

Shopmade Banding

Add striking geometric patterns to your furniture pieces

BY STEVE LATTA



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS YIELDS A VARIETY OF DESIGNS

Start by gluing up a multi-layered blank and slicing it into bricks (1). Assemble the bricks end to end to create a core (2), and then add layers of veneer to create the pack (3). Finally, slice the pack into banding strips (4).

There are many options when it comes to embellishing or decorating furniture. One of the best is banding. Banding is all around us and typically nested in architectural ornamentation. It can be used to break up a large surface, draw the eye to a specific detail, or help define the shape of a piece. While commonly found in Federal-style furniture, banding can be made in a variety of ways to suit both period and contemporary furniture. These little lines of ornament can make a striking addition to your piece.

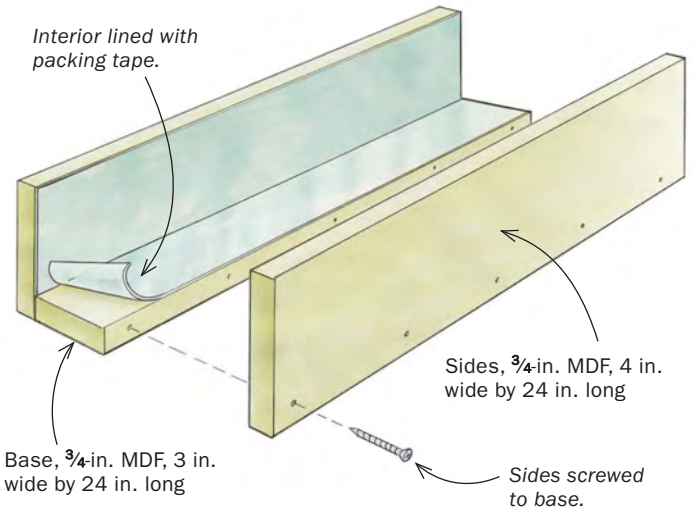
Each banding consists of a core: blocks and strips of wood in contrasting wood species, arranged in a geometric pattern. These are bordered on both sides by strips of veneer that bind the core together and add to the design. This assembly is called a “pack” or a “log” or any number of regional names. There are many commercial bandings available, but they typically use multiple layers of veneer instead of solid stock for the core, and consequently lack the crispness and clarity of solid-stock bandings. Luckily, bandings are relatively simple to make yourself. And the wider selection of veneer available today, plus the ability to mill solid-core stock and saw your own veneer out of a limitless range of species, opens up a much broader range of possibilities.

I’ll describe how to make a basic block banding, which is a common ornament and a great introduction to shopmade banding. This one has a core of maple and cherry, with a double band of sycamore and cherry veneers on the outside. These foundational steps will open the door to making a wide variety of bandings in your own shop.



Glue up a multi-layered core

This banding design begins with a core consisting of alternating layers of cherry and maple.



Make a simple banding press. The parts of the press are covered in packing tape to prevent glue from sticking. The sides are screwed to the base for easy removal if necessary.

Glue up the core.

Apply a thin layer of glue to both sides of each ply. A hard rubber roller is good for the task. The banding press (far right) keeps the parts aligned during gluing. A caul added to the top of the stack applies even pressure.

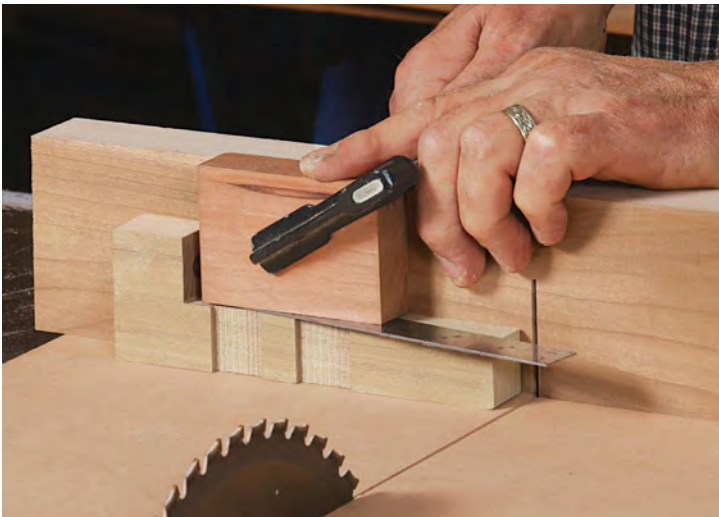


Clean up the edges of the core. Start by flattening and squaring one edge at the jointer. Rip the opposite edge parallel to the first at the table saw.

