

Elegant Side Table



Tasteful project celebrates ash's signature linear grain

BY MASON M c B R I E N

The primary motivation behind this table was to make a simple piece that celebrated the beautiful grain of American white ash—a tree doomed to extinction because of the invasive emerald ash borer. In keeping with the elegance of ash's linear grain, the table's construction is fairly straightforward—straight-tapered legs, split aprons connecting them, and a top profiled underneath.

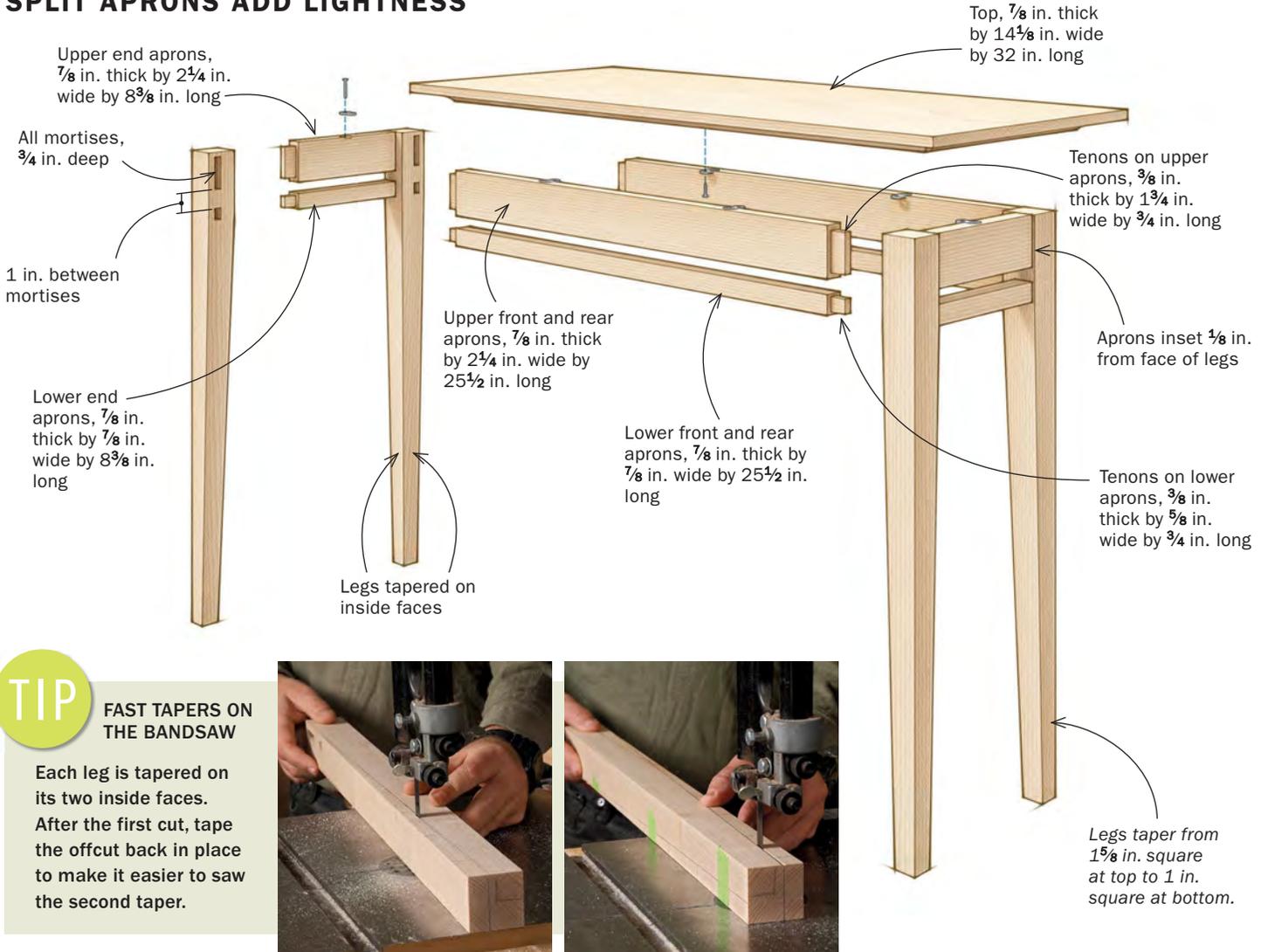
The double apron has a double benefit. Whereas a single wider apron would provide the necessary anti-racking strength, its size would have clashed with the lightness of the design. This dual apron keeps things light while acting

mechanically like a single wide apron. Don't let the table's simplicity and clean lines persuade you to take building it lightly, however. Its stripped-down aesthetic, meant to display the beauty of ash's grain and the lightness of its color, also lays bare any miscues.

