AUSTRALIAN
# Wood
REVIEW
126



## VASKO SOTIROV
A life story in a cabinet

## TUNED UP TABLE DESIGN
5 basic principles

## ROTATING DOVETAILS
Re-imagining Sam Maloof's famous joint

## THE MAKER'S MARK
Why and how to ID your work

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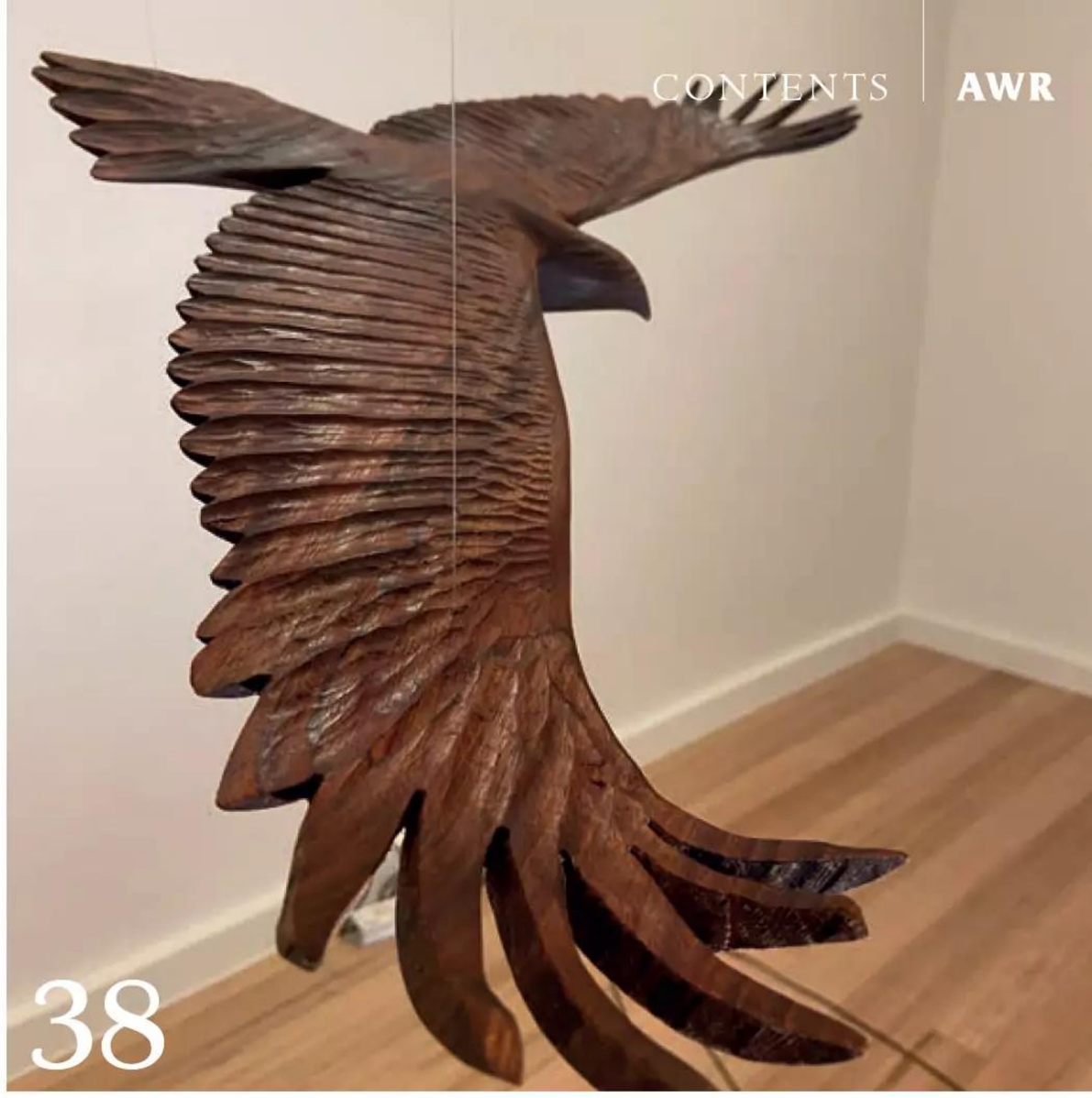



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# Editor's Letter

## The maker's mark

What do you call yourself? Are you a woodworker? A wood artist? An artisan? Designer maker? Sculptor or seeker? Maybe you're a dreamer. Does it matter anyway? The way you describe yourself reveals more than your main activity and carries connotations of self worth. Describe someone incorrectly and you'll find out what I mean.

For others to know who you are is essential to the handmade story, writes Luke Batten from p.44 as he discusses why acknowledging the maker's identity is more important than ever in today's world. Developing a signature style and designs are intrinsic to establishing an identity and there are also ways to literally sign, inlay, brand or otherwise add your own maker's mark.

Speaking of identity, what's one sure way to tell a woodworker? They're the ones that dive under a table for a closer look at the workings! This issue Jono Everett gives us a closer look at the structure of his *Tuned table*, minimalist on top but cleverly structured down below. Clearly there's more to achieving seamless curves and joinery as well, see p.22.

## Finding your niche

Finding your own path as a maker is part of the identity quest. Some of us know where we're heading right from the start but many of us have to explore different directions. Vasko Sotirov's *Ceremony of Desires* cabinet tells a life story of seemingly random paths that coalesce, see p.50. It's a sculptural piece that presented some technical challenges for its maker, who is also featured on the cover.

## Joinery reimagined

Sam Maloof is revered for his designs and the way he brought them to life, so much so that the way he joined a chair seat to a leg is now known as the Maloof joint. But what if that join could be turned and dovetailed in a rotating movement? That's the question US maker Alex Peay posed and has now answered with a technique that he shares this issue from p.28.

## In remembrance

When William Bayliss tragically died in a car accident in November last year there was a widespread expression of grief and loss. Talented, hardworking and well liked, he had already won many awards, amongst them Maker of the Year 2021. Sadly, this issue we pay tribute to Will with reflections from his mentors and colleagues, see p.54.

## Celebrating 100 years

Australian Wood Review's history goes back 33 years however this year our publisher, Yaffa Media, celebrates 100 years as an independently Australian family-owned company. This is a huge milestone for any media company, and worthy of mention – see p.72 to learn about some of the people behind the scenes.

## Maker of the Year 2025

We've made Maker of the Year Awards, presented by Carbatec, even simpler to enter this year! There are three categories; you can be an amateur, a pro or a student, and each category is open to makers all over the world. We hope you'll add your work to this year's showcase for fine woodworking! Learn more at www.woodreview.com.au/moty

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Vasko Sotirov works on his sculptural cabinet

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# iGaging Ez-Read Digital Router and Saw Gauge

*Reviewed by Damion Fauser*

This latest offering from reputable California-based measuring tool company iGaging is designed to simplify setting up cut height and fence settings on primarily the router table and tablesaw, but having now played around with it in the workshop for a few weeks now, I can see utility for this device on other machines as well as for other measuring situations.

The tool has a free-standing anodised aluminium body that straddles the cutter being measured. A stainless steel beam slides through the main body of the tool, creating a lineal differential between the bottom, reference surface of the body and the bottom of the beam.

The display is large and easy to read, with a choice between units being displayed of metric (to 0.01mm fidelity), imperial (to 0.001") or imperial fractions (to 1/64"). Stated accuracy is to 0.0015" (0.038mm) which will suit the needs of even the fussiest of users, and the range of measurement is to 50.8mm (2"). Zeroing the gauge is easy and fast – stand the tool on a flat surface, bottom out the beam and hit the zero button.

There is a locking knob on the side of the body to lock the beam in position. I really like this feature as it lets you preset a desired reading and then simply raise the cutter up until contact is made.

There is a 2" long narrow extension rod for measuring the depth of holes, which is a nice inclusion. I often see students struggling to obtain accurate measurements when using the narrow end of a traditional caliper as they fail to register the end of the tool flat on the datum surface, creating a diagonal. The nature of the body of this tool negates that potential source of error.

Also included are two separate anvils (1/4" and 1/2") that thread onto the end of the main beam. This allows users to accurately measure from the fence of the router table to the centre of either 1/4" or 1/2" cutters, which is important for various joinery cuts.

The digital readout is powered by a common 3V CR2032 button battery, which is included in the package. The 5-minute auto shut-off feature will ensure this battery lasts for a long time.

I consider this tool to be good value considering the build quality and what it offers. Is it absolutely necessary? Perhaps not, but it will likely save dedicated woodworkers vastly in terms of reducing time and materials used in setting up and measuring test cuts.

*Review tool supplied by Timbecon, www.timbecon.com.au*

*Damion Fauser is a designer maker and woodwork teacher in Brisbane, see https://damionfauser.com*



**Top:** The iGaging digital readout is designed for setting up cut height and fence settings on the tablesaw and router table.

**Left:** A free-standing anodised aluminium body sits over the cutter, while a beam slides through to create a reference surface to measure.

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# Zen-Wu Chisels and Plane blade

*Reviewed by Robert Howard*

Japanese woodworking hand tools have long been popular here, but one major difference between them and these Chinese made tools is that the Japanese tools have remained true to their history. The Japanese tools we use are, with some minor adjustments to compensate for our harder woods, the same as those used by Japanese craftspeople.

These Chinese tools, on the other hand, look to be copies of our Western tools. The chisel design in particular, is very close to the Blue Spruce, which itself has borrowed from Lie-Nielsen.

Most importantly, they have also copied the quality of those tools, and in some respects, have exceeded them.

The most obvious example of this is the laminating process they have used with the more expensive chisels and the plane blade. Instead of the traditional blacksmith method of forge and hammer to weld the different metals together, Zen-Wu have taken a high tech path, milling complementary slots with which to mate the two parts of the blade. The milled slots are dovetailed in the chisels, but are square shouldered in the plane blades, with the slots running down the length of the blades.

The blades are very sharp out of the box and are ready for work without any further attention.

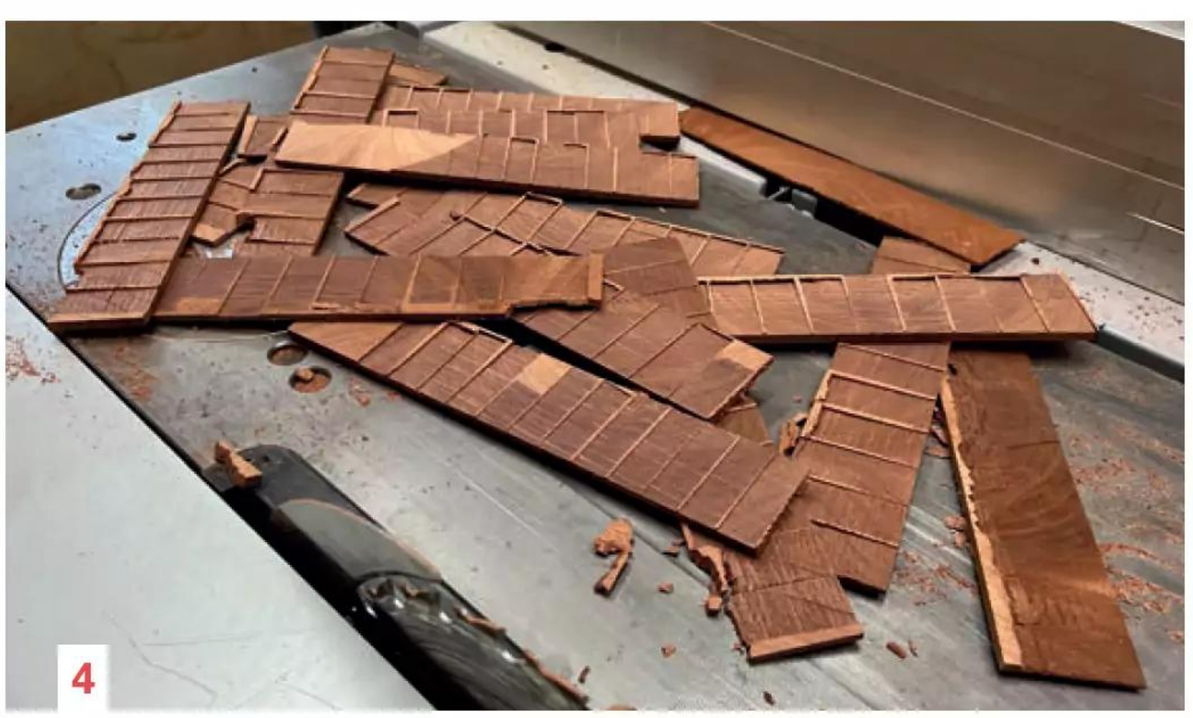
The attention to detail is impressive – the front edge of the plane blade chipbreaker has been ground and polished on both the upper and lower surfaces, for example. A small, flat plate screwdriver, designed to fit the screw that fixes the chipbreaker to the plane blade, is also included.

The boxed set of bench chisels are beautifully made, and appear to follow the Lie-Nielsen model of being precision machined from metal stock, rather than being drop forged. The edges are ground and polished to 30°. The blades have a slight concave curve along their length which is a pleasant change from the more common hump in so many chisels. The back of the chisels is convex across the width which I find aesthetically pleasing in both look and feel.

The boxed chisels are each made from a single piece of Y-1 'white paper' steel, with a hardness claimed to be 62.7–63.3 HRC.

The single Zen-Wu chisel is a much more expensive laminated blade, with the cutting edge made from X-1 steel, laminated to a titanium alloy body

The plane blade is Magnacut steel, laminated to a titanium alloy base, and hardened to between 62.5-63.3HRC. The blade is designed to fit all the modern planes based on the Stanley design without any modification of the plane bodies. The extra thickness of the Zen-Wu blade can be accommodated by adjusting the position of the frog, but in order to fit the old Stanley planes the mouth will need to be filed wider by up to 3mm.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1. Y-1 Zen-Wu chisel set – 'beautifully made' in white paper steel.
2. The Zen-Wu plane blade has MagnaCut steel laminated to a titanium base.
3. Test cuts on red cedar endgrain were made with the X-1 chisel and the largest Y-1 chisel.
4. At the end of each run, the surface was cut off for a new series of test cuts.
5. Zen-Wu's impressive X-1 chisel has a dovetailed construction.
6. Detail of X-1 chisel edge.

I sharpened the X-1 and the largest Y-1 chisel, along with a Lie-Nielsen A2 steel, a L-N O1 steel, and an original Veritas, at 30° using a honing guide to ensure uniformity on my waterstones, finishing at 8000 grit. I tested the blades by using a mallet to drive the edges through the endgrain of a block of 300 x 60mm Australian red cedar.

At the end of each run of cuts (each run done with one chisel) I cut off the tested wood to create a new starting surface. I used a cutting gauge to mark a line 1mm from the end of the board, and clamped the square section block used to guide the chisel in the cut on this scribed line.

After cutting through a total of around 2.2m of endgrain with each blade, only the O1 Lie-Nielsen and the Zen-Wu boxed set blades showed any edge damage. All of the edges however, were still good enough to shave my arm.

These are impressive tools, beautifully made, and comparable in quality to the best we have. I recommend looking at the Zen-Wu website for more information about this very interesting company.

*Review tools supplied by and available from https://ad-tools.com.au/*

*Robert Howard @roberthowardwoodworker is a designer maker who also teaches woodcarving from his Brisbane workshop. Learn more at https://roberthoward.com.au*

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# Arbortech Spheroplane

*Reviewed by Raf Nathan*

Arbortech's innovative new Spheroplane features an adjustable carving radius made with a flat spinning steel disc that holds two round tungsten cutters. The cutters rotate to expose a new sharp edge if needed.

The cutterhead sits in a steel shaft and is shrouded with a tough rounded plastic collar that raises or lowers on the threaded shaft. Extending the cutters slightly beyond the base forms a concave arc, while retracting the cutters gives a convex arc. With the round base sitting on the wood the tool only wants to create a sphere, or in the case of a bowl, an arc of a circle.


1


2

3

1. The new Spheroplane is a unique powercarving attachment that will form convex and concave curves and even shape complete spheres.
2. The cutter arrangement viewed from below.
3. An included sanding attachment comes with a range of grits.

## Fit and feel

Fitting the tool to a standard 115mm or 125mm angle grinder is pretty straightforward. Thread and tighten the cutter onto the shaft and use the bent bar to click and lock it to the grinder. This bar tends to float around so I taped it to the angle grinder.

Everything is very well made. The cutterhead is nicely machined and Arbortech state the collar and base are made from engineered plastic. Moulded into the collar is a dust extraction port that works very well hooked to an extractor. Whilst there were plenty of shavings on the floor, my dust extractor grabbed at least 80% of produced shavings.

As this is a new tool there is not much learning material online. The inventor, Kevin Inkster, and his colleague Seth have provided two good videos on using it, but the learning comes from practice.

## First use

You can make spheres but I began by making a platter 300mm diameter from wood 35mm thick. Basically it's all about seating the base on the wood so the tool keeps forming an arc. The initial cuts are always coarse but as you progress, the base of the tool will eventually sit neatly on a cut surface that's quite smooth and clean.

Carving the inside first is easier. I found carving the outside much more difficult partly because holding the wood securely is an issue. You can sit the bowl on a bench with a couple of stop blocks but I wasn't happy with this. My first platter creation was acceptable with the finish off the tool quite good.

## Second time around

For my next piece I used a large Huon pine slab that was 75mm thick and bandsawn to a 500mm round blank. Usually, you would carve a bowl of this size with chisels or turn it outboard on a big lathe. Woodturning on this scale is advanced work, so being able to tackle this with a power tool is quite an opportunity. I chose to carve the outside first and leave the easy part till last.

## Holding the piece

I coach-screwed a 50mm block to elevate the wood and give plenty of access to the Spheroplane. To this I screwed a 150 x 19mm hardwood board and clamped this to two stands. This meant I could walk around the piece to make continual cuts knowing the wood was safely clamped.

## It begins

Use a marker to draw reference circles on both sides so you can check your progress. It took at least two hours (including breaks) to mostly finish the outside, but expect to work faster when you have learnt to use the tool. I struggled a bit to get a perfectly clean 'off the tool' finish, and this was partly because I wasn't happy with the arc and changed the cutter extension and removed a little less towards the base. So I now had two arcs.

Ideally you don't change the arc so you can keep refining the cut. Remember the tool only wants to form an arc of a circle – you can't create your own curve. A bowl needs a flat or concave base to be stable and not rock around. I used the tool to quickly cut a concave for a dished base.

## Completing the outside

After achieving an acceptable finish I switched to sanding mode to smooth and even the surface off.

Remove the cutterhead and replace it with the velcro-faced 50mm sanding pad. This quickly spins on to the shaft and comes with 40, 80, 120 and 240 grit discs.


4


6


8


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7


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**4.** Screwing the blank to a block of wood and then a board allowed me to hold it securely.

**5.** Working through a series of reference marks to begin on the outside of a bowl.

**6.** Continuous cuts will achieve a progressively smooth surface.

**7.** The offcuts of the original blank were used to make a holding jig for carving the inside.

**8.** A flat rim was marked and then created with a sharp chisel.

**9.** The completed bowl in Huon pine made with the Spheroplane.

Choose your grit and with the tool switched off lower the sanding head till it just touches the wood, then lock the depth. The sanding function works very well, and you can take it quite quickly up to a fine clean finish – a light touch is all that's needed. The dust extraction for sanding is excellent.

## Tackling the inside

To carve the inside I nested the bowl on some padding within the original corner offcuts. This worked quite well although you need to resist the tendency to grab the wood with one hand when the blank moves, as it will. If your hands are always on the tool, you are relatively safe. It is a powerful carving tool and deserves respect.

The internal carving is easier and more controllable. There were still a few hours' worth of cutting to remove the bulk of the waste and complete the bowl. The more you cut, the smoother the surface will become however the walls will also become thinner.

Importantly, the inside and outside arcs should match as close as possible, avoiding a centre that's too thick and heavy.

## Finishing the inside

After hanging off the end of the angle grinder for a few hours there came a point where I stopped and switched to sanding mode. You can sand from say 80 grit and work your way up to a fine finish. I still needed to hand sand to achieve an even and smooth surface.

I think bowls need a rim otherwise when viewing it there is nowhere for the eye to rest. It makes a difference. Here I chiselled in a slightly convex edge about 15mm wide.

The bowl was given a coat of hardwax oil, buffed immediately, left for a day and then sanded to 400 grit before polishing again, and again.

## Next time!

In future I will remove as much waste as possible prior to powercarving. Outer edges can be planed or chainsawn off while a large bit on the drill press can remove waste inside the bowl.

## The new tool

The tool is very well made although I wondered about the engineered plastic used for the collar. Over the making of a large bowl, the collar could travel 100–200 metres or so and must eventually wear a little flat area on the base. This could affect how it sits on a wood surface – however replacement collars are available for $39.

My angle grinder is a low cost hardware job. A cordless tool with a short body and variable speed would be a better choice. Variable speed would give a low setting for sanding.

I used some hard Huon pine however the Spheroplane can tackle Australian hardwoods just as well. Its carbide cutters give good results even in difficult woods. To be able to create accurate large bowls (or spheres) with a power tool is a feat, let alone the ability to handle virtually unlimited sized wood slabs of any species. This is a revolutionary and quite brilliant tool and used safely it's very powerful. I am already planning my next work – maybe an even larger bowl.

*Photos: Raf Nathan*

*Raf Nathan @treeman777 is a Brisbane based woodworker and AWR contributor.*

*Review tool supplied by Arbortech, see www.arbortechtools.com/au*

# Fiddes Ultra-Raw Hard Wax Oil

*Reviewed by Damion Fauser*

**From top and side by side:** After eight weeks, samples of Victorian ash, rock maple and American white oak; untreated and finished in Fiddes Ultra Raw.

One of the most common questions I get from students and commission clients is 'can you stop this pale wood from yellowing under the finish?', so I was very interested to see this offering from Fiddes Australia.

Recommended primarily for paler timber species, this product has a whitening pigment that is designed to reduce colour changes, yielding a dead matt natural finish that aims to emulate raw, or untreated wood.

I dressed some boards of Victorian ash, American white oak and rock maple and sanded them to 180 grit, and then cut each board in half to retain an original, or control section of each species. I applied two coats to each species, approximately 24 hours apart and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

I was suitably impressed with the results, and as you can see in the image above, there is very little difference between the polished and the original untreated surfaces of each species.

After around eight weeks from first applying this finish, I re-examined these boards against the raw control surfaces and can report that it was most successful on the American white oak, with very little change in appearance to the raw, untreated surface. The Victorian ash was also quite successful. Some very slight yellowing was evident on the rock maple.

The Fiddes website notes that due to the whitening pigment, if planning to this product on darker species, or over other stains, a test on a sample is strongly recommended.

This product is available direct from Fiddes Australia and comes in a range of sizes including 250mL, 1L and 2.5L, with the 250mL can costing $42. It performs as intended, so if you're looking to retain the natural appearance of your paler woods, this product will be well worth investigating.

*Review sample provided by Fiddes Australia, see https://www.fiddesaustralia.com*

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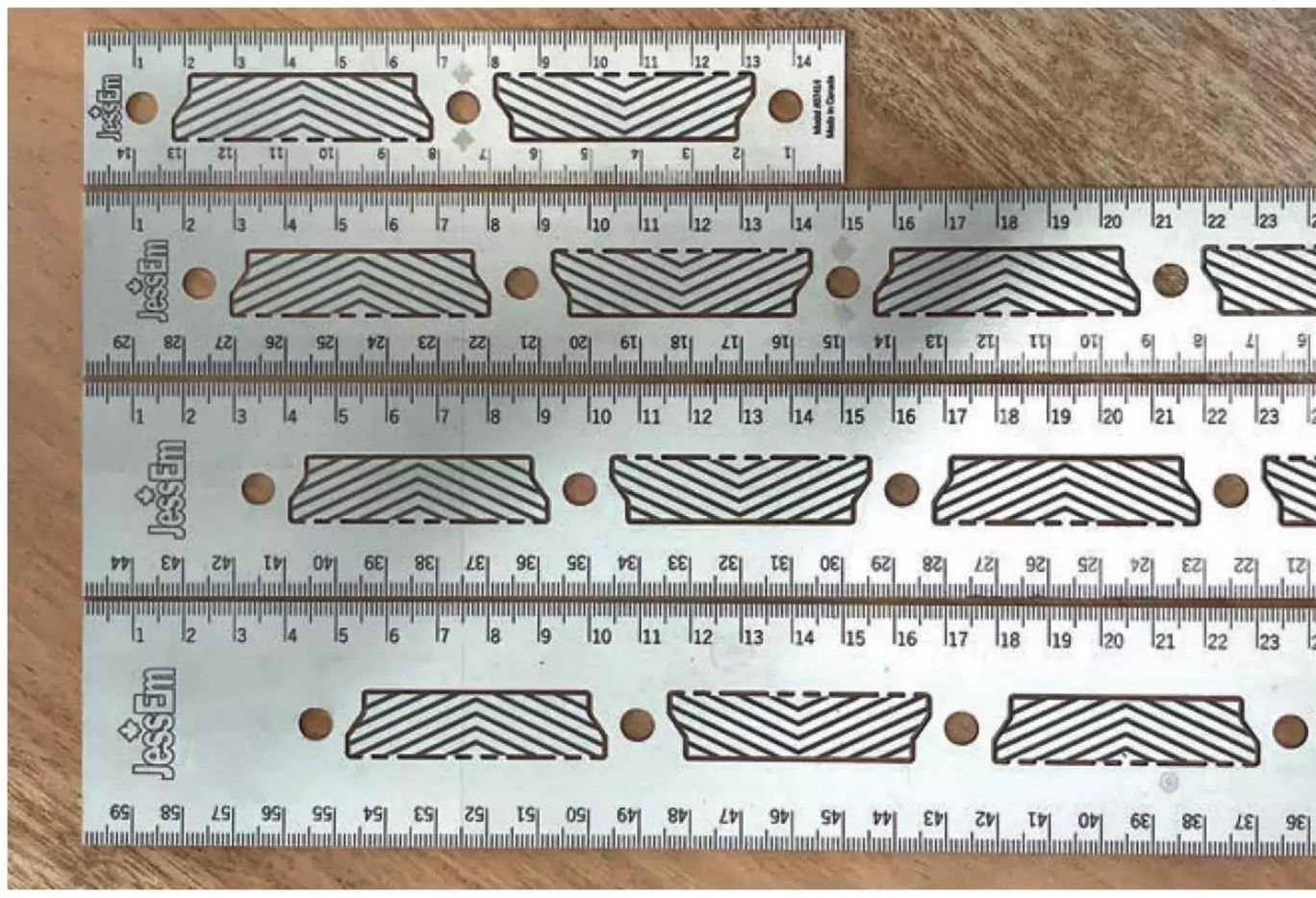
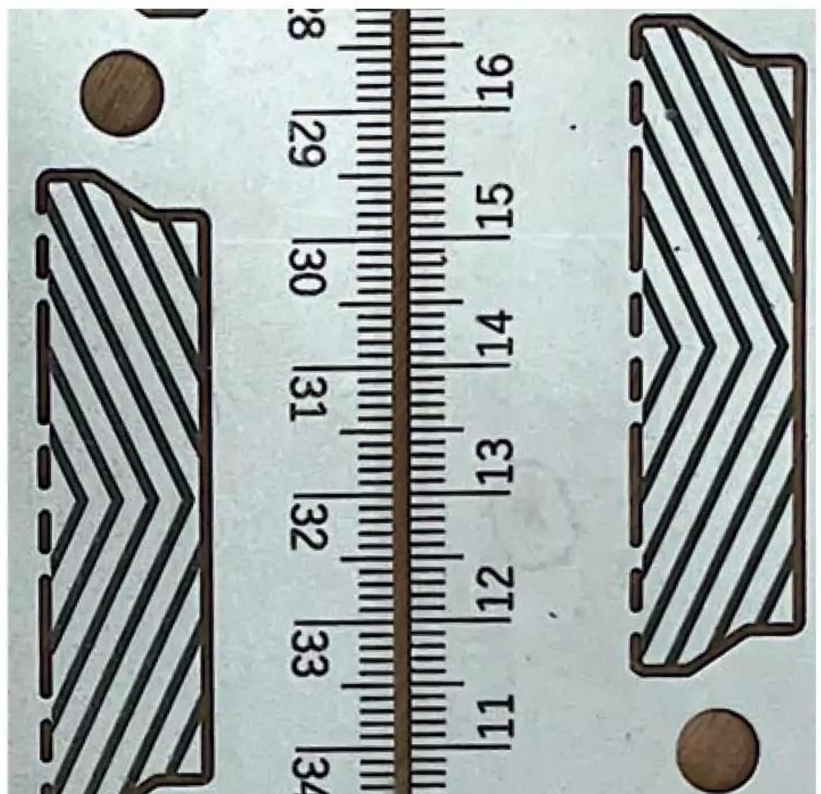
# JessEm Rules and Squares

*Reviewed by Raf Nathan*



**This page:** JessEm's metric stainless steel rules are available in 150, 300, 450 and 600mm lengths and have a Flex Tab non-slip feature.

