

Shaker Sewing Stand Remains Stylish, Practical

A two-way drawer hangs beneath a rectangular top

by Robert Treanor



Shaker sewing stands have a simplicity and a charm that few other pieces of furniture can match. Although I don't sew, and have buttonless shirts to prove it, I am drawn to these small stands. And that's not just because I like Shaker furniture. The stand's convenient size and two-way drawer (see the top drawing on p. 88) make it useful for any household—as an end table, a night stand or especially

as a hall table. Because the table is small, it will fit in almost any entryway, providing a place to drop the mail and your keys.

Most of us are familiar with the Shaker candle stands that have round tops. In Shaker communities, round stands were great for candles, but their tops didn't hold much else. Shaker craftsmen sometimes substituted rectangular tops for the round ones and suspended a drawer or two un-

der the top to provide additional storage. These tripod stands usually are called sewing stands, although their main purpose is debatable.

Several versions of sewing stands with under-slung drawers evolved (see the story on p. 91). The style I like best has a single drawer and cabriole-style (snake) legs, as shown in the photo above. I built this stand mostly from cherry, with a few pine

parts. Similar stands are attributed to the Hancock Shaker community in western Massachusetts and are, arguably, the most elegant. The height usually is about 26 in.

The legs on the original stand, on which my piece is based, are tenoned into the turned pedestal (a common feature of Hancock stands). The legs on my stand are joined to the pedestal by sliding dovetails. This joinery adds strength to the piece. Some original stands were built this way, and to further strengthen the connection, a metal plate (known as a spider) was secured to the bottom of the pedestal. I omitted the spider on my stand. The bottom drawing at right shows the patterns for the legs and the pedestal. I cut the leg dovetails on a router table. For the pedestal grooves, I use a jig and a hand-held router with the pedestal still mounted on the lathe, as shown in the bottom photo on the facing page. (For more on this, see *FWW* #110, pp. 72-73.)

The yoke unites the top, the drawer and the pedestal

The tabletop on my stand is 21 in. wide by 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ in., front to back. I edge-joined the top from two $\frac{3}{4}$ boards. After glue-up, I planed the top to $\frac{11}{16}$ in. thick, and I shaped the edges all around using a $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. roundover bit in my router. The radius is clipped because of the table thickness, but this slightly flattened round is intentional.

The U-shaped yoke that houses the drawer and attaches the top to the base distinguishes this stand from those with two drawers. The two vertical members of the yoke are joined to the crosspiece with through dovetails. The yoke could be joined with a single dovetail, but the original stand had twin dovetails. I used one in the middle and a half pin at each end.

