The Versatile Huntboard

This sideboard variation is just as comfortable in a hallway or a living room

BY GARRETT HACK

The huntboard is a wonderful furniture form, a relaxed country cousin to the more formal and high-style sideboard. It's essentially a tall serving table, with drawers and doors for storage of dinnerware. I've long admired the form, so for this year's annual auction of the New Hampshire Furniture Masters, I decided to design and build a cherry huntboard.

Typically, when designing furniture, my first thoughts are about form, proportion, shape, and detail. But versatility also can be an influence, especially for speculative work. I want potential bidders to see what they need—a sideboard in this case—but I also think my work could have many lives beyond the one I design for. This piece would be at home serving as a desk or a display table in a foyer or hallway.

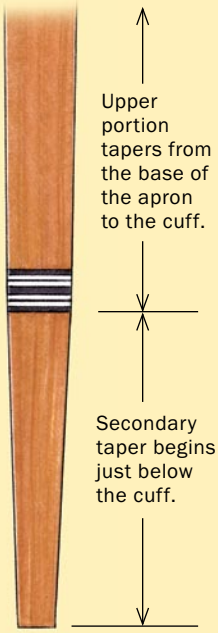
The focus of my design is the three central drawers, with flanking doors adding a sense of balance. The case itself is deep and tall, and is engineered to withstand the weight of a collection of flatware and dinnerware. It's also designed to withstand seasonal wood movement.

Shape the legs and add the banding

In designing the legs of the huntboard, I used a full-size mock-up to help me gauge where they needed refining. After all, visual strength is just as important as actual strength. Once I completed the mock-up, I used it to lay out and cut the real legs, as well as to lay out the cuff banding and mortises. Cut the legs on the bandsaw and refine the shape with handplanes.

After cutting all of the mortises and the primary taper in the legs, install the cuff banding. Although you can make your own custom banding (see *FWW* #166, pp. 116-120), ready-made banding is available (www.vandykes.com, www.woodcraft.com, and www.rockler.com). Cut the

