



## Restored log shop

BY KAREN M c B R I D E

**Reclaiming the past.** To build her log shop in rural Ontario, Karen McBride dismantled and restored a long-abandoned house. Inside, she has equipped the shop with an array of restored vintage machines and hand tools along with more recent models.



As a kid I spent weekends at our family's old, derelict grist mill. The mill had no running water or power and its windows were large, glassless, gaping holes. It was like camping indoors, alongside millstones and massive pulleys and gears. Those weekends fostered a passion for decrepit musty buildings and mysterious machinery. So the seed was planted long ago for my shop of today, an early 19th-century log building that had stood vacant and deteriorating for decades when I found it, dismantled it, and rebuilt it on my farm in Ontario, giving it a solid foundation, new chinking, and packing it with woodworking equipment.

As I planned the layout of my log workshop, my affection for big vintage machines provided a constant reminder that workshops come in only one size, and that's too small. But space and machine layout were not my only considerations. All along the way my choices made the shop personal as well as functional. An inspirational workspace is important to me, as it feeds my soul and encourages me to do my best work.



### Repurposed pieces

I often repurpose old furniture to make workstations or storage units. There are many examples in my shop, but let me describe one of the most notable. Created from an old mahogany kneehole desk, it is the outfeed table for my tablesaw. But it's a lot more than an outfeed table.

I removed the original desktop and replaced it with a subtop made by laminating four layers of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. plywood, producing a 4-ft. by 5-ft. work surface that is massively strong and solid and cantilevers beyond the desk's original footprint. I drilled holes through the subtop on 4-in. centers across the whole surface, making it an ideal steam-bending table. I use holdfasts to fix bending forms to the subtop wherever I need them.

To make the table useful as a downstairs workbench (most of my handwork happens at a traditional joiner's bench upstairs), I bolted a sheet of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. Baltic-birch plywood to the subtop, using insert nuts to facilitate easy removal. I drilled rows of holes through the Baltic birch (aligned with holes in the

### Online Extra



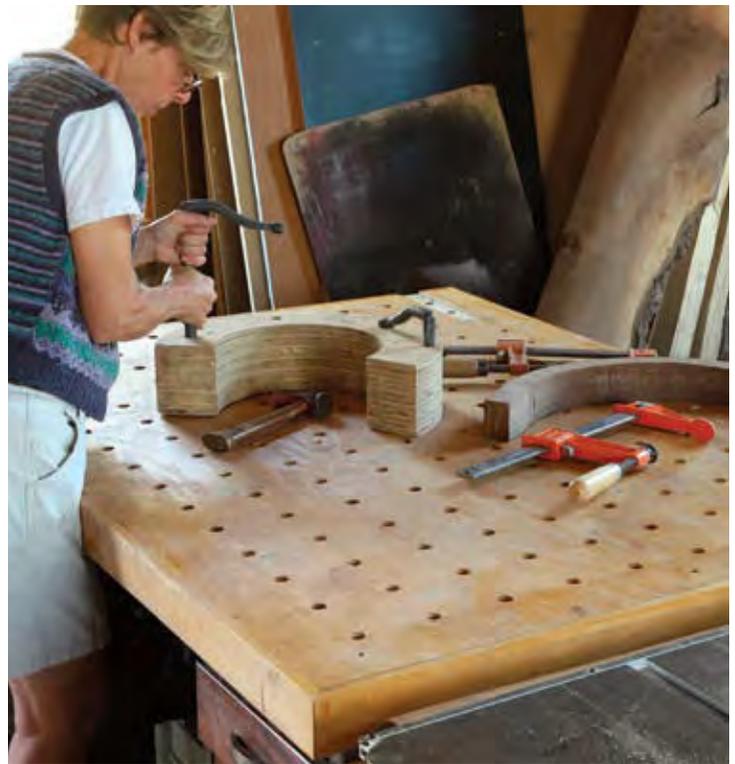
**Rescue story.** Karen McBride lays out in this article much that she has done inside her shop. To read the inspiring story of how she found, moved, and rebuilt the 200-year-old log building with help from friends and her father, go to [FineWoodworking.com/286](https://www.finewoodworking.com/286).



## Power desk

McBride is wondrously at repurposing old furniture for use in the shop. This mahogany kneehole desk is the outfeed table for her tablesaw, but it's also a multi-functional workbench and steambending table, and its drawers are home to six routers and a bevy of other tools and supplies. Oh, and its kneehole is the garage for her shop vacuum.

**Quick fix for a vise.** So she can set up auxiliary vises temporarily—but firmly—McBride bolts each one to a special pegged platform. Holes in the worktable accept the pegs and a threaded hold-down locks the vise in place.



