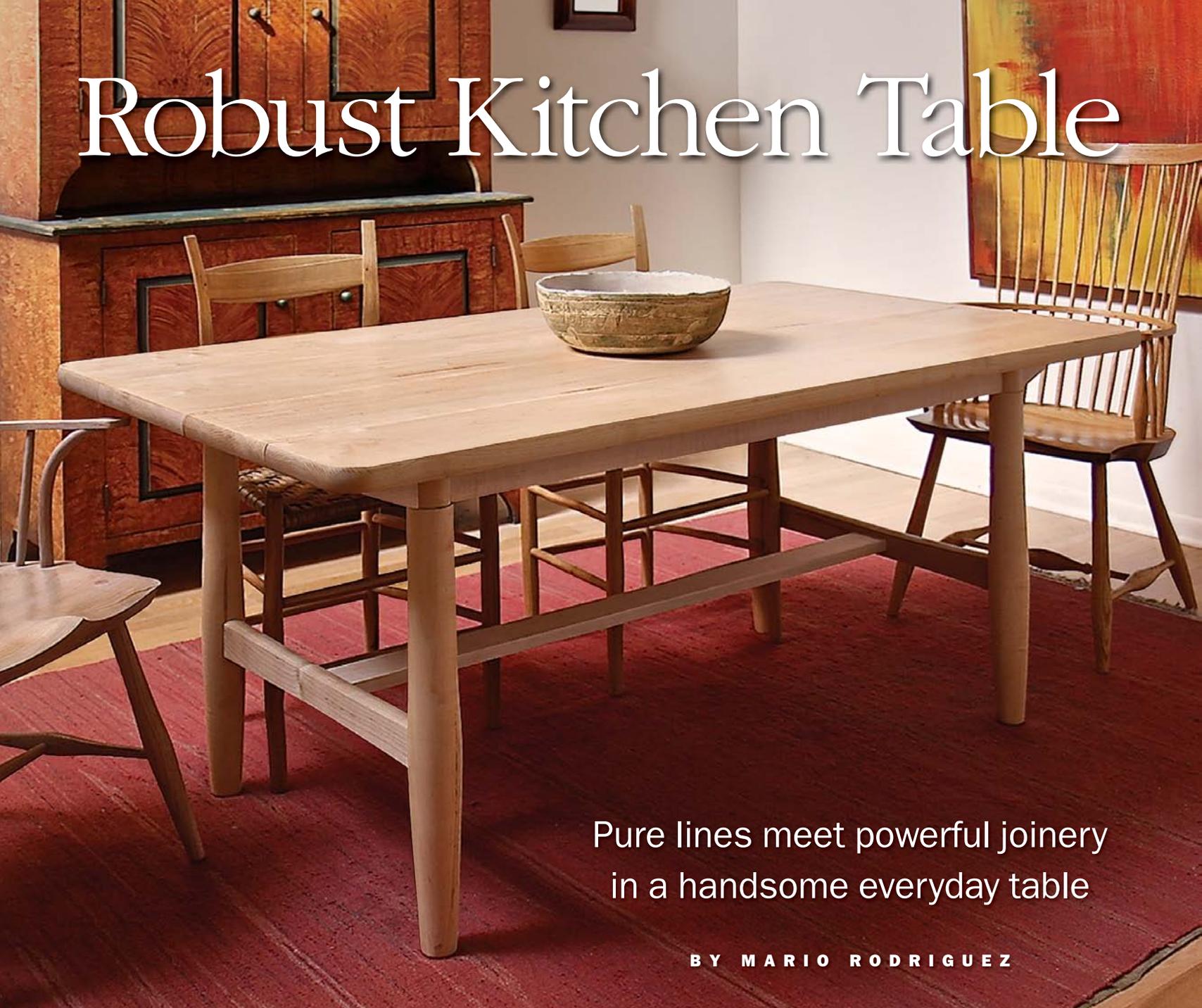


Robust Kitchen Table



Pure lines meet powerful joinery
in a handsome everyday table

BY MARIO RODRIGUEZ

The Smithsonian Institution calls Julia Child's kitchen "the workspace of a master craftsman," and I have to agree. I'm a huge fan of Julia Child. She was friendly, curious, enthusiastic, down-to-earth, and crazy about food. Her simple, encouraging approach to cooking changed the way America prepared its meals. When I visited her famous home kitchen—it's now an exhibit at the Smithsonian, intact down to the last saucepan and ladle—I was fascinated by her kitchen table. It's a Scandinavian farm table, one she bought in Norway in 1960, and she and her husband Paul ate most of their meals at it. Like Child,

the table is both robust and unpretentious. I decided to make one like it for myself.

