

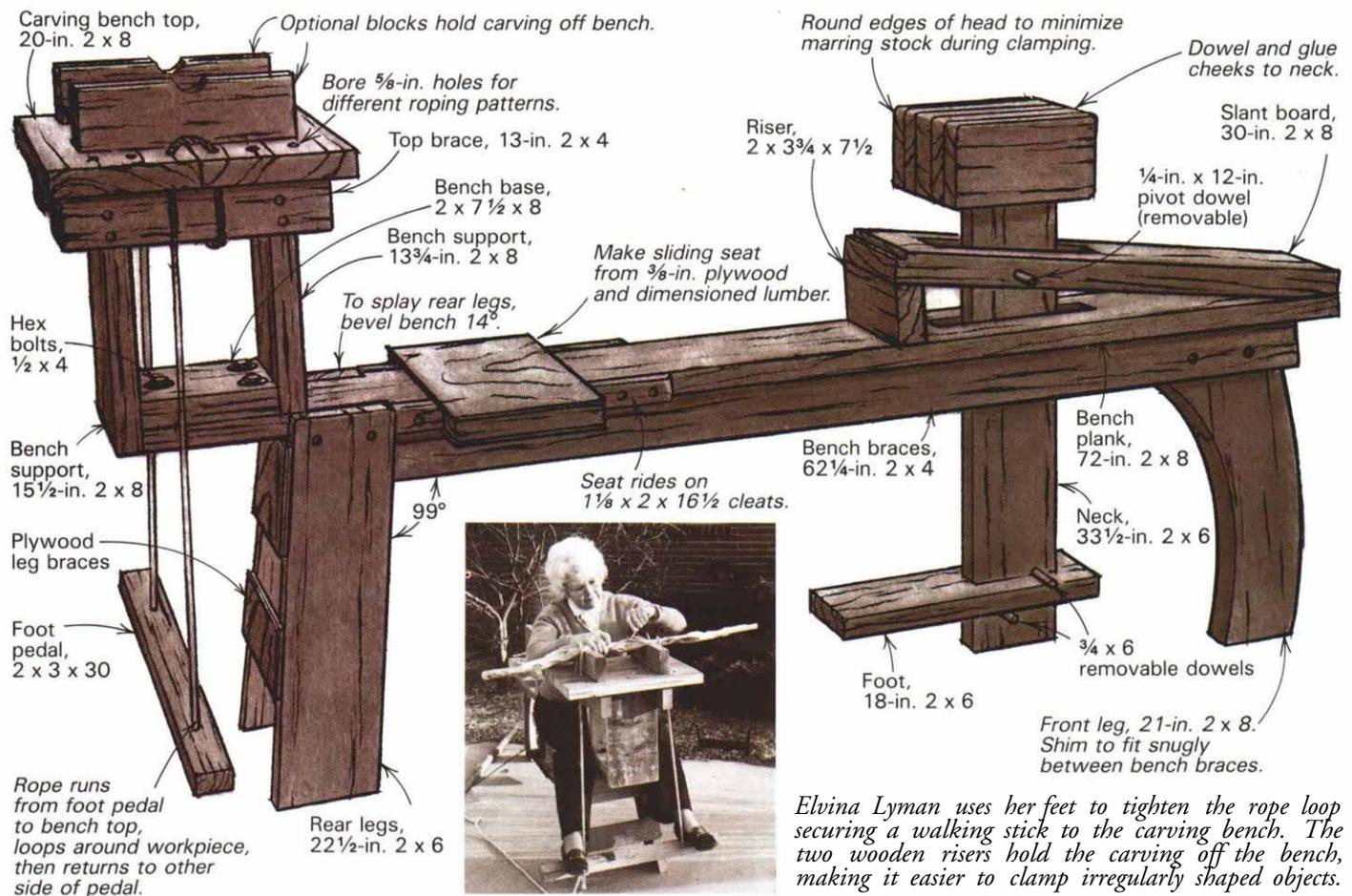
Carving Benches

Woodcarving benches are as idiosyncratic as the carvers who use them. Carvers who work on pieces that are small enough to be handheld don't need much more than a table to hold their tools. Relief panel carvers need solid, flat surfaces to anchor their work. Sculptors who work in-the-round not only need to secure their work, but must also be able to rotate the piece, or at least have space to work around it as they carve. And, depending on the person's height and the type of work being done, each carver tends to feel most comfortable working on pieces held at a certain angle or height.

It's no wonder that few carvers are satisfied with commercially available benches, and either customize their store-bought models or start from scratch and build specialized benches and clamping systems to solve their individual problems. Here are two such solutions—a heavy-duty sculptor's bench, which would also be good for many cabinetmaking operations, and a versatile shaving horse that combines a traditional design with a Chinese carving bench.

A carving/shaving bench

by E.D. Lyman



Elvina Lyman uses her feet to tighten the rope loop securing a walking stick to the carving bench. The two wooden risers hold the carving off the bench, making it easier to clamp irregularly shaped objects.

As a hobby, I make walking sticks from diamond willow and sumac. I needed a way to hold the stock securely while I shape it with a drawknife, as well as a place to carve the shaped sticks. To save space, and concentrate the messiest parts of my hobby in a single spot, I decided to build a bench combining the powerful clamping and quick release capabilities of two traditional designs—a dumbhead shaving horse and a Chinese carving bench.

In addition to creating a functional, attractive bench, I found the extra weight of the combination bench makes each of the devices more stable. I made the whole thing from scrap: oak for the head,

neck and foot; pine for the rest of the horse and the carving bench. The head end of the horse is about 2 in. higher than the rear, which makes for easier, nearly horizontal shaving. The sliding seat provides great comfort, and I sometimes mount on a tractor seat for long stints. I also added more holes on the carving bench, so I could vary the roping patterns, and two notched risers, 2x4s with dowels that fit into the bench holes, to raise the work off the bench surface and give me more room for carving. □

E.D. Lyman is a physician and woodworker in Lincoln, Neb.



Cloutier secures the carving with a carvers' screw, above, then tips the bench, raising the piece to a comfortable work height, below.

Articulated sculptor's bench

by Richard Starr

The Canadian town of St. Jean Port Joli is home to at least 100 professional carvers. One of the most accomplished is Pierre Cloutier, whose work appears in numerous big-city galleries under the name Pier Clout.

Cloutier works both in-the-round and in bas-relief. He specializes in life-size human forms and is widely recognized for his extraordinary ability to portray living flesh. His studio is clean, roomy and efficient. Huge windows provide west light that can be softened with white drapes. Storage cabinets are hidden behind large white panels. His tool rack, which is adjustable in height, can be moved anywhere in the room, as can his solid and versatile bench.

The bench's heavy T-shaped base is fastened with a threaded rod to one of the several keyed sockets that are cast in the shop's concrete floor. Once the base is attached to the socket, the bench can be rotated a full 360°, to take advantage of the natural lighting. Fitting over the base unit are two slotted tabs, which are, in turn, mortised into the benchtop,

A large Acme-thread vise screw pulls the tabs tightly against the base of the bench, and allows Cloutier to adjust the angle and height of his work surface. Cloutier grinds slight hollows on the inside surfaces of the tabs, so they'll grip the base better when the screw is tightened. Work can be held on the bench with a carvers' screw or bench dogs, or be clamped directly in the Record vise mounted at the end of the benchtop. □

Richard Starr teaches woodworking at Richmond Middle School in Hanover, N.H., and is the author of the book Woodworking with Kids (The Taunton Press, 1982).

