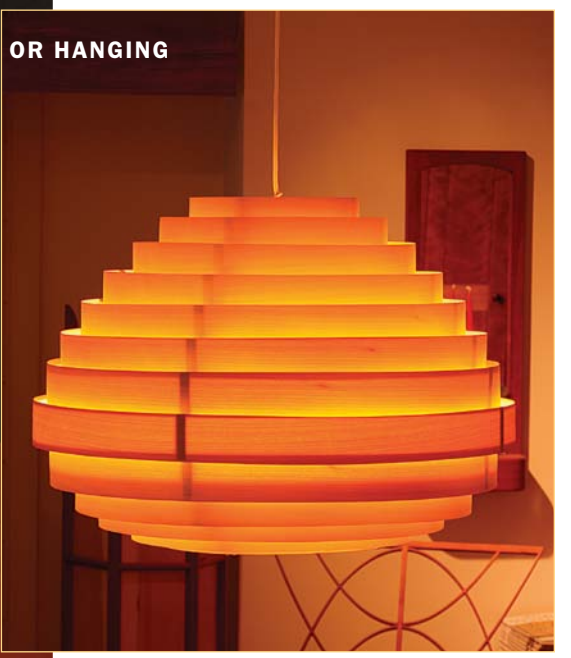
Two Unique Lamps

Rings of veneer create style and ambience

BY CHRISTIAN BECKSVOORT

I love the warmth of light passing through wood, and lamps made with thin veneers are the perfect way to get that effect. I've designed many hanging, floor, wall, and table lamps using a variety of veneers. Standard commercial veneers and wide edge-banding are just the right thickness, and lighter-colored woods tend to make the best lamps: birch, maple, pine, holly, white cedar, sycamore, and basswood, to name a few. This is one of my favorite designs, handsome yet easy to build, and versatile enough to work as either a table lamp or hanging lamp.

