

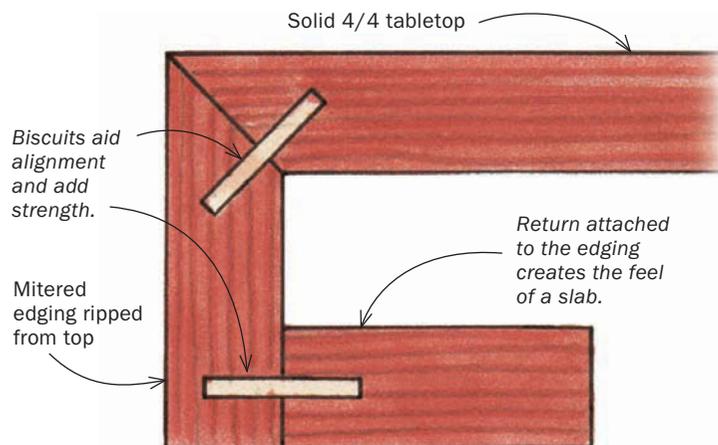
# Thick Tabletops from Thin Stock

Create lightweight panels with a heavyweight look

BY MARK EDMUNDSON

## MIND TRICK

You can use 4/4 boards to make what appears to be a solid slab top. Glue up an oversize panel, cut strips from all four sides, miter them, and reattach them as edging to give the top an apparent thickness of up to 4 in. Add a return underneath to complete the illusion.



Whether it will stand in a stark modern house or in a rustic timber-frame, a table with a massive solid-wood top can be a powerful presence in a room. I often get requests for such tables, but here in Idaho there's no local supply of big hardwood trees, and getting 12/4 planks means ordering very expensive, very heavy slabs from far-off places, sight unseen, and paying for shipping. So once when a client asked for a 3-in.-thick tabletop it occurred to me I could make one from 4/4 solid stock. I could glue up an oversize panel, cut off strips along the sides and ends, and then miter those offcuts and fold them down to create the appearance of a solid slab.

After I glued up my first faux slab tabletop and cleaned the glue joints, a timber-framing buddy stopped by the shop. His

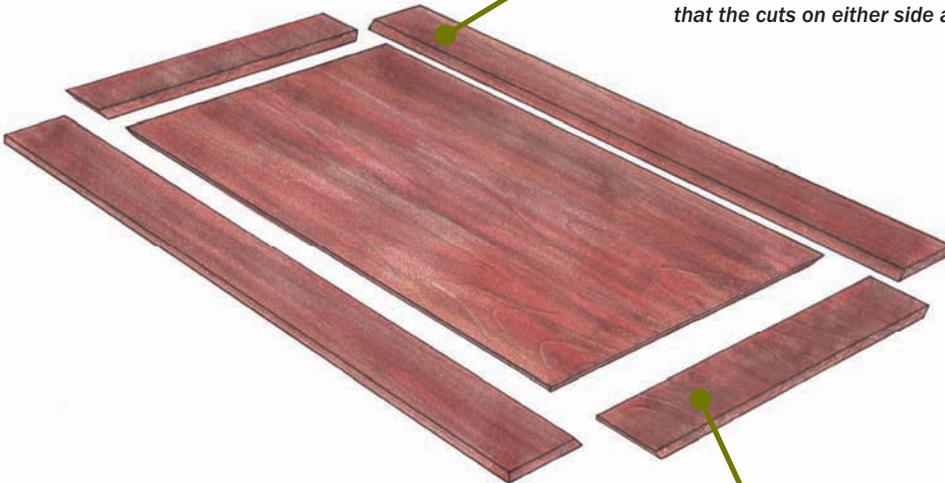
## BEVEL THE TABLETOP

Use a guided circular saw to miter all four edges of the oversize panel. The offcuts will become the edging and the return underneath.



1

**Long edges first.** With a sacrificial panel placed beneath the workpiece to support the offcuts, Edmundson uses a track saw with a long track to make smooth, accurate miter cuts along the length of the table. He's careful to ensure that the cuts on either side are parallel to each other.



2

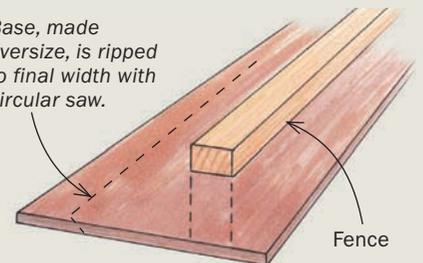
**Now square the ends.** Square the track to the long miter cuts you've made, and then make the miter cuts across the width of the workpiece.



