

Three Ways to Rack Lumber

Efficient stock storage opens up valuable workspace

BY MATTHEW TEAGUE

Finding an orderly way to store lumber is integral to creating an efficient shop. Side-stepping boards to get to machines and benches is not only unsafe, it's also no way to spend a day. For most, the key to a good storage system is keeping lumber out of the way but close at hand in as small an area as possible. There are almost as many storage methods as there are woodworkers. A look at three different lumber racks might help you adapt the system that will work best in your own shop.

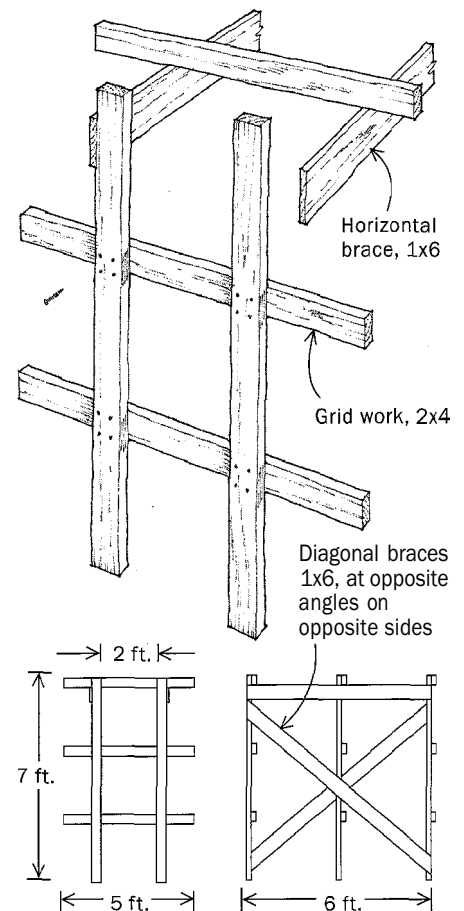
Matthew Teague is an assistant editor of Fine Woodworking magazine.

No frills storage

Kelly Mehler, a woodworker and teacher living in Berea, Ky., uses lumber racks that are as simple and efficient as you'll find. It doesn't take days or even hours to build a similar setup. "It looks like a tic-tac-toe board standing straight up," he says. "You'd be amazed how much strength you get out of a 2x4 when it's standing on its end." He's built three of these 2x4 grids. They stand straight up and are connected with horizontal 1x6 lumber. Each rack has nine holes with openings that are about 2 ft. sq., and the boards just slide right in.

"The flow of work is very important to me," Mehler says. He has two racks built this way—one on either side of his radial-arm saw. "I just pull the boards right off the racks and onto the radial-arm saw and rough mill them to size."

"It's all just nailed together," he says. "Screws would be better, but I didn't really think about it when I put them up 18 years ago."



Built to last. Kelly Mehler has used the same basic rack for more than 18 years. He stacks boards in the order they came off the tree and often lets them dry for a year or more.

Going vertical

After 19 years as a stairbuilder, teacher and spare-time kayak builder in Long Beach, Calif., Lon Schleining prefers vertical storage. "As a matter of fact," he says, "I moved into my shop because it had a high ceiling."

Schleining says that vertical storage saves him valuable time and labor. "My old shop had a low ceiling, and it seemed like the board I was after was always at the bottom of the pile. All I did was stack and unstack and move lumber around. It was like a gift from God when I got to a space where I could get to any board rapidly."

The boards are stored on end on a platform and are held up vertically by angled 2x4s. "I really stole the design from a local hardware store," he says. "They have big A-frames with lumber stored on both sides. I just built half of that and bolted it to the wall."

He also uses 1x6 plywood indexers that are notched to move on a horizontal board to denote and separate different species. "It makes it ever so handy," he says, "like having your paperwork in files."



A handy file of woods. You won't find Lon Schleining spending his day stacking and unstacking boards. His vertical storage system uses plywood indexers to separate species and keeps everything in easy reach.



Storing sheet goods

For John West, a cabinetmaker in Danbury, Conn., storing a large amount of sheet goods is an inevitable part of the job. "The general-use stuff we keep vertically," he says. "If it's something that'll be here a while, we store it horizontally."

West's racks are held off the ground with 2x3 lumber (he uses three boards sandwiched and bolted together) and plywood. Vertical bays are 18 in. wide and 12 ft. deep. Four horizontal racks are built one over the other and used to store sheet goods flat. The horizontal racks are 6 ft. wide, constructed out of 2x6s and have a plywood top. All the racks are held together with bolts.

"It is important to build something that will be big enough to handle anything you might have," says West. "Fiberboard comes in about 5 ft. 1 in. wide in 10 and 12 ft. lengths. The racks are 5 ft. 3 in. on the same principle. It would be easy to build a smaller rack for whatever you might need."

Staying flexible. John West designed his system based on the heavy supply of sheet goods his projects often entail, but the stalls accommodate varying types of stock as his needs change.