Consider the grain

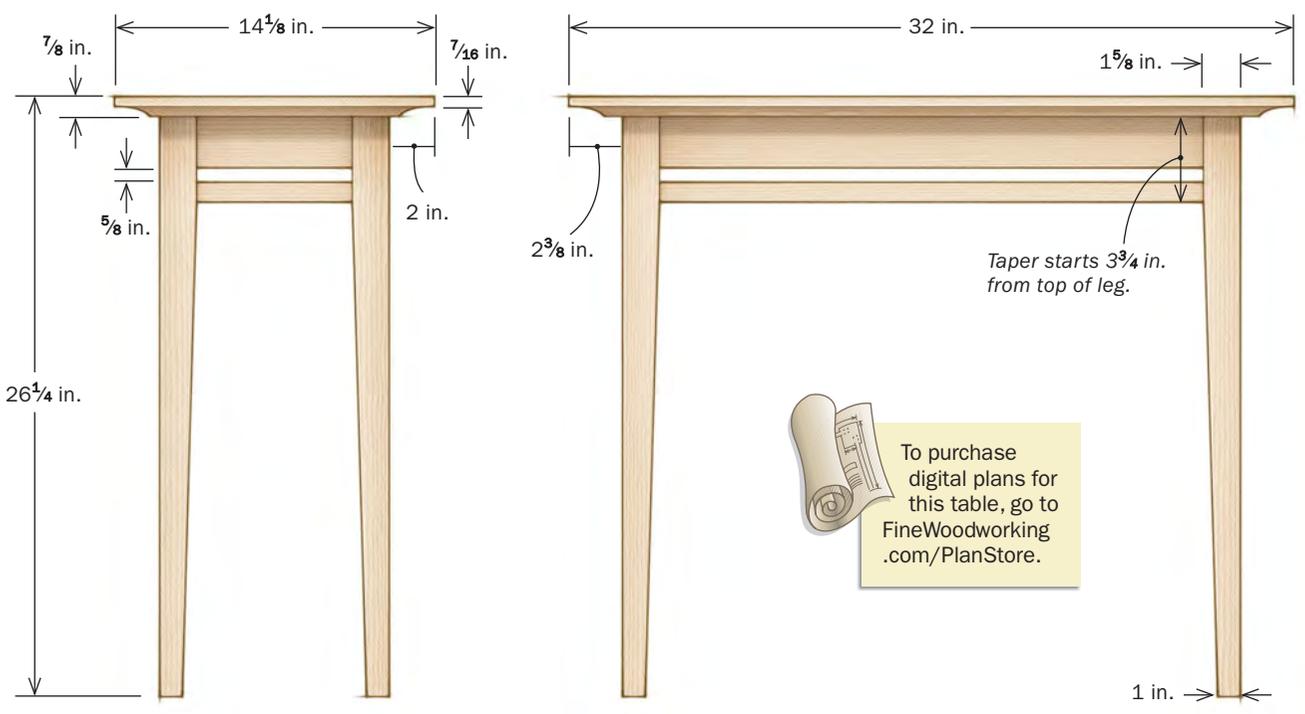
For me, the great fun of this project is finding the beautiful straight grain for all the parts. It requires patience and an observant eye not only to ferret out good boards but also to obtain linear grain from boards that might not look like

SPLIT APRONS ADD LIGHTNESS



TIP FAST TAPERS ON THE BANDSAW

Each leg is tapered on its two inside faces. After the first cut, tape the offcut back in place to make it easier to saw the second taper.



To purchase digital plans for this table, go to FineWoodworking.com/PlanStore.

