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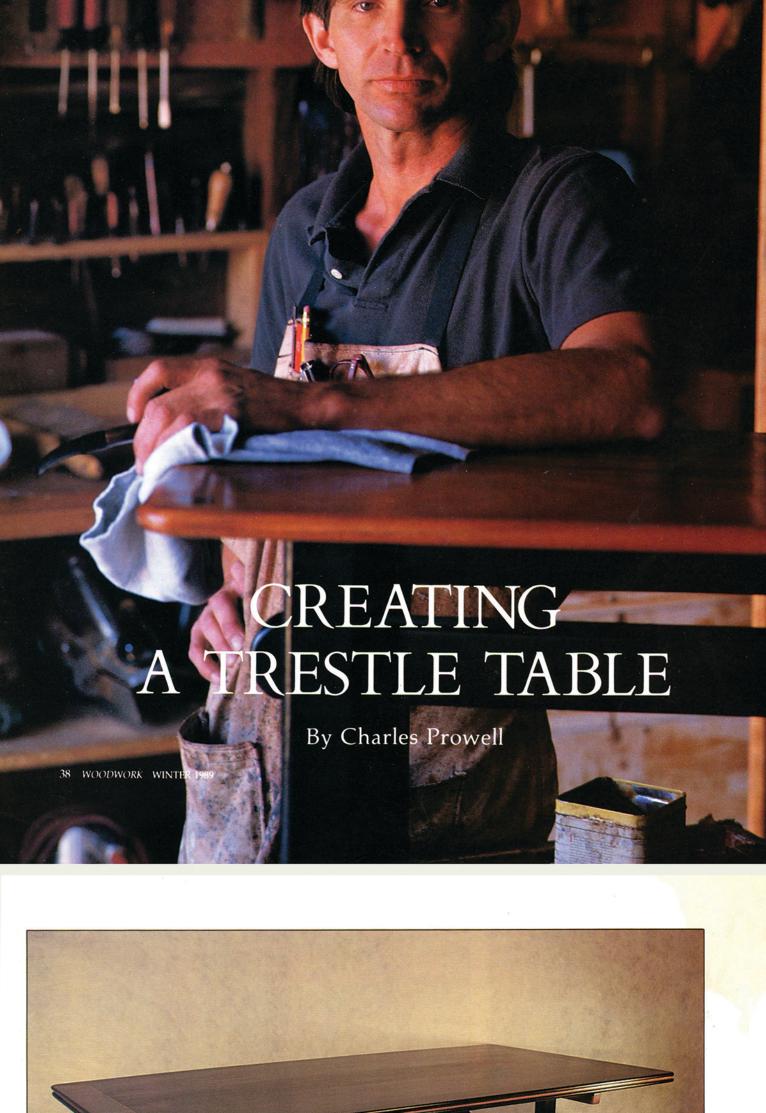
55 / THE MORTISE & TENON 62 / THE REVERSIBLE ROUTER/PLANER CART 64 / GALLERY OF WOODWORK 70 / A SECRETARY DESK **DEPARTMENTS** 2/COMMENT 4 / LETTERS 12 / EVENTS

suit a project?

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exploration design ideas, page 38 by Charles Prowell 30 / PRESERVING TEAK—SUSTAINED YIELD FORESTRY IN BURMA by Ted Tuescher by Joseph Olivari by Hugh Foster by Graham Blackburn by Eli I. Schefer by Bob Theiss

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tion imaginable of both native and

exotic hardwoods that it would

have made any difference to my

grandfather. The look of his work

fell somewhere between a Shaker

and Mission style, and seemed to

demand the use of certain elements

in a way that Kentucky railed fences

demanded white paint. Today,

however, when furniture design is

seemingly without limits or restric-

tions, the decision of which woods to use is never so simple. It becomes

a process for the nonproduction

furnituremaker that must recur with

each new piece. In this article I'll

explore how this process of matching materials with designs occurred

with my trestle table, a process that

can be as ambiguous and indeter-

of any piece of original furniture,

and particularly my trestle table,

With the preliminary drawings

minate as matching a tie to a suit.

that arrived every few months by the beginnings of a design come special order and was kept bound almost simultaneously with the and tagged in its own particular decision of what materials to use. bin. I don't suppose that even if This piece began with only a vague notion of a trestle-type legwork they had offered the widest selec-◆ PHOTO BY ROBERT BRUCE DUNCAN

taley Lumber, as I remember it

from my boyhood, was located just

outside of town flanked on one side by railroad tracks and cornfields

and on the other side by old Route

10 and more cornfields. Staley's sold

everything: barbed wire, hip boots,

cattle feed, coal, miscellaneous hard-

ware, lumber for the local builders

like my father, and hardwoods.

