades 1/2" wide and ground to 25°, one is a straight blade and the other a spear point. The spear point is said to be better for endgrain work, although for me I find the straight blade better as an all-rounder. The blades fix with an Allen key into a machined way. Narrower blades are available separately.

The blade height adjustment mechanism is via two guide rods and a central threaded rod that an aluminium block moves on for height changes. A large rear knob secures the blade while a top-mounted dial knob changes height with virtually zero backlash. You can adjust the height without releasing the lower knob so adjustments are made on the fly and very quickly. A tiny camlock stop is for repeat measurements.

Small blades as in this tool are tricky to hold and sharpen, however screwing the cutter onto the included holder lets you sharpen the small blade safely, just as you can with the Veritas. The holder doubles up as a marking knife with the spear point blade.

The blades are M2 steel, also known as HSS, and known for its abrasion and shock resistance in cutting tools. It is harder and hence slower to sharpen than A2 steel which is commonly found in woodwork chisels and planes.



9. Side views reveal the similarity of the handles on the Veritas (left) and the KM-17.

10. Overview of the author's long serving Veritas large router plane.

11. Showing the Veritas blade holding and adjustment mechanism.

With M2, the theory is that it is slower to sharpen but the edge lasts longer. Some woodworkers argue that M2 won't take as fine an edge though and is hence never quite as sharp as A2 steel. I found the blade ground to 25° but not sharp, however it honed easily on waterstones to a razor edge.

The tool has a depth gauge reading in imperial and metric. You lower the blade to make contact on the wood and set the gauge at zero. One turn of the top-mounted height adjustment knob is 1mm. This feature works really well.

The reversible fence is very good, although it is overall 30mm deep so will catch on thinner boards. The brass locking knob for positioning locks from below and needs to be locked tight.

Melbourne Tool Company large router plane

Like the Cowryman, this plane uses a hefty one-piece bevel-up blade. The blade is set into a beautifully machined groove with a bed angle of 50°. In this case the blade is fixed by a pressure plate held with two knurled brass knobs. The depth of cut is adjusted by loosening the pressure plate a tad and turning the brass knob which spins on a steel thread.

The body of the plane is cast iron and the base was ground perfectly flat. There are two nicely turned wood handles fixed vertically to the base.

The 1/2" wide blade is 10mm thick M2 steel ground with a 30° bevel. Narrower blades are available. In use the blade is pretty quick to remove and replace, and I found it easy to sharpen to a razor edge using waterstones. Other width blades are available. A brass depth-stop collar is a handy addition for repeat cut depths.

The included aluminium fence is double-sided with the concave face suited to following curved work. The fence uniquely fixes from above so it is excellent for adjusting it quickly although you need an Allen key to lock it. The fence only hangs down 12mm so unlike other planes it does not foul on thinner boards. Whilst made in China, like the Hongdui KM-17 and the Cowryman Pro, it is Australian

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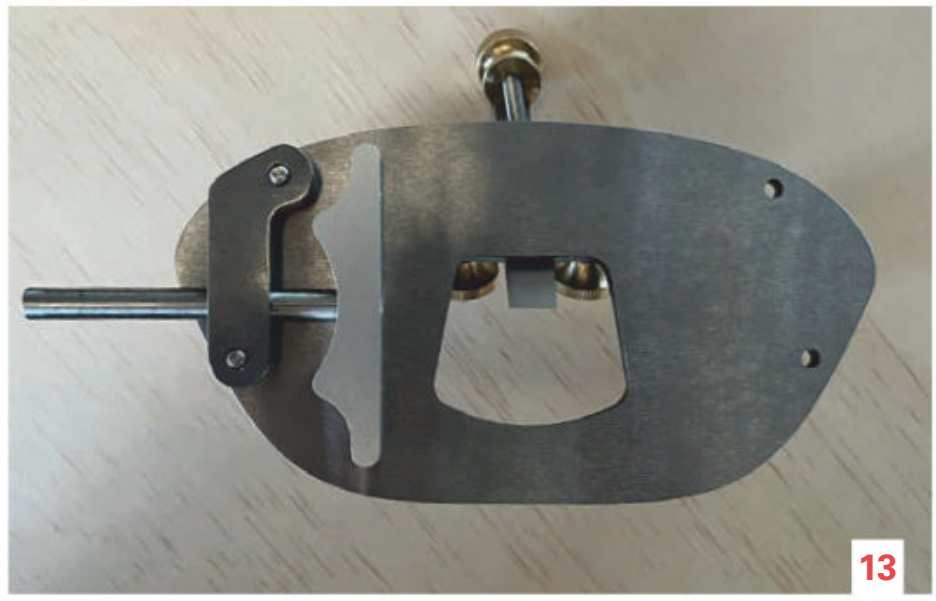

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12. Melbourne Tool Co large router plane

13. The MTC base is nicely machined.

14. The MTC blade locks with two knobs and a pressure plate.

15. The blade sits in a machined groove.

designed and owned, and priced at $249.

Veritas large router plane

The Veritas is my trusted user plane of many years so it is here as a reference tool. It uses the Stanley concept for height adjustment and does it very well. Various blades are available with narrow ones made as a single cranked piece of steel. It comes with two 1/2" ground to 30° blades like the KM-17. There is some backlash in the rise and fall which is slow to use. Veritas use high carbon steel for the blades which in my experience sharpens well and holds its edge. The fence does hang 30mm low and like the KM-17 catches on thin pieces of wood. Overall this is a very good tool.

In summary

All plane blades were initially honed to razor sharp and then used on a variety of woods. After using all the planes for a while it was interesting to note that for some processes the Cowryman was a go-to tool. It sailed through small scale work and I have to recommend it as easy to use with the blade retaining its edge well. Its downside is the uncomfortable vertical handles with protruding screws. It is reasonably priced, and being small, is easy to use with quick blade removal and sharpening.

The Hongdui KM-17 is always going to win on height adjustment. You just turn the top knob and advance or retract the blade. It is a good system.

The MTC blade adjustment is basic but quick and easy to use. You plane for a while, loosen one knob and adjust depth, and lock again. The MTC blade had very good edge holding ability.

The MTC plane is a fine woodwork tool perhaps not as comfortable with the vertical handles. It has the largest base so I felt it the best for large panel work.

The Veritas blade system makes removal slow particularly with narrower blades. However that's what the Stanley and Lie-Nielsen also use with the blade held in a collar system. My long term experience with this plane has been nothing but good and it is a pleasure to use.

Given the prices of the planes the MTC is probably best value for money, while the KM-17 is the one that I want.

Photos: Raf Nathan

Review tools supplied by
Carbatec (Veritas): www.carbatec.com.au
Cowryman 038: www.cowryman.com
Hongdui KM-17 Pro: www.hongduitools.com
Melbourne Tool Company: www.timbecon.com.au

Raf Nathan is a Brisbane based woodworker who makes furniture and other objects to order. Contact him via Instagram @treeman777

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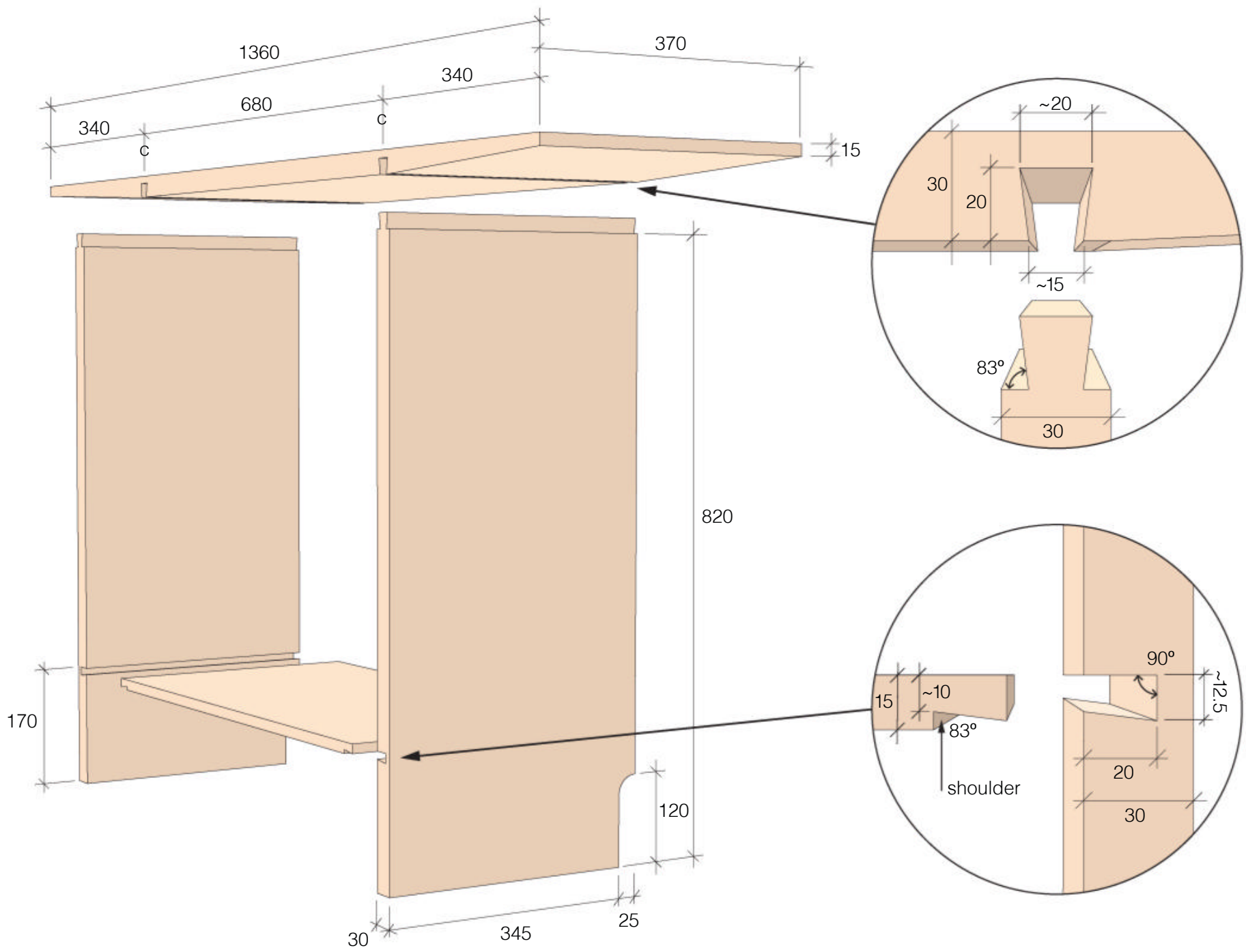
A Dovetailed Table

Sliding dovetail joinery and tapered under-bevels set this entry-way table apart. Story by David Luckensmeyer.

Main: Side table in New Guinea rosewood by David Luckensmeyer

Fig.1: Not to scale, all dimensions in mm



When I received a request to make a side table for home, I knew I wanted to tackle sliding dovetails again. They offer an elegant joinery method that keeps solid timber braced and flat. Let me show you how to make them on the tablesaw.

I also cover how to make tapered under-bevels. Large cantilevers add quite a visual element to the table. Along the way I share a few design tips for a project like this.

Design considerations

The budget is tight so a straightforward design is important. There are really only two constraints: the table must fit against a 1500mm long wall, and it must have a lower shelf for storage. I just don't have time to consider curves, laminations, doors or drawers.

My side table has a top, two legs and a shelf. I began with the nominal length restriction and a common height range of 600–900mm. The

CUTTING LIST mm

	Q	L	W	T
Top	1	1360	370	30
Leg	2	840	370	30
Shelf	1	690	370	15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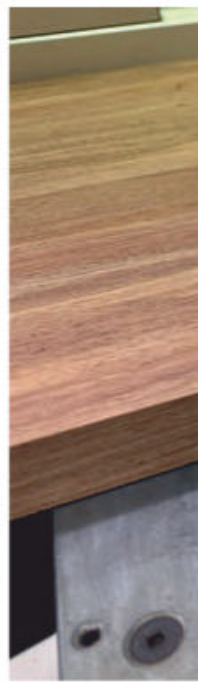


1. Make sure edges are parallel and ends are square after glue-up. Flat material is important for sliding dovetail joinery.

2. The exact distance between the legs is measured after completing the leg-to-top joinery.

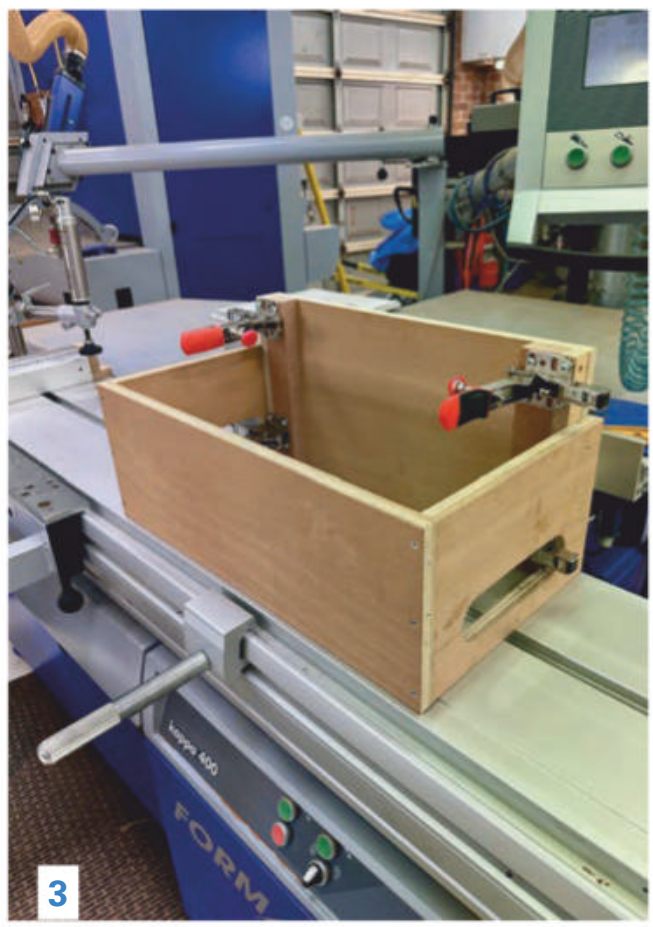
3,4. The jig holds project pieces in a vertical position and runs against the rip fence.

5. The trench should be slightly narrower than the base of the dovetail. The trench can also be made using a router and straight bit.

6. The blade pictured has been ground with a 7° bevel all one way, at a cost of about $30.

7. One side is now angled but the blade needs to be raised. I like to dial in the depth of cut.

8,9. Use a squared piece of plywood as a guide. Make sure the router bit is centred on the trench, and clamp sacrificial pieces to limit blow-out.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overall dimensions offer a nod to the golden ratio (5:8 is a close approximation), while specific decisions – overhang length, width, shelf position – are proportional to the table's length. Even the square negative space is pleasing (**fig.1**).

Prepare the material any way you like, gluing for width, and then aiming for the dimensions in the cutting list. Or whatever suits your needs. Sand faces now as sanding later yields loose joints. Edges can wait (**photo 1**).

The leg length must account for the material thickness (30mm) and joinery (20mm) to achieve an overall height of 850mm (e.g. 850-30+20=840). Likewise, the length of the shelf depends on the position of the legs, less the material thickness, plus the sliding dovetails on both sides (e.g. 680-30+40=690, **photo 2**).

Sliding dovetails

There are two sets of sliding dovetails in this table. The leg-to-top connection is made using a combination of a router and a tablesaw jig. The shelf-to-leg connection is made entirely on the tablesaw with the jig.

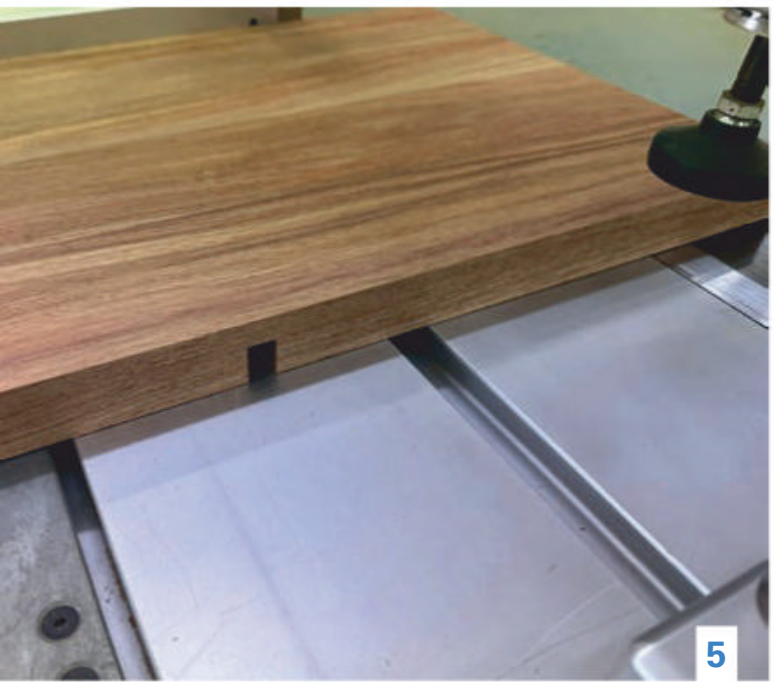
Why use a tablesaw to make sliding dovetails? For safety and adjustability of fit. The material is clamped safely, and the machining process is repeatable and easy.

The jig is basically a box, wide enough to hold the workpiece, and deep enough to provide rock-solid stability. As a reference, my jig is 500 x 250 x 250mm high (**photos 3, 4**).

Machining part A

Tablesaw arbors that tilt one way (i.e. most saws including mine) can only make the half-version of part A unless your joinery is central and you can turn the part 180°. Consequently, I used the half-version for the shelf-to-leg connection. For the leg-to-top connection I wanted a more traditional look, so I used a conventional router and dovetail bit for the trench.

Step 1: Make a trench using a mitre gauge, crosscut sled or in my case the crosscut fence on my sliding tablesaw,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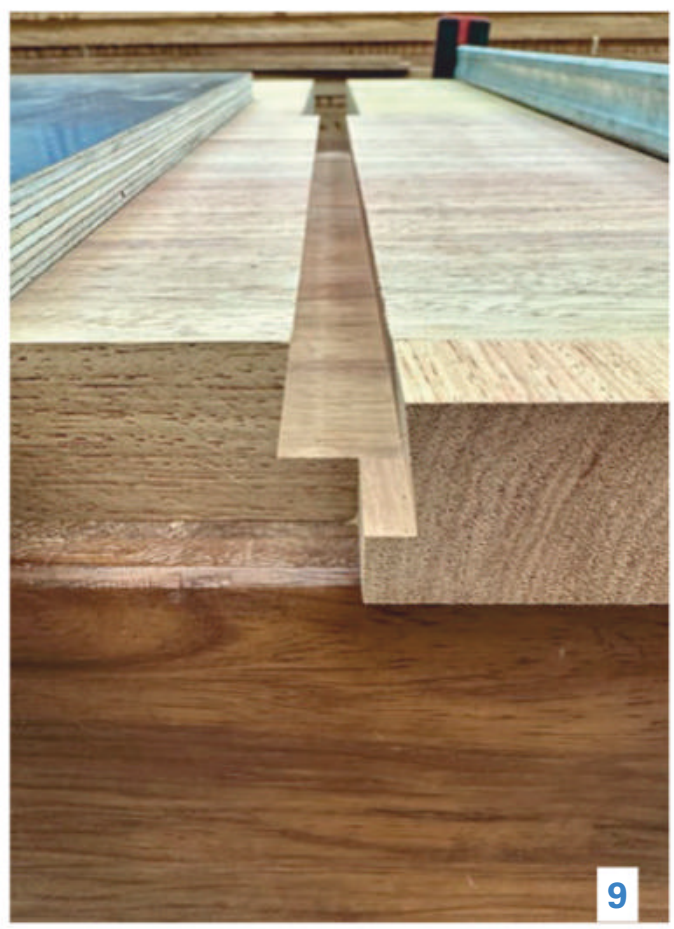
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and a flat-bottomed blade. This step works for both versions (**photo 5**).