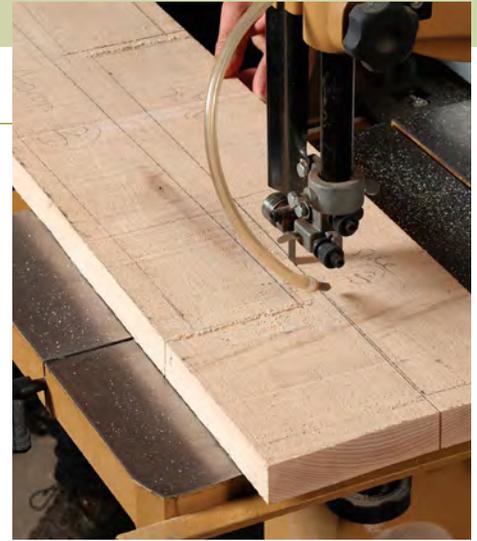
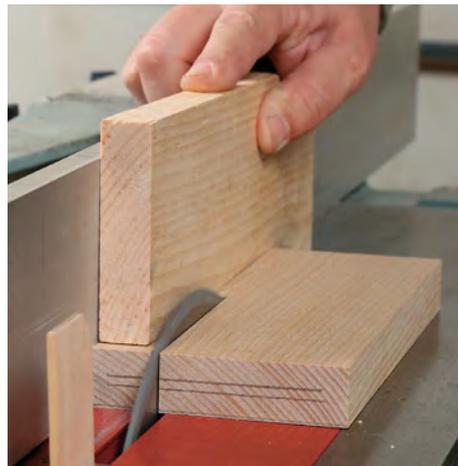
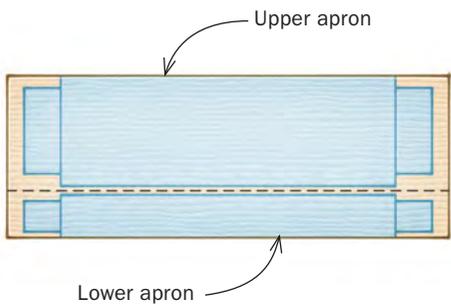
How to break down a board for best grain

APRONS

See the grain. When breaking down a board, McBrien likes to use a clear template a little bigger than the part he's laying out. This way, he makes sure the grain is exactly what he wants.



Rip wide and narrow aprons from a single board. This keeps the grain matching between the two, bolstering the table's harmonious linear grain. Mark the end grain so you can easily identify the pairs later.



Straight rips at the bandsaw. Because laying out for grain often means running at an angle to the board's edge, use the bandsaw for rips. A jigsaw can handle the crosscuts.

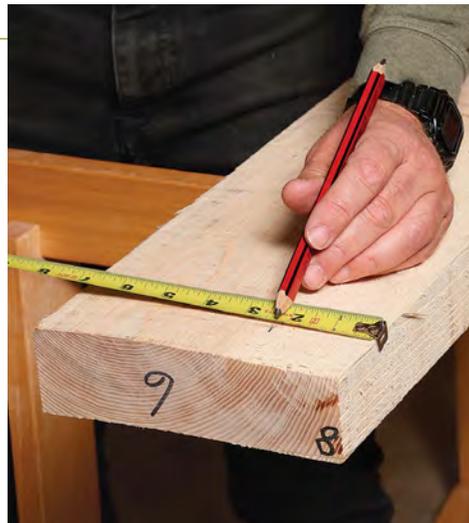
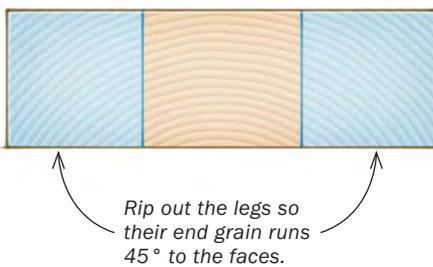
good candidates. When you succeed, the result is harmony.

A little time at the lumberyard will yield a few boards with enough straight grain at the edges for the legs and dual aprons, as well as suitable stock for the top. Although quartersawn works well, I usually find enough stock in the rift portions of flatsawn boards. I use the leftover crown portions as setup or practice parts. The top and aprons are made out of 4/4 boards. The legs are out of 8/4.

