Expand your workholding with a spoon mule

BY DAWSON MOORE

If you're into green woodworking, you've likely heard of a shaving horse. Mine, based on Tim Manney's split-rail design in *FWW* #262 ("Build a Thoroughbred Shaving Horse"), is invaluable, particularly when shaping long, skinny parts, like for chairs. However, as your workpieces get shorter and more sculptural, the shaving horse becomes less helpful because its clamping head is more likely to get in the way. Unfortunately, this precludes using it for a number of green woodworking projects, like spoons, cups, and bowls, that are a struggle to hold to begin with. Enter the spoon mule.

Photos: Barry NM Dima

USE

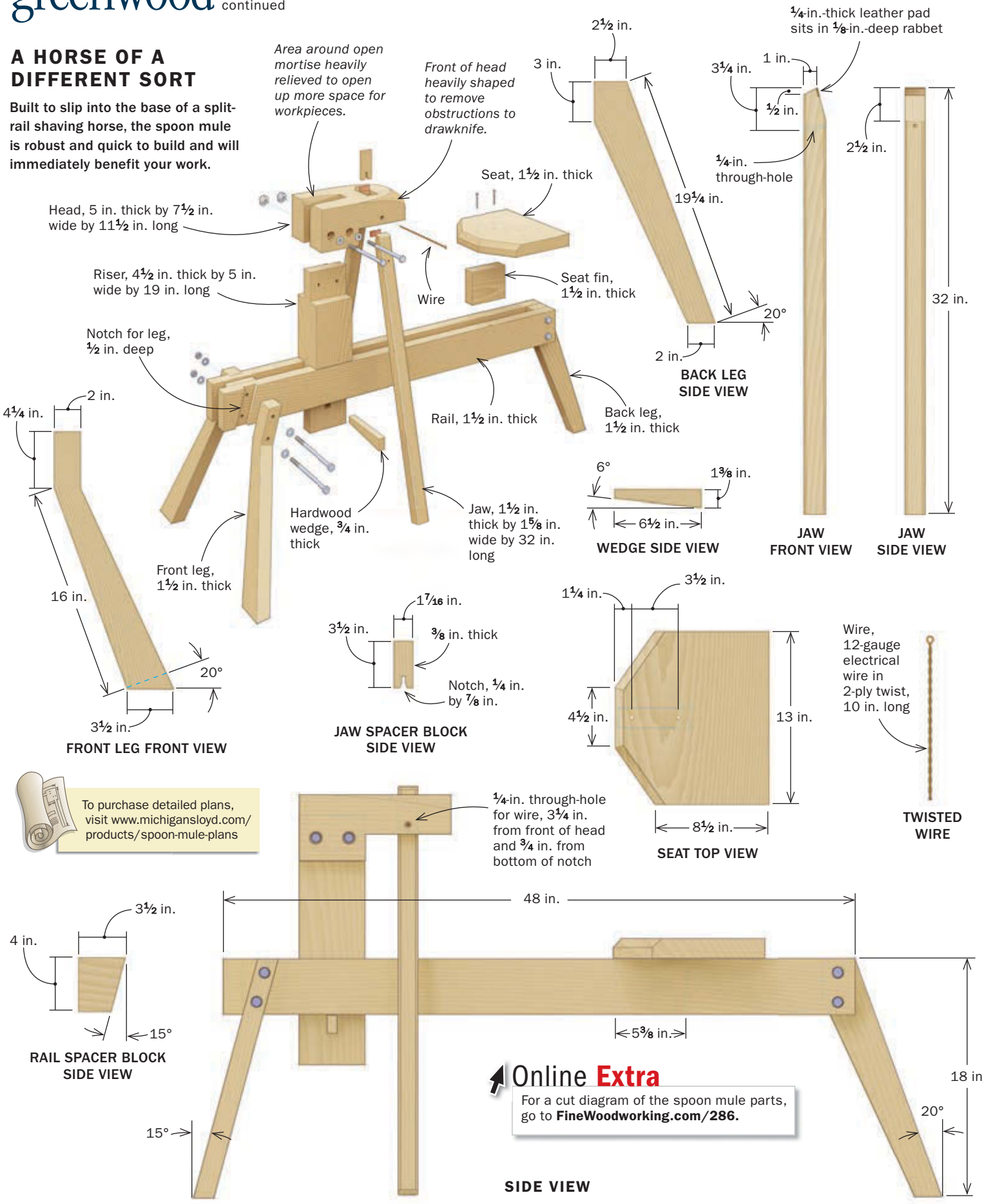
Spacer helps clamp thin parts. *Sometimes parts are too narrow to be clamped effectively. To close the space between the jaws, Moore adds a 3/8-in.-thick spacer that's notched to fit around the wire.*

Plenty of support. *The flat areas in front of and behind the jaws offer good support in a variety of circumstances. On this wooden cup, for example, the spoon mule can handle everything from the handle (left) to the backside of the bowl (above), a tricky place to work.*

Flip it around for better angles. *Don't hesitate to rotate the mule head. Moore does so here (left) so he can work on the front exterior of the cup's bowl while still supporting the piece from below (above).*

A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT SORT

Built to slip into the base of a split-rail shaving horse, the spoon mule is robust and quick to build and will immediately benefit your work.