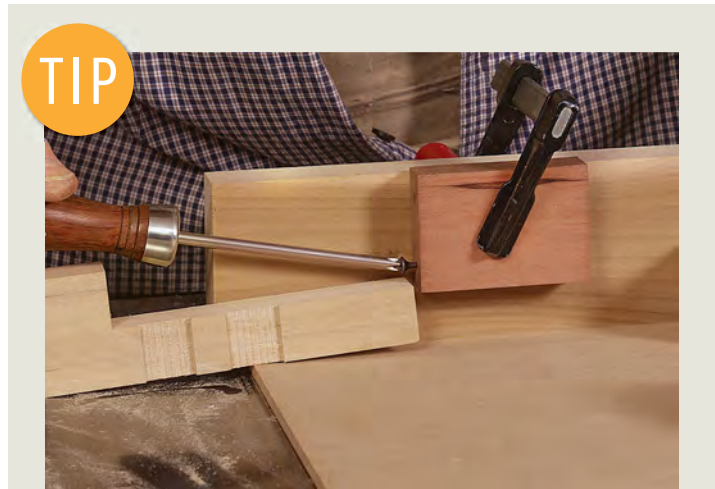


Crosscut the core into bricks

A sliding stop is the key to safe, accurate results.



A two-part L-stop. Place a rule along the top of the sliding L-piece when clamping the fixed block to the fence. This allows for clearance when using the stop.



TIP

A FLATHEAD SCREW FOR FINE ADJUSTMENTS

Instead of moving the reference block, use a screwdriver to dial in the thickness of your segments.

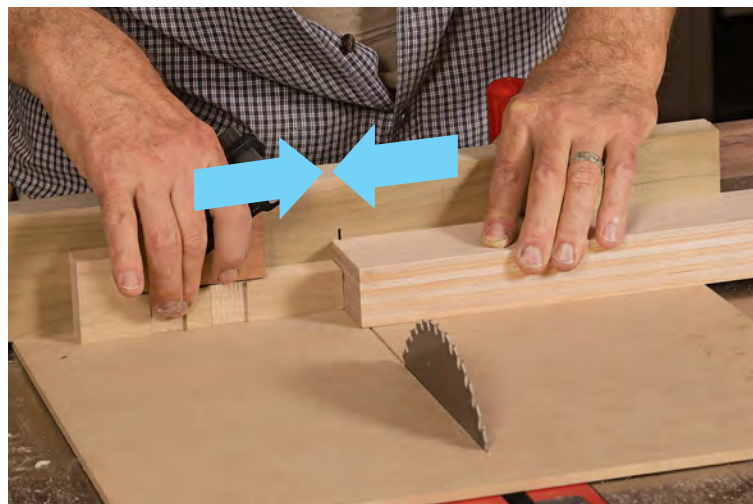
Make a banding press

A banding press is essential for laying up bandings. I have a U-channel made of MDF, lined with clear packing tape to prevent glue from sticking to the press. Alternatively, using melamine to create the U-channel eliminates the need for tape. The U-channel assembly is screwed together without glue, which allows you to break a pack loose from the press, if needed. Several clamping cauls, also made from MDF and lined with packing tape, are an essential part of the banding press. I place a couple above and below the U-channel to provide more clamping pressure. To distribute the pressure evenly over a broad area, I use heavier-duty clamps with larger pads. I use regular, reliable yellow glue applied with a rubber roller to glue up banding assemblies. This leaves enough glue and the film is even.