Start with the legs



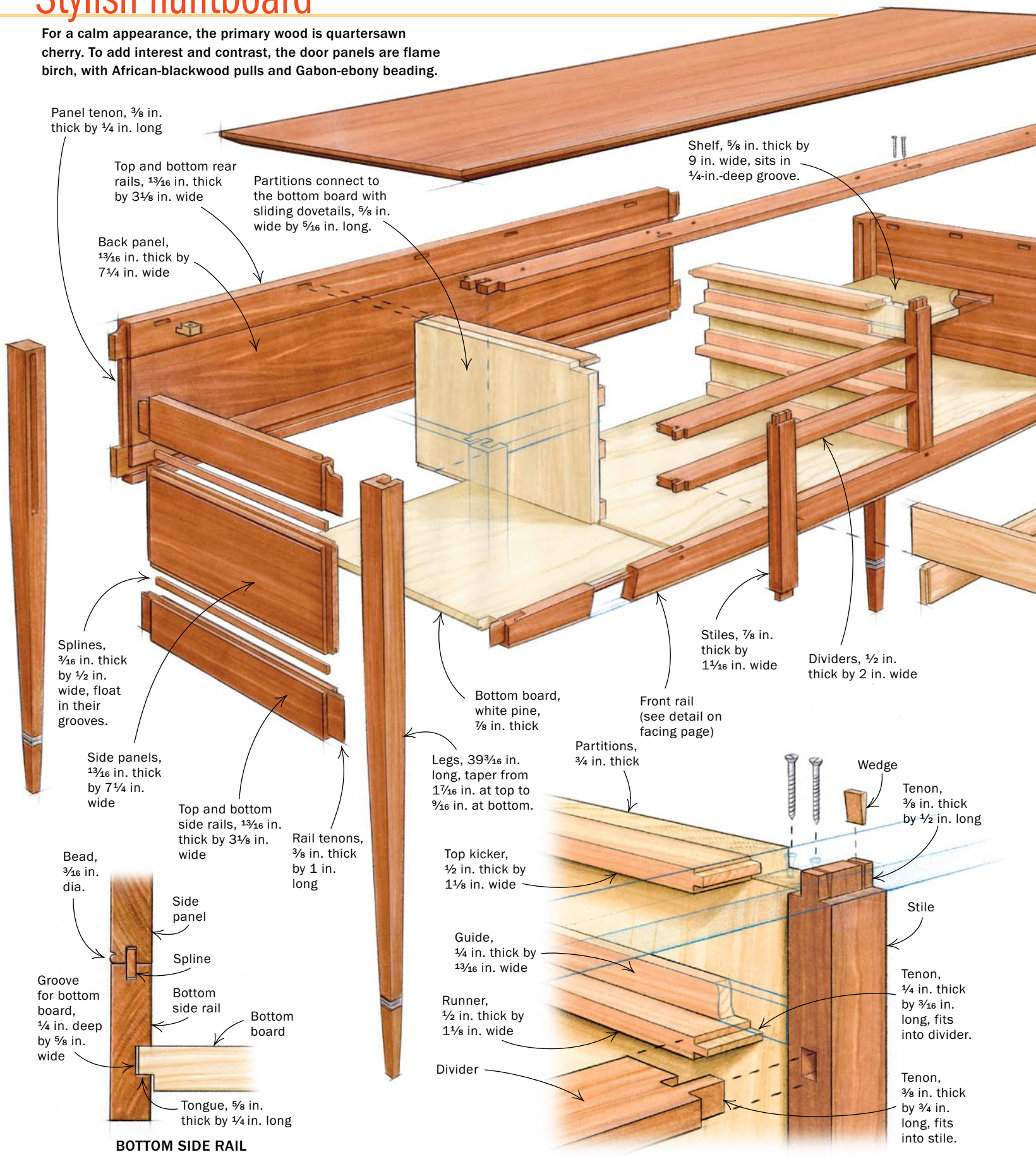
The foot of each leg is highlighted with a cuff-banding inlay and a secondary taper that give the piece a light, elegant appearance. After cutting the primary tapers on the bandsaw, miter and glue in the cuff-banding sections (1). Cut the secondary taper on all four sides, staying well clear of the cuff. Refine the taper with a handplane. Make guide marks just below the cuff (2) and at the toe of the foot, and plane until both marks are gone (3).