Online Extra

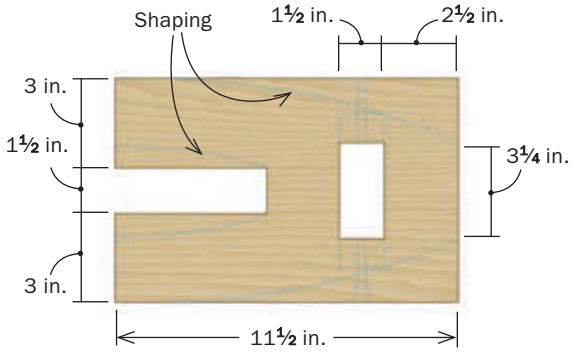
For a cut diagram of the spoon mule parts, go to **FineWoodworking.com/286.**

Drawings: Dan Thornton

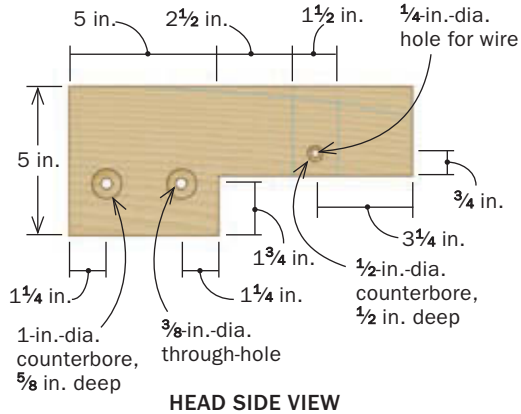
HEAD

Half of an angled mortise for the jaws. *To ease construction, Moore builds the head in three layers. Here, he's paring the end of what will become an angled mortise in the final assembly.*

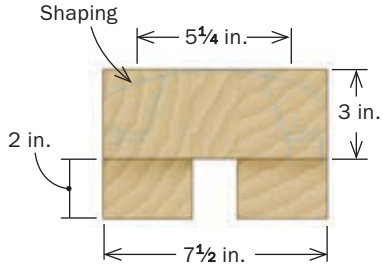
Drill for the bolts and wire. *After glue-up, the head gets bolted to the riser. Drill the holes for these, including the counterbores, now. Also drill for the wire that will hold up the jaws.*



HEAD TOP VIEW

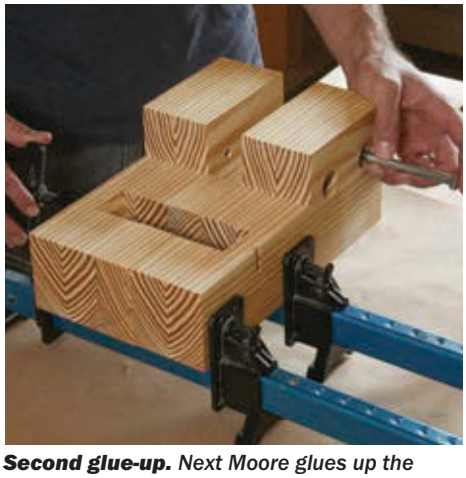


HEAD SIDE VIEW



HEAD REAR VIEW

First glue-up. *Moore laminates the head in stages to make the process easier. The first glue-up includes short blocks that help create the mortises for the jaws and the riser.*



