

# Get a Handle on Your Pulls

Drawer pulls make a strong statement, so be careful where you put them

BY MATT KENNEY



Drawers are made to be opened and closed, and that means every drawer needs a pull. And although attaching pulls is one of the last things you do when making a drawer, you can't wait until then to think about the style of pull you'll use and where on the drawer it will go. Because they are attached to the drawer fronts, pulls are highly visible and can have a dramatic effect on the beauty of a piece of furniture.

There's plenty to say about which types of pulls go with which pieces, but this article will focus on where to put them. Placing a pull on a drawer front is not as simple as "put it in the center." After all, it's not exactly clear how you center something like a pendant pull. And of course some drawers need two pulls, which should be spaced so that they are comfortable to use. Then there is the visual pattern created by the overall array of pulls, and that is determined mostly by how you size and orient the drawers themselves.

When I started to think about everything it takes to place pulls just right, I was overwhelmed. That's why I asked several successful furniture designers and makers for help. I not only learned some great basic guidelines, but also that there are situations you'll have to take one at a time.

*Matt Kenney is an associate editor. Christian Becksvoort, Gerald Curry, Garrett Hack, and Michael Fortune contributed to this article.*

## DON'T ALWAYS CENTER THE SCREWS

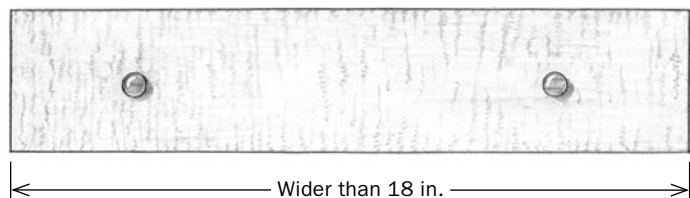
Typically, pulls are centered vertically. How that is done depends on the pull's style. Because their height is balanced above and below the point of attachment, place knobs and handles by centering their screw holes or tenons. However, a pendant or bail pull would appear low on the drawer if centered this way. Instead, balance its overall outline above and below the drawer's centerline. It's the same for every other pull type: Think about the overall height, not just where the screw or tenon goes in.



# ONE PULL, OR TWO?

## SIMPLE ANSWER: DRAWER WIDTH DECIDES

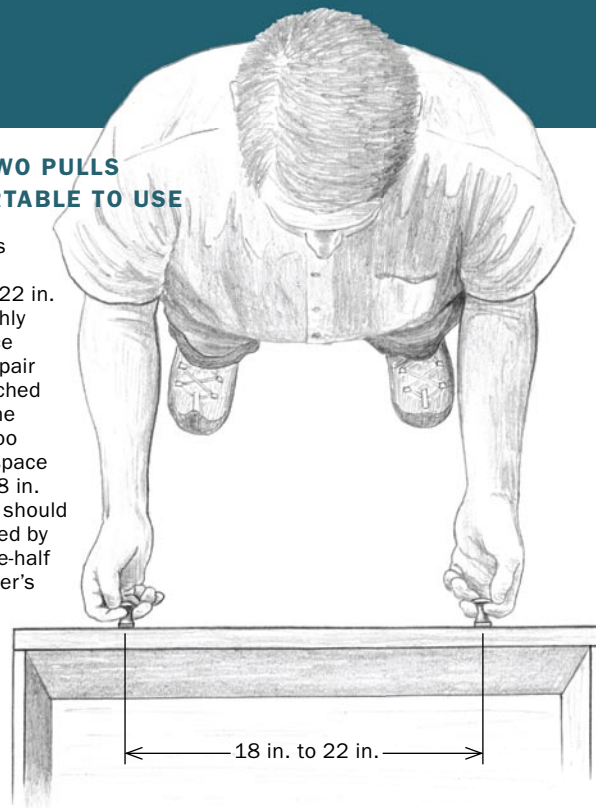
Drawers less than 14 in. wide need only one pull because they are small enough to open and close by pulling or pushing on the center.



Drawers wider than 18 in. definitely need two pulls. A single, centered pull would be stressed by the weight of the drawer, eventually causing it to break or break free of the drawer front.