Step 2: The half-version is made by tilting the blade to achieve the triangular 'dovetail' shape on one side (**photos 6, 7**). The traditional version is achieved by clamping a temporary fence to the project and using a router (**photos 8, 9**).

I like to size sliding dovetails at no more than two-thirds of the material thickness. In this instance, the material is 30mm so my dovetails are 20mm deep.

Machining part B

The tablesaw jig makes adjusting the fit of sliding dovetails a breeze, and works equally well for both versions. The only difference is whether the timber is passed through the saw on one or both sides.

Step 1: Establish the shoulder of the dovetail using the same blade for trenching earlier. Cut the shoulder on one (half-version) or both sides (traditional version; **photo 10**).

Step 2: With the blade tilted at the same angle as before (here 7°), clamp the workpiece in the jig and set the rip fence for a shallow first pass. Your tablesaw should be free of dust so jig and workpiece register accurately (**photo 11**).

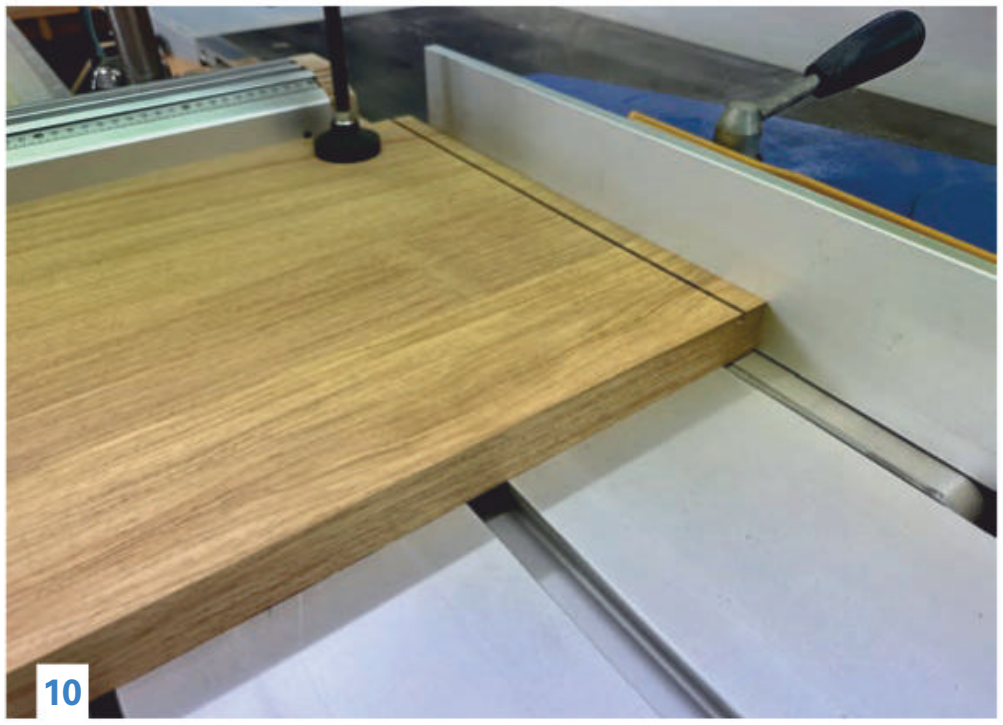
The half-version requires a dovetail cut on one face, while the traditional version requires machining on both faces (**photo 12**).

The final fit is obtained by making very small adjustments to the rip fence, and running the package through the saw again (**photo 13**).

Tapered under-bevels

An under-bevel provides an easy way to add character to a simple piece of furniture. It also lightens the look of the top. The size of the bevel is up to you. Stronger tapers (e.g. from 30 to 5mm) bring a radically modern element to the design.

I settled on a taper from 30 to 15mm. Long under-bevels mean less usable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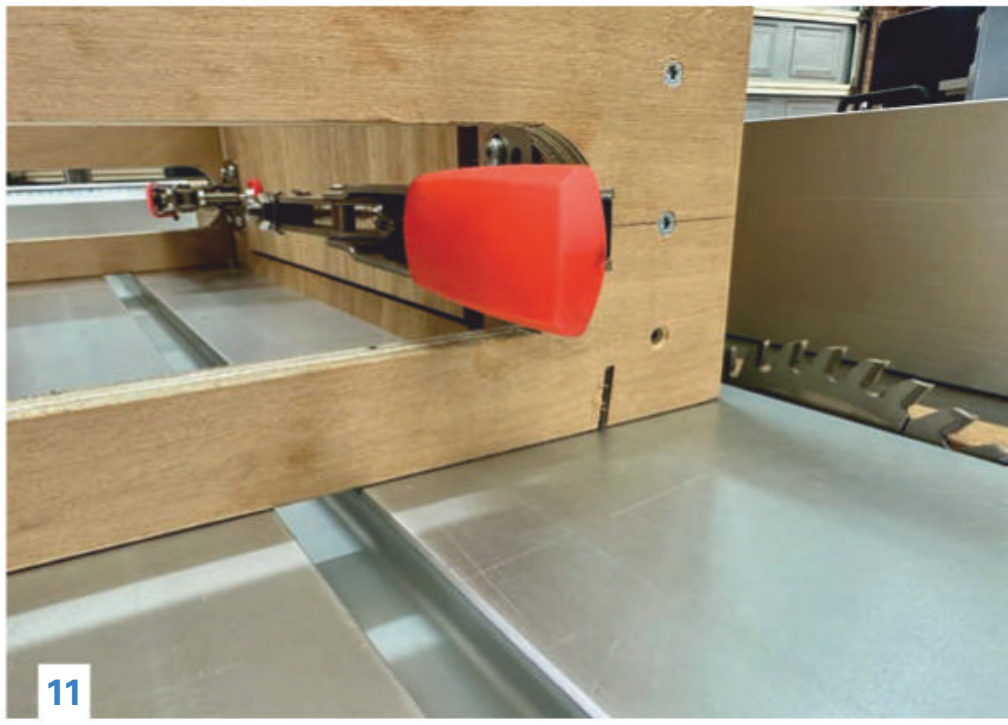
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10. The shoulder (part B) must match the depth of the trench (part A). Pull back your rip fence and use it as a 'bump stop'.

11. The angled cut is visible inside the jig. There are no screws or nails in the way right?

12. Here I'm checking the width of the top and comparing it to the trench. Still a pass or two to go.

13. The tablesaw jig eliminates the stress associated with a router balanced precariously on endgrain.

14. Leave some space between the sliding dovetail and the start of the taper, otherwise the taper can adversely affect the joint.

15. Chamfers on all three sides are key to precise edges and a flat taper.

16. Obviously work 'down the grain' towards the end of the board. I assess for flatness with a ruler.

17. Using a standard blade yields a small but unavoidable groove in the shoulder. This photo is zoomed in a fair bit. The real-world 'look' is better.

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space for the lower shelf. I considered proportions of 3, 4 and 5, and settled on an overhang equal to a quarter of the length (1360÷4=340). There is no right or wrong here (**photo 14**).

Step 1: After the tapers are marked, use a power planer or hand plane to remove most of the material. Work from both sides to eliminate tear-out.

Step 2: Use a block plane to chamfer the edges to the tapered line (**photo 15**).

Step 3: Now use a smoothing plane to form the taper. There is no need to check your progress as the diminishing bevels indicate where to remove more material. Alter plane strokes from across the grain and on the angle. Finish with passes along the grain (**photo 16**).

Building and design tips

Even if you don't like the look of half-version sliding dovetails, the tablesaw jig is still worth making. Part A can be made any way you like (blade, dado, router, etc.), but use the jig to make part B safely and easily.

The tablesaw work described above calls for two blades. While the specially ground blade is nice, it is not strictly necessary. I have made hundreds of half-version sliding dovetails using a standard blade (**photo 17**).

Regardless of which blades you use, keep in mind that you should make the trenches (part A) and the shoulders (part B) first. Only then tilt the blade to your chosen angle. This ensures that both parts fit perfectly.

I would have loved to angle the legs by 2.5° so the legs meet the taper at right angles. Alas, such a design would have complicated the joinery. Doors and drawers would be welcome additions to this project. But they would need to be the subject of another article.


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Assembly and finish

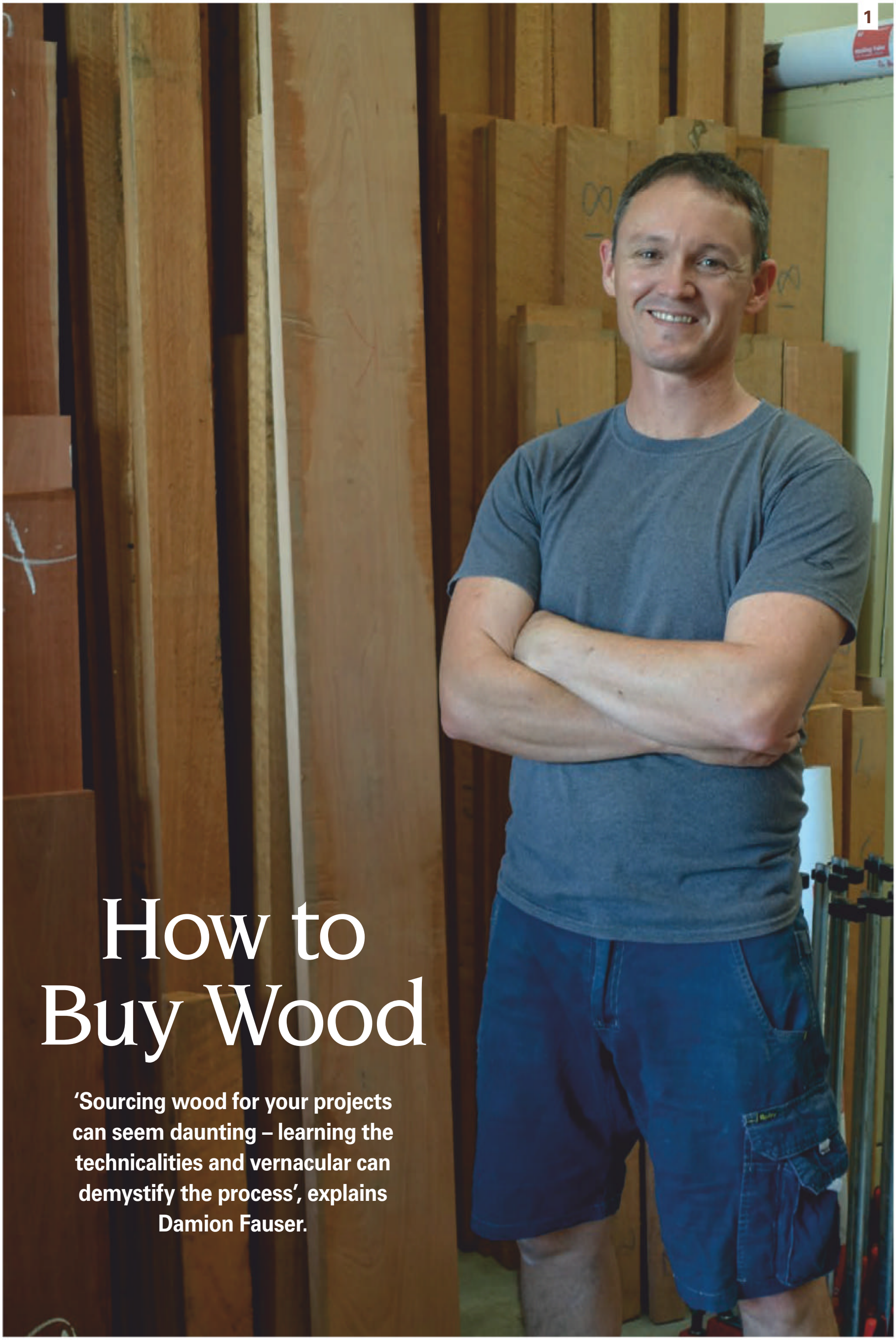
I like to pre-finish components where possible. I didn't bother taping the joinery as sliding dovetails are easy to avoid while applying oil. Of course if you opt for a sprayed finish, you'll need to mask off the joinery.

I had planned to add a sparing amount of yellow glue to the joints. Since sliding dovetails are a mechanical joint, the glue serves only to keep components aligned.

But during the assembly, I found the sliding dovetails had tightened slightly as a result of the oiling process. A few firm taps with a wooden mallet aligned the components and I decided not to use any glue. I love knowing that this side table does not wobble or rock even a little, and yet can be disassembled at any time. If the joinery becomes loose in the future, I can always add a spot of glue then.

Photos: David Luckensmeyer
Illustration: Graham Sands

David Luckensmeyer @luckensmeyer is a Brisbane-based furniture designer maker, see www.luckensmeyer.com.au



How to Buy Wood

‘Sourcing wood for your projects can seem daunting – learning the technicalities and vernacular can demystify the process’, explains Damion Fauser.

Almost invariably, one of the first questions I get asked when people first visit my workshop is 'where do you buy your timber?' And whilst there is an element of truth to my standard cringe-worthy dad joke response of 'from the wood shop', there are many background factors, standards and colloquialisms in the industry that, once you learn the vernacular, make buying the stock for your projects so much easier.

Whether you're buying your timber from a large-scale retailer (or even wholesaler, depending on the magnitude of your orders), a local or boutique mill, or even privately through the classifieds or socials, some of these considerations will apply to any board you ever buy. Most of what I'll be writing about will apply to buying from larger and reputable retailers and suppliers.

I'm not going to cover the details of tendering for logs, the specifics of calculating how much stock you'll need to buy, or the particulars of buying in strapped packs such as reading tally sheets – the first is outside the scope of this article and the latter two are the subject of another article this issue.

2

Industry standards and conventions

As a natural, fibrous, non-homogenous substance, we all know that no two boards are ever the same. Accordingly, there are standards and tolerances for the dimensions and assessment of quality by which furniture and joinery timber is sold here in Australia. Having these details memorised or ready at hand when you are ordering or selecting your stock will likely mean the difference between buying boards that are suitable or not for your project.

Take a moment to digest some of those tolerances shown in **Table 1** and what they could mean to your project. While most suppliers are pretty good and you generally get close to what is ordered, you do need to be aware of the potential cost of ordering with margins that are too fine. Let's say you're planning a tabletop that's 32mm thick – you'd be forgiven for thinking that you could get away with buying 38mm boards. But with an acceptable tolerance of +/- 5mm, you are able to be supplied with boards that come at 33mm thick, which doesn't leave you much room for dressing.

Accept the fact that sometimes you'll win and get stock that is over the standard dimension, sometimes you'll lose. Plan for this on a conservative basis and you'll not be left short. The numbers in the table apply to most species, but please note that some species (exotics in particular), have some slight variation in those numbers – it could be worth discussing this with your supplier at the time of ordering.

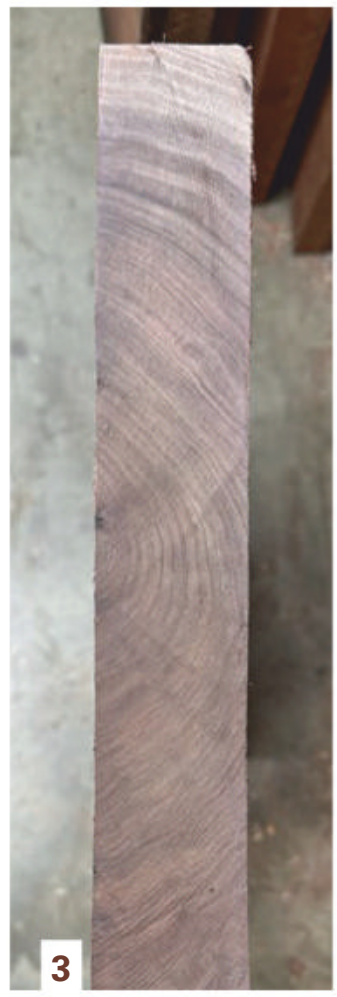
Note that there are limitations to what you can realistically expect in terms of these dimensions, particularly width and length. From a botanical perspective, some species simply don't grow large enough or in sufficient quantities to expect every board to be really wide or long, and even if they

TABLE 1

DIMENSION	SUPPLIED INCREMENTS	TOLERANCE
Length	100mm	+/- 100mm
Width	25mm	+/- 10mm
Thickness	19, 25, 32, 38, 50, 75, 100mm	+/- 5mm

1. Knowing industry conventions will help you get the sizes and quality you need, says Damion Fauser. *Photo: Linda Nathan*
2. D is for delivery day…and (shop) dog. Time to activate the 'human forklift', as the author calls it.

3. Rather than specifing quarter- or rift-sawn boards, understand that you can often source this material from the edges of wider boards.
4. Cutting through the milling marks to assess colour and grain pattern is a privilege that must be politely asked for.
5. The section shown was identified as defective and this was reflected in the pack tally sheet.
6. This board contained an obvious variation from normal straight-grained stock, but was not graded as defective.
7. A moisture meter and EMC chart are essential when assessing stock.
8. Comparing the reading from this image and the one adjacent shows how widely MC varies.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do grow very tall as a tree (such as hoop pine), as a rule the maximum length you'll be able to get will be 6m, which is defined by local transport and material handling equipment (MHE) capabilities. If you're doing a unique job that requires longer boards, then you'll be botanically limited in terms of species choice and will need to chat to your supplier about a custom order and the necessary transportation logistics.

Another local convention that you'll need to know is the sequencing of dimensions when describing a board or reading a cutlist here in Australia. Our local convention is Length x Width x Thickness, in that order, where length is always the long grain dimension and very well may be a smaller number than the width, for example a vertical divider inside a cabinet or desk structure. Note that this is not a globally accepted convention, so you may need to interpret the drawings or plans to ensure you convert to the correct convention here in Australia for ordering.

Imperial entanglements

The simple reality is that a substantial amount of good literature and plans come out of the USA, and so having a rudimentary understanding of the imperial system is very handy for us woodworkers. In particular, knowing how to convert feet and inches to centimetres (cm) and millimetres (mm), even approximately, will greatly assist. Going as far as having some imperial rulers and tapes may negate any requirement for conversion at all however.

