

# Classic Shaker Cupboard

Handsome  
storage cabinet  
is comfortable  
in any room

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In *FWW* #206, I wrote about a low chest of drawers and focused on its case construction, drawer runner system, and using a shopmade jig and router to cut dadoses and dovetail slots in the carcass. Since then, a client asked me to build a large Shaker cupboard to use in a kitchen.

This piece (and this article) picks up where “Shaker Chest of Drawers” left off. I’ll expand on how I approach Shaker case-work, showing you how to apply the three-sided face frame to the front. I’ll also walk you through how I fit and install drawers. Also, because the drawers are so wide, I included a simple but effective center guide that keeps big drawers from binding.

The way I approached the doors is appropriate for almost any Shaker piece, so the editors gave that technique its own spotlight (see “Frame-and-Panel Doors Made Easier,” pp. 54-57). By the way, because this piece will live in a kitchen, I sized the drawers to hold cutlery, kitchen linens, and even pots and pans. But this classic storage piece can be adapted to any room of the house. That’s what the Shakers would have done.

## Large panels can be a challenge

Other than the size of the panels, the carcass construction on this piece is almost the same as the low chest in *FWW* #206. There are a few differences: Because of the

## Online Extra

To read the Shaker chest article from *FWW* #206, go to [FineWoodworking.com/extras](http://FineWoodworking.com/extras).





## START WITH A CHEST OF DRAWERS AND GO FROM THERE

Though it shares a few construction and joinery details with “Shaker Chest of Drawers” (FWW #206), this taller cupboard requires additional parts.



**Make a solid face frame.** Mortise-and-tenon joints add strength and simplify assembly: One clamp will hold it together. Gluing the frame into the case makes it completely rigid.



**Inset it.** The face frame goes inside the sides of the piece, but overlays the subtop, which is cut short to accommodate it. Make the frame just a bit larger than the opening, and trim the side pieces with a block plane to perfect the final fit. Apply clamp pressure from top to bottom, front to back, and along the sides.

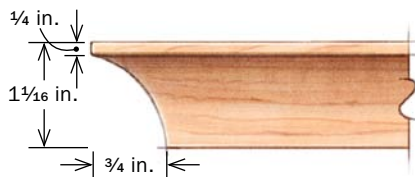


**Add the middle shelf and back.** The fixed middle shelf (left) sits on the web frame below it, sharing a wide dado in the case sides. A dab of glue at the front and a finishing nail through the top drawer frame hold it in place. Keep the clamps on the face frame, or allow the glue to dry completely before adding the middle shelf. A frame-and-panel back (above) adds rigidity and racking resistance. Fit it and glue it into the rabbeted sides.

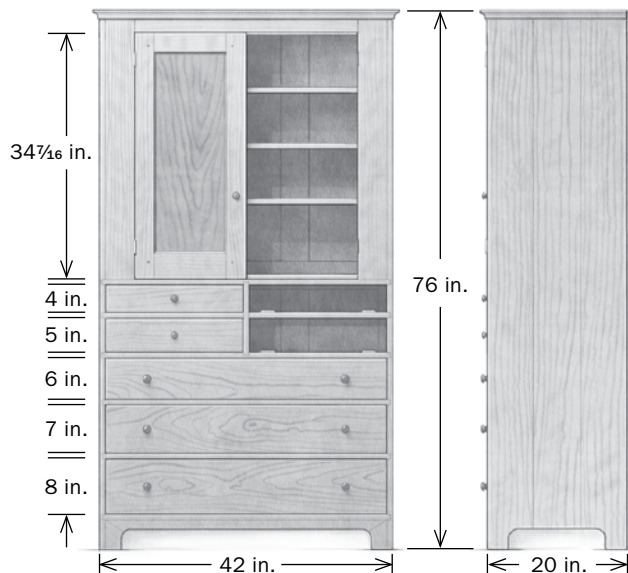


## CUPBOARD DETAILS

The subtop and fixed shelf are cut back to accommodate the face frame and back assembly. The middle shelf also acts as a stop for the lower edges of the doors.



