

Early American Blanket

When I was looking for good projects for my TV series, *Rough Cut—Woodworking with Tommy Mac*, my mind went back to my first year at North Bennet Street School. One of our first tasks as would-be woodworkers was to make a scale drawing of a frame-and-panel blanket chest. The original, now in the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Conn., was built in 1670 and constructed in the rustic, utilitarian style typical of Colonial-era furniture that preceded the high styles of the 18th century.

It's a great project because it combines straightforward design and machine-cut joinery suitable for a novice woodworker, with optional carving to challenge those with more experience. The design also can be scaled down to a toy box or even a large jewelry box. Whatever you build, you'll be rewarded with a piece that recalls this country's basic beginnings and the long heritage we woodworkers enjoy.

Many of you are familiar with frame-and-panel joinery, so this article will con-

Router technique makes carving a cinch

BY TOMMY MACDONALD



centrate on the carved panels and the router-cut detailing. The blanket-chest episode is slated for mid-December, but check your local public TV listings for show-times. For season one episodes of *Rough Cut—Woodworking with Tommy Mac* on DVD, along with full plans to build the projects, please visit my Web site, roughcutwoodworking.com, or ShopPBS.org.

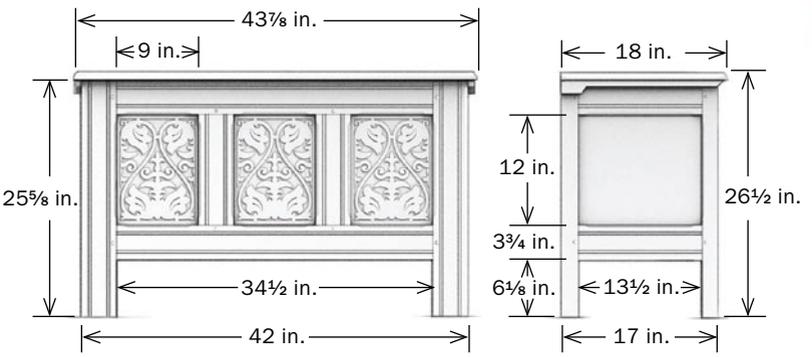
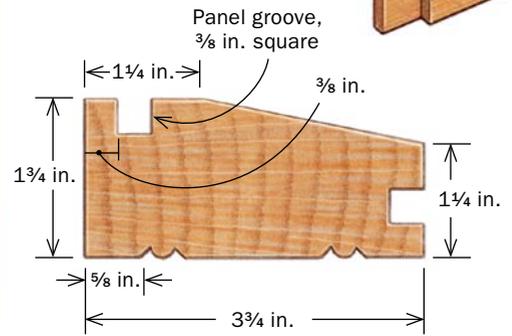
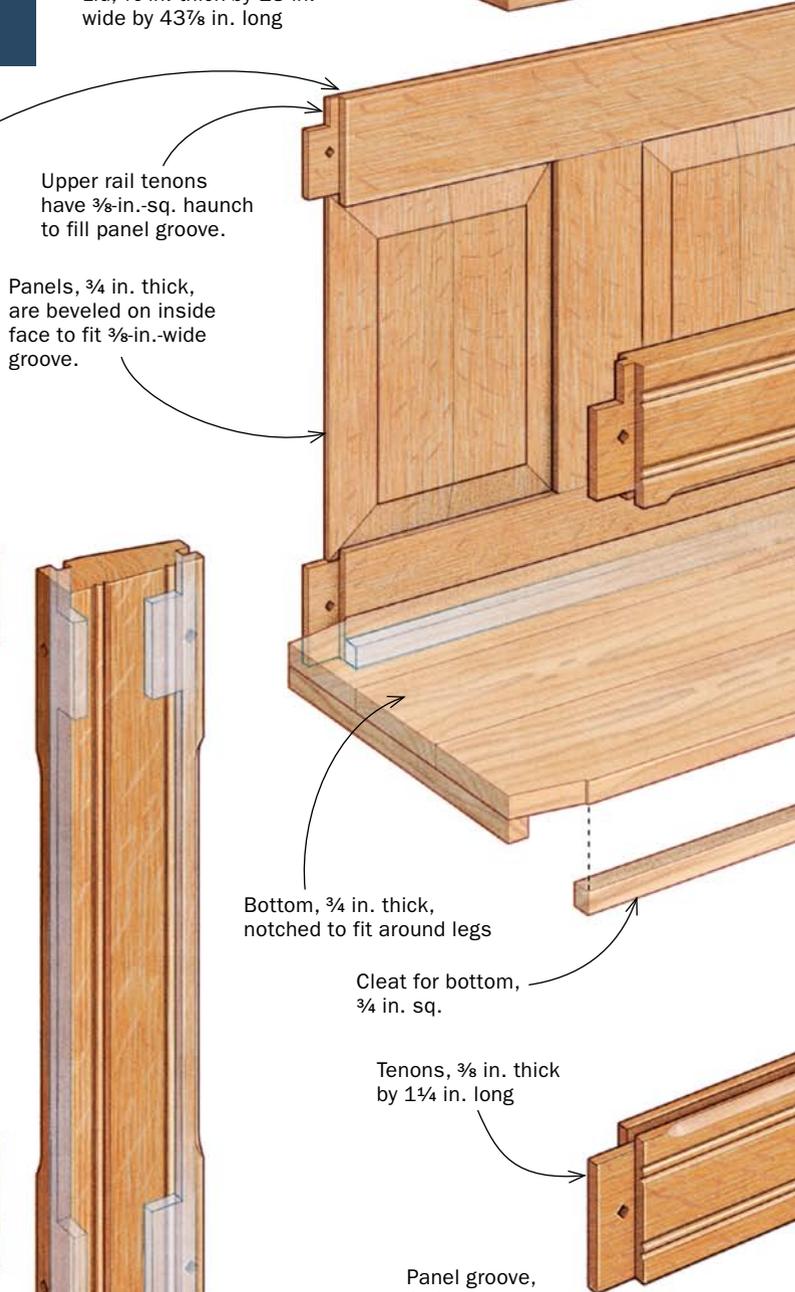
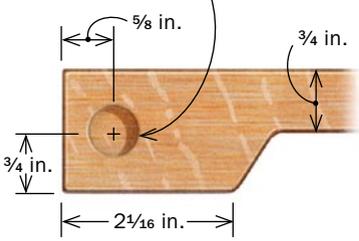
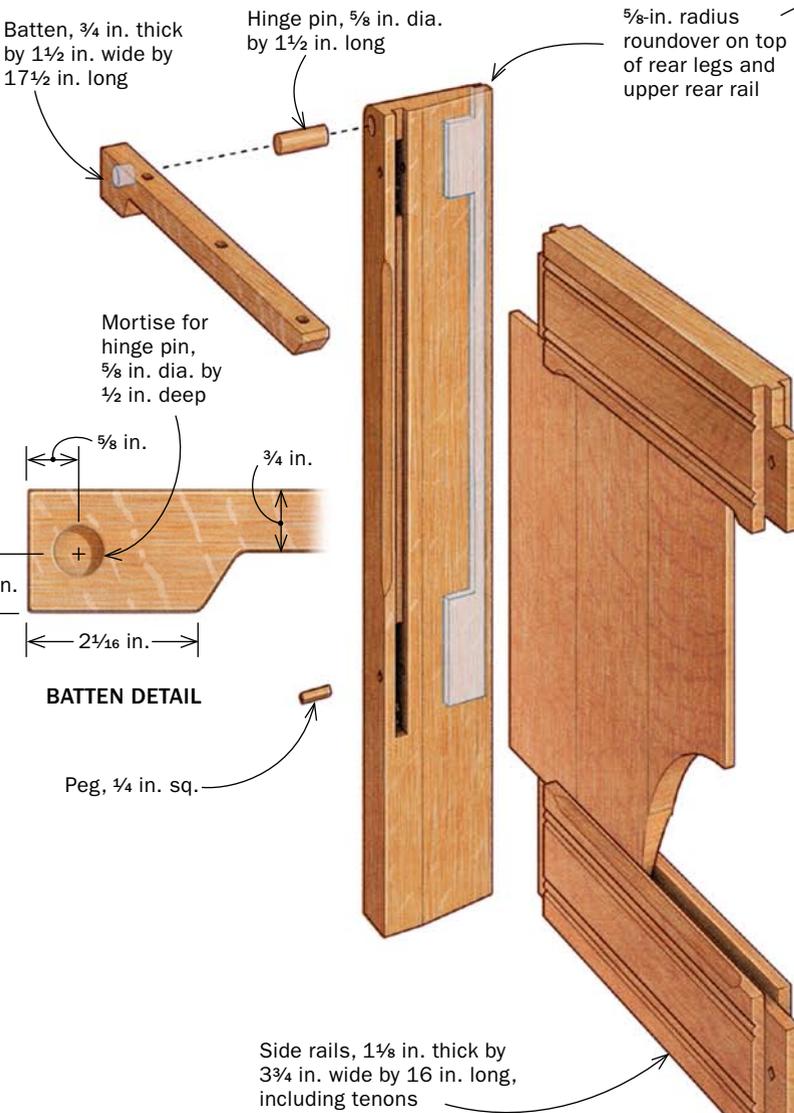
Tommy MacDonald is a furniture maker and TV host/producer who lives near Boston. Woodcraft is the exclusive sponsor of his new program.