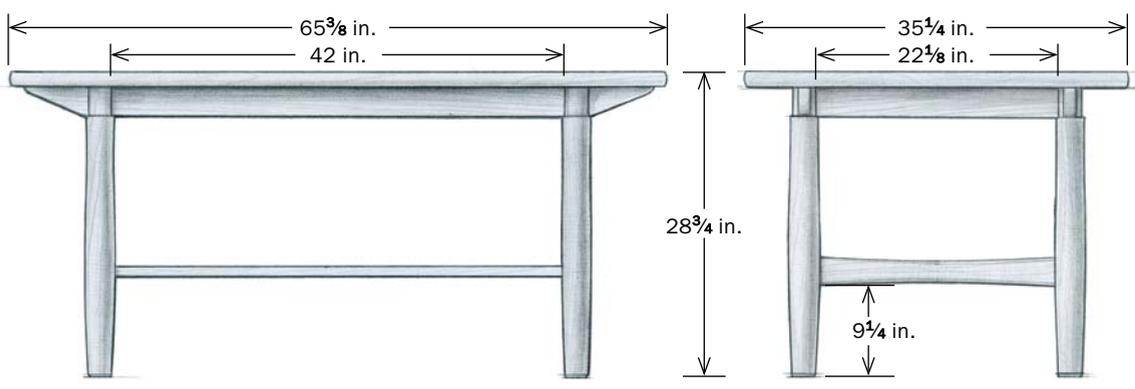
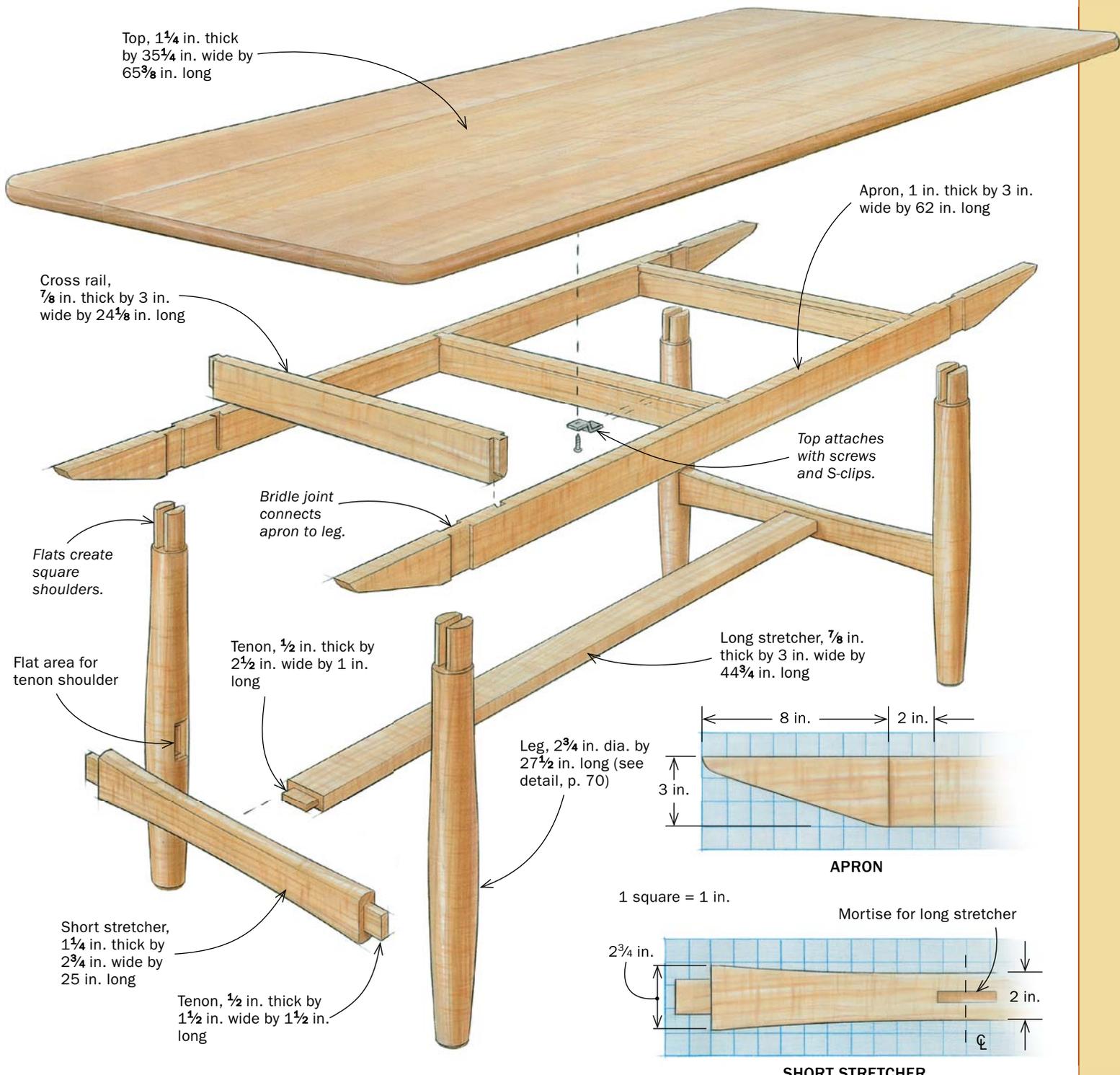
After quite a bit of wheedling, I got over-all dimensions from the Smithsonian, and online I found a photo of the table without a tablecloth, which had obscured some of its structure. Equipped with those and my experience repairing and reproducing many similar Scandinavian tables over the years, I worked out the details of part sizes, structure, and joinery.