Now, you've all probably seen plans that call for '30 board feet of 6/4 lumber' and wondered what they're referring to and how much stock you need.

A board foot is a volumetric measurement and equates to 144 cubic inches, in any dimensional configuration. For example, a board that is 12" long, 12" wide and 1" thick (approx. 300 x 300 x 25mm) is 1 board foot. Equally, a 12" x 6" x 2" (approx. 300 x 150 x 50mm) is also 1 board foot. Note how the dimensions multiply to yield 144 in either case.

The x/4 is a convention to describe stock thickness, where x/4 is x times 1/4" of thickness. For example, 8/4 stock is 8 x 1/4" which equals 2" or approximately 50mm.

Stock gradings

This where things can start to get a little subjective. All timber stock is graded by quality at the sawmill as soon as it is cut into boards from the log and prior to going off for air or kiln drying. It is then graded for a second time after coming out of the kiln. This fact is important to note for when we discuss defects later on.

The grading systems and standards vary between domestic and imported species, and they also vary in some cases between softwoods and hardwoods. Broadly, the grading systems in place define a list of grade titles and for each grade, the minimum dimensions for a board and a percentage of allowable defects for each board within that grading.

Note that each grading contains a range, so any pack at one grading can contain boards at the lower end and the higher end of the grade allocation. For domestic species, the gradings are specified in *Australian Standard 2796.2 – Timber, Hardwood, Sawn and Milled products, Grade Description*. It describes, amongst other gradings, the two most common grades you'll see for furniture and cabinetry timber, being Standards and Better (SAB) and Select. Hoop pine has its own grading system and you'll see gradings such as No.1 and No.2 Clears.


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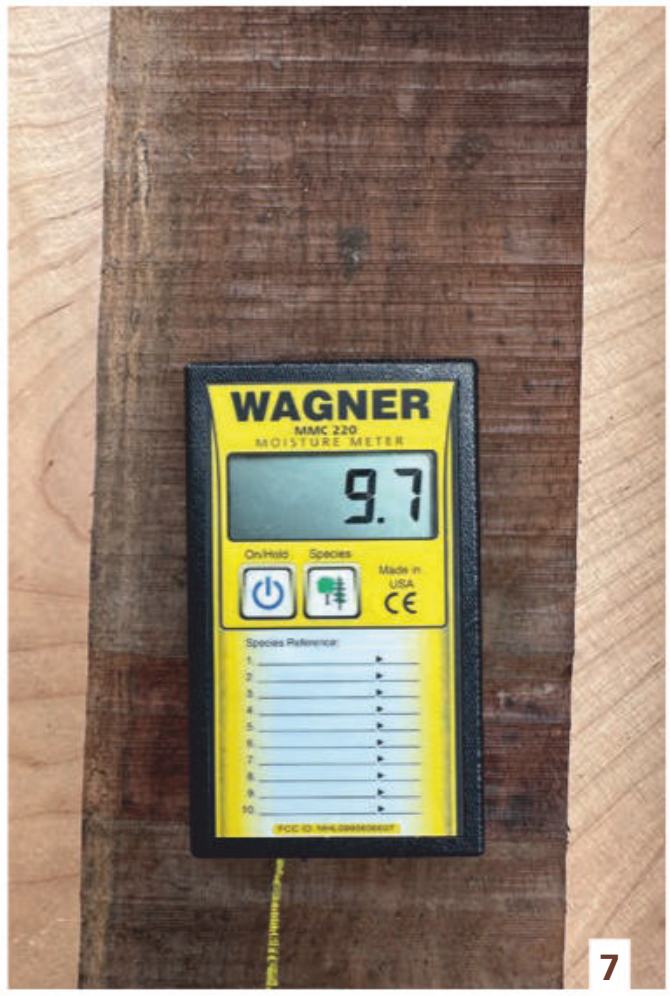

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For species imported from the US, the gradings can be found in the *Illustrated Guide to American Hardwood Grades*, published by the American Hardwood Export Council at americanhardwood.org. Grades you'll likely see for US timbers will be First and Seconds (FAS), Prime and Super Prime. Naturally, the higher the grade, the more expensive the stock.

Selecting stock yourself

Depending on the scale of the merchant you're buying from, as well as the amount you're proposing to purchase, you may be allowed to visit the depot to view and select the stock, but in many cases don't be surprised if this is not a viable option. If buying from socials/classifieds in your local area I would be very wary of any denial of inspection access.

If personal inspection and selection isn't possible, then you'll be faced with the prospect of buying sight-unseen. From the larger and reputable suppliers this is generally not an issue, as they will do their very best to satisfy you to ensure repeat custom. This can be a risk with species such as jarrah, Tasmanian blackwood, American white oak, walnut and New Guinea rosewood for example, that have wildly-varying colour tones and/or prominent sapwood demarcation within the species.

One of my regular suppliers now has a standard caveat when providing quotes for such species along the lines of 'please note that due to the varying nature of this material we will not colour match'. Whilst not a viable option for everybody, my solution to this is to buy substantially more than I need, which allows me to take the time I need in my own shop space to go through the order to select the best boards for colour-matching, avoiding defects, grain and figure selection.

Some sellers will let you visit the depot and select a small order, even down to one board. If you are fortunate enough to be able to be in this situation, then bear in mind certain protocols and courtesies to ensure your experience is a good one and you get invited back for future purchases. Simple things such as:

• Call ahead to confirm stock availability and even organise a time to visit. The stock you're after may be on the bottom of a pile of packs five-high and at the back of multiple rows of packs. Calling ahead will avoid a wasted trip and give the vendor time to get on the fork and dig the right pack out for you.

• Have a good plan or even drawing and cutlist of your project, as well as a budget of what you can spend to discuss with your supplier, this will help them best advise you on suitable and available stock.

• Where possible, buy the shorter lengths. 'Shorts' are anything up to and including 1200mm long and for a vendor can be an annoyance to store, stocktake and sell in pack volume. If your project has smaller components (even for example the legs on a dining table or workbench), then consider taking some shorts in lieu of breaking down longer boards. Everybody can win in this situation, and believe me, the vendor will appreciate it.

• If you're sorting through a stack or pallet of boards, then do the right thing and tidy up and reorganise the stack once you've chosen your boards.

• Don't assume you can grab your block plane and take some shavings to dig through the milling marks. Ask permission first, and don't be offended if the vendor prefers you

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COMMON LABELS

KD: kiln-dried

RS: rough-sawn

SEL: select grade

SAB: 'Standards and Better' grade

FAS: 'Firsts and Seconds' grade

RW: random width

50 or 8/4: thickness

3.0 or 30: length in metres, usually marked on the end or the face of the board at the end

9. 'Wanding' your stock with a metal detector is a good investment in time and money.

10. This bullet was discovered after wanding a board from a pack of prime grade stock from a reputable supplier. It does happen...

11. The crossed-out spalted section of this hard maple had progressed from decorative to being non-structural, and wasn't included in the pack tally. Sometimes defects like this are left in to make stacking the pack for transport easier.

12. This board of New Guinea rosewood is 2.7m long but has been tallied and charged at 2@0.9 to allow for the defective section marked with X's during grading. You can't ask for a discount on a board like this because it has already been accounted for.

didn't. Ditto for a pin-based invasive moisture meter.

• Have a plan in place for loading your purchases into your vehicle, including having the right cutting and measuring tools and PPE with you, or discuss delivery options with the vendor at the time of payment.

Stock labelling and nomenclature

There are a number of marking and labelling conventions that may appear bewildering at first glance, but with a little bit of knowledge you can immediately decipher what is in front of you. Some are listed on this page.

Many vendors will also have their own individual marking systems for identifying defects. For example, there may be a board with a substantial end-check crack on the end, or perhaps a large and structurally unsound knot right in the middle of the length of the board.

You'll often see chalk or crayon markings crossing those sections out and it then isn't included in the measurement or subsequent cost of the board. This is done to keep the board at a higher grading (as the defect is essentially not included in the measurement and therefore assessment of the board) and accordingly more valuable by volume. Everybody wins, as long as you don't go asking for a discount by virtue of the defect.

Checking your stock

Having a metal detector and moisture meter will greatly assist you when inspecting timber, particularly when buying informally through the socials or classifieds. And even though the reputable suppliers do their best to supply quality materials, it always pays to check prior to cutting. I've had 'kiln-dried' stock come into my shop and read 23% on the meter, likewise I've dug multiple bullets out of packs of stock graded as Prime.

Environmental and legal

Many species are now rightfully plantation and forestry managed, with extremely tightly legislated and regulated procedures for harvest and use. Many reputable suppliers will adhere to one or more of several internationally recognised chain of custody certifications for their products in an effort to reduce the


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effects of illegal logging. By choosing stock that is chain of custody certified you'll be doing your bit as well.

Examples of such certifications include Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and, particularly for Australian hardwoods, Australian Forestry Standard (AFS).

Be wary of buying exotic species on an informal basis. Many species are now officially listed under CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Among other things, this convention prohibits or restricts the trade and/or movement of listed species in an attempt to reduce and hopefully eliminate illegal and/or overuse of a resource to preserve the species.

Industry trends

Timber is a natural resource, and it can be argued whether or not any particular species can be classed as renewable. I'm not going to go into that, but I thought I'd discuss a number of recent developments that have or will impact us woodworkers.

Locally, a number of iconic forests are about to be closed to commercial logging. Two notable examples are jarrah in WA and Victorian ash in Victoria. This will naturally restrict supply and put upward pressure on prices.

Covid had a substantial impact on supply and pricing of many species, and locally in particular, many smaller mills either closed down or shifted their operations to structural rather than joinery timbers, which has meant certain species, such as spotted gum, are prioritised to the structural market by some mills.

One supplier that I spoke to predicts that laminated and finger-jointed (FJ) products are likely to become more commonplace and will need to be more accepted in the joinery industry.

In summary

Buying timber stock can be difficult, particularly for home-based woodworkers. Having some understanding of what I've discussed here, along with a good idea of how much stock you'll need based on your plan, will make your discussions with your suppliers so much easier, and they'll be able to provide you with far greater assistance. This will assist in fostering a solid and enduring relationship, as well as ensuring you get the right quality and amount of stock for your projects.

Photos: Damion Fauser

Timber Suppliers (see over page)

Britton Timbers
www.brittontimbers.com.au

Huon Pine Shop
www.huonpineshop.com.au

Island Specialty Timbers
www.islandspecialtytimbers.com.au

Melbourne Guild of Fine Woodworking
www.mgfw.com.au

Mountain River Timber
www.mountainrivertimber.com.au

Ramiens Timber
www.ramienstimber.com.au

The Wood Project
www.thewoodproject.com.au

Damion Fauser is a Brisbane designer maker who also teaches woodwork classes from his workshop. Learn more at http://www.damionfauser.com/

The Applied Art of Furniture Making

After a cabinetmaking apprenticeship came study for a music degree, and then a career as a high-end maker. Ross Thompson talks about the intersection of music and making furniture, and how music fostered his creativity. Interview by Linda Nathan.

Your work speaks of refinement in terms of design details and materials selection. What's your general process for designing a piece?

Depends, if it is for a commission, I listen to the needs and like to see the space, then provide drawings based on all the information I have. I like to give the client as much certainty as I can on the design – it can be a big investment, so giving as much detail as I can is important.

If it is for myself, I usually have a really rough shape or direction for a piece in my mind, but nothing on paper. I draw the main shape to scale on a bit of 3mm MDF just to get an idea of the overall size. Then I just start from the beginning – details are filled in over the build. I don't like locking myself into things too early on paper. My knowledge of technique has much to offer that I can't communicate on paper easily; ideas also evolve, or opportunities arise over the build in areas that I did not plan for, so I have stopped trying to!

How does that build into the 'designer maker' equation? Do you see yourself as more of one than the other?

This is something that continually ties me in knots. I have come to the conclusion that I need to be able to enter both worlds and work within them; but more importantly, in conjunction with each other. Ultimately, that is why I believe my work offers something unique. It has to be functional, but it is also imperative that it be considered as work of applied art.

Ross Thompson with his Macassar ebony and Huon pine *Writing Desk*, 2019, a favourite commission.

Chest of drawers, maple, curly maple and ebony handles and details

You once said: 'You can build incredible works, but not designed well they have no audience; conversely, you can design beautiful objects but if they can't be built, or are built poorly, they are of no value.' How do we know when it's a case of 'too much design'?

Obviously this is pretty subjective, but I believe when design stands in the way of something functioning properly, then it has been over-designed. A chair has to be comfortable, a table strong enough to withstand years of use, and a cabinet has to be big enough to properly use…

Age 31, after an apprenticeship and only seven years in your own business, you're still in an early stage of your career. What does it take to position yourself as a maker of high-end work? Are there risks involved?

There is no doubt that it is incredibly difficult and an ongoing battle. I don't think you enter this career and expect to have it made. People think because your work is expensive, that you must be making great money, but no one sees the back end.

Definite risks. Maintaining cash flow is difficult as jobs don't turn over quickly. One moment you will have a full account, and a week later not much left, especially the expense of raw materials and overheads of running a furniture business – equipment, rent, insurance and utilities are quite high. It is not as if you can work in your back shed or doing only online sales, there needs to be a lot of investment in infrastructure and equipment.

I have always been adamant that I have set up my business to do work

that I want to do, and work hours that are achievable and sustainable. Otherwise, what is the point? It just takes real commitment, patience and courage. I don't know how else to put it, really.

Last year at the Melbourne Design Fair you showed some beautifully made and detailed spec pieces. For a professional that can be costly in terms of time and materials expense – has it brought in work?

This event was government-subsidised which is the only way it was feasible. Initially I was a bit downcast about it all, but I just needed a bit of patience and to hold my nerve. As my work is nearly entirely custom based, I just needed to wait for the right projects and clients. It was a great opportunity to showcase my work and to see some reward for the time and effort is really pleasing and exciting.

Do you see any other benefits – for example, extending your own skillset?

Yes, it is great to develop your own creative pieces. Finding time to do this in day-to-day life is never easy to find. These events really make you focus in on this. You can also experiment with new techniques that certainly extend your skillset.

Can you tell us a little about your background? How much of your maker knowhow was self-taught? How did you learn more advanced techniques?

I did an apprenticeship after I finished school in 2010. There I learnt my technique and hand skills. I didn't really develop much of a creative/design side to my craft, I don't think I was mature enough yet at 19 and 20, but also was never really given the chance or the confidence in myself.

Close-up views of Ross Thompson's *Writing Desk* in Maccassar ebony and Huon pine. The detailing is inspired by Art Deco and Art Nouveau forms, and the work of Rennie Mackintosh. Curved drawers maximise the storage and the writing space. A concealed drawer opens with a magnet. 'The legs are my favourite part of this desk; beginning round at the top, they are planed on a taper down to a flat face on the outer corner where a fine inlay is recessed into the leg.'

FAST Q&A

Favourite hand tool?
A Norris hand plane which my parents bought me when I was really struggling as an apprentice. I use it most days and it always reminds me that we will always need help from those close to us.

Favourite machine?
Wide belt sander

Woods?
Huon, walnut, blackwood

Most admired maker?
Old: Emile Jaques Ruhlmann
Current: Anton Gerner for what he has been able to create over such a long time.

Designer?
Not an individual, but a genre I suppose – Bauhaus design.

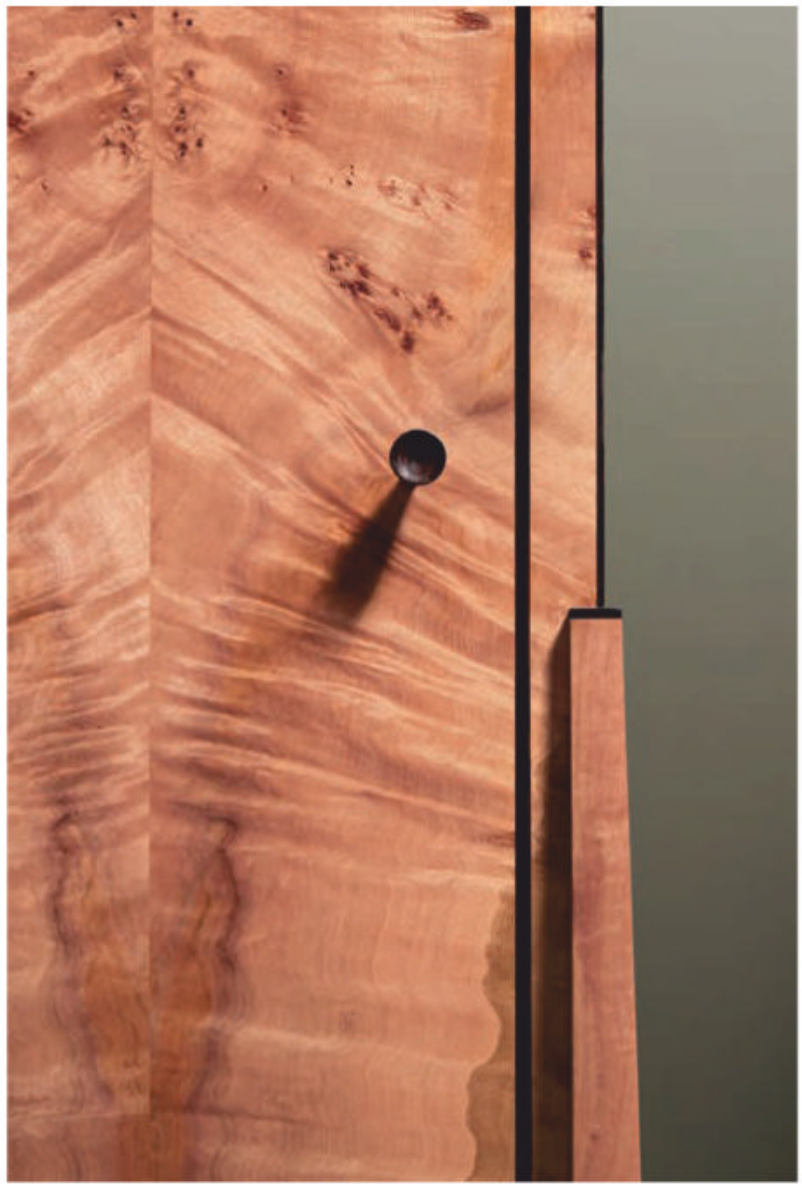
Who are your favourite composers?
Rachmaninov, Beethoven, Chopin and Ravel. More contemporary are Wilco, Gillian Welch, Dave Rawlings, Radiohead, Grant Green and the Beatles, of course.

What do you listen to when you're working?
Audiobooks, podcasts and music.

Best design inspiration?
Bauhaus and Art Deco

The worst thing about finishing a piece?
Exactly that – the finish. You can spend 100 hours on a piece but if the finish isn't right people will notice straight away!

The best thing about woodworking?
The map in my mind of woodworking and knowing how to navigate it. It's like I don't even need a compass or a map, I just know how to get from a concept to a finished piece. And even if I don't know the way, I love finding out how to get there. It is like my mind was created to figure it out.



