NUMBER ONE NOTES FROM THE SHOP

Woodsmith

T.M.

SAWDUST

This is the first issue of Woodsmith. When any new publication comes out the editor usually feels moved to liken the effort that goes into the first issue to that of childbirth. For me it was more like building a piece of furniture from scratch. It was a little frightening. And frustrating. And I was anxious to see what it would look like.

I am also anxious to hear what you think of it. After all, Woodsmith is being published for you, and you should have a voice in what's in it.

The purpose of Woodsmith is to serve anyone interested in creating things of wood. Whether you're just starting out, or you've got sawdust in your veins, Woodsmith is committed to provide you with ideas, information, and a touch of inspiration.

Why the name? Why Woodsmith?

Throughout the history of Man, ages have been designated by the materials he worked with: The Stone Age, The Iron Age, and now The Atomic Age. But no where is there mentioned The Wood Age. Maybe that's because, from the beginning to the present, wood has been such an integral part of man's existence that it goes almost unnoticed.

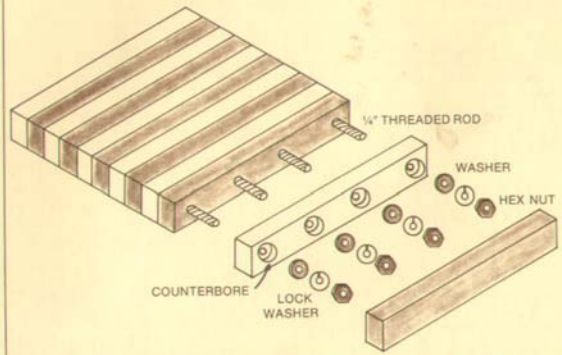
In fact, during recent times we have tried to mitigate the importance of wood. Plastics, metal alloys, and all sorts of synthetic materials are substituted for wood. Granted, many times these substitutes are more practical than wood. But whenever you see (or especially when you touch) a thing made of wood, there's that feeling of something genuine. It's really wood. And it has a quality all its own. Examine a thing made of wood. You can see (and feel) the skill, the care, and the effort of the person who created it.

Woodsmith is concerned with creating things of wood. The first half of the title "wood" is our medium, the material chosen to work with. The second half of the title comes the German root "smi-" meaning to form with a sharp tool. Hence, Woodsmith is for those who form things of wood.

So, here it is, the first issue of Woodsmith. Hope you enjoy it.

CUTTING BOARD

Most cutting boards take a lot of punishment. They're not only cut, scraped, and gouged, but they're subjected to frequent dunkings, splashings, and juice oozings. So, when you build a cutting board, build it to endure.



Maple or birch is the best choice for cutting boards. The grain on both these woods is tight and resists splintering. To get the striped effect shown in the drawing, alternate maple and walnut.

Each of the pieces is cut and then turned on edge to reduce the chance of warping. I ripped 3/4" birch 3/4" wide for the cutting board I made. If you want to make a nice thick chopping block, I'd suggest 1½" maple ripped 1½" to 2" wide.

Once all the pieces are ripped to size, put two pieces aside. (These will be the end pieces.) Drill 5/16" holes in all the other pieces. Two holes should be drilled about 1" from the outside edges (as shown in the drawing). Other holes (spaced 4" to 6" apart) are drilled in the remaining center section. (See page 6 for a drilling guide.) The two next-to-the-outside pieces are counterbored with a 5/8" bit before the 5/16" hole is drilled.

You'll need a batch of waterproof glue. I used National Casein "DR" Powdered Urea Resin Glue. It comes in powder form that you mix with water. Unfortunately, the instructions only give proportions by weight. If you don't have a scale, you can do what I did: mix seven tablespoons (four ounces) of powdered glue with two tablespoons (two ounces) of water. (Start with this amount, mix more if needed.)

Slop some glue on one piece, add the next piece, slop on some more glue, add another piece, etc. Then tighten the nuts and watch the glue squish out. Glue and clamp the outside (undrilled) pieces in place at least overnight (24 hours is better). Scrape off the dried glue and sand the board with a belt sander (coarse 50-grit belt).

Give the cutting board several coats of salad oil (Mazola, Wesson, etc.). A NOTE OF CAUTION: Don't use furniture oil or a varnish finish, they usually contain lead . . . a poison.

