

Case Closed

How to use off-the-shelf hardware
to close cabinet doors in style

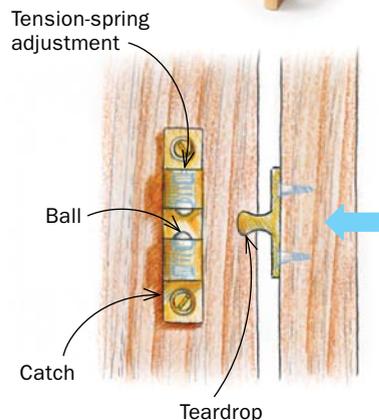


Browse through the clunky catches offered in some catalogs and it would be easy to conclude that a shopmade catch is the only tasteful way to keep a cabinet door closed. After all, the goal is a catch that will hold a door securely closed but be unobtrusive. But some commercial catches are simple and discrete enough to be at home in fine furniture. In this article, three of our contributing editors show you their techniques for making elegant use of different commercial catches. We'll also show you how to make a simple catch using hidden rare-earth magnets.



Double-ball catch: Adjustable power where it's needed

BY STEVE LATTA



Among all the contemporary catches I've seen, I like the double-ball variety for its versatility, appearance, and ease of installation. And, like the bullet catch, you can even install them when the cabinet back is already in place.

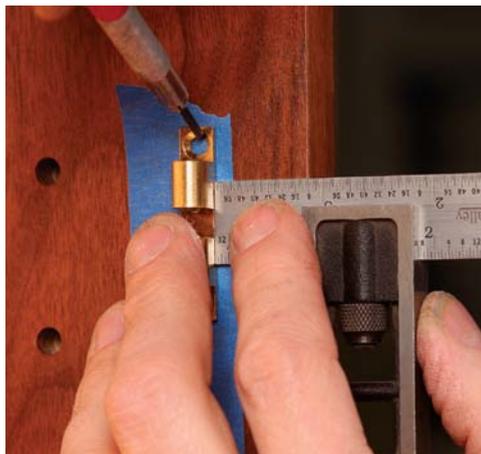
In general, it's good to place the catch close to where the door pull is located, but because these catches have the ability to pull a door into a frame or against a stop, you can place them selectively to alleviate a slight twist in the door caused by a poor glue-up or wood movement. Place them at the top, bottom, or along the edge—wherever the pressure is needed. I typically use them on inset doors, but they've performed well for my students on overlay doors, too. They are relatively attractive as far as hardware goes and, being brass, can be easily antiqued or polished. They are easy to install and easy to adjust. You can adjust the tension spring and, if need be, reshape the tear-drop portion for a smoother feel. The cost is minimal and they are readily available. A note of caution, however: I've seen the quality of many of these units decline over the years. I like the versions from Lee Valley and Whitechapel.

Steve Latta is a contributing editor.

INSET THE CATCH



Measure the door. To ensure that the door will close flush to the cabinet, use a combination square to measure from the front of the door to the edge of the catch's mounting plate.



Mark the case. Use the setting on your square to transfer the inset depth for the catch and mark the top hole's location for drilling. Painter's tape helps make the mark more visible.



Mount the catch. After securing the top of the catch with a screw, use the square to align the bottom and then mark the second hole for drilling.

A STICKY TRICK



Apply double-stick tape. Latta has a simple tool for finding the exact location of the mating teardrop: double-stick tape.



Put the mating pieces together. Set the teardrop into the catch and then loosen the tension spring so the teardrop will release easily.

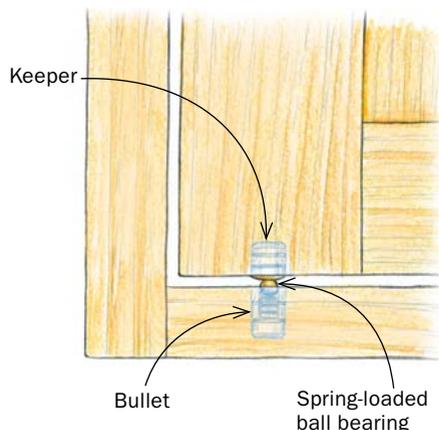


Close the door firmly, then open it. The double-stick tape will adhere to the door, placing the teardrop in the perfect location for mounting.



