

Tapers, veneer,  
and inlay give this  
table style to spare

BY STEVE LATTA

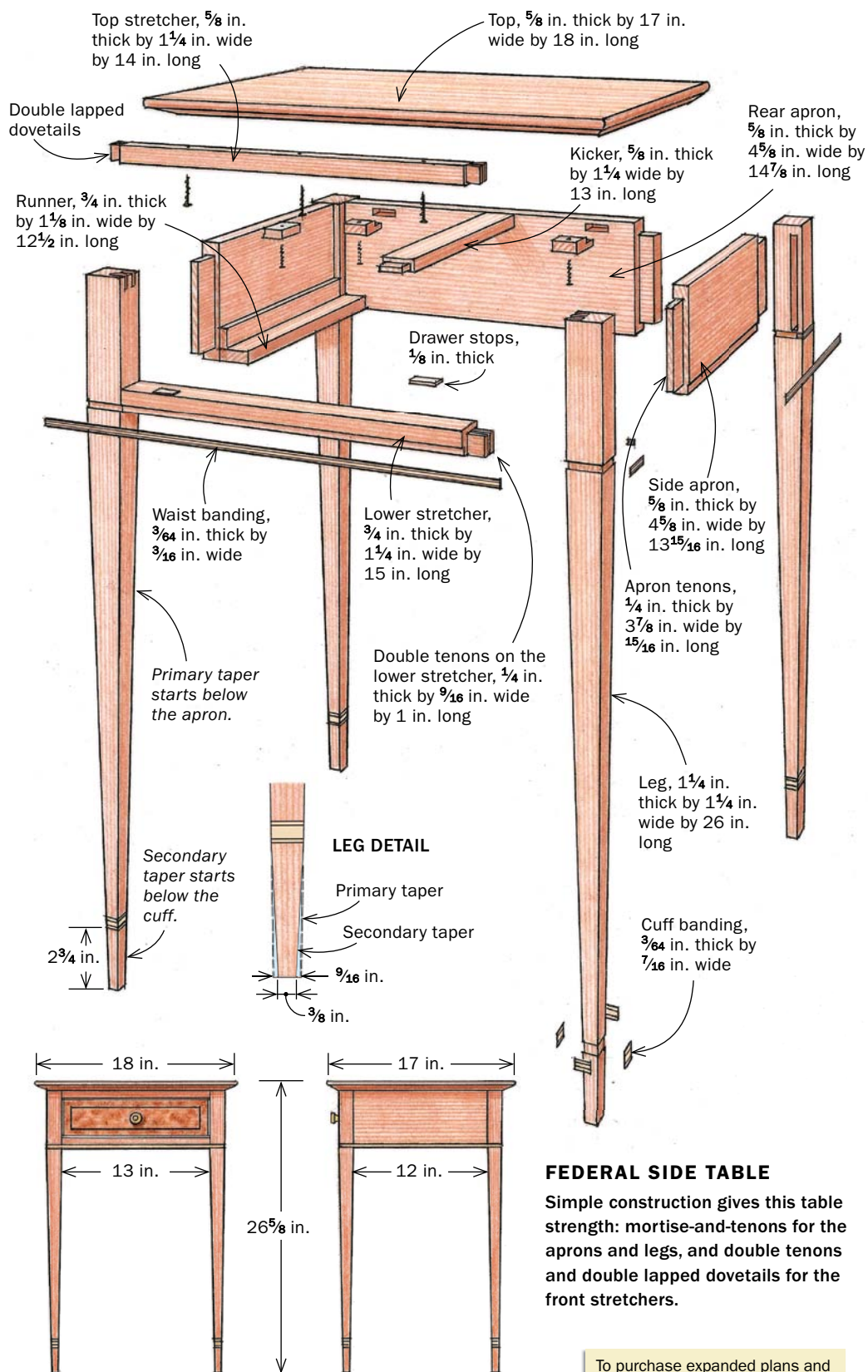
# Federal Details Transform a Simple Table

Since I began building period furniture more than 30 years ago, I've developed an affinity for the Federal style. The neoclassical lines and detailing in the furniture really speak to me.

A Federal piece doesn't have to be big or complicated to stand out. Combining details in a smart way can enliven even the simplest form. Take this table, for instance. Stripped of the banding on the legs and waist, and the stringing and cock beading on the drawer, the piece is plain and unassuming. But add those details into the mix and the table goes from simple to formal, drawing attention from every angle.

