master class

# Make your legs stand out with inlaid feet

## A TOUCH OF CONTRAST GOES A LONG WAY

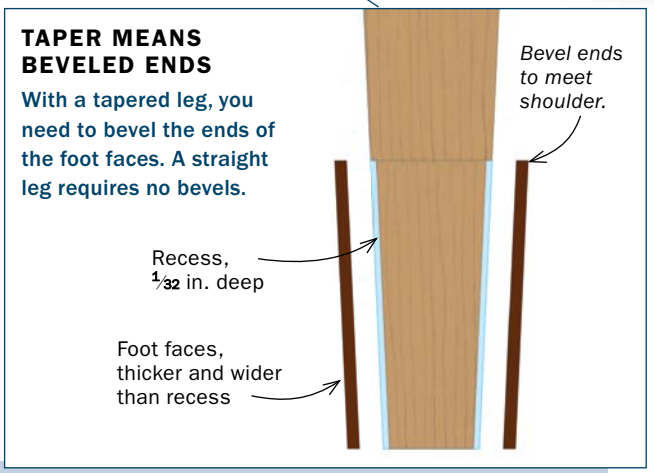
BY GARRETT HACK

I want a viewer's eye to wander every inch of my furniture, right to the tip of the toes. So it makes sense to add some pizzazz there. One of my favorite ways to attract this attention is to make feet from a contrasting wood—especially if it echoes a wood used somewhere else in the piece.

An obvious way to add a foot of a different wood is to shape it from a piece of solid wood and tenon or screw it to the bottom of the leg. A far stronger method is to assemble and inlay the foot in a recess at the bottom of the leg.

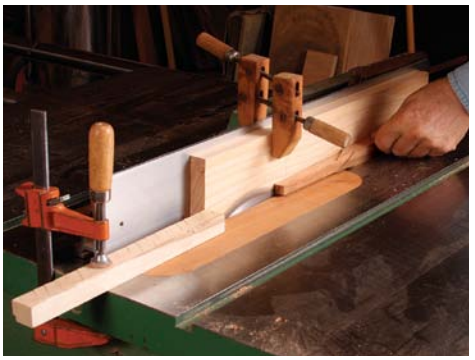
A foot with the top line parallel to the floor is the place to start. Then you can get jazzy and angle the top line of the feet—a technique I show on p. 82.

Choose a wood that has a nice contrast with the leg, figured or plain. Straight grain is the easiest to work and will likely appear most like a solid-wood foot. My examples are for a




## Make way for the inlay

***Mark the shoulder.*** *Once you've established the height of the foot, scribe a line around all four sides of the leg. For tapered legs (shown here), you'll need a bevel gauge.*



***Saw the recess.*** *Bury the blade in a sacrificial fence, and clamp on a stop block. After cutting, withdraw the leg carefully—keeping pressure against the fence. Rotate and repeat.*

***Clean up the cuts.*** *Use a handsaw to define the shoulder line, then chop and pare away material to make a clean landing pad for the inlay pieces.*

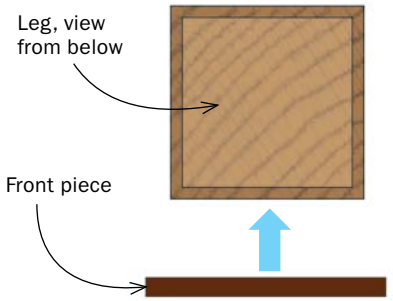


Photos, except where noted: Tom McKenna; drawings: Kelly J. Dunton

## Start with the front piece

### 1 MAKE IT OVERSIZE

**Be sure to smooth the back of the piece so that it lays flat in the recess and will meet the side pieces seamlessly.**




***Bevel the end.*** *A tapered leg will have an angled shoulder, so you need to angle the foot piece to match.*

***Slight overhang.*** *The front piece should project beyond the thickness of the two side pieces.*

tapered leg, but it's easy to adjust the method for a leg without a taper.

#### Nail the design

Decide first what length foot looks best on the piece. In general, I favor longer feet, giving a leg lift and grace, much like a ballerina on pointe. This can be hard to gauge from a drawing, so I'd experiment with a full-size mockup (or the real thing). Wrap a piece of tape around the leg at what will be the top of the foot. Move the tape up and down, and if you can, get a fresh look at it the next day before you commit.

Once you have the height figured out, mark it on all four sides of the leg. With a square leg, or one that's tapered on only two sides, you can use a combination square to mark the shoulders. But with a four-sided taper, you need to use a bevel gauge to scribe a line parallel to the floor. To set the gauge, put the blade on the bottom of the leg and bring the fence flush to the side of the leg. Adjust the gauge as needed until you can scribe a line all the way around the leg.