**Opposite:** In 150, 200 and 300mm sizes, JessEm squares also have a Flex Tab feature as well as a highly effective support tab.

## JessEm Stainless Steel Precision Rules

Along with their tasty router table equipment, JessEm have introduced some outstanding measuring tools. These stainless steel rules are available in imperial and metric in a wide range spanning 150, 300, 450 and 600mm.

The rules are made from 301 stainless steel with crisp markings that the manufacturers say are both engraved and etched, and with a satin finish on the surface for clarity. Against my reference tools the measuring scales were perfect on all rulers.

JessEm has patented its Flex Tab which is a series of framed angled cuts with the tab surface etched to give a slightly rough surface. This slightly grabs the wood and keeps the ruler in place quite securely so when marking it will virtually never slip. This is very useful as you can press down and make a line with a marking knife without fear of it wandering. It is a good feature.

The rulers are marked to read from left or right, and even better, are engraved on both sides. Manufacturing-wise this is not an easy thing to achieve accurately. For a job measuring both from left and right you can flip the ruler to get your readings with the zero point beginning from either the top or lower edge of the ruler.

The 600mm ruler was a favourite with me. It's not a daily user but when you need a long ruler that is also dead straight this is superb.

You can always buy a cheap ruler – which these are not. However, the precision build of these with their satin finish, clear ruler markings and helpful flex tabs make them very useful and reliable. An MDF storage case is included.

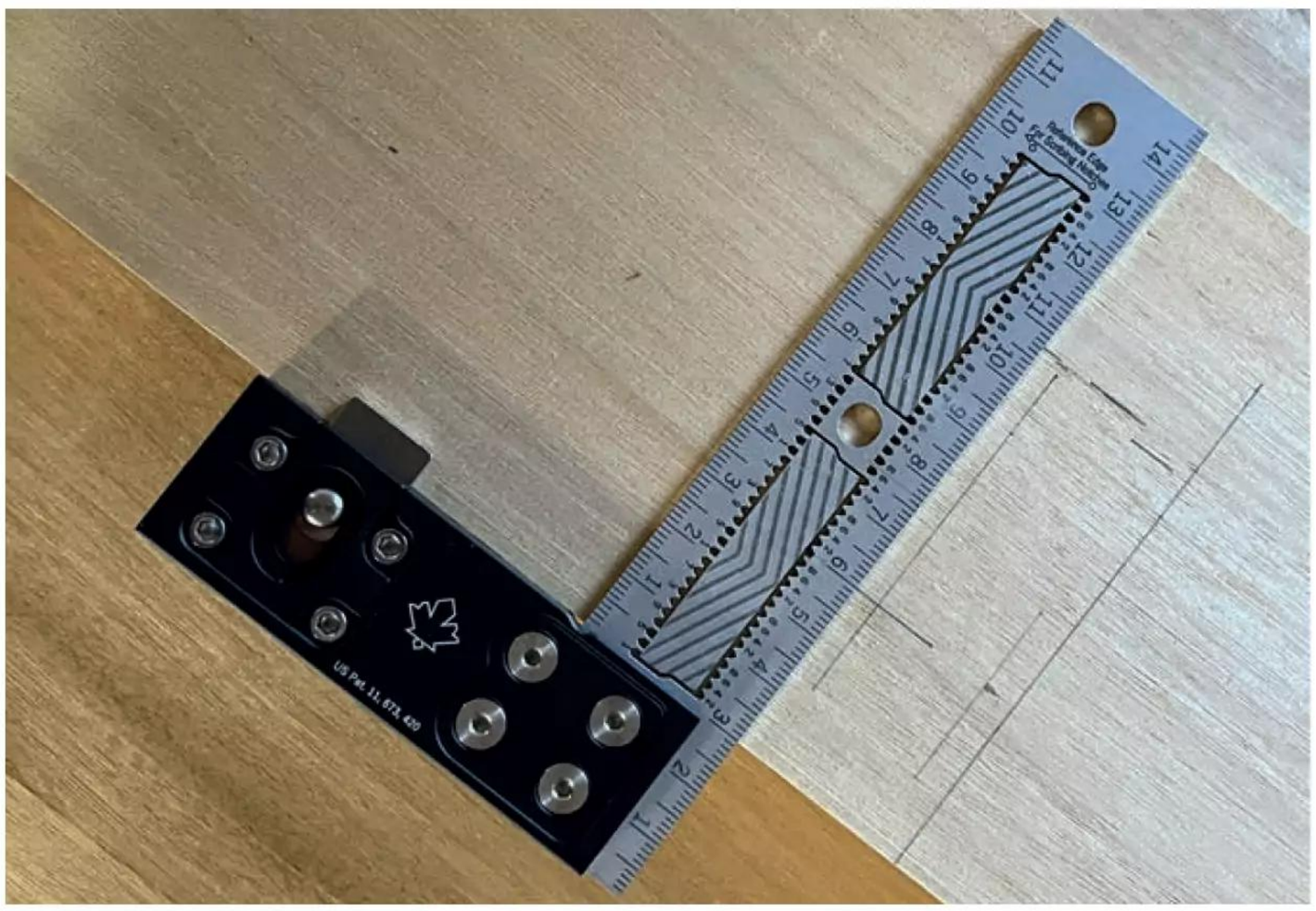
## JessEm Stainless Steel Precision Squares

Like their rules, JessEm stainless steel squares are available in metric and imperial. There are three metric sizes available – 150mm, 200mm and 300mm, all measured from the outside edge. The stainless steel blade has both etched and engraved ruler markings with a satin finish for easy reading.

The blades are set into a hefty black anodised aluminium stock and held with four large allen bolts. The stock thickness varies depending on the square size.

Against my reference equipment all the tools were perfectly square. Jessem say they set these to within 0.05mm deviation over the length of the blade. That's really good.

There are scribing notches set along

the blade at 1mm increments so you can draw a parallel line along an edge. The numbers for the notches are tiny and hard to read but the function is good.

Once again, like the rulers, the squares have Flex Tabs to grip the work surface and stop the squares slipping in use. This works well although it hinders certain operations, such as when I was laying out three boards at once and found the flex tabs worked too well as it was hard to slide the boards along for alignment.

Given the flex tabs have a textured finish, if you use the scribing notches to run a parallel pencil line, the tabs will scratch the workpiece. For most work that is to be sanded later this is no issue at all. If you were to lay out say a drawer handle on a polished surface though, the tab will leave tiny scratches on the polished surface. My verdict is that the squares would be much better without the flex tabs.

A big plus is the support tab built in at the end of the stock. This slides out as needed to allow the square to balance on its own. The mechanism for this is outstanding as it is embedded into the handle and the tab slides out via a spring-loaded knob. These squares are beautifully and precisely made.

Given the quality of build and accuracy, in addition to the artistic engineering involved with this level of toolmaking, I think the price is very reasonable. In fact compared to other high-end wood squares, these are cheaper. You can't help but like these squares.

*Review tools supplied by JessEm Tool Company, https://jessem.com*

# Accu-Burr Burnishers and Scrapers

*Reviewed by Neil Erasmus*

The card scraper and burnisher are as fundamental to fine woodwork, as are the must-have saw and chisel. So, when I received three versions of Accu-Burr's burnishers and two scrapers from Blackburn Tools, I was keen to see what may be new in this simple, age-old process.

The scraper is the simplest of all tools, and can only vary in materials, shape and thickness, nothing else – simple but versatile. Similarly, the tool used to turn a burr on its corners requires no more than a hardened rod. Thus, for me, I was sceptical about yet another tool to turn a burr on a scraper. I was sent three burnishers, the JR, AB1 and AB2 together with a couple of 0.62 scrapers.

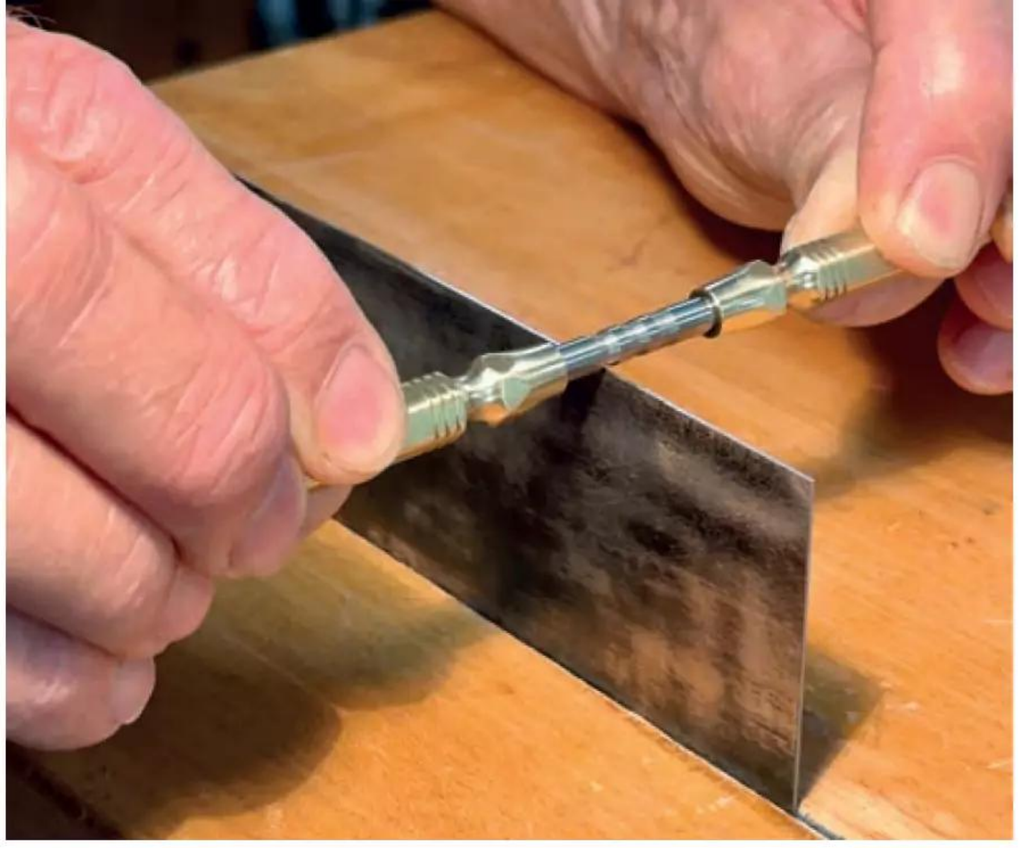

**Above:** Accu-Burr card scrapers come with a magnetic card which can be used to minimise heat transfer. The burnishing rods have three angled grooves and come with or without brass handles.

I have to say from the outset that I was immediately seduced by the heft, feel and quality of the Accu-Burr JR. This tool measures 120mm long and is double ended with brass handles. It has a 25 x 4.7mm carbide burnisher with three angled V-grooves finely ground around its circumference. The grooves, at angles of 5, 10 and 15°, represent the crux of this clever innovation, as the edge of the scraper lodges in the valley while the tapered sides engage the corners, simultaneously providing opposing burrs when pulled – two burrs, one stroke!

I started by flattening the face corners of one of the Accu-Burr card scrapers with an end of Accu-Burr's AB1 (or 2) non-handled burnisher, before filing the two edges square, then waterstone-honing them to one another – normal practice. 'Drawing' the steel in this manner can't be accomplished with the handled version, meaning a small disadvantage.

With the scraper in the vice, and the 5° groove in position, I pulled a satisfactory burr using two light to moderate strokes. As the burnisher is held at right angles to the scraper, nothing could be easier. The small, hexagonal brass handles fit comfortably between the thumb, index and middle fingers, helping to apply a suitably weighted stroke. This is all that it takes to create a cutting corner to a properly prepared scraper in order to take consistent, fine shavings.

I have always guessed an angle of 5–10° and found that the Accu-Burr's 5° setting created a good burr but one that had less 'bite' than anticipated. The 10° groove provided a marked improvement, while the 15° groove was a little aggressive, albeit excellent for heavy scraping prior to tidying up on the small or middle setting. The non-handled AB2 is a



heavier, more robust 6.35mm burnisher, while the AB2 is similar in size to the handled JR. All perform equally well.

The Accu-Burr takes all the guesswork out of trying to gauge burr angles for the many people who struggle in this regard, and who seldom achieve the desired outcome – an essential art now easily and speedily demystified. There's little in this overly commercialised world that excites me more than when a product not only looks the part, but also matches its aesthetic with smart innovation and sound performance.

To sum up, these are superb tools that I would happily recommend.

*Photos: Neil Erasmus*

*Sample tools supplied by Union Manufacturing Co, www.unionmfgco.com*
*The reviewed products are available from Carbatec, www.carbatec.com.au*

*Neil Erasmus @neilerasmus is a Perth-based designer maker and a long-standing contributor to Australian Wood Review.*

**Top:** In use, the angled grooves give reliable results when pulling burrs.

**Above:** After turning burrs on the card scraper the edges were sharp and effective.

# Tuned Up Table Design

**Jono Everett outlines his five design principles, and explains how a minimalist aesthetic requires a structural strategy.**

I'm putting it out there. I love designing and making and I love tables. With *Tuned*, an eight-seater table, I've pushed to find a minimalist design and stripped back to basic elements, drawing on Scandinavian design principles of contemporary simplicity.

This is a nice project – even if you don't have a lot of gear. Here is how I settled on this design and how I tackled the making of this table.

## Design – let's think it through

I often ponder the design approach on commissioned pieces for quite some time, until I can reach an agreement in my head (sorry clients).

My blueprint for design is to make sure I've considered five principles:

1. Bring something completely original. I treat each commission as a unique piece. I try to find a progression in my work, each piece better than the last (sorry former clients), focusing on clean, strong and clearly expressed lines.

2. Incorporate my design language and aesthetic approach to the piece.

3. Minimise timber use, minimise waste. Maximise structural integrity and aesthetic qualities.

4. Draw design clues from the client's house/aesthetics to ensure the piece will make sense in the space – form, details, section and timber choice. The handmade furniture piece doesn't always have to be the hero in the room, often less is more and the design needs to strike the right balance for the environment.

5. Bed down the client's practical requirements (make yourself a brief). Look at all aspects, ask the questions: How many people will be using it regularly and what will it be used for, (breakfast table, fine dining, everything/family table)? How often will they entertain? What is the table's scale within the space? And, critically, what is the choice of chair?

**Main:** Jono Everett with his *Tuned table*. 'Tuned' refers to the rhythm of the making process, and is 'a table design paring back to express continuous flowing lines and singular planes to produce definitive shadow play and crisp edges'.

**Fig. 1** Components mm not to scale




I don't design a table without first knowing if I'm making the chair or what chair is to be selected. In this case the chair has a backrest established from a continuous extension of the leg, turning back on itself, providing a strong visual curve. Not to mirror that detail but the table's design speaks that same language.

## Timber – it moves

Tables conventionally have a top mounted to an underframe. *Tuned's* design brings the legs out to the table's extremities, making the tabletop an integral structural and aesthetic element.

Fixing the legs directly to the top can be problematic. Let's cut to the chase – woodworkers know, looking at this approach, that the obvious design issue here is wood movement.

A tabletop is a large section of timber which will inevitably expand and contract, as much as 4% even for kiln dried timber – think aircon, a humid environment, or direct sunlight. This fact can frustrate and destroy original design ideas. I've taught many students that have presented ideas that, well, are beautiful, but ultimately just won't fly. Timber movement – ignore it at your own peril. Better to work with it, than pretend it's not a thing.

## My solution

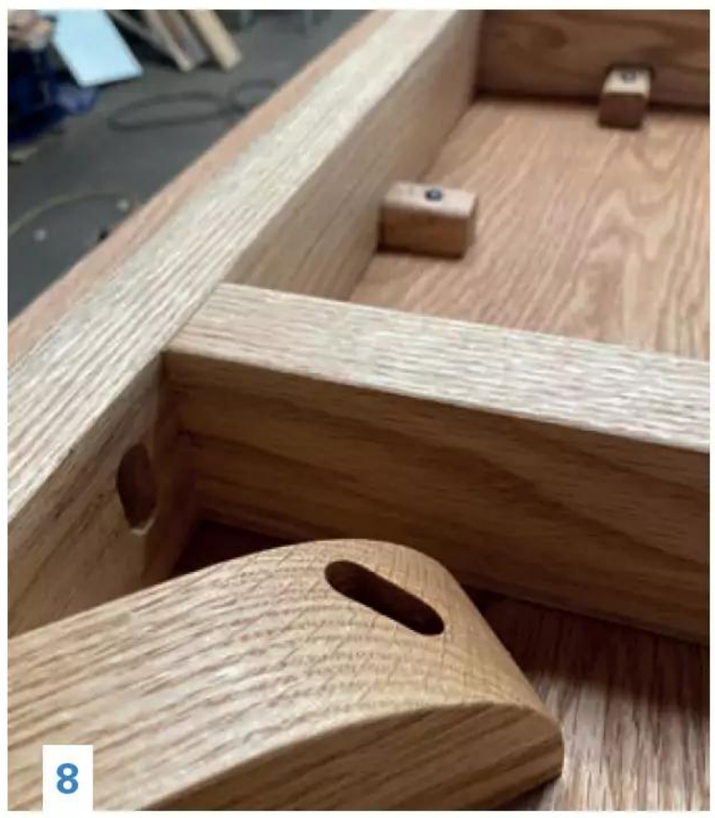
So, we need to stop the table from racking and keep the tabletop flat, but if the legs are fixed to the top and an underframe, it will tear itself apart or put the table in twist.

Can you get away with a timber table design without an underframe – hmmm? I've seen it but it keeps me awake at night. I have previously used the approach of routing C-section steel channel under the top, across its width. I'm not a fan of this technique for a few








reasons. It seems counterintuitive to remove meat from the table thickness, as this will only assist to mitigate cupping across the table, not along its length, and I worry about the different rates of movement between steel and timber.

I do get confused easily but I've never understood breadboard ends on indoor tables. So let's not go doing that.

My design solution for the *Tuned* table is to directly fix the legs to the top and have the underframe a completely independent component. Both can do their own thing while keeping the top flat.

## Let's make it

I first dressed the boards for the top oversize and left them stickered, and waited a fortnight to ensure they shook out any movement. I then redressed to section and skim the edges to be joined with a handplane to ensure a precision join using dominos and epoxy glue.

After sanding, I checked and rechecked the underside of the top is flat. For this table to work, it needs to stay flat! If the top cups, it will make the legs splay. A chunky 45mm thick top gives me enough to express the sides and end

1. Bandsawing the taper on the outer faces of the legs.
2. A jig was made to hold the legs on the router table.

**3, 4.** Showing the routing process using the jig.

**5–8.** A flat for a short rail was cut on the inside of the leg for added strength.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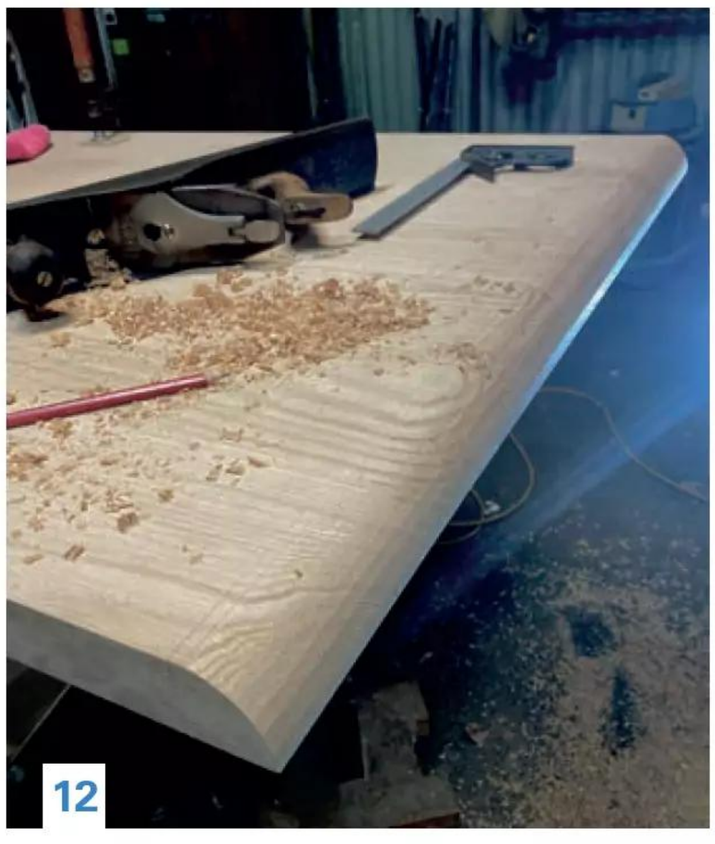
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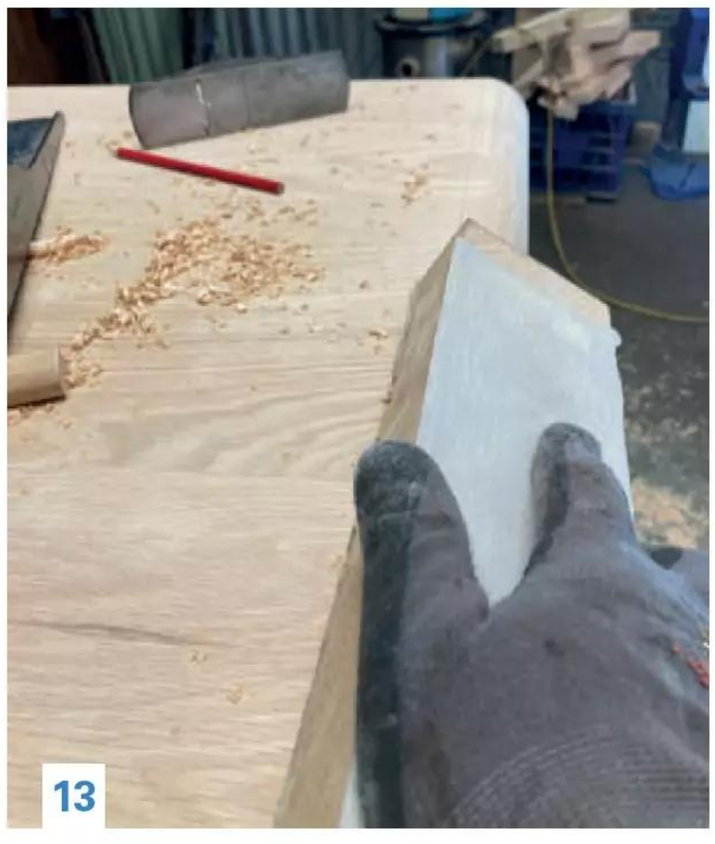
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curves as well as allowing good depth for the leg tenons into the top.

The 90 x 90mm legs have the top and bottom faces compound docked parallel to provide a 5° splay outward in both directions. The joinery is done first, shaping late.

I can now cut two dominos (floating tenons) in the top face and into the underside of the tabletop. I cut the taper on the legs' outside faces on the bandsaw **(photo 1)** and cleaned up on a jig on the inverted router **(photos 2, 3, 4)**. I cut a flat on the inside of the leg for a stubby rail to give the leg more strength (**photos 5, 6, 7, 8**).

A word of warning here – if your table design has legs plumb to the floor, cut a taper on the inside – otherwise your table will look pigeon-toed. I have compensated for this with the 5° splay. This gives the table an elegant 'grounded' look with the splay out from the table ends, though not enough for a person to trip over or interfere with a chair.

The curve for the tabletop was compass scribed on the sides, then using a combination square, staged increments drawn on the tabletop (**photo 9**). The spacing of these are not important but they are critical in 'keeping the line'. The curve needs to be kept true along its length. If you lose that reference you won't get it back, and inaccuracies along that curve will be very apparent once a finish is applied.

I used a router to move the bulk of the waste (**photo 10**), then incrementally brought the curve down to the line with a hand plane (**photos 11, 12**). I cleaned off any stepping and finish sanded with a long sanding block, ensuring I keep the curve true (**photo 13**). Using a power plane here could be considered a low level criminal offence.

The underside of the tabletop sides are then ripped at 30° on the tablesaw, slightly oversized. This angle takes all the visual weight out of the top's


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appearance leaving a 3mm knife edge. Legs are now glued to the underside of the top (**photo 14**). The underside curve of the top is now brought down to and married into the leg curve with a convex spokeshave and carefully let in with rasping and hand sanding (**photo 15**). Highly satisfying.

A 60mm deep 'floating' underframe was mounted under the tabletop with timber buttons, set well back from the ends and sides to give the table a light, weightless appearance (**photo 16**).

I applied two coats of satin hardwax oil and buffed with an open weave cloth until my arm was sore – this brings up a beautiful burnish on the curves, then finish with a silicon free natural wax (**photos 17, 18**).

Working to a detailed brief and understanding the medium will allow you to develop a design language for work that also has structural integrity.

*Photos: Jono Everett*
*Illustration: Graham Sands*

*Jono Everett @everett_creative is a furniture maker, artist and designer and co-manages the Soap Factory arts collective, Newcastle. You can read more about Jono's practice in AWR#123.*

**9.** Graduated lines are drawn on the edge and progressively shaped back to.

**10.** A router works to initially remove the bulk of the waste.

**11,12.** A handplane is an efficient way to next create the curves on the ends of the top.

**13.** The last stage is carried out with a sanding block and sandpaper.

**14.** Gluing the legs into the tabletop.

**15.** The curves of top are continued into the legs with a spokeshave, rasp and hand sanding.

**16.** The 'floating' underframe is an independent structure that is attached with table buttons.

**17.** Two coats of hardwax oil were followed by silicon-free wax which was further buffed.

**18.** The angled edge and curved ends of the top work to create slim lines.

# Dovetails in the Round

**Alex Peay tells how he came up with his turned and chiselled take on Sam Maloof's chair joint, and describes how to make one.**

**Main:** Alex Peay in his Spring, Texas workshop with the sample rotating joint.

1. Close-up of the author's rotating dovetail – a turned and chiselled evolution of Sam Maloof's chair joint.
2. Alex Peay's *Doberman chair* in hard maple and walnut, showing how the legs dovetail into the seat.

*Photos this page: Mike Roberts*

What is a rotating dovetail? The best way to describe the rotating dovetail joint is by comparing it to the joint most people are familiar with, the Maloof joint. Visually and in application, both joints are quite similar; the difference being the obvious addition of a dovetail, the rotational movement of assembly, and the structural benefit of its locking mechanism.

I'm Alex Peay, a Spring, Texas resident whose passions away from woodworking are music in all types and forms and…tacos. You'd be forgiven for assuming that I'm really just a simple man.

My path to this wood joint began in April 2020. The world was in the middle of a global pandemic. Through the chaos I was working retail at a hardware store and in desperate need for a cathartic outlet to quiet my mind. I found myself watching YouTube one evening and a video of someone making a chair caught my attention. I thought to myself, 'I bet I could probably do that'.

Armed with a limited set of tools I used while building fences, I began my woodworking journey. Very simply at first, making cutting boards. Then a workbench, and after that a headboard for my daughter's bed. With every project my skills improved. Fast forward to August 2021 and I completed my first chair. I was hooked.

Around that time, I was also learning how to hand cut dovetails. I was putting them everywhere just so I could practise. What was my next project going to be that I could put dovetails in? And then I came across a Maloof rocker. When the feeling of awestruck subsided the next thought surfaced quickly: Could I put a dovetail in a Maloof joint? Two years from that thought, shouldered with the drive, curiosity and passion I've met with every one of life's decisions, I answered, 'I bet I could probably do that', and I cut my first rotating dovetail. The sequence A–H overleaf shows the process on a sample joint.