I left after two and a half years, laboured in a factory for a bit, and then decided to travel the deep south of America to follow the blues trail. When I returned in 2012 I started a music degree – that was where I really developed my confidence in my own creativity. I loved that time of my life in Melbourne, but I really missed using my hands. Also, a music career is even harder to establish than a furniture making one!

Music has also been a big thing in your life. When and how did music enter the picture?

I've played the guitar since I was young, and always loved it. Two albums changed my life when I was at the perfect, impressionable age from 12 to 16 – the greatest hits of Chuck Berry which my dad bought me, and Jimi Hendrix's blues which mum gave to me. Looking back, both literally changed the course of my life! I get so much joy from all sorts of music, although it is very difficult to find time to listen and play with a business and a young family.

You said: 'Creativity makes you vulnerable and I never had the confidence to make myself vulnerable until I did music.' Do you think it helped you as a maker?

For sure, that confidence of knowing I had that creativity inside of me, that I knew my mind would lead me down the correct path and that it would be okay in the end is the only reason I can continue to do what I do. Mistakes are made, but life and work goes on, you learn and go again. I kind of went from extremes. The apprenticeship was very technical and the music side of things was very creative – and I think I landed somewhere in the middle. I had a break from the world of trade and realised that I really loved it.

The road to becoming a skilled musician requires a lot of discipline, hours of repetition, an ability to improvise and also to perform. Are there any parallels between making music and making furniture?

So many. Lonely hours spent in the shed, honing skills. Always chasing

a better result and never quite being 100% satisfied with what you created. Burying your head into something to learn everything about it, how and when it should be used and what qualities it brings to the piece. It is much like music really thinking about it.

You practice for hours learning the technique of scales and metronomic timing all to be able to improvise in the moment to express yourself. There could not be a more apt way of describing how I go about my work when creating – letting the build unveil itself with the skills I have practised and perfected over long hours.

What's your design style? Are you a blues furniture maker, or are you a jazz kind of guy?

I think classical and jazz if I think about it. Classical in that I want to nail technique and explore a huge breadth of tones and harmonies. But a lot of that crosses over to jazz, and as mentioned before, improvising.

Is there any crossover between your favourite music/furniture styles?

When you think about it – space, texture and tone, and harmony obviously – all those things you can extrapolate out to furniture and design as well. They're different forms but they can cross over.

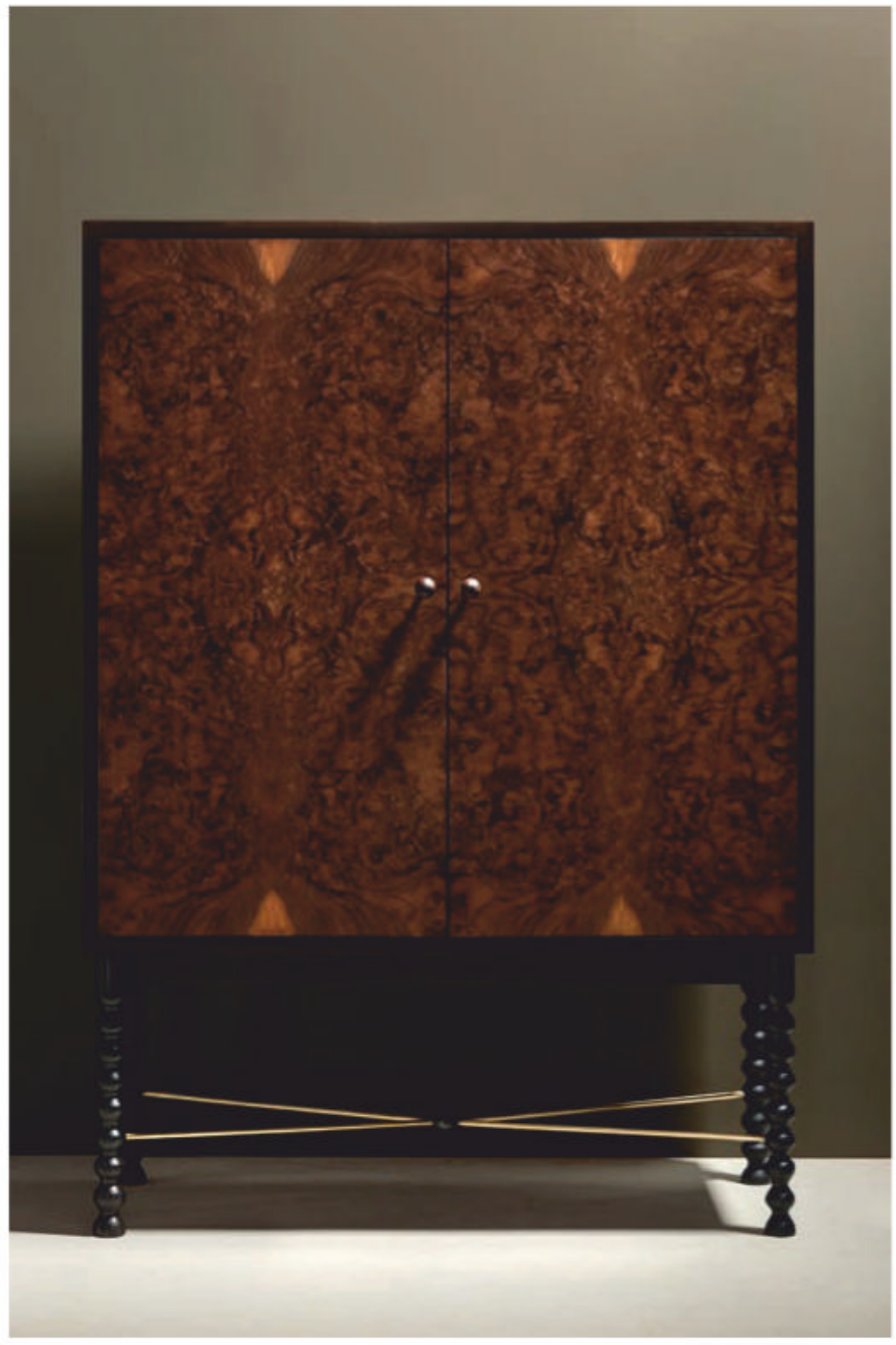
How do everyday business realities stack up against the passion side of the equation?

You're running a business, doing your own design work takes time, exploring ideas, pushing yourself, making mistakes – it all takes time. You've got to approach this from a business point of view. Being realistic but also meticulous in preparing, recording and executing your back end work – accounting, marketing, logging hours on jobs. This I have to get better at.

A lot of people get into this approach it as a romantic idea – you don't want to be a cynic or half glass-empty kind of person but you do have to realise that you're doing this to make money.

Cocktail Cabinet, Macassar ebony veneer, birdseye maple veneer, wenge and veneered smoked eucalypt. 'The curved doors are made of bendy ply glued to build thickness, and then hand fitted before veneering. I didn't work off any drawings, only a single template of the semi-circle to work the first caul off. It was a build that evolved – an enjoyable but also at times frustrating way to work, as I ached over many details for longer than I should have. However it was also quite liberating in that I didn't have any plans, it was just my creativity and technique that informed the finished product.'

Tall Cabinet, figured Tasmanian myrtle, Huon pine, wenge detailing. 'To make it "seamless", I mitred the four external corners. The tall and thin shape had been in my mind for a while; it really is just a study in proportion in my eyes. The legs are tapered in opposing directions and loosely based off the Art Deco furniture style of Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann.'



A cabinet in walnut burl, fumed eucalypt, copper and brass with turned 'bun' legs.

Yes, I love my job – I skip out the door every morning and I absolutely love it, but making money is the goal. So there is that pressure.

You've also got to be a little bit ruthless, be realistic about the kind of work you take on, what your skillset is, what tools and machinery you invest in. It's something I've learnt in the last 24 months; you're running a business, it's not a romantic side-hustle, you have to make it profitable.

Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?

I would like to have two employees – a qualified maker and an apprentice that take care of day-to-day work operations. Whether that is working on small scale production work through interior designers, or work that is not as complex or as custom as I would be doing. That would allow me to do the high-end work that might be limited throughout the year. I would also love to have someone take care of the accounting work. I don't think I ever want to have too many people or taking on massive quantities of work. I don't want to manage people and clients, I want to be a woodworker.

What's your advice for other woodworkers who are looking to extend their design and making skills, and perhaps even go professional?

Go slow, invest in tools, ideas, people and spaces that will last a long time, even if it takes longer. It always pays off. Start slow and don't overextend. If you can work part-time at it, then do so. Chip away and time will take you where you need to be. Be clear in what you want and how you want to get there.

Photos: Tess Kelly

Learn more about Ross Thompson @rossthompson_furniture at https://www.rossthompson.com.au/

Wood Diary

For more events and news sign up to AWR fortnightly newsletters at:
www.woodreview.com.au

Diary listings are free. **Email to:** linda@woodreview.com.au

Note: Listings are correct at time of publication but may be subject to change. It is advisable to check details with the organiser before visiting.

14 FEBRUARY
Maker of the Year, presented by Carbatec
Entries are now open for Wood Review's 2024 online and print awards and showcase for fine woodworking
Information and entry via:
www.woodreview.com.au/moty

25 FEBRUARY
Sydney Tool Sale 2024
Traditional Tools Group
9am–1pm, The Brick Pit Sports Stadium
1A Dartford Rd, Thornleigh, NSW
http://www.tttg.org.au/

1–3 MARCH 2024
Auckland Wooden Boat Festival
Work boats, yachts and launches; displays, seminars and activities
Jellicoe Harbour, Wynyard Quarter, Auckland, New Zealand
https://www.aucklandwoodenboatfestival.co.nz/

8 MARCH–15 APRIL
Australian Wood Design Exhibition
Showcasing Australian timber design
Orbost Exhibition Centre, Orbost, Vic
www.orbostexhibitioncentre.com/wood-design

9–10 MARCH
Lost Trades Fair Bendigo
Bendigo Racecourse, Djaara Country
Heinz St, Ascot, Victoria, 9:30–4:30pm
https://www.losttradesfair.com.au/

9–10 MARCH
Kiama Woodcraft Group Annual Woodcraft Expo
Demonstrations and sales
Kiama Masonic Hall, Collins Street, Kiama, NSW
9am – 4pm Saturday and Sunday
David Bywater: 0425 249 148

22–24 MARCH
Turnfest woodturning symposium
Demonstrations by international and local woodturning and carving professionals
Seaworld Resort and Water Park, Gold Coast, Qld
https://www.woodworkingsuppliesqld.com.au/

14 MARCH–2 MAY
Curated works by Pierre Yovanovitch
Criteria Gallery, South Yarra, Melbourne
https://criteriacollection.com.au/

22 MARCH–29 MAY
The Art of Making 2024
'The best of design and fine woodworking' by members of Studio Woodworkers Australia
Australian Design Centre, Sydney
https://australiandesigncentre.com/
https://studiowoodworkers.org.au/

21 APRIL
Antique & Collectable Hand Tool Market
Hand Tool Preservation Association Australia
St Anthony's Parish Hall
164 Neerim Rd, Caulfield East, Vic
9am–12pm, $5 entry
https://www.htpaa.org.au

1–2 MAY
Sydney Build Expo
Construction and design show
ICC Sydney, Exhibition Centre, Halls 1-4
https://www.sydneybuildexpo.com/

3–5 MAY
Woodcarving Weekend in Bacchus Marsh, Vic
Lady Northcote Recreation Camp, Glenmore, Victoria
John Paine 0473 579 508
www.woodcraft-manningham.org.au

4–6 MAY
Maleny Wood Expo
'From seed to fine furniture' the Expo highlights the use and appreciation of sustainable timber. Founded and organised by Barung Landcare, includes Sunshine Coast Wootha Prize exhibition
https://malenywoodexpo.com/

21–24 MAY
Xylexpo
28th biennial world exhibition for woodworking technologies and components. With Bimu, the biennial exhibition of machine tools, robotics and automation, additive manufacturing, digital and auxiliary technologies.
FieraMilano Rho Fairgrounds, Italy
www.xylexpo.com

23 MAY–2 JUNE
Melbourne Design Week
'Australia's largest annual international design event' presenting innovative and engaging projects across an 11-day program. The 2024 pillars are ecology, ethics and energy.
https://designweek.melbourne/

23 MAY
Australian Furniture Design Award (AFDA)
Exhibition opens. The AFDA is a biennial award that fosters Australian designers and makers and is presented by the National Gallery of Victoria and Stylecraft.
https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/

1 JUNE
Hand Tool Event
All-day tools and technique demonstrations with Lie-Nielsen Australia, HNT Gordon and others, refreshments available, 10am–4pm, free entry
Damion Fauser Workshop,
4/14 Buttonwood Place, Willawong, Qld
http://www.damionfauser.com/

7–9 JUNE
Q-Turn
'A weekend of woodturning wonders and skill-sharing for turners and all genres of woodworking.'
The Outlook, Boonah, Qld
https://ipswichwoodcraftsclub.org

13–15 JUNE
Design Show Australia
A national exhibition for interior design, architecture and fitout, ICC, Sydney
https://designshow.com.au/

17–19 JULY
Australian International Furniture Fair
Brands showcase furniture, lighting and products, industry seminars. Includes Vibrant Visions in Design (VIVID) design awards.
Melbourne Exhibition Centre
www.aiff.net.au

28 JULY
National Tree Day
Australia's largest community tree-planting and nature care event preceded by Schools Tree Day on July 26
https://treeday.planetark.org/

1 AUGUST–30 OCTOBER
Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA) 24
Codes in Parallel: an investigation into the multivarious languages codified in contemporary craft. Exhibitions, conference and events. 2024, Perth, Western Australia
https://indianoceancraftriennial.com/

10 AUGUST–27 OCTOBER
MAKE Award and Australian Design Centre
Exhibition tours to Geelong Gallery, Victoria
https://makeaward.au/

19-25 AUGUST
National Skills Week
Raising the status of skills and vocational learning. Showcasing career opportunities.
https://www.nationalskillsweek.com.au/

3–6 SEPTEMBER
Futuring Craft 24: The Value of Craft
An international conference which 'contemplates the various languages inherent in contemporary crafts' held within Indian Ocean Craft Triennial (IOTA24).
https://indianoceancraftriennial.com/

4 SEPTEMBER
Maker of the Year presented by Carbatec
Entries close 11:59pm AEDT for Wood Review's awards for fine woodworkers and wood artists.
Information and entry at
www.woodreview.com.au/moty

Travels with Woodwork

As a furniture maker who is also an Olympic rifle shooter, Dane Sampson frequently travels. He tells how he made a rocking chair that he could take on a plane and deliver to an overseas friend.

I have always wanted to be a woodworker. As a small child I often said was going to be a carpenter when I grew up. I always had a desire to work with wood, be it turning, repairing, designing or building. I don't recall when I first began delving into woodcraft, but I was 13 when my mum's father gave me his lathe and I tried turning – and that was when I truly found my love of woodworking.

Woodwork has been in my family going back to the mid-1800s – my paternal great grandfather was a carpenter and I use some of his tools to this day. I have two wood infill planes that I use in a lot of my work, one of which I use as a finishing plane and which I believe dates from the 1870s. I try to finish a lot of my work

Main: Dane Sampson, Tessen rocker.
Photos: Sam McLaren

straight off the tool and avoid using sandpaper whenever I can.

I started my apprenticeship in 2004 in antique restoration and custom furniture north of Brisbane. After finishing my apprenticeship in 2008 I began working for Barnes Construction and Joinery. Most of that time was spent working on the restoration of St John's Cathedral in Brisbane. Working with Barnes is where I obtained most of my knowledge of the technicalities of tuning hand planes, and of traditional joinery practices.

From there I took some leave from woodwork to pursue my sporting goals. I still did odd jobs here and there in Adelaide, including building a custom staircase made from jarrah. The staircase took up about six months of work spread over about two years whilst I competed and travelled for my sport. I spent some time working with another joinery until acquiring a workshop of my own in 2022.

Design influences

The design of this rocker comes from several influences. Firstly, I wanted to make a comfortable and ergonomic lounge chair, one that I would have in my own home. I studied two pictures taken the same day of my parents sitting in the same chair, the same way. I can't see the chair but imagined from how they are sitting what it might look like. It was important that the chair was aesthetically pleasing but also functional and comfortable. I particularly wanted to focus on back support.

On one of my sporting trips to Sweden I sat in a Bruno Mathsson *Pernilla* lounge chair, a piece owned by a friend of mine and very much enjoyed how it was instantly comfortable and supportive. I also liked the criss-cross webbing used as the upholstery. The *Pernilla* chair, like most of Bruno's work, is made up of laminated parts, common for mid-century Scandinavian furniture. My love of joinery, and also not having the equipment needed to produce laminations to the standard I would like, led me down a different path.

I have always liked Art Nouveau design, particularly the large curves, and these often find their way into my designs. Maybe there is a hidden influence from my great grandfather as he was producing furniture in the early 1900s, the middle of the Art Nouveau period.

Developing a design

When designing furniture I begin with an idea as a whole, envisioning the finished piece, rather than the function or frame. I like to start with a shape that appeals to my eye and then figure out what kind of furniture I can apply it to. Because of this I do

1. The main parts of the side frame were cut but shaped after joining and fitting.
2. The triangulated side frame joinery was complex – adjusting one mortise and tenon joint meant adjusting the others until all were perfect.
3. Machining mortises in the rocker 'blocks'.
4. Fitting the rocker blocks to the side frames – plenty of material was left for adjustments before final shaping.