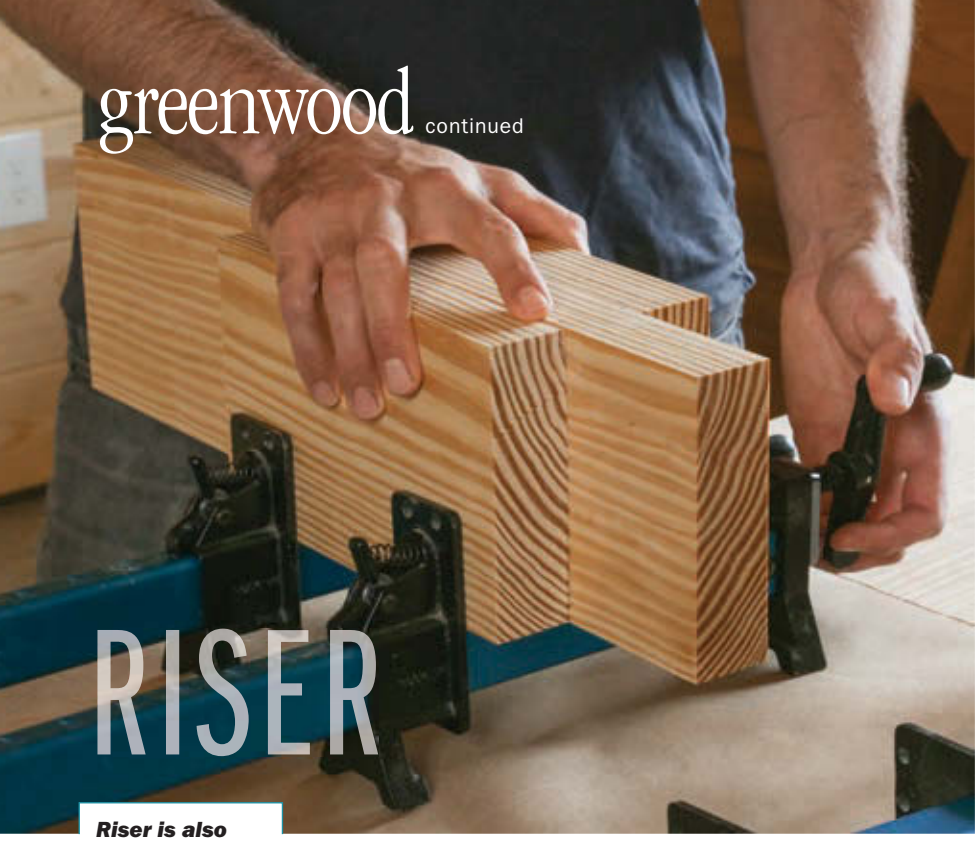
Second glue-up. *Next Moore glues up the whole head, taking care to be sure the parts stay aligned. He slides the bolts in place to help with this.*

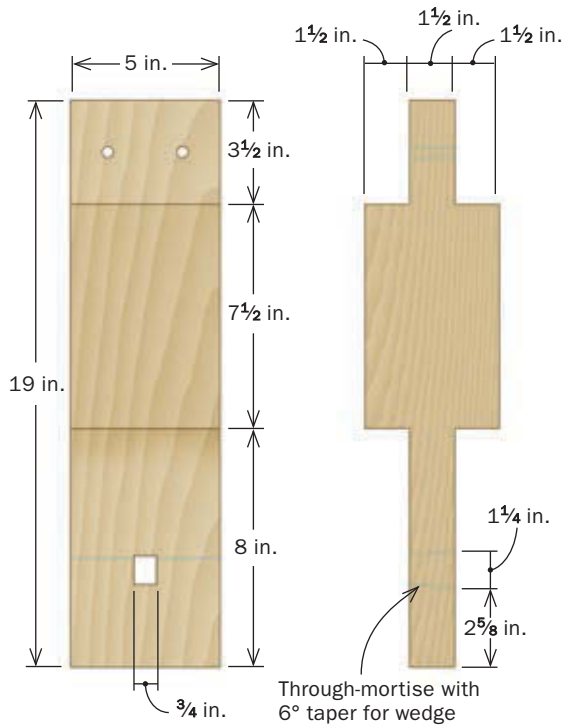
While a shaving horse clamps from above, a spoon mule clamps low and from the sides. You still use your feet to apply clamping pressure—using them to push out at the bottom of long, levered jaws—leaving two hands free for the drawknife and spokeshave, powerful and efficient tools. My mule, adapted from one built by fellow green woodworker Jarrod Dahl, has a removable head that fits into the base of a split-rail horse; the mule head can be swapped in and out for a typical head. For more details on making the horse, see Manney's article.