**Converting to steam.** When she needs a place to set up steam-bending forms, McBride removes the top from her outfeed table, revealing the rock-solid subtop below. Made by laminating four layers of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. plywood and lipped with solid wood, the subtop has holes drilled on 4-in. centers to accept holdfasts.

subtop) to hold bench dogs for a front vise and a Veritas insert vise. The holes are sized to work with Festool accessories too.

I drilled some additional holes in the benchtop that let me temporarily mount my mechanic's and guitarmaker's vises. Each vise gets bolted to a platform with two pegs underneath, and the pegs fit into holes in the benchtop. A hole in the platform accepts a threaded holddown that securely fastens the vise for brute force work. These auxiliary vises can be set up in a few seconds and just as quickly removed to restore the outfeed path for the saw. I cut stopped dadoes in the benchtop to accommodate the tablesaw's crosscut sleds.

The desk's kneehole cavity turns out to be a top-notch home for a shop vacuum. And with an air line dangling from the ceiling above, the desk is a fine place for sanding. The deepest desk drawer has enough room for six routers while other drawers store sanding supplies, screwdrivers, and wrenches.

### Old iron

The beating heart of my shop is a 24-in. Robinson EY/E bandsaw made in Britain in the 1960s. At 1,800 lb. and 7 ft. tall, it is the smallest bandsaw that Robinson ever made! The saw is powered by a 3-hp, 208–220 volt three-phase direct-drive motor that I wired to a dedicated variable frequency



## Well-chosen machines

**A beautiful beast.** The British-made 24-in. Robinson bandsaw McBride restored stands 7 ft. tall and weighs just under a ton. It's a towering presence in her shop, but it's the smallest model Robinson ever made.



**Type cutter's tablesaw and a colony of grinders.** Designed for printers who used it to cut lead type for letterpress printing, the Hammond Glider sliding tablesaw (left) delivers great precision in a small space; the top of this 1960's version measures 22 in. by 21 in. McBride mounted her grinders and polishers in a corner of the shop (above) to segregate their grit and fillings from other work areas.



## Smart, simple storage

**Scraps on the move.** McBride's scrap bin, equipped with heavy-duty wheels, is usually tucked under the side table of her tablesaw, but it glides smoothly to wherever she's working.

drive (VFD), which provides electronic phase conversion. The Robinson's massive bulk all but eliminates vibration, the bane of all hand and power tools. I set the saw on riser blocks so a workpiece being sawn rides from the Robinson's table right over another vintage machine, a Hammond Glider tablesaw.

The Hammond Glider, an object of devotion among certain precision-loving woodworkers, was originally used by printers to cut metal letterpress typeface blocks. The Glider's sliding table has a 90° miter fence, or "finger assembly," that cannot be removed and a blade that does not tilt, making the saw's limitations its strong point. The deadly accurate miter fence and its micro-adjust, indexed stop are perfect for fine joinery work. In addition, the saw's cam clamp gives the Glider the ability to cut the very tiniest workpieces. Although the saw has no dust collection, its closed body and airflow force sawdust into the rolling "chip buggy" bin (complete with a handle) housed in the base of the saw. The Glider's Art Deco lines, its heft, and the quality of its materials and workmanship set it light years ahead of (or perhaps I should say behind) today's machinery.

My grinders and polishers hang on the wall in one corner of the workshop, placed there to keep metal filings well away from benches and tools. This concentrated setup operates



**One concrete concept.** Sonotubes, the inexpensive cardboard cylinders used for pouring cast concrete columns, provide the perfect way to utilize odd-shaped empty spaces for storage of long, thin scraps and other items. Using tie straps, McBride hangs Sonotubes between the rafters, under her outfeed table, and elsewhere.





## No wasted space

**A drawer on the floor.** To take advantage of dead space beneath the stairs, McBride built a drawer to fit. She tacked strips of slippery UHMW plastic to the bottom, which makes it easy enough to drag in and out.



**How to file finishes.** As every woodworker knows, finishes propagate like bunnies. McBride finds that a lateral three-drawer office file cabinet serves beautifully as storage for a huge population of jars, cans, and bottles.

successfully by placing the polishers with the finest grits above the coarser ones, as coarse grit on a fine polishing wheel would be a nightmare. I can stand or sit to use the sharpening grinder. Mounted 27 in. off the floor, it has a 6-in. wheel for hollow grinding and an 8-in. wheel to sharpen turning tools.

### Savvy storage

My log workshop is 1,000 square feet, spread over two floors, but I still treat it like a boat and use every inch of storage space possible. To create storage space overhead, I hang durable and inexpensive cardboard Sonotubes (forms for pouring cylindrical concrete columns) between the rafters. For long skinny items that get regular use, like drawing paper or vacuum-pressing bags and mesh, I'll mount Sonotubes under the overhang of a table or bench.