Chest



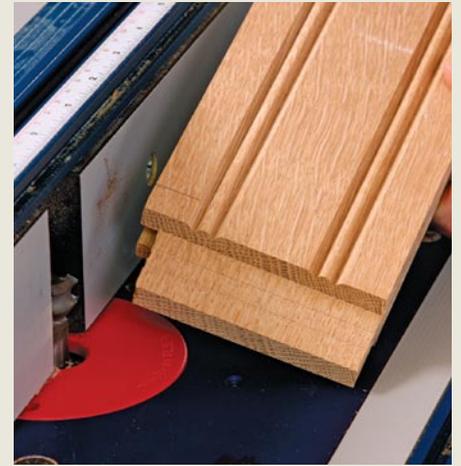
THE JOINERY IS STRAIGHTFORWARD

The sides of the chest consist of eight panels enclosed in frames. The rails connect to the legs using haunched mortise-and-tenon joints, while regular mortise-and-tenons join the stiles to the rails. All joints are pegged for centuries of durability. The bottom simply rests on four cleats while the lid is attached using a shopmade hinge consisting of two battens and two wooden pins. Not only did the original maker avoid having to pay the blacksmith to forge expensive ironware, but the battens also serve to keep the lid flat.





BEAD THE LEGS, RAILS, AND STILES WITH ONE SETUP



Although you could leave them off the piece, the parallel lines of beading break up the flat surfaces on the chest's carcass. The original beads would have been laboriously carved with a scratch stock, but today's woodworker can get them done quickly and flawlessly on the router table. *Fine Woodworking* recommends using Whiteside bit 10-382 (available from woodcraft.com) to get the exact profile seen here. Set the height of the bit and the location of the fence using a test piece, and then run the parts against the fence, flipping them 180° to cut the second bead.



STOPPED CHAMFERS ARE EASY AND ELEGANT

Stopped chamfers are a little trickier than normal ones, but you are rewarded with a sophisticated look. Make the router table's fence opening as small as possible, and the inside edges will show you exactly where the bit is at all times.



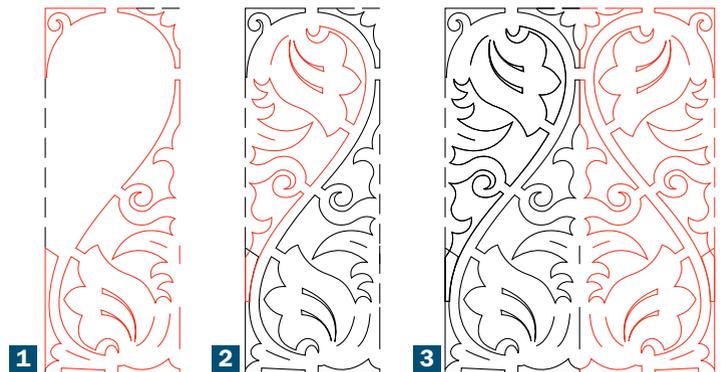
How to start and stop. Mark the ends of the chamfers. Pivot the front of the workpiece into the bit with the mark in line with the inside edge of the outfeed fence. Move the workpiece across the bit. Then pivot the back of the workpiece away from the bit when the second mark reaches the inside edge of the infeed fence. If you don't cut the chamfers quite long enough, it is a simple job to extend them using a bench chisel bevel-side down.

CARVE WITH A POWER-TOOL ASSIST

The three carved panels elevate and personalize the chest, but you don't have to start by apprenticing with a master carver. The heavy lifting is done with a router, carving tools are used only for cleanup cuts, and two shopmade tools texture the background. Once you get the hang of it, you can create your own designs for future projects.