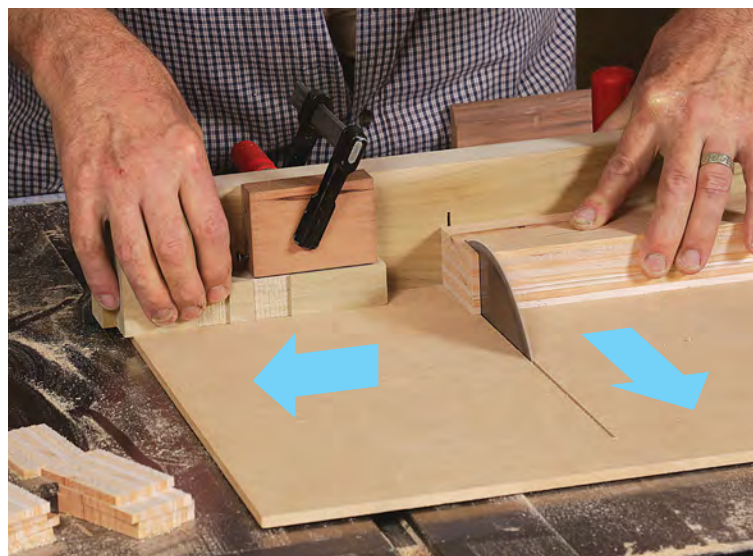
Laminate the core stock

The first step is creating the core stock. Begin by milling up eight pieces, $\frac{3}{16}$ in. thick by 3 in. wide by 24 in. long, four in maple and four in cherry. Mill them at the same time so that their thicknesses are identical.

Apply a thin film of glue to each face of the cherry and maple, stack them together by alternating species, and place the assembly into the banding press. Place a couple of cauls on top of the pack, and



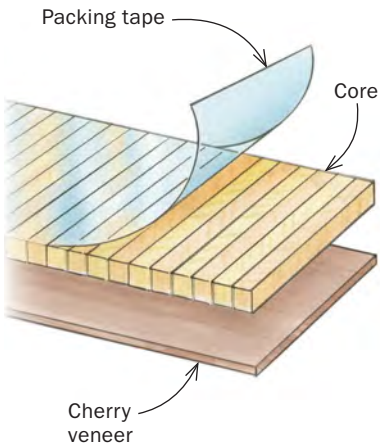
L-stop slides for safe cuts. Butt the L-stop against the fixed block, and then position the stock against the L-stop (left). To make the cut, slide the L-stop away from the stock. This prevents the offcut from getting trapped between the blade and the stop (lower left).



Make a pack

Bricks laid side by side form a solid core which is then faced with layers of veneer.

1. GLUE THE CORE AND ADD ONE BORDER



Tape the segments together. Clamp a straightedge to your bench and assemble the segments against a stop. Compress and clamp a second stop before applying packing tape to its face.



Glue the edges together. Flip the assembly over and apply a bead of glue in between each brick. Close each joint as you work from one end to the other.



apply clamps starting from the middle and working outward. This prevents pockets of air from being trapped in the glue-up and directs squeeze-out.

After 45 minutes, remove the pack from the press and scrape off excess glue. Then, reclamp the pack outside of the press so air can speed up the curing process. Once the glue is completely dry, get one edge flat. This depends entirely on tool preference, but I use my jointer with a carbide cutterhead. Once the edge is flat, rip the core to maximum width on the table saw.

Crosscutting segments

Using a crosscut sled on my table saw, I cut the segments to length. I use a $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-



Glue the first layer of veneer. Apply glue to the face of the assembly and one layer of cherry veneer. Secure veneer with tape before placing the entire assembly into the banding press.



kerf blade to yield more material, and a sliding stop block to safely cut the segments. The stop block butts to a reference block and slides away prior to cutting, allowing the segment to fall freely instead of getting pinched between the blade and stop block.