The table lamp has a crosslapped base,

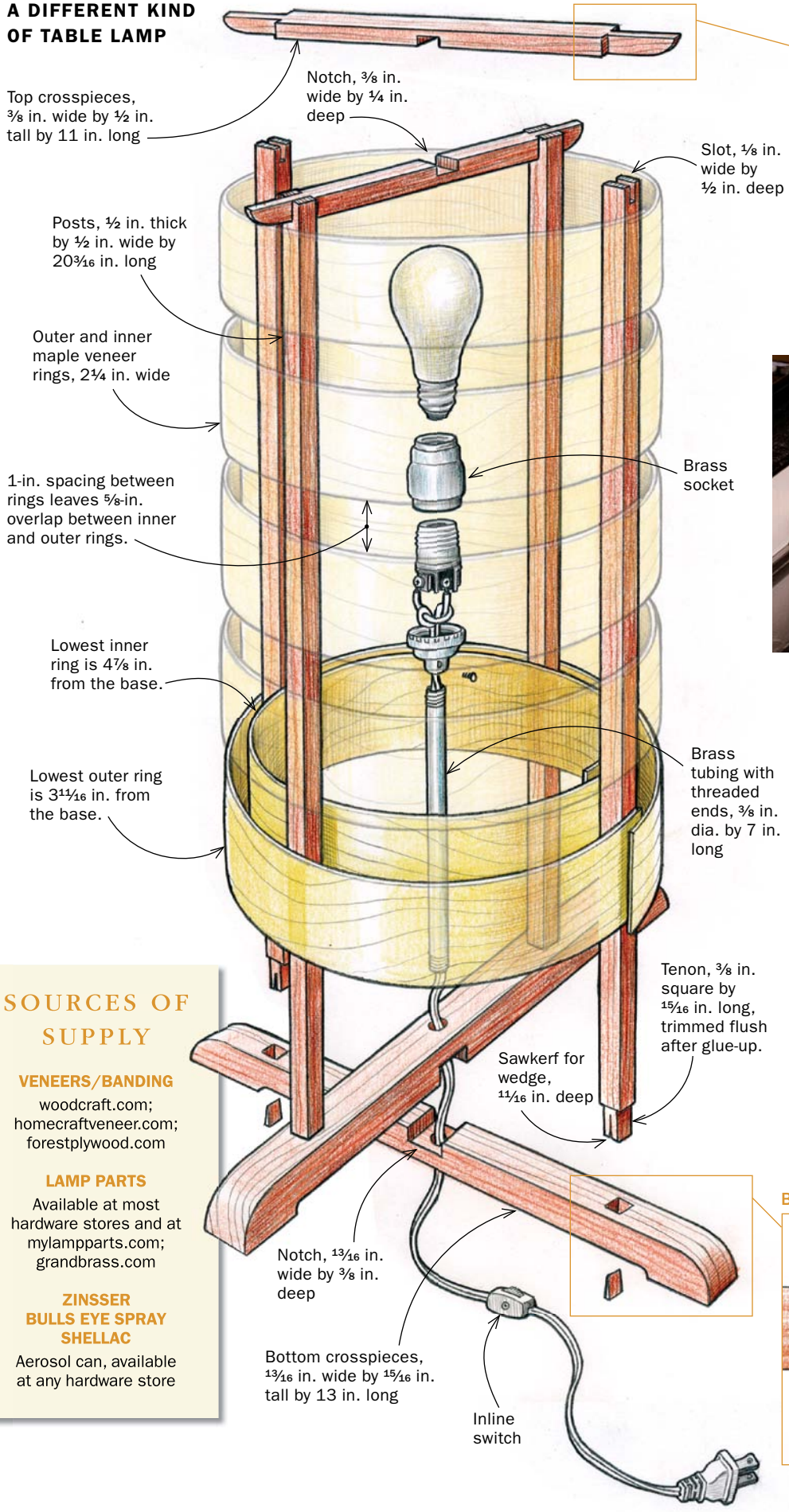


Make two different lamps using one technique. See p. 79 to build Becksvoort's hanging version.

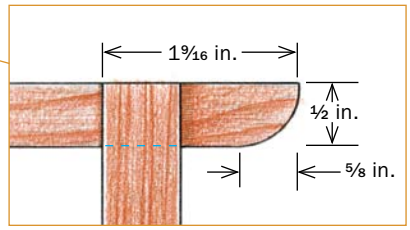
four vertical posts, and a smaller crosslapped top to tie the posts together. The shade is hard maple veneer rings alternating from outside to inside. I had store-bought edge-banding in my shop, which made this project easy because I used the existing width and didn't have to cut veneer strips. But you can always use full sheets of veneer and cut them to width without complicating things too much. That would give you grain

Photo (this page, left) and drawings: John Tetreault

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TABLE LAMP



TOP CROSSPIECE TENON DETAIL



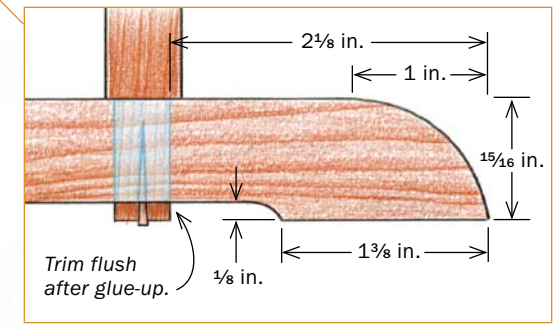
PERFECT CROSSLAPS

Create the crosslaps at the top and bottom of the lamp using a standard tablesaw blade.

Center the joints. *Using the rip fence as a stop, make repeat cuts to waste away the joint. Start at the center point and work your way out, flipping the piece back and forth to keep the joint centered in the stock.*

Sneak up on the fit. *Keep test-fitting the second piece to the first as you make the centered cuts. The pieces should fit snugly.*

BOTTOM CROSSPIECE FOOT DETAIL



SOURCES OF SUPPLY

VENEERS/BANDING
woodcraft.com; homecraftveneer.com; forestplywood.com

LAMP PARTS
Available at most hardware stores and at mylampparts.com; grandbrass.com

ZINSSER BULLS EYE SPRAY SHELLAC
Aerosol can, available at any hardware store

DRILL AND MORTISE THE BASE

The base gets four mortises to hold the posts, and a center hole for the brass lamp post.

A shallow relief creates the feet. *Using a stop block against the router-table fence, Becksvoort pivots into the cut and pivots out at the halfway mark. Then he flips the piece and pivots in again from the other side. This ensures that all the feet are exactly the same size.*

Work from the center out. *Locate the center of the crosslap, and then use a compass to mark an equal distance on all four feet. The distance is not as important as that they all be identical.*

continuity along the height of the lamp and open up your wood choices.

Easy joints for the base and posts

I started with the base, crosslapping the parts at the center. When I had a perfect fit, I drew the curved ends of the pieces, cut them on the bandsaw, and sanded them smooth. Also, I routed a relief on the bottoms that created four feet.