ONE-EVENING PROJECTS

Turn off the tube, head for the shop, and crank out one of these easy-to-build projects. There's no better way (to my way of thinking) to cast off the problems and worries of the work-a-day world. And, in just a short time you'll have a nice gift for someone.

TIE RACK

I used to hang my ties on a closet door knob or drape them over a hanger. But they were always falling into a rumpled heap on the floor. So, I built this tie rack and now my ties are organized and wrinkle-free. The whole thing is made of ½" pine and ¼" dowels.

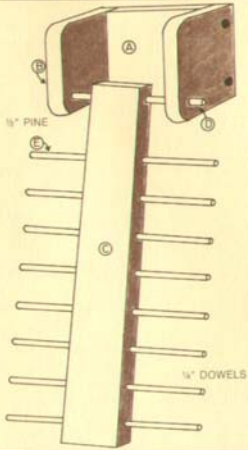
CUTTING THE MATERIAL

First cut an 18" length from a piece of ½" by 3½" pine. The center bar (C) is ripped 1¼" wide — leaving enough waste to cut out the holder. To cut the holder, rip the waste 2" wide, then cut off 2¼" for the back piece (A), and two pieces 1½" long for the two sides (B).

ASSEMBLING THE HOLDER

I assembled the holder with glue and dowels, but then, I'm a nut for doweled joints. Drill two holes in the side pieces and use these holes to pin-point the holes in the back piece.

The first hole on the bar is centered ½" down from the top. Drill this hole with a 9/32" bit so the bar will swing freely on the ¼" dowel. The second hole (¼" diameter) is drilled down 3" from the top,



and all the rest are spaced 2" apart. All of the dowels should fit snugly enough so you don't have to use any glue. Attach the tie bar to the back of a closet door with round-head screws.

ASSEMBLY FOR SLIDING DOOR

If you have a sliding door on your closet, use a slightly different assembly procedure to produce a nifty pull-out tie rack. Here's how. Everything remains the same except the top dowel should be 3/8" diameter instead of ¼". Drill a 3/16" hole at both ends of this dowel. Then whittle down a ¼" dowel to fit in these holes and act as stop pins. Attach the holder to the inside of the sliding door with toggle bolts (this assumes the door is hollow). Slide the top (3/8") dowel in place, secure it with a pin, slide the bar on the top dowel and secure it with a pin.

LIST OF MATERIALS

A	Back	⅛ x 2 x 2¼
B	Sides	⅛ x 2 x 1½
C	Bar	⅛ x 1¼ x 18
D	Pivot Dowel	¼ x 3¾
E	Tie dowel	¼ x 4¼

COOLING RACK

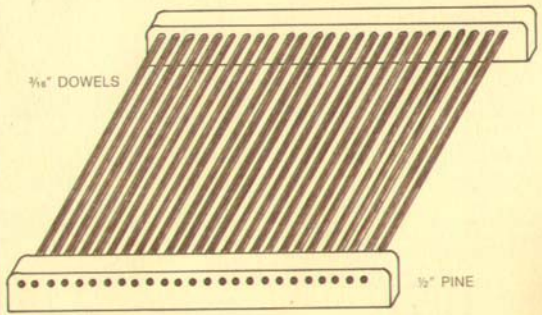
Here's a deal: if you make this cooling rack for a lady-friend, maybe she'll bake some cookies or a cake for you. (I wound up with a batch of chocolate chip cookies.) All it takes is ½" pine and 9/16" dowels.

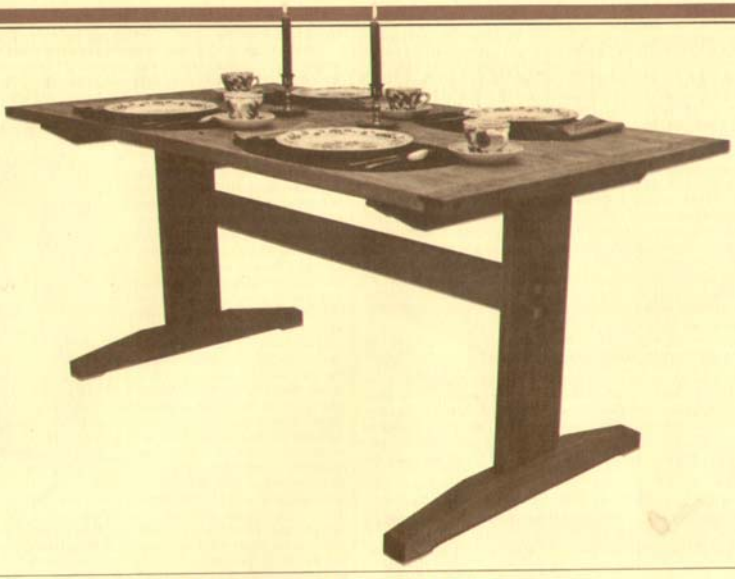
The two side pieces are 1" high and 10" long. To get the rounded corners, use a dime to trace the curve, then file it down.