ASSEMBLY NOTE

The huntboard glue-up is complex. It's easiest to start by assembling the side aprons and the legs. But glue only the front legs in place at this stage—you'll need to remove the rear legs for a later step (see p. 42).

Stylish huntboard

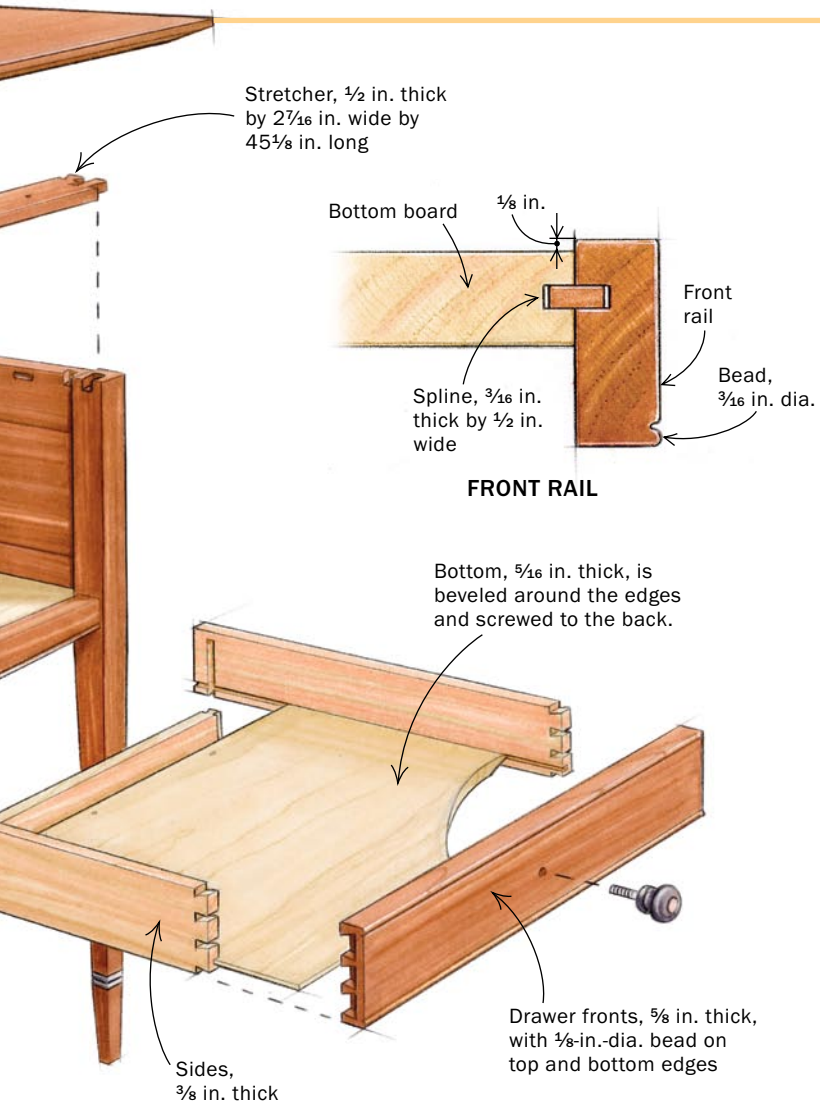
For a calm appearance, the primary wood is quartersawn cherry. To add interest and contrast, the door panels are flame birch, with African-blackwood pulls and Gabon-ebony beading.



