Hanging Butt Hinges, Unconventionally

Three unusual applications for this most basic kind of cabinet hardware

by Stephen Lamont

Several years ago, I moved to Devon, England, with my wife and son to study with an excellent craftsman and teacher named Christopher Faulkner. He taught me the basics of furnituremaking, one by one. I remember spending hours painstakingly cutting the mortises for my first set of butt hinges on a tool cabinet that I still use.

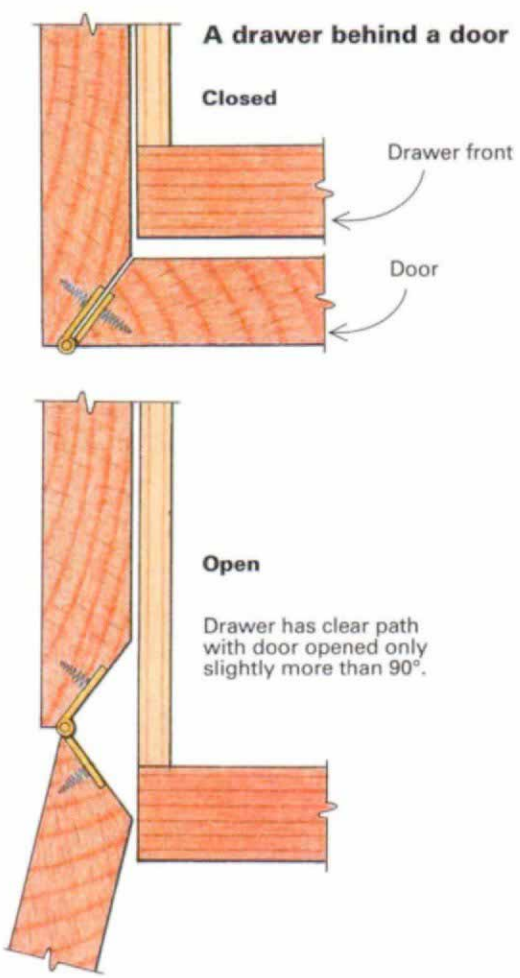
As with most of what I learned back then, the process of installing those hinges was pretty exciting. Yet, in some ways, it's even more so now because of some of the unusual design details that have come up in my work. Practical or esthetic considerations sometimes lead to different approaches to installing hinges. □

Stephen Lamont works as a craftsman at the Edward Barnsley Educational Trust in Hampshire, England,

HANGING DOORS IN FRONT OF DRAWERS

I received a commission a few years ago to build a stereo cabinet. The clients had a collection of audio tapes and compact discs, and they wanted room for more. So I had to design a bank of drawers within the cabinet, behind the doors. With a conventional butt-hinge installation, the inset door would have to open a full 180° for the drawers to clear the hinge stile. That would make the simple task of pulling out a tape or compact disc impractical and inconvenient.

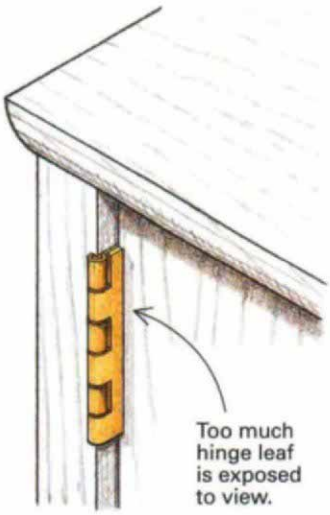
My solution to this problem was to bevel both the door stile and the mating surface of the cabinet. It's the location of the hinge pin that determines the path of a swinging door. The bevels effectively moved the hinge pin away from the path of the drawer so that the door could swing clear of it when opened only a bit more than 90°, as shown in the photo at right.



Drawings: Vince Babak

DOORS SET IN FROM THE CABINET FACE

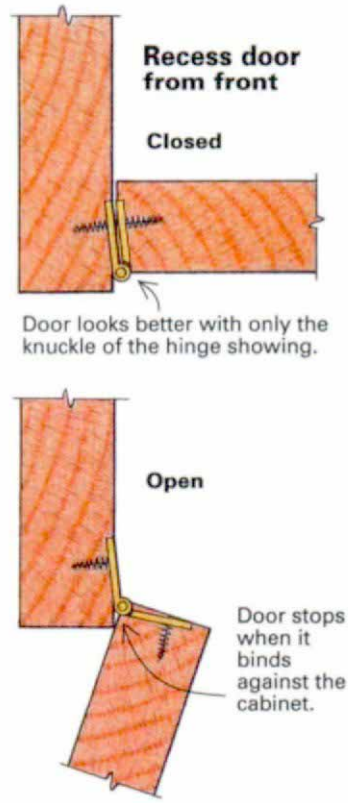
Sometimes, the design of a cabinet will require that the doors be set back from the front face of the carcase. In such cases, you could mortise the hinge into the carcase as you would if the door were flush with the front. This locates the pin all the way out to the front edge of the carcase, so the door swings freely and opens all the way. But doing that would make the hinge look unsightly; too much of the leaf would be exposed, as shown in the drawing at left.