The anatomy of the table is straightforward, so this article is going to focus more on adding the Federal details than on the construction of the piece. I'll tell you how to make the double-tapered legs, and on p. 67, I'll demystify the process of making and inlaying banding and stringing. Then, in the Master Class on p. 82, I'll demonstrate how to use the traditional technique of hammer veneering to add walnut burl





## FEDERAL SIDE TABLE

Simple construction gives this table strength: mortise-and-tenons for the aprons and legs, and double tenons and double lapped dovetails for the front stretchers.



### VIDEO WORKSHOP

Watch Latta build this table from start to finish in a members-only video at [FineWoodworking.com/extras](http://FineWoodworking.com/extras).

To purchase expanded plans and a complete cutlist for this table and other projects, go to [FineWoodworking.com/PlanStore](http://FineWoodworking.com/PlanStore).



# Cuff banding

## CLEAR A PATH FOR THE CUFF



**Set the bevel gauge.** Pick up the leg's taper angle by pressing the bevel gauge against the bottom and side of the leg, then use it to lay out the cuff banding.



**Mark the first line.** Measure  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in. from the bottom of the leg, then use the bevel gauge and knife to mark a line around all four sides.



**The banding sets the width.** Use a piece of banding to space the bevel gauge from the first line, then knife the second line.

veneer to the drawer front, and cock beading to the edges of the drawer. Let's start with the leg tapers.

### Tapers and banding make boring legs more exciting

The legs have a double taper on all four sides. The primary taper starts below the apron, and the secondary taper starts below the cuff banding. After mortising the legs, you'll taper them in two steps. Cut the primary taper using a tapering jig on the tablesaw before installing the cuff banding. You'll cut the secondary taper later, after the cuff banding is glued in (for more on the tapering

jig and my method for using it, see "Perfect Tapers on the Table-saw," *FWW* #229).

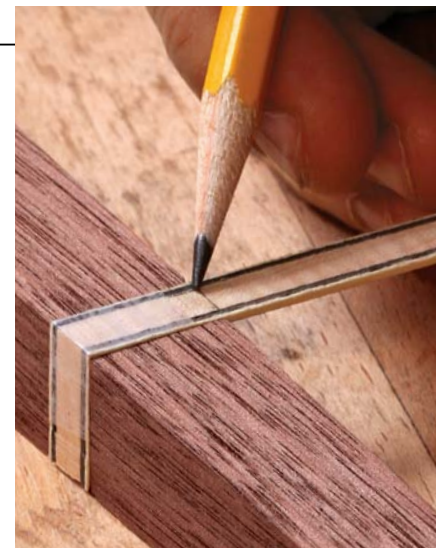
The cuff banding is mitered at the corners and recessed into dados on all four sides of each leg. First lay out and cut the dados. The primary taper puts the leg sides a few degrees off parallel, so use a sliding bevel gauge for the layout. Set the gauge by registering it against the bottom and side of the leg and locking in that angle. Mark the lower edge of the cuff first. Measure  $2\frac{3}{4}$  in. from the bottom with a combination square, and then use the bevel gauge to knife a line all the way around the leg at that height.

## MITER AND INSTALL THE PIECES

**Miter the banding.** Latta uses a plane blade and a  $45^\circ$  block to miter the banding at the corners. He chops the piece to rough length with the banding lying flat, then stands it on edge to slice the miter.



**Tape the corners together.** Cut the first side to length, then line it up against a straightedge with the next piece, and tape the miters together.



**Work your way around the leg.** Dry-fit the taped banding in the dado and mark the next joint's location, then miter the next corner.





**Start the dado with a chisel.** Establish shoulders next to the scribe lines by removing a chip from each side (left), then chop up the waste in between and remove most of it to create a dado (right).



**Finish it with a router plane.** After setting the blade depth by placing cuff banding under the base, clean up the bottom of the dado.

Next, mark the upper edge of the dado. Set the tip of the marking knife in the lower scribe line and use a piece of banding as a spacer to position the bevel gauge for the second cut. Remove the banding and knife the second line next to the bevel gauge. Chisel out the waste and use a small router plane to get the bottom of the dado flat, making it slightly shallower than the banding's thickness.