BOTTOM SIDE RAIL

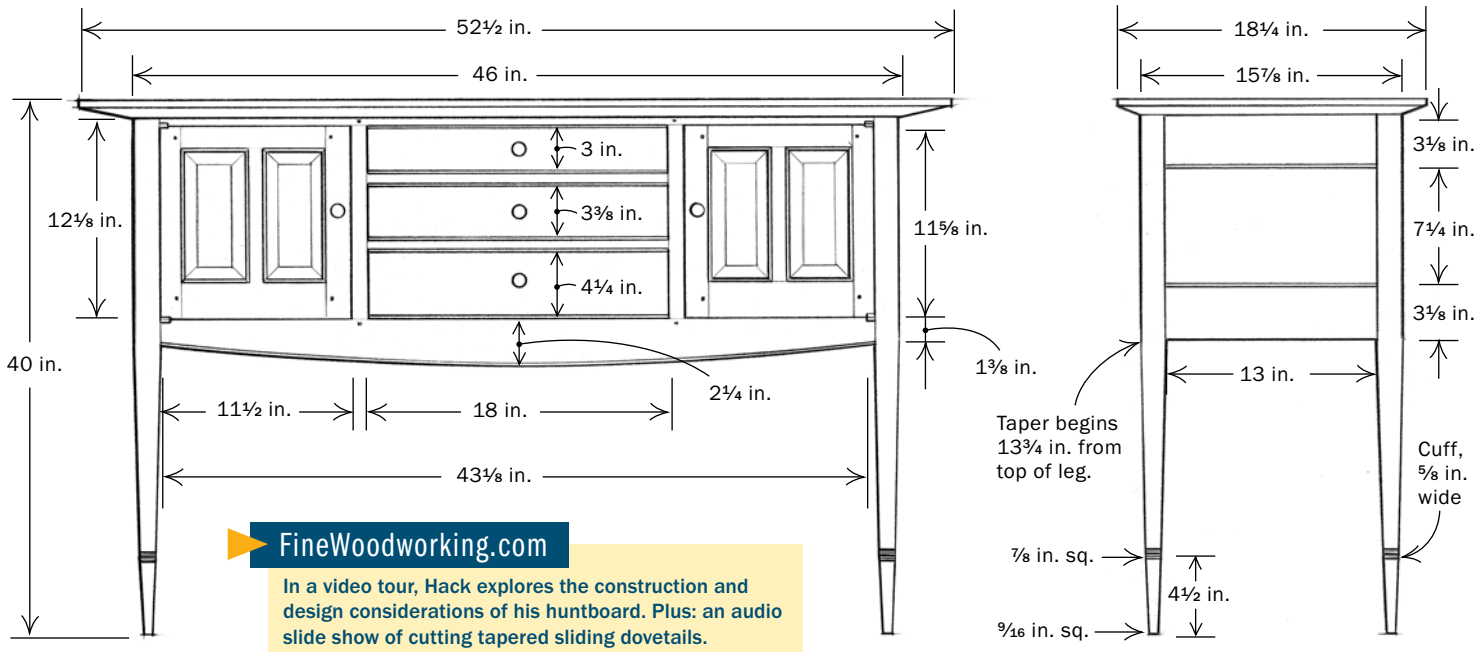
CASE INTERIOR

Photos: Thomas McKenna



FITTING A CRITICAL JOINT

The front stretcher is rabbetted and dovetailed to the legs and side aprons to help stabilize the case against racking forces. Begin by marking the shoulders of the rabbet with the case dry-assembled (top). Cut the stepped rabbet using a backsaw and chisels, then saw the dovetails (center). Set the stretcher in place and scribe for the dovetail housings in the leg and apron (bottom).



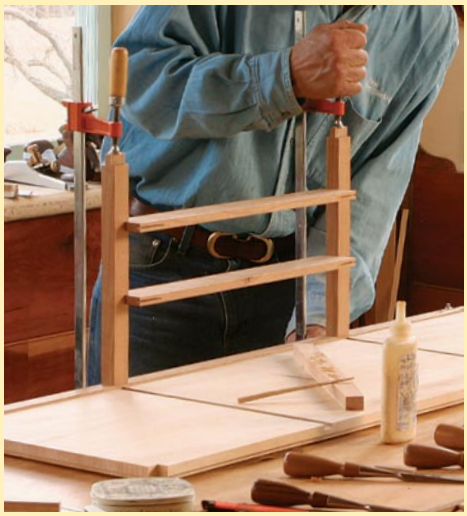
FineWoodworking.com

In a video tour, Hack explores the construction and design considerations of his huntboard. Plus: an audio slide show of cutting tapered sliding dovetails.

Drawings: Bob La Pointe

Glue up the case in stages

Attach the front rail to the bottom. *Glue the spline into the bottom board, then add the front rail. Be sure all of the joinery lines up before clamping.*



Glue the drawer stiles and dividers to the front rail. *Assemble the stiles and dividers, then fit them into the front rail as a unit.*

Slide in the interior partitions from the back. *Glue will help the tapered pins slide. Clamp the partitions, then let the glue dry before going any further.*

Attach the case to the rear assembly. *After gluing the front legs and side aprons to the case, slide the shelf into position, and drop the carcase into place.*

dadoes that house the banding using either a router or hand tools (for more on this process, see *FWW* #180, p. 106). Each section of banding is mitered using a 45° guide block and chisel; the block also is used to miter the door beading (see top right photo, p. 45). After the banding is glued in place, level the sections with a block plane, then plane a tapered toe from the cuff to the floor (see photos, p. 39).

Assemble the side and rear aprons

One of the most challenging aspects of this design is planning for the inevitable seasonal movement of the 13½-in.-wide aprons. Cherry boards that wide will move significantly, increasing the potential for cracking the case, opening a gap where they meet the top, and pinching a drawer or a door.

A simple and attractive solution is to make each apron in three parts: a top and bottom rail and a center panel, joined with cherry splines but no glue. The tenons of the rails are glued into the legs, while the stub tenons of the panel float in their mortises. As a decorative element, and to disguise small gaps that will open during the dry winter months, I cut beads in the center panel where it meets the rails (see bottom side rail detail, p. 40).

The most accurate way to cut the tenons and shoulders on the three parts of each apron is to dry-assemble them with the splines and cut them all at once, holding the pieces together with masking tape. Clean up the shoulders with a shoulder plane, then take apart the assembly and trim the center panel tenons down to ¼ in. long. Now, cut the miters and haunches in the longer tenons of the rails. Finally, cut a groove in the bottom rail to accept the tongue of the bottom board.

Fit the front rail and stretcher

When the aprons have been fitted, it's time to cut, shape, and fit the bottom front rail. Also, cut the slot in the rail for the spline that connects it to the bottom board, and scratch the bead along the bottom edge.