These hardwoods are what brought

my grandfather, a furniture maker, into Staley's and, unlike my father,

he would sometimes linger for half

the morning before finally leaving

with only a half-dozen boards in the

a basic inventory of oak, maple,

birch, mahogany, a little walnut,

and, for my grandfather, a longtime

preferred customer, a standing

reserve of American black cherry

What they offered at Staley's was

back of his truck.

PHOTO BY MADELINE SCHNAPT failure of the drawer face.

although the basic trestle design

was rooted in the past, this new

detail quickly set a contemporary

precedent. Any woods that might

be associated with the original tres-

tle look (oak, cherry, pine) would

only generate comparison and result

in what we'll call a "conflict of gene-

rations." In other words, plant the

design in its origins but move it far

enough away so that it stands alone.

grain of Peruvian walnut for the

wedges and inlay details, onto first

maple, then birch, then satinwood,

then discarded them all and turned

to the walnut as the primary wood

for the table with the lighter woods

for the details. It worked, and for

the first time I was able to envision

the piece in my mind, an asset that

allowed me to begin filling in the

gaps of the legwork. This is the part

I considered the dark, straight

CHERRY WRITING DESK, American black cherry and wenge. I anticipated a sandwiched carcass with a slight, almost brittle look to the legwork — an inconsequentially simple piece whose defining features rested entirely on the success or KADELL DRESSER & MIRROR, Anilined maple & padouk. This dresser was the sixth piece in a seven-piece commissioned bedroom set, in which I discovered the advantages and limitations of water-base anilined dye. The drawer pulls were fashioned from a pattern and template guide on the router, carrying over a similar

most; the basic framework has been

laid, the structural needs have been

met, and all that remained was the

fine tuning, the missing links that

would complement what already

existed. Oddly enough, this is nor-

mally done away from the drawing

board, in the early morning before

the work day begins, or evenings,

under the guise of walking the

dogs, or even, alas, in the midst of a

bility. I could find little, and order-

ing stock could take months, an incon-

adding my own color to the wood,

a viable alternative that had me

suddenly considering the range of colors

offered by aniline dyes. It was intoxi-

cating (I could have Fire Truck Red

By this time I was considering

Meanwhile there was a problem with the walnut, namely its availa-

conversation with my wife.

venience at best.

detail used on the headboard of the bed. On completion the dresser seemed some-

how unfinished, and with the client's approval I designed an accompanying mirror.

PHOTO BY DON RUSSEL experience with anilines in the past had been favorable, and there were certainly advantages. I could go with a less expensive and more easily obtainable wood such as maple, and produce the near black pigment I had in mind. It also had its disadvantages: the flakes themselves were expensive; the application was time

consuming; and it would be impos-

sible to lay in my lighter highlights over an already dyed surface, for to

sand them flush would discolor the surrounding wood (the idea of

touching up with a fine brush seemed a little ridiculous). I had by this time

completed the surface design, cal-

ling for an eighth-inch inlay at the

bread-board joint. This detail, along

with the pattern of laid-in splines for

each exposed tenon on the legs,

worked to overrule any notion of

dyes. And yet by this time a new

candidate had surfaced, a wood of

ineffable beauty that would

cause me more trouble than I could

have imagined, because its working

properties were somewhere

delectable, pleasures in life is to

wander about a well-stocked book-

shop." By supplanting bookshop

with local hardwood supplier, you'll

Somerset Maugham once wrote that "... one of the minor, yet more

between white oak and granite.

PHOTO BY MADELINE SCHNAPT

that would, at first glance, appear

bottom-heavy with the accumula-

tion of visible details in the base.