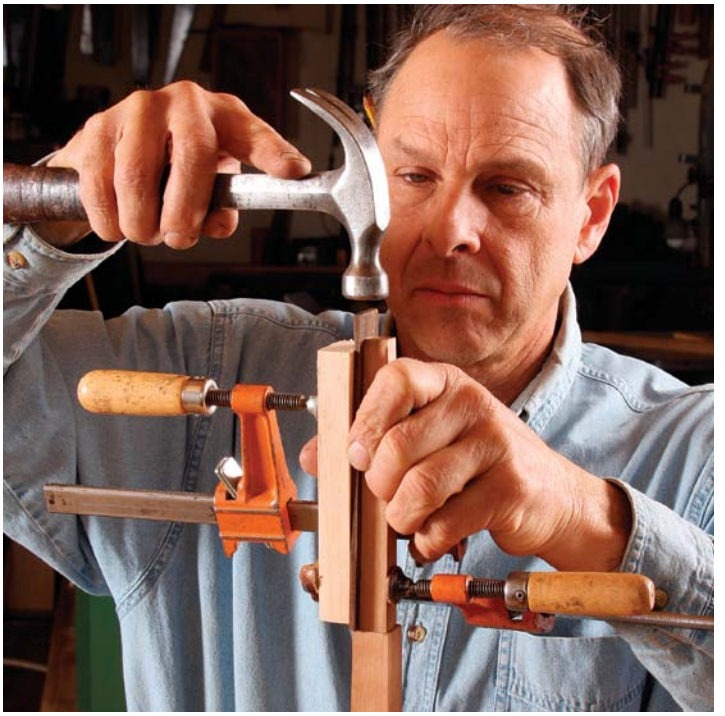
#### Cut the recess

To make way for the contrasting foot, you need to cut a recess that's about 3⁄32 in. deep. For that job I use a tablesaw. It's worth having an extra leg for setup and test cuts.

I use a wooden sacrificial fence clamped to my tablesaw fence, with the blade buried and just exposed, and make short ripcuts with the leg against the fence and table. Then I remove the leftover wood with a chisel and chisel plane, and pare to the shoulder line, which I define with a handsaw.

#### When gluing, order matters

Resaw the inlay material slightly thicker than the recess, and slightly wider and longer. Lay out the pieces to get sets of four



***Tap for a tight fit.*** *When gluing and clamping all of the pieces, tighten the clamps just enough to hold the parts in place. Tap the top of the piece to snug it up against the shoulder. Then fully tighten the clamps.*

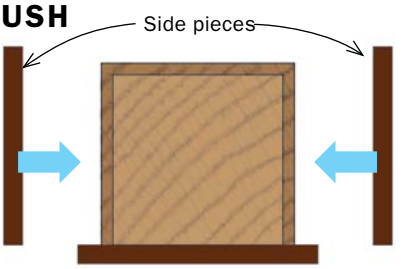
that work well together, where the grain will look natural at the corners. Plane or smooth the back surface of each face. This not only ensures that the inlay seats well but also that the pieces meet seamlessly around the foot.

Work on the front piece first, which is the most visible surface and thus the most important. Fit the blank to the top line with a block plane so that it overhangs the entire foot slightly in width and length; you'll have to work the end at an angle so

# Sides, then the back

## 2 SIDES ARE FLUSH IN FRONT

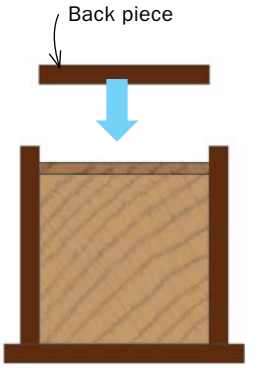
The sides are prepped the same way as the front. But you need to joint the front edges to eliminate gaps.




***First side piece.*** *When gluing the side piece, put clamping pressure against the leg and against the front piece. Cauls make it easier to get the clamps around the inlay pieces.*

## 3 BACK SLIDES IN

Taper the back piece with a block plane and fit it from above.




***Back slides home.*** *Mark the taper on the back piece (above) and plane away material until it slides in from the top without binding (below).*

***Pedicure.*** *Plane the foot flush to the sides of the leg. Then trim the foot pieces flush to the bottom of the leg. Use a block plane to chamfer the corners and the bottom.*

that the inlay is flush with the top shoulder of the recess. Sand the back of the blank very slightly with a flat block and P220-grit paper, to give it some "tooth," especially if you are working with dense, oily woods such as rosewood or ebony. Glue it in place, tapping it down to the shoulder before you cinch down the clamps.