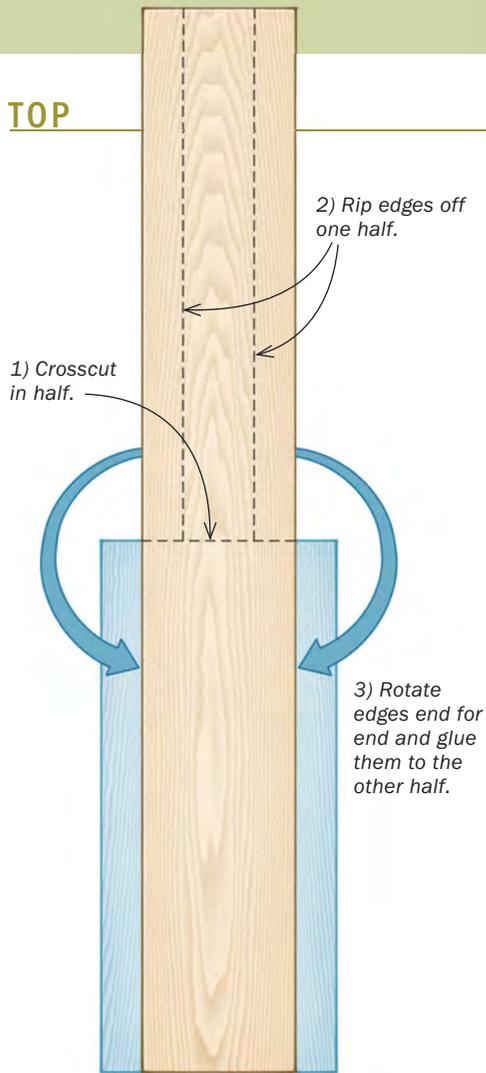
When choosing the leg material, look for straight grain on the edge of the board as well as 2 in. of straight grain on the face. An even-grained 6-ft. flatsawn board should yield four legs.

LEGS

Legs need rift grain. Look for straight grain on the edge of an 8/4 board as well as 2 in. of straight grain on the face (right). Ideally, you want growth rings that are evenly spaced on all faces and run 45° across the ends (far right).



TOP



Try to keep the grain harmonious on the aprons, too. If possible, choose sections of boards that have $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. of linear grain. This way, you can rip each pair of aprons out of the same section, letting the grain flow between the two. Start by laying out the front apron, then the sides, and finally the back. Mark their ends to keep them together through milling and glue-up.

The top requires a 10-in.-wide, 6-ft.-long board with centered cathedrals and $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. of straight rift grain on the edges.

On any piece in which the grain doesn't run parallel to the roughsawn edge, straighten things out before milling by bandsawing parallel to the grain.

Base gets mortise-and-tenons

The table joinery is fairly simple. Still, I like to mark my parts to ensure I don't cut a mortise where it doesn't belong. For the legs, this means bundling them with



Make the top from a single board. This ensures grain and color match. Crosscut the board and use one half as the middle of the glued-up top; the second half gives you straight, riftsawn edges.



Glueline disappears in the rift. Rotate the riftsawn edges end for end and glue them onto the first half of the board you crosscut, and the glueline vanishes in the straight grain. The tighter and straighter the grain, the better the effect.

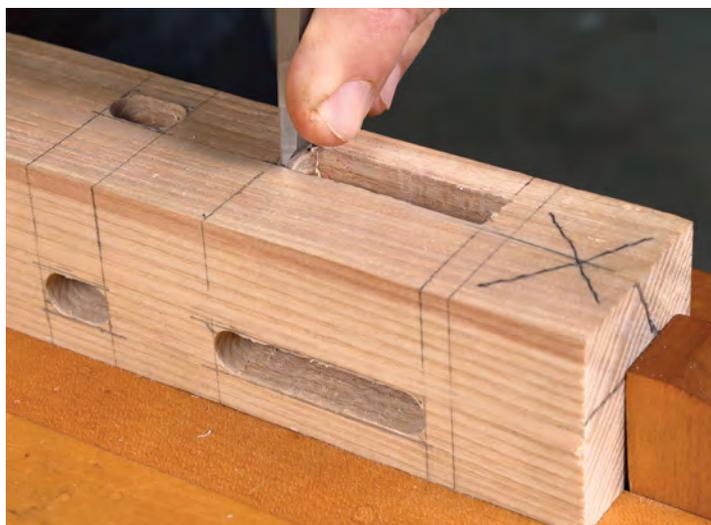
A simple approach to joinery

MORTISES

Lay out the mortises. McBrien lays out one leg's mortises before transferring the end lines across the other three. He leaves the legs 1 in. overlong at the top to avoid blowing out the end grain when chiseling the mortises square.