At the drill press, I drilled a hole near each end of the crosspieces and a fifth hole in the center. Next, I chiseled around the holes to make four through-mortises, leaving the center hole round to accommodate the brass tubing that holds the wire. Finally, I glued and clamped the lap joint.

The four posts are easy to make. I tackled the tenons on the bottom ends first, then on the top end, I made a centered slot to form the inside of the bridle joint.

Top pieces get crosslaps and tenons

The top is similar to the bottom, two pieces crosslapped in the center, but you don't have to cut through-mortises for the posts. Instead, cut a tenon on the ends of each piece, which forms the center of the bridle joint. Again, I made the crosslap on the tablesaw, then cut a centered tenon on

Start on the drill press and finish up by hand. *While the base pieces are together, drill for the center hole that will hold the brass post (left). Then take apart the base and drill the four holes that will be the through-mortises (center). Use a chisel to turn the drill-press holes into square mortises (right).*

FINISH UP THE FRAME

Four posts are mortised into the base and then the top pieces are added to provide the framework for the rings. The bottom of each post gets a traditional tenon to go into the base. The top of each post gets a bridle-joint slot to hold its top piece.

Tenon and slot the posts. *You can form the tenons with a standard tablesaw blade. Use a miter gauge, with the rip fence as a stop. Work your way around the stock, making multiple cuts (above). Create the slot on the top of the posts with a tenoning jig (right).*

Glue the posts into the base. *For added strength, Becksvoort hand-saws a kerf in the tenons and wedges them during the glue-up (above). So the top doesn't get in the way while gluing in the rings, he only dry-fits it at this point, holding it place with rubber bands (right).*

each of the four ends. The bottom edges of the tenons are rounded. After sanding, I glued the crosslap but just dry-fitted the top onto the posts, until the rings were in place. This completed the lamp frame and left me with the fun part, the shade.

Nine rings for the shade

To make the shade, I prefer plain wood banding, but banding with thin paper backing works, and makes the wood less likely to split. The pre-glued stuff does not work, because the glue may melt. I made the rings first and then attached them to the frame. A simple formula determines the length of the veneer strips that

Photos, except where noted: Anissa Kapsales

ADD THE RINGS

The nine veneer rings give this lamp its unique look and warm glow. Use an easy mathematical equation to figure out the size of the rings. First create the rings, and then glue them to the frame.

Embrace the math. *For perfect-fitting rings, Becksvoort uses a simple formula. Measure the distance from the outside of the posts for the outer rings and the inside of the posts for the inner rings. To find the circumference (the length of the veneer strips), multiply that distance by pi (π), 3.1416. Add ⅜ in. for the gluing overlap.*

Rings are easy to make. *Cut the rings to length with each end square (right). Mark the ⅜-in. overlap at the ends of each strip, apply a thin layer of glue, and tape the lap to form a circle. Working on a flat surface, add a small caul on the inside and outside of the lap and apply a spring clamp for pressure (below).*

I glued into the rings (see photo, left). You might be tempted to just test-fit one ring for the outside and one for the inside and make the rest to match. I am leery of this method for two reasons. Test-fitting a circle on the inside is more difficult than the outside. If you don't get it right, you could mess up all the interior rings. Also, you could end up with squarish circles instead of the consistency you get with minor calculating.

Once I cut the veneer strips to length, I marked the overlap on the ends of each strip, applied a thin layer of glue, and clamped the overlap to form a circle.

I laid out the location of the rings on the posts. Since a table lamp is seldom seen straight on, the rings overlap to hide the bulb. This also creates a dramatic effect because the lighting is different where the rings overlap. I glued on the bottom outside ring first and worked my way up, alternating between the outer and inner rings. Because the spring clamps I use for pressure get in the way of gluing and clamping the next ring, I also use tape to keep things in place. That way I can pull the clamps after a few minutes and keep working. The top crosspieces go on last.