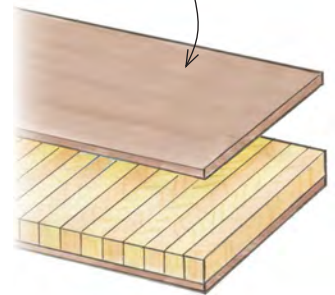
Each segment, laid on edge, is 1½ in. long, and I can get four of these pieces per inch by cutting them to 3/16 in. A standard banding length is 36 in., which means I need 6 in. of material to yield one strip. From my original 24-in.-long pack, I yield about two dozen banding strips at the end.

To glue up the segments and veneers, I clamp a long straightedge on my bench



2. ADD A SECOND LAYER OF VENEER

Add cherry veneer on opposite face.



Remove the tape. Take the assembly out of the banding press and remove the clear packing tape to expose the next face for veneer.



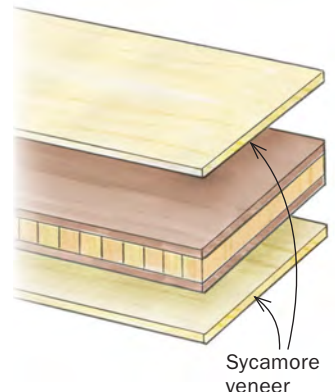
Add a second layer of veneer. Using your rubber roller, apply glue to the face and add the second layer of cherry veneer. Secure it again with tape and place it back in the banding press.

and secure a piece of stock approximately 1/8 in. by 3 in. at one end to serve as a stop. Butt each segment, side by side, against this piece and tight against the bar. Once the segments are in place, clamp another stop block to compress the pieces. Apply a piece of clear packing tape to the surface of the stop block, and press down to ensure good contact. Remove the stops and flip the assembly over.

With a glue syringe, place a bead of yellow glue between each segment. Lay the assembly back down on the bench, and use a rubber roller to apply a thin film of glue to the face without tape and to one strip of cherry veneer. Apply the veneer to the assembly with glue face-to-face, and secure with painter's tape to keep the veneer from



3. ADD A SECOND LAYER TO EACH FACE



The last two veneers are applied at the same time. After the pack has spent 45 minutes in the press, you can glue the last two layers of sycamore veneer.

Rip the banding strips

A simple setup allows you to safely rip banding strips on the table saw.

A push stick for thin stock. Use your bandsaw to notch a 20-in.-long piece of $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. MDF. This will allow you to apply pressure along the length of the stock for safe, accurate ripping.



Brad nail acts as a splitter. The $\frac{1}{16}$ -in. blade is too narrow to use with the saw's riving knife. Instead, the author drives a brad nail into his throat plate and clips off the head to act as a splitter.



Ready for safe ripping. The long push stick guides the stock and prevents it from lifting and chattering during the cut. The splitter prevents the stock from coming away from the fence and into the blade after the cut.

sliding. Running the tape at an angle and folding a pull tab onto each end makes removal easier. Place the assembly in the banding press and clamp it up.

After about 45 minutes, remove the assembly from the press and remove excess glue. Peel away the painter's tape and the clear packing tape. Use a card scraper to remove pooled glue and level the surface. Glue the second layer of cherry veneer to the opposite face and apply painter's tape in the same manner. Place the assembly back into the press for another 45 minutes.

After taking the entire assembly from the press and removing the tape, you can add both layers of sycamore veneer to the outsides. Use the painter's tape again, for alignment. This



TIP

ADD A WASTE PIECE FOR FINAL RIPS

To maximize the amount of strips you get from each pack, glue on a waste block when the pack becomes too narrow to rip safely.

assembly goes into the press for a third time. After an hour, remove the assembly and apply caul to both sides and reclamp, allowing air to speed up the gluing process. This needs to be clamped at least overnight to ensure it is fully dry, and to prevent twisting and cupping.

Cutting the banding strips

Once the pack is fully cured, joint one edge. Set up the same $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-kerf blade on the table saw, with a zero-clearance insert made of plywood. I put a small brad with the head removed just behind the blade to serve as a splitter. This nail must be lower than the blade.

The push stick is very important for this process. I make mine from a strip of $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. to $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. MDF that is about 3 in. wide and just a little bit shorter than the banding pack. With a plywood push stick, the tab left from the kerf will bend and be cut away on the second pass. MDF remains stable and allows you to make multiple cuts with support behind the strip.