TOP DETAIL



Door frame rail, 3/4 in. thick by 1 3/4 in. wide



Top rail, 3/4 in. thick by 2 7/8 in. wide by 13 13/16 in. long

Stiles, 3/4 in. thick by 2 7/8 in. wide by 34 7/16 in. long

Groove, 1/4 in. wide by 1/2 in. deep

Molding, quarter-round, 1/4 in.

Door panel, 1/4 in. thick by 11 5/16 in. wide by 23 3/16 in. long

Dovetail, 3/4 in. thick by 5/8 in. wide

Dado, 3/4 in. wide by 1/8 in. deep

Dovetail, 3/4 in. thick by 3/4 in. wide by 3/8 in. long

Tenon, 1/4 in. thick by 3/4 in. wide by 1 1/4 in. long

Knob, 1 in. dia.

Peg, 1/4 in. dia.

Bottom rail, 3/4 in. thick by 3 3/4 in. wide by 13 13/16 in. long

DOOR

Tenon, 1/4 in. thick by 2 1/2 in. wide by 2 1/4 in. long

Vertical divider, 3/4 in. thick by 1 7/8 in. wide by 10 1/2 in. long

Drawer divider, 3/4 in. thick by 1 1/4 in. wide

size of the pieces, I used a jigsaw instead of a bandsaw to cut the arches into the bottoms of the two sides. This chest has a permanent middle shelf that the low chest doesn't, and, also because of the size of the pieces, I got creative about dovetailing and how I transferred the tails to the pin boards. I laid out and cut the tails first on the subtop, then moved to the half-blind pins on the sides. I rested the long workpieces on the ground and tacked the top in place with a small brad, creating a freestanding inverted U. I stood on a stool to transfer the tails to the pin board, and then cut the pins at the bench. Once the

Drawer bottoms, small, 1/4 in. thick, large, 5/16 in. thick

Drawer front, 3/4 in. thick

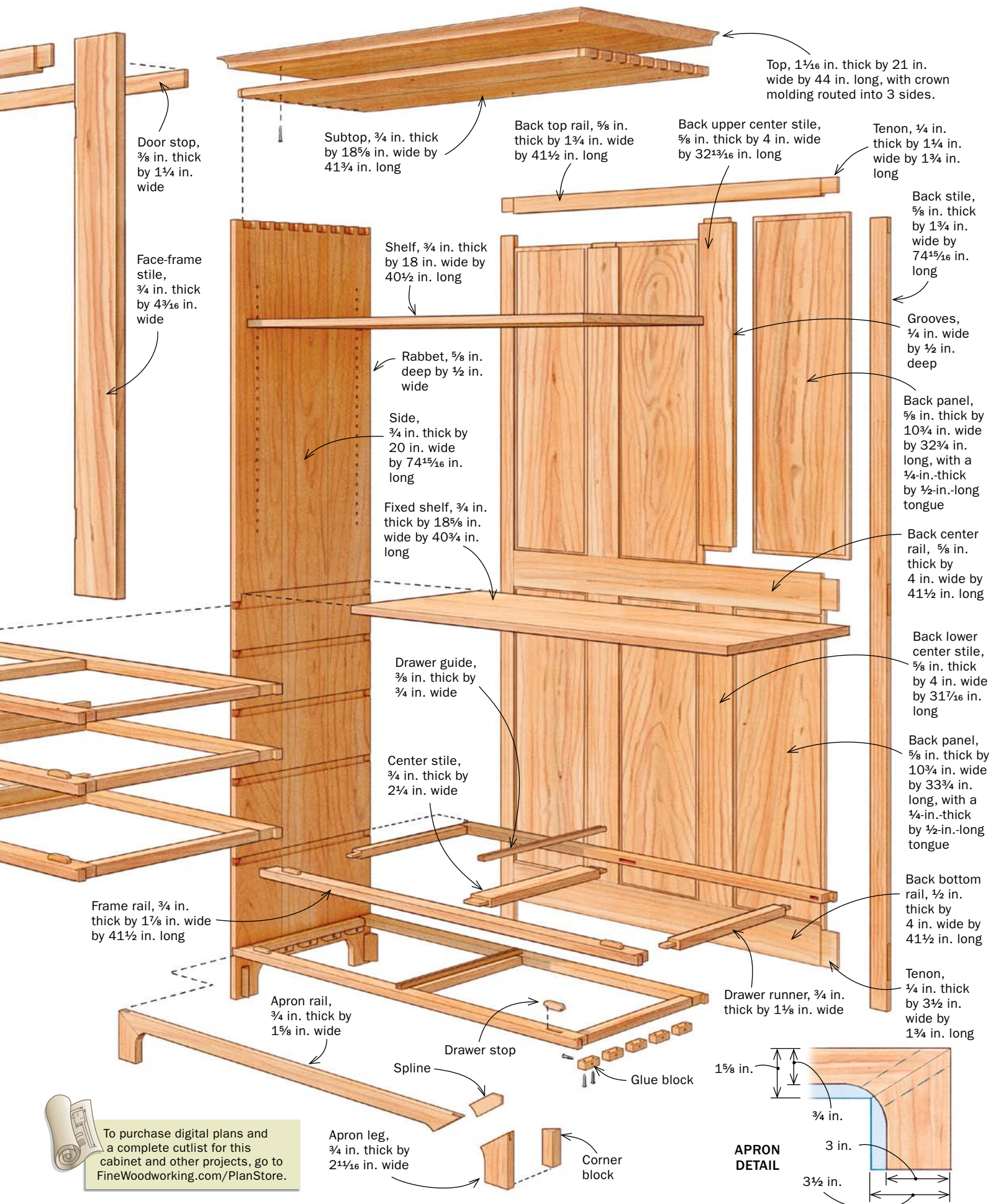
Knobs, small, 1 in. dia.; large, 1 3/16 in. dia.

