

## 5 takes on the tea box

**T**he idea was simple: Ask a few *Fine Woodworking* contributing editors to make a box to hold tea bags. We gave them dimensions for the bags, but no other design constraints. Then we waited for the boxes to get made and sent to us. As we expected, Christian Becksvoort, Michael Fortune, Garrett Hack, Roland Johnson, and Steve Latta created boxes that are beautiful, elegant, practical, and charming. However, we were a bit surprised by just how well each box expressed the personality of its creator. There's just no mistaking who made which box.



### The power of waves

My tea box evolved from my fascination with the patterns formed by waves and running water. Construction is simple and elegant—sliding dovetails join the sides to the top and bottom—and creates overhangs that I shaped into asymmetric curves based on the irregularity and randomness of waves. The drawer fronts are wavy, too. I find slight differences in the alignment of the waves across the front more alluring than perfect consistency between top, drawers, and bottom. The figure of the curly pear I used for the case and drawer fronts enhances this wave energy, and the rosewood bead below the bottom reinforces the shape.

—Garrett Hack



### A handy tea tote

When I first considered the tea caddy, I envisioned one with a shape that matched the simplicity of its purpose. I also wanted the caddy to express my sense of humor, which is unusual according to many of my friends. The idea of using a handplane came about while I was discussing Bailey transitional planes with another woodworker, who remarked that they make better decorations than tools. Thinking about this, I had an epiphany in my shop, realizing that a jack plane blade is the exact width of many tea bags. After removing the blade assembly, the frog, and a bit of cast iron, there was just enough room for an assortment of tea bags. I had my plain (or plane) tea caddy. I added a bit of material on each end of the plane body for jars that could hold sugar.

—Roland Johnson



## Swirling, turning, stirring

I usually have at least a vague idea of the form I'd like to pursue when I begin designing, but in this case I started with just two words: spin and fold. "Spin" implies movement, in this case visual movement, and "fold" plays with angles and changes of plane. I built a series of 1/4-scale models, letting the shape evolve as I went. I introduced light and dark woods when I thought the "spin" detail was not emphasized enough. After I was happy with the design, I made full-size models to nail down the joinery. The design of the top represented a separate dilemma. At one point it was quite tall and looked like a dunce cap—and it went downhill from there when it started to look like the proportions of a concrete bunker. The final design solves that problem, and the lid must be twisted slightly to get it on and off.

—Michael Fortune



## Light, refreshing, and practical

This tea box is one of four I designed and made (not one of them was made of cherry!). This one became more of a tea basket. The material—white pine and torried poplar—was left over from a previous project. I wanted a little contrast between the woods in the basket, and the torried poplar, which looks almost like black walnut, looks great set against the pine. I milled all of the pieces 1/4 in. square, then cut them to length. The solid bottom has alternating strips of pine and poplar, while the sides and dividers are stacked to give it a light, airy look. Pine handles on each end are carved with slight curves to keep the basket from looking like just another rectilinear box.

—Christian Becksvoort

## Pennsylvania tea box

Outside Philadelphia, a venerable Quaker retreat center has some of Pennsylvania's oldest trees. Several were damaged by storms that have pounded the East Coast in recent years. One storm took out a walnut tree. Another took down a limb of a beech believed to be the largest and oldest of its kind in the state. The retreat center contacted about 30 woodworkers to make and donate a piece made from the fallen trees to be auctioned as a fund-raiser. This box is one of a pair I made from that truly amazing wood. When I picked up the material, the walnut was what I expected: medium-size boards with several defects but truly great color. The beech was a different story—stacks of 4/4 and 8/4 spalted planks both wide and long. The branch that had dropped was larger than many of the "mature" trees around it. Respecting the Quaker value of simplicity, I made a basic box accentuating the figure of the beech and adding inlay, in this case tea leaves, to the top. It was a humbling experience working with wood from a tree that was standing when William Penn was granted the charter for his colony.

—Steve Latta