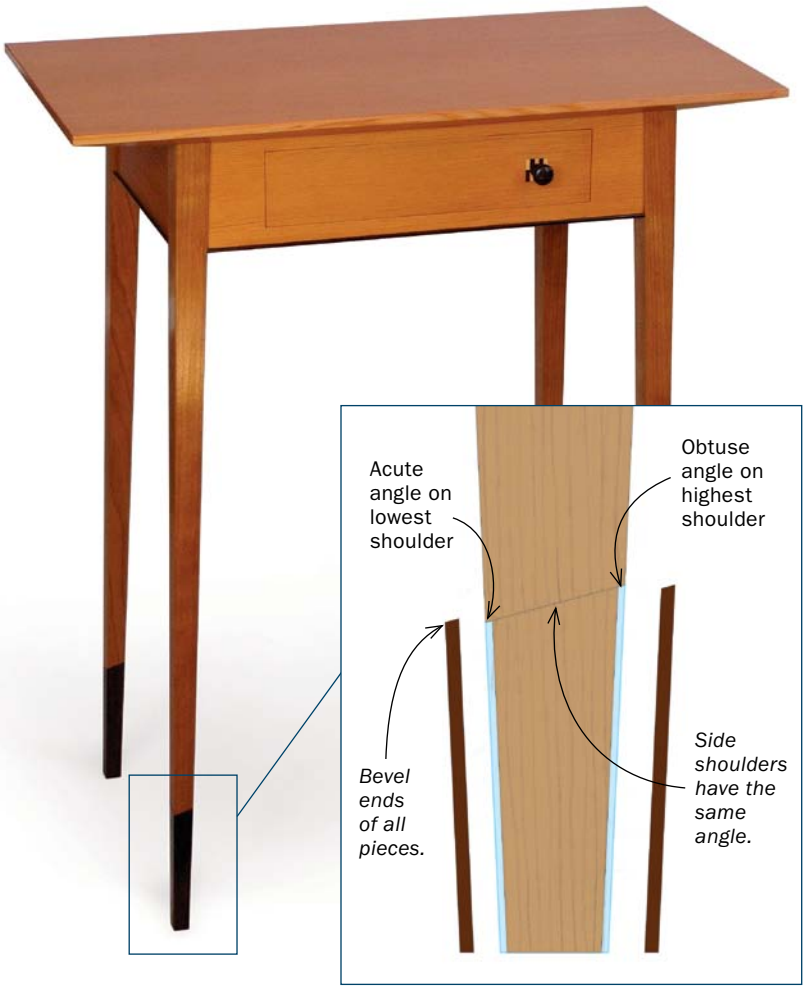
After fitting and installing the side pieces, work on the back, which is the most difficult to fit due to the taper. Lay it on the side pieces, draw the taper along the edges, then taper the back using a block plane. It should slide in from the top without binding. Once it fits, glue it in place.

The feet look rough at this point, long, and uneven at the corners. I plane the faces of the foot flush to the leg. Then I trim the bottom flush with the leg, Finally, I chamfer all four corners, as well as where it meets the floor.

---

*Garrett Hack is a contributing editor.*

## Angled feet are sharper




**Feet with an angled top can give your legs even more of a stylistic lift, and they are only slightly more challenging to make than straight ones. Use tape as before to find the right height and angle. Most important are a consistent pattern around each foot and how each foot relates to the others. The outside corner of each leg should either be the highest or lowest point of that foot.**

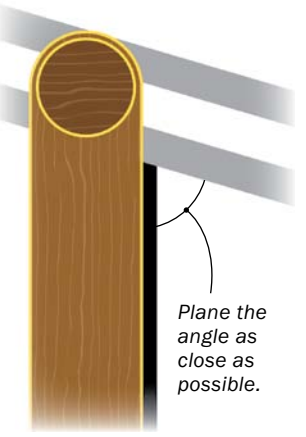
**Use a bevel gauge and pencil to trace the angled line around the leg. There is a bit of fudging here because of the taper, so start marking out on the front piece, then the sides, and connect the sides on the back. Keep the bevel gauge locked in its setting, as you can use it to check your work.**

**Cut the recesses on the tablesaw. Unlike those on the straight-topped foot, the recesses for the angled foot are different lengths. After cleaning up the recesses, cut and fit the pieces one at a time. The big difference here is that the highest and lowest pieces are angled the opposite way at the shoulders (see drawing, above). Be sure to keep that in mind as you cut those shoulders and bevel the pieces. Beyond that, glue-up and cleanup are the same.**

***Shoulders are trickier.*** *Set a bevel gauge to the angle, and trace around the leg so that all corners meet perfectly.*

***Plane the bevel.*** *Hack uses a handsaw to cut the end of the inlay at the correct angle. Then he adds the bevel using a block plane.*

***Eyeball it.*** *As you plane the inlay, use the bevel-gauge setting to check the angles on the ends.*




***Flush fit.*** *Each piece should fit the shoulder seamlessly.*

Photo, top left: Garrett Hack