



Applied moldings have a long history in furniture making, and for good reason. A molding can be the aesthetic crown that tops a piece of furniture. Moldings create a play between light and shadow, adding visual interest. They also can serve as a visual grounding, or provide a sense of termination.

Head over to your local home center and you'll find a big selection of moldings, but those are all sized for architectural work. To get moldings proportioned for furniture, you need to make them. Perhaps the most common approach is to rout them, but then you're stuck using the profiles and proportions of the bits.

A better solution is to forgo the router altogether and create moldings with hand tools. It's not as hard as you might think.

With a few planes, you can easily create graceful

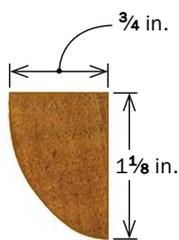
Make custom moldings

WITH JUST A FEW PLANES,
YOU CAN CREATE BEAUTIFUL PROFILES
NOT FOUND IN THE ROUTER-BIT RACK

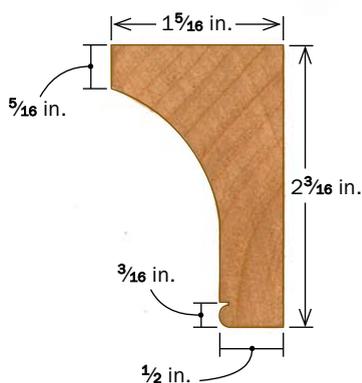
BY GARRETT
HACK



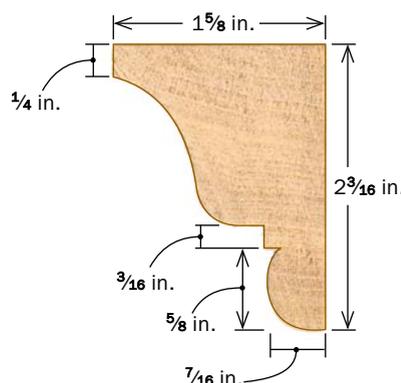
ELLIPSE



COVE AND BEAD



OGEE AND A HALF-ROUND



and beautiful custom profiles for your furniture that would be difficult or impossible with router bits. And there is no size limit, which allows you to dial in the proportions to complement the piece of furniture perfectly.

For a piece of furniture, you probably won't need more than several feet of molding. I've been making moldings this way for most of my career. Here, I'll show you how I do it.

Elegant ellipse with everyday tools

A block plane works great on convex curves. It's the only tool you need to transform the common quarter-round into a graceful quarter-ellipse.



Lay out the profile. Hack does this on the molding blank's leading edge, so he can gauge his progress as he removes waste at the tablesaw.



Power up. Angle the tablesaw blade to remove as much waste as possible in a single pass.

Use hand tools where it counts

The majority (if not all) of the moldings you'll make will require you to remove a fair amount of waste material before you get to the task of shaping the profile. You could do that by hand, with a shoulder or rabbet plane, but I don't recommend it. Instead, use your tablesaw. This will let you get to the important job—creating the graceful lines of the molding—much faster.

Begin with a blank wider than the molding (you'll cut



Plane away the facets. Start with thick shavings along the grain, and finish up with light shavings, which create smaller facets, resulting in a smoother curve.



Check the profile. To ensure consistency, Hack relies on a template made from a thin piece of wood.