The table's construction is unusual—and excellent. Dispensing with typical leg-to-apron joinery, the table has shouldered bridle joints that lock its legs to a pair of

long aprons. This arrangement eliminates racking along the table's length. Three dovetailed cross rails link the aprons, and along with the H-stretcher system, they make the table rock-solid. I built mine of soft maple—hard enough to survive daily use, but with a rosier, more attractive color than hard maple.

Shape the legs on the lathe

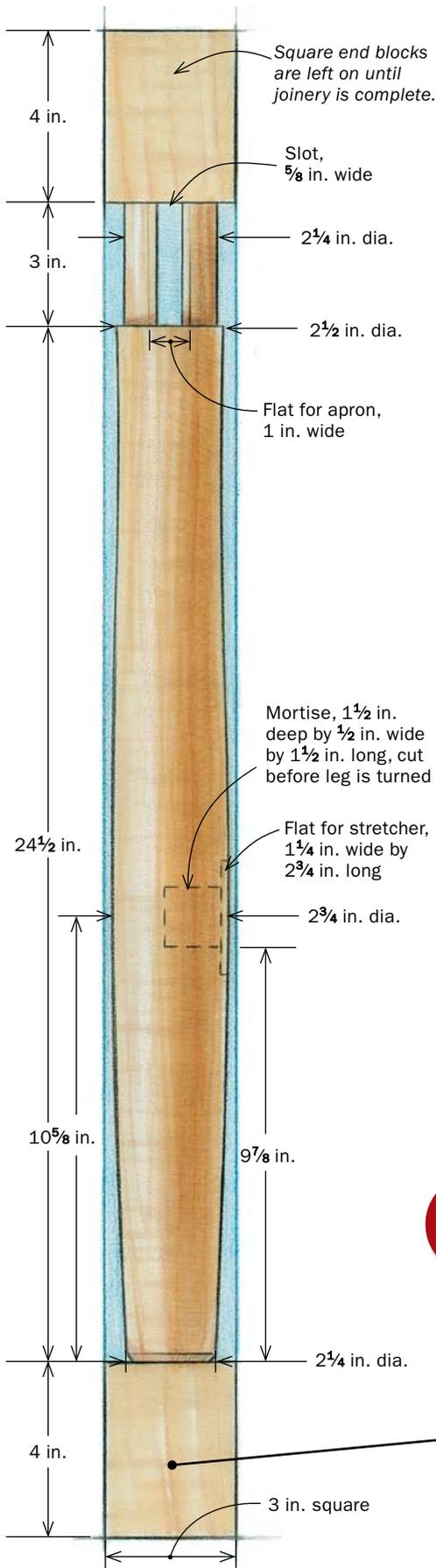
I began the table by preparing the leg stock. Although the finished legs would be 27½ in. long, I cut the 3-in.-square blanks to 35½ in. long. The extra length permitted me to turn the leg while leaving