Drill out the mortises in several passes. After drilling out the ends of the mortise and clearing in between, McBrien makes a series of passes to clean up the scalloped ridges, leaving nearly flat mortise walls that need little paring.



Square up the mortises. Use a sharp chisel to lightly chop and pare to your layout lines.



Trim the legs to length. For an accurate cut, McBrien lines up his layout line with the zero-clearance kerf in his crosscut sled.

the best faces out before drawing a bold reference triangle atop all four. These legs will be tapered, so you'll have a chance to remove surface imperfections.

Next, I draw light lines where the mortises will go. The mortises are placed so the aprons are inset about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. from the front of the leg to give a nice shadow line. I usually leave the legs a little extralong at the top to avoid blowing out the short grain when paring the top of the upper mortise. I trim them to length afterward.

I cut the $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. mortises on the drill press and then clean and square them up with chisels. With the mortises cut, you can taper the legs. I cut them at the bandsaw and clean up with a jointer plane.

For efficiency, I mill the two-part aprons as one unit before ripping them apart. For the upper aprons, I cut the tenon shoulders at the tablesaw and the face cheeks at the bandsaw. After scribing the tenon's width directly from its mating mortise, I cut the tenons to width with a backsaw.

I use slightly more handwork for the tenons on the narrower lower aprons. I cut only their front and back shoulders at the tablesaw and cheeks at the bandsaw. To cut the tenon to width, I use the backsaw for both the shoulder and cheek cuts.

Wide, seamless top

The tabletop is more than 14 in. wide—not an easy dimension to find in a single

TENONS



Tablesawn shoulders. Using a stop for repeatability, cut all the $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. shoulders on the upper and lower aprons.



Bandsawn cheeks. Cut the aprons' front and back cheeks using the bandsaw. Set a stop to keep from cutting into the shoulder.



Scribe and saw tenon's width. Because McBrien cleaned up the end of each mortise by hand, he may have introduced some variation. So he uses each mortise to mark the width on its mating tenon (far left). Then he saws the tenons to width by hand (left).

board. Here is my way of making it from narrower stock: Find a 10-in. board with a little over 2 in. of straight rift grain on both sides and a centered crown. The top is about 32 in. long, so cut two sequential 32-in. pieces. From one board, rip off the rift sides, swing them onto the other board, and glue them to the edges. The gluelines become nearly impossible to find in the straight grain.

To form the coved profile under the top, I use a vertical panel-raising bit. These are much less taxing on your router table than horizontal panel-raising bits.

At this stage, you can chamfer the edges on the legs, aprons, and top.



TIP

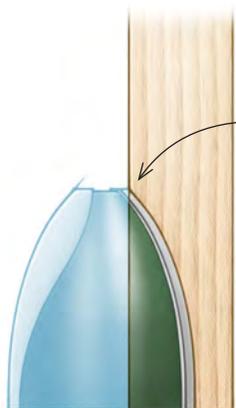
SPACER HELPS LAY OUT NARROW APRON'S TENON

The narrow apron's upper and lower shoulders are only $\frac{1}{8}$ in., so McBrien cuts these entirely by hand. To ensure the gap between the aprons is uniform, he uses a spacer between the narrow apron and a dry-fitted wide apron.

Cove the top



Rout the cove under the tabletop. McBrien uses a vertical panel-raising bit because it's less taxing on his router table than horizontal bits. He leaves about $\frac{7}{16}$ in. at the table's edge.



Stop at apex of the cutter to avoid fillet at the end of the cove.

NOTE: Take multiple light passes to reach final depth.



Glue-up and finish

Glue up the shorter ends before the longer front and back. This way, you can more easily use spacers to hold the lower aprons in place. Because of all the joints involved, I prefer to use a glue with a longer open time.

