

Building a community of benches

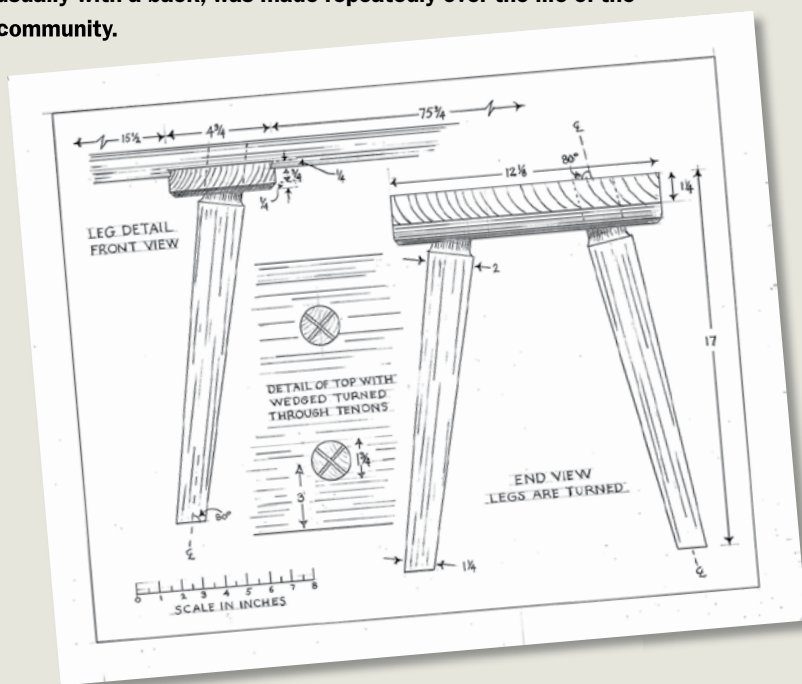
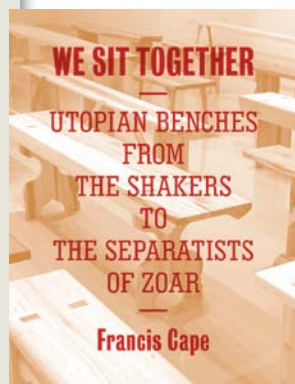


Amana Church Bench

The original of this bench was one of hundreds of benches Cape found at the Community of True Inspiration in Amana, Iowa. The Amana society, which lasted from 1855 to 1932, had been led to America from Germany by a cabinetmaker, Christian Metz. Although Amana didn't originally make furniture for sale, each of the seven villages comprising the community had its own sawmill and cabinet shop. This style of bench, though usually with a back, was made repeatedly over the life of the community.

Francis Cape's travels in search of utopian benches (see the back cover) took him to communities from Maine to Iowa. At each stop, he drew on the woodworking skills he developed as an apprentice in England, where he learned to measure and reproduce carved

details in architecture and furniture. His new book about the bench project, *We Sit Together: Utopian Benches from the Shakers to the Separatists of Zoar*, contains descriptions of 12 communities and measured drawings of 18 benches.