## The equipment

First, I'll go over the tools I use: router table (dovetail and straight bit), lathe, drill press, forstner bits, track saw, flush cut saw, planes, chisels and card scrapers. I use these tools mainly because they are the ones I have access to and I'm most comfortable with, however some of these processes can be achieved in

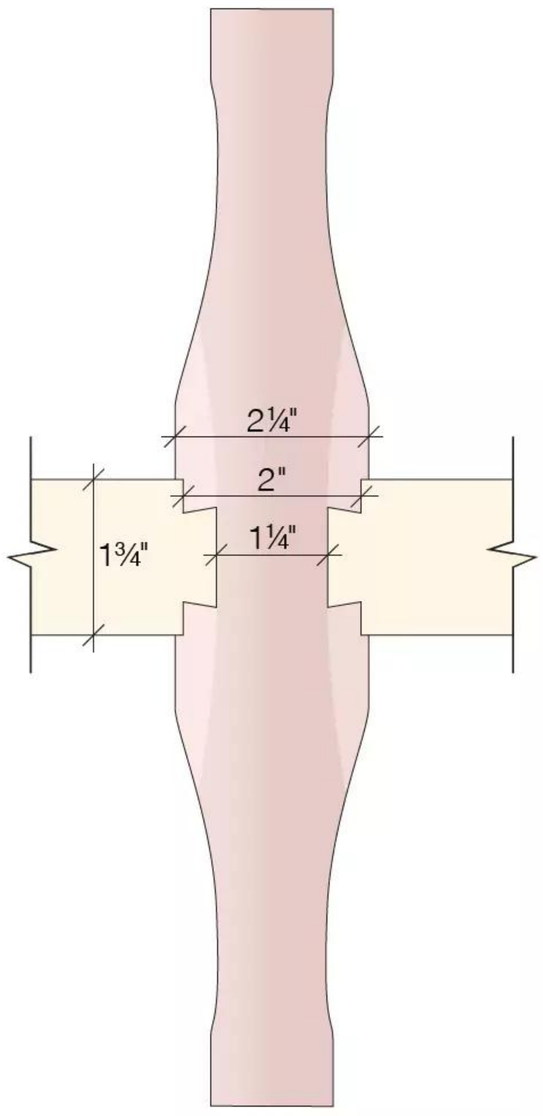





**Fig. 1** Dimensions, not to scale

**A.** The 2" outer diameter is cut 1-3/4" wide to equal the finished thickness of the seat. A 2" recess is drilled 1/4" deep from both sides with 1-1/4" hole.

**B.** A 5/8" wide slot is cut slightly larger than the inner diameter of 1-1/4". The seat socket is cut in half.

**C.** The inner diameter is defined to 1-1/4" using a dovetail bit while also widening the slot and cutting the dovetail angle. The ends are tapered.

**D.** Relief cuts are used to establish margins and give something to work towards.

**E, F.** The 'pins' are roughed out using planes, chisels and card scrapers.

**G.** The tail is cut with chisels after the pins are marked out and transferred over from the leg.

**H.** Showing the finished rotating dovetail joint sample in walnut and hard maple.

other ways. For instance, if I didn't have a lathe, I could buy round stock or use a dowel making jig. The drill press is convenient, but I could also use a hand drill. The joint consists of two pins cut into the leg, and one tail in the seat. Yes, it's only two pins and one tail – you can just see both ends in **fig.1**. I'll begin with square stock.

## Measurements and increments

Before I start any of the joinery, I need to know the finished thickness of the seat for a set of shoulders I'll add to the leg later in the process. For the seat thickness I'm shooting for around 1-3/4" or 45mm. Let me just take a second to say something that's probably pretty divisive in the States. If I could go back and buy all of my measuring tools in metric I absolutely would. Is 3/32 bigger or smaller than an 1/8? I know you had to think about it! However we use imperial measurements in the US, hence their use in this article.

Knowing the finished thickness of the seat I can start the leg portion of the joint. I'll be referring to three different diameters here: an inner 1-1/4" (32mm), outer 2" (51mm), and overall diameter 2-1/4" (57mm). The inner and outer diameter directly correspond to the size forstner bits used to cut the seat socket. The overall diameter can be any size that I want. The difference of the overall diameter and the outer diameter divided by two will be the width of the shoulder and will extend out over the seat as the joint is rotated together.

## Machining the parts

First I turn my overall diameter on the lathe. Next, I cut the outer diameter on the router table. I will position my fence, so the leg is centred over the straight bit. Stop blocks are used along the fence to keep my margins nice and crisp. I rotate the leg while keeping in contact with the table and fence as I move towards each stop block making sure to rotate the leg counter to the rotation of the router bit. When I'm done, my outer diameter along the length of the leg should be equal to the thickness of my seat (**A**).

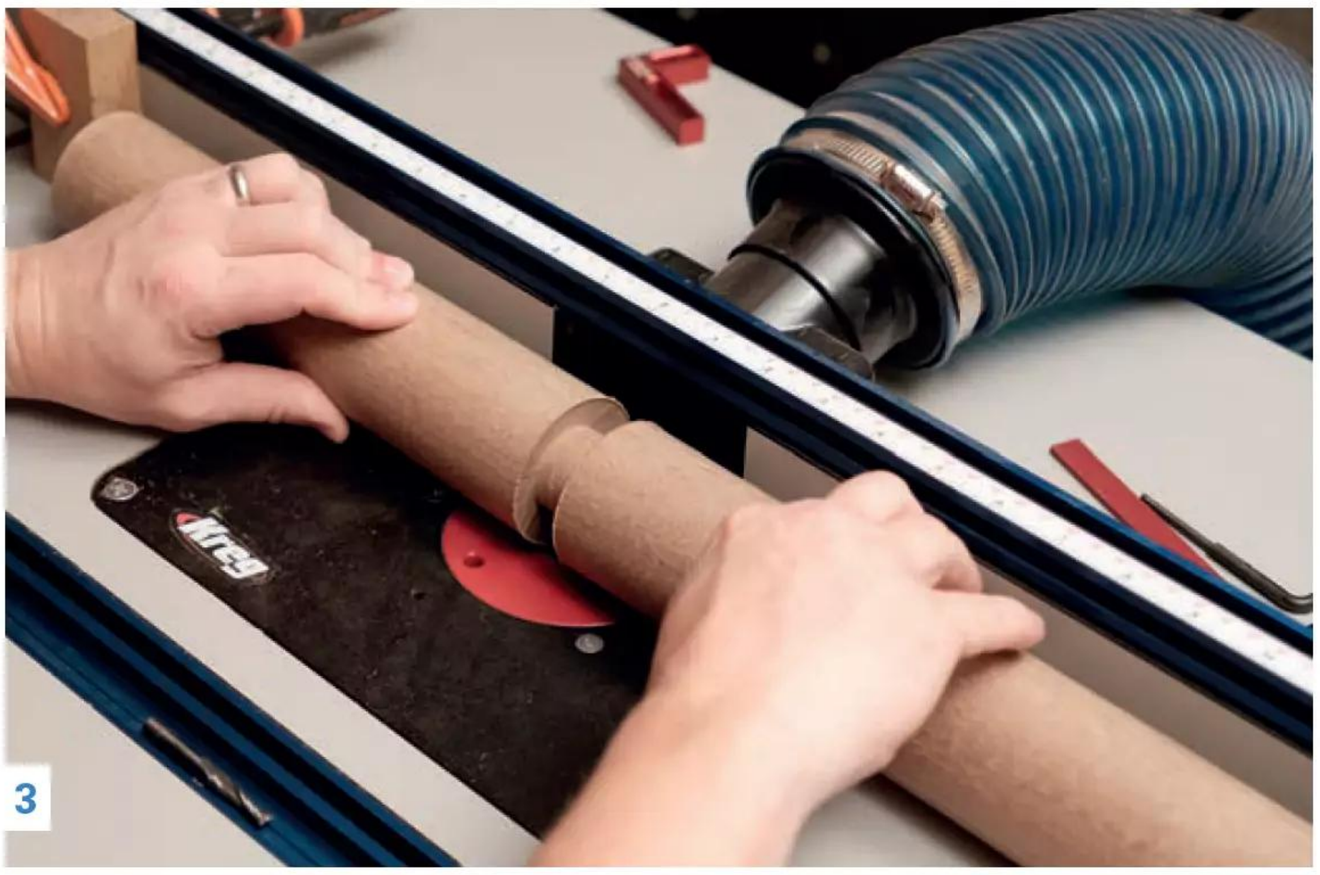






Now I need to cut a slot in the leg that's pretty close to my inner diameter. I do this on the lathe. The width of the slot for me is just wide enough to get my dovetail bit into the slot safely (**B**). I then take the leg back to the router table. I'll raise my dovetail bit incrementally to define my inner diameter. Then, using stop blocks again, I cut the dovetail angle in the pins. Again, I make sure to rotate the leg counter to the dovetail bit. The slot is then widened to about 7/8" (22.25mm) with the dovetail bit. Once the pins are cut, I take the leg over to the lathe and taper each end (**C**).

Then it's time to open up the joint. I will use my wagon vice for work holding. First I'll make two cuts to







give me something to work towards (**D**). I don't quite halve the joint as the edges tend to bruise when fitting. I'll plane down to my inner diameter and then use a series of chisels and a flush-cut saw to finish opening it up (**E, F**). Slowly I'll see the pins start to make their way to the surface. I keep it pretty rough at this point and will shape it into its final form after I've glued the joint.

## Cutting the 'tails'

It's time now to cut the tail portion of this joint. I'll be using a 2" and 1-1/4" forstner bit on my drill press to do most of the heavy lifting. When I first showed this joint to the internet, I got a lot of questions on how I cut the half circle. There are indeed many ways to cut a half circle. I found the easiest way for me was to cut a full circle and then cut that circle in half. There were also many suggestions on how to cut the circle with the dovetail angle included – all plausible, from a custom ground forstner bit to a custom ground rosette cutter.

I found the seat socket much easier to cut and more precise if I fit the tail to the pins by hand rather than using a custom ground cutter. It takes spindle runout and any mistakes I've made cutting the pins out of the equation as I'll transfer the pins onto the tail with a marking knife.

It's important as I cut the seat socket that I drill from the same position on each side of the seat. I mark out my socket locations meticulously for visual reference, but I rely heavily on stop blocks and a fence – especially since I need to switch from the 2" to 1-1/4" bit during this process and I'll lose any reference marks I've made.

The 2" bit is up first. The depth of this cut depends on how far apart you made the pins on the router table and how thick your seat is. For me it was about 1/4". After the 2" bit I'll move to the 1-1/4" bit. I will get some tear-out as I exit, but I'll be paring that off with a chisel in a moment. After the socket is cut then it's time to cut it in half. I use my track saw for cutting this joint in half, but I could use a tablesaw as well.

I'm on the home stretch now as I mark out the tail. I should be able to press fit snugly the leg into the seat socket and have it stay while I mark out the tail with a marking knife. Then I just go after it with my chisels. I use a template made with my dovetail bit to let me know when my angle is correct. Then I'll start to test fit. I make this fit extremely tight and a strap wrench gives me the leverage I need to make the rotations.

I'll end up burnishing the two surfaces as it rotates in to identify high spots and tend to them. It sounds like I'm breaking the joint during the fitting process, but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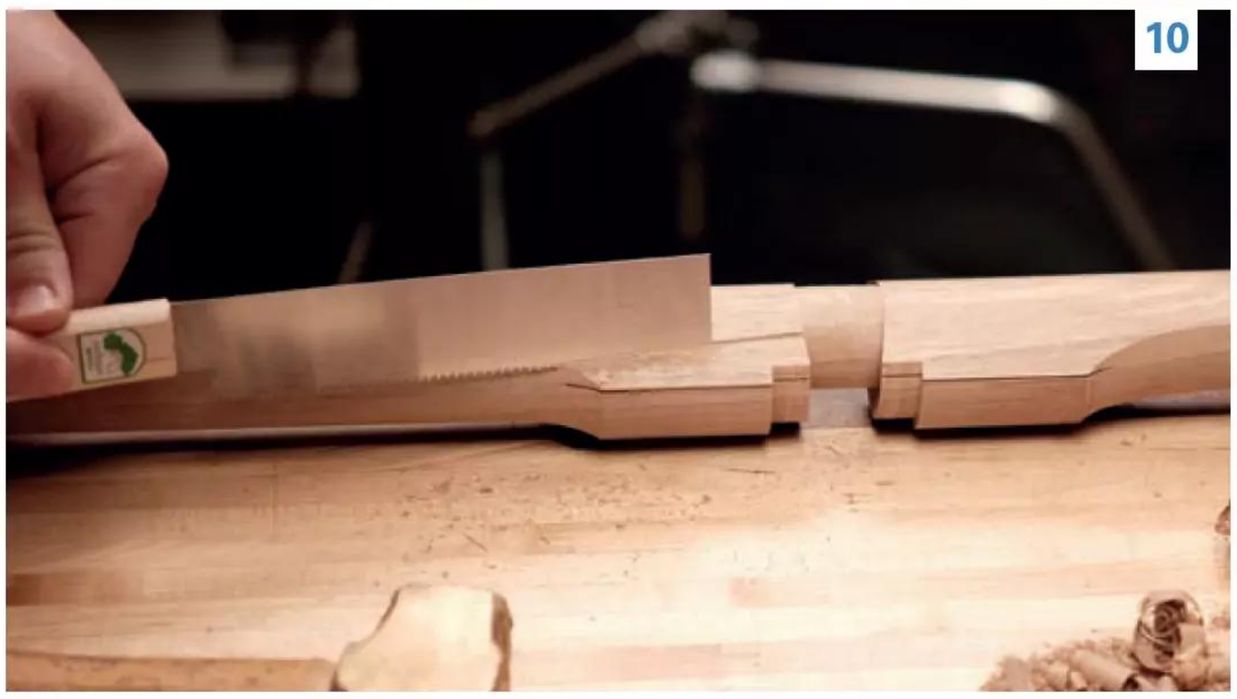
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3. Cutting the dovetail angle on the router table using a dovetail bit.
4. Marking out the 'tails' with a marking knife.
5. Planing down to the inner diameter to open up the joint.
6. Using chisels to continue opening the joint.
7. Using a 2" forstner bit to drill the joint socket on a seat blank.
8. A step is next created in the socket with a 1-1/4" forstner bit.
9. Chiseling the dovetail angle in the tail.
10. A flush cut saw finishes off the opening process.

honestly – I don't know what it would take to break one. The burnishing of the two surfaces also has another advantage when glue is eventually applied to the joint. The water in the glue will swell those burnished areas and gives extremely clean lines. The pins from the leg will be proud of the seat socket, but those areas are mostly full of bruises from the fitting process. I'll pare them down after glue (**G**) and then joint is complete (**H**).

## Frequently asked questions

Sometimes I'm asked about expansion and contraction of the wood as it goes through the seasons – won't it split? This is definitely a possibility, but let's take into account the shape of the joint and how a butterfly or bowtie is used in furniture.

I also get asked why I cut it into endgrain rather than side grain. The truth is that just happened to be how I cut it the first time, but there are some practical reasons why endgrain is advantageous. It allows for cleaner lines as I chisel out the tail. It also puts the location of any tearout from the 1-1/4" forstner bit to a portion of the joint that will not be seen and or pared away.

This joint is extremely challenging to make, but not unattainable. It has a lot of steps that include meticulous planning and foresight. Let me tell you though – the feeling of getting it right is unmatched in any other joinery I've completed. When I first started woodworking, I had one goal and that was to make something that would outlast myself, something tangible that my daughter could carry with her after I'm gone. I feel like I've done that here. I wish you the best and hope you find success not only in cutting this joint, but in all the things that give one purpose.

*Photos: Alex Peay*

*Alex Peay @peay.alex is a hardware store manager by day and a keen woodworker by night. Learn more at www.alexpeayfurniture.com and also on his YouTube channel @alexpeay where you can also watch the build process.*


# Slimline Shaves

**For more control on tight curves you can look to one of the new slimline spokeshaves now on offer. Review by Damion Fauser**

Spokeshaves are extremely versatile tools that see a wide variety of usage in my workshop. Shaves with narrower, rounded profiles excel at getting into tight curves such as sculpted joints for example – others use them for tasks such as guitar necks and cabriole legs.

For the last few months I've had the opportunity to road test three different offerings, the HNT Gordon small curved sole spokeshave and two others released to market in 2024 – the Caleb James cigar shave and the Ironbark Tools spokeshave.

After some research into the difference between a spokeshave and a cigar shave, it's evident to me these tools blur the line between the two, so I'll be referring to them as slimline shaves.

To test each tool I made a series of straight and curved cuts in both hard and soft woods, on surfaces and edges. From this I was able to gauge the quality of the cut surface, the ease with which the cuts were made, in addition to how easy the tools are to assemble, set up and adjust, and importantly, how each of them felt in the hand.

Rather than review each tool in turn, I've compared them head-to-head against key functional, design and ergonomic criteria.

Let me say, at the outset, that whilst these three tools have some clear differences, they all excel at their intended function – so I hope the following comments may help you to choose the one most appropriate for your needs.

## Design

For three tools essentially designed to do roughly the same thing, there are design differences that are immediately apparent. The HNT Gordon and the Ironbark are essentially metal-bodied tools with wooden handles attached, whereas the Caleb James is a wooden-bodied tool with an inset brass boxing strip and an attached blade.

The Caleb James and Ironbark are both designed with the blade inserted bevel down and a section of flat sole, allowing for on-the-fly, tactile adjustment of the depth of cut by rocking the tool forward and back. The HNT Gordon has a curved sole, meaning there is one engagement point required to be found to achieve a cut, and the blade can be mounted


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**Main:** 'Slimline' spokeshaves, designed for light and fine control. Top to bottom, Australian made Ironbark and HNT Gordon, and US-made Caleb James.

1. Innovative adjustment on the Ironbark shave. Twist the brass end knobs to secure and, if desired, skew the blade.
2. The Ironbark blade fits into a dovetailed keyway in the tool body and is stopped against two stainless steel screws.

bevel up or down, allowing for either a planing or a scraping cut.

The Caleb James is elegant in its simplicity, the HNT Gordon is intuitively simple and the Ironbark breaks new ground with some slightly more complex features that offer significantly more adjustability and in one case, basically eliminate one of the traditionally frustrating aspects of spokeshave use – disassembling the tool to clear a blocked mouth aperture.

The curved sole and narrow (9.5mm, 3/8") radius profile of the HNT Gordon allows for working into radii as tight as 12.7mm (1/2"). Both the Caleb James and Ironbark shaves have slight flat facets on the sole and slightly thicker bodies. The Caleb James is able to cut into 1-1/2" (38.1mm) curves. This metric for the Ironbark was not available at the time of printing.

## Ergonomics

For me the ergonomics of a tool come down to both technical metrics and the feel of the tool in the hand. Whilst all three tools are visually diminutive, their comparative metrics are substantially different.

The Caleb James is 247mm long and weighs a tiny 80g. It has two subtle yet immediately functional scallops on the front edge of the body that just invite a comfortable thumb placement – pick up this tool and it just falls into place in your hands. This tool is as light as a feather and incredibly comfortable to hold, meaning longer work sessions are not likely to result in any discomfort. It has an asymmetric profile though, and my impression is this tool is designed for using only on the pull stroke.

The Ironbark has distinctly more mass, coming in at 230g, giving a feel of heft and strength to throw the tool through rapid, coarse work. It is shorter than the others in length, so even with my small hands, I found I had my little fingers hanging off the end of the tool in use.

The cylindrical profile of the central part of the tool body provides a comfortable surface to rest the thumbs, and allows for slight adjustments of thumb position when rocking the tool back and forth to adjust shaving thickness on the fly. Whilst at first glance this tool could perhaps be used in both a push and pull stroke, I feel the protruding depth-setting screws are right where I'd want to rest my thumbs when holding the tool for a push stroke.

The HNT Gordon, like the Caleb James, is particularly light, coming in at a stated mass of 90g (the one provided to me weighed in at 87g on the digital scales) and is 235mm long. Some elegantly machined facets and curved sections on the handles, some of which beautifully transition from timber handles to the brass body, provide ample comfortable registration points for the thumbs in either the push or pull stroke. This is the narrowest of the three, with the main brass body measuring 12 x 12mm and tapering down the ends of the handles to 10 x 8mm. Whilst some with larger hands may find this difficult to grip with any strength, I don't see this as a downside as this profile means this tool almost demands to be held and used with a delicate yet effective touch.

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**3.** The Caleb James cigar shave is easy to adjust and takes wide cuts on a pull stroke.

**4.** Lightest of the three, the wooden-bodied Caleb James is comfortable to hold.

**5.** The HNT Gordon has a curved sole and the blade can be mounted bevel up or down to give planing or scraping cuts.

**6.** Assembly for the HNT Gordon is easy – insert the blade into the body and tighten the lever cap with two knurled brass lock bolts.

## The business end – the blade

My first impression is that each of the three blades will need to be sharpened freehand, with only the HNT Gordon blade having some potential to be held in honing guides. This is not a criticism, nor a reason to withhold from investing in one of these tools, I'm just making sure you're aware of what you're in for.

The HNT Gordon comes standard with an O1 blade, but many select the optional HSS blade. It comes with a 30° bevel and is 19mm wide and so can only be used to take relatively narrow cuts. It is mounted in the tool to achieve a 60° cutting angle, which is nice and steep to help minimise tear-out risk.

The working edge Caleb James O1 blade is 35mm wide, so this tool can take wide cuts where required. I'm pleased to see that the blade is beefed up to 1/8" (3.2mm) in this case, to minimise chattering in the cut.

The Ironbark blade is made from M2 HSS and the available cutting width is 45mm, wide for such a slim shave. It is beefy at 1/8" thickness and mounted to achieve an effective cutting angle of 35°, which is a lot lower than many other shaves. This allows for greater flexibility in adjusting the tool cut on the fly and also opens up better options for shaving cross- and endgrain surfaces.

## Assembly and adjustments

All three tools have markedly differing assembly processes and adjustment mechanisms.

The HNT Gordon blade is inserted into the body and two knurled brass lock bolts tighten the lever cap in place. Fast and simple. Depth of cut is adjusted manually and the blade can be skewed to one side slightly to allow for varying cut thickness from one side of the mouth to the other.

The Caleb James blade is a custom shape and has more width at the back end of the blade, with two slots machined front-to-back, one at each end. Two small screws lock the blade in place through these slots into metal threaded inserts. Again, nice and simple assembly, with manual cut


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depth adjustment and the ability to skew the blade.

The Ironbark is a totally different beast, and to the best of my knowledge incorporates some new thinking not seen in other shaves. The blade has bevelled edges, like a bench chisel, and is inserted into a dovetailed keyway and stopped against the flat bottom of two adjustable stainless steel screws, which control the blade protrusion.

The knurled brass knobs on the ends of the handles are attached to stainless steel rods with tapered ends. These rods run through the hollow centre of the timber handles into the tool body. Tightening the brass knobs and the ends of the rods engage and elevate stainless steel lugs which lock the blade against the dovetailed keyway. Not only does this rigidly secure the blade, reducing chatter, but it cleverly allows for the mouth opening to be skewed to match any chosen skew of the blade cut depth.

This is a very clever and conscious design feature that would largely eliminate the problem that many commercial shaves have, which is the mouth being clogged constantly because the mouth is too fine for the shaving being taken. This adjustment feature takes a little getting used to (and I mean 'a little', like 5 minutes) and works very well, and may well get this more expensive tool over the line for those who've been frustrated with clogged shaves in the past.

## Your choice

Designed to perform similar tasks, these tools are markedly different in some aspects, and subtly different in others. They all excel at cutting, and I've had a lot of enjoyment putting all of them through their paces. Ultimately, you wouldn't be disappointed with any of them in my opinion.

The Caleb James is a delight to hold, has a nice wide cutting edge, is easy to adjust, but is really only ergonomically-designed to cut on the pull stroke. The Ironbark offers a wide cut and a very shallow cutting angle, vastly improving the cut surface and opening up better options for cutting short and endgrain. It also offers an innovative and very effective multi-purpose adjustment capability but is perhaps a little short and less ergonomic in my view. I must stress this is a very personal, subjective observation and in no way does it detract from the performance of the tool.

If it were me? I'd choose the HNT Gordon, primarily for the versatility it offers, being able to be used comfortably and effectively on either the push or pull stroke and because the blade can be reversed to achieve a scraping cut in sections of tricky grain. It is in my view also the easiest to sharpen. Not as important in this decision, but it is also the more cost-effective tool of the three.

*Photos: Raf Nathan*

*Caleb James tools from calebjamesmaker.com*
*HNT Gordon from hntgordon.com.au*
*Ironbark from ironbarktools.com.au*

*Damion Fauser is a Brisbane designer maker who also teaches woodwork classes, see https://www.damionfauser.com/*

# Inspired by Nature

**An interview with South Gippsland based woodcarver, Olivia O'Connor discusses her background and influences.**


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**Main:** Olivia O'Connor in her studio workshop in South Gippsland, Victoria.

1. *The Joy and Sheer Terror of Swooping Season*, 2024, carved and painted magpies
2. *Yellow Sky, Swallow Fly*, 2024, woodblock print
3. *Eagle Hill*, first place Neerim Bower Small Sculpture Prize, 2024
4. *Where Eagles Soar*, 2023, blackwood, 920mm and 780mm 'wingspans'. 'The sight of wedge-tailed eagles soaring high above and their shadows dancing across the landscape fills me with awe. Through my work I explore the connection between humans, nature, and enjoy the constant inspiration it provides.'

Often we explore different avenues in life to settle on one that suits us. Olivia O'Connor is a wood sculptor and printmaker who undertook formal studies in furniture design and making at RMIT, and then studied prop making and scenic art at NIDA before creating her own career niche. We asked her about her inspiration and her working life.

*Birds, air and waterborne, frogs, rippling water, and 'big skies' often feature in your work. Why does nature inspire you?*

I think it's impossible not to be inspired by nature, especially as someone who works primarily with timber – a natural material. Working with timber requires treating it as a living material that reflects the environment in which it grew. Using those natural characteristics to inform my design decisions creates a connection to nature that is central to my work.

*What was life in the theatre world like?*

I loved the work, but I struggled with the disposable nature of the industry, particularly from an environmental perspective. Some of my favourite jobs were working as a saddle maker for the New York production of *War Horse* while in the props department at the Royal National Theatre in London. I also loved painting sets for various operas at Opera Australia. Making props for *This is Our Youth* involved practically living at the Sydney Opera House for a month, which felt very special – even if I barely slept! It was far easier to cope with that pace in my twenties.

*What did set and prop building teach you?*

It taught me the importance of testing every process thoroughly, as you often get only one attempt to create or paint the final piece. Deadlines are tight, and you're frequently working with unfamiliar materials or techniques. Consistent, high-quality results are essential – if you don't deliver, you won't get hired again, and you risk delaying the entire production.

*How do you approach learning new skills?*

I love learning new skills and find that jumping in at the deep end is a great way to do it. It forces me to learn the core skill I'm pursuing and, more often than not, to solve unexpected problems along the way. That process broadens my knowledge and skill set in ways that playing it safe with little projects doesn't always achieve.


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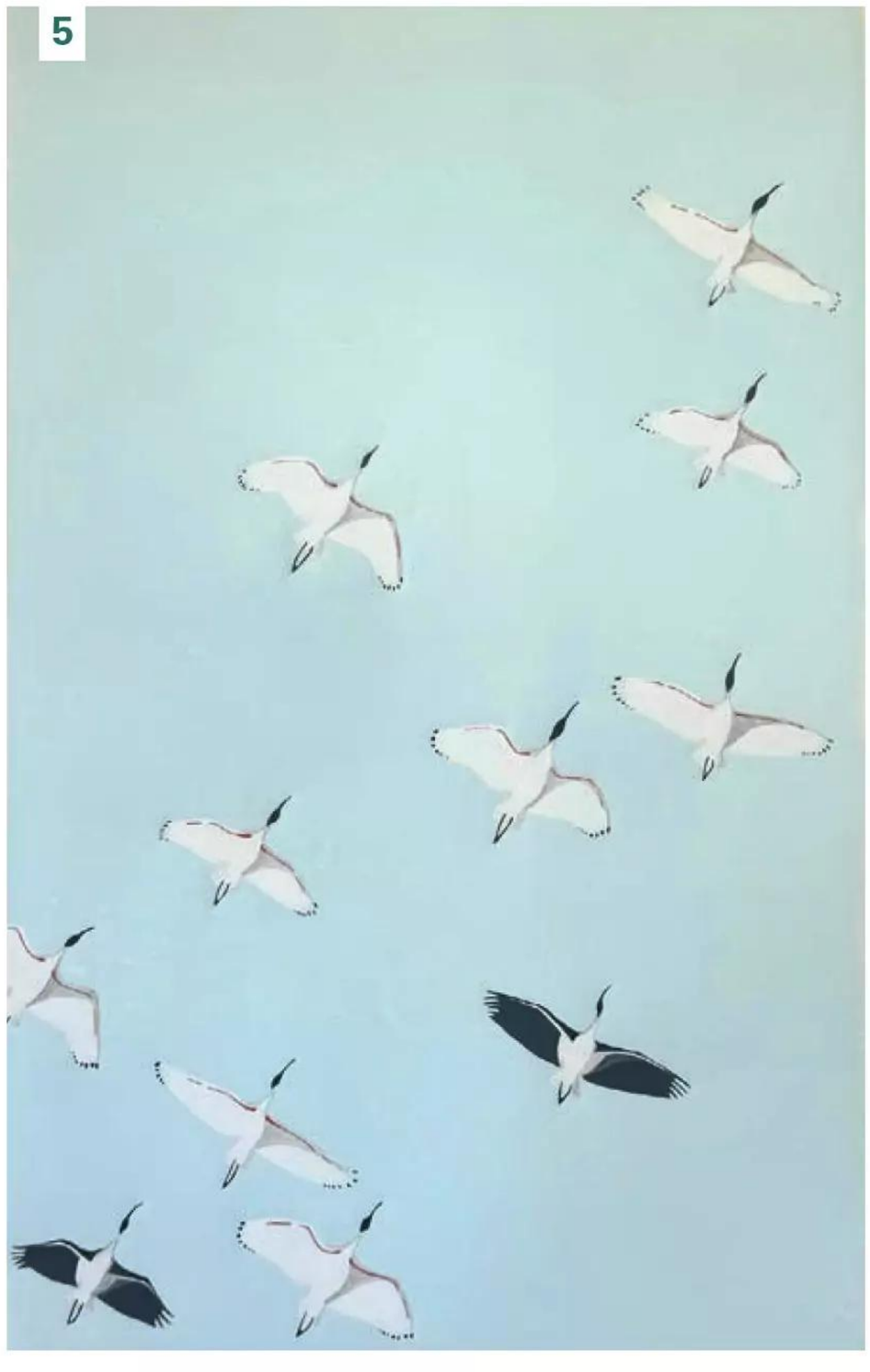




**5.** *Morning Flight*, 2025, woodblock print

**6,7.** Olivia O'Connor, *Heron*, 2020, storm-fallen golden wattle, 525mm high. 'I used the natural bend and twist in the timber to create the shape of the bird and let the natural colour difference between heart and sapwood become the focal point of the piece, emphasising the outline of the wings.'