The front stretcher is dovetailed into the top of the front legs, and into the top of both side aprons just behind the legs (see photos, p. 41). For accuracy, dry-assemble the case and place the rail in position. Lay out the location of the shoulders and dovetails, and then cut them. Place the rail back in position, mark the dovetail housings, then rout and chop them out. Finally, cut the mortises for the two kickers of the top drawer into the back edge of the stretcher. Also, cut the mortises for the knife hinges in the stretcher and the bottom front rail (for more on installing knife hinges, see *FWW* #152, pp. 108-110).

Add the top stretcher and kickers

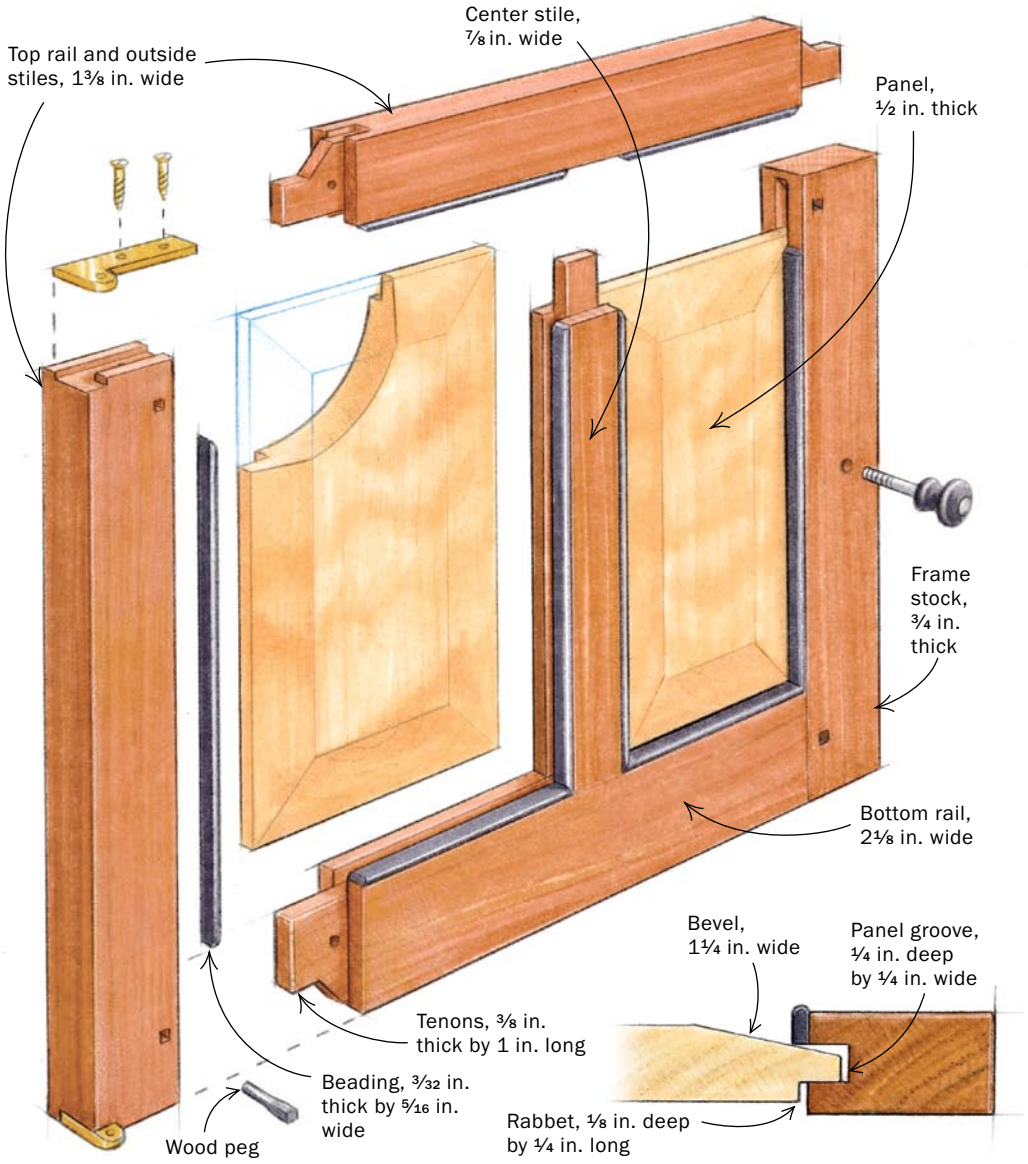
With the case upright on the floor, install the stretcher. *This is tricky because you have to glue in the kickers for the top drawer at the same time. The stiles of the drawer frame are tenoned into the stretcher. Drive wedges into the tenons, then screw the stretcher to the interior partitions.*