SCANDINAVIAN KITCHEN TABLE

Instead of traditional mortise-and-tenon joinery, this table uses bridle joints to lock the legs to the aprons. The stretchers below and dovetailed cross rails up top combine for a clean, rock-solid structure.

Legs first



Turn the taper. After turning the leg to a cylinder with a roughing gouge, taper it gently toward both ends. By the way, Rodriguez cut the mortise for the stretcher while the blank was still square.



Prepare for the bridle. Turn a smooth cylinder at the top of the leg, where the slot of the bridle joint will be. Make multiple depth cuts with a parting tool (left), clear the waste with a narrow gouge, and finish the surface with a file (right).



TIP FOR SHORT-BED LATHES

If the 35 1/2-in.-long leg blank won't fit between centers on your lathe, you can still get the benefit of square end blocks, which greatly simplify cutting the joinery on a round, tapered leg. Before turning, cut the leg blank to the finished leg length and carefully fit a block to each end. Drive one screw dead center and another one offset. Remove the blocks and mark them. After turning the leg, screw the blocks back onto the leg to do the joinery.



JIG CREATES FLATS FOR THE JOINERY

Square end blocks make it easy to keep the round leg immobile and properly oriented while routing the flats at the stretcher mortise and the bridle joint.

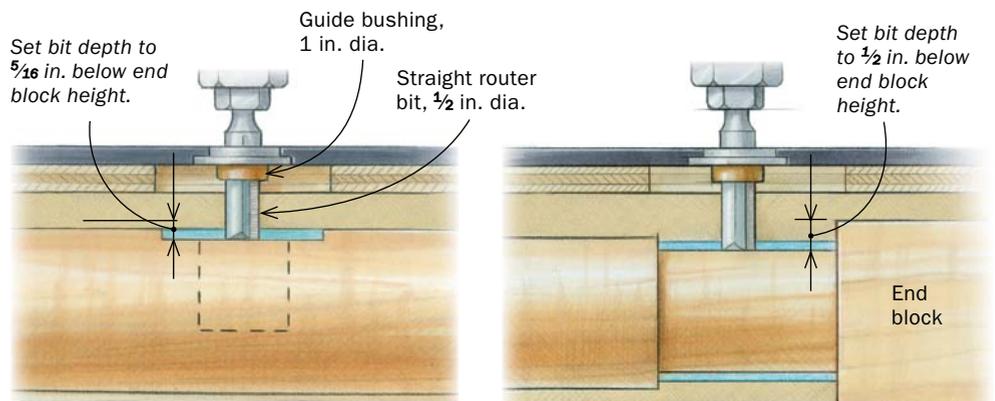
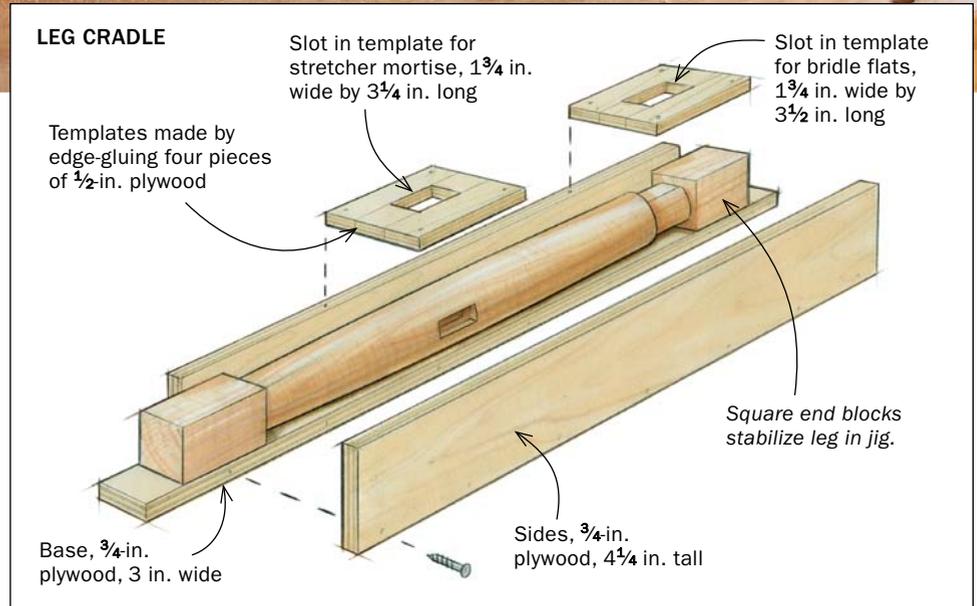