**8.** Olivia O'Connor, *Little Frog. Big Climb*, 2024, Huon pine, 360mm high. 'Whilst being joyfully inspired by the nightly chorus of frogs near my workshop, this piece celebrates the beauty and fragility of our natural world.'

**9.** *Frog and Three Lily Pads*, 2024, recycled Huon pine

*Why rocking horses? What prompted the change?*

Everyone loves a rocking horse – how could you not? I made my first rocking horse for my masterwork project at NIDA. In the final year, students are given time and a budget to teach themselves a new set of skills. I had experience in furniture making but hadn't tried woodcarving. Designing and carving a rocking horse was a great challenge, as was learning airbrushing, leatherworking, and even some metalwork. I also had to work with animal hair for the first time.

I love that rocking horses require so many skills and materials to come together seamlessly. They're treasured heirlooms, and everyone seems to have a fond memory of a rocking horse – whether they had one as a child or knew someone who did. I've been making and restoring rocking horses full-time since 2013.

*How popular are rocking horses? Do you make many?*

They're a lot more popular than most people think! I used to make more new rocking horses, but in recent years I've shifted my focus to restoration work. I still take on the occasional new commission, especially if the horse has a unique story, but restoration is the bulk of my work now, and I love it.

*How long does it take to make a rocking horse? Can you outline the basic process?*

It takes me about a month to create a custom heirloom rocking horse, including painting and hand-stitching the saddle. I also run a five-day rocking horse class where participants carve their own horse (a simpler version of my style). I teach them painting techniques, and they take their horse home to finish with the provided hair, tack and stand.

Most people are surprised to learn that rocking horses are hollow and

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made from multiple parts. I start by cutting out the components using a bandsaw and tablesaw, then carve and shape them with a flexible drawknife, gouges, and rasps.

After assembly, I refine the shape, sand (a lot!), and prepare for painting. Once painted (which takes at least a week), I attach the mane and tail, hand-stitch the saddle and bridle, and make the stand – including bending and welding the swings.

*What are your priorities when restoring rocking horses?*

Yes, I love restoration work. It's a huge privilege when people trust me with a treasured family heirloom. Sentimentality is often a priority for clients, and many want a sympathetic restoration that honours their childhood memories.

Sympathetic restoration involves preserving original paint and repairing any damaged areas. I match missing paint sections by hand, and I ensure that the hair, stand, and tack are faithful to the original maker's style. It's important to retain the horse's character and age while making it safe to ride.

I also enjoy commissions where clients ask me to paint a rocking horse to resemble a real horse from a photo as this truly makes the horse one of a kind and they come with some great stories.

*What's your workshop like? What sort of machinery and tools do you use?*

I rent a shed from my aunt and uncle, where I work and run classes. Over the past 12+ years, I've built a collection of new and secondhand tools and machinery to suit my needs.

My most commonly used machines are my tablesaw and bandsaw. As for hand tools, my carving gouges are my favourites – and I suspect my collection will never be complete.

*With your other carvings, how would you describe your style? What sort of aesthetic are you chasing?*

I would describe my sculptural work as gentle carvings inspired by nature. I love reading the timber and letting its unique features guide the shape and style of my carvings. I am not consciously chasing an aesthetic, preferring to let my work change and grow.

*Where did the interest in woodblock carving come from? How does your printmaking aesthetic differ from your carvings?*

I've always loved art, but I work best in three dimensions. Woodblock carving and wood engraving feel like three-dimensional processes that result in two-dimensional art. I enjoy experimenting with colour and the challenge of multi-layered reduction printing.


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*In basic terms, how does woodblock carving differ from other forms of woodcarving?*

For woodblock carving, you can use the same gouges as in other types of carving, as you're working with the long grain of the timber.

Wood engraving, however, requires a different set of tools and is done on the endgrain. Fruit woods are ideal for engraving because of their tight, consistent grain, which allows for very fine detail.

Both woodblock carving and engraving are reductive processes – removing material to create a shape – which contrasts with additive processes like sculpting in clay.

*Your work covers many areas, and you also teach. Is this what it takes to make a living?*

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**10.** *Hippocampus*, 2024, jelutong, copper leaf, varnish, metal, oils, artist oils, 1710mm h x 400mm wide x 620mm long. 'It may look like a gentle giant, but the hippocampus is one of the fiercest and most loyal creatures of Greek mythology.'

**11.** *Hippocampus,* carving in-progress

**12,13.** Before and after restoration views of a dappled rocking horse by Olivia O'Connor.

**14,15.** Olivia O'Connor, *Walnut Hands*, 2020, American oak, 350mm wide. 'Carved by my two hands, and modelled on my father's hands and my own.

**16.** *Onwards*, 2023, woodblock print

**17.** *Where The Hills Kiss The Clouds*, 2022, wall mounted woodcarving, blackwood and gold leaf

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*What do you love doing most?*

I enjoy having a varied workload and love teaching. Sharing my skills with others keeps my work fresh, and I'm always excited to start the next project. The job I'm currently working on is often my favourite – though if I did just one thing all the time, I'd probably want to try something new.

*Are there any artists and craftspeople that inspire you?*

So many! People often tell me that my wood engravings and prints have a distinct traditional Japanese feel, which I find interesting because I don't consciously aim for that aesthetic. Honestly the list could go on for days, currently my favorite wood engraver is Molly Lemon. I also admire the gentleness of Chris Pye's woodcarvings.

*What has taught you the most as a woodcarver and artist?*

I'm largely self-taught, which is one reason I enjoy running classes – I couldn't find any when I was learning, so I relied on YouTube, but I prefer in-person instruction. I've learned invaluable tips from woodcarvers like Mary May, Jeff Donne, Carol Russell, Claire Minihan and Amy Umbel. A fellowship in the US allowed me to learn painted timber restoration techniques from carousel restorer Rosa Patton.

*Where do you see your work heading in the next 5 to 10 years?*

I see myself continuing to work with rocking horses, teaching carving and exhibiting my sculptures and prints in galleries. I'd like to improve my metalworking skills and incorporate more of that into my sculptural work.

*What advice do you have for those wanting to learn?*

Just get started, and don't be too precious about it. Invest in a small set of good-quality gouges rather than a large set of cheaper tools. If possible, take a class with an instructor who understands your goals. The best lessons come from mistakes – understanding why something went wrong is more valuable than having everything go smoothly.

*What's the best thing about woodworking in your opinion?*

It's taken me places and introduced me to people I never expected to meet. I love working with my hands to shape such a beautiful natural material and being part of that connection to the landscape.

*Photos: Olivia O'Connor*

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*Learn more about Olivia O'Connor via @oliviaoconnorcarving and www.oliviaoconnor.com.au This year Olivia will demonstrate at Lost Trades Fair in Bendigo and also teach alongside US woodcarver Mary May for Wood Dust in Melbourne and Perth.*

# The Maker's Mark

**Acknowledging the identity of the maker is an essential part of the handmade story and to the meaning of craft. Luke Batten explains.**


## Initial brand

My own maker's mark is underpinned by simplicity; designed to be unique, tactile, derived from my own hand, efficient to apply, repeatable, hard to remove, long-lasting and one that doesn't distract from the made object.

Since childhood I have drawn, and over time I started to sign my sketches with my initials. These quickly became the most obvious choice for my branding and also my makers mark. The exact letter forms were informed by my industrial design studies where I learnt architectural printing, albeit crudely.

The design for my maker's mark has gone through two iterations, with more likely to occur in the future. The first was a full-sized scan of my initials and the second was a smaller scaled version for smaller work. From each design, an electric branding iron insert was machined from solid brass to create efficient, repeatable, and tactile impressions on my work, and provide a lasting link between me and the object.

**Main:** The making of Roy Schack's maker's mark, which is inlayed in his work. *Photo: Roy Schack*

**Above left:** *Fragment* tables in walnut, American ash and glass. A single symmetrical and repeating module inspired by cell reproduction and the photomicrography of bone creates a series of customisable sculptural tables. *Photos: Rohan Thomson*

**Above:** Luke Batten's maker's mark and the branding tool and jig used to produce it. *Photos: Luke Batten*

Storytelling is an integral part of our culture. It touches nearly every industry, drives decision making and forms our shared culture. Narrative is synonymous with craft. It is the essential characteristic in the creation and marketing of craft. Offering genuine authenticity and greater emotional connection, craft leverages narrative to be uniquely bespoke and deeply personal.

Abundance created through commercial design and mass production intensifies the desire for objects to offer more than mere practical benefits – for narrative. We yearn for meaning. Objects that inspire and captivate us, that we identify with, and objects that convey our values are increasingly sought.

Craft and craftsmanship are inseparable. Authorship is not only central to craft but also a cornerstone of the craft story. In fact, every creative industry is established around authorship. However, as creative industries increasingly rely on other people or use nontraditional making systems to realise their work, authorship and attribution becomes complicated.

Each contribution made in the development of a piece of work helps bring it to life, even those that appear insignificant. Yet, in many creative contexts attribution is simply inadequate, and individual contributions are often neglected.

Craftspeople of all mediums appear to sit in a grey zone of poor attribution. It is odd, as undoubtedly

## Inlayed symbols

In our world of woodworking, being able to mark your work with some form of personal signature speaks volumes as to how you value your craft and how you want the world to perceive it. It also unquestionably brands your work as your own.

Maker's marks can take so many forms, and I love checking out those of other makers. Metal stamps leaving beautifully crisp marks, branding irons burning into the fibres of the wood, badges or medallions laser printed or engraved, or even simple signatures with dates and locations. These little bits of information add gravitas and are a seal from the maker to say to the eventual owner, 'you have a piece of my original work, and with it, you have a piece of me'.

My favourite marks are those that tell a story and are synergistic with the piece they are representing. Marks that are crafted or carved and incorporated into the body of the work in such a way that they are difficult to remove. They become one with the work and reflect the personality of the practitioner.

My maker's mark has evolved over time. It has always been a very simple affair, with three sterling silver pins forming a triangle. The three dots, or points of the triangle represent my three influences in furniture design: Shaker style, Danish design and the Japanese sense for objects in space – or *ma*. I designed it in 1994, whilst a student at the Sturt School for Wood. My teacher, Tom Harrington told me that if I'm proud of my work, then I should put a mark on it – my mark. It was quite a memorable moment for me.

The mark itself has changed ever so slightly to be embedded into a tapered plug, typically endgrain for contrast, domed over, then inserted somewhere inconspicuous, in the main body of the piece.  somewhere close enough for inquisitive fingers to feel its smooth dome.

My sentiment towards maker's marks is similar to Tom's. Be proud to show the world that you back yourself with your abilities. It shows confidence, and clients love that.

*Roy Schack @bluecheak, www.royschack.com*

the realisation of any design is equal to or greater than the idea, and after all an unrealised idea is just that.

### Narrative

The persistent romanticism of the handmade creative process, relating to creativity, skill and production, makes craft compelling. This creation process is a rich pre-purchase narrative – who designed it, how it was designed, how it was made, the tools and techniques involved, and the materials used. Not surprising then, is the post-purchase narrative that develops between user and craft object. The depth of this shared experience is distinct to handmade craft objects, connecting craftsperson with user through the object.

Even as the divide between craft and design progressively widens, one part of the story remains mutually significant – authorship, which acknowledges the contributions made to create original work. In academia, authorship is embraced with every contribution appropriately acknowledged. Although, within creative industries this tends to manifest as 'selective attribution', particularly as the number of individuals involved increases – one contribution is emboldened over another, or contributors are completely omitted.

The shift in Western culture to value knowledge workers over blue-collar workers is part of this story, signalling perhaps that ideas are valued first and foremost. Knowledge workers such as designers are highly regarded, yet craftspeople who emphasise physical creation but also operate as narrow knowledge workers appear to be less valued. With surprising consistency physical creation is overlooked as a form of knowledge work – production design.

Traditional craft emphasises maker authorship, while mass production

**Above:** Showing details of Roy Schack's furniture with his inlaid maker's mark. *Photos: Roy Schack and Jesse Smith*





**This page:** Furniture by Rolf Barfoed is credited with the names of the client/s, designer and maker. *Louvre* bedside and *Resolution* table both in Tasmanian oak, both in Tasmanian oak. *Photos: Lightbulb Studio*



typically neglects the maker(s) in favour of design authorship, or diminishes all contributions through wider brand attribution. This suggests that selective attribution is intentional and is used as a marketing lever determined by perceived consumer value.

To this end, brands emphasise front-end values (lifestyle aspirations), mirroring consumer demand, where price point and transactional personal benefits take priority. While craftspeople tend to engage with back-end aspects, to accentuate process, construction and materiality.

Each industry doubles down on what makes it distinct – a narrative around concept design or a narrative around production design and material. Attempting to accentuate these aspects for greater appeal.

## My own label

I employ a team of craftspeople who make work designed by me and by others. For the last few years, I have labeled my furniture with the names of the patron, designer, maker and the place and year of its creation.

Including the team member's name on the label acknowledges their contribution. It shows my appreciation for their effort, and it even helps to inspire their craftsmanship. The craftsman's reputation is at stake as much as the designer's. Adding a label also makes me and my team accountable to the patron. Labeling work is akin to wearing a name badge in retail.

The label makes it easy to connect with the original business, designer and/or maker for informed maintenance advice. In the past, people have previously reached out to me, telling me they flipped a chair and found my contact details on the underside of the seat. I want future generations to understand the provenance of the piece and (hopefully) continue to enjoy the furniture.

I'm still chasing the dream. Searching for my signature; a distinct cabinetmaker's aesthetic. My furniture should be innovative, useful, and easy to live with. Developing a recognisable style takes persistence and I'm working towards a bigger body of work.

*Rolf Barfoed @rolfbarfoed, www.rolfbarfoed.com.au*

**Right:** Leon Sadubins' stamped bowsaw and 'bench bird' logos, and an image of one of the benches he made for Parliament House, ACT. *Photos: Leon Sadubin*



## Memorable logos

In 1977 I started working as a self-employed furniture maker. An early task was to design a maker's mark which would give my work individuality. A mark that could be stamped on my crafted creations, drawn or printed on labels, on marketing materials and on signage.

I liked the concept of a bowsaw – a well made wooden frame tensioning a sawblade held with turned handles. It would make a memorable logo. Applying for a trademark seemed a logical process so I got my drawing of a bowsaw registered. It took about six months to jump through the hoops.

I then had a punch made up by an engraver so I could make a permanent mark on endgrain and add a date with individual punches. The bowsaw logo appeared on all my work, on my stationery, business cards, my truck and workshop signage. It made an impression – work flowed in. I had an identity!

The name of the workshop was Wood Works and my business name was Leon Sadubin Designs. Both names were registered. In 1990 my wife Ginny and I set up a specialist shop in our Thornleigh workshop showroom. We called it The Woodworks Book and Tool Co. We thought it would be appropriate to use the bowsaw as the logo for the shop as well.

In 1997 we decided to sell the business and return to full time making and realised we had to say farewell to our trusty bowsaw logo. My design for the bench seats I made for the new Australian Parliament House had a distinctive end shape – that of a bird flying. Thus in 1998 was born the new maker's mark, the 'bench bird'.

*Leon Sadubin @leonsadubindesigns, www.leonsadubin.com.au*

## Matters of credit

Attribution matters because people matter. Within our culture the importance of authorship cannot be understated. Throughout history we persist in glorifying the singular creative genius. We idealise the notion of the self-made person and the lone creative prodigy. There is a much wider picture here though, one where it takes groups of people and multiple viewpoints to make large creative breakthroughs.

Large projects are susceptible to non-attribution or selective attribution despite typically involving multiple people in their creation. It is common with selective attribution, for the availability of information to be condensed or omitted depending on how and where a project is engaged with.

Misleading consumers through selective attribution occurs because there is no standard or guidance on what attribution should look like. Surprisingly, it takes place across the entire creative landscape, from individual makers to small business to national projects and galleries.

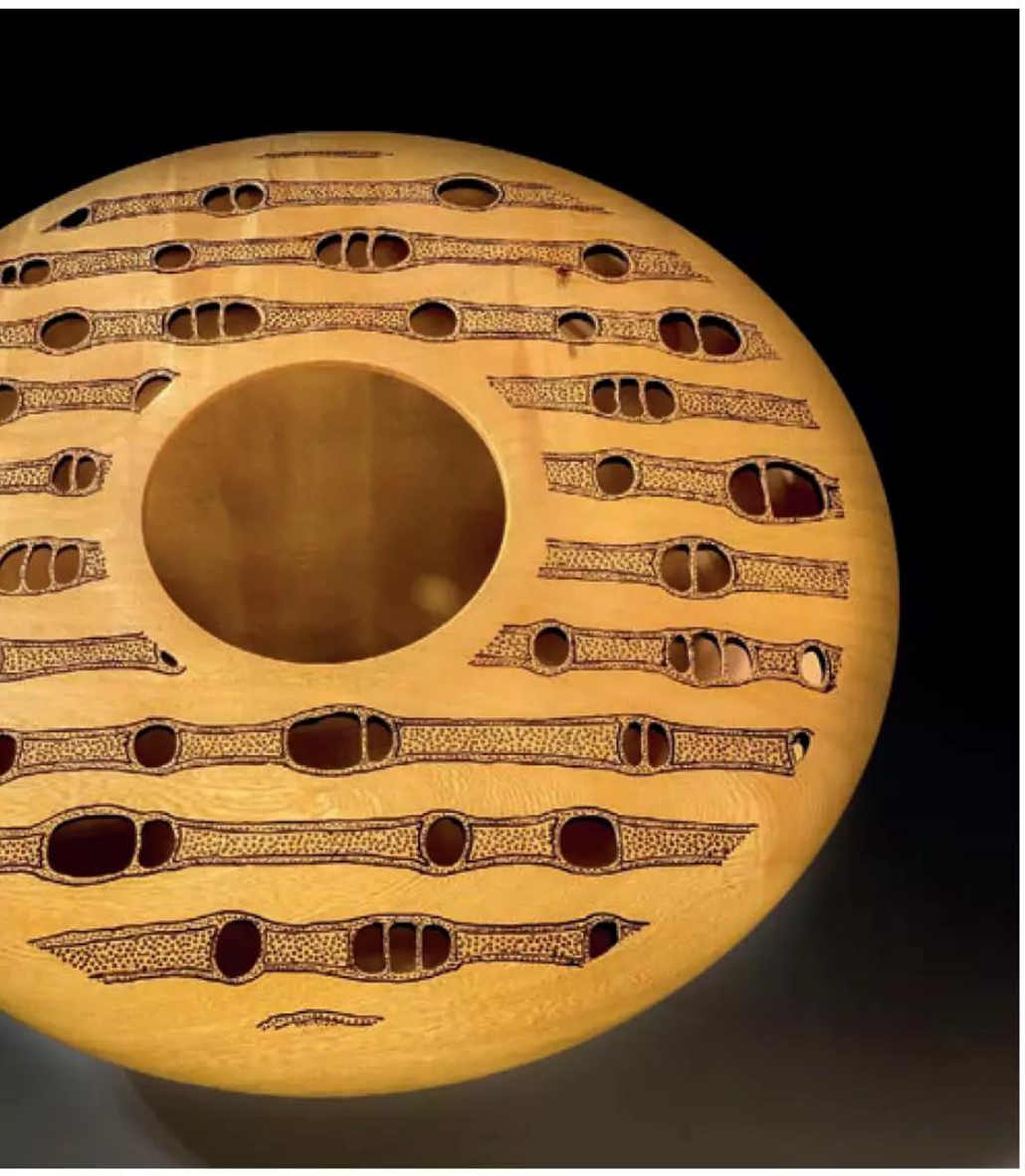
If making is essential to the creation of any artwork or object, non-attribution suggests that an individual's production expertise is replaceable or interchangeable. However, this is a grey area, as makers, just as people, aren't interchangeable and measuring expertise between makers is incredibly complex.

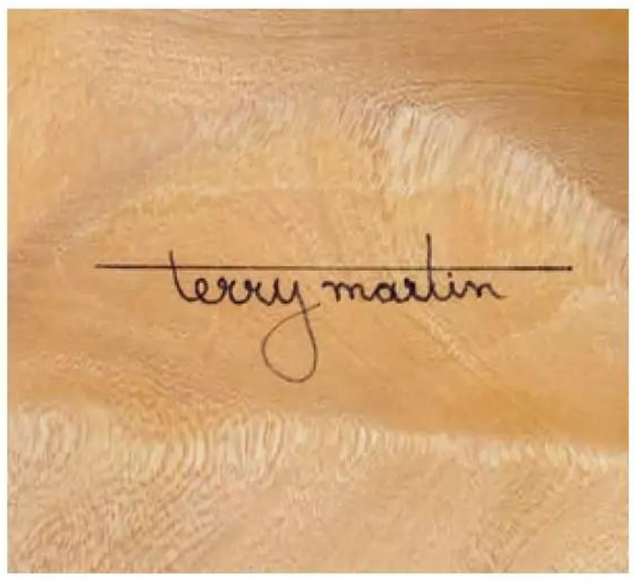
It is a curious dichotomy – nowhere is authorship more important than in our creative fields, yet this is where poor attribution persists. Artistic authorship is significant as true creativity is ambiguous and non-formulaic.

In a craft context, selective attribution or non-attribution is a missed opportunity. It demonstrates a certain level of disregard for that person, their profession, their contribution. More severely though, it is a rejection of craft at its core – the craft message is lost, and the central craft tenants, such as integrity, and authenticity, are called into question.

## Branding

Attribution has an important role to play in building reputation. Within the






**Left and above:** Terry Martin, *Heart of the Tree*, jacaranda, 450mm dia, 350mm high, walls 5mm thick. The pierced pattern is an enlargement of a microscopic image of the cell structure of jacaranda wood. The maker's signature shown is on the underside.

*Photos: Terry Martin*

creative industries, as reputation builds, authorship value grows in parallel. For late career artists, who have established their credentials through a body of work, exhibitions and competitions, reputation and authorship drive the perceived value of their work.

Within a craft context, physical branding, or a maker's mark, may be the most rudimentary from of attribution. It is a physical signature, a communication tool, implying where and how something is created. More significantly however, it should represent exactly who created it, linking object and maker for the life of the object.

Each object expresses qualities that are linked with the maker, including aspects like design, aesthetics, quality, style, structure, and function. For independent makers, these qualities and what they communicate, help to develop reputation, and ultimately forms their perceived brand. A maker's mark is another element that contributes to this story. Its design and type ideally complement and reflect these values.

Regardless of what from it takes, a physical signature is essential. It is at the heart of all creative work, forming a vital layer in the narrative that craft consumers seek.

## Attribution matters

Authorship and attribution are an important part of recognising and promoting the unique skills and knowledge that individual makers and local manufacturers bring to their craft.

The lack of standards in creative industries for authorship and attribution, leaves industries to self-determine and self-regulate what is considered appropriate. In a contemporary world where social media and artificial intelligence clouds the origins and production of creative work, it is up to designers, artists, and craftspeople to provide clarity on who or what has made the objects they produce.

*Luke Batten @lukebatten handcrafts bespoke objects in Ngunnawal country. He has worked as a product designer and a graphic designer, and taught design, sketching and illustration at university level. Learn more at www.lukebatten.com*

## Signed by hand

When I decided to become a full-time woodturner in the 1980s I realised that I would need to sign my work clearly. My usual handwriting is bad and my signature is illegible, so I tried to produce a flowing signature in keeping with my hand-worked bowls. I had a vague idea that the words 'Terry Martin' should be able to flow together, but the capitals seemed to interfere with that. I tried writing my full name in lower case and immediately saw that the crossed 't' in both my family and given names could be linked together by extending the crossing across the whole signature. I practised and practised till I could get it right every time, and I have never changed my signature since then.

So how do I make my signature on the wood? Pyrography and engraving are both good choices because they work on most woods and are permanent. But I tried them and found it hard to get the flow that a pen will offer. I decided indelible pens might work, so I tried different permanent markers. Some, such as Sharpies, leave a metallic sheen that looks odd, but over the years I have narrowed my choice down to Artline Drawing System pens with 0.8mm tips, or Staedler Pigment Liners with 0.5mm tips. I draw a straight line with a ruler, then place the bowl on a table ready to write. I always take the time to calm myself because a hurried job can leave unsightly lines. If I mess up the signature, I sand it off and do it again. My usual finish is Penetrol or Kunos oil. I apply that first finish over the signature, which preserves it very well. I sometimes buff my work and then buff on hardening carnauba wax. However, I don't buff the signature as it can remove the writing, but I do apply the wax over it. If I use a wood that is too dark to see the signature, I will use pyrography or scribing with a high-speed rotary tool.

I gave so much attention to developing my maker's mark because it is the most immediate and durable advertising, and it cost me almost nothing. For me, the calm act of writing my name on the wood is a logical finishing flourish to the craftsmanship that I try to bring to all of my work. I like to think of the thousands of pieces I have made, many of them still out there advertising my work.

*Terry Martin,*
*terrymartinwoodartist.com*

# The Ceremony of Desires

**Vasko Sotirov's sculptural cabinet symbolises how the many paths of a life journey can come together as one.**

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When you were a little kid, did someone asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up? I'm guessing your answer is not what you do for a living today. If I got that wrong I'm very envious, but if I'm right, there is one thing we have in common.

The reality is we make a lot of choices throughout our lives and typically we rarely know what the right option is. Sometimes we make the wrong choice, then pick a different one, and before we know it, years have gone by. This is a story about a piece I made that symbolises exactly that.

## Many paths

I'm 35 and have undertaken quite a few different paths that ended up being dead ends. Like a job, or personal relationships, or even hobbies that I didn't enjoy so much. It sounds depressing, but not if you look at the broader picture.

The question here is, why should someone follow a path? In my case, I'm looking for something… happiness! Put simply, I'd say that my life is one very exciting pursuit of desires. Walking a path, chasing desires that at some point might turn into reality. Collecting them as if they were the treasures of life.

This is the very same conversation I was having with a friend and apparently our thoughts resonated so much that at some point he asked me to make him a piece that celebrates the fulfilment of desires. The idea of a little chest of drawers popped up in my head immediately. A particular one though, made up of many legs and disconnected drawers. The legs, all pointing in different directions to better represent the different paths in one's life, and a bunch of sparse drawers symbolising the desires that were fulfilled along the way. All intricately bonded together.

## Stories within

As I worked on a small-scale mock-up, an unexpected visitor to my workshop made everything that much better. Primo Formenti is an artist friend of mine, who creates three-dimensional abstract paintings that he calls *racconti*, literally 'tales'. A serendipitous encounter, the dream in the drawer, weird cabinet had its content. I asked him to recount some of his desires through a series of small paintings that I wanted to enshrine inside my creation.

**Main:** Vasko Sotirov's *Ceremony of Desires* was conceived to represent the union of many life paths.

1. This piece consists of a series of boxes, each unique but connected by means of routed channels and metal fixtures.
2. The dovetailed boxes are made mostly of cherry with sycamore details.
3. Design began with an idea, then sketches and a mock-up to work out a multitude of angles. Each box contains its own story in the form of a small painted *racconto*.