Thick stock and solid joinery create a stiff structure

With a huntboard, it's possible that many heavy items will be stored in the drawers and compartments. To make the case quite stiff and sturdy, the bottom board and the

Doors feature contrasting beading

Jig creates perfect bead stock. *The jig is a piece of ½-in.-thick plywood with two fences spaced the width of a block plane. The plane rides on identical shims, ensuring uniform thickness. A brad in front of the beading holds it in place.*



top are thick, and strong joinery in the face frame and interior partitions helps tie the top and bottom together.

The face frame and the drawer runners and dividers are joined with mortises and tenons while the interior partitions connect to the bottom board with sliding tapered dovetails (the slots and pins are wider at the back and narrower toward the front). Tapered dovetails ease assembly but still provide a strong mechanical joint.

To cut the dovetail slots in the bottom board, dry-fit the face-frame assembly and the bottom rail. Connect the bottom board with the spline and mark out the dovetail-slot locations. Remove the bottom board and cut the slots. Clamp a fence to the board and remove most of the waste with a straight bit. Then finish with a ⅝-in. dovetail bit. Taper the slot by shifting one end of the fence over by about 1⁄16 in. and then running the dovetail bit through the cut again.

Use a router table when cutting the dovetail pins in the partitions. Be sure to leave the partitions long for now, as trial and error is the only way to set the pin cut for a perfect sliding fit. I use a side rabbeting plane to taper the pins to fit, though you also could use a paring chisel.

Build doors and drawers after glue-up

When all the partitions have been cut and fitted, dry-assemble the piece, then lay out and cut the slots in the partition and side

Glue the beading to the frame. *The beading should be proud of the outside of the frame. Use plenty of clamps and a caul to ensure a good bond.*

Simple jig for perfect miters. *Clamp a 45° guide block to the frame members and chop the beading to length.*

apron for the shelf that's tucked behind one door. Also, lay out and cut all the mortises for the buttons that secure the top, as well as the mortises in the rear apron for the two top-drawer kickers. Once you're sure everything is fitting nicely, get ready for the glue-up.

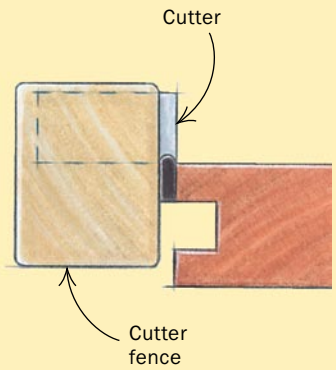
There are a lot of pieces to put together here, so to make the job easier, assemble the case in steps (see photos, pp. 42-43). After the case is glued up, cut the top to final dimensions, shape the underbeveled edge, and secure it in place with buttons and screws.

Finally, after building the doors (see photos and drawings, this spread), assembling the drawers, and turning and installing the knobs, the piece is ready for finishing.

Nothing beats the dazzle of shellac

To bring out the rich color of the cherry, I started with a light coat of oil/varnish. Once dry, I padded on many layers of orange shellac (1-lb. cut) using a clean cotton rubber, rubbing it out between coats with 0000 steel wool. A final "ghosting" with a rag with just vapors of alcohol leaves a beautifully smooth finish. A topcoat of wax is the final and renewable protective finish. □

Garrett Hack is a contributing editor.
Past articles and full-size plans are available at FineWoodworking.com.



Scratch the bead. *Run a simple scratch stock along the beading. You're done when the cutter just starts to bite into the frame.*

Cut the panel grooves, then assemble the door. *Cutting the grooves after the beading is applied ensures a flush fit between panel and beading. Trim the horns after the glue dries.*