Bullet catch: Discrete and supportive

BY GARRETT HACK



Like a catch that holds a door shut and is quiet, gentle, and not obvious. A little bullet catch does all of that, plus, when located at the bottom of the door, keeps it from sagging. These catches hold best if the gap around the door is small, roughly $\frac{1}{16}$ in.

A bullet catch has two parts: The “bullet” is a compact brass cylinder with a spring-loaded ball bearing at one end. On nicer catches, like those from Brusso or Horton Brasses, the mating “keeper” piece is a shorter cylinder with a slightly convex end that’s indented across the center to capture the ball bearing.

A good place for the catch is centered both on the door’s thickness and on the width of the outer stile. It’s possible to mount the bullet on the underside of the door, but most of the time I put it in the bottom rail of the case, with the keeper in the door, where any wear will be hidden.

Garrett Hack is a contributing editor.

Drill the hole.

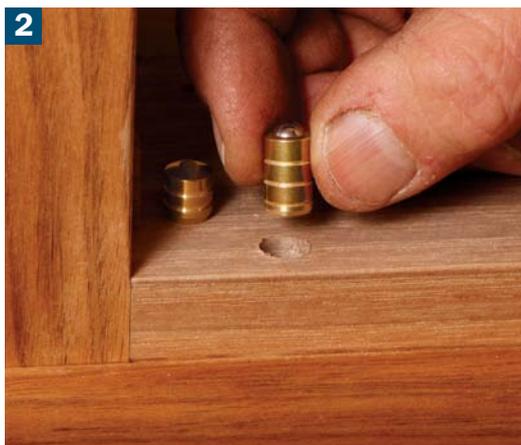
Mark the hole location with an awl to help seat the Brad-point bit and locate a pre-drilled guide block. The block helps keep the bit vertical and prevents tearout. Mark the hole depth on the bit with a piece of painter’s tape.



1

Set the bullet in place.

First, double-check the hole’s depth (Hack uses the sliding end of a dial caliper); the cylinder can be difficult to remove. A few taps with a hammer and wooden block should help seat the ball so that its collar is flush with the case.



2

Layout trick is on the ball.

Cover the ball with pencil lead to help mark its location on the bottom of the door.



3

4

Close the door to mark the location. A strip of masking tape on the strike area will make the pencil lead visible.



5

Where the pencil line stops, drill your hole. Dimple the spot with an awl to receive the drill bit. Use the same pre-drilled guide block as you did for the bullet, and again double-check the depth of the hole.



6

Install the catch. The indentation should run side to side, to trap the ball in the center of the catch. The rim should be flush with the bottom of the door. If you’ve drilled too deep, pry or tap the keeper loose and shim it with tape.





Rare-earth magnet: Blend it into the woodwork

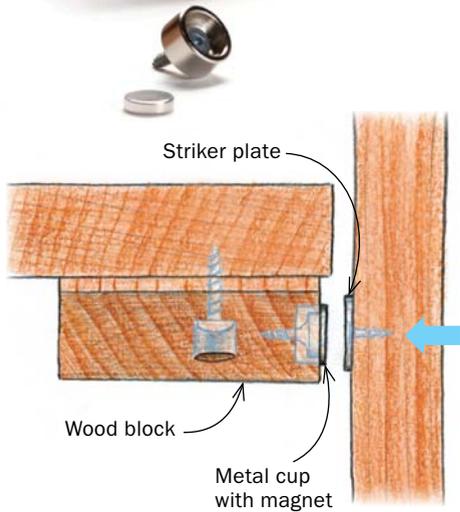
BY MICHAEL FORTUNE

To create a simple but effective catch, I like to mount a rare-earth magnet in a piece of wood shaped to reflect the overall lines of the cabinet or a detail such as the handles.

The block is typically from 4 in. to 8 in. long, and I attach it with #6 round-head screws and slightly oversize holes, so there is a degree of adjustability. Two deep counterbores hide the screw heads. Major woodworking suppliers like Rockler, Woodcraft, and Woodworker's Supply sell the magnets and hardware: a metal cup that securely cradles the magnet so it doesn't pull out, and a striker plate that screws into the door.

I often use darker contrasting woods in my furniture, so I'll use a block of wood in the same species or even ebonize it. When I do this, I also color all of the magnet hardware black with Brass Black metal finish, available at Amazon.com and sporting-goods stores. Sand the surface lightly first to prepare it for the coloring treatment.