The holes are drilled ¼" down from the top, and centered ¾" apart. These holes have to be exactly vertical, so use a drill press, portable drill mounted in a drill stand, or a Portalign. Clamp the side pieces together and drill through both at the same time.

Cut the dowels 8¼" long. You can get four lengths per dowel this way.

You can also build a couple of racks 15" or 16" long. The longer ones will accommodate a large batch of cookies (at least until they're cool enough to eat).





Trestle Table

Building this trestle table took me back to the days of Colonial craftsmanship. It wasn't so much the design or knowing its heritage. It was that reassuring ssch-chunk when the tenon slid cleanly into the mortise. Then I knew I had built a table that would last a lifetime.

What intrigues me most about this trestle table is the rail. A functional member of the table acts as a design feature. In addition, a joinery technique (keyed mortise and tenon) also becomes a design feature—almost a decorative feature—that enhances the overall beauty of the table and shows you exactly how it's held together.

During Colonial times trestle tables were meant to be easily disassembled. Keyed mortise and tenon joints anchored the rail to the legs, and the top simply rested on the legs. The table shown here retains this feature, but you can fasten the top permanently if you wish.

Also in keeping with tradition I made this table of pine. I chose 5/4 clear pine because of its thickness. (By the way, 5/4 is pronounced five-quarter, and means 1¼" thick, nominal.) The thickness of the wood is crucial to the overall appearance of this table since the edges of all the members are so visible.

LIST OF MATERIALS

Code	Piece	Number	Dimensions*
A	Top	15	2⁹⁄₁₆ x 60
B	Base	4	3½ x 30
C	Top Support	2	2½ x 32½
D	Cleat	3	1¾ x 32½
E	Upright	4	3½ x 28
F	Rail	1	3½ x 55
G	End Piece	2	2½ x 35
H	Wedge (oak)	4	½ x 3

*All pieces 5/4" thick, except wedges.

Five-quarter pine has a unique, custom milled look, and is sturdy enough to span the 48" between the legs without bowing. It's usually found at better lumber yards in Select grades.

All of the pieces for this trestle table can be cut from six boards, as shown in the Cutting Diagram at left. Though it can be shortened or lengthened, this table will comfortably seat four people, and six (one extra at each end) without trouble.

Trestle tables come in a variety of styles and designs. Most have heavy posts and pedestals. Others incorporate turned posts and "sleeping dog" feet. I decided to simplify the design—much in keeping with the simpler Pilgrim or Shaker designs. To my way of thinking the right angles and straight lines of the simpler version enhance rather than diminish the overall appearance. Thus, the table takes on a timeless elegance, and a lighter, not so awesome appearance with the emphasis on the wood rather than the design.

1 CUTTING THE WOOD

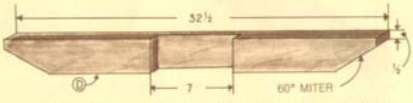
One of the first things to consider is what saw blade to use. I chose a hollow-ground planer blade. I had it sharpened before I started this project, and it cut like a dream — you could hardly see any saw marks.

Start by cutting the 60" lengths for the top (A) first. I made the initial cuts about 60½" so I could trim off the mill-cut end. Then, set up the saw for ripping. I found that ripping these long boards isn't as easy as it looks. I needed some way to hold them in place while cutting or I'd wind up in deep trouble. My advice: use hold-down clamps. (You can make you own, see page 6.)

Before ripping the boards for the top (A) mark a carpenter's triangle on each board. (A carpenter's triangle is just a large triangle drawn on the wood — from edge to edge. You'll see how it helps keep things organized once you rip the pieces.) Cut all the other pieces to the lengths and widths shown on the Materials List, except for the end piece (G) which will be trimmed to fit later on.