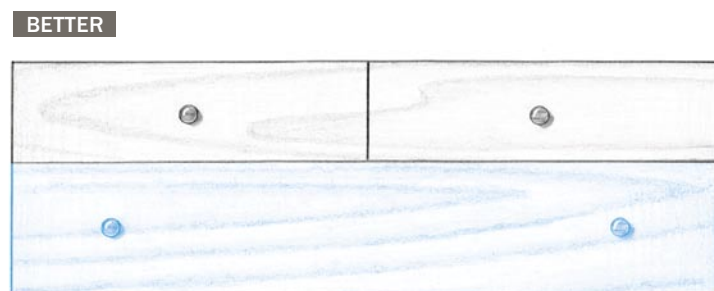
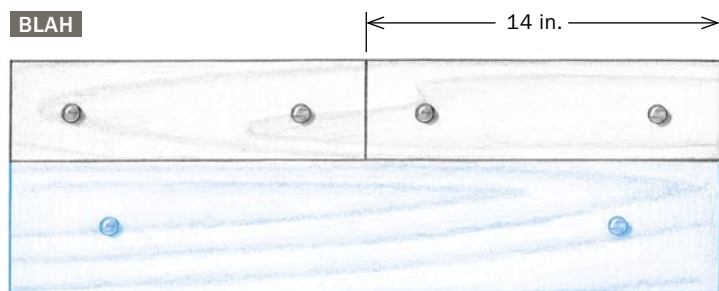
## MAKE TWO PULLS COMFORTABLE TO USE

Space pulls between 18 in. and 22 in. apart, roughly the distance between a pair of outstretched hands. If the drawer is too narrow to space the pulls 18 in. apart, they should be separated by at least one-half of the drawer's width.



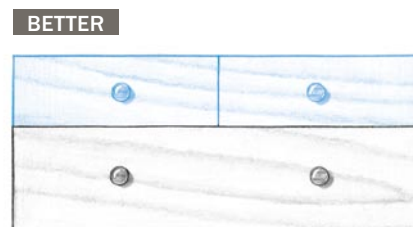
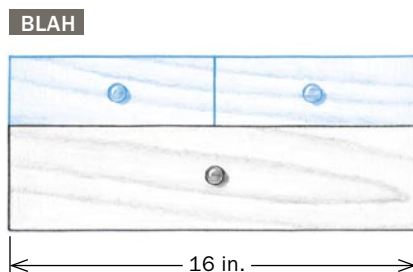
## ON MEDIUM-SIZE DRAWERS, CONSIDER THE WHOLE ARRAY

Between 14 in. and 18 in. is a gray area. The choice between one pull or two comes down to aesthetics.



1. With two knobs on each of the small top drawers, this array looks top-heavy. Centering a single knob on each small drawer balances the pattern. It also brings the knobs on the top drawers closer together, creating two inward slanting diagonals, which suggests a solid base and upward movement.

2. A single, centered knob on the bottom drawer creates an inverted triangle and a top-heavy pattern. However, placing two knobs on the bottom drawer—and aligning them under the knobs on the top drawers—gives the array a more solid feel.





## NOW CONSIDER THE WHOLE PIECE

On a piece with multiple drawers, the number, size, and arrangement of the drawers affects how the pulls are arrayed. You'll have a better chance of integrating the array into the overall design if you begin to think about drawers and pulls as soon as you start to sketch out a piece.

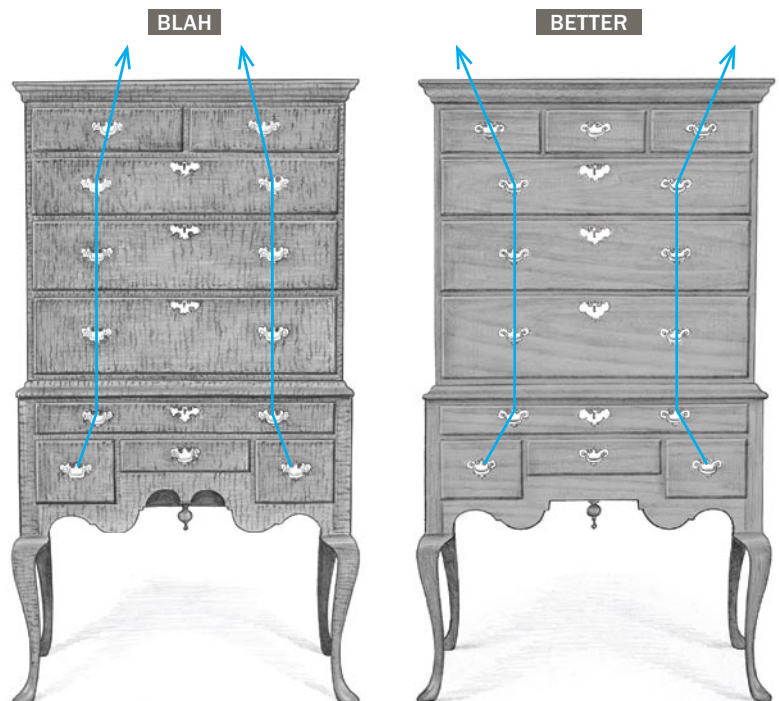
### LEARN FROM THE CLASSICS

Gerald Curry's reproduction of a Chippendale block-front chest of drawers is a perfect example of how the arrangement of drawers affects the array formed by their pulls. The brasses on each drawer form an arc. Because the drawers are graduated, the most dramatic arc is at the bottom and the most gentle at the top. The tighter arc on the bottom drawer complements the arc suggested by the bracket base, and the more relaxed arc on the top drawer transitions nicely to the straight line of the top. Moreover, the series of arcs reinforces the strong, stable stance while drawing the eye upward at the same time.