## NO TRACK SAW? NO PROBLEM

You can use a good standard circular saw to cut clean miters by making a simple guide. Glue a fence to a plywood or MDF base, then tilt the sawblade to 45° and make a cut along the base to create a zero-clearance guide. Clamp the guide to the panel to make the miter cuts.

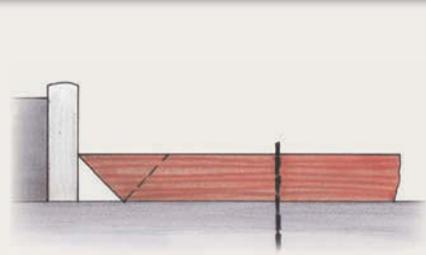
Base, made oversize, is ripped to final width with circular saw.



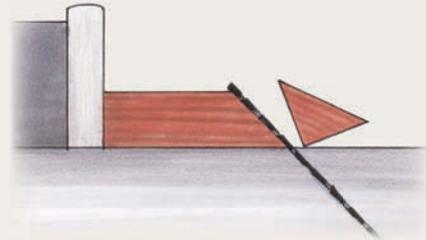
Clamp guide to workpiece.

## MAKE THE END EDGING FIRST

Trim and re-miter the cutoffs to make the end edging. At glue-up, ensure the face of the edging is square to the top surface; this simplifies adding the side edging.



**Rip one edge parallel.** At the tablesaw, with the blade vertical, run the tip of the cutoff's miter against the fence and rip the other edge square. Cut close to final width, so you get a good-sized offcut to use for the return.



**Recut the miter.** Set the blade to 45° and cut a miter in the other direction. Because you're using offcuts from the panel, the ends of the edging are already properly mitered.



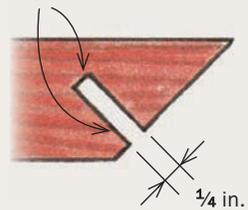
first words were to ask me where I got the 12/4 black walnut for it. Even after examining the top, he didn't realize it was all 4/4. That's when I knew the faux version was a great alternative to the real thing.

To make the illusion even more convincing, I glue return strips inside the bottom of the edging, so if you grab the tabletop and feel underneath, it seems like a full-thickness slab. There was one hiccup, though. The first time I added those strips underneath, I noticed that the top of the table gave off a deep echo when thumped. I solved that problem by adding a piece of 3/4-in.-thick plywood to the underside. That deadened the noise completely. It also made the top easier to attach to the base, since I could screw the plywood to the base and then attach the solid top through slotted holes that accommodate seasonal movement. If you choose not to add the return strips, you won't get the drum sound and you can forego the plywood. One other note: Using this technique, the miter where the side and end edging pieces meet is a cross-grain joint, so I wouldn't make one of these tabletops more than 4 in. thick.

### Cut the main miters

To cut the miters on the top panel, it helps a lot to have a track saw; I use a Festool 55. But you can get by with a good circular saw and a shopmade guide (see drawing, previous page). You could also cut these

Offset the biscuit toward the bottom of the workpiece to prevent the slot from cutting through the surface.



**Biscuits reinforce the joints.** Be sure to place a biscuit very close to the end of the joint to keep that area aligned.



miters on a tablesaw with a sliding table, if you have one. As to the miters on the edging pieces, I cut those on my tablesaw.

The project starts with a good selection of 4/4 stock. Choosing boards with lots of vertical grain makes it easier to produce a look at the ends of the table that mimics end grain. To create a seamless match of color and grain between the top panel and the side edging, I use wide boards for the first and last boards in the panel glue-up. To account for the edging and the return strips underneath, figure on gluing up a top panel about a foot longer and perhaps 8 in. wider than the finished top. Less overage is required on the sides, as the side returns can be cut from unmatched stock.

Once the top panel is glued up, cut the miters on the long sides. If you use a track-guided saw, make sure the cuts are parallel. Next cut the miters on the ends of the panel. Use a square to align the track perpendicular to the sides, and mark each offcut to match the end it came from. The beauty of using these offcuts as edging—

apart from the perfect grain match—is that they are already just the right length and have miters on the ends that will mate with the side edging. But they still need work.

First, at the tablesaw, with the blade vertical and the point of the miter riding against the fence, rip a clean edge parallel to the long miter (and save the offcut if you are planning to add return strips underneath the table). Then tilt the blade to 45° and run the clean edge against the fence to recut the miter. For a good grain match, you want to remove as little wood as possible from the top of the edging.