a section square at each end. Those square end blocks made it simple to orient the leg while I cut the joinery, after which I sawed them off. To mark out the turned part of the blank, I made four $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-deep crosscuts on the table saw, making a collar at each end of the leg. Before turning the legs, I cut mortises in them for the stretchers. I used a hollow-chisel mortiser, although a router or horizontal mortiser would work as well. It might seem that you would catch your turning gouge in the mortise, but it's not an issue.

Turn, turn, turn—Once I had a blank between centers, I turned the leg to a cylinder with a roughing gouge. Then I used a parting tool to establish critical diameters. I turned the leg to its long double taper with a shallow gouge, and smoothed it out with a light cut from a block plane.

To create the cylinder at the top of the leg where the bridle joint would be, I made multiple cuts to finished depth with the parting tool, checking the diameter with a pair of calipers. Then I cleaned out the waste between cuts with a narrow gouge and used a file for final smoothing.

Quick flats—With the turning complete, I used a shop-built cradle to hold the leg blanks as I routed two sets of flats: one



STRETCHER MORTISE FLAT

BRIDLE JOINT FLATS

Apron joinery

SLOT THE LEG

Help for the slot cuts.

The end blocks ride on an extension fence as you cut the bridle-joint slot. Bandsaw right through the top end block to cut the first cheek. Rotate the blank to cut the second cheek, then make stopped cuts to remove the waste between the cheeks.



to mate with the shoulders of the short stretcher tenons, the other to mate with the shoulders of the apron bridle dados. I used a guide bushing on the router and made templates for the jig that control the travel of the bushing.

Cut bridles on the bandsaw

Next, I cut the slots for the bridle joints on the bandsaw. I made an L-shaped extension fence long enough to support the square blocks at both ends of the leg blank during the cut. I set the fence to cut the outer cheek, so any drift away from the fence would be into waste. After making the first cut, I rotated the blank to cut the second cheek. To remove the waste between those two kerfs, I made multiple cuts freehand, stopping them at the bottom of the slot. I checked the width of the slot with a scrap milled to $\frac{5}{8}$ in. thick, then I bandsawed the end blocks off the leg blank and cleaned up the slot with a chisel.

Other half of the bridle is a dado

The “tenon” in this bridle joint is created by dadoing both sides of the apron. I used the tablesaw fence to control the location of the cut. To establish one shoulder of the



Off with their blocks. Once the bridle slot is cut, saw off both end blocks. Rest the leg in a V-block as you make the crosscuts.

dado, I ran the end of the apron against the fence as I made the crosscut using the miter gauge. For the other shoulder, I put a spacer against the fence and ran the end of the apron against that. To dial in the exact height of the dado set, use a test piece the same thickness as the apron and cut dados in both faces at one end, creeping up on a good fit in the leg slot.

Next I made the diagonal cuts at the ends of the aprons on the bandsaw. I smoothed



Bridle chamber. Clean up the bottom of the slot with a narrow chisel.

them with a handplane and used a spokeshave to round the ends.

