I’ve long admired the clean lines and simplicity of an iconic cupboard made at the Enfield, Conn., Shaker colony. When I decided to build one for my house, I altered the design to make it better suited for its intended use: a place for my wife’s sewing supplies. The biggest changes are the two interior drawers I added and the narrower face frame stiles that create a larger opening to improve access.

I also made the cupboard out of hard maple instead of the eastern white pine used in the original. The door panels are curly maple. I painted the drawer fronts with blue milk paint, giving them a modern pop that’s rooted in tradition (the Shakers were fond of bright colors).

This cupboard is not difficult to make but there are a few challenges, including how to dovetail a big case. The sides are tall, so I had to figure out a sure way to hold the subtop so that I could transfer the tails to the sides and rout out the pins. I’ll show you how I did that, as well as how I dealt with all of the other little construction twists that make this a fun piece to build.

**Begin with the case joinery**

The first order of business is the dovetailed case. I cut the tails in the subtop at the bandsaw. To help cut out the pins on the tall case sides, I used an L-shaped jig. I used the same jig to rout the pins. I set the depth to
the baseline of the pins and just followed the layout lines by eye. After this, paring the pins to fit was quick.

After I fitted the dovetails, I used the tablesaw and a dado set to cut the through-dadoes for the shelves. The dadoes will be hidden in front by the face frame.

Now rabbet the back of the subtop and sides for the back panel. I used the router table and a rabbeting bit. The top rabbet is stopped at the dovetail baseline to avoid compromising the joint. On the sides, the rabbet can go straight through the foot end because the stiles on the back extend to the floor.

**Shape the feet and assemble the case**

I used a template to make the feet identical. First, I used it to trace the foot profile on the side, then roughed out the shape at the bandsaw. I used the same template and a flush-trimming bit to clean up the cut at the router table. Then I squared the two corners with a chisel.

Now make and fit the case bottom and shelves. Set aside the shelves until later. Glue up the case and as soon as the clamps are on, measure the diagonals to ensure that the case is square. If it’s not, loosen the clamps, square the case, re-clamp, and measure again.

**Attach the face frame**

The face frame is simple to make. The top rail is joined to the stiles with mortise-and-tenons. I cut the mortises with a mortiser and the tenons with a dado set at the tablesaw. Make sure the rails are \( \frac{1}{8} \) in. wider than their final width so they can be planed flush later. Before you glue up, cut and rout feet into the bottom of the stiles using the template as a guide.

Glue the face frame together, using a spacer to keep the stiles from toeing in at the feet. The spacer’s length should equal the shoulder-to-shoulder length of the rail. Once it has dried, glue the frame to the case. The top edge of the rail should be flush with the top of the
To hear an interview with Matt Kenney on designing furniture reproductions, and to watch a step-by-step video on applying a milk-paint finish, go to FineWoodworking.com/extras.

This fresh take on a classic Shaker cupboard has a hard maple case with curly maple in the frame-and-panel door. Milk-painted drawers on the interior add a bit of color and improved storage for smaller items.

Plane the face frame flush to the cabinet, then install the shelves. The shelves immediately above and below the drawers get stopped dadoes for the vertical dividers. I cut these at the router table with a spiral upcut bit. After fitting the vertical dividers, you need to cut stopped dadoes in them for the drawer divider. Once the dividers are glued in, you can turn to the door construction.

**Build and hang the door**

The door is frame-and-panel construction. The raised panels are done using a special Shaker panel-raising bit ($37, leevalley.com, 16J66.51), but as the Shakers did, I placed the case and you can reuse the spacer during this step to keep the opening square.

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Dadoes for shelves. The dadoes for the shelves are cut at the tablesaw with a crosscut sled and dado set. Kenney uses the rip fence as a stop to ensure that the dadoes on both sides are cut perfectly in line.

Rabbets for the back. The case sides are rabbeted at the router table with a bearing-guided bit. The bottom of the case sides can be rabbetted straight through, but at the top, the rabbet must be stopped at the pin baseline to avoid a gap in the joint.

Feet finish the sides. After tracing the foot pattern on the case sides, cut out the curved portions at the bandsaw and remove the waste. Once that's done, clean up the feet to the line and square the corners with a chisel.

Raised fields on the inside. After gluing the door together, reinforce the joints with shopmade pegs (see drawing, p. 36).