2 THE TOP SUPPORTS AND CLEATS

I always like to get my feet wet by cutting an easy piece first. The top supports and cleats are a good place to start. Measure down ½" on both ends of the top support (C) and cut a 60-degree miter. While you have the miter gauge in place, measure down ½" on the ends of the three cleats (D) and make the same 60-degree cut.



I cut the half-lap joint in the middle of the top support with a dado blade. It saves a lot of time since it takes out a 3/4" chunk with each pass. The half-lap should be a smidgen over 7/16" deep. (This will vary from board to board. Five-quarter pine is supposed to be 1-3/16" thick, but it varies.)

3 THE TAPERED BASE

You'll need a tapering jig to cut the taper on the base. (See page 6 if you don't have one.) The taper is 2½" per foot, or 12 degrees. Start the tapered cut 9" in from the end of the base piece. It should end so there is 1½" left at the end of the piece. Then cut the notches to form a mortise — each notch is 3/8" deep, 6" wide.

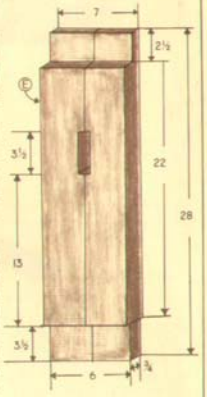
The diagram shows a 3/8" relief cut at the bottom of the base. It's a nice touch but difficult to cut. I used a band saw (and tried several other methods). If you don't have a band saw, use a coping saw. If all this sounds like too much work, leave the bottom straight and put four furniture pads at each corner.

4 UPRIGHT: MORTISE, TENON, AND HALF-LAP

The upright ought to challenge your flexibility with making joints. It has a half-lap at the top, a mortise in the middle, and a tenon at the bottom — all of which can be cut on a table saw.

Cut the half-lap at the top of the upright (B) about ½" deep to start. Then check it with the top support. If it's too thick, crank the blade up just a touch, and make the cut again . . . until you're right on the money.

A mortise can be a real headache — requiring drills, chisels, precision, and patience. But in this case it's a snap. All you have to do is cut a notch (3/8" deep and 3½" wide) in the two pieces that make up the upright. Join the pieces together, and presto, a mortise. That may sound like cheating, so, if you're a fanatic for authenticity, juggle the Cutting Diagram around so you can have a solid piece for each upright and cut the mortise in the traditional manner.

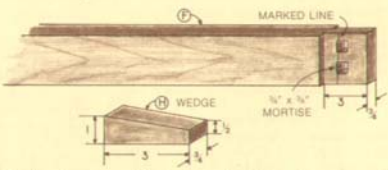


The tenon at the bottom is fairly easy. Adjust the depth of the cuts so you wind up with a tenon that's 3/4" thick. When you trim the ½" off the outside edges, make sure the notch forming the mortise is up as you make these cuts. When all the cuts are made, glue the two pieces together. (I used Franklin Titebond glue and pipe clamps.)

Now you can assemble each leg assembly. Glue and clamp the top support (C) to the top of the upright (E). Since you put the relief in the base, there will be 3/8" of the upright's tenon sticking out of the bottom of the base. Mark it and trim it off. Then, glue the mortise into place. Drill two ½" holes from the *inside* face of the base, through the mortise and tenon joint, but stopping before you go through the outside of the base. Glue a length of ½" dowel in this hole. (This is a pegged mortise and tenon joint.)

5 THE RAIL: KEYED MORTISE AND TENON

Cut a tenon at each end of the rail (F), just like you did on the upright. Make sure the measurement — from the lip of one tenon to the lip of the other — is 48".



Cutting the two mortises in the ends of the rail requires a little hand work — just like 200 years ago. So, put yourself in that frame of mind. (It helps to say things like, "One if by land, two if by sea".) The two mortises are 3/4" square. But before you mark them for the cut, slide the rail's tenon into the mortise of the upright (hear the ssch-chunk?) and draw a line on the tenon marking the outside face of the upright. Then remove the rail and draw another line about 1/8" in toward the center of the rail. This second line will be your inside line for the 3/4" square mortises. (You cut the mortises here so the wedges have enough room to do their thing.)