### WHAT WORKS ON ONE HIGHBOY DOESN'T ON ANOTHER

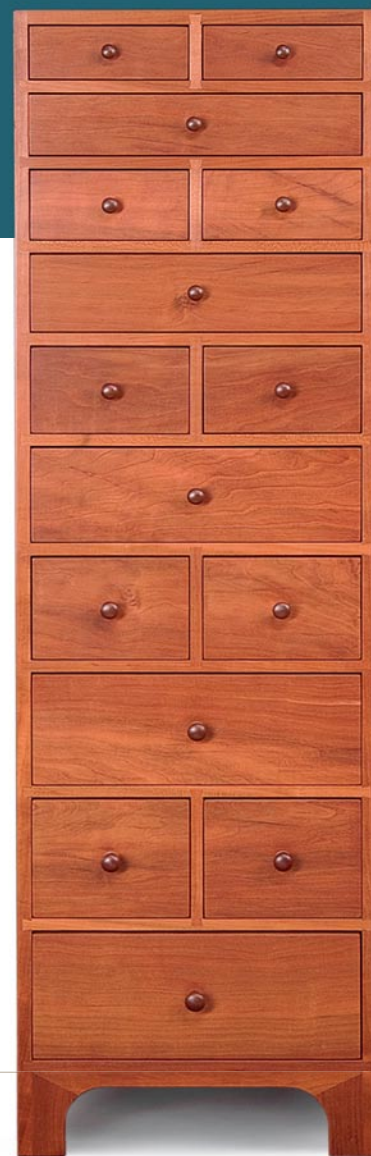
On Jeffrey Greene's bonnet-top highboy (left), the pulls on the lower drawers are farther apart than the pulls on the two drawers in the top row. The pattern they create mirrors the lines of the piece created by the sides and the bonnet top. The same drawer arrangement doesn't work on a flat-top highboy (below). Adding a third drawer to the top row makes for a more successful pull array. The outer pulls on the top row are moved out, pulling the eye up and out toward the cornice, and the top two rows create an angle that mirrors the angled corner joint of the cornice. The top row also emphasizes the thinness of the piece's waist, making the pulls on the lower drawers appear closer together and balancing the three pulls on the bottom row of drawers. Note that the pulls on the lower half are directly in line with the knees, giving the base a wonderful grounded stance while drawing the eye up and into the waist. From there the eye is pulled up to the cornice.





### STEPPED DRAWERS CREATE CONVERGING LINES

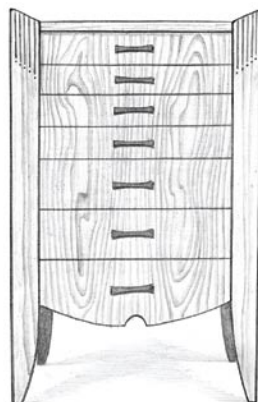
The stepped drawers on Hank Gilpin's sideboard (above)—narrower at the bottom than at the top—mirror the arc of the middle legs. By centering a single pull on the drawers in the two lower rows and placing two pulls on the center drawer in the top row, Gilpin uses the pulls to echo the arc as well. Garrett Hack used centered knobs to emphasize the stepped rise of the two outer columns of drawers on his sideboard (right).



BETTER

### RULES ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN

Michael Fortune knew the usual rules wouldn't work on this seven-drawer cabinet. If he had centered the pulls vertically (see drawing below), the lowest one would be too close to the floor and awkward to use. Also, while the pulls are nicely proportioned, on the large drawers they would appear lonely if centered vertically. So he positioned all of the pulls the same distance from the top of the drawer.



BLAH

**Centered, but off-target.** When centered vertically on the lower three drawer fronts, the delicate pulls get lost. Also, the column of pulls no longer enhances the graduation of the drawer fronts.



### TWO WAYS TO SPICE UP SHAKER

Christian Becksvoort and Gerald Curry used drawer design and pull arrangement to put a spin on Shaker design. By alternating rows of one and two drawers (above), Becksvoort created a pattern of diamonds. Curry's take (left) is more aggressive. The small second drawers on the third and fifth rows create an asymmetric diamond pattern.