Test the fit of the miter joint to see that the edging forms a 90° angle with the top panel. If it doesn't, make a slight angle adjustment on the tablesaw and recut the miters. When the miter is right, rip the edging to width to create the faux table thickness you want.

ing glue-up. The ends of the edging must line up correctly, so I place the first and last biscuits fairly close to the ends. For further help with alignment, I temporarily screw a strip of wood to the underside of the top, just behind the miter.

At glue-up I apply vertical pressure with quick-release clamps and horizontal pressure with bar clamps running the length of the tabletop. I use Gorilla glue for its longer open time. To play it safe, I glue one end at a time, dry-fitting the opposite end to protect the beveled edge. If I see gaps during the glue-up, I use the back of a chisel to burnish the corner slightly, crushing the grain so that the joint looks tight. It rounds the corner a bit, but no more than I will when I sand before finishing.

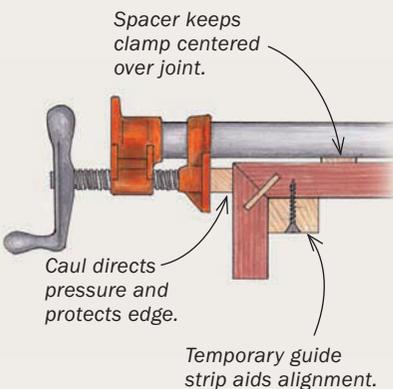
The side edging is the next step, and it's a bit trickier. I use test pieces while fitting

### Attach the end pieces first

I use biscuits in these joints, both for reinforcement and to help align the pieces dur-

#### GLUE ONE END AT A TIME

For maximum control of the miter joints, Edmundson glues on one piece at a time. He dry-clamps the opposite end for clamping purchase and to protect the sharp edge.



**Ensuring a square glue-up.** It's key that the outside face of the edging and the top surface of the table form a 90° angle. Using biscuits helps with this, as does using both vertical and horizontal clamps. Edmundson screws on a temporary guide strip just behind the miter to seal the deal.



TIP

**Use a guide strip.** Screw down a straight strip right at the edge of the miter. This will help keep the edging at 90° as you clamp it on, and also help to keep it from shifting inward.

## SIDE PIECES REQUIRE TEST-FITTING

The trick here is to use a test piece to gauge the actual miter angles at the ends of each side, which might not be perfect. Note the angles for each joint and then cut the real edging.



**Fitting the test piece.** On a test piece that's mitered along the top edge, cut one end at a 45° angle, sawing at 90° to the length. If that fits perfectly, great. If not, make an adjustment to one or both of the angles at the chopsaw. Using the other end of the test piece, repeat the process to find the correct angle for the joint at the opposite end. Then cut the side edging to length.



**Biscuit and glue the edging.** Mark and biscuit the tabletop and edging. The glue-up process is the same as before: one piece at a time, with the opposite piece dry-fitted to protect the mitered edge.



it. They let me dial in the angle of the miters on the ends of the edging, which may not be exactly 45°. The test pieces don't need to be full length, just long enough to be safely cut on the tablesaw. Repeat the procedure from the end edging to produce edging and test pieces that are beveled on the top edge and ripped to width.

Now cut a 45° miter on both ends of your test piece, and slide one end into place on the table to see how it mates with the end edging. I make adjustments on

the chopsaw until the fit is tight and then make notes on the angle. It might require a compound-angle cut. Repeat this process for the other three corners.

Now that you know the miter angles, you can cut one end of a piece of side edging, cut the other end a little long, and sneak up on the fit. Remember that at glue-up you'll be able to close small gaps by crushing the corner of the miter slightly.

When you've fitted both sides, cut biscuit joints and glue one side into place at a

time, just as before. You don't need a guide strip this time, because the end edging will keep the side edging at 90°.

To add the return strips underneath the table, I start by gluing on a 2-in.-wide strip the full length of each side edging. Then I fill in the gap between these two strips with the offcut from the end edging. Last, I cut a piece of 3/4-in.-thick plywood to fit roughly into the opening in the bottom of the faux slab—it doesn't have to fit perfectly. I screw the plywood to the



base, and then, through slotted holes, I use pan-head screws with washers to attach the plywood to the underside of the tabletop.

Once your table is finished, I think you'll find that with a little cunning and some clean miter joints, you've made a massive-looking tabletop without breaking your back or your bank account. □

*Mark Edmundson builds custom furniture in Sandpoint, Idaho.*

**Complete the illusion.**

*When someone reaches under the tabletop, the return strips make it feel like a solid slab. Glue on the side strips first, then fill in between them at the ends.*

*For the end returns, use offcuts from the ends of the panel so they expand and contract with the edging and the tabletop.*