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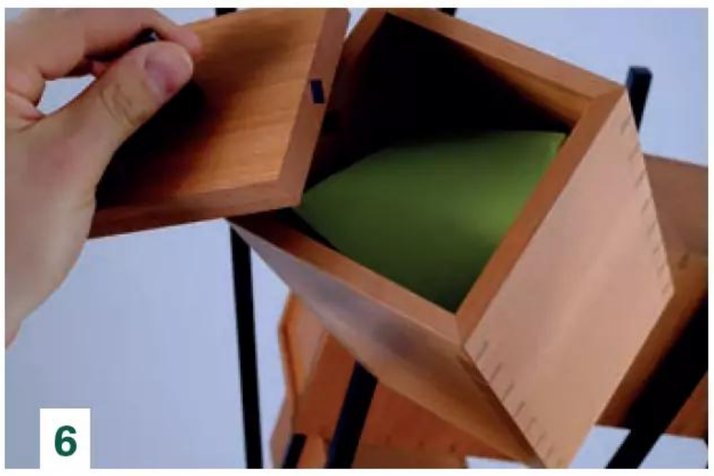
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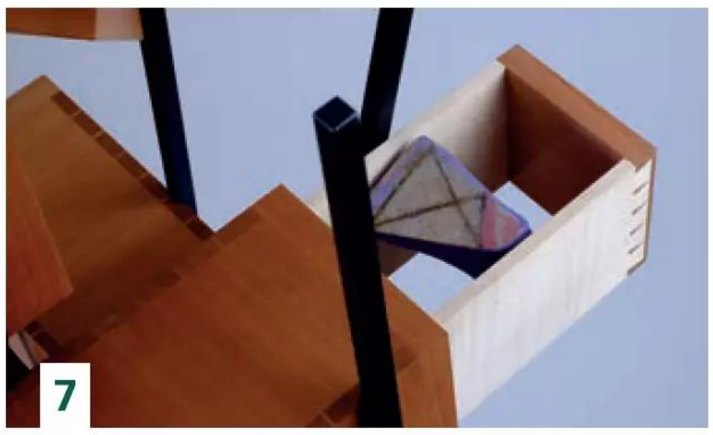
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**4.** Each drawer is different, this one has a parquetry cover which slides open.

**5.** This drawer has a pull-to-open hinged drawer front.

**6.** The top of this 'drawer' has a front cover only

**7.** This drawer opens from the back when you push it inwards.

**8.** Open the drawer, and the *racconto* rises up.

**9.** The inlaid polka dot interior is a gentle surprise.

**10.** The 'kumiko jail' drawer was an opportunity to play with lattice work.

**11.** When cutting the pins, I saw to just a tiny bit on the outside of the line.

**12.** I then pare with a chisel perfectly to the line.

**13.** I cut the tails first and clean the bulk of the waste out with a fretsaw.

**14.** A 45° jig with a sharp chisel helps to create a clean mitre.

**15.** Drawer carcase parts jointed and ready for assembly.

**16.** Careful work and it all comes together.

For a mock-up, I used cardboard and superglue for the drawers and thin strips of wood for the legs. The actual legs would be made from steel, as they represent the indelible past, but also because I had envisioned slender and fairly long elements. Somehow, I couldn't trust a 1500mm long leg that was 15 x 15mm thick made of wood.

Initially I decided to mitre solid cherry for the drawer cases, and I did, until ironically, I felt it was not the best choice and changed path. Fulfilling a desire typically takes time and effort but a mitred construction is not exactly time consuming. Enter the dovetails. Eight exquisitely dovetailed cherry drawers hanging on eight seemingly unrelated steel legs.

## Time to dovetail

I love dovetailing, as to me it's not just about the structural function of the joint, but rather about how the dovetails ornament a piece. For a fairly fine and delicate piece, I was not concerned with structural integrity. Let me clarify this – I have conducted quite a few experiments trying to understand just how strong dovetails are and my conclusions were always extremely surprising. I even ran my car over a small, dovetailed corner and it didn't break.

When I lay out the tails, all I'm concerned with is the way the joint looks. I sketch possible layout solutions to scale, varying the number of tails and their angle. Typically, I tend to prefer odd numbered tails, and in this case I wanted mitred corners for a more refined look as well.

After finishing the layout with a pencil, I cut the tails first and use a fretsaw to clean out the bulk of the waste. Then I use a chisel to perfectly remove the remaining waste down to the baseline. For the mitred look at the ends, you have to start and finish


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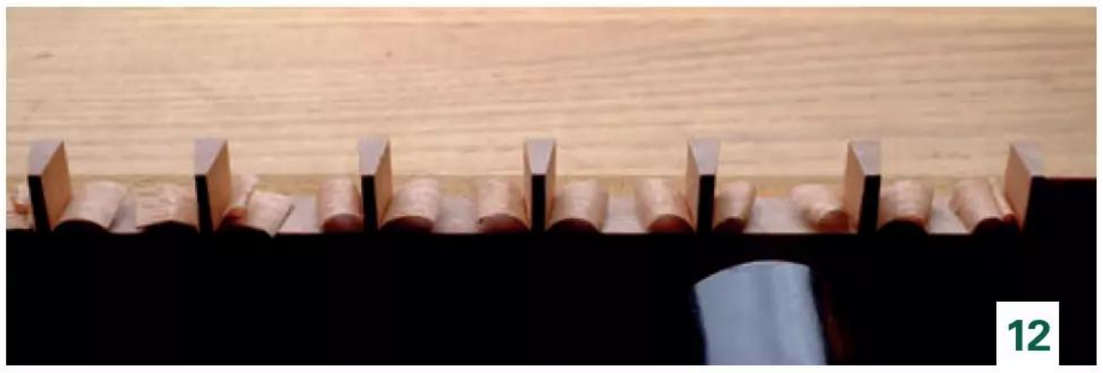
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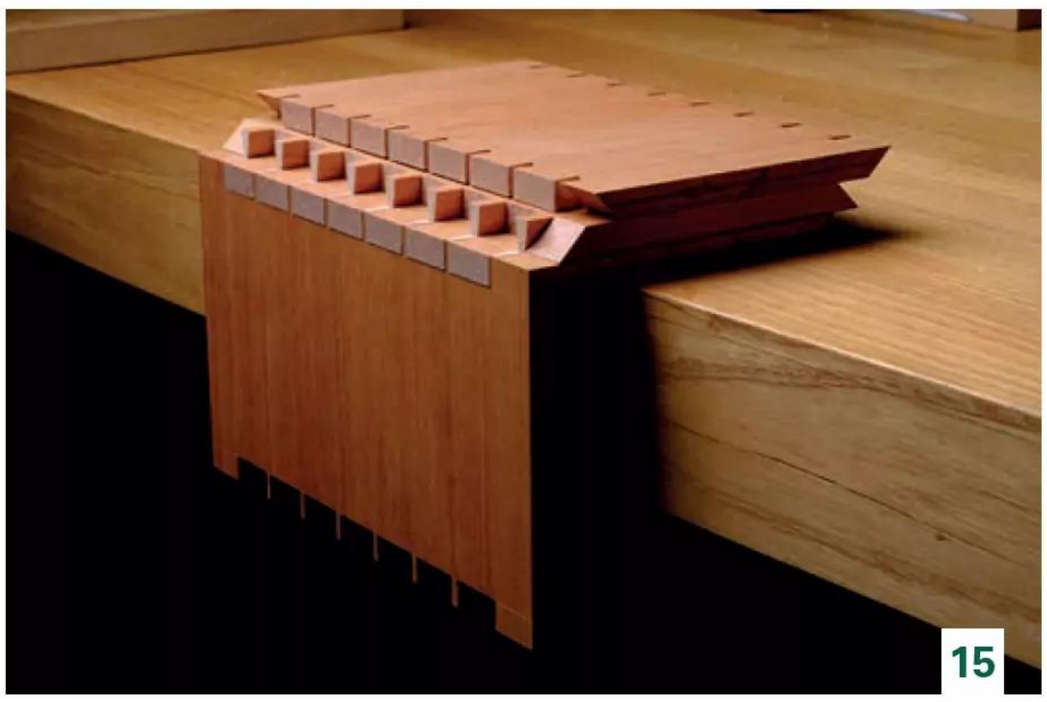
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the row with half a tail. It's important to transfer the tails on the pin boards before any mitring occurs.

When cutting the pins, I avoid taking my chance sawing on the line, so I stay away just a tiny bit to the outer side of it. After removing the bulk of the waste, yet again with the fretsaw, I use a sharp chisel to carefully pare everything to the line. Remember not to get rid of the material at the ends of the pin boards, as it is going to be cut at a 45° angle to meet the other half of the mitre.

You can pare from the top to the bottom, or from front to back depending on the specific pin. If the grain is straight and compliant, I might go from the top to the bottom using a chisel and a hammer, but if the grain leads to the wood cracking towards the inside of the pin, I stop immediately and clean the waste from the front to the back.

At this point it's time to mitre the outside edges. I saw away most of the material and then use a sharp chisel with a 45° jig for a nice clean mitre.

## How paths meet

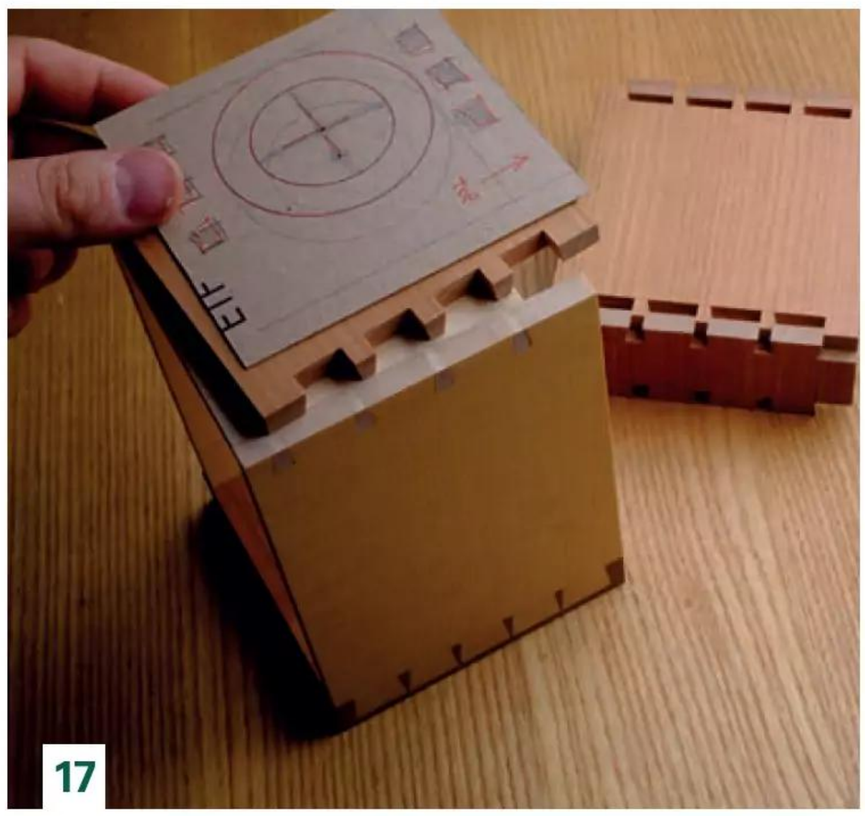
The cabinet legs are fixed directly to the drawer cases with M6 countersunk machine screws. Initially I was a bit overwhelmed by the number of parts to elegantly coordinate but used my mock-up as a guide.

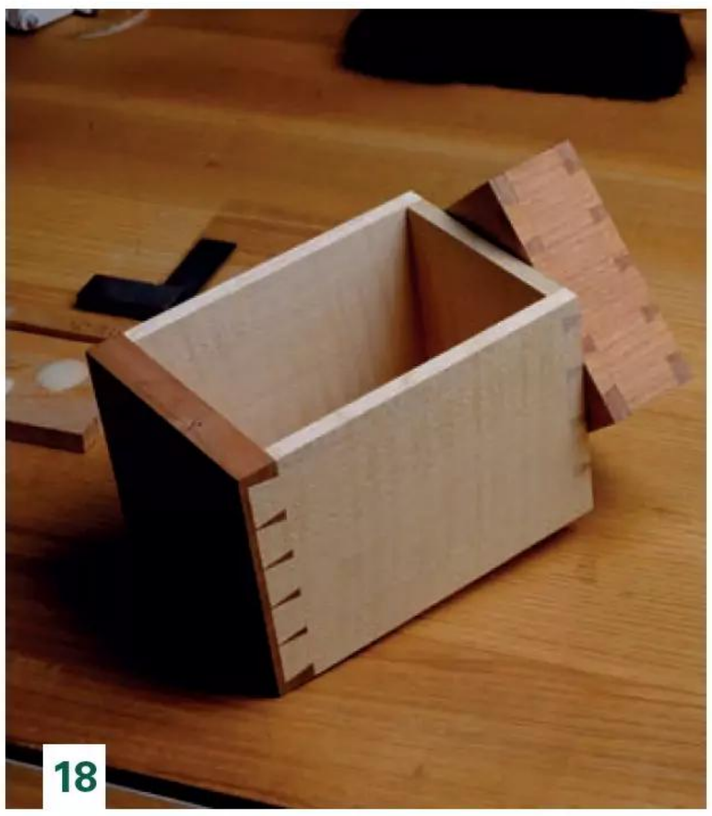
I used a bevel gauge to set the angle of each leg in relation to a drawer and then marked the corresponding spot on the actual drawer. A shallow 18mm wide groove was then routed to house the leg, and positions were marked for locating machine screws.

A through hole was then drilled and tapped with M6 threads. With the help of a couple of sharpened-to-a-point screws, I then transferred the position of the holes on to the drawer housing. Holes created with a brad point drill bit were later countersunk as I disassembled the dry fitted drawer boxes. The same steps were repeated as the whole cabinet was slowly but steadily assembled. It's no accident that most of the drawer boxes are towards the top. Like a tree, the sweetest fruits are high up.

Everything is now ready to be disassembled, prefinished and glued up. While the drawer cases are drying, the legs are being taken care of. A 5-minute metal epoxy was used to plug the outside of the holes, before sanding back carefully and painting with satin black paint.

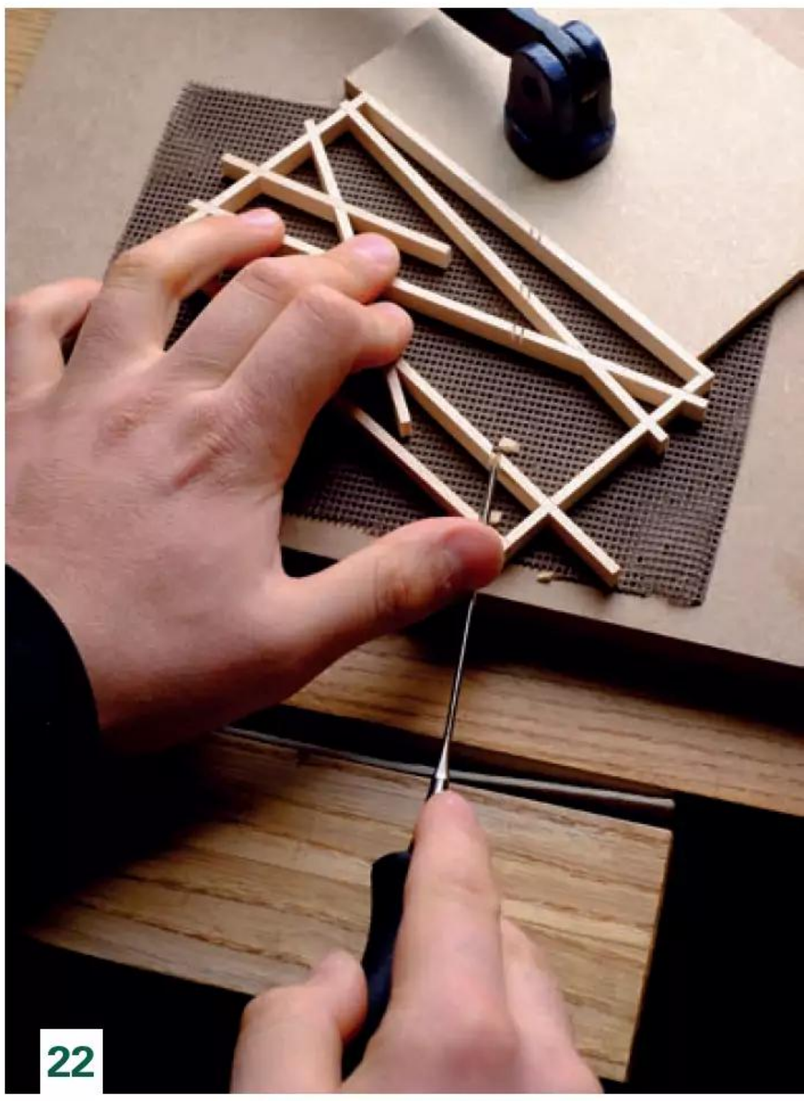
The cabinet is then reassembled and it's time to start making the actual drawers. The reason I drilled through holes in the metal legs that I then had to plug with epoxy is because it's much easier to tap through holes, and it was also more convenient while










test assembling the piece. Using sharpened screws for marking drilling positions would have been impossible with a blind hole.

## The perfect fit

Each of the eight drawers is unique. They look the same on the outside but have a distinctive feature when opened. They are all piston fitted to their openings. Half blind dovetails for the drawer fronts were a must, five tails in this case looked more appealing to my eye compared to three, two and four were out of question, and six was way too cramped.

For piston fit drawers I size the front and the back elements to a squeaky fit to the opening. The sides are cut to the desired length and brought to a gapless fit height-wise. A shooting board is very useful for this operation. I then dovetail the drawer such that the sides slightly protrude from the pinboards.

Basically, when I mark the side thicknesses on the drawer front, I purposefully set the marking gauge half a millimetre less than the actual thickness. After the structure of the drawer is done, I rout grooves for the drawer bottom on all pieces. The back of the drawer is then cut at the bottom just enough so the base can slide into the grooves.

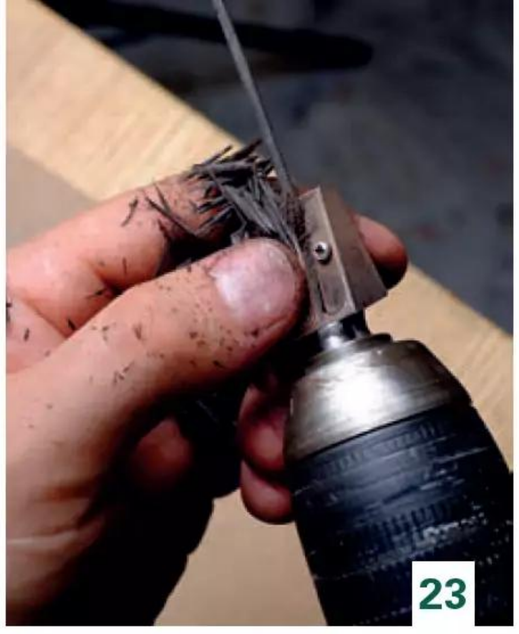
The drawers are then glued up checking for squareness, and after the glue has dried, it's time to do the fitting. I hold the workpiece in my vice and use a cut-to-size backing piece that prevents the thin sides from bending under the load of the hand plane. I take full shavings from the front to the back until the side elements are flush with the pins front and back. Now the drawer should fit, remembering the squeaky fit at the beginning.

I like to use a 0.05mm feeler gauge to help me determine where I need to plane more material off. Take a few very thin shavings, check, measure with the feeler gauge and repeat until the drawer slides in effortlessly. The goal is to have it fit with pretty much no side-to-side movement.

Height-wise, you want a little gap to allow for wood movement. The amount depends on the type of wood, and on the initial and expected humidity conditions. Afterwards I slide in the base and fix it in place with a dash of glue into the groove located in in the drawer front. For small stuff like this, I find it pointless adding any sort of mechanical fasteners at the back.

## Inside stories

Each drawer has a different interior. One has a dot pattern created by drilling 2mm blind holes at the drill press and inlaying them with ebony dowels. Sanding these panels would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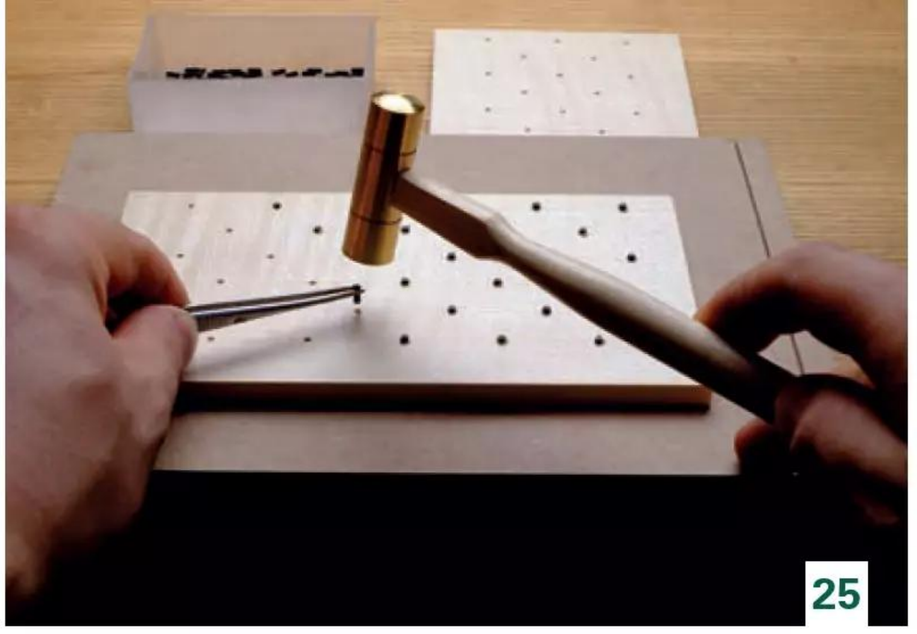
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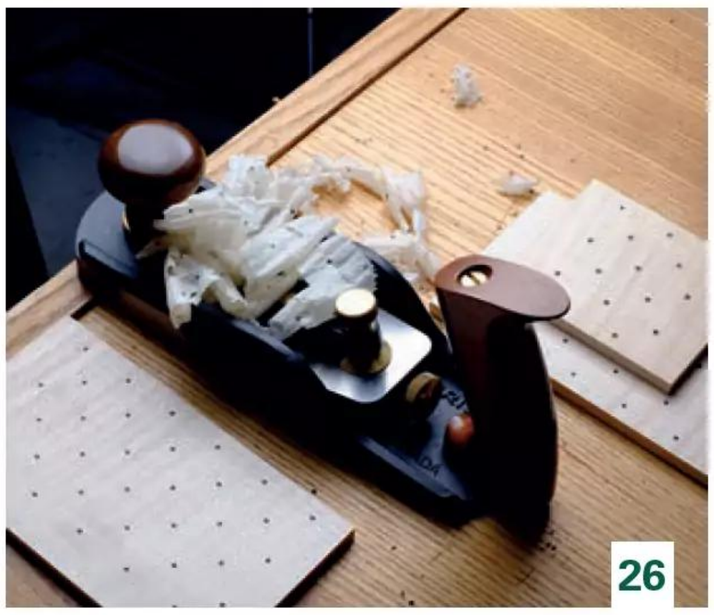
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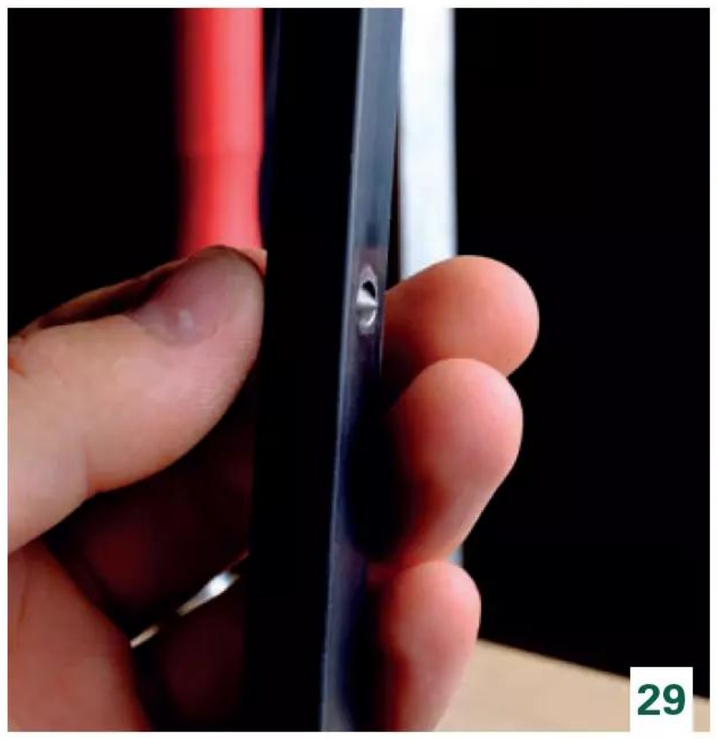
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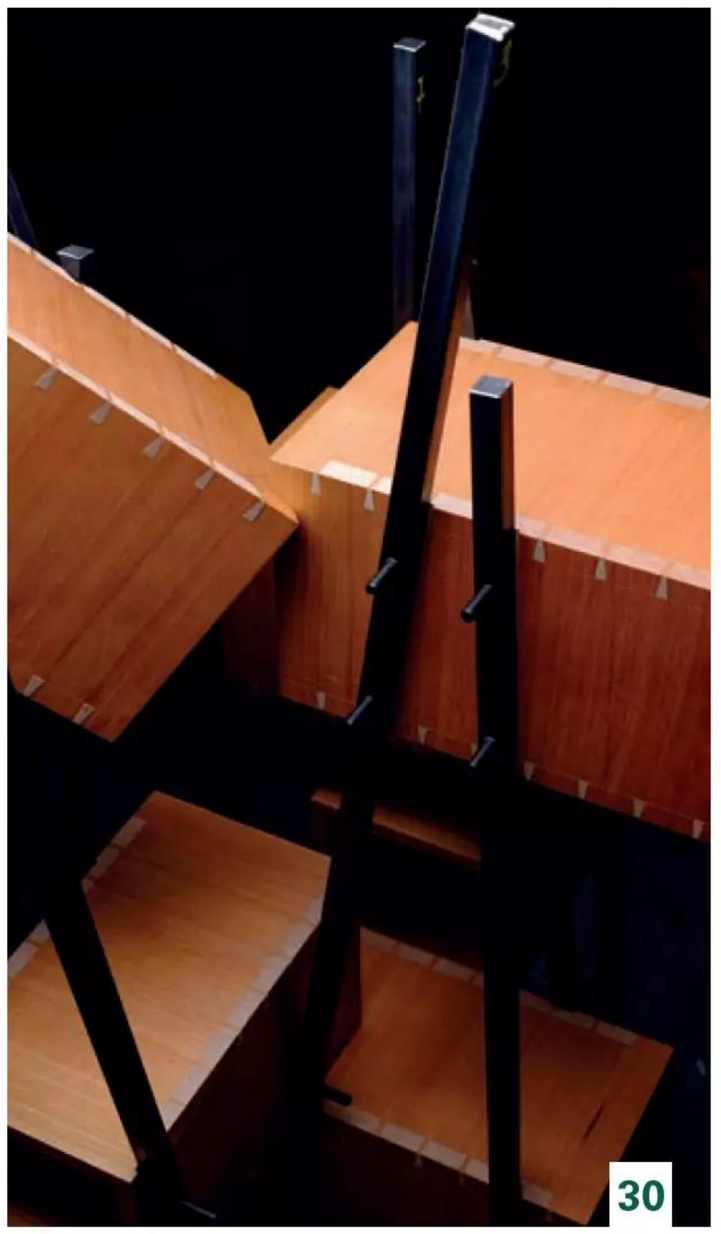
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make a mess as the black dust created would stain the sycamore. Instead, I use a nicely tuned handplane that produces a mirror finish surface with no cross contamination whatsoever.

Another drawer has a playful rotating mechanism. It looks upside-down when you open it, however it rotates 180° on its axis to reveal the *racconto* hiding inside. Hidden magnets stop it falling out when the drawer is upside down. For a seamless look in the drawer base, I resawed it in half, drilled a blind hole from the inside to house a thin magnet and then laminated the bottom back up again.

Probably my favourite drawer has a clever mechanism inside that elevates its 'tale' as the drawer opens. I made it using some brass stock and my router table.

Some of the drawers were just an excuse to experiment with a few ideas such as kumiko and parquetry patterns. Others are just playfully designed to intrigue the user. There's one that will open from the back when you push it in.

For all the drawers I made delicate cylindrical brass pulls and to retain the overall bi-tone look, cold-blued the brass elements.