Not wanting to waste the dead space under the first few treads of the shop staircase, I fashioned a sliding drawer to fit there. The drawer is a simple plywood box with UHMW plastic runners screwed to its underside. The runners allow me to slide it out from under the stairs. The same system could suit other confined floor-level spaces, such as under a workbench.

Pound for pound, my most efficient storage system is a three-drawer lateral filing cabinet that I use to house finishing supplies. The full-extension drawers not only store a massive amount of material but also allow me to see their entire contents at once. To differentiate finishing containers with similar-looking lids, I label the tops with a marker.

I garnered many shop storage tips during my internship with



**Cluster your clamps.** Applying an idea she gleaned while apprenticing with fellow Ontarian Michael Fortune, McBride built racks that allow her to stack clamps and arrange them in dense groupings.

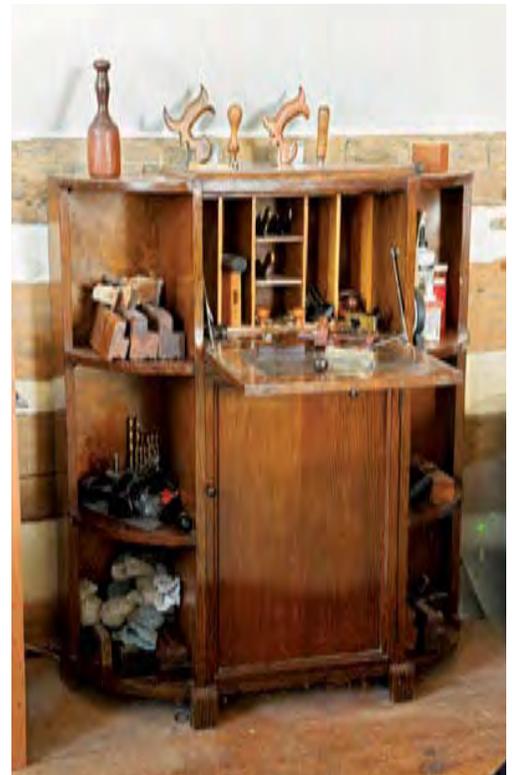


**Walk upstairs into a haven for hand tools.** McBride's workbench and most of her carefully selected hand tools are found on the shop's airy second floor. Into the risers of the stair she carved a quote from the writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."



## Upstairs hand-tool shop

**A new function for old furniture.** A painted sewing table from a garment factory provides a generous surface for drawing or reading plans. And a vintage dropfront desk with pigeon holes and flanking shelves, purchased for \$50, made an instant hand-tool cabinet.





## SUDDENLY, A SPRAY BOOTH



**Parachute panels.** Pulling a sheet of parachute fabric from a length of PVC central vacuum tubing, where it is rolled for storage, McBride unfurls one wall of her temporary spray booth. Once it's pulled fully open, the fabric wall is held in place with bungee cords stretched to tie-off points.



**The fan is handy.** Mounted on a bracket that is hinged to the ceiling, the fan is fastened overhead most of the time but lowered down into the window when needed.



**All ready to spin and spray.** The stand for McBride's rotating spray table is made with two threaded cast iron pipes, one nested inside the other. One attaches to the car rim at the floor, the other to the tabletop.

Michael Fortune, but none as handy as his stacking clamp storage system. Stacking clamps one on top of the other greatly increases the storage density and enables you to grab a fist full of clamps with just one hand.

The large, easily accessible rolling scrap bin I built, which lives beside my table saw, not only squirrels away potentially useful pieces of wood but can quickly be rolled anywhere to be filled while I work.

### Spray booth for a skydiver

Sometimes spatial constraints are a gift. I like to spray finishes but I didn't want to dedicate shop space to a permanent spray booth. Confronted with this dilemma, and with an odd configuration of walls around the dormer window on the second floor of the shop, I came up with a design for a collapsible spray booth with walls made from parachute fabric. Between uses, the fabric is rolled up and stored in wall-mounted PVC tubes. When it's time to spray, I simply unroll the fabric panels and secure them to tie-off points with bungee cords. I mounted an exhaust fan on a hinged bracket screwed to the ceiling. That way I can store the fan against the ceiling, but when it's needed I simply release a cord and swing the fan down into the window for use. Once the lights and fan are plugged in, I am ready to spray.

My log shop is a simple, rustic structure, and most of the tools inside were made when the aesthetic design of a bandsaw was as important as its working guts. Together, my shop and tools create more than just an inviting place to work. They guide my creative dance and instill in me a sense of adventure and delight. □

*Karen McBride, who makes furniture and sculpture in Dunrobin, Ont., Canada, also teaches and writes about her craft.*