The top surface would appear sim-

ple, without much detail, but by its

sheer expanse demand the same

attention as the supporting base.

So whatever wood the top was

made of, it should not be too eye-

catching in itself so as not to upset the balance between top and base. I

needed an absence of color, an

extremely light, or extremely dark

wood, and possibly both. The lines

of a basic trestle design are simple

and a stark contrast might help prevent the details from being lost

in their surroundings. I decided on

through mortises for the legs, along

with exposed wedges and spline inlays for every exposed tenon. To

highlight these details, the decision to go with contrasting woods was

At this point, only a few sketches along, it seemed clear that any earth-

tone woods would be ruled out. I

had developed a rolled, sandwiched

edge to the top's perimeter and

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firmly made.

a sentence that's easy to write but which, in practice, took me almost two hours to complete and cost a I chose cherry as the secondary wood for the wedges, the trestle board, and inlay. The tendency had been toward a lighter wood, which would give a look of absolute contrasts. But that gave way to the subtler cherry in a conciliatory effort

PHOTO BY MADELINE SCHNAPT Figure 1 Constructing began with gluing up the top under the bread-board was mitered with a strip of 1/8" cherry at the slab. To install the bread-boards, I marked out a mitered cut in the slab to accept the 6" bread-board joint, viewable only from below. I now had the rolled edge I looked for and a rabbeted inset 5/8" deep and made the cut with a circular saw, carefully aligning it with by 1/2" tall. I made up a strip of straight edges clamped to the slab. cherry to this dimension at 1/8" A 1/2" rabbet bit was used to acquire thickness and glued it into place. the tongue on the slab side and a For the legs, I began with 8/4 3/8" deep slotting bit for the groove stock that measured out to 1-3/4". in the bread-board. A strip of 1/8" The mortises were bored out on the cherry was laid into the top side of drill press and cleaned up with the tongue, and the bread-board heavy duty mortising chisels. This was slipped into place. could also be done with a plunge The edge board wraps the underrouter. The last step in cutting the mortises was to align the upper cut side of the table with a 3/4" by 5-1/2" cross section (fig. 3). This gives to the desired slope of the eventual the thickness I wanted along the wedges. This was done by drawing out to scale the leg and wedge fit edges but leaves only 3/4" thickness in the field. Before setting this and then pulling the angle off the piece into place I made up the paper and transferring it to the sandwich edge by first rabbeting actual mortise. A block was cut to the underside of the slab with a 5/8" this angle with which to position rabbet bit set at 1/4" depth. I the chisel every so often returned along this edge using a 3/8" roundover set an extra 1/4" low to ease the edge of the rabbet. The roundover on all sides. same process was used for the sandwich board and the two were glued together. The edge piece

possible with just one go-around. But aside from whether you are a one-of-a-kind woodworker, or more production-minded, the maxims of your materials defining your design, and vice versa, remain the same. And if my grandfather, whose careerspanning corpus consisted of variations on the same design, had for some reason moved away from his Shaker-like style, he undoubtedly would also have moved away from And yet perhaps overriding all else, no matter what style of furniture you create, the most startling dictum is that there essentially are no rules. There are techniques. And as long as these techniques are met, then the only basis for judgment left is purely subjective: does the completed vision work, or not. But this is an endless dilemma, wrestled with throughout the art world, consisting of opinions that

The middle rail was made up and all rail tenons were cut with a straight bit on the router set at 1/4" WOODWORK WINTER 1989 43

wedges, I used a piece of 1/4" square waste material and set it in the

open mortise above the tenon. I

marked the strip, and measured the

distance from the top of the marker

down to the tenon. All eight wedges

were made up and set in place for

fine tuning until each one had a

tight fit that left the wedge with a

1/2" extension beyond the mortise.

This took time, but because so

much rests on the fit of these wedges

I made certain they fit well. These

wedges were all sanded and given

with a dado blade on the table saw.