Sometimes you have to take a few different directions in life, before you discover how it all comes together.

*Photos: Vasko Sotirov*

*Vasko Sotirov @vaskosotirov is a wood artisan in Bergamo, Italy. Vasko Sotirov has previously written about his Lockdown cabinet (AWR#108), profiled The Brothers Levaggi (AWR#110) and Giordano Viganó (AWR#112). Learn more at https://vaskosotirov.com*

**17.** The 'upside-down' drawer has a playful rotating mechanism.

**18–20.** The drawer has two parts and allow the larger one to twist.

**21.** The kumiko drawer was an excuse to create an ornamental front using a simple sawing jig.

**22.** The pattern is not traditional but has a 'random' look.

**23.** Creating the 2mm dia ebony dowels with a drill and a pencil sharpener.

**24.** A polka dot pattern was first created by drilling 2mm blind holes.

**25.** Positions were marked before inlaying the ebony dowels.

**26.** The surface was planed with a very sharp blade – sanding would have marked the sycamore with black ebony dust.

**27.** The holes in the frame were threaded.

**28.** Screws sharpened to a point were used to mark locations for the drawer cases to the frame.

**29.** Shallow grooves were routed to house the leg, and holes drill to accept screws.

**30.** The piece was assembled and disassembled several times to fit all the components.

# Design as a Way of Life

**Angharad Summers writes about kickstarting a career in design and the challenges of moving a design and make work practice overseas.**

Moving countries is never easy, but when you're trying to kickstart a career in a competitive industry, it can be exhausting. Add a language barrier, cultural differences, and a poorer work-life balance, and you're in for an even bigger challenge. I've experienced all this firsthand, navigating a career in furniture design while moving between Melbourne and Berlin – two cities that couldn't be more different in their design landscapes.

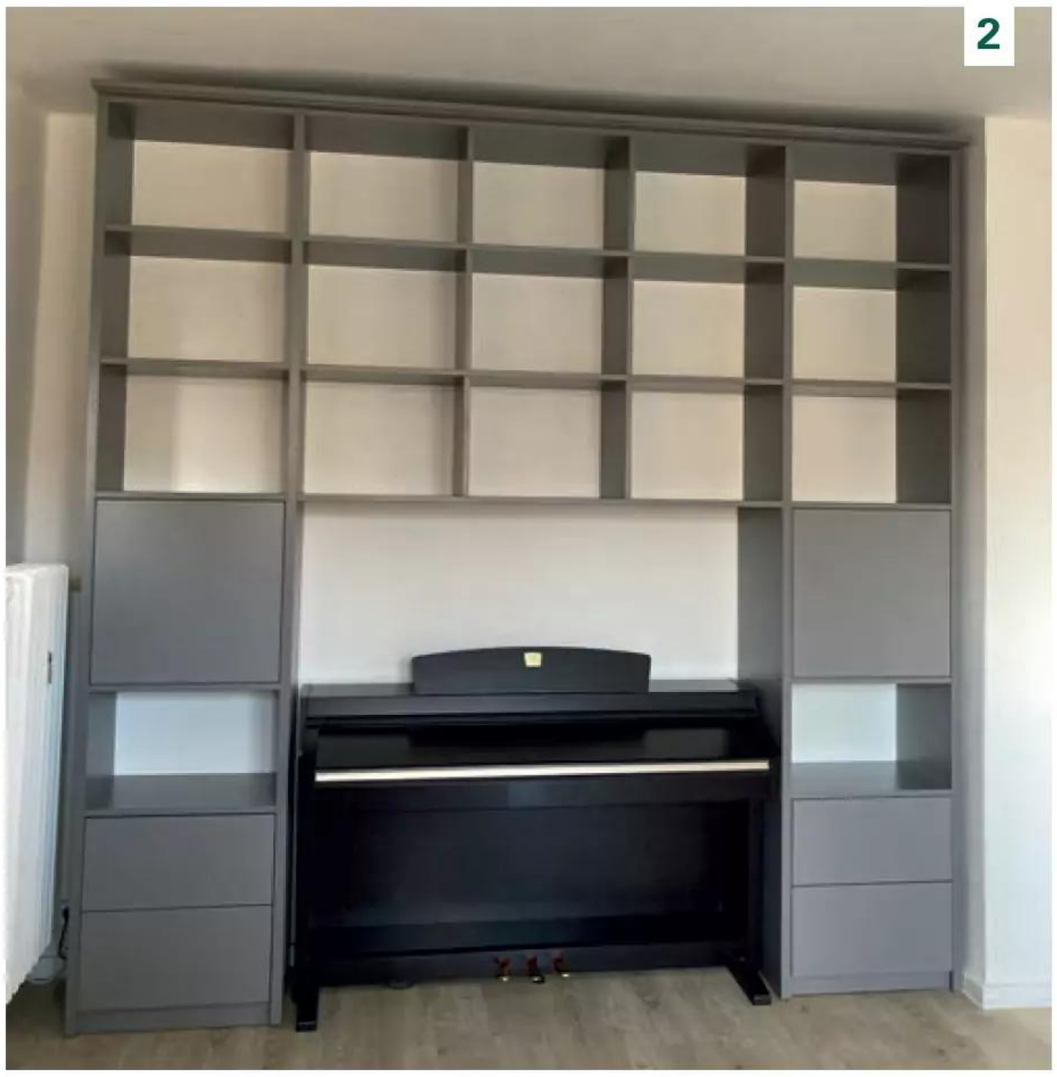
## Melbourne: a thriving design hub

I first arrived in Melbourne in 2017 as a fresh graduate, knowing only one person in the city. With no job and no real connections, I threw myself into the unknown, starting by cold calling every designer I could find. Adam Markowitz, a furniture designer-maker and architect, was one of the few who took the time to meet me for coffee. Through him, I discovered the Victorian Woodworkers Association (VWA), met young furniture maker Bailey McFarlane, and learned about Fringe Furniture, an exhibition open to anyone.

I also took matters into my own hands. Armed with a stack of CVs I walked down Johnson Street in Fitzroy and went into every single furniture store, asking for a job. The second to last shop I walked into offered me a position shortly after. That provided me with an entry point into Melbourne's vibrant furniture scene, a community where designers, makers, and creatives regularly meet through talks, exhibitions, and competitions.

Even without a full-time job, it felt like there was always something to do. The number of furniture designers and makers in Melbourne only seems to grow although the bubble is still small enough that you start to see familiar faces.

After living abroad and travelling I returned to Melbourne in September 2022. Within a month of applying, I landed a job at Tait's factory in Thomastown, producing premium outdoor furniture. There I met Carl



Broesen and Maryam Moghadam, both design graduates recently moved from Sydney and working in the design team with founder Gordon Tait.

Carl told me about a new design competition called 30UNDER30 which selected the top 30 designers under 30 in Australia. We both entered and made the final cut, culminating in a creative retreat in Bali with our fellow winners, sponsors and mentors.

Along with Maryam we also submitted an exhibition proposal to Melbourne Design Week and organised *Pop 'round: one person's junk is another person's chair.* It felt like everything took off. When Maryam left her role at Tait I replaced her, only a few months after starting there. I dove headfirst into all my design pursuits and it really paid off.

I was also shortlisted for both Australia's Next Top Designer and the IDEA Awards in 2023. Everything felt like it was falling into place. But life has a way of throwing curveballs, and love led me to make a major change. I made a leap to Berlin, determined to make the best out of the situation and see what the city had to offer me.

## Berlin: A different design landscape

In Berlin, however, I've struggled to find a scene that matches the vibrant furniture industry I'm accustomed to. While there is a thriving carpentry sector, the focus is largely on door and window restoration, as well as fabrication and installation. This is largely driven by stringent laws on historic preservation, which require old timber doors and windows to be either refurbished or replaced in their original style.

1. Angharad Summers on the tablesaw in the machine shop she shares with others at Fluktus Werkstätten in Berlin. *Photo: Valerie Wegner*
2. Everyday work: a custom built-in unit for a private client by the author.
3. Typical custom office furniture made by the author with colleague Jens Schefeldt.

*Photos 2, 3: Angharad Summers*




When I've asked local carpenters why furniture making seems to take a backseat, the answer is often the same: people simply aren't willing to pay for custom timber furniture. There are very few businesses here who design and make furniture though I've found a small handful. The Edgar range from the industrial design team Studio Mark Braun, for example, is an elegant collection with a distinctive leg detail that adds a unique touch.

Other notable names in the city include Bartmann, Wood Boom, and EDER – three businesses that are all dedicated to producing high-quality, solid timber furniture. Even their range, however, is limited and EDER's Flip shelf is the best example of an innovative, modern design.

There's a noticeable gap in cutting-edge design. One experience that highlighted this contrast occurred during Berlin Design Week 2024. I attended an independent exhibition featuring upcycled furniture made by a woodworker and upholstered by an artist. While the concept was interesting, the execution didn't stand out.

The majority of work on display at Berlin Design Week was by university students presenting their graduation projects. I can only imagine that the participation fees (starting at €595 for a two night event which is roughly equivalent to A$987) are a huge barrier for emerging designers interested in taking part. Melbourne Design Week, in comparison, charges no fees for participation.

My first job in Berlin involved working for a local carpentry and trades services business. They undertook a wide range of jobs from furniture making to demolition, repairs, restoration, painting and furniture making.

I spent four days a week making custom furniture pieces with one colleague in a small workshop. The work was mostly pre-veneered chipboard panels used to make built-in furniture for new office spaces in the city centre but I still learnt a lot about producing a fair amount in a small workshop space. Fridays were spent traveling to construction sites around the city, sometimes up to two hours away, leaving little energy for my own creative projects.

Adding to the challenges, my employer recently informed me that I'm not allowed to work, due to issues with my work rights, despite having confirmation from the German visa office. I am currently employed but unallowed to work. This is just another set-back, all too common in Germany, where bureaucracy rules.

## The IKEA dilemma: Challenging the norm

One of the biggest challenges I've faced as a designer in Berlin is the dominance of IKEA. Many young professionals

**4.** Designed and made in Berlin: *Flip Shelf* by EDER. *Photo by EDER*

**5.** *Usus Table* by bartmann, Berlin. *Photo by bartmann*

**6.** *Modular Drawer Bed* by woodboom, Berlin. *Photo by Joschka Olma*

**7.** Another view of the shared machine room at Fluktus Werkstätten in Berlin. *Photo: Valerie Wegner*

here furnish their homes almost entirely with IKEA furniture, choosing it for its affordability and convenience. Of course it's a struggle for local businesses to compete. Customers only see the surface value. This creates a difficult environment for local designers and makers, who often find themselves competing with products that are far cheaper, even if the quality and sustainability are questionable.

A timber-looking bed from IKEA may cost €150, but it's made from chipboard, hardboard, plastic, and various synthetic materials that are far from environmentally friendly. In contrast, a locally designed, solid timber bed might cost €1800, which many customers find hard to justify. Many people will choose the cheaper option without a second thought.

I see an opportunity to challenge this dominance by showing that beautiful, unique furniture can be designed and made without relying on virgin materials. Reclaimed timber, old bed frames, and factory offcuts – much 'waste' is simply waiting for someone to rescue it and give it a new life. I hope to create pieces that not only compete with mass-produced items but offer a more sustainable, thoughtful alternative.

## Looking ahead: Design as a way of life

In the face of all these challenges, I'm reminded of a quote by graphic designer Alan Fletcher: 'Design is not a thing you do. It's a way of life.' For me, design has never felt like work. Over the years, I've spent countless hours working on personal projects – often late into the evening, after a full day at my regular job. I've attended many events after work, and even hauled timber home on the train, all to fuel my passion for design. The joy of creating, of making something meaningful, drives me.

As I prepare for my upcoming solo exhibition at Berlin Design Week in May 2025, I'm reminded that this journey – no matter how winding – is all part of the larger picture. From Melbourne to Berlin, my path as a designer is a constant evolution, and every challenge is an opportunity for reinvention.

It's not a straight and easy path, but it's the one I've chosen. Design is not just what I do – it's who I am. Wherever life takes me next, that will always be my guiding force.

Design is my way of life.

*Angharad Summers @angharad_summers_design is a product and furniture designer from New Zealand currently based in Berlin and Melbourne. In AWR#124, Angharad wrote about eco-centric design in an article titled The Struggle is Real. Her first story for AWR was in issue #121 where she wrote about the ideas explored in the exhibition Pop 'round: one person's junk is another person's chair'.*

# New Perspectives

**The past, present and future came together in the works presented by Sturt School for Wood graduates at the end of last year.**

Last year was an extraordinary year for Sturt School for Wood and for the nine people who completed the year-long Certificate IV in furniture design and manufacturing course. While Sturt underwent a review of its operational set-up, classes for the certificate course continued, as it will henceforth while its directors seek to implement a not-for-profit funding model.

From all accounts, the full-time Sturt year is an intense experience. For those who undertake it, it can mark the start of a new career, or at least a turning point. It's a year of coming to grips with hand tool and machine processes that can then take years to refine. Exploring and developing a design style that respects ergonomics and reflects a sensitivity to the material is an ongoing journey.

Sturt Certificate IV students complete specific projects over four terms that cover a range of skills and processes. Michael Harris was the Wood School Coordinator throughout 2024, while a series of notable and high profile teachers taught specific units. Visiting teachers included Neil and Pam Erasmus, Peter Young, Stuart Faulkner, Paul Nicholson, Darren Oates, Jon Goulder, Andrew Carvolth and Isabelle Moore.

The title of the 2024 graduate exhibition, *Perspective,* expresses the diversity of backgrounds represented in the nine graduates, listed in the exhibition catalogue as 'bartender, lawyer, portfolio manager, cop, programmer, nature guide, printer, and graphic designers'.

This year is the 40th that full-time education in fine woodworking that Sturt has been offered. In 2025, another group of students are now working towards accreditation. Congratulations to the class of 2024, whose works and words are shown here.

*Photos: Ashley Mackevicius*

*Learn more about Sturt School for Wood at https://www.sturt.nsw.edu.au/*

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**Andrew Watt, andrew@watt.contact**

'What a journey this year has been. It more than met expectations, reinforcing the need to balance form with function, to respect and use materials responsibly, to always design with sustainability in mind and to balance hand skills with the efficiency of machines.'

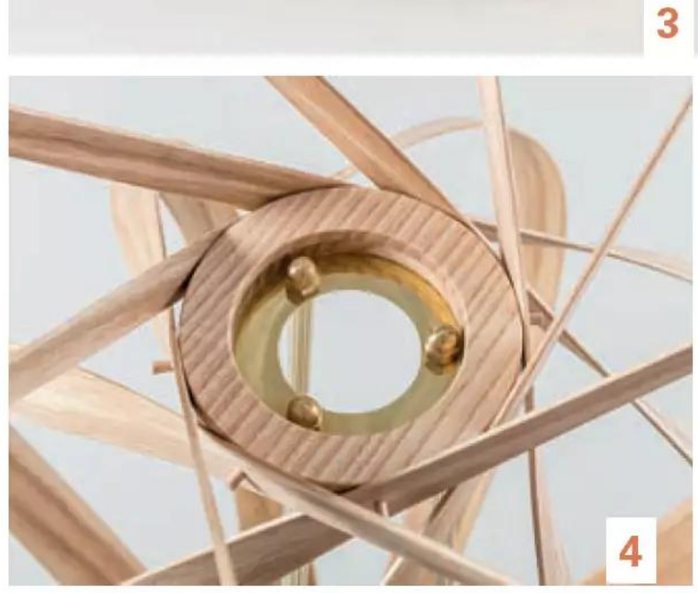
1. *Abacus display console*, torrified oak, marri with Double Bridle side tables in oak. 'The console plinths are located on grooves in the rails and glide with ease courtesy of small nylon wheels. Perfect for displaying a special piece or for letting the kids have fun.'
2. *Quiet Please hall console*, Victorian ash, New Guinea rosewood. 'It's all about the drawer. Designed so the quietness of this piece draws the viewer in.'
3. *Bowl or tray?*, bent laminated white oak and blackwood veneers.

**Josh Donald, joshdonald1@gmail.com**

'Last year I took a leap of faith, leaving my role as an outdoor education guide to embrace my passion for woodworking. Drawing inspiration from outdoor experiences, I've sought to weave natural curves and organic forms into my furniture design.

This can be seen in my lamp design as it captures the warmth of evenings spent around a campfire, while the credenza reflects the rippling patterns of sand shaped by a surging ocean.'

4. *Light Bending*, steambent American white ash and brass. 'My lamp captures the warmth of evenings spent around a campfire.'
5. *Rippling Sand cabinet*, American cherry, redgum. 'The tambour doors have carved, flowing curves inspired by sand formations shaped by ocean waves.'



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**Sharynn Moors,**
**alfred@samlaw.com.au**

'Prior to moving into my current profession as a lawyer, I had an enjoyable career in fashion. The (Sturt) course is amazing, albeit running at a frantic ppace. We are blessed to have been instructed by a constant stream of inspiring tutors.'

**6.** *Coffee table*, Qld silver ash, camphor laurel with marquetry from silver ash, walnut, jarrah, blackheart sassafras. 'Inspired by Japanese style and a nod to the Rising Sun.'

**7.** *Tall cabinet*, jarrah with walnut, jarrah, zebrano and silver ash marquetry. 'Inspired by my career in fashion and a 1970s retro print.'

**8.** *Wall-mounted coat racks*, recycled spotted gum. 'The birds became my signature during the year and I used them extensively.'

**Matt Tindale,**
**hi.matt.tindale@gmail.com**

'9 students. 9 perspectives. 9 tutors. 10 projects. 11 months. A few agricultural prototypes. A few more expletives. Many more lessons learnt. A lot of smiles. 100s of ideas. Countless hours sanding. And always a surprising number of ways to do something. Plenty of 'f' words (fettle, FEWTEL, former, flush-trim ...). Lots of fine creations. Never enough clamps. One thing is for sure, design and making is my future. I'm ready to work, learn, grow, be creative, and use my design background in a new way.'

**9.** *Viewpoint cabinet*. Oak, natural and ebonised. 'At first glance, the black lines may seem random but there is a hidden illusion. Viewed from the right angle, the lines begin to meet and form a shape.'

**10.** *Balance hall table*, Vic ash, silver ash

**11.** *Nu plant stand*, Queensland maple

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**Jon Reilly, jayarr243@gmail.com**

'The year at Sturt School for Wood provided me with the opportunity to learn from a wide range of teachers, and I've tried to embrace the full scope of styles presented in the work throughout the year.'

**12.** *Starburst bedside tables*, Tas blackwood, Vic ash, zebrano, wenge. 'Ideas came from traditional Arts and Crafts style, but I then explored ways to personalise the tables.'

**13.** *Sturt tool cabinet*, New Guinea rosewood, Huon pine. 'To get this project completed and hung behind my own bench at the end of first term was a real milestone. The cabinetmaker's mallet was made from American white oak and Crubber and never far from hand.' The customised dovetail saw is another 'traditional' project for the Sturt program.

**Craig Lind, craig.lind.ls@gmail.com**

'I came to Sturt after a life-changing event led me to look at my life and career from a different perspective. With each design brief, the class reflected this expansive injection of knowledge, producing vastly different interpretations and displaying the myriad viewpoints possible. I have now formed a different view of, and confidence in, my abilities and creativity.'

**14.** *Side table*, European beech, rock maple veneer

**15.** *Mantis desk*, walnut, Vic ash. 'I wanted this to look like it was alive by making the legs different angles and having the drawers askew to give the impression of eyes focussing.'


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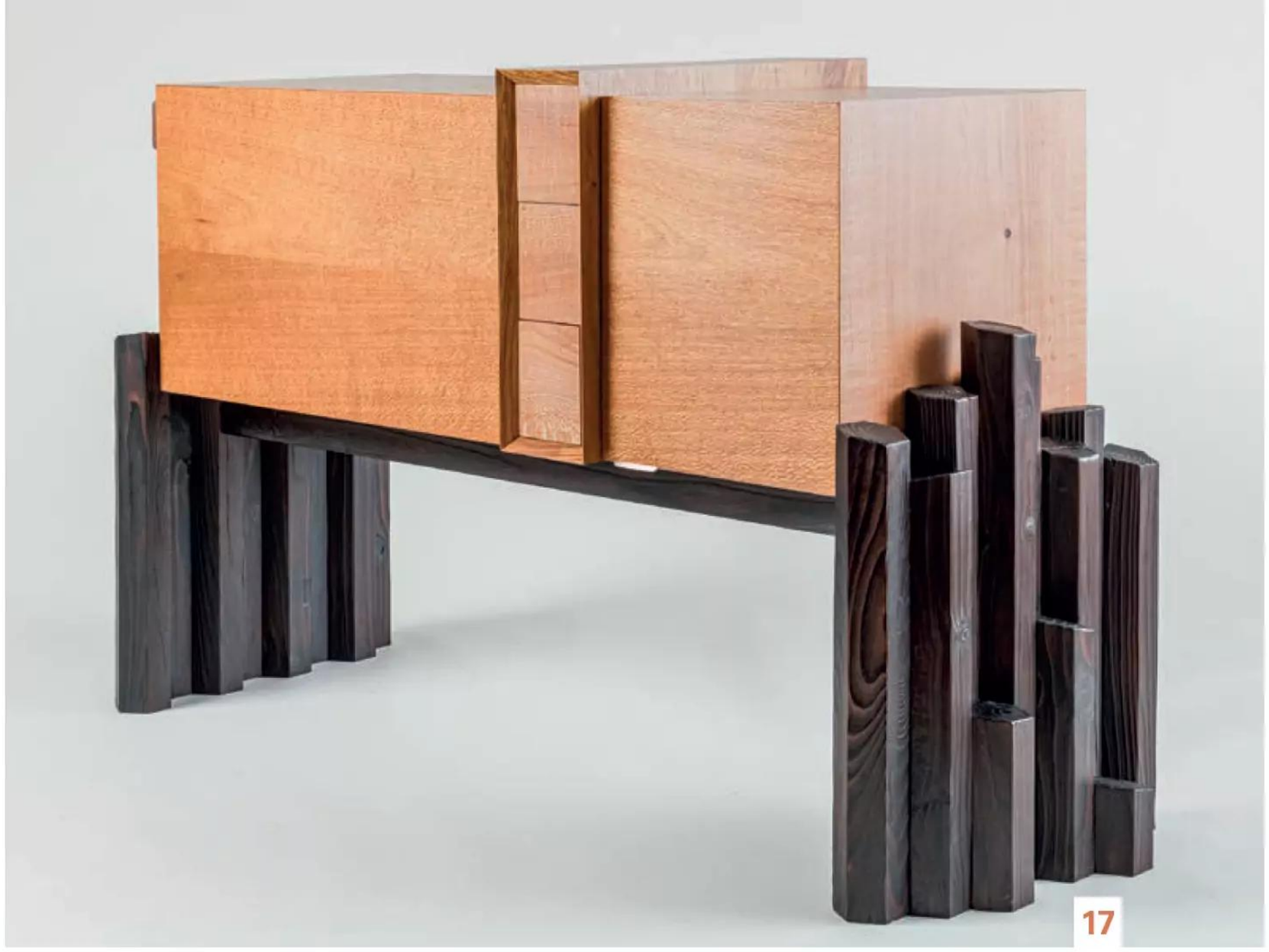

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**Ken Playford, seeriver@gmail.com**

'As an architect with experience in graphic design, I've always been drawn to the interplay of form and function. My passion for creating spaces naturally led me to explore the design of tangible objects. Starting with no woodworking background, I've dedicated myself to mastering the craft this year. I've experimented, learning invaluable skills that bridge creative concepts with practical applications. Transitioning into furniture design has been challenging and rewarding.'

**16, 17.** *The Columnar Sideboard*, silky oak, New Guinea rosewood, Vic ash, walnut veneer. 'Inspired by a geological structure where closely spaced fractures, called joints, create a regular array of polygonal prisms or columns. The cabinets are made from 500mm wide silky oak slabs and mitred throughout for a seamless look.'

**18.** *Arch coffee table*, blackbutt, brushbox veneers. 'This coffee table features three laminated bent arch legs with a sunburst veneer top.'

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**Dominic Billson, morellobrien@gmail.com**

'For me, this year has been the first steps of a pipe dream that I never thought would happen. Formal schooling was always a struggle, due to ADHD and autism, and university didn't feel possible. Woodworking has been a passion since I was a kid, but I never thought it would be more than whittling on days off between bartending shifts. Learning how to design and make fine furniture has fed that passion enough to want to pursue it as a career.'

**19.** *Wave stool*, ebonised merbau seat on a mahogany base.

**20.** *Shaker coffee table*, merbau

**21, 22.** *Hand-cut side table*, American white oak, featuring traditional Chinese joinery cut and tuned by hand.

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**Jarrod Cook, cook.jarrod@icloud.com**

'Stepping through the red door at Sturt presented a very different set of challenges to those of a 20 year policing career. So many long days that all add up to a year. The momentary lapses in concentration, a cut too short – was it a mistake, a lesson, or a design opportunity? The seemingly insignificant tasks. A shaving off here and a slight change in angle there. Decisions and choices that were not insignificant to the overall result. This craft is complex. Timber as a medium is limited and unforgiving, yet the possibilities seem endless. If I have learnt anything it is how little I know.'

**23.** *Cambia tambour liquor cabinet*, torrified ash, rock maple, utile, sapele. 'Furniture can often be so static. I am fascinated with the concept of pieces that bring interest through movement and allow for changes in looks and feel. The top levels of this piece have double tambours which mix and match the reveal, or pull back and hide to permit display.'

**24.** *Arches coffee table*, blackwood. 'The legs are identical arches made from tapered laminations while the top consists of shop sawn bookmatched veneer.' 'Moving around the table rewards you with an interplay of varying angles and shapes leading to almost a change of 'personality' from one side to the other. To see people walk past, stop, double take, bend down and look underneath to understand how it works makes me smile.'

**25, 26.** *Array lamps* in Tasmanian myrtle with fabrics designed by Australian artist Jocelyn Proust.

# In Memory of William Bayliss

**Reflections from mentors and colleagues on the work and life of William Bayliss.**

When an older person dies, we mourn, and there's an opportunity to celebrate their past. When a young person dies, there's an added sense of loss for what might have been, particularly when that person shows a great deal of promise.

William Bayliss died 11 November, 2024 in a car accident. He was 26 years old and notable as an award winner. Apprentice of the Year in 2018, Wootha Prize winner in 2019, fellowship recipient at the Centre for Fine Woodworking NZ the following year, and in 2021 Wood Review's Overall Maker of the Year. In 2023, Will picked up another Maker of the Year award for his then-named *Wilcannia cabinet*. In 2024, another Wootha Prize furniture award followed, and there seemed no end to it.

From age 16, Will worked in the Queanbeyan, NSW workshop of Evan Dunstone. He cut his teeth on production and custom work to fully qualify as a trade cabinetmaker.

Having met Will several times and interviewed him during his New Zealand residency, I can say that in person he was well and quietly spoken, articulate and friendly. Watching him work on the *Wilcannia cabinet* and then the crate that would carry it back to Australia, I saw him move around the workshop with the pace and confidence of a professional.

There was an immediate sense of shock in the woodworking community when the news of Will's death came. Many who didn't know him personally certainly knew of his work and knew that he was one to watch. Young and already expert, he was kicking goals for a new generation of makers. For older makers, here was someone who would keep the faith and take the craft forward. In terms of skills, Will had the goods, and I for one was looking forward to seeing the direction his design work would take.

It's with much sadness we extend our sincere condolences to Will's partner, family, colleagues and friends. These pages show examples of work designed and made by William Bayliss, 1998–2024. The reflections are written by his mentors and colleagues.

*Linda Nathan, Editor*

William was very bright but hated school. Show me a dyslexic introvert, and I'll show you a potential master craftsperson.

William started with us before his 17th birthday. I had to learn how to read him; William's body language, not his tongue, told you if he understood, or disagreed, or had a better idea.

I trained him to be our cabinet specialist. We made all the commissioned cabinets together until he no longer needed me. Somewhere in that third year, the future William emerged.

William could hold complex relationships steady in his head in a way that I can't. I need to sketch components, intersections and relationships. William could simply 'see' them. Woodworkers can get obsessed with technique and can be blind to beauty. It's the craft that taste forgot. I wanted William to be free of technique, to be able to approach any design problem with mastery. To focus on the beauty, not the process, and he excelled.

At 20, William won a scholarship to study under the Canadian master, Michael Fortune, at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson, New Zealand. The timing was perfect. He was desperate for some freedom.

In New Zealand, William's core hand skills and deep understanding of process allowed him to achieve whatever he put his mind to. William left Australia as a maker and returned seven weeks later as a designer.

