

Inspiration for a Bedside Cabinet

Subtle details complement
form and function



BY MICHAEL FORTUNE

When designing a piece of furniture, I never know where an idea is going to come from. Indeed, it sometimes evolves quietly from an unlikely place. That certainly was the case when I designed this bedside cabinet.

During my college days, my apartment had virtually no furniture. One day, however, I had the good fortune to find an old pine chest of drawers in a ditch by the side of the road. I hauled the piece back to my apartment, all the while anticipating the luxury of getting my clothes off the floor.

I figured the chest to be about 200 years

old. It was apparent that the builder was both clever and expeditious, as evidenced by back legs that simply were cut out of solid-wood side panels. I ended up living with that chest for 35 years. During that time, I came to appreciate the brilliance of the simple back-leg design. And when I began to design this bedside cabinet, I included the leg curve from that wonderful old chest.

The bedside cabinet also includes a wide cove that runs top to bottom along the

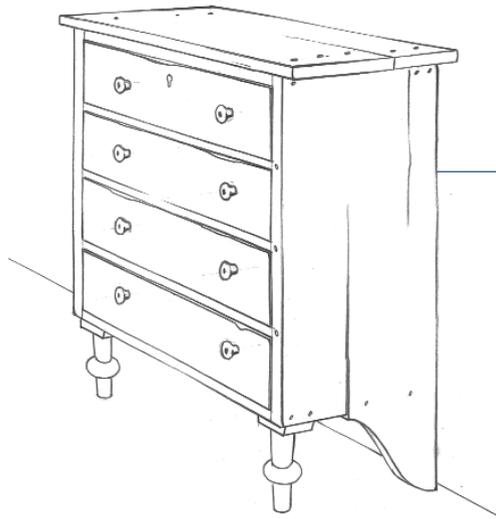
back.

Initially, it was to serve as a channel for cords from a lamp and an alarm clock. But some rough sketches I made, followed by more detailed drawings, revealed that the cove also introduced an interesting rhythm to the back surfaces of the form.

I included the semicircular cutout detail on the bottom of the doors to draw attention to the space under the cabinet. The door cutout also complements the cove at the back of the cabinet.

I wanted to avoid using European-style concealed hinges for the door. Although you can't see these hinges when the doors are closed, European hinges become very visible once a door is opened. I thought the mechanism would look too big on a somewhat smallish piece. I solved the problem by incorporating a bead detail on both sides of the front legs. Then I put two butt hinges within each bead. As a result, the barrel of the hinge simply becomes part of the bead detail. First, though, I had to find a hinge with the appropriate thickness, and then I sized the bead to match the barrel of the hinge.

I've used this bead-and-hinge detail before, with an ebony bead and brass hinges acid-etched to make them black in color.



When installed, the hinges all but disappear into the bead, especially after coating them with the same clear lacquer used on the cabinet.

The drawer was planned as a simple curved-front box that would be hung on drawer glides mounted to the underside of

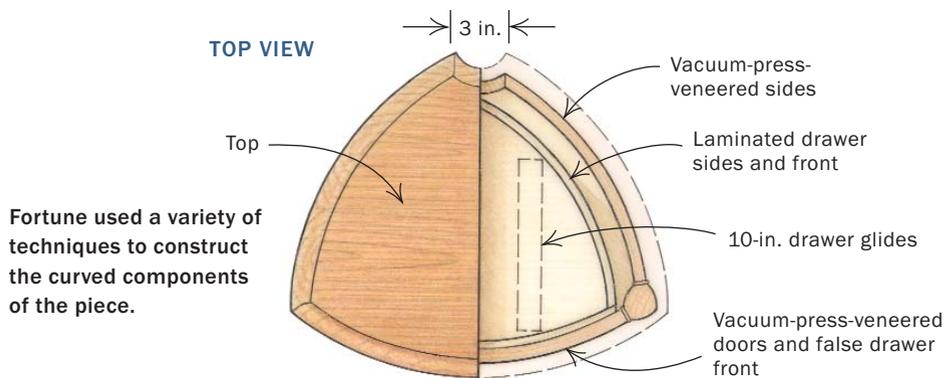
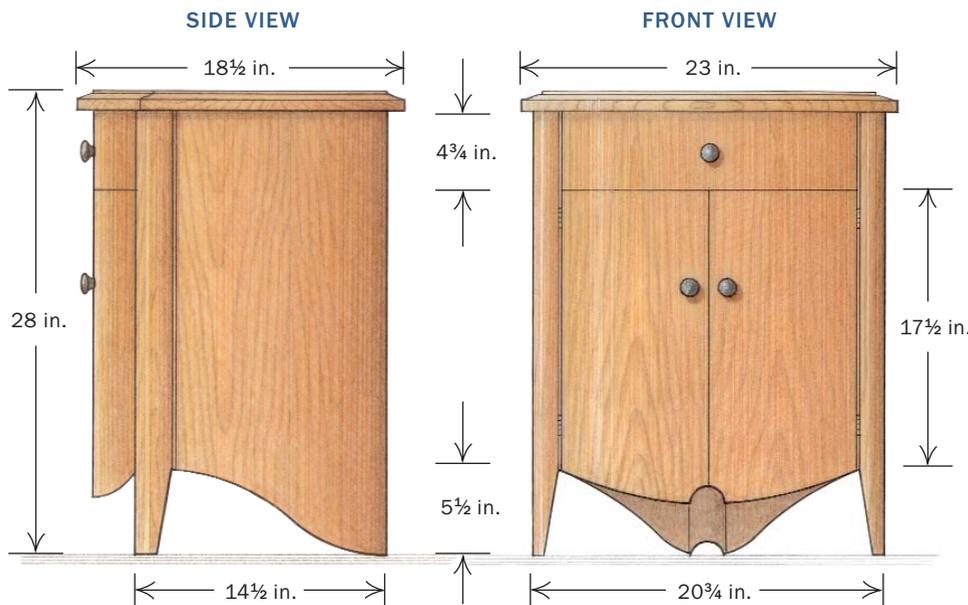
This found chest was the author's design inspiration for dozens of pieces.

the top. But then I realized once the drawer was opened, the rectangular shape would be out of character with the curved lines of the cabinet. So, using bent-lamination techniques, I curved the drawer sides to match the curve of the cabinet.

Designing furniture can be a wonderful challenge. The process of waiting to see if the completed piece matches the one envisioned can sustain you through the long hours spent in the workshop. And when the finished piece matches perfectly with your design vision, the joy of making furniture goes up tenfold. □

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A CABINET WITH CURVES



Fortune used a variety of techniques to construct the curved components of the piece.

BEAD MIMICS HINGE BARREL

To camouflage the hinges, the long beads in the legs are the same diameter as the hinge barrel.