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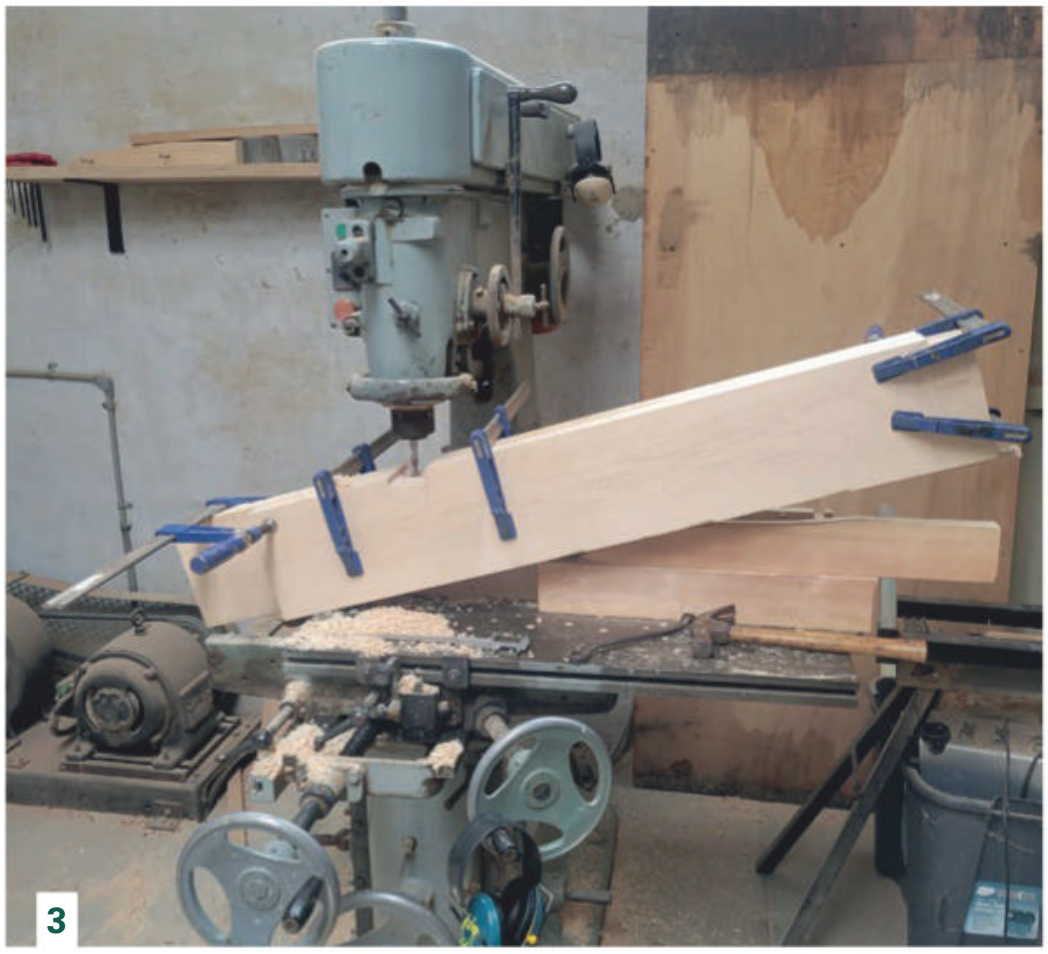


3

4

a lot of my design sketches with charcoal rather than pencil. From a charcoal sketch, I then do full size drawings on MDF that I take all measurements from and use as a pattern guide. The sketch and the drawing help me make sure the proportions are correct and pleasing to the eye.

The initial sketch for this chair was the side frame, however it was some time before I worked on the design again. It wasn't until a friend in Sweden asked if I could make her a rocking chair for a nursery as she was expecting her first child. I thought of my charcoal sketch and said, 'Well I just happen to have a design that could be perfect'.

Some of the design features were made with the idea that the person sitting in it would be nursing a baby. I wanted the curved arms to support the elbows in a natural position, and the angle of the back had to be comfortable for long periods and provide enough support for a parent and growing child. I didn't want the chair to look like a typical nursery rocking chair – it had to stand the test of time aesthetically.

Fig. 1 Frames (mm), not to scale

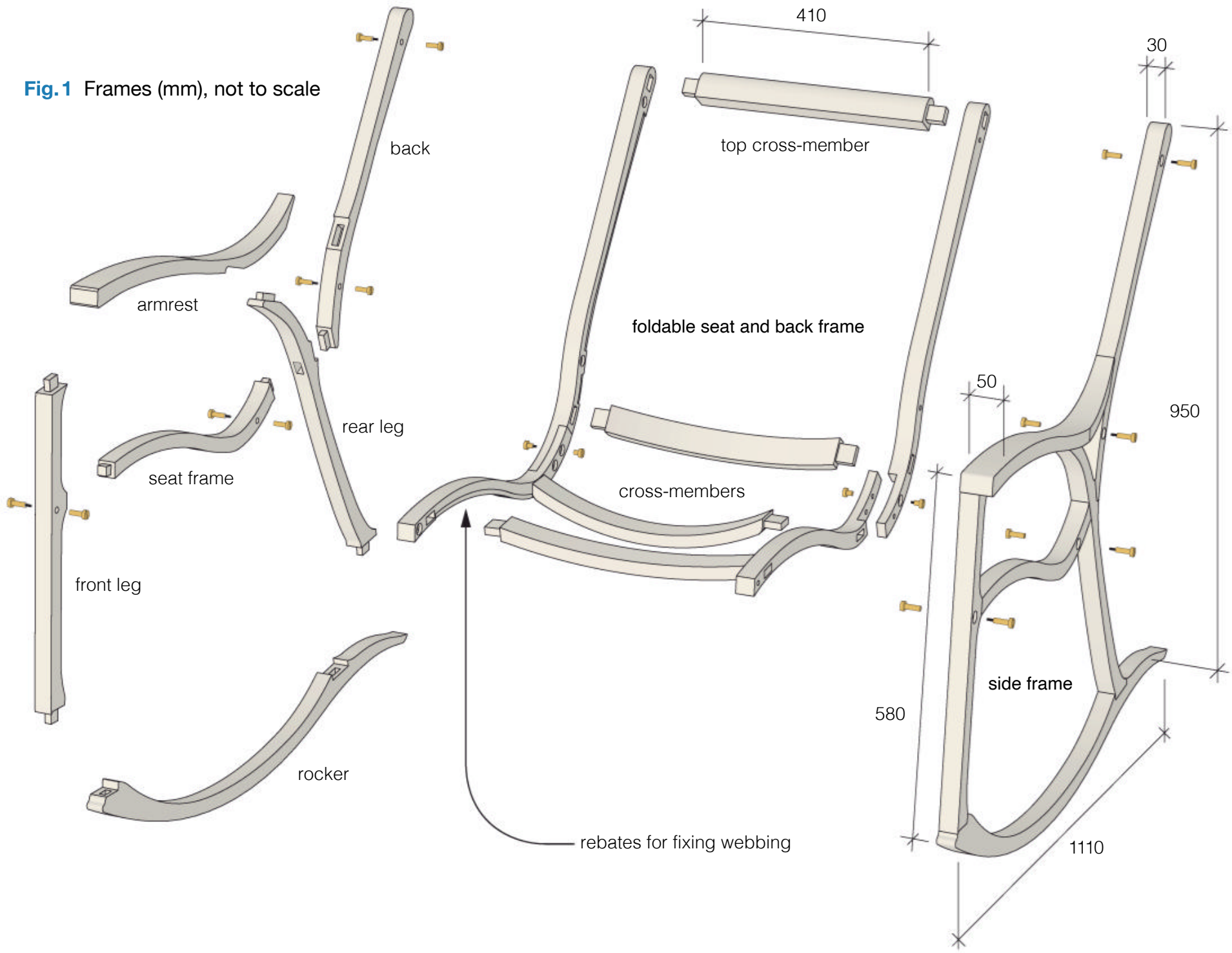


Fig. 2 Component profiles 1:10

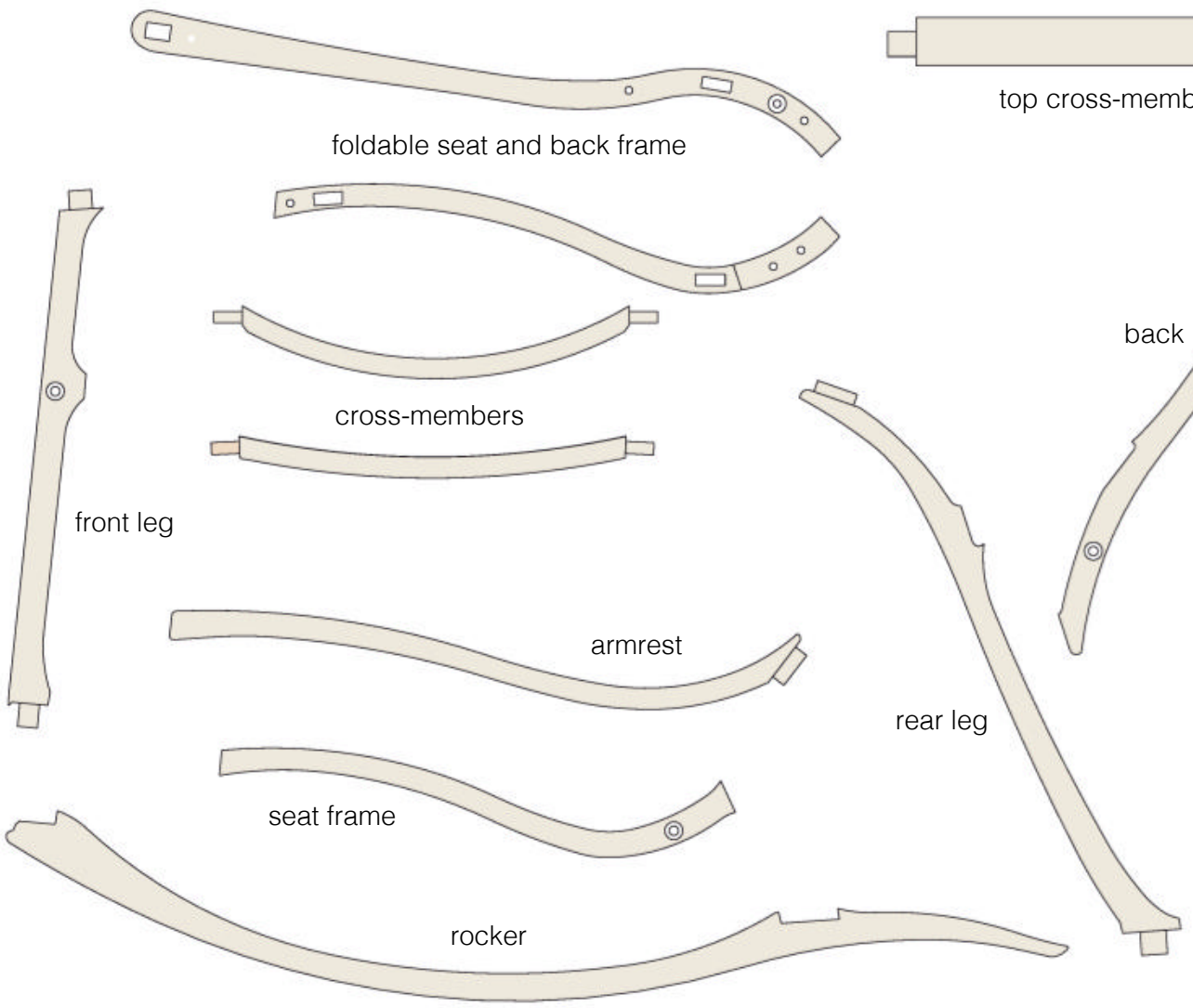
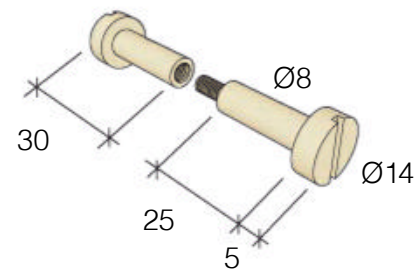


Fig. 3 Clamping bolt (mm)



One of the problems I faced was how to get the chair from Australia to Sweden without a significant shipping cost. I considered building it in Sweden, but this presented its own complications. Ultimately, I decided the design would be the solution to the problem – the seat and back would be a foldable unit with separate side frames – three pieces which could be easily transported and put together.

Making the chair

Because of the large curves and areas with some short grain I chose to use American rock maple. Rock maple is tight grained and strong, which allowed me to make the shapes from solid wood. My old Wadkin patternmakers mill came in very handy as almost nothing on the chair is straight or square.

Every joint has mortise and tenon joinery. Because of the complex nature of the irregular mortise and tenon joints in the side frame I had to make multiple patterns – some to include the tenon, and some without for the shoulders of the joint.

The part of the side frame where three structural pieces meet with a mortise a third of the way along and a tenon at the end of each, as seen in **photo 1**, needs very precise fitting and was the most difficult to get perfect.

The side frame parts were first machined with the patternmakers mill, before making fine adjustments so the joint was perfect, not only in isolation, but in relation to the other two joints. Any mis-fitting of these joints takes away from the strength in the frame and will compound at the extremities, meaning the left and right-side frames won't match up.

With three mortise and tenon joints opposing each other, adjusting one joint in turn means adjusting all joints (**photo 2**). However once fitted, these three joints create a triangulated and therefore very strong structure which the rest of the chair is built off.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Once this three-piece structure is glued, the other components can be added one at a time. I first made a block that the rockers were cut from (**photo 3**), and then fitted the rear leg tenon. From that, the front leg and seat frame support rail could be made. With each piece added I left plenty of material on the rocker block so any fine adjustments to the joinery could be made as I went along (**photo 4, 5**). The last part of the side frame is cutting out the rockers with the final shaping done after the last glue-up.

The back and the seat are simple, square frames built to match the shape of the side frames and to create a smooth and simple silhouette (**photos 6, 7**). The cross-member rails for the seat and back are curved to allow for the give in the upholstery so there won't be timber under the seat or in the lower back area of the person seated. The seat frame needs to be substantial enough to take the force the webbing puts on the structure as it is fitted (**photos 8, 9**).

The whole construction is held together with two different sizes of custom brass bolts that I designed and that my father, a welder, machined (**photos 10, 11**). I chose white cotton webbing for the fabric, in keeping with the light Scandinavian look I was aiming for. In future I would like to use Danish webbing as this high quality product will work beautifully with the Scandinavian style of the chair.

Although I used patterns and profile router cutters where I could, there was still a lot of hand work shaping different parts like the arms and rockers. The rock maple was a pleasure to work and has quickly become one of my favourite timbers. To best show the timber and keep a soft look, the chair was finished in tung oil and a wax product. This finish works particularly well on hard dense timbers like rock maple. It is also very easy to replenish and helps to produce a beautiful patina.


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Getting to Sweden

For the trip to Upssala, I flat packed the chair parts in a blanket to cushion blows and then wrapped the entire package in cling wrap. The whole package weighed only 18kg, making it easy to tuck it under my arm while jumping on a train. At my friend's house in the Swedish countryside, I was able to put the chair together in minutes in her lounge room with minimal tools as she made dinner for her husband, newborn son and I.

The moment before a person sees the product you express yourself through is fraught with anxiety and expectation, however the moment they see it and love it makes all the hard work worthwhile. When someone orders an original piece and gives me the chance to design it, I always name the piece after them, hence calling it the *Tessen* rocker.

My goal is always to create something with a story before it is even made. To have that story grow as the piece ages, as people and family memories fill its grain and become part of it and their lives for generations.

The table your family sat at as a child, a turned sculpture your father rests his watch on, a stool your mother has for her glasses and tea, a bookshelf your sister makes a library from and a rocking chair a friend nurses her child in... All just start out as a stick of timber. An idea and someone trying to express their creativity through their passion. That's what makes every piece unique and special. That is what I aim for with all my designs and that's what pushes me to always strive for the highest quality I can produce. Art with wood to last through the ages.

Process photos: Dane Sampson
Illustration: Graham Sands

5. Another view of the side frames while fitting the join to the rocker.

6,7. The folding back and seat frame unit was shaped to fit the side frame.

8. The seat and back cross-members were curved for comfort and to allow for give in the upholstery.

9. Showing a completed side frame and the foldable seat and back.

10,11. Custom designed brass clamping bolts look good while allowing for easy assembly.

Aside from being an accomplished woodworker, Dane Sampson has competed at the London 2012, Rio 2016 and 2021 Toyko Olympic Games, and at time of writing, attending qualifying competitions for this year's Paris Olympics. His sport has taken him to 33 countries and he has been regarded as the best for his respective events in Australia for the last 10 years. He started shooting at the age of 12, around the same time his woodworking life also began. 'There are certainly some parallels between rifle shooting and woodwork', he says. 'Like any two trades or practices, when aiming for high quality performance the mental attitude is always the same. Problem solving and focus are skills that can be practised in both, and the sensitivity with hand eye coordination is needed for both also.' Learn more about Dane Sampson at https://www.genotfurniture.com/

The Art and Craft of Straw Marquetry

In the wake of a new revival, the craft of straw marquetry has unleashed a world of colour and patterning. Story by Laura Inguaggiato.

Straw marquetry is a centuries old craft that sees the use of straw applied to furniture and other objects in decorative patterns. Its popularity has waxed and waned, however today marquetries of ribbon-thin, flattened straw may be seen in some of the most luxurious homes, shops and hotels, as a new aesthetic that offers vivid and mesmerising colours and patterns.

Knowledge lost and found

Straw marquetry is thought to have originated in Asia before appearing in Europe in the 17th century. The technique spread rapidly, and after an adaptation to European tastes, quickly became popular in bourgeois circles where it was used on a range of substrates. Examples of this are the wood and cardboard boxes created for special occasions and religious celebrations.

Another example are the Easter eggs covered in straw marquetry which are still a common tradition in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately only a few antique testimonies to straw-covered objects have survived, possibly due to the perishable substrates they were applied to, and perhaps also because they were not as highly valued as their wood marquetry counterparts.

Straw marquetry was once even called 'the gold of the poor' due to the bright and modest nature of this material, indicating that it was probably used for reasons of economy rather than preference.

Main: Laura Inguaggiato in her studio. *Photo: Sid Marin*

Top: Woodward Hotel, Geneva interior designed by Pierre-Yves Rochon with Lison de Caunes straw marquetry panels. *Photo: Gaëlle le Boulicaut*

Above: Straw marquetry artist and ambassador Lison de Caunes with her collection of antique straw marquetry objects. *Photo courtesy Lison de Caunes*

Clockwise from above: Lison de Caunes, *Madras* coffee table detail. *Photo courtesy Lison de Caunes*

Lison de Caunes, *Egg Collection. Photo: Gilles Trillard*

Florescence Collection coffee table and boxes by A&A, Adam Goodrum and Arthur Seigneur. *Photo: Andrew Curtis*

Although some European craftspeople produced straw-covered objects, this was more often done by nuns, convicts and sailors as an extra income sideline. During the Napoleonic wars, straw marquetry became more common due to the large numbers of prisoners kept in European jails. Great examples of incredibly delicate artworks made by convicts can still be found today. The 18th and early 19th centuries are considered the most refined period for straw marquetry, even if it was still regarded more as a folk art rather than a high-level craft.

After being forgotten for decades, straw marquetry regained in popularity during the Art Deco period in France thanks to the designers Paul Poiré, André Groult and Jean Michel Frank.