One of the reasons I love ash so much is its light color. To preserve this as much as possible, I use a water-based varnish, Behlen's Rockhard Waterborne Brushing Varnish in semigloss. After two to four coats of that, I apply Liberon neutral wax, which doesn't color the wood. □

Mason McBrien is a furniture maker in Union, Maine.



Rout the ends before the edges. McBrien coves both ends before the edges to avoid blowout in the finished top. Rout in stages, taking a series of light cuts.

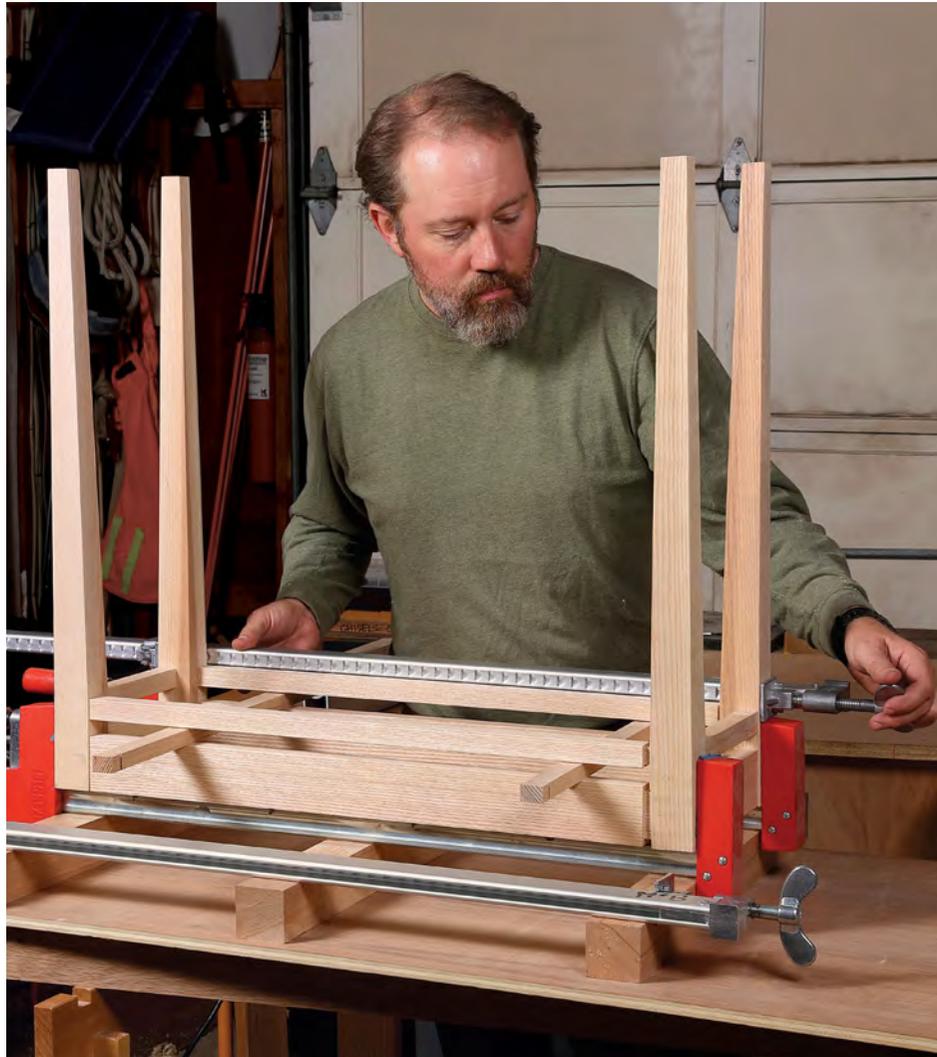
Take a calm approach to the glue-up



Start with the ends. Glue the end assemblies together first. The short aprons make them easier to manage, and assembling these first will make gluing in the longer aprons easier.



Spacer keeps front and rear narrow aprons in place. Because of their length, the narrow aprons can be unwieldy during glue-up. A pair of spacers fixes this headache (above), making clamping the end assemblies to the long aprons much easier (right).



Top attaches with figure-8 fasteners. McBrien uses one fastener on each short apron and two on each long apron. Use a Forstner bit so they sit flush with the top of the aprons (above). After adjusting the top's overhang, predrill and screw the figure-8s to the top (right).