Hanging the door is a bit easier because you only have to fit three sides. Cut the hinge mortises in the door stile first. I use a template and a short flush-trim bit. Then set the door in the opening with spacers between the door's top edge and the face frame so that the gap there will match the gap on the hinge side. Transfer the mortises to the face frame and rout them. I use the same bit and template. Next, hang the door and try to close it. This should give you an idea of how much material needs to be removed from the lock stile. Remove the door from the hinges and plane the stile with a slight inside bevel on the edge. If you plane it square, by the time the back corner clears the face frame, the visible gap can be too big when the door is closed.

Before moving on to the top, make and fit the drawers. At this point you can also make the pulls for the door and drawers, but don't install them until after you've finished the cupboard.

Add the top and molding
Now turn your attention to the top and the molding. The top has a simple bullnose profile on the front and side edges that I shaped by hand using a block plane. Set the plane for a heavy shaving, working to just outside the layout line. Reset the plane for a light shaving and work right to the layout lines. With a sharp plane and light shavings, the facets left behind will be so small and smooth that there's no need to sand afterward.

Screw the top to the case and start the two-step process to make the cove molding: I remove the waste at the tablesaw and then clean up the rough profile with a hollow plane. Start with a blank milled to the molding's final thickness, ¼ in.
**CASE GLUE-UP**

**Dovetails first.** Using cauls, glue the dovetails at the top of the case first (above). Putting the bottom and a shelf or two into the case will help keep it square during this part of the glue-up. Kenney glues in the bottom separately using cambered cauls (below), making sure the back of the bottom is flush in the rabbet so the back can fit in later.

**FACE FRAME**

**Simple frame.** With the mortise-and-tenon joints cut and fitted, a single clamp takes care of the top portion of the glue-up.

**Help staying square.** Use a spacer cut to the same shoulder-to-shoulder length as the frame’s top rail to ensure a square glue-up.

**Seamless frame.** The face frame simply gets glued to the front of the case and then planed flush with the case sides.
wider than its final width, and long enough to wrap around the three sides of the cabinet, plus 6 in. to allow for mistakes in the fitting process. Lay out the profile on the end grain. At the tablesaw, set the rip fence and blade height so that you can cut a kerf down the low side of the molding. Move the fence and raise the blade to cut a second kerf next to the first one. Repeat this process until you have reached the top of the molding (see photo, opposite).

There should be a ¼-in.-wide strip of waste that supports the molding as you cut away the waste. Flip the molding, put its back against the rip fence, and cut the waste free.

Head to the bench to turn the stepped, rough molding into a smooth profile. The best tool for this is a hollow plane, but a gooseneck scraper works too. I prefer to hold the plane vertical during use, so I made support blocks that hold the molding with the arc faceup.

As you plane away the remaining waste, don’t worry if the profile isn’t perfectly identical along the molding’s length. What’s most important is that it matches where it bends around the cabinet—and it will, as a natural outcome of how you’ll cut and hang the molding. Start with one side of the cabinet. Cut a miter in a length of molding a few inches too long for the side. Hold it up to the side so that the miter is aligned with the front face of the cabinet. Mark the back end, and cut it flush. Drill clearance holes in the molding so that it doesn’t split, and nail it to the cabinet.

Now fit the front molding. You’ll need to recut the mitered end that was left from the first side. This miter cut should mate to the piece that’s hung. Hold the molding on the cabinet with the miter joint closed tightly and mark the back for length directly from the cabinet. I cut it a bit long, fit it with a shooting board, and nail the molding in place. To fit the last piece, recut the mitered end so that it mates with the open miter on the cabinet, hold it, mark it, and crosscut it. Nail it in place.

Make the back and add the finishing touches
For the frame-and-panel back, I cut the joinery the same way as for the door. The stiles extend to the floor, but I didn’t shape the interior dadoes for dividers. Use a ¼-in. straight bit to cut the stopped dadoes into the case shelves for the vertical dividers that will form the drawer box.
them like the other feet because the cabinet will live against a wall. After the cabinet is finished, attach the back with countersunk screws.

I finished the cabinet with shellac, brushing it on and sanding between coats. After the final coat, I knocked it down with extrafine steel wool and then waxed it. For the drawer fronts, I used three coats of Old Fashioned Milk Paint (Federal Blue). Before you spread any paint, tape off all four edges of the front. I sanded with 320-grit paper after coats one and two, and then used 0000-grit steel wool after the third coat. Then I rubbed on a coat of wax.

Finally, glue the pulls in place and install a catch for the door. For a catch, I glued a magnet into the lock stile and covered it with leather. The magnet sticks to a screw—countersunk and covered with leather—driven into the shelf edge opposite.

Matt Kenney is a senior editor.

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