These jaws bite

The heart of the mule is its long pincer jaws, which, with just a bit of outward

RISER





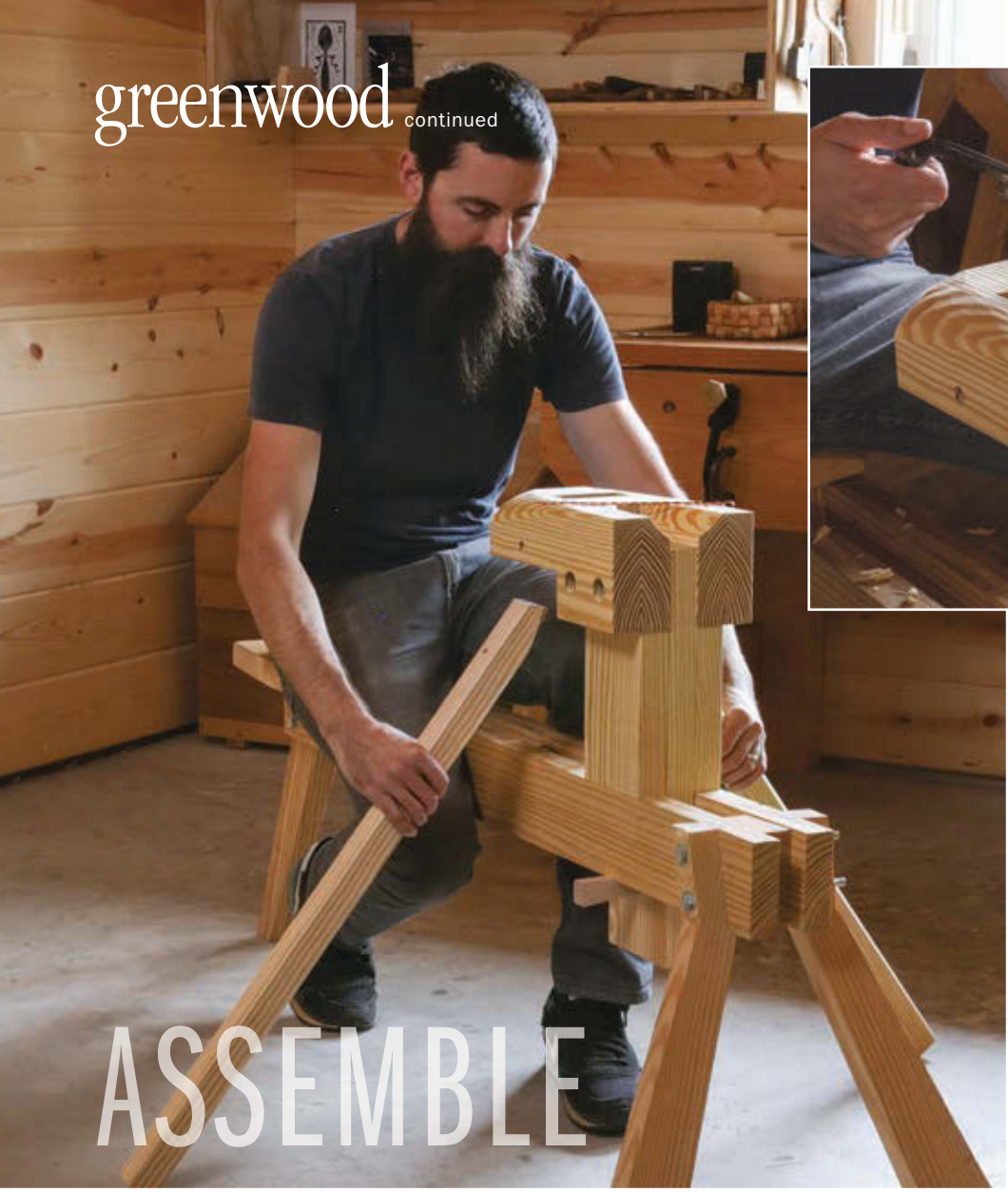
RISER SIDE VIEW

RISER FRONT VIEW

Riser is also a sandwich. *Laminating short and long pieces creates a large tenon with little work.*

Angled mortise for a locking wedge. *To lock the riser to the base, Moore cuts an angled mortise for a hardwood wedge.*

Drill clearance holes for bolts into riser tenon. *Moore clamps the head to the riser to use it as a drilling guide. He uses T-nuts on the other side of the head to receive the bolts. This creates a rock-solid joint that will withstand the constant pullings and pressures of workholding.*



Round over the front of the head. *Doing so gives plenty of clearance for your hands and tools when working (inset). Bring in the jaws afterward, making sure they have some vertical play.*

pressure, clamp narrow pieces tightly and quickly—great for sculptural pieces, where you're constantly moving the workpiece around to work a different edge, shape a facet, or feel a thickness. For maximum leverage, I run these jaws all the way to the floor. At rest, their top ends sit about ⅝ in. above the head.

Don't be shy to test different shapes at the top of the jaws; they're sized to be a 2x4 ripped in half so they're cheap and easy to experiment with. Different profiles will let you better clamp different projects. □

Dawson Moore is a green woodworker in Harbor Springs, Mich. See his work at michigansloyd.com.

Wire holds up the jaws. *Moore uses a twisted length of 12-gauge electrical wire. An eye loop at one end stops the wire at the bottom of the counterbore.*

Bury wire in dado on other side. *This keeps the metal wire out of the way so you don't hit it with your knuckles or a sharp drawknife. Don't overtension the wire. A little slack maintains that up-and-down play.*