Cross rails connect with dovetails

For maximum strength, I used sliding dovetails to connect the cross rails to the aprons. The sockets in the aprons are stopped. I routed them using a guide bushing and a plywood template, making one pass with a straight bit, then a second pass with an 8° dovetail bit. I used the same



DADO THE APRON FOR THE LEGS

Two dados make a tenon. Using the miter gauge on the tablesaw, cut dados on both faces of the apron so it mates with the slot in the leg (above). Rodriguez uses the fence as a stop while cutting one shoulder of the dado, and puts a spacer against the fence to cut the other shoulder. He removes the waste with subsequent passes.

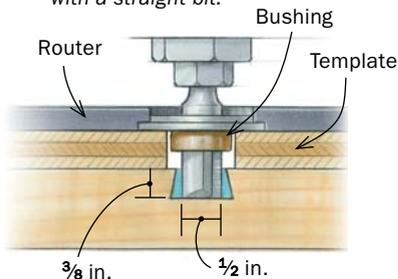


DOVETAILS FOR THE CROSS RAILS

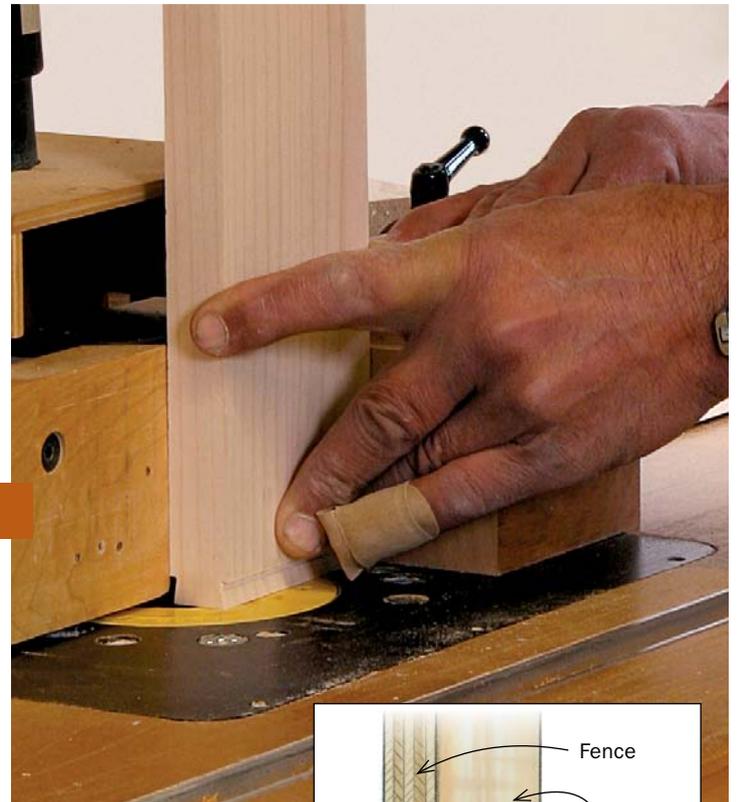
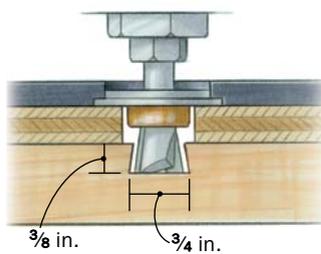
Socket session. A plywood template guides the router as you cut the stopped dovetail sockets in the aprons. Cut in two passes—first with a straight bit and then with a dovetail bit—for a clean, accurate socket. Two routers will speed this job.

EASY DOVETAIL SOCKETS

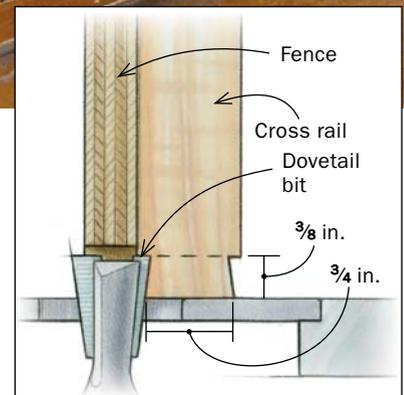
1. Make first pass with a straight bit.