6 ASSEMBLY OF THE TABLE TOP

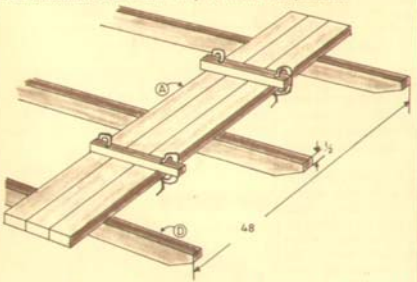
There are two ways to go about assembling the top. The first way is the way I actually did it for this table. The second way is the way I'd do it if I had it to do again. (See Second Thoughts, below). I'll explain the first way first.

After cutting all 15 pieces for the top (A), run them through the saw again, this time trimming a hair off the edge that was cut by the mill (sometimes the mill's cut isn't square). Now, lay the three cleats (D) on a piece of particle board or plywood. Space two cleats so their outside edges are 48" apart. Center the third cleat between the other two. Nail all three cleats to the particle board with 8-penny finishing nails — just so they won't go anywhere — and let the heads stick out so you can pull them later.

Lay all 15 top pieces (A) on the cleats, arranging them in order (remember, the carpenter's triangle?). Shuffle the three-piece boards to create a nice grain pattern on the top surface. Now, flip (end for end) every other piece so one has the grain curving up, and the next has the grain curving down. (This will help prevent warping later.) Draw one huge triangle over all 15 boards, then remove them.

Find the middle board (the eighth one down if you kept them in order). Glue and toenail this board at the center of the cleats with 6-penny finishing nails. Working form this middle board out to one edge, apply glue to the edge of the next board and nail it in place.

One of the joys of working with solid wood is that it tends to warp, bow, twist, and cup (Did I say, "joys"?) So, as you put each board in position, use four bar clamps to pull it tight, then toenail it in place, countersinking the nails. (Alternate the bar clamps: for the first and third, the bar is on top of the wood; and for the second and fourth, the bar is under the wood.) Now, if by chance (ha!) the boards are bowed, clamp some 2 x 2s on the top and bottom of the boards to pull them into position.

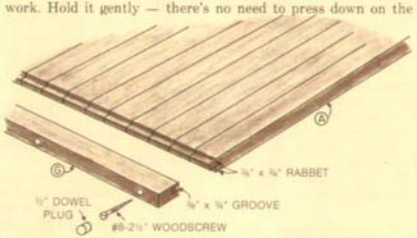


Second Thoughts: If I were going to build this table again, I'd use splined joints to assemble the table top. This would be especially true if a hardwood, like maple or birch, were used instead of pine. Why would I use splined joints? I'm not worried about the strength of the joints. The way I did it first, with butt joints, is strong enough. Granted, you can argue that a butt joint is not very strong. But modern glues are. Most woodworking joints were devised in the days of very poor glues, and the joint had to be strong because the glue alone simply wouldn't hold. Even with plain old butt joints there's over 60 square inches of glueing surface between *each* pair of boards. They will hold together.

So, why splined joints? To cut down on the amount of finish sanding. Even with all my juggling and care, the top still looked like a washboard. (That's a slight exageration, but it wasn't perfectly smooth and took a lot of sanding.) To help even-up the surface before sanding you could make a splined joint by cutting a ¼" wide by 9/16" deep dado along the edge of each board. Then glue a ¼" x 1" plywood spline in the dado. If you decide to do it this way, just make sure that when you cut the dado, the face of the board is toward the fence with each pass.

7 SANDING AND THE END PIECE

If the top of your table looks like a washboard (as mine did), don't despair. That's why they make belt sanders. If you've never used one before, just remember to let the sander do the work. Hold it gently — there's no need to press down on the



wood; and keep it level — don't let it tilt on an edge and gouge the wood. Use a medium belt (80 grit) *across* the grain first, then *with* the grain. Switch to a fine belt (100 grit) and sand only with the grain. When you've got it fairly smooth with the belt sander, use your arm, a sanding block and medium (100 grit) sandpaper. Finally sand with fine (150 grit) sandpaper. Sand until it's perfect. Remember, this is a table top that everyone will be looking at . . . and touching to see if it's smooth.