Dovetailing the crosspiece to the up-rights

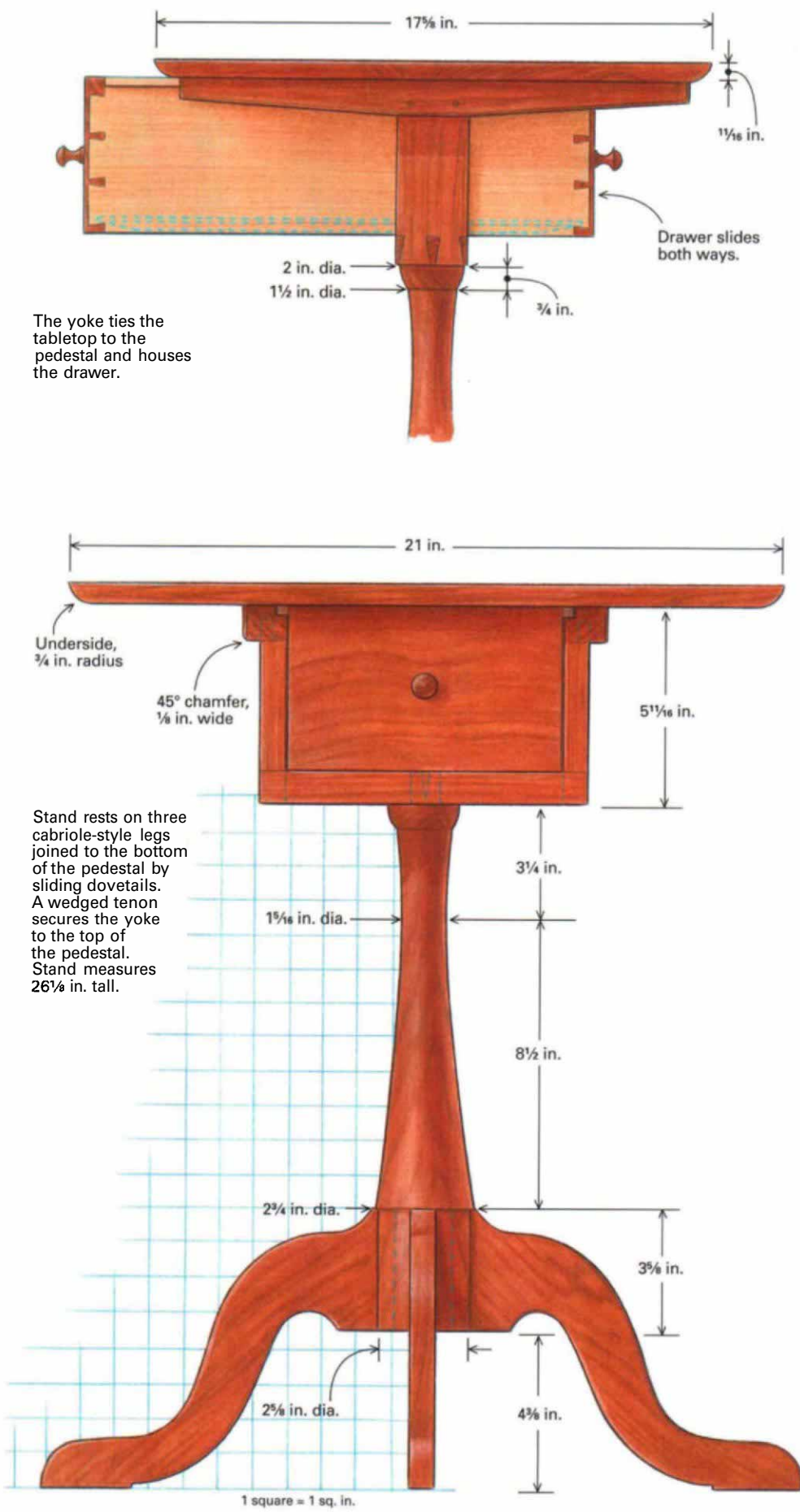
I laid out the dovetail pins on the horizontal crosspiece. For accuracy, I cut the pins with a dozuki (a Japanese cross-cut saw) and a chisel. When I chopped out the waste at the deep part of the pins, I guided the chisel against a square block clamped to the top of the work (see the top photo on the facing page).

I lay out the tails on the uprights of the yoke using the pins as a pattern. Just as with the pins, I carefully saw the tails and chop out the waste. Ideally, the joint will fit right from the saw. But a little paring with a chisel is often needed.