William hated the limits of practicality. His *Torrent HiFi cabinet*, which won the Wootha Prize when he was 20, was the last piece he made for himself that could be described as 'practical'. All his subsequent private designs were consciously, even daringly, whimsical. He couldn't care less if they didn't sell. He made his living as a craftsman, and he won competitions for his own amusement in his own time.

And then, in June of 2024, he designed his *Canopy Light* for a Dunstone Design client. It was beautiful, sculptural, impeccably crafted and commercially viable. William had found a key to the future. And five months later, he was dead.

William could be a difficult employee. He hated making things that he felt were beneath him. I once gave him a simple plywood cabinet to make for a client (it was basically done as a favour to the client), and it was back two weeks later with the door falling off. William was so insulted by the project that he barely gave it any attention. But he was incredibly fast and confident if the work engaged him. His speed when making a complex cabinet was unparalleled. He was, in my heavily biased opinion, the greatest craftsman of his generation.

*Evan Dunstone* @dunstonedesign, *furniture designer maker and owner-manager Dunstone Design, NSW*

**Opposite:** William Bayliss in 2020, at work on the *Wilcannia cabinet*. Every drawer had a different set of angles and only one had a front that was parallel with the floor. Even the bases were kerf-cut to gentle curves. *Photo: Daniel Allen*

**Above:** *Mundi Mundi entrance table*. 'Inspired by the sunrise landscape over the Mundi Mundi plains with the sunlight hitting the caps of the highpoints of the topography. The tactile fluted top draws the hand and the eye to explore. Suspended by a light but sturdy curved base lifting the energy of the piece.' *Words and photos: Will Bayliss*

William Bayliss' *Bunyjul Occasional Table* in jarrah with rock maple detailing was the winning Maker of the Year entry in 2021. *Bunyjul* means frillneck lizard in the Nugal-warra language. Will wrote how this table explores the shapes and textures of organic forms to create a piece that is both sculptural and whimsical. 'There's an obvious nod to Alan Peters' *Fan Table* in this design, but I've taken Peters' basic form in a more organic direction. *"Through others, we become ourselves." – Lev Vygotsky.'* P*hotos: Will Bayliss*

It's hard to believe that Will was a colleague of mine for nearly a decade. The world of woodwork that we both inhabit is very different to the one the vast majority of woodworkers live in – this is our job, our careers.

At lunch, the conversations were around Will's latest passion over some type of antiquated technology, whether it be the Lazer Disk or Vintage Victor push mowers. Rarely did we discuss things like which glue to use, but if we did the conversations were raw and honest. When it came to his work, Will was deeply passionate, and would defend his position to the death.

This shows in his work. Will would get fixated on the piece he was working on, whether it be for himself or for the workshop. This fixation was in many ways kind of manic. If he could, he would have worked non-stop until it was complete. When finished he was highly critical of his creation, to the point where within a week, he seemed not to care about it and just focused on whatever was next.

Will could at times prove to be challenging to manage, as this drive and determination ran to his core. There were many times where for his own good, and for the good of the work, he just needed to slow down and take a deep breath. He was an incredible maker and that was inherent within him.

In many ways conventional 'woodwork' be dammed, he didn't let 'this is how it should be' or technique get in the way, and this could lead to exciting and interesting creations.

Will will be deeply missed in the workshop, both for his brooding intensity, and for the fun joyous moments of seeing him shuffling away while doing a glue-up, or showing you how finely tuned to monkeys his Instagram algorithm was. Sadly, there were too few Friday after-work beers had together.

*Alex MacFarlane, workshop manager at Dunstone Design*

Will designed and made magnificent furniture without limitation. Some woodworkers are encumbered by 'I'II design what I already know how to do'. Not Will, every sketch explored forms and challenging techniques new to him. He had an incredible ability to visualise and construct complex joinery even early in his career.

I met Will in 2020, the youngest applicant for a $5,000 scholarship for a residency with me at The Centre for Fine Woodworking in New Zealand. Will arrived, very quiet, kinda slouchy. I realised later it was a disguise which he topped off with a worn baseball hat that only partially acknowledged the original shape.

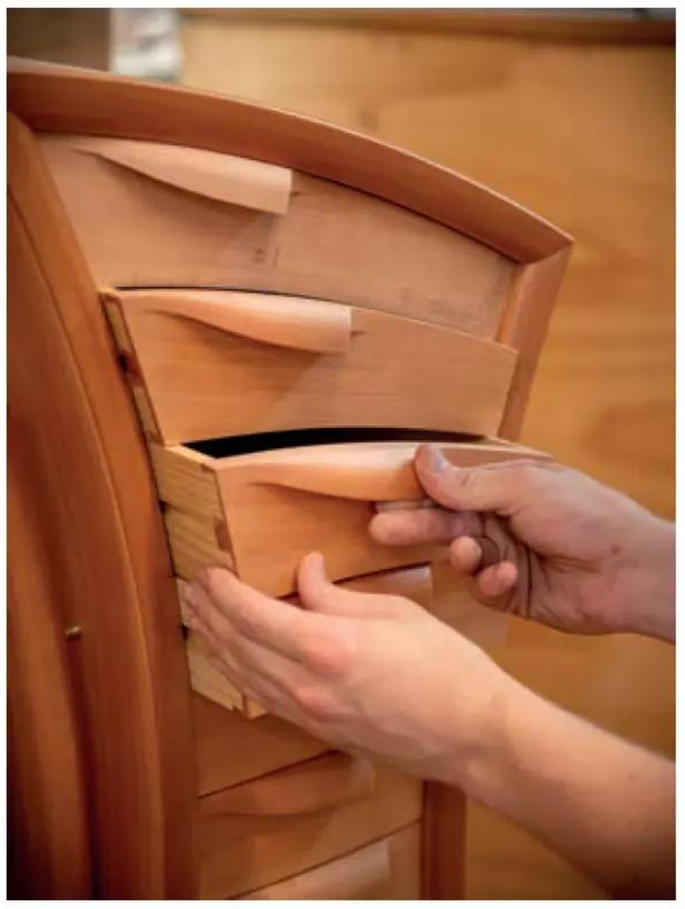
The residency outline had the students go through a specific design sequence leading to the construction of a unique piece of furniture. Will quickly generated page after page of very fluid ideas that led to a wonderful volume of surprising 3D pencil renderings. 'Where did you learn to draw like that?', was met with a slight grin. He intuitively knew it would help his design sense.

Once he was introduced to the history of the finest furniture, I think he saw it as a dare to create his own interpretation. Refining his woodworking skills was integral to that goal.

Will worked efficiently. When something didn't feel right he would remake several variations rather than just stew over the issue. It gave him confidence to go where he'd never been before.

What created his passion for woodworking? People, apprenticing with Evan Dunstone. Places, working with a supportive group in New Zealand, seeing the creative woodworking at the gallery in Bungendore and not least, his desire for pursuing the unusual in life and his furniture.

*Michael Fortune @michaelfortune, designer maker, Canada*



William's later rendition of the design he developed in New Zealand was a category winner in Maker of the Year awards 2023. Will wrote: 'I'm inspired by Australia's arid woodlands. The *Wilcannia Cabinet* captures the organic, twisted shapes of the arid bush through movement, asymmetry and interconnection. Every aspect of the *Wilcannia Cabinet* offers surprising geometry. Just as many inland trees resist conventional uses, the cabinet suggests function, but resists it at the same time. The drawers are memory vessels, not practical storage. The understructure is strong but flexible, allowing the cabinet to quiver in response to its environment.' *"Trees, planets, rivers, time know nothing else. They express it moment by moment as the universe. – Les Murray"*

*Canopy Light*. Designed in 2024, Evan Dunstone writes: 'It was beautiful, sculptural, impeccably crafted and commercially viable'.

Will was a fairly closed book when we first met. He was at work to work and seemed introverted and reserved. For the first couple of months, beyond his intense interest in quirky vintage cars, I had no idea what he was like outside of the workshop. But one week, Evan and Alex went to Melbourne for a couple days on a delivery and left Will and me to man the workshop.

The conversations that we had that week in the smoko room were the beginning of a friendship I'm so grateful to have had. And as it turns out, Will was one of the most interesting people I ever met. I looked forward to seeing him every day at work, and it was an even better day if we got to chat while oiling, gluing up or if he was mentoring me on a project. We'd have long conversations about nonsense things like debating how filling duck and chicken were by comparison and preference, or the perfect dinner party arrangements, down to potlucks with secret chefs.

Will was one of the most creative people I've ever met, in his work life and outside of it. As a designer and a maker, he was extraordinary. Evan designs with functionality at the forefront, but Will was free of that constraint. His work was a way for him to explore form and beauty without limitation. As I got to know him, I realised that he was always exploring, always finding that exciting thing about the people he met and in the things he did. I loved how through his designs he was able to make whimsy and elegance have a sophisticated conversation. I've not seen another maker walk the same line so flawlessly.

William Bayliss will always have my respect, admiration and love, through the things he did, what he taught me and the friend he was. He created pieces that told a story we should all learn from: there is fun to be had here.

*Aditi Sargeant @sargeantmaker, furniture maker at Dunstone Design*

# 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.

### UNTIL 30 MARCH 2025
**Written in Wood: Kevin Perkins inspired by Richard Flanagan**
Five sculptural works by Tasmanian master craftsman, Kevin Perkins, each based on a novel by the acclaimed Tasmanian writer, Richard Flanagan.
https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au

### 15 FEBRUARY
**Maker of the Year, presented by Carbatec**
Entries open for Wood Review's awards for fine woodworkers and wood artists.
Information and entry at
www.woodreview.com.au/moty

### 23 FEBRUARY 2025
**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 MARCH–8 JUNE 2025
**Thinking together: Exchanges with the natural world**
Major works by contemporary artists. Robert Andrew, Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan and Keg de Souza, with paintings by the Martu communities of central Western Australia
Bundanon, South Coast NSW
www.bundanon.com.au

### 8–9 MARCH
**Kiama Woodcraft Group Annual Woodcraft Expo**
Demonstrations and timber sales.
Kiama Masonic Hall, Collins Street, Kiama, NSW
9am – 4pm Saturday and Sunday
David Bywater: 0425 249 148

### 8–10 MARCH
**Lost Trades Fair Bendigo**
Rare trades and heritage crafts, 9:30–4:30pm
Bendigo Racecourse, Djaara Country
Heinz St, Ascot, Victoria
https://www.losttradesfair.com.au

### 10–21 MARCH
**Introduction to fine woodworking**
Two-week solid skills course for beginners
Centre for Fine Woodworking, Nelson, New Zealand
https://www.cfw.co.nz

### 23 MARCH
**Antique & Collectable Hand Tool Market**
Hand Tool Preservation Association Australia
St Anthony's, 164 Neerim Rd, Caulfield East, Vic
9am–12:30pm, $5 entry
https://www.htpaa.org.au

### 28–30 MARCH
**Turnfest woodturning symposium**
Demonstrations by international and local woodturning and woodcarving professionals
Seaworld Resort and Water Park, Gold Coast, Qld
https://www.woodworkingsuppliesqld.com.au

### 7–12 APRIL
**Curved wall hanging shelf masterclass**
Intermediate to advanced level masterclass in steam bending and curved joinery
Centre for Fine Woodworking, Nelson, New Zealand
https://www.cfw.co.nz

### 14–16 APRIL 2025
**Dubai WoodShow**
An international trade fair that focuses on wood, furniture, and woodworking machinery industries in the Middle East and North Africa.
https://www.woodshowglobal.com/dubai

### 7–8 MAY
**Sydney Build Expo**
Construction show featuring 550 speakers across 15 stages with 500 exhibitors
ICC Sydney Exhibition Centre
https://www.sydneybuildexpo.com

### 15–25 MAY 2025
**Melbourne Design Week**
An 11-day program of talks, tours, exhibitions, launches and workshops across Melbourne with over 1,300 designers, 400 events and exhibitions across Melbourne and the regions.
https://designweek.melbourne

### 26–30 MAY
**LIGNA 2025**
International woodworking fair celebrating 50 years: 'High-tech and tradition from 1975–2025'.
Hannover, Germany
https://www.ligna.de/en

### 12–14 JUNE
**Design Show Australia**
Interiors, lighting and furniture alongside Archi Build Expo and Kitchen and Bath Show
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre
https://designshow.com.au

### 13–15 JUNE
**Q-Turn**
Skill-sharing weekend for; woodturners, scrollers, carvers and burners. Hosted by Ipswich Woodcrafts Club at The Outlook, Boonah, Qld
Jim Tutin: 0418194184, jimtutin6@gmail.com
https://ipswichwoodcraftsclub.org

### 16–18 JULY
**Australian International Furniture Fair**
Trade show showcasing furniture, lighting, seminars. Includes VIVID design awards.
Melbourne Exhibition Centre
www.aiff.net.au

### 27 JULY
**National Tree Day**
Australia's largest community tree-planting aevent preceded by Schools Tree Day on July 25
https://treeday.planetark.org/

### 25–31 AUGUST
**National Skills Week**
Raising the status of skills and vocational learning and showcasing career opportunities.
https://www.nationalskillsweek.com.au/

### 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

# Looking back on 100 years and bold plans for the future

From printing to publishing, Yaffa Media has always been about its people and niche audiences. In 2013 it acquired *Australian Wood Review* from Raf and Linda Nathan and has now been educating and inspiring wood workers for 12 years. Founded in 1925, it proudly celebrates a centenary of storytelling.

## Founded on Friendship

Vision, strength of character and an irresistible personality enabled David Yaffa to become a key player in the media industry.

**Yaffa Syndicate Pty** Ltd was incorporated in 1925, but it had been five years in the making for the founder David Yaffa. Born in Sydney in 1893, David Yaffa Snr was the son of immigrants from Latvia. He attended Fort Street High School and went on to be a successful salesman for an importing company. This most likely gave him some entrepreneurial ideas about what he could import and sell in Australia.

He decided to specialise in products and services for the newspaper industry, which was the dominant advertising medium at the time – radio would not launch for a few years yet, and television was decades away.

In 1920, aged 27, he went to the USA where he secured the Australian agency for the Underwood Photo Service, and on his return set up a small office in Pitt Street. More travel and more agency deals followed, with Yaffa also representing other companies from America and Britain. Soon he was selling Australian rights to not just photographs but also news articles, feature writing, fiction and comics. He imported the first American comic strip into Australia and through his services Australian readers were introduced to leading feature writers from American and British publications.

Before long Yaffa Syndicate controlled Australasian distribution of features from world-famous services in the USA, UK, South Africa and Europe, and had offices in the US, UK and New Zealand.

His obituary in *Newspaper News* stated: "Olden generations would have sensed the secret of Mr Yaffa's remarkable success in a fairy godmother's gift at birth of the Golden Magnet of Friendship. Always – in Australia and New Zealand, in Britain and the Continent, Canada and the United States – he drew friends irresistibly, and was possessed of a genius for dissolving disputes and for acting as arbitrator."

In tributes after his death in 1947 aged only 54, a common theme came through. He wore out a lot of shoe leather selling his services personally to the newspaper proprietors, and became well known for his great friendship, hospitality and negotiating skills. It was a remarkable achievement that from humble beginnings he soon became 'one of the boys' with the heavyweights of the Australian newspaper establishment. How did he do it? Through his forever friendly personality, business acumen and, according his grandson Max Yaffa, through "partying them to death".

Sir Keith Murdoch, chairman of the *Herald & Weekly Times* and father of Rupert Murdoch, issued this tribute: "For 25 years I have known Dave Yaffa as a kindly, busy, progressive man, with plenty of pluck for adventurous business. He gave these years of service to the newspaper industry and wore himself out in the process."

Another tribute came from Frank Packer of Consolidated Press: "Mr Yaffa was in all ways a man and a friend to be proud of. His ability and business acumen were recognised by all working newspaper executives of Australia, England and America. No-one had ever before occupied his unique position in Australian journalism and commanded the wide respect he did."

David Yaffa was the negotiator for many important newspaper deals, including the sale of the *Daily Telegraph* from Associated Press to the Packer-controlled Consolidated Press in 1936. He had a very close relationship with Frank Packer – he helped Packer with the launch of the *Australian Women's Weekly* in 1933.

David Yaffa Snr.

## International Connections

The first products to be sold by David Yaffa under licence in Australia were photographs. His continual knocking on the doors of newspaper offices began to pay off.

**Before long, newspaper** pages across the country were publishing photographs with the credit line YAFFA on them. Many were what we would today call stock images, particularly photographs used in advertisements, but as radio technology improved photos for news stories were sent by cable, the early equivalent of the fax machine. They were referred to as radio pictures, radio photographs or picturegrams. And with instant transmission they were in great demand for use alongside the latest news stories.

Some newspapers were slow to adapt to the new technology and did not establish early connections with news services overseas. This left an opening for David Yaffa who on his early trips to America and Britain established links with overseas news services. Soon he was providing a news service to newspapers in Australia and New Zealand, syndicating news and feature articles as well as photographs. Syndicated news stories also carried the credit line YAFFA.

Yaffa Syndicate offices were established in New York, London and Wellington. The Yaffa Syndicate represented US firms Underwoods

and McClure's, and the UK firms Newnes, Odhams and Punch, controlling Australasian distribution of feature stories from publishing companies in the USA, UK, South Africa and Europe. Through this syndication service Australian readers were introduced to the leading feature writers of publications such as *Life, Time, Fortune, The New Yorker* and *Punch*.

Comics, too, were big business. Yaffa imported the first American comic strip into Australia, *The Clancy Kids* by Percy Crosby, and went on to syndicate a multitude of famous comic strips including *Popeye, Blondie, Mandrake, Speed Gordon, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Dick Tracy, Superman, Dagwood, Orphan Annie* and *Henry The Little King*. Fortunately, with some persuasion from David Yaffa no doubt, newspaper publishers everywhere recognised that the comic strip was an essential ingredient for readers who became strong followers of their favourite comic characters. Hearst-owned King Features Inc of New York was one of Yaffa's largest suppliers with comics in nearly every newspaper in Australasia.

## Newspaper News

In 1928 David Yaffa launched *Newspaper News*, a monthly trade publication that enabled him to stay even closer to his newspaper friends and clients. It was only the second publication in the world of its kind (the first was in Canada, called *Marketing*). It was also great timing – newspapers reached their peak in Australia in the 1920s with 23 metropolitan dailies in print in 1926; today there are ten.

Making use of its international connections, *Newspaper News* published the latest developments in advertising, radio, newspapers and newsprint, sourced out of the cable news services in his New York and London offices. This kept Australasian newspaper, advertising and marketing executives up to date with international trends and developments in their industries.

In addition to overseas news about media and marketing, *Newspaper News* published quirky side stories such as one about a journalist who was knocked over by a bus and wrote his own obituary as he lay dying on the footpath. Talk about gutter journalism!

Locally it covered news and features about Australasian media, advertisers, advertising agencies and printing technology. Companies operating in these sectors found that not only was the content useful for their own businesses but also for their clients. It followed that if advertisers such as Colgate-Palmolive and Reckitt & Colman were reading it, then advertising agencies and the media would want to advertise in it to attract business from them. The media would also advertise in it to attract business from anyone.

## In the heart of the CBD

With business booming for both *Newspaper News* and the Yaffa Syndicate, larger and more appropriate premises were needed. In 1934 the company moved into new offices on the top floor of the Warwick Building at 13-17 Hamilton Street in the middle of Sydney's CBD. Also in this building were the editorial and production departments of *The Sydney Mail*, a weekly magazine published by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, while in the next door building on Hunter Street were the offices of the *Sydney Morning Herald* – talk about getting close to your clients!

David Yaffa continued his overseas travels in the 1930s to cement relationships with clients in the US and UK, but with the onset of war he had his own battles to fight. In March 1940 the Australian Journalists' Association lodged a complaint with the Federal Government about "the great harm inflicted upon Australian industry by the importation from overseas of cheap syndicated press material". The main argument was that local artists and authors were being deprived of work, and that the syndication of overseas material was "a menace to the cultural and industrial standards of Australia created by the practice by which wealthy newspaper proprietors in this country are importing syndicated copy and drawings." The government duly banned the importation of comic strips and other artwork for printing newspaper supplements that had been created overseas.

This naturally galvanised David Yaffa into action. Apart from the comic strips he was deriving good business from selling newspaper supplements. In a letter to the Minister for Customs he explained how in July 1939 he had been commissioned by Consolidated Press "to go to America to prepare and purchase ready printed colour comics. On their behalf I made a contract with the Acme Colorprint Coy and the first shipment left America three days after my arrival and landed in Sydney about the time war broke out."

He marshalled his newspaper proprietor friends to lobby the government and a flurry of letters and telegrams from the publishers followed. He wrote regularly to the Minister for Customs and other Ministers. Frank Packer wrote to the Trade and Customs Minister pointing out inconsistencies in their rulings affecting Consolidated Press. Not all newspaper publishers, however, were prepared to join the argument, saying that all their energies would be devoted to the war effort.

Despite all the lobbying the ban continued – there was a war on, after all – but it was still in place when David Yaffa died in 1947. Lobbying can be an exhausting process, perhaps it contributed to his early death.




Left to right: newspaper article with Yaffa credit line; *Phantom* comic circa 1930s; ad from *Newspaper News*.

## A Player In Print

In 1940 David Yaffa bought a newspaper press from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and converted it to four colour printing. This was the start of the company's commercial printing operations.

**Prior to 1940,** *Newspaper News* would have been printed by outside printers, possibly by the *Herald* on the same press purchased by Yaffa. The newly-acquired press, a newspaper rotary letterpress machine, was installed in the basement of the Warwick Building along with binding and stereotype departments, a loading dock and a crane. With an emphasis now on printing, a new company, The Rotary Colorprint Pty Ltd, was set up.

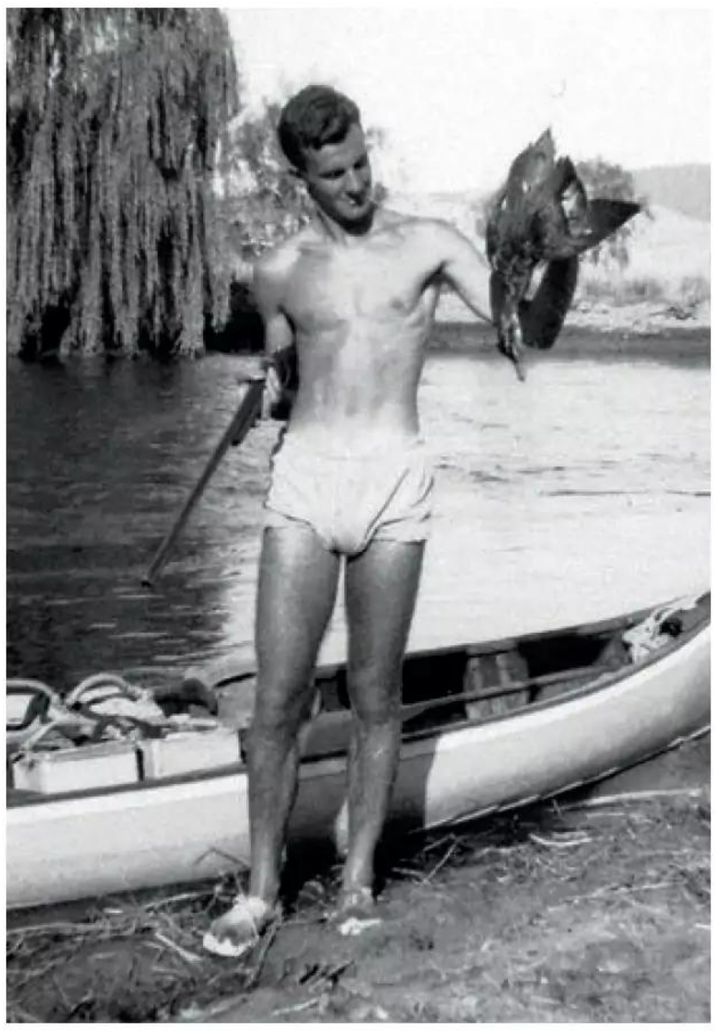
Among the first publications printed by Rotary under licence were the Pacific editions of *Reader's Digest*, *Time* magazine and the first *Phantom* comics. The *ABC Weekly* magazine and the *Australian Army* newspaper were amongst the earliest local titles printed.

To complement the newspaper printing operation a second printing facility was set up at Crane Place, a small laneway between George and Pitt Streets at Circular Quay. That building contained a number of shops and other commercial businesses, and like the Warwick Building the printing operation was in the basement. This included sheet-fed presses, later to be upgraded in 1958 to three Heidelberg Cylinder Letterpress machines, still considered to be the best letterpress press ever made, plus Heidelberg Platen and Vertical Mehile equipment. The compositors department had four linotype (hot metal typesetting) machines. Altogether there were about 30 staff at Crane Place including machinists, compositors and proof readers.

In its 65-year history there were only three managers at Rotary Colorprint. The first, Bob Ritchie, died on the job in 1966. The second, Neville Bunce Snr, held the position until 1982 when his son Neville Bunce Jnr took over.

The young Bunce started at the company as an apprentice in February 1963. "Prior to doing apprenticeships at the printers," he recalls, "all apprentices were required to do three months of office work as delivery messengers at the Yaffa Syndicate offices in the Warwick Building on Hamilton Street. The first three months of my working life were spent delivering parcels, advertising copy, metal printing blocks and newspapers all around the city, plus daily trips to Martin Place to collect the company's mail from GPO Box 606. We walked everywhere, no public transport for us. I was fifteen and a half years old and got to know all the streets and important city landmarks.

"I started my five-year apprenticeship as a letterpress printer at Crane Place in May 1963 but later that year we were told that the Warwick Building was going to be sold. A new building was to be built on the site… Sydney's



David Yaffa Jnr (DY) in New Guinea.

Australia Square." (In all, a total of 30 buildings would be demolished for this iconic Harry Seidler-designed building that became Sydney's tallest skyscraper at 50 storeys).

## Moving to Surry Hills

The company had been given notice to quit the Warwick Building in May 1962, but finding suitable new premises for the presses proved to be a major problem, causing extensive delays. Finally a building was found in Surry Hills near Central Station at Butt Street. (Butt Street is a dark, narrow lane that was known colloquially as Blood Alley because warring gangs of young men used to dump the bodies of their enemies there).

"The Butt Street building was three storeys, previously a cosmetics factory, large enough for both printing operations including the 55-60 printing staff and all the office staff. The newspaper press and large equipment from the basement in the Warwick Building could be accommodated on the ground floor, while the Crane Place staff and their letterpress machines could be accommodated on the first floor. The office staff were on the top floor. That was the plan," says Bunce. "not everyone was happy… Surry Hills was so far away!

"I was the first employee to walk into Butt Street – being the youngest staff member it was my job the clean up the new building. The Rotary truck driver would drop me at the door in the morning and come back in the afternoon to pick me up. I spent a few days by myself sweeping the dusty floors and doing a general clean-up.

"What I didn't know at the time was that I would be doing the same job 42 years later when the company vacated the building… sweeping the floors and cleaning up everything. I was the last person to leave the building, as well as the first to enter it!" (Young Neville is also the only person alive today to have worked at the Warwick Building, Crane Place and Butt Street).

Rotary Colorprint was a mid-size commercial printing operation from the 1960s through to the 1980s. It employed around 55 staff working 8-hour day and afternoon shifts. Over the years more than 30 apprentices did their five-year trade course there, with three apprentices achieving Apprentice of the Year status. Apprentices and truck drivers were usually sourced by Neville Bunce Snr at his local pub in Leichhardt.

In the early 1950s Rotary printed the comic sections for the weekend newspapers plus standalone King Features comics including *Blondie, Dagwood, Archie, Phantom Ranger, Lois, The Shadow, The Invisible Man, Flash Gordon, Beetle Bailey, Mandrake, Jungle Jim, Felix the Cat, Denis the Menace* and so on, and Cleveland Westerns. These were followed in the '60s and later by booklets of crosswords, puzzles and horoscopes and a succession of 'pulp fiction' products – detective stories, action stories, 'true confessions' and a host of titillating and risque titles such as *Daring Men's Stories, Adventure For Men, Modern Men* and *Real Experiences*. Different times – the presses had to be kept busy somehow!

By the turn of the century printing technology was marching on and plate-less printing was the way of the future. On top of this, much of the machinery at Rotary Colorprint was reaching the end of its life. Eventually there was a clear choice – upgrade most of equipment at great cost or get out of the printing business. Pragmatism won the day and the company closed operations in August 2005.

## A Diversion to New Guinea

David Yaffa died in 1947 and was survived by his wife Doris, daughter Denise and son David Jnr, who was only 13. Stanley Eskell, husband of Denise Yaffa, became managing director of the company.

**Stanley Eskell had** been in the army during the war and had served in New Guinea, an experience he would soon put to advantage. In 1950 the company launched *The South Pacific Post*, based in Port Moresby, to be followed later by a group of other local newspapers that included *The New Guinea Courier*, *The Rabaul Times*, *The New Guinea Times* and *Nu Gini Toktok*.