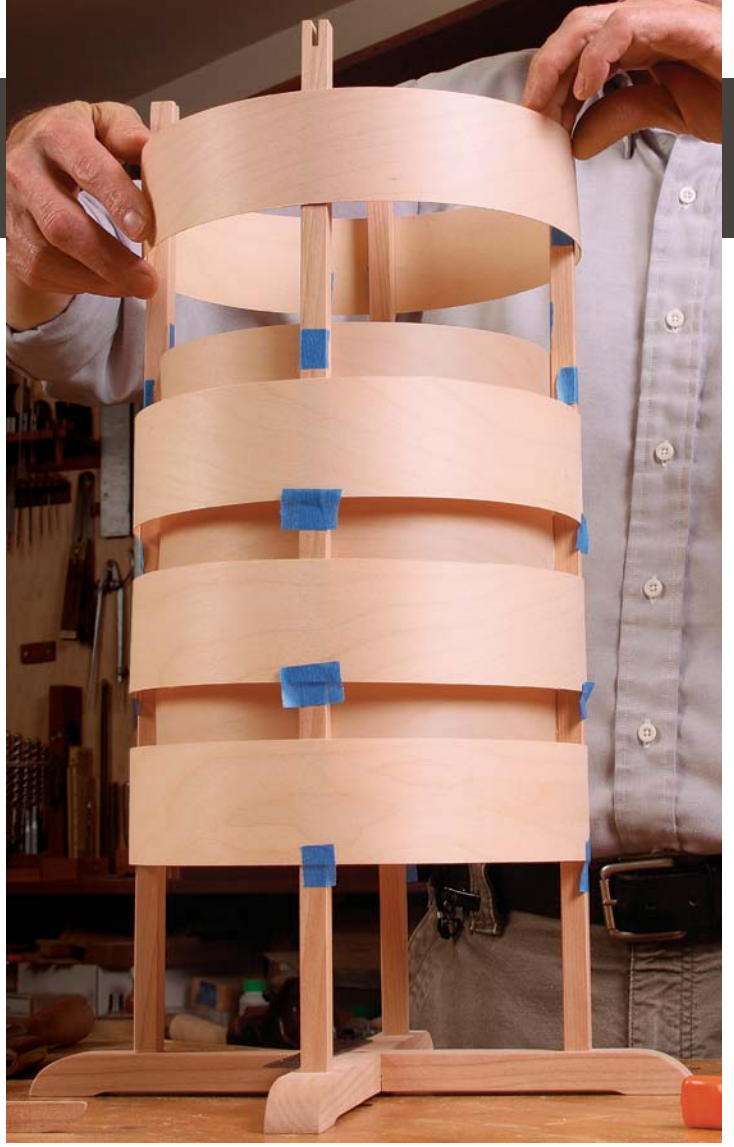
Adding electricity

To electrify the lamp, I purchased a brass socket, brass tubing with threaded ends, two threaded brass lock washers to fit, about 10 ft. of electrical cord, an inline switch, and a plug. Simply wire the cord to the socket, tie an underwriter's knot, pass it through the tubing, screw the tube through the ⅜-in. hole in the feet, and attach the plug and inline switch. I use compact fluorescent bulbs because they create less heat than standard bulbs.

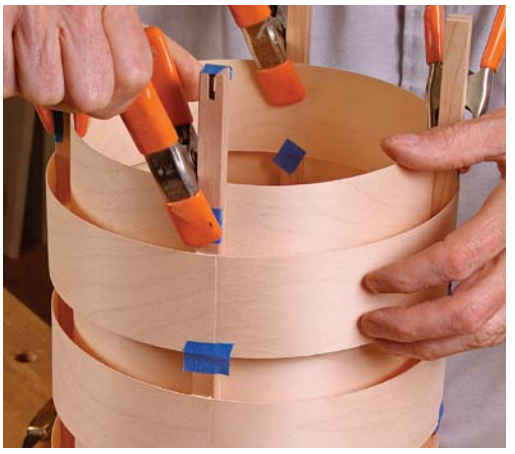
For a finish, I decided on spray shellac. Any wipe-on or brush-on finish is out of the question, because of the overlapping rings. I concentrated on spraying the outside of the rings, but to do a good job covering the overlapping areas you will have to get some spray on the inside of the shade, which is not a big deal. □

Christian Becksvoort is a contributing editor.

Photo (top right): Christian Becksvoort



Dry-fit first. *Mark the locations with tape (above), make sure the rings fit well, and make sure all the joints end up on the same post (right), which will become the back of the lamp. When you are ready to apply glue, work from the bottom ring up, putting glue on the posts only, not the veneer.*



Add the top. *When all the rings are dry, glue the top into its bridle joints. Spring clamps are perfect for this glue-up.*

A twist on the straight lamp

This version of the veneer ring lamp uses store-bought edge-bandings the same way as the straight version. The difference from the straight lamp is the internal frame. Rather than four straight posts connected to a top and bottom, four curved, notched plywood frames get screwed to a top and bottom ring turned from a bricklaid block of cherry. When the rings are attached, they follow the stepped shape of the frames. The brass hanger is from Lampshop.com, with its ring snipped off and its arms inserted into the cherry ring. ***—C.B.***

HANGING LAMP FRAME