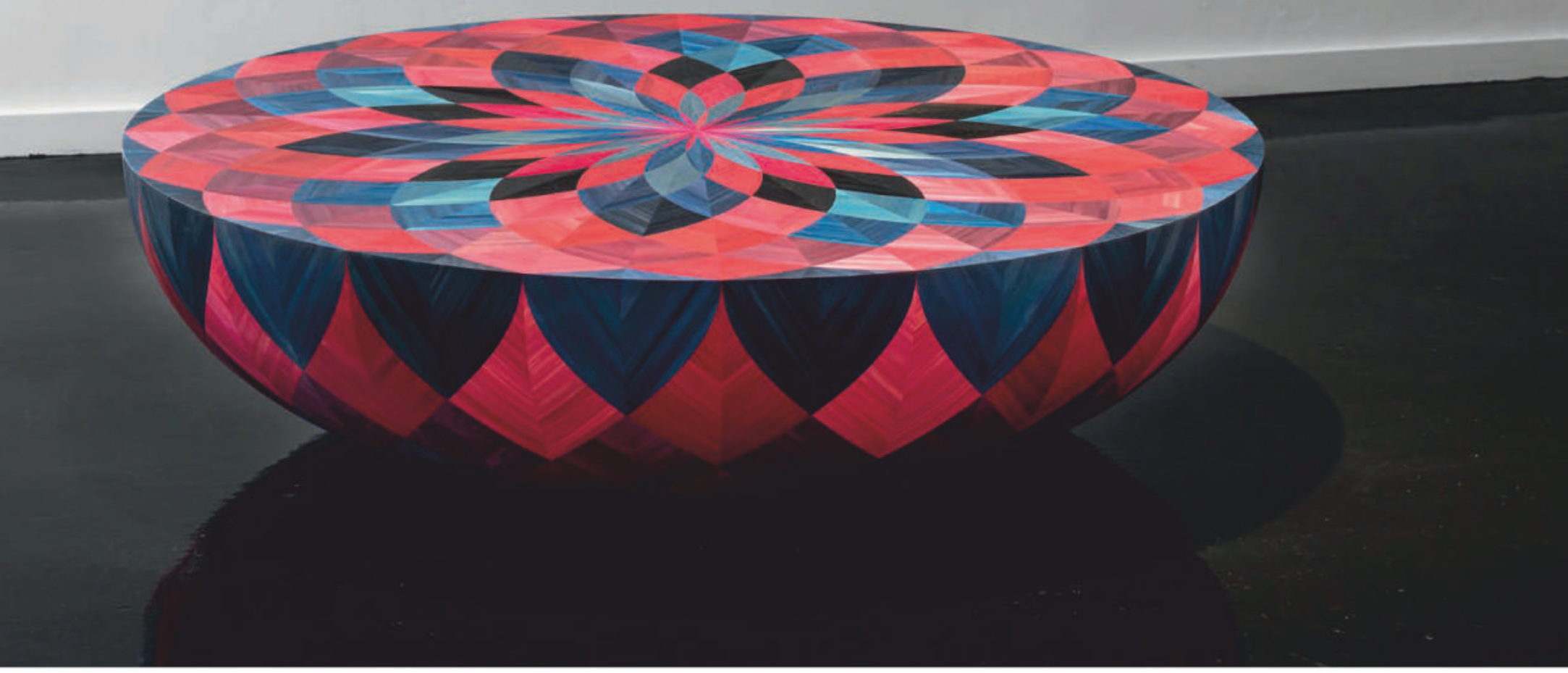
For the first time straw appeared on expensive furniture and on wall panels inside luxury apartments, and thus entered the world of high-end craftsmanship. This trend became widespread, especially in France. Jean Cocteau, the famous French writer and artist, even said that Jean Michel Frank was the man who had put Parisian society *sur la paille*, an expression meaning 'put on straw' and signifying financial ruin. But once again this popularity faded, and straw marquetry was once more neglected, after the Art Deco movement ended.

It was only in the 1980s, when Lison de Caunes, Andre Groult's granddaughter, started to work on the recognition for this art form that straw marquetry re-emerged again in the furniture industry. Surrounded since childhood by straw-covered objects, and influenced by the work of her grandfather, she started by restoring straw Art Deco furniture, which was back in fashion, and worked to promote this craft by making contemporary creations with a modern aesthetic.

It took Lison de Caune many years, however today straw marquetry is recognised throughout the world as a refined craft. There are now dozens of straw marquetry workshops on almost every continent, developing their own techniques and aesthetics. Straw marquetry today has even crossed the border between craft and modern art with the sculptural furniture of Adam and Arthur, the award winning Australian duo, Adam Goodrum and Arthur Seigneur.

Straw types

Straw has always been used in housing, from roofs to mattresses and chair seats. For marquetry, rye straw is most often used, although rice and wheat straw can also be used. The main producers of rye straw suitable for marquetry are based in France, where only a few farmers still grow it. Straw grown for bread is destroyed during the



harvest process, while straw used for marquetry is carefully cut before grain formation. The strands are then dried, sorted, and dyed, usually by the grower as well.

The marquetry produced is subject to the natural variation of the material. In some years, the straw will be longer and denser, in others it will be darker, thicker or thinner. As every single strand is unique, the variety of the natural shades of the straw remain visible even when dyed, and lend a natural beauty to the marquetry produced.

Another characteristic of this material is its brightness. Once flattened, straw becomes an incredibly shiny material as it contains a fine layer of silica on its outer surface, making it soft and smooth. This natural phenomenon exempts straw creations from requiring an applied finish, as this silica coating makes it naturally durable and water-resistant.

Technique rediscovered

As a long-forgotten craft, it's been a case of each craftsperson rediscovering the technique and making their own innovations. The basics however are common to all and require only a few hand tools.

For a simple pattern, the only equipment required is a bone (or plastic) 'folder', PVA glue, a brush, scalpel, ruler and rags.

The first step is to flatten the straw. Each strand is split and pressed on a board with a bone folder in a continuous

Showing the materials and tools required.
Photo: Sid Marin

1. Flattening the straw

2,3. Gluing the straw

4. Cutting the straw

5. Cleaning the marquetry

Process photos: Sid Marin

Opposite page: *Vertigo*, made and photographed by Moea Vonsy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flattening movement. Careful preparation of the material is a repetitive and time-consuming but essential – well-flattened straw will achieve a high-quality composition.

After flattening, gluing comes next. Each ribbon is glued in sequence on its matt side with a thin layer of PVA and gently pressed with the bone folder. A continuous back and forth movement of the folder not only helps to flatten the straw onto the surface, but also allows the glue to heat up and adhere more quickly.

After the first strand is well glued the others are glued edge to edge by repeating the same procedure until the composition is done.

The complexity of straw marquetry is embodied in this simple action. For quality work each strand must be glued without any visible gaps and there must not be any overlapping so each strand fully adheres and won't loosen over time. This really is the tricky part, even for an experienced craftsperson, but the more you work with straw the more your sight and your sense of touch will learn to feel all those imperfections and prevent you from doing it.

As straw is a natural material and not always straight, cutting a bit off the strands after gluing will allow you to work from a straight line again, and help avoid overlapping.

The final step is the cleaning and finishing of the marquetry. To remove any glue residue the work is firmly wiped with a small cloth with a little moisture added to remove any stains. Friction will remove glue from straw with its silica coating, however it's really important to not wipe too strongly or to add too much moisture to avoid damaging the work. Once everything has been cleaned, the piece can be flattened again with the bone folder to create a soft unified appearance. As mentioned, there is absolutely no need or recommendation to sand or varnish straw marquetry, as this will destroy the thin silica layer and make the straw less shiny and moisture resistant.

The process may seem simple however a lot of practice is required to make even a basic pattern look good. It has been said that straw marquetry is one of those 'easy to learn, hard to master' crafts and while this should in no way dissuade you from trying, you will quickly realise there is truth in that saying.

Learn more at:
Lapin Furniture https://www.lapinfurniture.com/
Lison de Caunes https://www.lisondecaunes.com/en/
Adam and Arthur: https://www.adamandarthur.com/

Laura Inguaggiato began her career at Ateliers Lison de Caunes in Paris after completing a degree in fine furniture making and design in France. She then worked for Adam and Arthur in Melbourne on straw marquetry and project monitoring, 'blending the frontier between art and craft and mixing traditional high-end skills with new technology'. She also works on her own projects in wood and straw at Lapin Furniture, a homeware and furniture workshop she set up with Louen Pinpin. Her past work has been exhibited during Paris Design Week and techniques she has developed were published in Australian Wood Review#118.

Laura is now teaching straw marquetry at Melbourne Woodworking Courses in Box Hill https://melbournewoodworkingcourses.com.au/

The Medium is the Message

He's Tasmanian but lives in London. His designs are licensed and made in Europe and elsewhere. His works are in public and private collections. He's a master of digital design but likes to keep it hands-on...and increasingly, he's driven by environmental concerns. Meet Brodie Neill. Story by Linda Nathan.

Oceans of plastic debris and kilometres of thin veneer can be found in the furniture creations of London-based but Tasmanian-bred designer Brodie Neill.

Organically and often futuristically streamlined, his furniture is generally made from recycled and abandoned materials and carries a stern message that is cloaked in beauty.

Brodie Neill, 43, is a designer with an extraordinary range. Complex forms are conceptualised and realised through painstaking iterations. He's a master of digital design who also likes to get his hands on the work, even though some of his designs will only ever be made by others. Wood, metal, plastic and more are transformed and combined.

His works are licensed, commissioned, exhibited and reside in private and public collections in several continents. He's had a lot of press and currently has a recently acquired piece on show at the National Gallery of Victoria as part of the NGV Triennial.

Twenty years ago Brodie completed an honours degree in furniture design at the University of Tasmania – that was in the days when John Smith headed the course and Kevin Perkins also taught there. 'It gave me a great foundation, not only physically making things but being quite experimental with processes, forms and materials,' said Brodie. 'The things I learnt still echo in my ears and are very much the foundation of things.'

It started before that though, 'I was making things when I was probably 12', Brodie said. His British-born grandfather was 'a problem solver who built houses and taught trades and engineering'. It was in the blood so to speak, 'Some people go as far as to say it was reincarnation…and I have his tools in my studio here, beautiful tools engraved with his name that must be about 80 years old'.

Receiving a fellowship from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) sent him next to the USA to do his Masters. 'That's where the digital and the handmade literally

Main: Brodie Neill with strips of Hydrowood veneer offcuts.

1. Recently acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria and on show until March within the NGV Triennial, *Recoil* (2021) is made from Huon pine, eucalypt, celery top pine, sassafras, myrtle and blackwood veneers recovered by Hydrowood from submerged trees in the Pieman River Valley. *Photo: Eugene Hyland*

2. It took around 60 hours to hand coil the strips estimated to extend some 3.5 kilometres. 'Other than the lacquering, everything was done in-house. It's very difficult to explain how to make that table. You've really got to feel the materials and see how they behave.' *Photos opposite and above: Mark Cocksedge*

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went hand in hand. I was confident with my making skills, so that's where I was able to explore digital design tools as an extension of imagination and how that might be brought into not just visualisation like rendering, but to also be able to break down the complex configurations. In later years that got into quite advanced projects like the (*Recoil*) table currently on show at the NGV that is very much an example of those two worlds coming together.'

'After graduating from RISD I had a sketch book and a head full of ideas and was ready to embark on my career. In New York City I got a job designing point-of-purchase displays for L'Oréal stores. It gave me a taste of that world and it wasn't for me. I really wanted to embark on a career as a furniture designer.

'In 2005, along with a friend from RISD, who also graduated, we took an exhibition to SaloneSatellite in Milan – the young designers' platform, where talent scouts search for new designers and new ideas. And I was very fortunate to pick up a couple of Milanese companies who still produce my work today in that kind of licensing model. But I always craved making, and designing for licensing is a very 'hands-off' approach – you really do just hand over the drawing or the CAD and leave it to someone else to figure out, which is a shame because that was the magic that I wanted to be part of and wanted to do.

'So then I wanted to get back into being that kind of Tasmanian designer maker, doing experimental, functional art design pieces. And because my focus was in Europe and because I could (with British ancestry), I relocated to London in 2005, still a youngish man. It was a vibrant, really creative place and my work really kind of germinated in those first few years. We did some signature pieces like the *E-Turn* (as in eternity) bench and the *@Chair,* a seamless mobius strip chair that was acquired by the Art Gallery of South of Australia in 2023.'

Working across a wide range of materials and combining them has meant years of research and inquiry. 'We've done everything from cast glass to upholstery to…everything really. It keeps things interesting for me. I'm always envious of the Japanese master that keeps repeating the same process over and over to absolute perfection – I'm just not that person.'

As well as licensing certain designs out, Brodie has his own 'self produced' Made in Ratio brand, designs that are sometimes produced in-house, or at other times in batches through partner workshops in the UK or in Europe, Asia and Australia.

Over the years his business model has changed. 'There were stages; early career was production, trying to get a foot in the door of the

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3. *E-Turn* (2022), *stainless steel. A* seamless mobius strip seat acquired by the Art Gallery of South of Australia in 2023. *Photo: Angela Moore*

4. *Jet Desk:* 'An energetic adaptation of a side desk. The graphite form swoops around from the front legs to the flat surface before becoming a single support.' *Photo: Alex Hamilton*

5. Made in Ratio *Alpha Chair (*2015): 'Solid-wood, all-purpose, stackable. An A-shaped structure where the back legs and backrest are organically and sensually moulded into one.' *Photo: Elliott Lowe*

6. '*Gyro* substitutes examples of precious marble, timber and ivory with "ocean terrazzo", a material produced from fragments of ocean plastic waste.' *Photo: Angela Moore*

7. Made in Ratio *Rotor Stools* in walnut with leather padded seats are 'inspired by sacred geometry.' Shown with Stellarnova table in marble with bronze legs. *Photo: Mark Cocksedge*

Italian industrial design model, and then in 2008/9 we moved to limited editions making kind of spectacular pieces.' The latter were produced in conjunction with a London and Paris based gallery. 'A lot of these pieces were material-based concepts. I would design and render the pieces and produce material samples and models as a proof of concept. The gallery would then have limited edition rights to produce, distribute and sell them.'

The GFC in 2008 affected the high art design market and there was also a push to make design more affordable and accessible, explained Brodie. Coupled with a desire to invoke his roots as a maker, the range launched in 2013 signalled a return to being part of the process. The *Alpha Chair, Cowrie Chair* and *Cowrie Rocker,* and *Stellarnova* series are all part of the studio's Made in Ratio brand that celebrated its tenth year in 2023. 'It was a way to get hands dirty again and get back into it. We were designing limited edition pieces, but they were just kept in galleries and even worse, kept in a crate, so we wanted to make things that were accessible and that we could fulfil orders for.'

'Where do you get all your ideas from?', I asked. 'They really are what-if moments…just curiosity as to what might happen if you put two-and-two together. They certainly don't happen when I'm sitting at my desk sketching. They happen when I'm out walking on the beach, through the woods, on the street…and you just kind of get these ideas. I must admit I'm not a very good designer-for-hire. If you said: "I'll give you two weeks to come up with an idea for something,"….I could sit there and fester and come up with various things and it just won't happen.'
'So you're a bit more spontaneous?', I suggested. 'Yeah, and when you do get those spontaneous ideas you really do have to focus on them and see them through.'

The process for developing a new edition piece can take quite a bit of time. 'I would probably have a list of ideas that I would love to explore. For example, the *Recoil* table was an idea for a couple of years before we did anything with it. We basically took some scraps of veneer and started coiling them to try and recreate the annual rings of a tree, and it was a disaster! It didn't work, but there were areas that were successful and if some of those issues could be resolved then there could be something special there. And I think you've just got to kind of chase that.'

8. *Origin (*2021), reclaimed wenge herringbone flooring and glass. 'An organic skimming stone shaped for set on an architectural glass element, making a bench that transforms the prosaic into the poetic.' *Photos: Mark Cocksedge*

9. *Meridian* (2022), 1000 parquet blocks were painstakingly refurbished, stack laminated and carved into the contour lines of a curved bench seat. *Photo: Angela Moore*

10. *Latitude*, 422 recycled pinewood dowels are interlaced in a sequence 'elevating salvaged wood to new heights whilst bridging the material properties of old and new'. *Photo: Brodie Neill*

11. Made in Ratio *Cowrie Chair*, 2013, veneered ash plywood. The shape is inspired by the concave lines of seashells. 'A contemporary bentwood occasional lounge chair that fuses art and design into one.' *Photo: Elliott Lowe*

12. *Cowrie Rocker* (2012). 'The secret to the concave form is the removal of surface tension from within the centre of the plywood leaves. Developed in unison with its sister design the *Cowrie Chair*, extensive form explorations began in paper, card and then ply before I made the first full scale prototypes in a workshop in Hackney, London. From these experiments, prototyping moved to a timber engineering company in the north of England, before full scale production moved to Belgium where it has continued ever since.' *Photo: Mark Cocksedge*

13. *Torso Side Tables*, panga-panga (wenge) parquet blocks 'salvaged from a school in Leicester, where it lay as a herringbone floor for almost 60 years'. *Photo: Angela Moore*


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When Brodie Neill says 'We have a lot of little ideas', you could be forgiven for thinking that is an understatement. Coming back to ideas seeded years before and working through forms, processes and prototypes takes persistence. Coiling three kilometres of mixed Tasmanian veneer strips, or for that matter coalescing a miscellany of reclaimed plastic ocean flotsam into glued-up and resplendent tabletops – these are not exactly weekend warrior projects.

'Working from home, there were 10 to 12 smaller iterations (of *Recoil*) and we eventually stumbled on a way of keeping the tension. It's like coiling a spring – you've got to keep the tension on using traditional things like veneer tape. We came back to it over a period of time, maybe five or six years. After I was approached to do an event for London Craft Week with Design Tasmania, I thought it was an opportunity to do a very Tasmanian collaboration and showcase.'

It was also about utilising offcuts and waste. Hydrowood gathered what were basically workshop seconds or offcuts from other designers, unusable for most other producers. These pieces are not models for large scale production but designed to say something about the material, its origins and value, and our attitudes to its usage.

'Every product that we do in this ilk is definitely a message,' said Brodie. 'It's showing resourcefulness, an alternative to what waste can be and a demonstration of innovation.' These scraps would literally be thrown away, mulched, incinerated…'

'How important is it to you to get that word out?' I asked. 'It runs through all my work, from the work we do with ocean plastics to recycled metals, and reclaimed woods. We did a whole series of pieces where we took 6,000 parquet floor pieces, beautiful African


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wenge laid in the 1950s – a material that I would not touch in its virgin state because of the chain of action involved in logging and exporting it out of the Congo – but here's a material that's secondhand, waste, and covered with the bitumen used to glue it down and would otherwise be burnt for heat. And it's the most gorgeous wood. We found an effective way to remove the bitumen and the tongue and groove.'

The plastic waste used in some of Brodie's work comes from ocean gyres or garbage patches. 'These are predominantly in the Pacific but we collect it from lots of places – the West coast of Tasmania, the Roaring 40s that whip around the southern coast of Tasmania. There are amazing people who collect this kind of stuff. 'I came back from Tasmania once with an extra suitcase packed to the brim with tiny fragments of ocean plastic. Hawaii is where we get most of it, and we get it by the absolute sackload. The middle of the Pacific is where most of it congregates.'

New works 'wood ones, very different' are on the horizon but the focus is still personal. 'I love the experimentation, having an idea, breaking it down into processes and then realising it. And then, at the end of the day, when it's finished, stepping back and seeing it there.'

To others Brodie Neill certainly seems like someone who has literally 'made it', so what's his advice for aspiring designer makers? 'I always say, follow your own ideas. I know it sounds a bit cheesy, but you can be very influenced by trends or things you see in magazines or on Instagram, but the real essence of something new is when people embark on new adventures and their own ideas.'

Learn more about Brodie Neill @brodieneill at https://brodieneill.com/ and at www.madeinratio.com

Buy the Pack

Some tips on buying larger quantities of timber, and how to figure out which sizes and sections you need for a given project. Story by David Luckensmeyer.

In the beginning, I bought timber at woodworking shows or swapped boards with mates. As my skills and aspirations progressed, I looked for timber merchants who sold by the lineal metre. But at some point, larger projects came along and I needed more timber.