In addition to printing and publishing its newspapers in New Guinea the company was busy distributing the comics that it printed in Australia as well as representing the American publications *Time* and *Life International* in the region. It also distributed *The Bulletin* and *Australian Women's Weekly* magazines and the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers for Consolidated Press. Its letterhead proudly described the company as "Commercial printers and publishers of the first air-delivered newspaper in the Pacific".

David Yaffa Jnr (referred to as DY from here onwards) joined the company at the earliest opportunity aged 22 and became a director in 1959, aged 25. In 1961 Stanley Eskell resigned from the board and DY took over as managing director.

The following year discussions were held about the possible expansion of the company to include more offices and additional commercial printing operations in New Guinea. There was also comment made that the papers needed stronger editorial direction bearing in mind the changing political environment. A number of interested parties expressed their interest in purchasing a stake in the company to address such criticism. This led ultimately to the sale of a controlling interest in the New Guinea operation to the Melbourne-based *Herald & Weekly Times* Group.

Essentially Yaffa Syndicate ended its New Guinea business in 1965.

## Building a Stable

For more than 30 years the company owned just one publication, *Newspaper News*. That all changed in the 1960s as David Yaffa Jnr (DY) assembled a stable of business and consumer magazines.

**The company's presses** were busy enough printing pulp products, but no doubt there was a limit to how many booklets of puzzles, crosswords, detective stories, true confessions and titillating tales the market could stand. Alternatively, magazines could produce a healthy income from advertising and subscriptions, particularly if they could corner a market or dominate a category.

Launching a magazine cold turkey is a lengthy and expensive process. If it fails, the financial loss can be high and irretrievable. DY's preferred method was to buy publications that were struggling or in a fire sale, and breathe life into them. By keeping a heavy lid on costs he could run them more economically than under their previous owners and, as the stable of titles grew, economies of scale could kick in.

In the 1960s he purchased eight magazines and launched none; in the 1970s he purchased eight more magazines and launched one. Right from the start the magazines were a mixture of business titles (trade magazines) and special interest titles (consumer magazines). This mix is unique – no other publishing company in Australia covers both categories, they are either publishers of business magazines or publishers of consumer magazines. This is still the case.

Three of the magazines acquired in the 1960s are still published: the business magazine *Packaging News* and the consumer magazines *Australian Flying* and *Sporting Shooter*. The one magazine launched in the 1970s, *Guns Australia*, survived in a fashion, being merged with *Sporting Shooter*. The other seven are no longer published.

Magazine publishing is an ever-changing business. Successful titles are invested in and improved. Spin-off products such as guides and directories may be created to capitalise on the momentum of the parent title and an effective subscriber list. Unsuccessful titles are quietly buried, but only after every effort has been made to keep them alive. These efforts might include changing the frequency, the paper stock, the page size, the number of pages, the binding, the print run, the distribution or the staffing.

DY was a master at tweaking these variables, but in the end it always came down to the bottom line. No room for sentiment. Of the 56 titles published by the company since 1960 only 16 survive in print. The stable reached its zenith in 2003 with 37 magazines.

Over the years with its business titles the Yaffa Group published the market leader or significant magazine in more than 20 industries including packaging, food manufacturing, advertising, shooting, photography, air conditioning, panelbeating, boating/sailing, fishing, dance, aviation, textiles/fashion, defence, sports goods, stationery, hospital management and club management. With special interest magazines it published leading titles about flying, fishing, cycling, photography, shooting, dance, sailing, walking, health, woodworking, skiing and scuba diving.

## The Empire Builder

David Yaffa Jnr (DY)'s career with the company spanned 57 years from 1955 to 2012. As proprietor he built the company into arguably the largest independent specialist publishing group in Australia.

**DY's father would** not recognise the company as it is today. The syndication business, the backbone of the company before the war, no longer operates. The printing company, the major contributor to the company's coffers in the generation after the war, no longer operates. The world changed, and the company had to change with it.

During his time with the company DY presided over the expansion of its printing operations, initiated its major move into magazine publishing, assembled a stable of more than 30 magazines. He also closed down the printing company – there was no room for sentimentality.

"David Yaffa was a proprietor with a true feel for the media," stated *AdNews* in its obituary in 2018. "He was in it for the long haul. He spent a lifetime building up the business his way, through trial and error, virtually single-handed. His greatest business achievement was the development of his father's business into a significant force in Australian publishing. Few companies in Australia remain in private hands after nearly a century.

Tracy Yaffa and David Yaffa.

"While he was single-minded and demanding, he was not the stereotypical, ruthless media proprietor. He was polite and fair and would treat his staff with respect if they did their jobs well. For those on the editorial side it was gratifying that the content of the magazine came first. In theory a good product attracted readers, and good readership numbers attracted advertisers. More revenue could then be allocated to improving the product further. Consequently he backed his good editors and let them get on with the job without interference."

At work he remained behind the closed door of his office every day from 8.45 to 6, preferring to speak with his lieutenants by phone. There were occasional meetings in his office limited by the number of chairs for visitors (three). In later years budget meetings were held in the boardroom with senior staff of the different magazine groups, but company-wide management meetings never happened.

Most of his employees would only see him fleetingly. He was not the type of boss to wander around the building, let alone have discussions away from his office. The company Christmas party was an exception, when he was happy to chat with his staff. In some years there were rumours that he would make an announcement about the company to his staff, but that never happened either.

He retired in good health in 2012, possibly with some reluctance about handing over the company he had built to the next generation. He enjoyed six years of retirement and after his death in 2018 the company's staff were invited to join the family at the Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron in Kirribilli to celebrate his life.

All four of DY's children have worked in the company at one time or another. Tracy is


The evolution of *Newspaper News* to *Advertising News* then *AdNews*.

managing director, Max was a sales manager on business magazines for many years, Guy worked briefly in the marine group of magazines in the 1990s, and James was publisher of *AdNews* before his current role of establishing the bicycling classics events. Tracy's daughter Lucy is the company's marketing and events manager. The company is now owned by Tracy and James.

## The Flagship

The oldest publication in the Yaffa stable is *AdNews*, the flagship of the company, which will be 100 years old in three years' time. It started life as *Newspaper News* and went through quite a few name changes.

**Newspaper News launched** as a monthly tabloid size newspaper in 1928, and despite its name was never just about newspapers. Advertising is the lifeblood of media, and David Yaffa recognised this right from the start. There were two publications about advertising already circulating – *Advertising in Australia* and *The Advertiser's Monthly* – that would have been seen as competitors. So he bought them out and merged them into *Newspaper News* within a year.

*Newspaper News* reported on all forms of media, not just newspapers, although newspapers were the dominant advertising medium until well after the war. Coverage concentrated more on the business side of publishing – advertising, circulation and production technology – and less on the journalism side. Commercial radio and outdoor advertising (posters and billboards) received token coverage in the early days.

Commercial radio gathered pace in the 1950s and television launched in 1956, leading to the launch of a spin-off publication called *Radio Television News* in 1957. At the same time the frequency of *Newspaper News* was increased from monthly to fortnightly and it became a magazine rather than a newspaper. *Radio Television News*, however, faced strong competition, was unable to exist on its own, and was incorporated into *Newspaper News* in 1961.

The impact of television was enormous. The production values of commercials became more and more important, leading to a rapid expansion of the advertising industry with its expertise in the creation of advertisements and media planning and buying. International ad agency networks, mostly from the US, spread across the world. Advertising agencies became indispensable players, in many ways controlling the relationship between their clients (advertisers/marketers) and the media. The appearance of specialised media buying agencies in the 1970s strengthened their position further.

This ascendance of the advertising industry led to the publication being renamed *Advertising & Newspaper News* in 1969, with a further change to *Advertising News* in 1971. This was shortened to *AdNews* in 1984 as part of a redesign.

The 1980s and the rest of the century were hectic times for the media. Until Treasurer Paul Keating stopped it, the fringe benefits tax allowed entertainment as a tax-deductable expense. Enormous amounts of alcohol and food were devoured in the interests of doing business. Long hours at the pub, lunches that never ended and exotic junkets were par for the course. For many organisations, including *AdNews*, the primary aim was to finish the week's work by lunchtime Friday so that you didn't need to go back to the office from the restaurant or pub.

Cycling Classics founder, James Yaffa in lycra.

In 1980 *AdNews* interviewed Don Morris, managing director of the ad agency Mojo, which was winning every pitch it contested at the time. "We work bloody hard here," he said on the record. "We start around 7am so that we can finish the day's work by lunchtime. That way we can enjoy lunch and not go back to the office. We do that every day of the week."

Agency Christmas parties were legendary. Certain agencies became known for their spectacular parties and made enormous efforts to ensure each one was better than the last. Mike Magnus of Magnus Nankervis & Curl owned a rural property southwest of Sydney alongside a disused railway line. Somehow he persuaded NSW Railways to open up the line and provide a train service for his guests to ride from Central Station to the end of his property's driveway where a temporary platform was constructed.

Guests at agency Christmas parties were typically staff, clients and friends in the media. For one Christmas party at MDA Sydney an above ground pool was installed in the agency and before long guests were stripping off and hopping completely naked into the pool... if they could find space... staff and guests, male and female, all piled in.

Things calmed down somewhat after the recession of 1990. Nevertheless, the advertising industry still had plenty of character – it was, after all, supposed to be the leader in creativity – but the boozy culture eased up as agencies gradually became more corporate.

## Transition to Media

In 2015 the Yaffa Publishing Group was rebranded as Yaffa Media. The transition from printed magazines to a media and marketing company with multiple touch points was a complicated and at times painful journey.

**The arrival of** digital technology in the 1990s hit the media industry like a sledgehammer. Disruption was rampant. Print-based companies such as newspaper and magazine

publishers were in many ways hamstrung by their past as they tried to hold onto their print revenues. Like most publishing companies Yaffa was a laggard in embracing the new technology, a situation that opened the door temporarily to start-ups and digital natives that had no legacy to protect. Consultants were employed to build systems and websites in the early days, often with very little success. Finally, by the end of the century, the company started to establish workable websites and newsletters and get up to speed with the changing technology.

Managing director Tracy Yaffa looked back at how it was during the transition: "When we first did digital the editor had to be across it, of course, but there was this other department that did all the uploading and other digital things, and there were even dedicated sales people just for digital. People became focused almost on keeping them separate. There was print and there was digital, whereas now it's just what it is, it's just publishing."

The rebranding of the company was announced at a staff function in 2015. "We are no longer magazine publishers," said Tracy. "We are creators of engaging media. Our inspired content is consumed on different platforms. We are experts in our diverse fields and a trusted and valued source in this new world. Our magazines are now brands across print, digital, apps, conferences and social media. We must continue to strive to achieve or maintain market leadership in each of our targeted segments."

Most importantly, the rebranding required a change of approach among the staff – they needed to embrace the future, and were advised that they could either get on board the 'Yaffa bus' or choose another bus. "It was a matter of getting wholesale change from the people," said Tracy. "They had to think differently, think about what the needs of the company were, and what the aims of the publications were. A few jumped off the bus because they simply couldn't adjust to changing needs, but by and large it was really impressive about how excited everyone got about it. It's been amazing seeing what people can turn their attention to once they get it."

One of the company's earlier diversifications was the move into events. Since the 1990s the company had been commissioning Two de Force, an events company, to organise the *AdNews* Agency of the Year Awards, an annual industry awards dinner. The relationship worked, and when Two de Force was offered for sale to Yaffa in 2007 the deal was done. Awards and other events for Yaffa magazines could then be handled in-house by Two de Force. Additionally, Two de Force could expand its operations independently by organising events for non-Yaffa clients. Events provided multiple revenue opportunities – sponsorships, entry fees for awards and competitions, and tickets to attend.

While events can be a key part of the mix, there are many other ways the company has developed to help clients achieve their marketing aims. The list now includes conferences, exhibitions, product launches, competitions, awards, podcasts, videos, roundtables, moderating and hosting. Magazines that can be extended into these areas are the ones that have survived; magazines that have not been able to offer such additional marketing opportunities are unlikely to survive. As Tracy explains: "We used to mark our success by the economies of scale – the more titles the better – although the 80/20 rule applied with 80% of the profit coming from 20% of the titles. But then the internet and social media arrived and we found the long tail of the less profitable titles was dragging us down. So our strategy became one of going deep into the industries we served – in each industry we aim to be number one, be relevant and reimagine what we can produce for them. Now there's a suite of things we can do very easily, whether it's a conference, a breakfast, an awards program, an online entry campaign or a white paper. We can do all these things and offer them up for each industry."

This has required a long list of additional skills from the editorial and production staff. The editors continue to co-ordinate content – just as they did in the old days of printed magazines – but now they need to get out of the office, be comfortable on the stage at conferences and events, create podcasts and videos, and generally be the face of the publication as well as coordinate editorial support. Now they are professional communicators, conference agenda leaders and keynote speakers, and the presence of the editor driving the content package sweetens the deal. 'Church and state', the traditional divide between editorial and advertising, is a thing of the past.

Celebrating 100 years with an eye on the future: James Yaffa, Tracy Yaffa and Lucy Yaffa.

## The Next Generation

Lucy Yaffa, marketing and events manager of Yaffa Media and a fourth generation member of the family, takes a look into an unknown future.

**It's near impossible** to predict what impact changes in technology will have on the business – from AI to The Metaverse – innovation in technology will continue to transform how Yaffa Media's content is created, distributed and consumed.

As we look into the future, one constant at the core of our business is the people and their communities. From photography to packaging we will continue to connect with and serve the needs of each community. The nature of these connections will inevitably change as we explore new platforms and ways to connect.

Working for a medium-sized family business is quite a different experience compared to the global multinational companies I have worked for in the past. While we may not have the same access to resources as larger companies, our agility puts us in a strong position to navigate the future. We can implement changes quickly without the need for lengthy approval processes. In addition, we are open to taking risks and exploring new ideas for connecting with our communities.

I'm incredibly proud being the fourth generation in a business which has successfully adapted and evolved over the past 100 years. I'm excited about the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for Yaffa Media.

**By Jeremy Light**

Jeremy worked at *AdNews* from 1978–2015.

# On Standby

**We read, work and play on our personal devices. This is a simple project for a phone stand designed for daily use. Story by Raf Nathan.**

At mealtimes and other times, a good phone stand is a frequently used friend. There are three parts to this version – the face, base and phone ledge.

You can select wood for the face according to your preferences and framing this with a contrasting wood can also add to the look.



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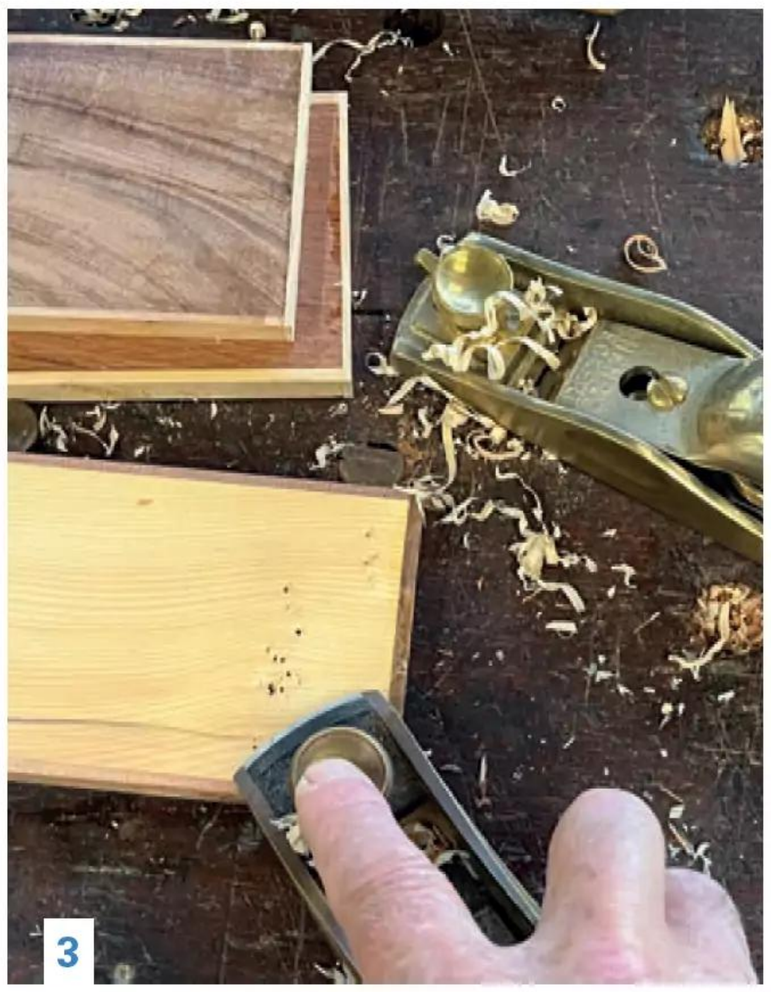

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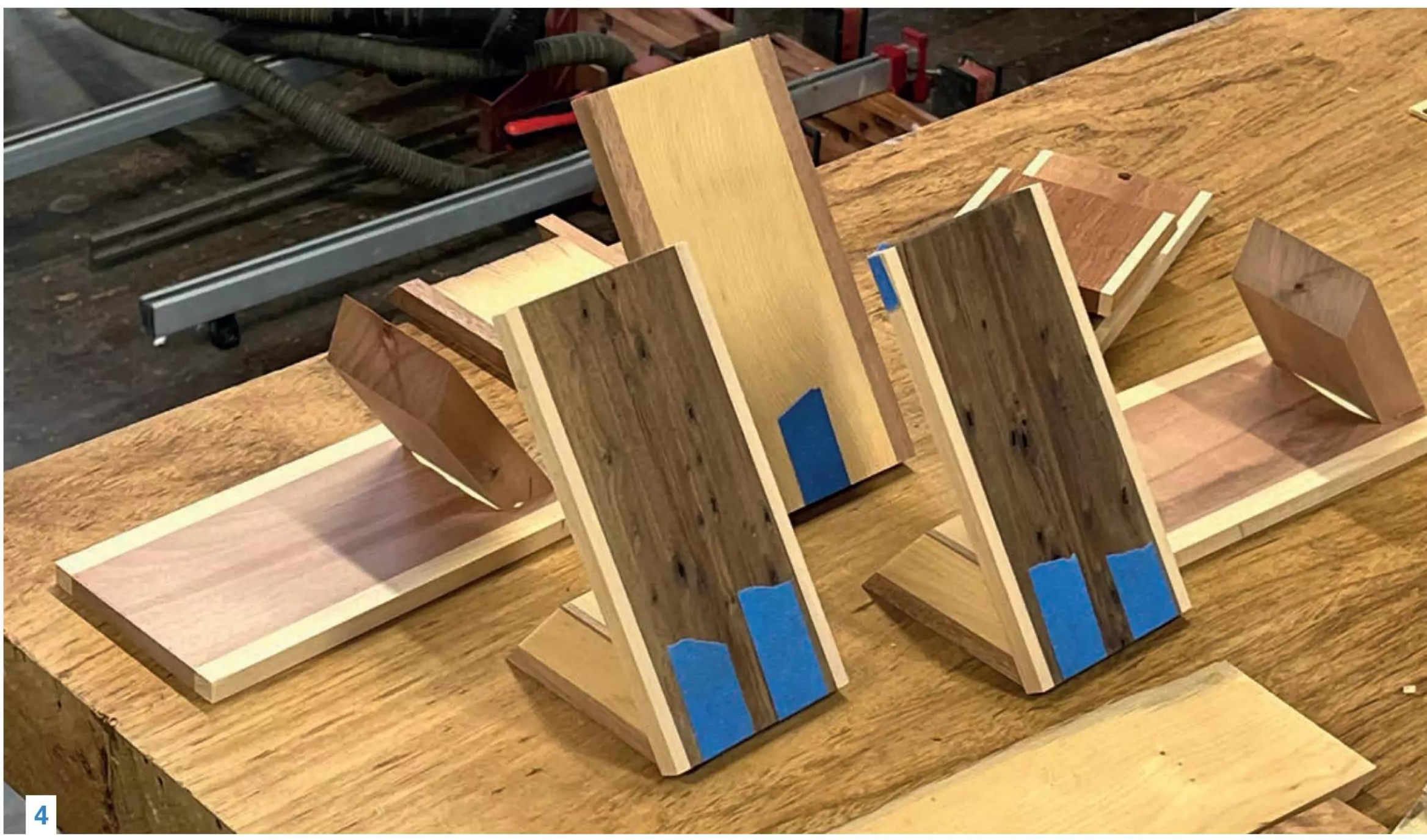

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The angle of the face is important. After experimenting with various angles, I settled on 37° as optimum for viewing a phone screen whilst seated. The base and ledge then have to support the weight of the phone and face piece.

## Face and base dimensions

On the stands shown, the face is 95mm wide overall and 140mm long finished, but I leave these initially a bit longer at say 170mm. The thickness can be 8–10mm thick.

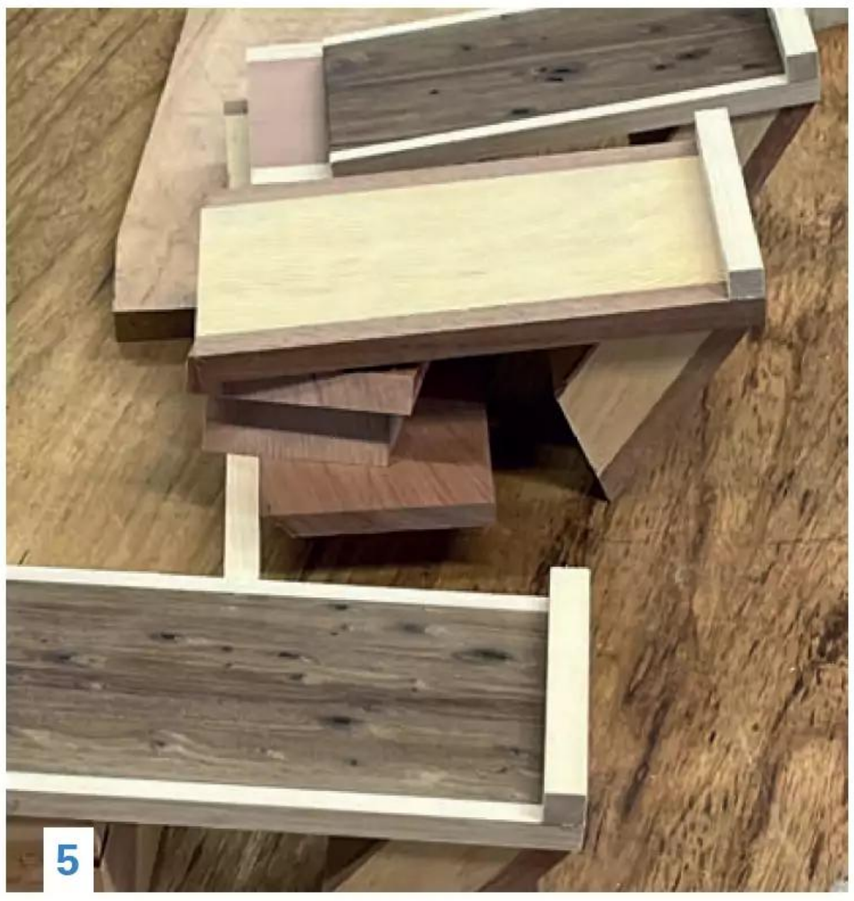
Prepare the face piece square and glue on the edge strips.

The edge strips can be 4 or 5mm thick. Flush these down when the glue is dry. The face is then sawn to final length. A hand or mitre saw can be used for this.

The base can be a simple block of wood or you can laminate it up with contrasting timber on the edges or faces. This is sawn at 37° both ends.

**Main:** These phone stands are a simple project designed for everyday use.

1. Glue on the edge strips and when dry flush them down.
2. You can add to the look with another edge strip at the top of the face. This frames the face piece and can highlight any special wood you use.
3. Flush down the edge strips with a block plane and follow up with sanding.
4. Glue the faces and bases together and secure with tape.



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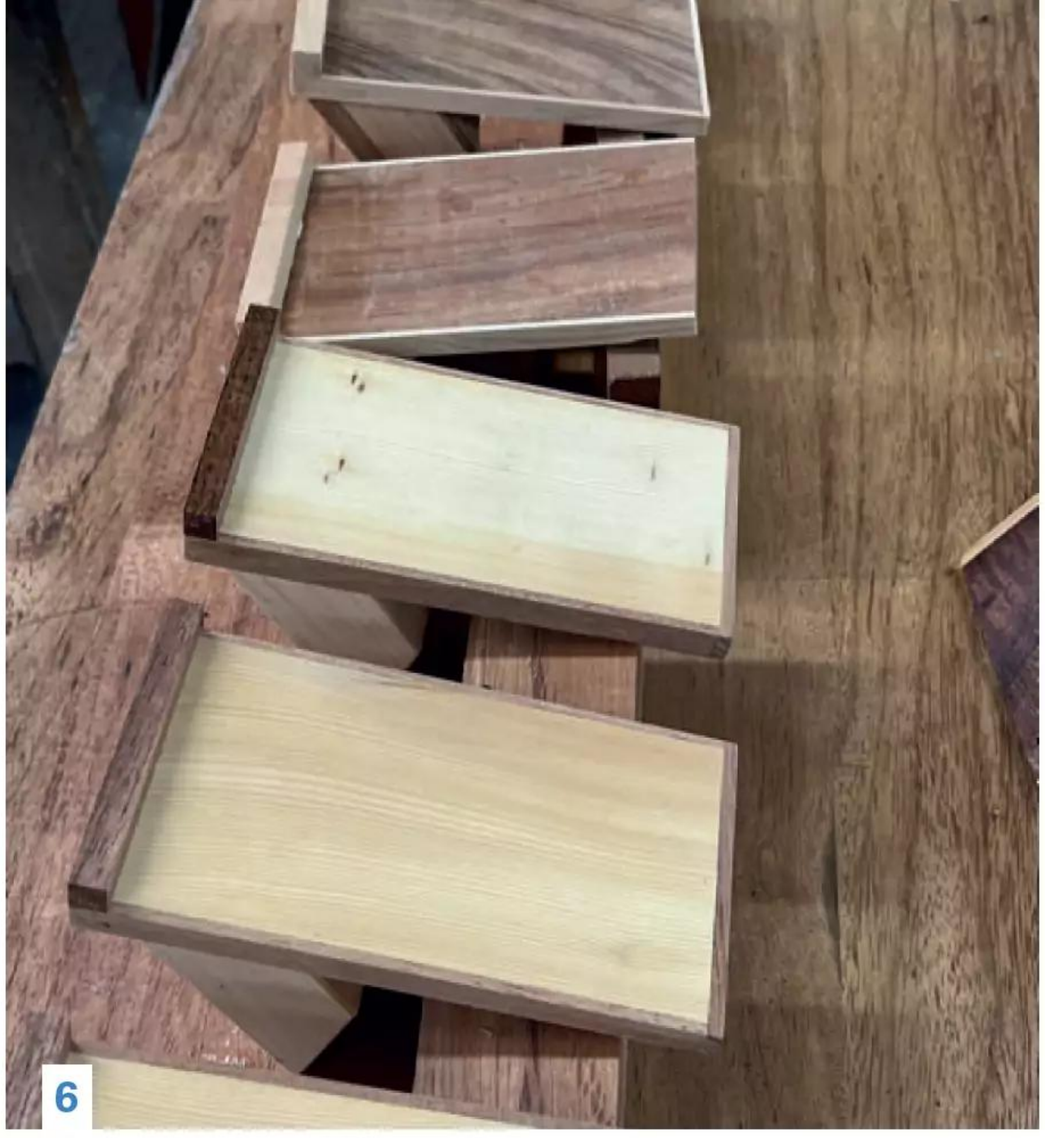

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5. The ledges are glued on next.
6. After the bases are glued on, edges were lightly chamfered the whole assembly sanded.
7. A batch of phone stands made from blackwood, Huon and celery top pine.

To cut these small lengths more safely on the drop saw, I made a jig to support the wood when sawing the angle. I also use a long push-stick to keep the sawn piece of wood stable.

## Assembling the stands

Sand and prepare the face and base and then glue them together. I use a quick-setting glue for this which has proven to be exceptionally strong. Given the angles you are gluing I found it best to use tape and gravity to clamp the pieces together. The phone ledge is 10 x 10mm and is glued in place.

## Finishing off

All the edges need to be neatly chamfered and any glue run-out removed before polishing. I use my phone stand often and found these stands to be welcome gifts as well.

*Photos: Raf Nathan*

*Raf Nathan @treeman777 is a Brisbane based woodworker and frequent contributor to Australian Wood Review.*

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