Doors can significantly affect the appearance of a cabinet. *A simple frame and flat panel are perfect for showing off the wildly flame-figured panel of this door.*

A frame-and-glass-panel door *turns a storage cabinet into a display cabinet. Glass provides a view of the contents, and three drawers hide behind the solid lower panel.*

Doors Make the Difference

Five options dramatically change a basic box

by Christian Becksvoort

Photos: author

Hand-carved panels *create an interesting textural effect in an otherwise plain door. Dividing the door horizontally makes the cabinet look shorter and wider.*

A vertical center stile and thin, recessed panels give *this cabinet a tall, narrow appearance. Quarter-round moldings are an easily added detail.*

Carved, flush panels separated by a vertical stile *add texture to the long, lean look. This combination of styles became the author's favorite door.*

The most obvious feature of many wall cabinets, kitchen cabinets or even freestanding cabinets is the doors. By changing the style of the door, you can subtly or significantly alter the appearance of the cabinet, as I found on a recent job when I ended up making five different doors for the same carcase.

I wanted to design a simple wall cabinet that mounts on a hidden hanger (see the box on p. 52) and that would function in a variety of settings. I started with a basic box for the carcase, as shown in the drawing on p. 53, with the idea of making the door the main attraction.

I carefully selected quartersawn stock for the frame material for this door (and all subsequent doors) to minimize movement. For the single, flat and flush panel, I used a wildly flame-figured cherry board given to me by a friend. Once oiled and polished, the figure seemed to leap off the panel, as shown in the photo at right on the facing page. The simple frame-and-panel construction (see the drawing on p. 53) was the perfect showcase for this magnificent piece of wood.

As I stood admiring my handiwork, I began to wonder, what if...? One idea led to another, and soon I was at work on door number two. For this door, I decided to divide it horizontally with a center rail, yielding two stacked, flat-flush panels, as shown in the drawing on p. 53. The results were okay, but compared to the incredible figure in the first door, door number two seemed rather plain. It needed something to set it apart. After a little midnight inspiration, I took a carving gouge to the panels and textured their front faces, as shown in the photo at left. This was a simple but time-consuming process that required some care and a sharp gouge, especially around the edges to avoid tearout. The oiled, carved facets gave the panels a nice

Adjustable shelves and drawers with carved pulls *enhance the simple features of the dovetailed carcase. Also shown is the routed finger pull used on the carved, flush panel door.*

three-dimensional look, but I couldn't help wondering if the door might not look better divided vertically.

Thus I began door number three. This door has a vertical center stile and two thin, flat, book-matched panels (see the drawing on the facing page). I framed the panels with 7/32-in.-wide quarter round moldings to add some detailing and to create an entirely different look, as shown in the center photo on p. 51 An alternative method would be to shape or rout the stiles and molding into the rails. But this requires more complicated joinery to assemble the door frames.

Door number four was a combination of doors two and three. Door four had vertical panels as in door three, but the panels were flat, flush and carved as in door two (see the drawing on the facing page). I really liked the tall, thin, clean lines of this door, as shown in the photo at right on p. 51 To accentuate the look, I did away with the knob and routed a finger pull on the edge of the door frame. This was my favorite door so far, but what if...?

To give the piece a bit more versatility, I decided to make one last door. Door number five is glass paneled (see the drawing on the facing page) to serve as a display cabinet. A single piece of glass set in the mortised-and-tenoned frame provides an unobstructed view of the cabinet's contents, as shown in the photo at left on p. 50. A small, quartersawn, horizontal panel at the bottom of the door covers three drawers (see the photo at left). Carved pulls recessed in drawer fronts maximize interior drawer space.

At this point, I decided to stop making doors. Although I hadn't yet made the standard raised-panel or gotten into complex carved lattices, end-grain or stained-glass panels, I now had four more carcases to build for my door collection. One has to quit somewhere.