Cove and bead are a refined pair

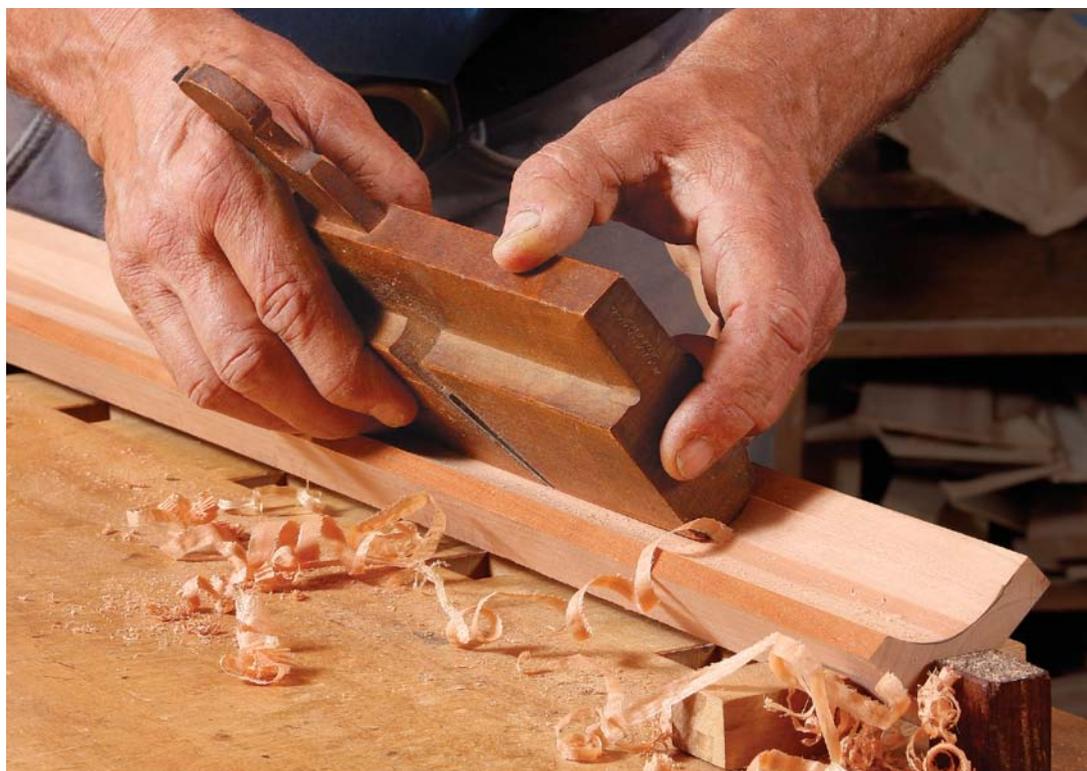
All it takes is a scratch stock to give the common cove a bit of panache. Size the bead to complement the cove's proportions.



More cuts remove more waste. Speed up the work by taking several cuts with a tablesaw. To keep the molding stable throughout the process, remove the large chunk of waste on the bottom last.

the molding free after it's made). After the tablesaw has eaten the waste, it's time for the handplanes to turn the roughed-out shape into a beautiful molding. The easiest profiles to handle are fillets and convex curves. Fillets are really just rabbets, and you can clean them up with a rabbet or shoulder plane. The right tool for convex curves is a block plane. (I rarely use hollow planes. They're troublesome to sharpen and set up.) Use a coarse setting to quickly remove material and get close to the final profile, and then switch to a fine cut, which leaves a smaller facet, making it easier to get a smooth curve from a tool that cuts flat surfaces.

Concave curves are no more difficult than convex ones, except that you need



Refine the cove with a round plane. Match the plane's radius to the cove's as closely as you can. If the cove's radius changes across the profile, switch out planes accordingly.



Begin the bead with a block plane. Roughing out the outside edge this way greatly speeds up the process of cutting the bead. Hack works to a layout line to rough in the bead.



Complete it with a scratch stock. This is the most accurate way to form a small bead. The cove needs to end in a narrow flat, as wide as the cutter.



Clean up with a scraper. To remove any ridges or tracks left by the round plane, use a gooseneck (shown). Rotate and angle the scraper to match the cove's curve.



Beauty built from an ogee and a half-round

Step away from the standard ogee by varying the curve's radius, and create greater depth by adding a half-round at the bottom.



Clean fillet. A rabbet plane removes machining marks left by the tablesaw blade and creates a crisp line where the fillet transitions to the ogee.

a specialty plane to create them efficiently. Ideally, you'd use a round plane with a radius that closely matches the molding's profile, but it doesn't have to be perfect. Get as close as you can, and then use a gooseneck scraper to get the rest of the way. The trick with the scraper is to find the section that matches the profile most closely, and then rotate it on its vertical axis until the scraper's edge is a perfect match. Or, if you're up for it, file a scraper to match the molding.

Finally, hand-sand the molding to remove any facets or bumps that are left. □

Garrett Hack, a longtime contributing editor, is a professional furniture maker in Vermont.



Prop up the molding. Resting the molding on a piece of scrap brings the cove section of the ogee closer to vertical, making it easier to plane.



Back to the block plane. Fair the convex curve, and create a smooth transition into the concave section.



Make the half-round on a separate piece. This allows you to create the entire curve with a block plane, rather than needing a specialized plane or a very large scratch stock.



Glue on the half-round. Yellow glue and a few clamps are all you need. Hack glues the part together on a piece of plywood, making it easier to keep the two parts flat and properly aligned.