Miter the cuff bandings with a sharp plane blade and an angle block, using a slicing motion to get clean cuts. Cut the miters at 45° and tape the outside faces together end to end. Fit the front side first, and work toward the back, where any gaps in the last

corner won't show. After fitting all four sides, put glue in the dado and on the banding and tape the banding in place. Once the glue is dry, remove the tape and sand the banding flush using a sanding block and P180-grit paper.

Mark lines for the secondary taper on the bottom of the leg instead of the face. Cut it by working from just below the cuff toward the line with a block plane, and finish smoothing it with the sanding block. To keep the bottom corners of the feet from chipping during use, give them a small chamfer with the sanding block.



**Glue it in.** Put yellow glue in the groove and on the banding, making sure to get some in each miter. Then stick it in the dado.



**Tape holds it tight.** Latta holds the joints together and uses clear tape instead of clamps to keep the banding in place until it's dry.



**Finish off the foot.** After the glue dries, sand the banding flush, then shape the secondary taper with a block plane.



# Waist banding

## MAKE WAY FOR THE BANDING



### Waist banding adds detail in the middle

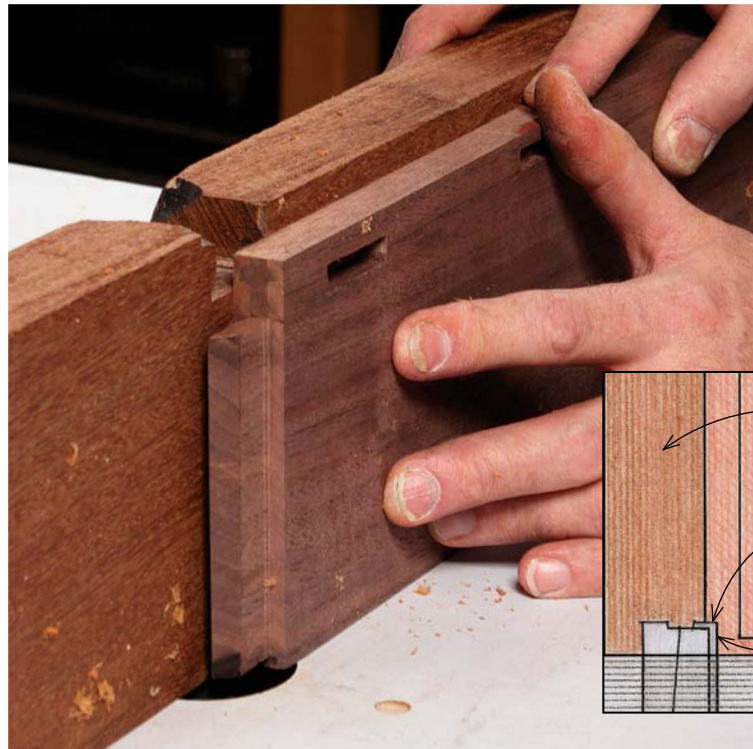
The narrow waist banding at the bottom of the apron runs around all four sides of the table, including the legs. The banding is added to each part individually, so it's critical to install it carefully so that each part lines up when you glue up the base.

Start by rabbeting the lower front edge of each apron and the lower drawer stretcher. Mark the width of the rabbet and protect against tearout by scoring a line with a marking gauge set to the banding's width. Cut the rabbet with a straight bit at the router table, making it a little shallower than the banding thickness.

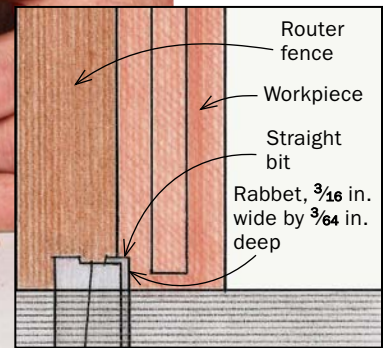
Rough-cut the apron bandings to length and use clear tape to secure them in their rabbets. Leave the bottom edge of the banding unconnected; this allows you to fold the banding back like a hinge and apply glue to the rabbet. Then fold the banding back into place and put on the clamps.

Make a specialized glue caul for the banding by cutting a groove down the edge of a piece of wood that's  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick by 1 in. wide. Clamp the caul in place with the groove facing the workpiece, so that one half presses down on the banding (see drawing, opposite). When the banding dries, trim the ends flush with a chisel and use a card scraper and sanding block to flush up the front.

