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# Make Your Own Bandings

Once you master the basics, the only limit is your imagination

BY FREDDY ROMAN

**A**ppearing light on its feet, almost as if standing on its tiptoes, Federal-style furniture relies on symmetry, tapered and turned legs, simplified moldings and carvings, and above all stringing and banding, or to give the latter its correct name, *tarsia a topo*. This technique, invented by Italian craftsmen during the Renaissance era, can be roughly translated as block marquetry. At its simplest it is nothing more than stacking, cutting, and gluing woods of contrasting colors, thicknesses, and widths to create geometric patterns.

Here I'll demonstrate how to make such bandings using shop-made jigs and basic woodworking tools. It's a pretty straightforward process. Once you perfect the fundamental skills, you'll have the know-how to make your own custom bandings.

## A simple but striking banding

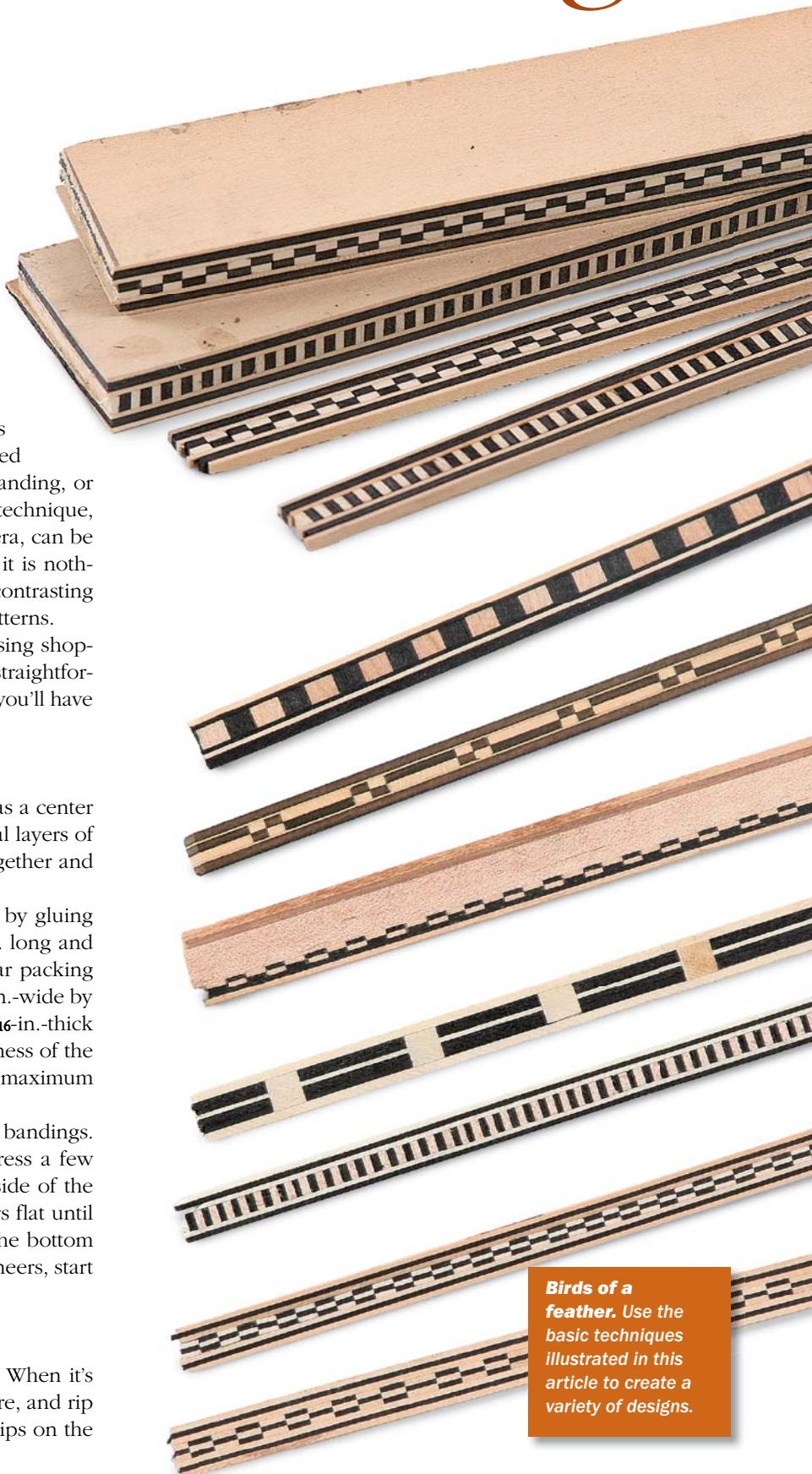
I'll start with a simple but eye-catching banding that has a center core of alternating black and white squares, and several layers of veneer glued on each side to hold the center chips together and give the banding the desired thickness.