The legs were stood upright and clamped to the miter guide. The

initial cuts on the band saw were

more a precaution against chipout

than anything else; I trust the band saw with this type of cut more than

The lowest rail was 1-3/4'' by 3-1/2''. To give some detail on this

part of the base I elected to add the

raised piece that would accept the

trestle board. I cut out the lower rail

and the fitted raised piece with a

combination of the table saw and

band saw and then took a 1/4"

rabbet bit on the router where the

two meet to give me a reveal that

would lend some attention to the

area. The fitted, raised piece was

cut out to accept the trestle board

wedge in the same way as the rail

(fig. 5). Then those edges coming

This would show that the two were

distinct without waving any flags.

contact with the reveal were given a 1/4" roundover.

the table saw (fig. 4).

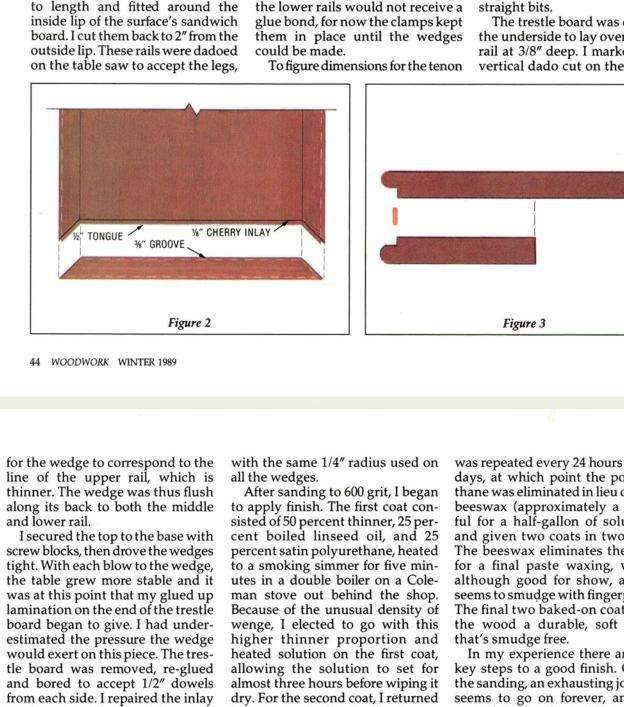
each to accept the single crossand I'll get to that later. I laid in board that essentially connected wenge along these two edges and the base together (**fig. 4**). Once the glued the piece back in place, left dados for the cross-board were cut with a clean mortise that was fin-I returned with a dovetail bit and a ished off with the router. Using a router aligned with a straight edge slotting bit I cut and laid in the to give the dado sides their dovewenge strips along the cross-grain tail bevels. The legs, lower rails, edge of the trestle board. I moved and connecting rails were assemahead on the rest of the inlay on the bled and clamped together. I bored trestle board, using first a 1/4" slotout a 1/2" hole at the top through ting bit along both sides, and then the fitted legs and connecting rail 1/2" and 3/4" straight flute bits. The and glued and dowelled these inlay here was cut and rounded on together. The base would now the ends on a dremel sander to corremain fixed in place, and although respond with the radius left by the straight bits. The trestle board was dadoed on the underside to lay over the lower rail at 3/8" deep. I marked out the vertical dado cut on the lower rail

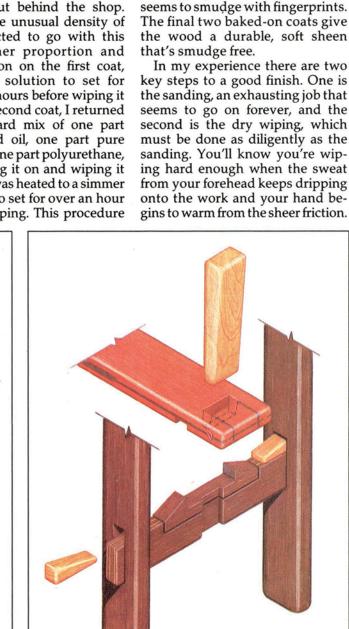
Figure 4

all the wedges.