DRAWERS

Drawer back, 3/4 in. thick

Drawer sides, 3/4 in. thick by 18 5/8 in. long





To purchase digital plans and a complete cutlist for this cabinet and other projects, go to [FineWoodworking.com/PlanStore](http://FineWoodworking.com/PlanStore).



## HOW TO FIT WIDE DRAWERS

Careful fitting and smart stops are the key to good-looking drawers and a flush front.

**Size the front to the opening.** Leave a small gap at the top edge to allow for wood expansion. Then cut the dovetails and assemble the drawer box.



**Fit them individually.** Start by rough-sanding the pins flush, and get the drawer to just fit the opening. As you pull out the drawer, make pencil lines where the sides rub and use those lines as a guide to sand or plane the sides to an exact fit (far right).



dovetails, dadoes, and rabbets were cut, I glued the subtop and bottom to the sides.

With the carcass together, it's time to work on the web frames and runners that will hold the drawers in place and allow them to run smoothly. For step-by-step details on this, go to *FWW* #206, p. 41. To separate the top drawers, I added a centered vertical drawer divider and behind that a center runner. Although the three wide drawers at the bottom get an added center guide, don't tackle that until you've glued the frames in place and made the drawers.

### U-shaped face frame is applied

Once the rails and runners are in place, make the face frame for the upper half of the cabinet. You can do one of two things: use an applied face frame that butts against the inside edges of the sides, or use a more complicated approach that involves notching or mitering the side pieces on just the upper portion. I use the first, less complicated method, which leaves the edge of the cabinet sides exposed all the way to the top. This requires careful wood selection to hide the glue joint where the outsides of the frame meet the sides of the carcass, but saves time and effort because you don't have to notch the carcass sides halfway or cut a stopped miter on the sides and miter the face frames.

When the frame is glued in place, sand the entire face of the cabinet flush. Then glue the fixed middle shelf into place, sliding it in from the back and against the face frame.