The first step is to make an L-shaped banding press by gluing and screwing together two pieces of MDF, each 15 in. long and about 3 in. wide. Cover the two inside faces with clear packing tape to keep glue from sticking to it. Then cut some 2-in.-wide by 12-in.-long strips from  $\frac{1}{32}$ -in.-thick holly veneer and  $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-thick black dyed tupelo veneer. You want the finished thickness of the blank to be between about an inch and close to the maximum depth of cut on your tablesaw.

I use Old Brown Glue, a liquid hide glue, for all my bandings. Glue one face of the veneers and put them in the press a few layers at a time, pushing the edges flush against the side of the press. Put some weight on top to keep the glued layers flat until you get all the pieces into the press. Make sure that the bottom and top layers are not the same color. To clamp the veneers, start working from the center out to the ends.

## Cut apart the brick and rearrange the parts

This interim step in making banding is called a brick. When it's dry, scrape the glue off the edges, joint one edge square, and rip the opposite one parallel. Next crosscut  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-thick chips on the

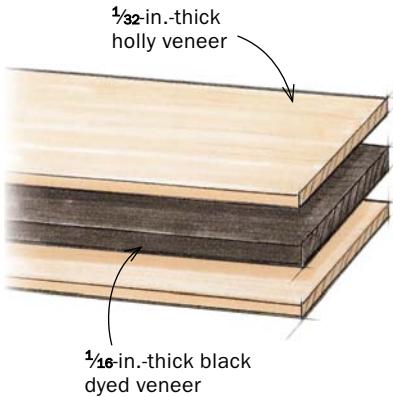


**Birds of a feather.** Use the basic techniques illustrated in this article to create a variety of designs.

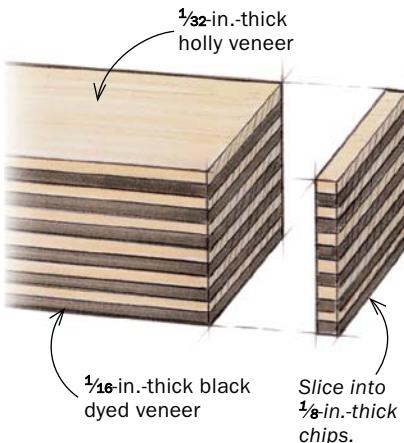
# A basic banding

This simple banding has an eye-catching core of alternating black and white squares.