A more attractive solution is one I learned from a book by Ernest Joyce, *The Technique of Furniture Making* (published as *Encyclopedia of Furniture Making* in the United States by Sterling Publishing Co., New York, N.Y.). It's a little complicated and more difficult to cut the mortise because you have to cut it in at an angle. The key here is to make sure the pivot point of the hinge is in line with the front of the door. Mortise the knuckle entirely into the door stile at the front, and mortise the leaves equally into the edge of the door stile and the cabinet side at the back, as shown in the drawing at right.

There's one drawback to this method: It limits the door travel. Depending on how far back the door is hung, its face will bind on the inside front edge of the cabinet. And because the door travel is restricted, this application would not work with cabinets that have drawers.

Before mortising hinges on an angle, I'd recommend practicing on some scraps until you feel confident enough to start digging into a finished cabinet.

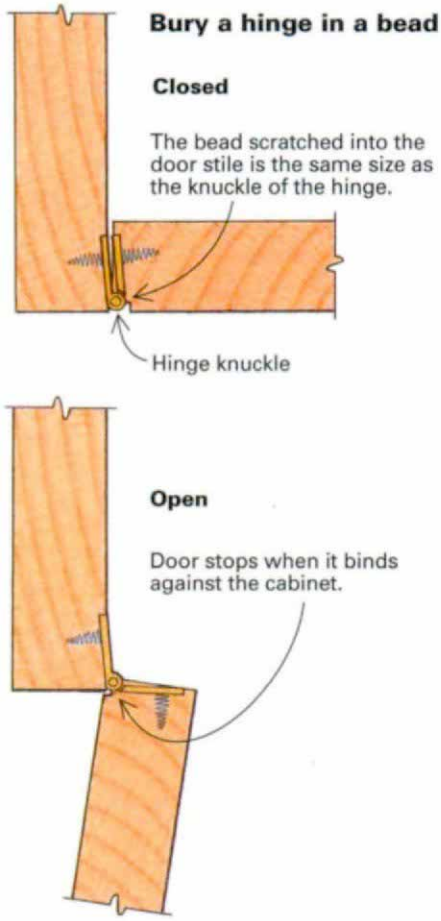


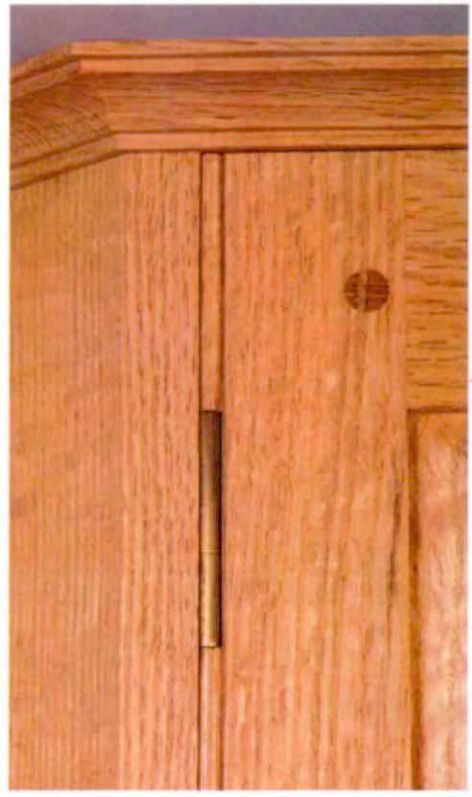
BEADED STILES MATCH THE KNUCKLES

Several years ago, when I first came to the Edward Barnsley workshop in Hampshire, England, for a six-month study program, I learned another unusual technique for installing butt hinges. It's one that I particularly like.

Just as with the method described above, the leaves are cut in at an angle, but the door fits flush with the front face of the cabinet (see the top drawing at right). What makes this method unique is that you scratch a bead into the door stiles at precisely the same diameter as the knuckle of the hinge. So when the hinge is installed, it seems to melt into the cabinet.

This is a lovely detail, but just like the technique above, the door will bind when it's opened a little more than 90°. This method is especially well-suited for use in a corner cabinet like the one shown in the photo at right.





Photos: William Duckworth