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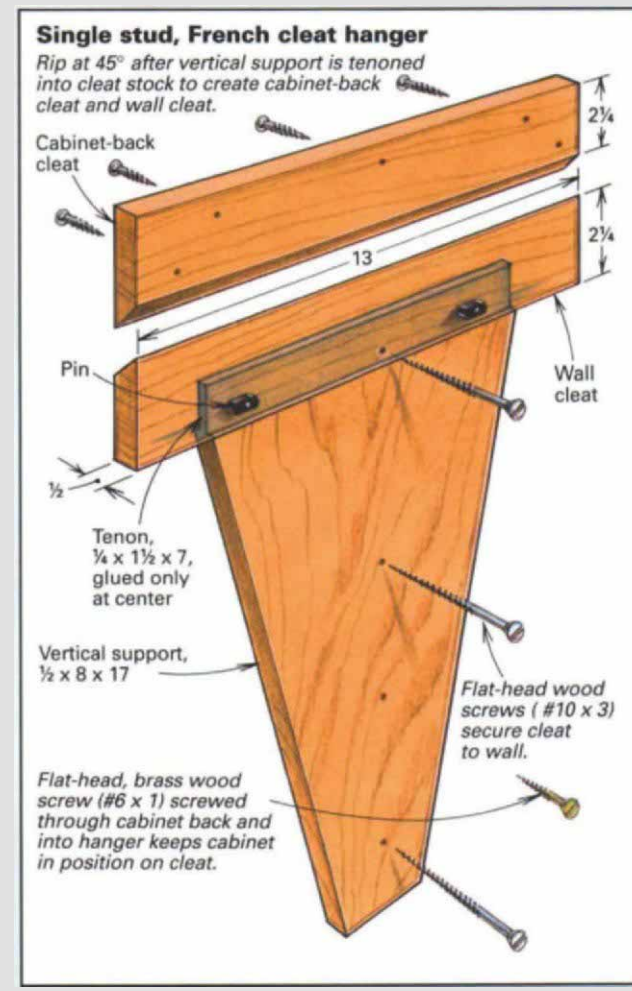
Hidden cabinet hangers

To avoid interfering with the clean lines of my wall cabinet, I chose a hidden hanging system for mounting the cabinet to the wall. I used a variation of a French cleat. A French cleat is a system that uses interlocking beveled cleats, one cleat screwed to the cabinet back and the other cleat screwed to the wall, as shown in the drawing at right. Anyone who has ever tried to balance a wall cabinet with one hand while trying to drive a couple of screws through the cabinet's mounting strip and into the wall with the other hand knows how difficult this task can be. A French cleat makes hanging wall cabinets a breeze. The cleats are easily screwed to the wall and cabinet; then it's a simple matter to press the cabinet against the wall and slide it down so that the cabinet's cleat interlocks with the wall-hung cleat. Recessing the cabinet back an extra ½ in. completely hides the hanging system.

Normally, the wall cleat spans at least two studs and is anchored in a couple of places. Because my cabinet is only 14 in. wide, I was able to screw into only one stud. A single screw into the usual narrow wall cleat would allow the cabinet to swivel on the wall but might not offer sufficient support for the cabinet and its contents.

My solution was to make a T-cleat, as shown in the drawing at right. The bottom of the T is tenoned into the wall cleat and extends down the wall another 17 in., providing plenty of extra space for screwing the cleat to a single stud. Be sure to level the cleat when screwing it to the wall.

After screwing the top cleat to the cabinet-back frame, the cabinet is ready to drop into place on the wall cleat. As a safety feature, I also add a small brass screw through the panel back into the hanger. This keeps the cabinet from being lifted off accidentally and inspires wonder in the uninformed: How can one small screw support that cabinet? — *C.B.*

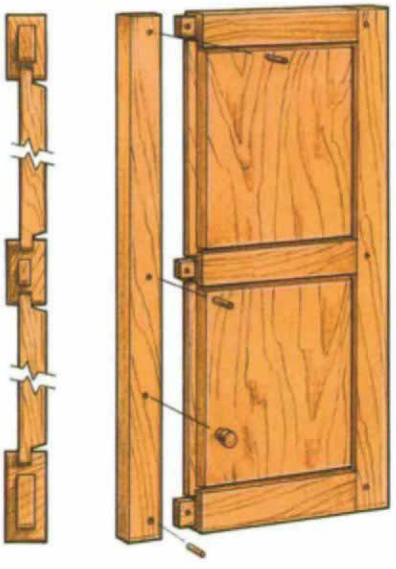


Drawings: David Dann

Five doors to dress up the basic box

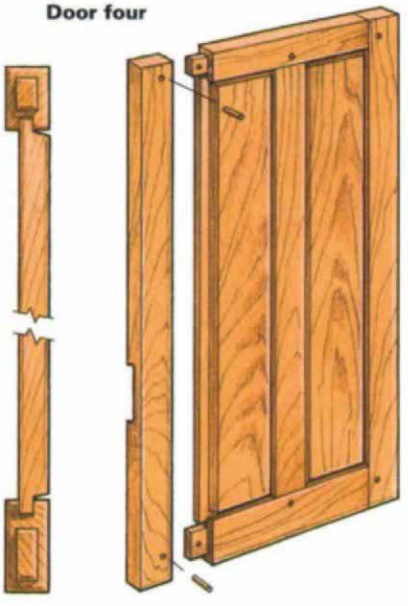
Door one

Door two



Door three

Door four



Door five