The back comes next. Since the back is captured in rabbets on the sides, I used 1¾-in.-wide quartersawn cherry for the side stiles

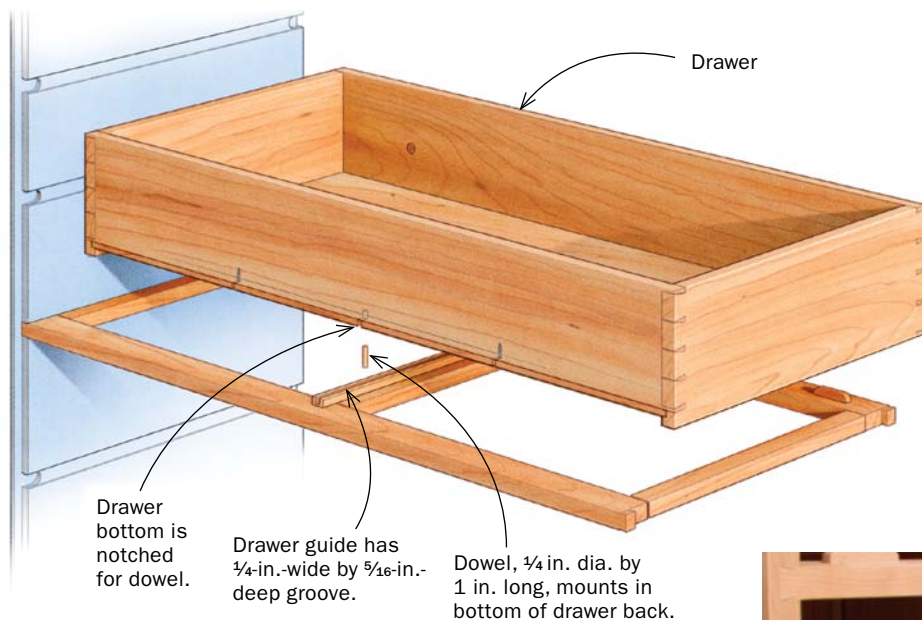


**Add stops for a flush front.** All the drawers get a stop at both ends. Use a trim router resting on the front edge of the drawer frames to cut shallow, 1¾-in.-long by ⅜-in.-wide grooves (above) for handmade stops. Then glue and clamp the stops into the grooves (left).



## CENTER GUIDES KEEP THEM IN LINE

Wide drawers have a tendency to bind, but this simple dowel system keeps them running smoothly.



**Make a groovy center strip.** The center guide is simply a piece of wood with a groove that runs straight through.

and the top rail. The bottom and center rails as well as the center stiles can be flatsawn and wider, for strength. The six panels are flat and flush inside and out. Use a block plane to carefully fit the back so that it just drops into the rabbet, and glue it in. Now you can make and fit the doors (see pp. 54-57).

### Wrap up some details, then tackle the drawers

With the doors complete, most of the hard parts are finished. While the case is still open, use a handheld drill and jig (a simple piece of plywood with predrilled holes) to drill holes on both sides of the upper section to accept pins for the adjustable shelves. Then glue in the mitered, splined apron in the base at the front.

Once the case is sanded, cut the top to size and then run a cove profile around the front and sides of the top on the router table. Screw it to the subtop from the inside.

Drawers are the last hurdle, and the most time-consuming. I cut half-blind dovetails in the front and through-dovetails in the back, and I always cut the tails first. On the tablesaw, groove the front and the two sides for the drawer bottoms. These grooves will help align things when it's time to transfer the tail layout to the pin boards. On the wide drawers, make sure to locate the grooves 3/4 in. from the bottom to allow enough room for the center track.

After you complete the drawers, turn the knobs, glue them in place, and add drawer stops to the fronts of the web frames. Next, make the tracks for the wide drawers to run on. They are fitted, centered, and glued and screwed to the front and center rails. Now drill a hole and insert a dowel into the drawer back, centered exactly. Finally, test-fit each drawer and make adjustments.

I finished the case with Tried & True Danish oil. Once dry, I screwed in the drawer bottoms, polished the brass hinges, and added leather bumpers to the door and drawer stops. □

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**Use a stick to keep it on track.** To keep the guide centered as you mark around it, use a notched stick at the front and then the back. Glue and screw the guide only to the front and back rails of the web frames.



**Center a dowel on the drawer bottom.** Becksvoort measures for the center to lock in the location, and uses a doweling jig to drill straight.