The two rear legs are next. Dry-fit the base with the tops of the legs and aprons flush. Use a sharp pencil to mark the rabbet location on the legs, then take them apart and use a combination square and a marking knife to transfer the lines to the faces of the



**Route the rabbet first.** To eliminate tearout, score a line on the face of the apron with a marking gauge.



**Mark the waist banding on the legs.** The waist banding wraps around the aprons and legs at the same height. To ensure that each part meets perfectly, dry-fit the aprons to the legs before transferring the rabbet location to the legs. Then cut the dadoes for the waist banding using the same technique as for the cuff banding.

legs. Using a piece of banding as a spacer, mark the second line above the first. Remove the waste from the dadoes and miter the banding as you did the cuff banding, but stopping the banding at each mortise. Then add glue and tape it in place.

The waist banding on the front is slightly different from the rest of the table. Because the legs are flush with the stretchers, one long piece of banding runs all the way across, and the front gets glued up before the banding is added. First dry-fit the stretchers and front legs together and mark the lower stretcher's rabbet on the legs. Cut the dadoes, then glue together the legs and stretchers,



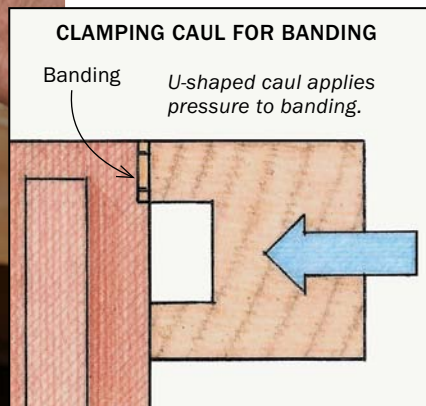
## APRON



**Get the waist in place.** Cut the waist banding slightly long, then tape it across the front to keep it tightly in the rabbet.



**Fold back the banding to put on the glue.** The tape acts like a hinge, allowing the banding to fold open for the glue (left), then fold right back into place for a perfect fit. After adding the glue, Latta puts on the clamps with a special U-shaped caul that directs the pressure to the banding (below).



## LEG

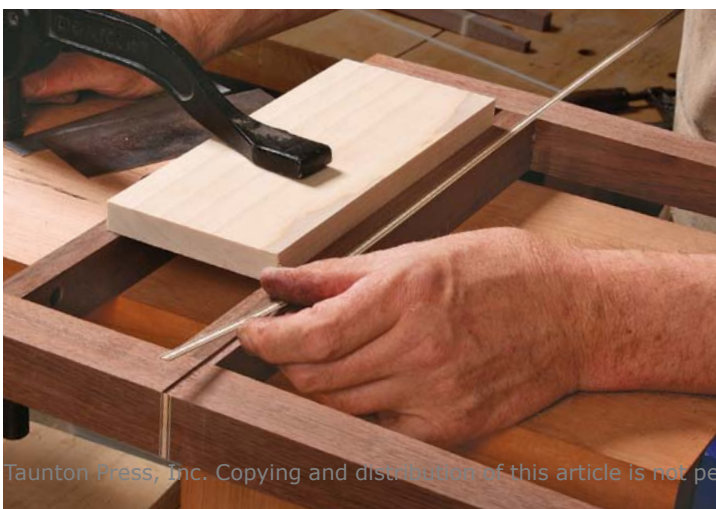


**Install the waist banding on the back legs.** The banding is mitered around three corners of the back legs. It won't be visible inside the frame, so it stops at the mortises.



## FRONT

**Glue-up comes first.** Since the stretchers are flush with the front of the legs, cut the banding dados in the legs and glue the front together before you install the banding.



**Banding goes all the way across the front.** With the dados and rabbet aligned and the front glued together, inlay one long piece of banding across the front, mitering the corners like before.



# Drawer stringing



making sure the dadoes and rabbet line up exactly. When the glue is dry, fit the banding and glue it in.

## Holly stringing makes the drawer front pop

String inlay is great for visually breaking up the big, flat surfaces on furniture. Here, the stringing brings extra attention to the burl veneer of the drawer front. The stringing is inlaid after the front is veneered, cut to size, and dovetailed, but before the cock beading is added. To lay it out, measure  $\frac{11}{16}$  in. from the edges with a combination square and mark for the stringing using a white pencil. Cut the grooves with a cutting gauge-style inlay tool, being careful not to cut beyond the corners. Use a chisel to trim the sides of the groove in each corner. You can make a tiny tool for cleaning the bottom of the grooves by customizing a hobby knife. Grind away the sharp edge, and create a standard chisel edge at the very tip.

