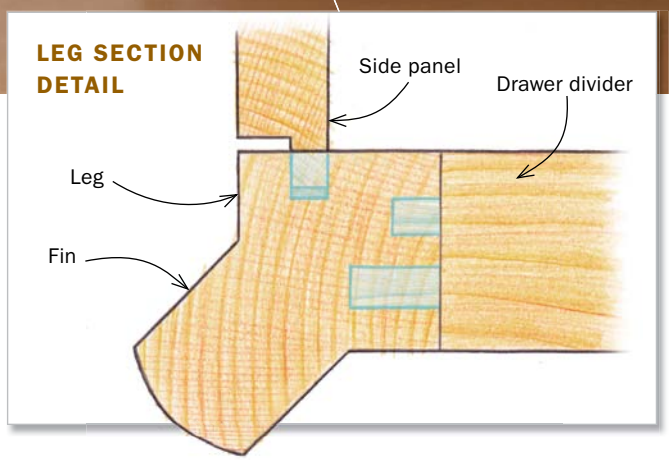


The Gilpinoid leg

ADAPTABLE LEG GIVES CASEWORK THE DISTINCTIVE MARK OF ITS MAKER

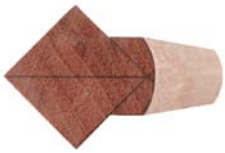
BY HANK GILPIN

Photos: Jonathan Binzen

One day long ago, while designing a desk, I watched my very energetic 2-year-old son racing through the house, his head at tabletop level. The furniture suddenly seemed to be bristling with pointy corners and sharp edges, each one of them inviting him to a perilous head-meets-corner moment. The potential for serious bruising got me thinking, and before long I had designed a leg for the desk that combined a traditional square post with a fin-like projection on the outer corner that I could round off to eliminate the sharp angle. The section of the new leg was an odd shape—I believe the geometric term for it is the seven-sided Gilpinoid. Structurally, the leg functioned just like a plain square leg, but the fin gave me all sorts of decorative options.

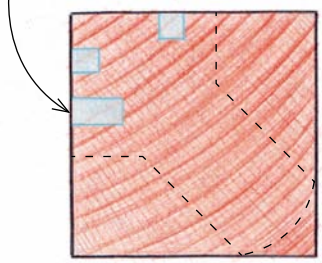
I realized I could taper the fin so it projected less at the top than at the bottom, giving the leg a bit of a graceful lift and leaving enough width at the bottom to make a shapely, scalloped foot. Where the desktop projected over the top of the leg, I designed a turret corner, which echoed the shape of the leg while eliminating more head-whacking right angles.

My first thought was to glue up the finned leg from two or three smaller pieces. But in the end I chose to cut it entirely from a single thick blank. A bit wasteful, perhaps, but a cool way to make a complex shape, working by subtraction like a

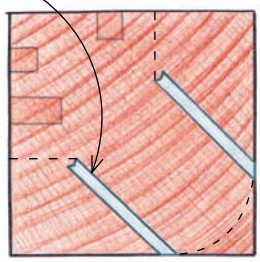


MAKING THE FINNED LEG

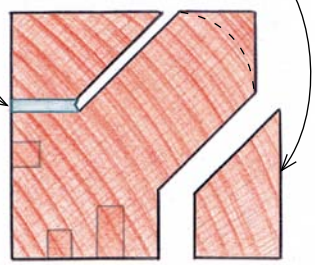
1. First, with the blank milled square, cut mortises for the frame rails and drawer dividers, and cut grooves for panels.



2. On the tablesaw, with the blade angled at 45°, make two ripcuts to define the sides of the fin.



3. On the tablesaw, with the blade at 90°, make two ripcuts to define the square section of the leg. Be sure the waste piece falls to the outside of the blade.



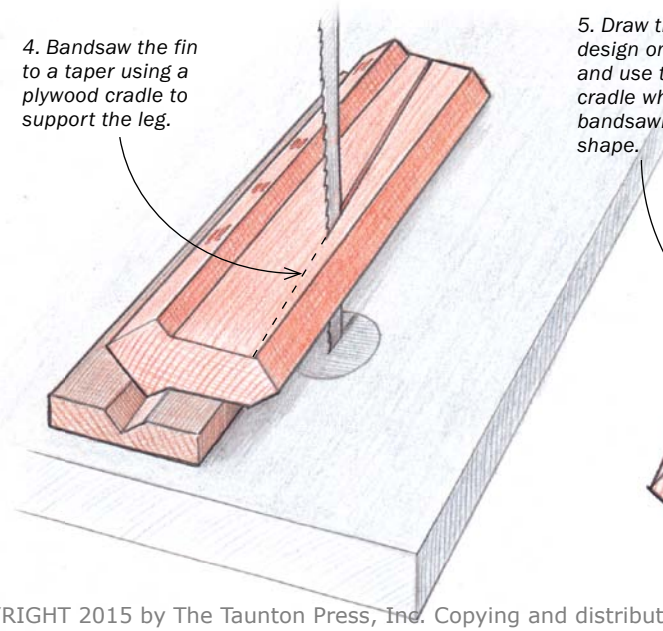
sculptor with a block of marble. I do like to create interesting shapes that make you wonder, "How was this made?" Making it this way also results in perfect continuity of grain and color.

The leg worked well on the desk, so I used it on a cabinet. And another. Then another. My son is 30 now. In the years since he learned to maneuver safely around furniture, I've used the leg on scores of pieces, everything from diminutive jewelry boxes to 8-ft.-tall armoires.

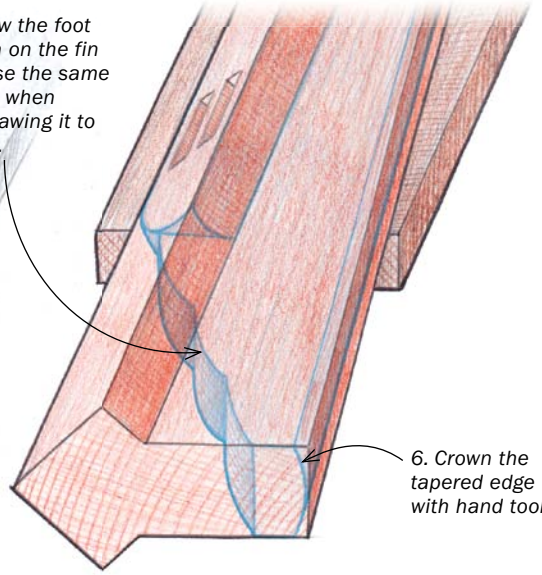
Like the cabriole leg, which craftsmen adapted to footstools and highboys, dining chairs and writing desks, this finned leg was extremely versatile. And it allowed me, in a funny way, to be imaginative in a limited context, keeping things fresh without requiring that I reinvent the wheel every day. □

Hank Gilpin builds custom furniture in Lincoln, R.I.

4. Bandsaw the fin to a taper using a plywood cradle to support the leg.



5. Draw the foot design on the fin and use the same cradle when bandsawing it to shape.



6. Crown the tapered edge with hand tools.

Drawings: John Tetreault