was repeated every 24 hours for six days, at which point the polyurethane was eliminated in lieu of pure beeswax (approximately a handful for a half-gallon of solution), and given two coats in two days. The beeswax eliminates the need for a final paste waxing, which, although good for show, always seems to smudge with fingerprints. In my experience there are two

key steps to a good finish. One is the sanding, an exhausting job that seems to go on forever, and the second is the dry wiping, which must be done as diligently as the sanding. You'll know you're wiping hard enough when the sweat from your forehead keeps dripping onto the work and your hand begins to warm from the sheer friction.





of any design which I enjoy the with Lemon Yellow highlights!) My find that most woodworkers tend 40 WOODWORK WINTER 1989 substantial sum. to avoid a deco-like sleekism. If the woods had been reversed, with cherry as the primary, this danger wouldn't have existed. And in fact to have used any woods other than those chosen would have created as many different effects. Many furniture makers, my grandfather among them, develop a line of furniture, created no differently than I created this piece, with the exception that there is usually one or several prototypes constructed before introducing the piece to the open market. By this time the kinks have been worked out and the piece is as perfect as it will ever be. For the one-of-a-kind commission this is a luxury that cannot be afforded. The design and construction has to be as close to perfect as his beloved cherry. FIREPLACE, cherry veneer and wenge. For the woodworker, the fireplace offers a welcome challenge in design. It becomes at once the focal point of any room and an opportunity to have some fun. With this piece, in a 1930s tract house recently remodeled in pastels and opened walls, I attempted to draw the eye, while not stealing the show. to agree. I was "wandering" one finished up. In each of those proafternoon, killing time between jects the wenge had threatened to appointments, when I came across upstage my primary woods (it the wenge (wen-gay), black as night seemed to come into a life of its and enough backed-up stock to own with even a hint of finish). Yet furnish half a house. I had worked at the same time it was dark enough with wenge before, more to comnot to make the table top jump out by their very nature will always be plement other woods, and each time visually. I returned the following I was struck by how wonderfully it day and purchased what I needed, open to debate. WOODWORK WINTER 1989 41

> make sure I hadn't gotten off track. The mortises were then given a 1/4" The top joint on the legs was cut on the band saw with a 3/4" blade and then the center plowed out Parts List Prowell Trestle Table

> > end breadboards and edge wraps

and I cut a dado in the center of

long edge wraps

connecting rails

crossboard

lower rails

raised piece

rail wedges

rail wedges

trestle wedges

mid rails

trestle

legs

a 1/4" radius. Rather than drill and chisel out the mortise in the trestle board for the main wedge, I elected to cut through from the end on the band saw to allow solid inlay along this joint. This proved to be a mistake,

work on the end grain of the trestle to my standard mix of one part board and returned for another try. boiled linseed oil, one part pure The wedge was again driven down tung oil, and one part polyurethane, until the table was stable and the again brushing it on and wiping it newly strengthened lamination dry. This too was heated to a simmer held fast. I cut the main wedge to and allowed to set for over an hour before dry wiping. This procedure length and sanded and routed it

 $-3/4'' \times 41'' \times 80$ - 3/4" x 5-1/2" x 80 4-3/4" x 5-1/2" x 41 Frame $2 - 1 - 3/4 \times 2 - 3/4 \times 37$ $1 - 1 - 3/4 \times 2 - 3/4 \times 44$ - 1-3/4 x 3-3/4 x 29-1/4 $-1-3/4 \times 3-1/2 \times 22-1/2$ - 1 x 3-1/2 x 22-1/2 $2 - 1 - 3/4 \times 2 \times 10$ $1 - 1 - 1/2 \times 4 - 7/8 \times 56$ $2 - 1 - 1/2 \times 2 - 3/8 \times 13$ $4 - 1 - 1/8 \times 1 - 1/4 \times 6$ $4 - 3/4 \times 7/8 \times 4$ inlay and dowels to fit

depth on the 8/4 rails and 1/8" on the two 4/4 rails. I left the tenons running 3/4" beyond the outside of the mortise. The rails were then set in the bench vise and using a slotting bit with a depth of 1/2" the finger inlays were cut into the end grain of the exposed tenons. The lower rails were given two 1/4" inlays and the middle rails were given one 1/8" inlay. The cherry strips were installed at this point and sanded flush, and a 1/4" radius given to the tenons. The top connecting rails were cut to length and fitted around the

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Figure 5