In order to maximize the amount of strips and keep the process safe, I glue a piece of stock about 2 in. wide and the same length and thickness of the pack to one edge of the core. With the fence set at $\frac{1}{16}$ in. or a little less, place the push stick on top of the pack and tight to the fence. Have the blade set about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. above the banding. Make the cut with the push stick traveling right above the blade. Using this method, anticipate about eight to nine strips per inch. □

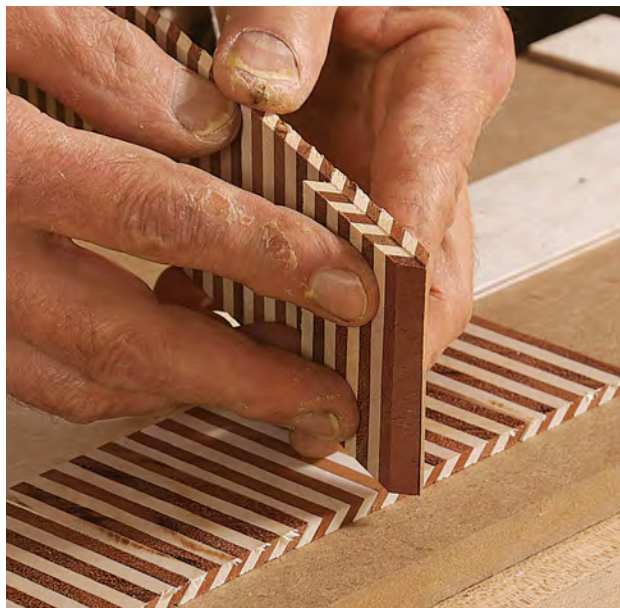
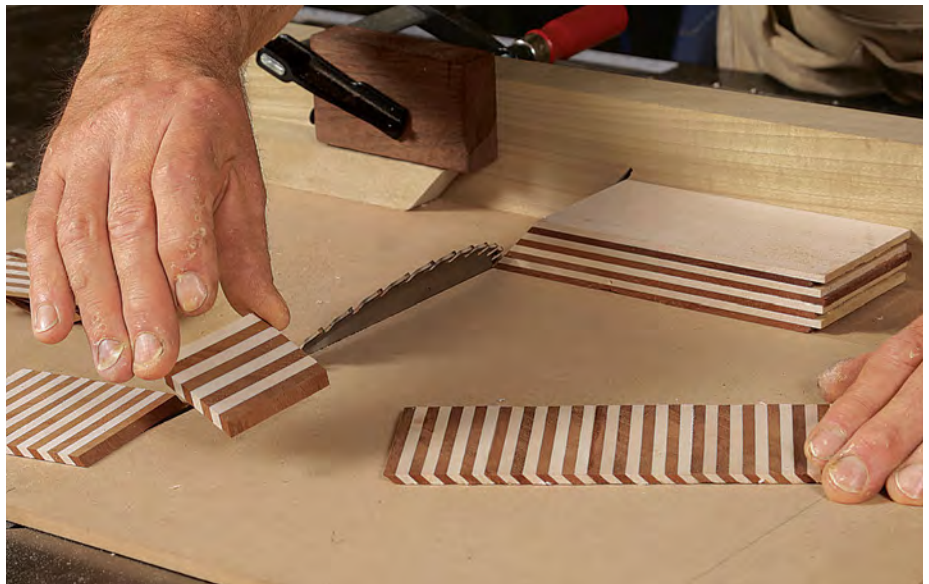
Contributing editor Steve Latta teaches woodworking at Thaddeus Stevens College in Lancaster, Pa.

Tilt the blade for a new design

The same basic technique can be used to create a variety of banding patterns.



Angled crosscuts. A mitered L-stop allows the bricks to be cut at 45°. This opens up the possibilities of different patterns.



Laying up bricks. Side by side, the 45° pattern makes a beautiful herringbone pattern (far left). Placing veneer in between the bricks makes up a traditional arrowhead pattern (left).