## 1. MAKE THE OUTER LAYERS AND THE CORE



**Make a brick.** Glue up a stack of black and white veneers, and clamp them between a caul and the fence of an assembly jig (right) to form a brick. Then scrape the dried glue off one edge and joint it with a handplane (below right).



tablesaw. You now need to make an assembly board. Glue and nail a  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in.-thick by 1-in.-wide fence to the long edge of a piece of MDF that slightly exceeds the longest length of banding you'll need. Nail on a stop block at one end, exactly 90° to the fence. Lay three or four chips on the assembly board, pushed against the fence with the first one against the stop block. Make sure you have contrasting colors where two chips meet. Use a block to push the chips tightly together and then

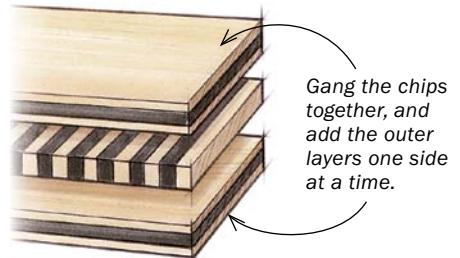
clamp the block to the jig. Connect the chips using veneer tape. Once the tape dries (30 seconds), remove the chips from the assembly board and tape three or four more together. When you have enough to make the length of banding you want, tape the groups into one long piece.

Flip the line of chips on the assembly board so that the taped side is facedown. Brush glue on the exposed side, set the adjacent white veneer on top, then glue on a layer of black veneer followed by another

white layer. Put a caul on top and clamp them together. Once the glue dries, wet and peel off the tape from the other side of the chips, and repeat the veneering on that side. When the glue is dry, clamp the package in a bench vise between two long cauls and joint one edge with a handplane.

In banding terms, you now have a log that is ready to be bandsawn into strips of banding. You want the banding to be slightly thicker than the depth of the recess it will fit into, but the minimum thickness I

## 2. ASSEMBLE AND SLICE INTO BANDINGS



**Tape the chips in groups.** On an assembly board with an L-shaped fence, use veneer tape to tightly bind three or four chips together.



**Add the outer layers.** Flip the taped side down and apply glue to the other side of the chips and to the first of the outer layers of veneer.



**Off comes the tape.** Now that the outer layers of veneer are holding the inner core of chips together, you can dampen, scrape, and peel away the veneer tape on the exposed side of the chips.

work with is  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. As long as your bandsaw is cutting straight and true, there is no need to rejoin the log after each cut.

### Make a two-tier checkered banding

Using the L-shaped assembly board, glue together two pieces of veneer,  $\frac{1}{16}$  in. thick by 2 in. wide by 12 in. long, one white and the other black. Scrape off any glue squeeze-out after it's dry and joint one edge straight. I cut this piece by hand because the smaller chips easily can get sucked down by the tablesaw blade. As a bonus, handsawing gives the banding a more authentic antique look, which I like.

To make the necessary bench-hook-type sawing board, start with a piece of poplar

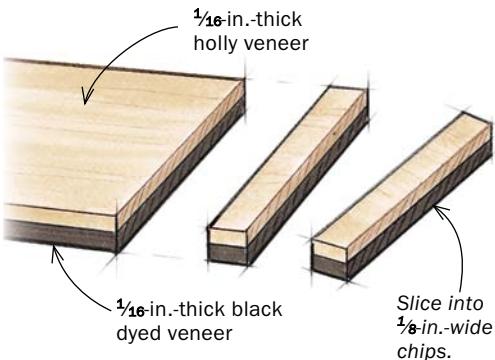


**Saw up the log.** After adding outer veneers to the other side of the chips, scrape and then joint one edge. Now take this "log" to the bandsaw and cut strips of  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-thick banding.

# Add a checkerboard core

A fun twist on the basic banding, this design gets its punch from slicing and flipping the core to create a checker pattern.

## 1. CUT THE CHIPS



**Black and white.** The core of this checkered banding starts with a piece of black veneer and a piece of white veneer glued together.