Hancock Shaker Village Bench

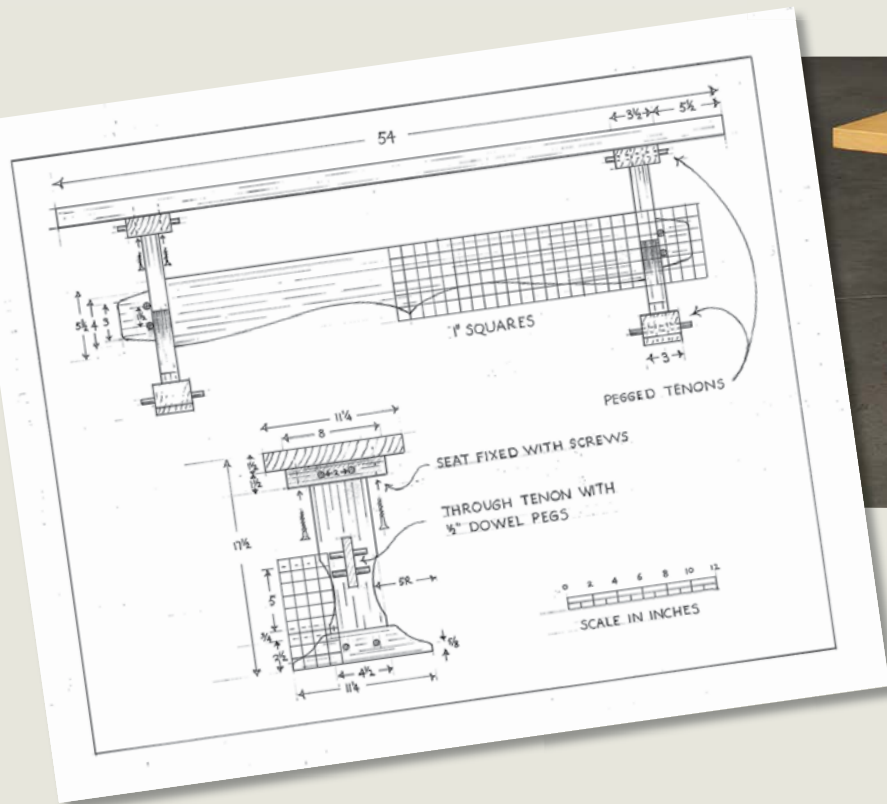
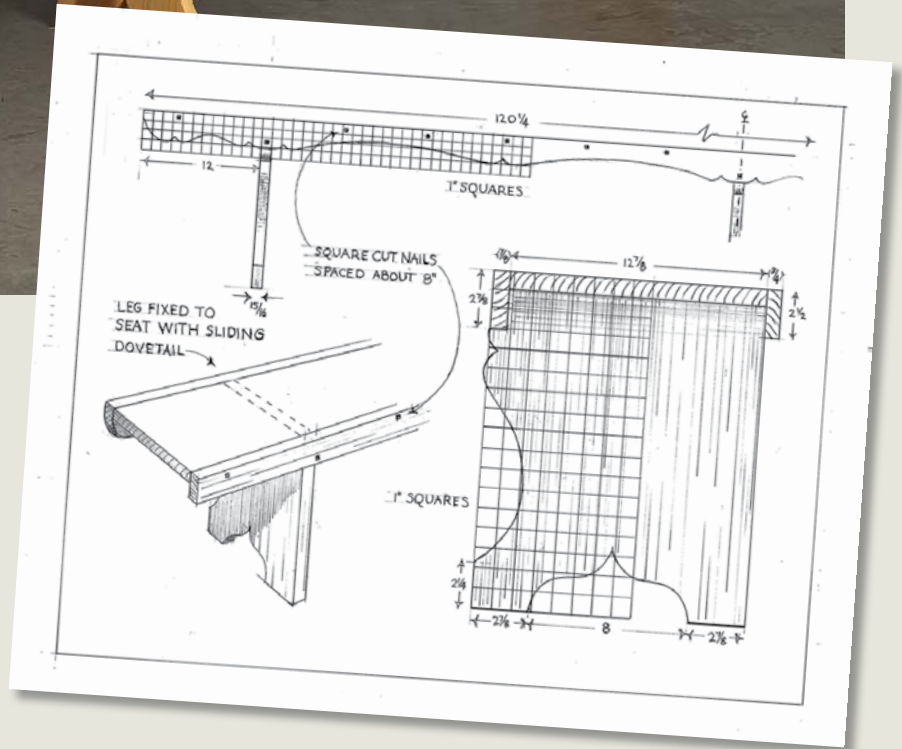
This bench is based on an original at the Hancock Shaker Village near Pittsfield, Mass., which was active from 1783 to 1969 and is now a museum. After building it from plans in John Shea's book *The American Shakers and their Furniture*, Cape was inspired to travel to a range of utopian communities and make his own measured drawings of the benches he found there. "True craft," Cape says, "is humble, egalitarian, and anonymous." The original of this bench is all of that, and simply and soundly built as well. Its cyma-curve brackets are joined to the legs with half-laps and screwed to the seat.





Zoar Number One House Bench

Built by the Society of Separatists of Zoar, a 19th-century religious community in eastern Ohio, the original of this bench expresses “the mix of austerity and joy in the Separatists’ lives,” Cape writes. Having fled religious persecution in Germany, some 300 Separatists established their community in 1817. They built furniture for themselves, but also for sale. Cape found the original of this bench still sturdy, its legs attached to the seat with sliding dovetails and reinforced with cut nails through the front and back aprons.



Twin Oaks Dining Bench

Cape reproduced this bench from an original at Twin Oaks, a commune established in Virginia in 1967 that remains active, with about 75 members. Although Twin Oaks, which is known for making hammocks, has its own sawmill, the original of this bench was made with common 2x stock. The bench is from a set of four that are used daily for dining. The maker, Cape says, “was able to accept the rather poor materials allocated to the project, and adapt what is basically a traditional table design to make a pleasing bench.”