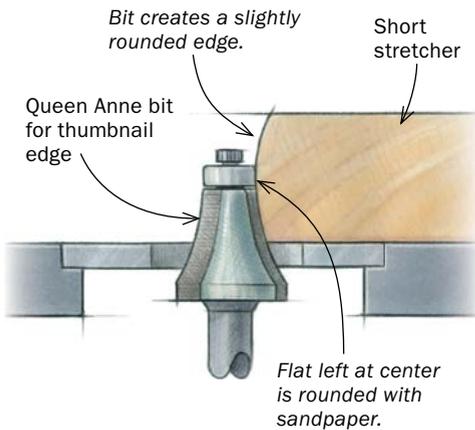
2. Make second pass with a dovetail bit.



The key to the joint. Using the same 8° dovetail bit that cut the sockets, Rodriguez cuts the dovetail keys on the ends of the cross rails. Afterward, because it will be a stopped sliding dovetail, he shoulders one end of the key, using a handsaw and chisel.



Fit the stretchers



Tapered and rounded. After cutting the tenons and mortises while the stretcher is still square, bandsaw and smooth the short stretchers to their bowtie taper. Then rout the edge profile.



Coaxing the curve. Two passes with the bearing-guided Queen Anne bit leave a flat strip at the center of the edge. A quick hit with sandpaper on a flexible block will fair the arc.

dovetail bit in the router table to cut the dovetail key on the ends of the cross rails. Afterward, I used a handsaw and chisel to trim the key back at the bottom edge so the rail would slide fully home in the stopped socket. Before putting the cross rails aside, I plowed a groove along one face $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the top edge. The metal S-clips I used to attach the tabletop fit into this groove.

Stretcher recipe

The short stretchers are narrow at the center and widen at the ends. It's a nice touch, lightening the bulk of the part while maintaining joint strength. To simplify things, I cut the joinery on these pieces while the stock was still square. Then I cut the taper on the bandsaw, faired the curves with hand tools, and routed the thumbnail profile on the tapered edges with a Queen Anne bit (Infinity No. 10-500).

This table is built mostly by machine, but fitting the short stretchers' tenons to the legs requires careful handwork. The key is seating the tenon shoulders, which have curved edges. Push the tenon into the mortise until it stops against the leg and mark the curves in pencil. Then use a gouge with a matching sweep to cope the ends of the shoulder recess. With these joints fitted, dry-assemble the legs, aprons and short stretchers, then measure for the long stretcher to get the length just right.

To the top

To make the glue-up of the table's large, four-board top easier, I glued the boards in pairs, then glued the two pairs together. I used biscuits in the edges for registration.



Coping for a sweet fit. To get the joint seated properly, transfer the stretcher's curved edge profile to the leg.



Match the arc to a gouge. Use a gouge with a shallow sweep to chop to the pencil line (above). Then clean up the floor of the recess with a chisel. If there's a ledge along the sides of the flat area, trim it away with a chisel or scraper so the stretcher will be enclosed only at its curved ends.



Put it all together



Assembling the undercarriage. With the H-stretcher already glued up and set aside to cure, Rodríguez assembles the bridle joints.



Connect the sides. Once the bridle joints are cured, glue the H-stretcher to the legs (above). Then complete the base by knocking in the dovetailed cross rails (left).

To round the corners of the top, I made a plywood template about a foot square and rounded one corner of it. I traced the curve onto the four corners of the table and removed much of the waste with a handsaw. Then I clamped the template to each corner in turn, and followed it using a router with a bearing-guided, flush-trimming bit.

I used the same Queen Anne bit in a handheld router to give the top the same thumbnail edge detail as the stretchers. I routed around the perimeter from one face, flipped the top, and then routed from the other. The two passes left a small flat strip at the center, which I easily smoothed into a pleasing curve with sandpaper.

Get ready for dinner

Wanting a finish as sturdy as the table, I chose a wipe-on urethane varnish (by General Finishes) that is both durable and repairable. Before applying the finish, I sanded the entire table up to 220-grit. I applied four or five coats of the varnish, allowing each one to dry at least 24 hours before rubbing it out. Finally, I applied paste wax and buffed it with a clean cloth. Then it was just a matter of reaching for a platter and a corkscrew. Bon appetit! □

Mario Rodríguez, a 23-year contributor to the magazine, is constantly cooking up new projects at the Philadelphia Furniture Workshop (philadelphiafurnitureworkshop.com).



Clip it good. Metal clips hooked into the groove in the cross rails fasten the base to the tabletop.