

A man with dark hair, wearing a red t-shirt and a brown leather apron, is focused on his work in a well-lit workshop. He is leaning over a large, light-colored wooden board that is clamped to a workbench with several black clamps. He is using a small tool to work on the surface of the board. The background shows shelves filled with various woodworking tools and a window looking out onto green foliage.

Strategies for Squeeze-out

Expert tips
and tricks for
cleaning up glue

**BY TIMOTHY
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I've been teaching furniture making for more than 15 years. I'm a fairly relaxed person, so I rarely get too worked up when my students make mistakes. That being said, when I find hard, dried glue somewhere on a student's piece, I start to hear the voice of master craftsman and teacher Alan Peters: "We've taught them nothing—*nothing*." With Alan, it was the random-orbit sander that got him going; for me, it's the dried glue.

When I learned to make furniture, the emphasis was placed on not using too

much glue. As the years passed, I've had a few joints come loose and I have come to believe that when in doubt, it is better to err on the side of too much glue than too little. (Of course, I've also figured out where I should spare the glue.) Along the way, I've come up with a ton of tips and tricks for managing the inevitable squeeze-out. Here I'll share my secrets.

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THREE APPROACHES FOR PANELS

Panel glue-ups offer some latitude because they are accessible on both sides and the flat surfaces are easy to clean up. Rousseau puts a good film of glue on both edges with the goal of getting about a $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. bead of glue squeezed out of the joint.

The best approach? Let it set. Wait about 30 to 45 minutes for the glue to gel, and then scrape down the glueline with a putty knife. Rousseau sharpens his putty knife much like a chisel, with the back flattened and beveled on one face. Tuned like this, it leaves virtually no glue behind.

1



2

Get it while it's wet. If you don't have time to wait, carefully scrape up the excess glue with the sharpened putty knife. Clean the knife frequently and wipe the surface clean with a damp rag.



3

The hard way. You let the glue set all night? The best tool to conquer the rock-hard glue is a carbide-tipped paint scraper.

GEAR UP FOR GLUING

Rousseau's cleanup tools range from a paint scraper for rock-hard dried glue to a soft toothbrush for glue that's still wet.

Soft tools for soft glue. If the glue's still wet, you can use a straw, a toothbrush and warm water, or a shopmade wood chisel and damp cloth.



Scrape it when it's dry. Depending on how hard the squeeze-out is, you can use a paint scraper, chisel, putty knife, or plane iron to scrape it off.

MORTISE-AND-TENONS

By its nature, a mortise-and-tenon joint is prone to squeeze-out. As a tight-fitting tenon is pushed into the mortise, the glue gets squeezed back to the tenon shoulder and squeezes out of the joint. The level of difficulty in removing that squeeze-out depends on whether the surfaces of the rail and stile (or leg) are flush or offset. If the parts are flush, it's fairly easy to remove excess glue simply by wiping or scraping. But when the parts are offset, glue removal is trickier.



Flat is easy. Wait for the glue to gel, then scrape it using a crank-neck chisel or putty knife. Then sand and plane.



Corners are tricky. After clamping, and while the glue is very fresh, use a straw. With its tip cut at a slight angle, it will remove 90% of the excess glue. Then remove the rest with a wood chisel (opposite page) and a wet rag.



THROUGH-TENONS

This visible joint presents a challenge. If the through-tenon will be trimmed flush to the surface after the glue-up is complete, Rousseau doesn't worry about cleaning the glue off the exterior of the joint. He'll just plane it off the following day, much like he does on dovetails or finger joints. However, if the through-tenon will remain proud of the outside surface, he cleans off the squeeze-out immediately to prevent it from staining the end grain.



Spread glue with a thin wood scrap. Generously apply the glue inside the mortise and around the tenon.



Straw and a wooden chisel again. After removing most of the fresh glue with a straw (above), Rousseau uses a piece of softer hardwood like walnut or mahogany, cut at an angle and wrapped in a damp cloth, to remove what's left (right).



TIP

When the straw loads up with glue, snip off that section with scissors and get back to removing squeeze-out.



Chisel without the cloth. Shed the damp cloth and the chisel gets right into the corner to clean out the micro residue. This wooden chisel is used only when the glue is wet.

CASE CORNERS

When gluing a carcass together, the best time to remove any squeeze-out from the interior is immediately after gluing up. The second best way is to wait for the glue to gel and pare it out with a chisel or plane iron an hour or so after glue-up. It's a bad idea to let it dry hard and hope to clean it up the next day because the wood is likely to chip out with the glue. On the exterior, however, you can wait until the following day and plane it off when cleaning up the joinery.

Not too much, not too little. On a carcass glue-up, spread glue on both faces of the joint and aim for $\frac{1}{16}$ in. of squeeze-out once clamped.



Straw first, then toothbrush.

Remove most of the wet glue using a straw with an angled tip. On porous woods, move to a toothbrush dipped in warm water. On non-porous woods, the wood chisel, with or without a damp cloth around it, works great.



Use a chisel or plane iron for gelled glue. A crank-neck chisel (top) is handy to have, but a plane iron works as well. Work into the corner from both directions to remove the glue. Tape at the back of the plane iron (center and bottom) angles the blade enough that it cuts at the surface but not so much that it digs into the wood.

DOVETAILS

As a dovetail joint is assembled, the glue squeeze-out is directed toward the inside corner of the case or drawer. That tight area is difficult to access, so gluing drawers together is one place where it's best to work sparingly with the glue.



A little glue will do. On drawers, place a thin film of glue on the walls of the pins and tails. The end-grain areas provide no glue strength, so adding glue there will only lead to a bigger cleanup.



Assemble and check for square. Use a block that fits between the pins when tapping the drawer parts together (left). Check for square by measuring the diagonals (above) and adjust as needed until both measurements match.



Don't wait too long for cleanup. If there is any squeeze-out, pare it off with a crank-neck chisel an hour or so after gluing. The chisel or plane iron are a delicate way to remove squeeze-out without disturbing the drawer's squareness before the glue has dried.

Online Extra

To see a video showing another way to deal with glue squeeze-out, go to FineWoodworking.com/extras.