Michael Fortune is a contributing editor.



Drill the holes before shaping the block. Use a Forstner bit to drill a recess for the magnet and its mounting cup.



Shape the block. Use double-stick tape to attach an extension block that lets you cut and sand the block safely.



Attach the block. Fortune mounts the block under a shelf or the top (the cabinet is flipped here), slightly behind the edge to accommodate the striker plate.



The magnet sits in a cup. The metal cup is sold with the magnet and is held in place with a flathead screw.



No glue needed. The magnet seats itself in the cup, and it stays put.



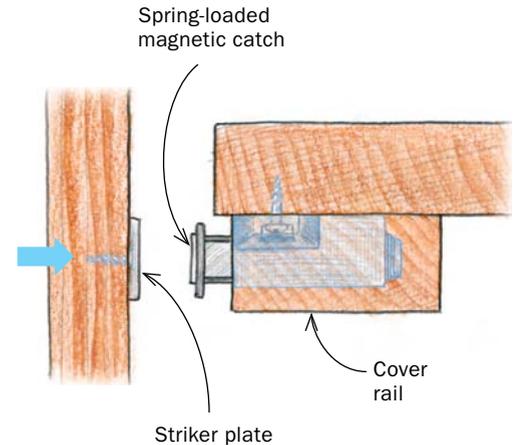
Attach the striker. Reference marks transferred from the case help locate the striker plate, which consists of a steel screw and a small washer.

Touch latch: Replaces door handles

BY MICHAEL FORTUNE

When a cabinet's design would be compromised by surface-mounted handles, I use a commercial touch latch. The latch uses a spring-mounted magnetic catch that releases when the door is pushed inward slightly, so no door handles are required.

These latches—available as single or double units at Woodcraft, Riche-lieu Hardware, and other cabinetry suppliers—are made of plastic and, while they work well, they're a little too ugly to leave in plain sight. I fix this by fashioning an elegant cover for the latch, made from solid stock that harmonizes with the cabinet. This cover rail typically matches the length of the rail or shelf to which its attached. Installing it is a matter of mounting the latch and accurately locating the openings in the custom cover.



Michael Fortune is a contributing editor.

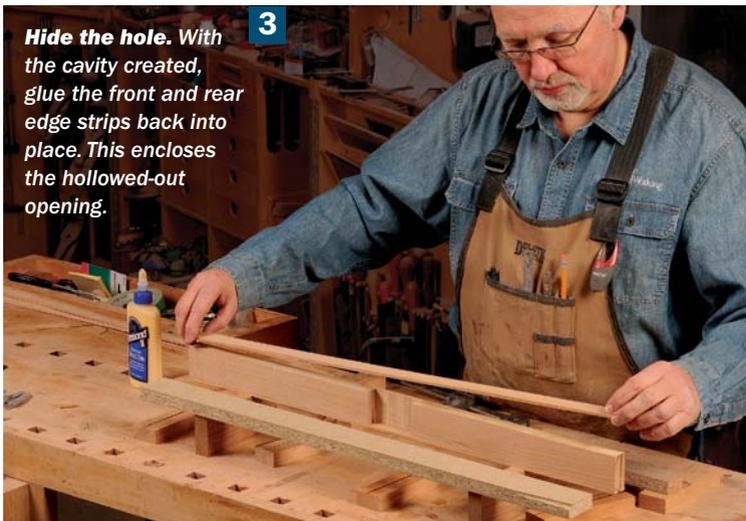
Cut away the front and rear faces. After milling the solid-wood block that will house the latch, Fortune rips a thin strip—a little less than $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick—from each edge.



Create a home for the latch. Use repeated tablesaw cuts to excavate a cavity to house the latch mechanism.



Hide the hole. With the cavity created, glue the front and rear edge strips back into place. This encloses the hollowed-out opening.



4 Let the plungers through. Fortune uses a Forstner bit to drill clearance holes through the front face for the two latch plungers. Insert a wooden block into the cavity to prevent blow-out during drilling and when squaring up the holes with a chisel.



5 Attach the latch. Mount the latch on the underside of a cabinet rail or shelf. Set the catch back from the rail's edge to make room for the striker plate.



6 Install the cover rail. The clearance holes should fit over the latch plungers, with the plunger faces slightly proud. Countersunk screws hold the cover rail in place. A striker plate is mounted on each door using reference marks transferred from the case.