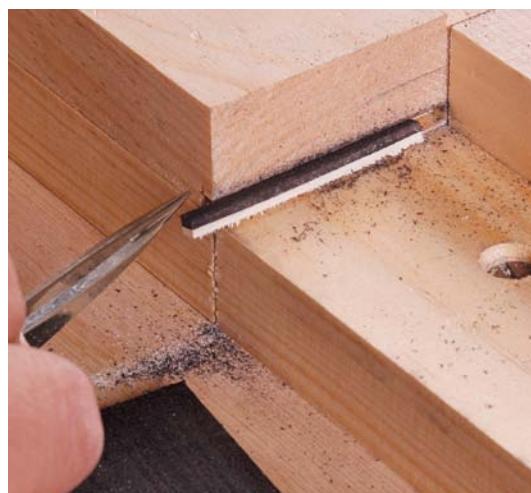


**Cut the core by hand.** On the stop block of the sawing board, create a rabbet whose width matches the desired width of each chip. The sawing board should guide the saw tightly and keep each cut square.



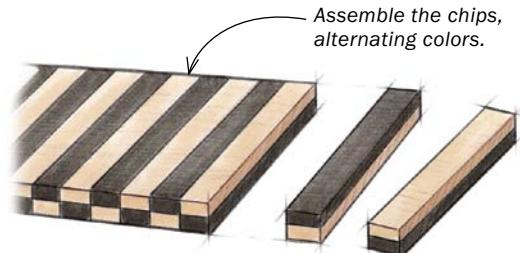
or other softwood, roughly 2 in. square by 12 in. long. Crosscut it in half at exactly 90° and screw one piece near the top left-hand corner of a piece of 3/4-in.-thick plywood that is 8 in. long by 12 in. wide. Make certain the piece is 90° to the edge of the plywood. Next, bore two slightly oversize holes in the other 6-in. piece, which will allow adjustment of the sawkerf and any adjustment for 90° if necessary.

Now put the saw you'll be using in between the two pieces and screw down the second piece. This creates a zero-clearance sawkerf. To support the veneer core, add two more pieces half the thickness of the fence. Using the saw as a guide, butt the pieces against it and the fence, again making one section adjustable. Last, screw a rabbeted stop block to a core support block so that it lines up flush with one side of the sawkerf. The height of the rabbet should match the 1/8-in. thickness of the core veneer, and



**Use tweezers.** A tight-fitting stop block minimizes tearout, but you may need to pry the chip out of the rabbet after each cut.

## 2. MAKE THE CORE



**Taped in groups.** Line up 14 to 20 chips on the assembly board (lengths of about 2 in.), making sure that the colors alternate and that you have opposite colors at each end. Cinch the chips together with a clamped block. Then apply veneer tape to one side of each group of chips.



**Tape groups together.** Form a line of chips that matches the desired length of the banding and apply tape down the whole length.



**Apply outside veneers.** As with the first banding, glue outside veneers first to the non-taped side, and when dry, remove the veneer tape and veneer the second side.

the depth should match the desired  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. width of each chip. The rabbet will also help reduce any tearout from the saw.

Crosscut the log into small chips and line them up on the assembly board, alternating colors. Push them all flush against the fence and use a square block to push them against the stop block, clamping the block in place to hold them there. Next, tape them together with veneer tape, put a caul on top, and let it dry for 10 minutes. Assemble as many of these sections as needed to make the desired banding length. Just make sure that you don't end up gluing the same color chips together.

As with the first banding, apply the outside veneers to the non-taped side, then when dry remove the tape and veneer the opposite side. The last step is to remove the log from the clamps, joint an edge, then rip the bandings on the bandsaw. □



**Ready for banding.** Scrape and joint one edge of the log before sawing it into banding.

Freddy Roman is a period furniture maker and restorer in Littleton, Mass. ([periodcraftsmen.com](http://periodcraftsmen.com)).

## SOURCES OF SUPPLY

### VENEERONLINE.COM

$\frac{1}{16}$ -in. thick black dyed tupelo,  
 $\frac{1}{32}$ -in.-thick black dyed anigre,  
 $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.- and  $\frac{1}{32}$ -in.-thick  
English sycamore\*

### CERTAINLYWOOD.COM

$\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-thick hard maple\*

### EBAY.COM

Good source for a variety  
of veneers

\*Can be used as a substitute for holly