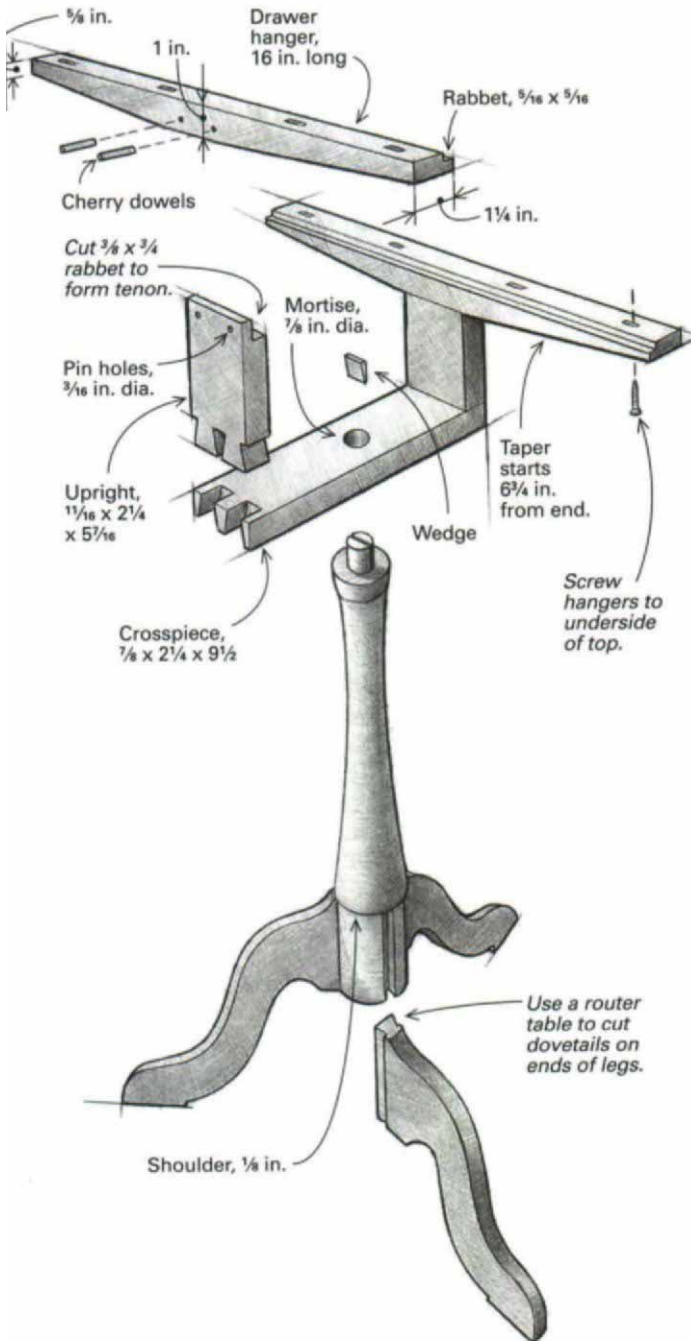
Tenoning the yoke to the pedestal

The yoke crosspiece is attached to the stand's base by a turned tenon on top of

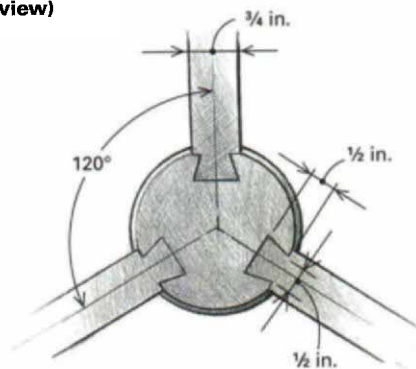
Shaker-stand anatomy



Yoke and drawer supports



Legs-to-base detail (bottom view)



A guide block improves accuracy—When chopping the through dovetails in the crosspiece, the author uses a block of wood to guide his chisel. The crosspiece forms the bottom of the U-shaped yoke.



Glue and insert a wedge in the slotted tenon to secure the yoke to the pedestal. Orient the wedge perpendicular to the crosspiece's grain to prevent splitting.