I had no experience buying timber by volume (m^3). So the first time I looked through tally sheets, I was quite lost. How much timber do I need? Which pack is better? What about bad boards? And how do I get so much timber into my workshop? Read on to find out what you need to know when purchasing more than a board or ten.

Develop relationships

Where you buy is more important than price. Some timber merchants offer an accurate assessment of their timber and price accordingly. Others might sell improperly dried timber, or hide unusable boards in the middle of a pack.

Be upfront with your expectations. Are you looking for the best price on a commonly available species, or are you willing to pay top-dollar for stellar widths and figure?

As your purchases grow in size and frequency, professional relationships often result in win-win transactions. Your loyalty ensures repeat sales and merchants tend to look after you.

Finally, there is a common misconception that only businesses (with an ABN) can access pack rates. This is usually not the case. 'Commercial' in this instance can just mean that you are buying by volume, not by the board.

How much to buy?

Sometimes I've bought way too much and other times not nearly enough. To be honest, that uncertainty is one of the downsides of buying by volume.

Buy what you think you need plus 30%. Most of the extra timber

becomes offcuts which are put away for another (smaller) project. And of course a portion of the pack is turned to sawdust and woodchips.

You can check whether this works for you. Calculate the volume required from your project materials list. During the build, measure the volume of every board used including offcuts. Then determine the difference.

Sometimes the species or project influences the amount of timber required. Some timbers have more defects to cut around, so you might order 40% extra. Or a pack might have the exact sizes required – as such, 20% extra might suffice.

Reading a tally sheet

A tally sheet (or packet report) lists every board in a pack. When you ask for the price and availability of a particular species, your merchant will provide tally sheets for perusal.

Main: A truck loaded with furniture grade hardwood. At approximately 7m³, this is the author's largest timber purchase to date.

1. Some timber merchants welcome walk-ins but a better idea is to make an appointment as the timber you want might be buried.
2. A pack may contain boards with with marked-off sections which are not included in the tally sheet.

TALLY SHEET

Pack 1 (tally for length)

Section	Tally								Vol. m³
100 x 50	6/0.9	3/1.2	5/1.5	1/1.8	27/2.1	2/2.4	23/2.7	2/3.0	0.74

Pack 2 (tally for length and width)

Section	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.6	3.9	Vol. m³
100 x 38	1			1	1	2						
125 x 38	2	2	2	5	2	2	1			1		
150 x 38	4	1	4	11	6	11	2	4	1			
200 x 38			1						1			
250 x 38					1							0.75

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Packs are generally one species of a standard thickness. In Australia, commercial packs are sold in rough-sawn thicknesses of 25, 38, 50, 75 and sometimes even 90mm. Machined timber is always specified, e.g. 'dressed all round' (DAR). Usually packs are 'rough-sawn'.

It is common to purchase a timber thickness to suit the thickest component of your project. For example, if your project calls for a mix of 20–30mm, you would purchase a 38mm pack and resaw for thickness as required, although some merchants offer broken packs for a fee.

Sometimes packs are consistent for length and width. If so, it is easier to obtain a volume amount in cubic metres by converting all measurements to metres. For example, a pack of 85 boards at 3.2m x 100 x 50mm is calculated as follows: 85 x (3.2m x 0.1m x 0.05m) = 1.36m³. More commonly, packs consist of different lengths, either of boards with consistent widths (Pack 1), or boards of different lengths and widths (Pack 2).

It is important to look carefully at tally sheets. Pack 1 might have six boards at 0.9m (not desirable) but these boards add up to very little compared to the 27 boards at 2.1m and 23 boards at 2.7m. Likewise, for Pack 2 note where the bulk of the volume is tallied. Over 0.5m³ is made up of 150 x 38mm boards.

Project materials list vs tally sheets

Deciphering tally sheets is one thing, but comparing a project materials list with potential packs for purchase is another entirely.

The length and width of project pieces need to be taken into account and compared to tally sheets on offer. For example, let's say we want to build a series of tables with chunky legs and 30mm thick tops. The tables are 2.1m long and 1.1m wide with 90 x 90mm legs with a typical height of 750mm.

Pack 1 looks very suitable for the legs. Each 90 x 90mm leg is glued up from two boards (for thickness). The lengths required can be obtained with little waste from nearly every single board tallied.

However, Pack 2 does not look so good for our tops. Just less than half the tally is long enough to glue-up for tabletops, and the longer boards have significant offcuts. It would be far better to find a pack where the bulk of the tally sheet is 2.4m.

The time taken to analyse tally sheets easily pays off. Mentally stepping through the lengths and glue-ups required helps determine which pack or packs are most suitable.

Breaking a pack

Packs are pre-bundled 'packages' or 'packets' of timber in a timber yard or warehouse. Volume purchases means discounted pricing. But it also means pack sizes are fixed, and there is certainly no way to sift through packs and pick the 'best' boards. That's another downside.

You might want 0.8m³ only to find the smallest pack on offer is 1.4m³. Or you might see a bunch of extra wide boards in one pack and wish you could take just those boards and combine it with another pack that looks suitable.

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3. Always make sure to write board lengths on the ends, so you can assess stock levels at a glance.

4. Set aside a dedicated space for offcuts (or 'shorts'). I find one metre deep shelves work best. For me, shorts are any board under 1.2m.

5. The stack on the left has boards of different lengths and random widths (RW) while the stack on the right is mostly consistent for length and width.

6. Timber storage solutions are often dictated by the available space. Loading timber from the end works best for me.

7. Timber yards are quite happy to forklift a pack onto your trailer. Just make sure you know how to strap it down! And check your legal obligations for projecting loads.

Some merchants refuse to break a pack. Some will for a price increase, or for a modest break fee. Some will accommodate your needs because you're a repeat customer. Professional courtesy (on both sides) goes a long way here.

Just keep in mind that if your merchant agrees to break a pack, you still don't get to choose which part of the pack you will receive. In such instances, merchants take whatever comes off the top.

Freight charges

Buying packs of timber usually means a freight company gets involved. Gone are the days of selecting three prize boards, folding down the back seats of your car, and threading said boards through to the front!

Organising freight can seem daunting at first but it is not difficult. Small packs may still fit on a residential trailer. Larger packs are usually too long and require a different solution.

I've rented a car trailer which has ample length and payload capabilities but backing up is not for the faint-hearted. Sometimes the merchant is able to organise a small crane truck. Other times, especially if the purchase is large, a semi-trailer is the only way to go, and you'll have to restack boards inside the shop.

There are multiple companies who offer online quoting and booking of freight services with no 'commercial account' required. Armed with the pack specifications (length, width, height and weight), simply enter the pick-up and drop-off locations and make payment.

Conclusion

Any perceived negatives of buying packs of timber are compensated by the reduced pricing compared to lineal metres or board by board pricing. That said, I must admit that I have far more timber stored in my workshop than is good for me.

Ask a friend or colleague for advice if you need additional help starting out, although part of the learning experience includes making your own professional relationships. After all, there is no woodworking without wood. Good luck!

Photos: David Luckensmeyer

David Luckensmeyer @luckensmeyer is a Brisbane-based woodworker and furniture maker, see www.luckensmeyer.com.au

A Vision for the Future

At the end of a 32-week course, seven new makers showed an impressive range of work that allowed them to explore new skills. Story by Brian Reid.

In May 2023, seven individuals pushed pause on their lives to try something new by beginning full time study at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson, New Zealand. They wanted to learn how to design and make furniture to a high level of craftsmanship.

Learning skills

For some the decision to attend may have been precipitated by the upheaval of the pandemic. For others it was a dream they had nurtured for years, in one case for decades. Most of the students were from New Zealand; two were from the UK and one was from Brazil. Almost half of the students hoped to make woodworking their new profession, the rest were looking for a serious hobby. Their names are Glen Hamilton, Deb Harwood, Gloria Hildred, Steve Judge, Alice Knight, Cam Scott and Arthur Noguiera.

So many readers of Wood Review magazine, I imagine, are craftspeople both professional and amateur. Remember back to the day when at most, you had simply screwed together a bit of timber to make a bookshelf? These students came from a variety of backgrounds: accounting, information technology, music, theatre, non-profit management, and one had recently graduated from high school. Most had never sharpened a

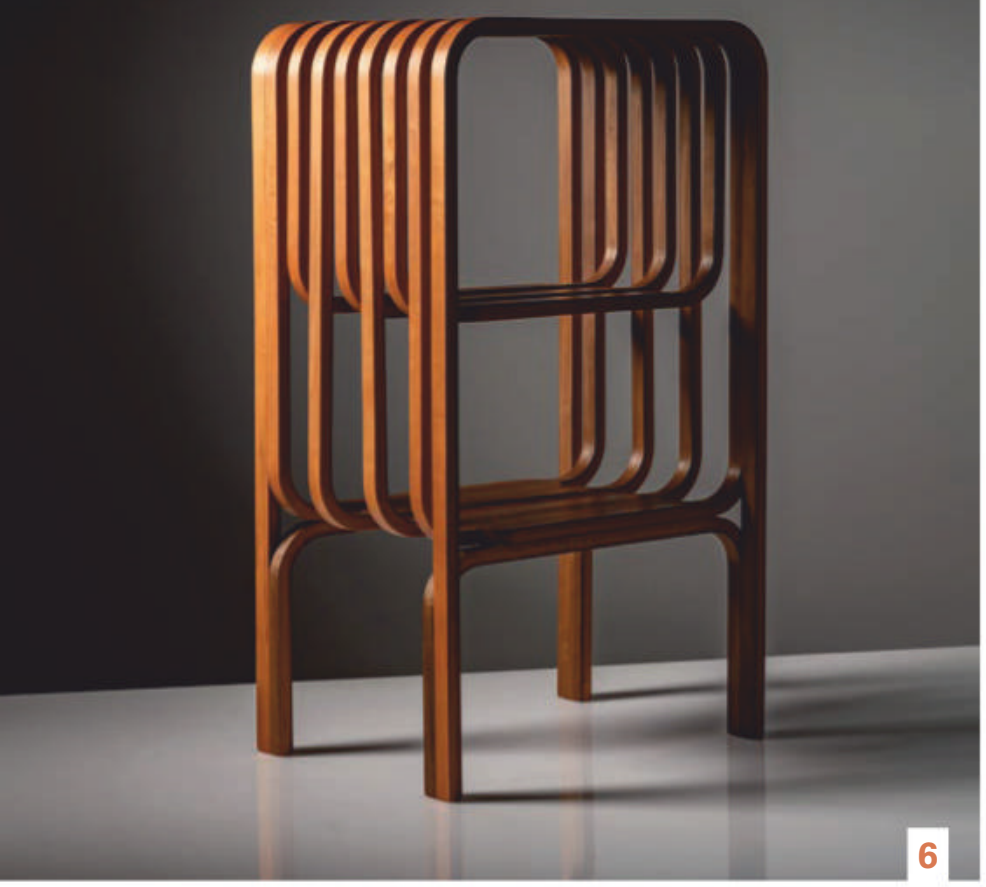
Alice Knight:
1. Dawn Hall Table, American walnut
2. Low Groove Cabinet, American oak
3,4. Curiosity Box, American ash, natural and ebonised
5. Occasional Chair, American oak

chisel, never used machine tools and didn't know that wood expands and contracts. They thought they knew what they were getting into. Little did they know. And yet at the end of a 32-week journey they stood proud.

In the beginning

The students learned from a variety of projects of increasing complexity led by a team of teachers that included Lou Fuller (lead instructor), David Haig, Hape Kiddle, Grant Palliser, Stuart Faulkner and me.

The basics are first taught: hand tools, layout and basic machine techniques. This is the groundwork for all that follows. The first eight weeks culminates in the design and construction of a dovetailed box. This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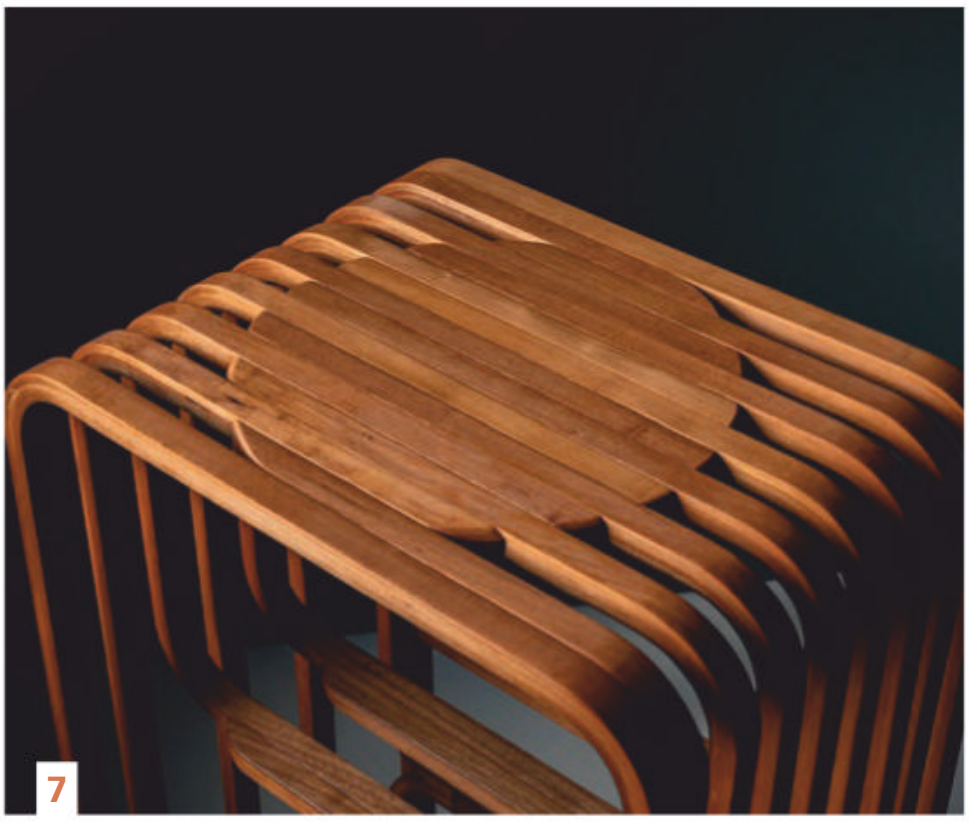
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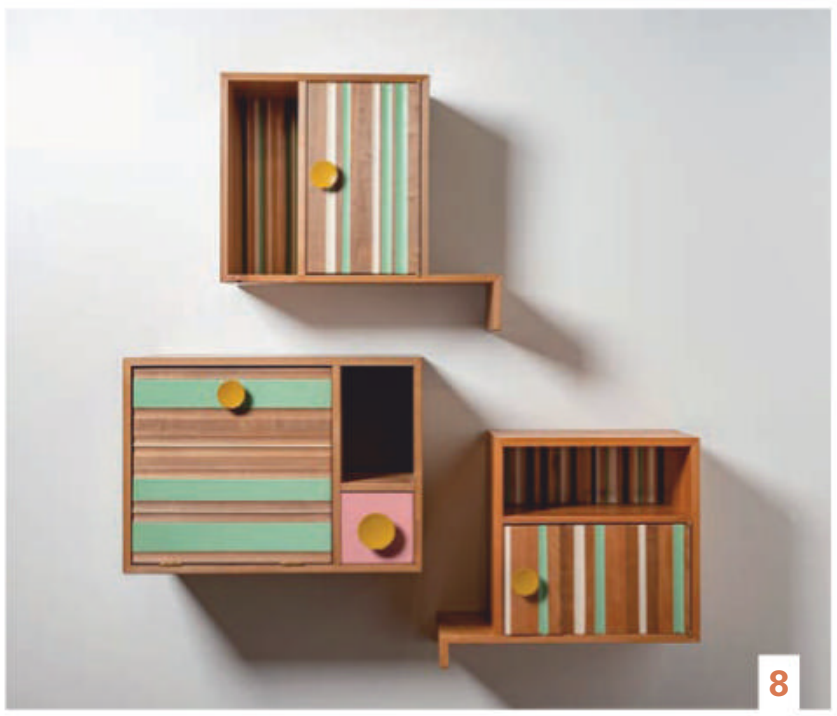
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is the exhilarating part of the program. Everything is new and fresh, easy to comprehend. One just needs to get the mind and the body working together.

Alice Knight's *Curiosity Box* exemplifies the skills taught in the first term. With its gently tapered sides, perfectly fitted lid and complementary use of materials, it is a great example of what can be accomplished, with proper tutelage, in such a short space of time.

Curves ahead

Curvature, steam bending, laminating, kerf bending, brick laying and curved joinery are next taught. So many techniques to cover. The design brief was to design and make a hall table. All of a sudden things are more complicated, confusion takes hold. There's a three-dimensional puzzle to organise in the brain. Ouch! Do I really need geometry?

Cam Scott's *Tidal Table* at first look seems so simple. The S-curve, seemingly easily bent, is quite a technical feat that required a lot of forethought, precise machining and accurate jig making.

Steve Judge's hall table demonstrates the difficulty of joining two curves together. To keep the two legs symmetrical as they pierce the brick laid ring was no easy feat.

Gloria Hildred's table is so simple and yet so appealing with its reference to Art Deco or Gothic design. Her detailing in this piece ties all the components together.

Seat of learning

Designing and making a chair is a pretty daunting task just four months into the program. A chair has sculptural qualities. It is constrained by ergonomics and it has to be comfortable for a huge range of body types. Which takes precedence? For a first chair, an eight-week timeframe is very short. Full-scale mock-ups have to be made. Three-dimensional joinery has to be learned and resolved. Time for a vacation.

Arthur Nogueira's *Anakin Vader* chair is a fairly common form of chair design. But Arthur's design is made more intriguing by the graphic interplay of black-and-white between the frame and the seat.

Glen Hamilton's *Dan-Ash* chair is so nicely resolved. Intentional or


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Deb Harwood:
6,7. Connections Table, NZ red beech, walnut
8. Beach Bach Boxes
9. Admin Box, cherry, American walnut

Glen Hamilton:
10. *Floating Weave Cabinet*, American white ash, sapele
11. *In the Wind Table*, American white ash, sapele
12. *Grounded Box*, mahogany, wenge, American hard maple

Gloria Hildred:
13,14. *Table*, American hard maple, sapele

Arthur Noguiera:
15. *Waters of March Coffee Table*, American ash, kwila, stones
16. *Anakin Vader Chair*, American ash, ebonised walnut
17. *Chisel Box*, maple, walnut, wenge

Steve Judge:
18. *My Treasure Jewellery Box*, American walnut, American maple, silver, pearl
19. *Hall Table*, American walnut, American hard maple
Drinks Cabinet, American cherry

Cam Scott:
20. *Tidal Table*, American white ash, American black walnut, glass
21. *Recluse's Throne*, sapele, upholstery
22. *Hall Table*, American walnut and hard maple


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not I feel he has alluded to elements of historical design periods such as Danish design and maybe Spanish Art Nouveau.