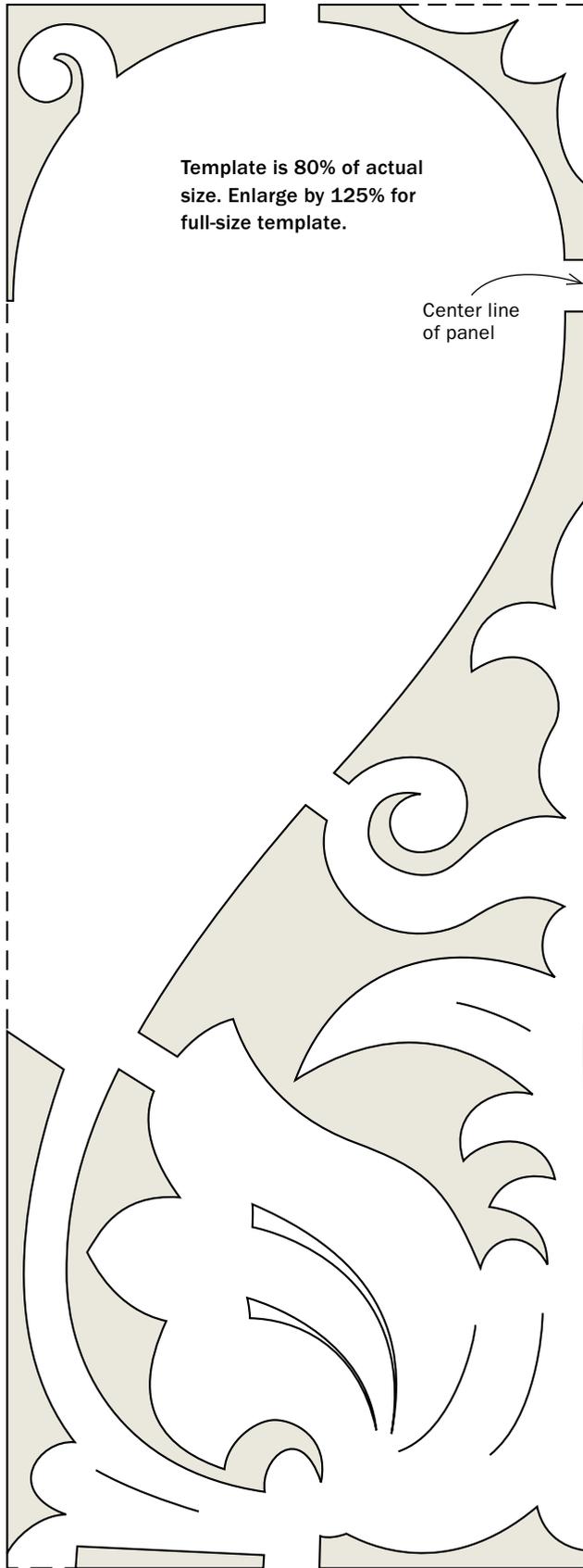
CLEVER DESIGN REPEATS ITSELF

At first sight, this design appears to be a simple mirror-image, but the pattern is actually flipped lengthwise, too, to complete the design. This clever arrangement saves time making the original pattern. Photocopy the design, cut away the shaded areas, then trace the design onto stiff card. Cut this out with a knife and use it as your template. As with all carving, try to use the tools you have to create the design. This way the curves will match the sweep of your gouges and you won't have to own every gouge ever made. I used six tools on this design; sweep gouges 7/20 (the first number refers to the sweep or curve, the second to the width in millimeters), 8/13, 9/10, and 11/10; fishtail gouge 5F/20, and V-parting tool 16/3. If you have slightly different tools, feel free to alter the design accordingly.



FOUR PARTS MAKE A WHOLE

Start by tracing the template onto one half of the panel (1). Flip the template vertically and horizontally to fill in the detail in the upper quadrant (2). Repeat on the second half of the panel (3).



HOG OUT THE WASTE WITH A ROUTER, AND FINISH BY HAND

It is a whole lot faster and more consistent to remove the background wood with a router than by hand. Because you are only going down about $\frac{3}{32}$ in., you don't need a full-size router to do the job—a laminate trimmer or even a Dremel attached to a base works fine. What is important is to have a clear view of the workpiece to make sure you don't stray into the design. With the bulk of the waste removed, outline the design with the matching gouges, then use a bench chisel, bevel-side down, to chip away the waste up to the line.



TEXTURED BACKGROUND CONCEALS AND REVEALS

The last step to carving the panel is to texture the background using a couple of shopmade tools and a mallet. Texturing conceals any irregularities left by the router or the gouges, but more importantly it makes the raised part of the carving stand out.



Route in stages.

It helps to have several sizes of straight bit in the $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-dia. to $\frac{1}{4}$ -in.-dia. range. The big bit removes large areas of waste quickly, while small ones can reach into confined parts of the design and reduce the need for handwork.



From pin to punch.

MacDonald used a pin from an old hinge as his texturing punch. Use a triangular file to create the six-pointed star on the end. When texturing, don't try to create a pattern with the punch—it doesn't matter if the punches overlap—but avoid leaving flat spots.



Chop and pare. Clean up the pattern with gouges. Make vertical cuts first and then use a $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. bench chisel, bevel-side down, to remove the waste.



Carve the leaf veins. Use the V-parting tool to carve the veins on the foliage.



Second tool for tight corners.

File the end of a screwdriver into three peaks, and use it to texture the surface right up to the carved lines.