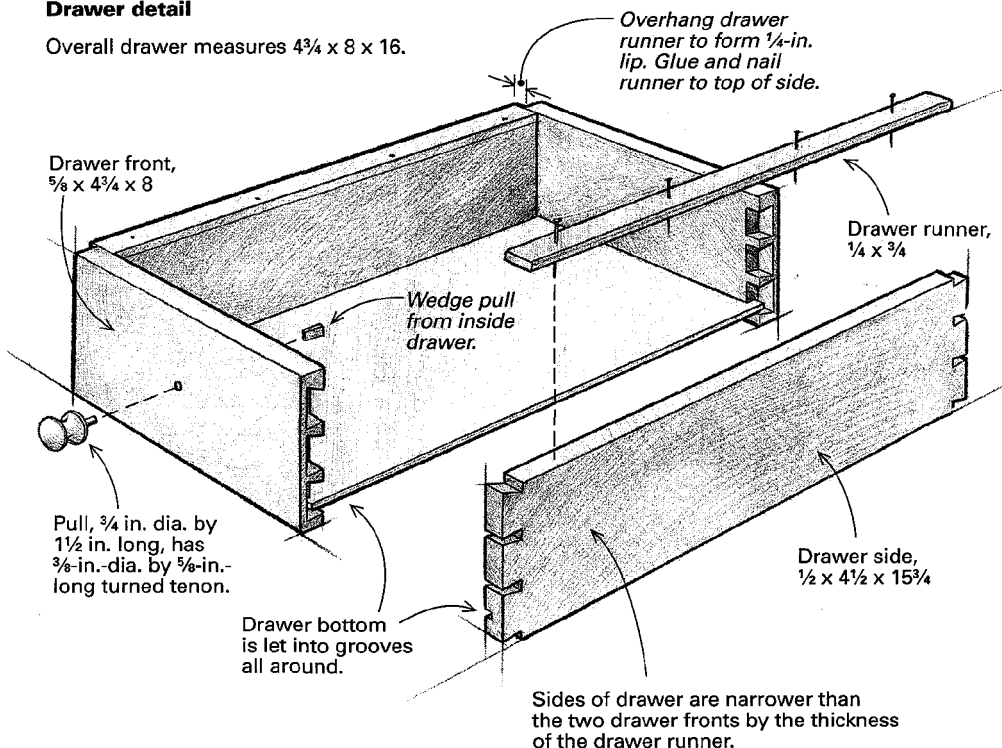
Router jig cuts sliding dovetail sockets—With the pedestal still mounted on the lathe, use a router to cut sockets for the leg dovetails.



Assemble the drawer with the bevel down. The pine bottom floats in grooves in the pine sides and in the cherry drawer fronts.

Drawer detail

Overall drawer measures $4\frac{3}{4} \times 8 \times 16$.



the pedestal. I sized the tenon while the pedestal was still on the lathe. I like to rough out the tenon diameter so it's slightly greater than the finished one. Then, using a gouge (you could also use a skew), I slowly trimmed the tenon down to size, stopping the lathe frequently and checking the tenon diameter with a dial caliper.

I bored the hole in the crosspiece and sawed a slot in the tenon before the yoke was assembled. Then I assembled the yoke, placed it on the pedestal and drove a wedge, wet with glue, into the tenon to lock the yoke in place (see the center photo on p. 89). To avoid splitting the crosspiece, I oriented the wedge perpendicular to the grain.

The drawer is suspended and guided by two hangers

A $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. runner was glued and nailed to the top of each drawer side. The runners guide the drawer in two L-shaped hangers that connect the yoke and tabletop. The hangers, tapered gently at each end, have rabbets cut in the upper inside edges to support the drawer. Each hanger is attached to the underside of the top with four screws. I counterbored the slotted holes in the hangers to recess the round screw heads. To break the hard edges of the hangers, I used a spokeshave to make a $\frac{1}{8}$ -in., 45° chamfer around the outside.

The uprights are joined to the center of the hangers with pinned tenons (see the top drawing on p. 89). It's best to cut the tenons before you dovetail the other ends of the uprights. The stand that inspired mine has two pins at each juncture, which suggests that double tenons were used. I used single tenons, but I matched the look by pinning each tenon with two $\frac{3}{16}$ -in. cherry dowels.

I joined the drawer sides and fronts using half-blind dovetails. The original stand's drawer had through-dovetailed corners, but I opted for half-blind dovetails because I think their functional, understated look goes better with the nature of this stand. The drawer bottom is let into a groove all around the inside, frame-and-panel fashion (see the photo above). The pulls, turned with integral tenons, are affixed to the two fronts with wedges from the inside. The drawer can be opened from either end. This push-me/pull-you orientation may be unique to Shaker furniture. Regardless, it makes the stand more interesting and useful. □

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