Cut strips of holly veneer using a slicing board and a cutting-gauge style inlay tool. Thickness the strips, checking the fit as you go. I use an inlay tool and thickening tool from Lie-Nielsen. Cut the stringing to length, miter the ends with a chisel, and fit the pieces to the grooves. Use yellow glue—a plastic syringe helps get it in the grooves—and glue in the long sides first. Then scrape off the squeeze-out. Plane the stringing nearly flush, then glue in the short pieces. Once the glue has set, flush the corners of the stringing with a chisel and plane and sand the rest flush. Pre-finish the drawer front with shellac to keep it clean and protect against glue contamination in the final steps.

To add the veneer and cock beading to the drawer and wrap up this beautiful project, check out the Master Class on p. 82. □

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## SLICE A RECESS



**Cut the grooves.** Latta uses a straight line cutter to cut the stringing grooves, making sure not to cut beyond the corners.



**It's OK to cut these corners.** Latta uses a 1-in.-wide chisel to establish clean edges near the corners.



**Turn a hobby knife into a tiny chisel.** Regrind and sharpen an X-Acto knife with square edges and a chisel tip—it's the perfect tool for cleaning out the grooves.



## ADD THE INLAY

**Trim the stringing to size, then glue it in.** After cutting the stringing to length and mitering the ends, put yellow glue in the long grooves and press the stringing into place (above left). After planing the long pieces nearly flush, glue in the short ones (below left), then carefully plane them down and flush them all with a sanding block.





# Make your own banding

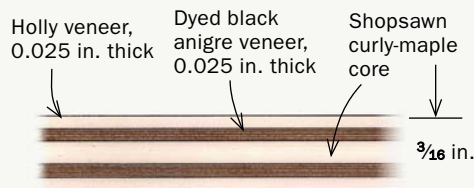


**Bandings start as a sandwich.** Stack layers of veneer and thin-milled solid wood for gluing. Use tape to keep them aligned (above), wrapping diagonally to prevent tearing the grain during removal. Then clamp the stack in the press (right).

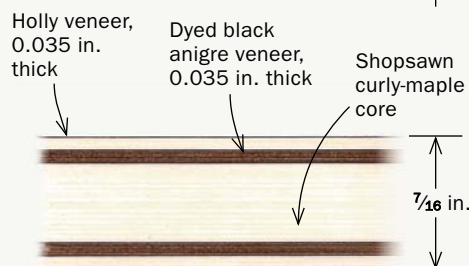


**Ready to rip.** After the banding dries, joint an edge and rip it into  $\frac{3}{64}$ -in.-wide strips using the fence on the bandsaw. You can reduce tearout by using a zero-clearance deck—make one by cutting a few inches into a piece of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in.-thick MDF, and clamping it to the bandsaw table.

## FEDERAL INLAY DETAILS



### WAIST BANDING



### CUFF BANDING

Bandings can have a major impact on the visual sophistication of a piece. Making them might seem challenging, but the process is actually straightforward. Essentially, you glue up a sandwich of veneers and thin-milled solid wood in contrasting colors, and then cut the sandwich into narrow strips.

The sandwich for this table's waist banding has a central layer of  $\frac{3}{32}$ -in.-thick curly maple between thin outer layers of holly and ebonized anigre veneer. The cuff banding, which is wider, has a central layer of  $\frac{5}{16}$ -in.-thick curly maple between holly and ebonized anigre veneers. I did the glue-up with a simple U-shaped banding press made from  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. MDF. Cover the inside faces of the MDF with clear plastic packing tape to prevent glue from sticking to them before screwing the pieces together.

To create the sandwiches, cut all the veneers and core stock into strips 2 in. wide. Apply glue to each layer with a small paint roller, quickly stack them together, wrap them with tape, and then clamp them in the press. Once the glue dries, joint one edge, then rip the sandwich into  $\frac{3}{64}$ -in.-wide strips on the bandsaw. If the saw leaves a surface that's too rough, rejoin the edge of the sandwich before each rip.

## STRINGING

**Cut the stringing into strips.** Latta uses a slicing board—a piece of MDF with a shallow fence on one edge—and a cutting gauge to cut the stringing from a 0.035-in.-thick sheet of holly veneer. To make sure the stringing fits perfectly in the grooves, Latta pulls it through a thicknessing gauge (far right) that he designed with Lie-Nielsen.