Cabinet complexities

The last and final project of the course was to design and make a cabinet with a piston fit drawer and a hinged door. Numerous joints had to be learned including corner joints such as mitres and fingers, and divider joints such as tapered sliding dovetails and thru wedged-tenons. Process, patience, organisation, problem solving and adaptability were key lessons. Understanding the complexity and interrelatedness of all the components and joints is challenging. The students were wearing out. The projects have to be finished. The end-of-year show is coming up.

Gloria Hildred's *CD and Vinyl cabinet* exemplifies the goals of the last term. Despite being constrained by the function of the cabinet, Gloria included every joint and technique that was taught. She wanted it to be restrained in appearance but appreciated as one discovered the subtle detailing.

Deb Harwood's *Beech Bach Boxes* were another excellent example. The joinery exercises were all there but spread through the three cabinet structures. Deb concentrated on the composition of the design that turned out so nicely. She added colour, something that is generally overlooked in this type of program. Refreshing.

Alice Knight's *Low Groove* as well as Deb's *Beech Bach Boxes* also used texture as an additional design element in the coving of the doors added much to both cabinets' overall appearance.

On show

I'm writing this article just a few days after the exhibition's opening at the Parker Gallery. The students' furniture was exceptionally presented and opening night was well attended and quite packed. I think the students where a bit overwhelmed by the seriousness of the attention they were getting. This was so much more than just friends and family. Works were being purchased by strangers. It was an exhilarating evening, a validation that a year's commitment was worth it. All of us craftspeople who have been through this grind know that this journey was


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an experience of a lifetime. I think Glen, Cam, Gloria, Arthur, Deb, Alice and Steve would agree.

Photos: Daniel Allen

Learn more about the Centre for Fine Woodworking at https://www.cfw.co.nz/

Brian Reid has taught for 25 years at the Centre for Furniture Craftsmanship in Maine, USA and at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in New Zealand since 2015. He trained at Parnham College in Dorset, England, under the tutelage of Robert Ingham and Sir John Makepeace. In 2023 Brian taught the final term in the course which focused on cabinet joinery and design.


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A Renaissance Man in Melbourne

Dan Dwyer steps back in time to find a busy modern day enterprise.

Martin Paul is a classically trained violinist turned luthier repairing and selling stringed instruments from his West Melbourne workshop. His studio is a refuge from the modern world. Should you stroll past on Victoria Street, chances are, you'll see Martin working in his large street-facing window, immersed in north-facing natural light. Martin's collection of vintage tools line the wall behind him, and his assortment of restored wall-mounted instruments sit front and back, some dating to the 18th century.

I arrived to see Martin working on a violin bridge and sound post set-up. He handed me a violin as classical music tingled over dappled light. I peered through the F-holes and saw a beautiful, hand-printed paper label: John Smith, Falkirk, Scotland, the name of a previous luthier. In fact, this violin had been sold by the previous owner of Martin's shop, a decade ago, and was now back for repair, a homecoming of sorts.

The violin's all-important sound is heavily dependent on the sound post, a small, dowel-like cylinder traditionally made from solid spruce that sits vertically inside the

The view in Martin Paul's West Melbourne violin repair workshop. *Photo: Anna Encio*

instrument. The sound post acts as a conduit, transferring vibrations, and therefore sound, throughout the whole instrument.

Martin completed a Bachelor of Music with Honours at Monash. But his real start as a luthier came when he fell under Brenton Fyfield's tutelage. Brenton, who founded the business in 1986 in Richmond, took on Martin who initially started with restringing and doing set-up work, before developing an interest in repair. Martin was uniquely placed for this work due to his violinist background. Brenton arranged for Martin to complete his one-year violin repair apprenticeship at Newark in the English Midlands under luthier John Gosling. The master apprentice succession is now complete – Martin has owned the business for four years.

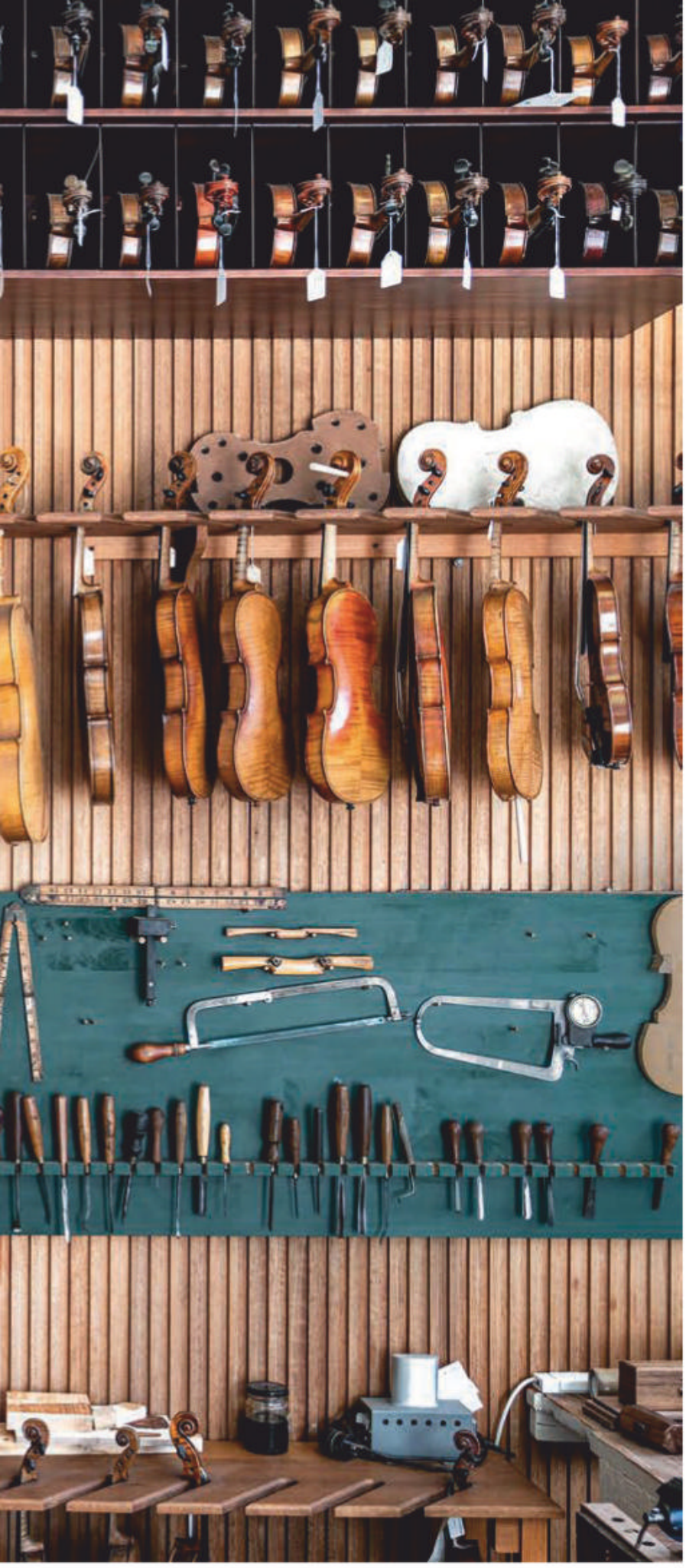
Martin explained that violins are traditionally made with spruce tops, maple backs, ribs and necks. I watched as he used a spur-shaped tool to set the sound post with the help of a brass gauge. The Z-shape of the tool allows access to the inside of the violin via the F-holes to set the sound post in

position between the top and back plates. The sound post is held under pressure, not glued. This requires readjustment over time – a job Martin is frequently called upon to do.

As I stood, bathed in natural light in Martin's wood-panelled workshop, I wondered that such a shop could still exist in our disposable, post-industrial society. But Martin is busier than ever. In fact, he never stopped working during my entire visit. And little wonder, as there are only two or three other shops in Melbourne who can undertake similar repairs.

Martin's archetier or bowmaker lives a rather idyllic life in Tasmania. Paul Shields makes his much sought after bows from Brazillian pernambuco wood, including ebony frogs inlaid with pearl eyes. He makes the entire bow by hand, including the silverwork which is found on the tip and the frog. Pernambuco (*Paubrasilia echinate*) is now protected, being the national tree of Brazil. But don't fret, Paul is sitting on a well-humified stash of the rare Brazilian hardwood for many bows to come.

Martin showed me around his workshop. In one glass wall-mounted cabinet, he pulled down a Benjamin Banks violin from the 1790s that was part of his collection for sale. It was engraved with 'B.B', below the chin-rest, near the end-button.
The flame of the maple projected through the varnish, still gorgeous hundreds of years since leaving the original luthiers' workshop in Salisbury, Wiltshire. The 'flame' in the maple is highlighted through the varnish. The layers must be applied under natural light to ensure the right contrast is created. And it's varnish work that Martin enjoys most, as repairing it employs



All in order: vintage and modern tools for luthiery. Photo: *Martin Paul*

Martin Paul: 'A renaissance man quietly working away in his West Melbourne window.' *Photo: Anna Encio*

traditional painting techniques using ground pigments.

There was one question I was dying to ask Martin. 'There's something I've got to ask…have you ever had a…'' …Stradivarius?', said Martin without looking up from his bridge work. We both laughed. 'Not yet, but we've had an Amati, made by one of the fathers of violin making.'

Martin's clients include professional players and international buyers who are looking for their lifetime instrument. A bit like finding a spouse, really.

Often, the most challenging repair work is patching in new wood to a damaged instrument. First, for a crack in the sound post area of the top plate, Martin will remove the plate from the instrument, clean the crack and glue it level. He will then take a plaster cast mould of the plate to support the curve and shape while he carves out a small section of the damaged area. Lastly, he will cut a little bit of spruce, shape it to fit the damaged section and offset the grain a little for strength, before gluing it in – this is all quite precise work.

I really enjoyed meeting Martin. A renaissance man quietly working away in his West Melbourne window. In the current age of specialisation, Martin is a paradigm of capability, using hand and eye to take a compromised instrument and not only restore it to play, but honour those master luthiers before him—with grace.

Dan Dwyer is a Melbourne woodworker and contributor to Australian Wood Review magazine.

Turning Branch Timbers

With a little understanding of (and forgiveness for) wood movement, smaller green branch timbers can offer up the potential for interesting forms. Story by Andrew Potocnik.

When my wife decided the large oak tree in front of our house needed a trim, I couldn't bear to see the many branches go to waste, or even worse, chipped or relegated to someone else's firewood pile.

As a dedicated turner and a person who hates to see anything go to waste, I soon worked out a way of converting thicker branches, however there are some issues involved in using wood of such a small size compared to the boards used for furniture.

Most often, wood needs to be dry so it is stable and will not move as you cut, shape and join it. Here lies the problem in using small diameter pieces of wood.

The general method used to dry wood requires the log (or in this case branch) to be cut in half along the grain, removing the heart, or pith, and allowing the wood to shrink around its diameter as cells dry out and collapse, reducing the chance of cracks developing. This process presents two problems, which are time and size. Time equals how long it takes for the wood to dry sufficiently so it will be stable enough to use, and how much usable wood will you have when you halve a branch of about 100–150mm diameter, which really is of little use.

Turning opens opportunities not available to furniture makers who work with wood that needs to be straight, stable and stay put! We are a strange fraternity who are

probably more closely aligned with carvers, willing to allow nature to take control of what we make, rather than impose our controlling nature of making wood do what we want it to and we are willing to use unusual wood, heart and all.

These small projects make the most of small sections of wood we all have access to in our home environments. Here the wood can follow its natural instinct to wander and distort leading to often surprising results. There are however a few factors to take into account to avoid disappointment, and even possible disasters.

Endgrain bowl

Without an understanding of how wet (or green) wood changes as it dries, it seems logical to simply take a slice through a trunk or branch and leave it to dry before later making it into a tabletop or cutting board. Unfortunately, this doesn't take into account that the slice will split as the cells dry and shrink.

This bowl fits the concept, however with one major difference – thickness. Thin walls will move and distort due to internal tension within growth rings, so allowing the wood to follow its natural inclination will increase the probability of a success.

I kept my branches to around one metre lengths, short enough to move around and store (**photo 1**). The ends will dry quickly and begin to crack (**photo 2**), but cut away about 25mm and you'll be back to solid wet wood (**photo 3**). The colour of freshly cut wood will differ to wood left to dry for even a couple of weeks. Depending on the climate and seasonal temperatures you're working in, winter may give you a week or so, but summer may only allow hours before cracks appear.

Several 120mm long blanks were chainsawn and put in plastic bags to prevent moisture loss while waiting their turn on the lathe. If you're working in batches, you can bury blanks in wood shavings to keep them moist as you work away.

I mounted my blank between centres located as close to the middle as possible at each end so I could trim excess from the exterior and cut a tenon with which the bowl could be reversed and gripped in a chuck (**photo 4**).

Reversed into a scroll chuck, the tailstock and live centre gave support as the bowl form was hollowed (**photo 5**) shaped and sanded though to 320 grit (**photo 6**). It's a simple process but you need to consider appropriate use of PPE along the way. Apart from suitable eye protection, you need to use dust masks when sanding and ensure ample dust extraction as well.

Before sanding you can dry the wood first so you don't simply clog sandpaper to the point of uselessness and need to throw it away swearing in frustration. Use a heat gun or a hair dryer on the turned surface, just enough to remove moisture from the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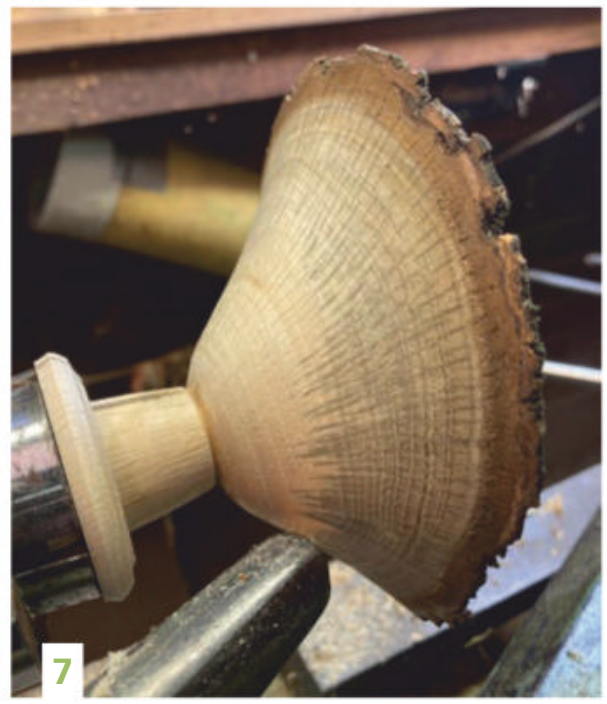
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outer layer. Abrasive friction will dry the next layer as you work through to a smooth surface. Beware! Don't apply too much heat, pressure or use a high rpm, all of which lead to that initial problem – drying out cells and not allowing them room to move, hence cracks developing as you work.

Now for the exterior of the bowl and its base. I worked my way gradually from bark edge to the middle of the branch, stopping frequently to check for a uniform wall thickness and the overall form (**photo 7**). **Photo 8** shows how the wood can be translucent if wall thickness is thin enough, in this case about 2mm.

The bowl was reversed into a carrier mounted in the scroll chuck and supported by the tailstock so its base could be hollowed (**photo 9**). Electrical tape was applied to a fissure which I feared might open further as material was removed – better safe than sorry! The remaining stub of wood was later carved away with a small gouge before drying the piece in a microwave oven for a speedy completion.

Natural edged bowl

To create a natural or 'wane' edged bowl, a piece of about the same length and width was mounted with the grain running across the blank (**photo 10**). This was carefully trimmed to a cylindrical form revealing colour variation and some wonderful radiating medullary rays (**photo 11**).

A wine glass shaped form with a small foot and tenon was shaped and sanded through to 320 grit (**photo 12**), before reversing into a scroll chuck and hollowing (**photo 13**) to a wall thickness of about 6mm as most unwanted material was removed with a deep fluted bowl gouge, before reducing to 3mm. The surface was again dried with a heat gun before sanding through to 320 grit (**photo 14**).


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To complete the base I mounted a 120mm long scrap of wood into a chuck fitted with long nose jaws, trimmed the end to a rough dome shape and added some thick electrical tape (**photo 15**) to protect the interior of the bowl once reversed. The tailstock held the bowl in place while I carefully worked down to a thin stub and then sanding (**photo 16**). The remaining stub was carved away by hand with a small gouge (**photo 17**) and the remaining wood sanded smooth by hand.

After some two minute 'cooks' in the microwave, each allowed to cool in between, it was time to check for changes in dimensions. The original diameter of 83mm changed to 76mm across grain and 84mm along the grain – in **photo 18** you can see how one side distorted more than the other.

Conventional bowl

With my timber mounted between centres another issue presented. When a tree grows vertically there will ideally be uniform growth rings with the pith, or centre, of the trunk located in the middle of the cross section. Branches grow from the side of the trunk, so compression wood is created to support branches that need to work against gravity. The growth rings on the lower side of the branch are tighter than those on top, again creating irregularities and that will distort the wood as it dries. In **photo 19** the pith is further to the left of the branch indicating the growth rings are closer on this side.

One of the benefits of mounting wood for these projects between centres is that the blank can be repositioned as it is roughed so it is balanced and even amounts of material can be removed as the form evolves (**photo 20**), until the shaping is completed and sanded smooth ready for reversing (**photo 21**).

Here an inverted lemon or onion shape emerged with a small tenon formed so the bowl could be reversed and held in a scroll chuck. You can also see the bark ends of the branch I began with, and the bowl form revealed from within it.

The bowl was hollowed and sanded in much the same way as the others (**photo 22**) before reversing onto jaws


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in expansion mode (**photo 23**). The tenon was then turned away and the base hollowed slightly, sanded and a couple of V-lines cut with a diamond pointed scraper (**photo 24**). Held in my hand, you can see the scale and profile of the completed form prior to drying (**photo 25**).

You can allow the wood to dry naturally which takes time according to temperatures in your environment, but I again opted to microwave mine.

The key is to weigh the form before giving it a couple of shots in a microwave oven. This one began at 105g and reduced to 45g, while the diameter along the grain changed from 90mm to 92mm, and across went from 90mm to 82mm. The height reduced from 72mm to 70mm. The wall thickness on side grain had a marginal reduction from its 5mm thickness.

If drying your bowls naturally, record the weight when still wet, then weigh them regularly – when the weight stabilises you've hit EMC (equilibrium moisture content). The latter means they are as close to dry as your environment will allow. Keep in mind, if you move it to a more humid climate, moisture from the atmosphere will be absorbed; and conversely, in a drier area more moisture will be removed. In either situation the wood will move.

Due to distortion the base needed flattening on a sanding board before an oil finish was brushed on and the excess wiped off after about an hour.

This is how I make the most of branch material, but don't be afraid to experiment. If your trials work be happy, but if they fail, what have you lost? Timber that was destined for the firewood pile or to be converted into mulch? In the process of experimentation, you will no doubt have figured out ways of improving your technique and another path to success.

Photos: Andrew Potocnik

Andrew Potocnik is a Melbourne wood artist, teacher, author and regular contributor to Australian Wood Review. See https://www.andrewpotocnik.com/

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