

Master Class

Shape bracket feet in any style using the bandsaw



BY RANDALL O'DONNELL

Bracket feet have held up furniture for more than 300 years. Like most enduring elements, they have weathered changes in style but never went out of fashion. Simple, straight bracket feet date to the Queen Anne Period. Eventually they became more sophisticated and evolved into a graceful ogee (late Queen Anne), many variations of which exist. As rendered in some Chippendale and Federal work, they are slimmed down and called French feet.

I made my first set of ogee bracket feet about 15 years ago for a little New England-style blanket chest. I wasn't quite sure how to start, so I did some research that suggested I get an antique molding plane to shape the ogee. But finding such a plane in working order involved time and a bit of luck. I also knew that shaper cutters could be found to cut the profile. That, however, was an expensive option. So I went to the scrap bin and started experimenting with jigs. The solution turned out to be simple and involved the bandsaw. I've been making bracket feet this way since.

My jig consists of a plywood base and a post screwed to it. That's it. With a bracket-foot blank mounted on the jig, and the profile penciled in on one face of the stock, I can cut any shape, from any period, without the need of expensive shaper cutters or rare molding planes. Poor boys have poor ways.

FURTHER READING

The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director by Thomas Chippendale (Dover Publications, 1966)

Furniture Treasury by Wallace Nutting (IDG Books Worldwide, 1949)

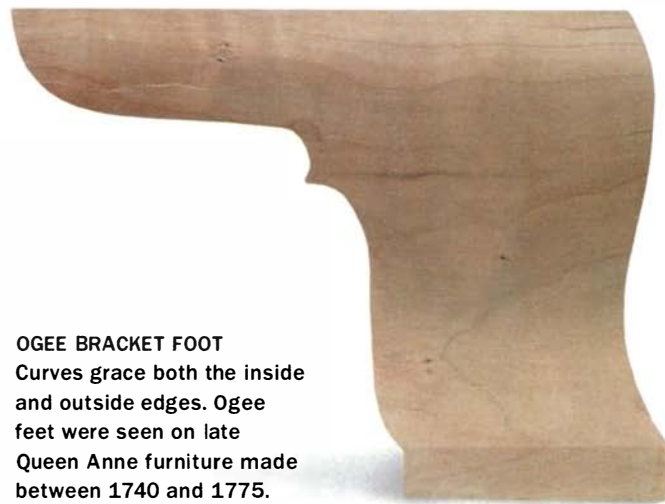
The Four Books of Architecture by Andrea Palladio (Dover Publications, 1976)

The American Builder's Companion by Asher Benjamin (Dover Publications, 1969)

THREE STYLES OF BRACKET FEET



STRAIGHT BRACKET FOOT
Only the inside edge is profiled. The outside edge is plumb. Straight bracket feet were common on Queen Anne furniture made between 1720 and 1780.



OGEE BRACKET FOOT
Curves grace both the inside and outside edges. Ogee feet were seen on late Queen Anne furniture made between 1740 and 1775.



FRENCH FOOT
Also called a splay foot, this foot has a clean sweep that gives it a modern appearance. French feet were common on Chippendale and Federal furniture made between 1780 and 1810.



The foot derives its strength from an internal spline and a corner block. Although the corner block is screwed in place for the glue-up, to remain true to the period the author replaces the screws with antique nails before attaching the foot to the case.

MAKING AN OGEE BRACKET FOOT

START BY ASSEMBLING THE FOOT



Cut a slot for the spline on each face of the miter. The author makes the cut on the tablesaw with the blade set at 45°.



Rout a stopped rabbet on the upper inside edge of each leg half. Then square the end of the rabbet with a chisel.

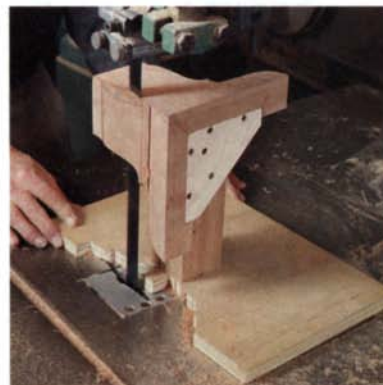


After bandsawing the foot's inner profile, assemble the halves. Use small bar clamps to close the joint, then strengthen it with a corner block glued and screwed into the rabbet.

BANDSAWING THE PROFILE



Mount the blank to the jig by screwing through the corner block. The jig consists of a post of solid wood screwed onto a piece of plywood large enough to balance the assembly while it's being bandsawed.



Cut the outer profile. The author nibbles away at the shape and cuts from both directions as needed.



Reposition the stock on the jig to cut the other face. The glue line serves as the layout line because it follows the profile exactly.



Use rasps and files to fair the surfaces. Finish by sanding, but take care not to round over the crisp edges.