When the top is fairly smooth, you have to attach the end piece (G). Here's where I goofed on the table I built. I attached the end piece using a lap joint. After thinking about it and talking with some friends, I should have used a tongue and groove joint. The top pieces (A) will expand and contract more than the end piece. Eventually the glue on the lap joint will break. But a tongue and groove joint would allow the wood to "slide" a little.

To make the tongue and groove joint, cut a 3/8" by 3/4" rabbet on the top and bottom of each end of the table top. This will leave a tongue about 3/8" thick. Then cut a groove in the end piece to match the tongue. Attach the end piece to the table top with glue and woodscrews as shown in the diagram.

8 FINISH: OIL AND STAIN

I used MinWax Early American Stain on my trestle table. It's a good penetrating oil stain that gives the table an even, rich color. Then I put on several coats of Watco Danish Oil Finish. The pine really soaks up the oil, but after several coats there's a beautiful, tough finish. If you decide to varnish the top, make sure all the sanding marks are completely gone. Varnish will show even your slightest mistake . . . oil is a little more forgiving. That's why I chose oil.

The top can just rest on the trestles, or, for a more permanent arrangement drive some No. 8 2" woodscrews through the cleats and into the top supports. The rail slides into the mortises in the trestles and is secured by driving the wedges in place.

After you've assembled the table, stand back and take a look. Looks pretty good, huh? The part I like best is the wedges. They really hold the legs and rail together — with no need for screws, glue, nails, or any other kind of fastener. Just looking at those wedges and the mortise and tenon joint makes the whole project worthwhile. Welcome back, Colonial Days.

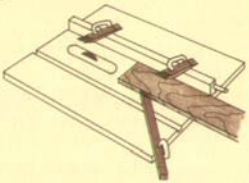
Tools & Techniques

Hold-down clamps

While I was building the Trestle Table shown in this issue, I needed to rip five-foot-long boards. "Hold-down clamps," I thought, "I need my hold-down clamps." The ones I use were made from 1 x 2 scrap for practically nothing.

Cut a series of kerfs about 1/8" apart and 2" deep at the end of the 1 x 2. The first two or three cuts on the outside edges are the most critical because that's where most of the "spring" occurs.

A set of three clamps will meet most of your needs: two short ones (about 8" long) clamped to the rip fence hold the workpiece down, and a long one (16" to 20" long) clamped to the table pushes it against the fence.



Carpenter's triangle

Have you ever layed out the boards for a table top, arranging them in the order you want to get a nice grain pattern, and then devised an intricate coding system to keep the boards organized? That's what I used to do until I found an easier way. It's called a carpenter's triangle.

It's a quick reference guide that helps keep the boards in order for ripping or moulding cuts.

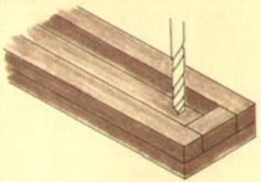
All you have to do is draw a triangle on the boards. Then, even if they get mixed up while you're working with them, it's easy to put them back in exactly the same order by simply aligning the triangle again.

If you rip a board and want to keep the ripped pieces in order, draw the triangle on the board first, then make the cut. Align the triangle and every piece will be back in order. Also, if you want to cut a groove or tongue on each board, the partial triangle on each board will be a guide to which edge is which.

Drill press guide

I have to admit that my marks for drilling aren't always right on the money. That's why I made this drilling guide to use on my drill press when I was drilling holes in the cutting board.

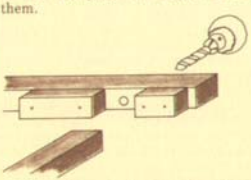
I used a piece of scrap 1 x 4 for the base, then nailed two other pieces of scrap on top to hold the workpiece in place. I found the best procedure for assembly is to nail one of the edge guides down first. Then put the workpiece in position and nail the other edge guide against it (just a hair loose, so the workpiece slides in and out easily). Nail a small block at the end as a stop. Every piece you drill will have the hole in exactly the same spot . . . nice, huh?



Drilling guide

Drilling holes for dowel pins in the end of a piece of wood can be a real hassle — even if you have a drill press. While I was making the rungs on the Double Duty Table (page 7), I used this little setup to speed things along.

To make a setup like this you need a length of wood (hardwood scrap is best) to act as the guide. Just drill a guide hole (3/8" for dowel pins) and nail two small pieces of scrap on both sides of this hole so the workpiece fits snugly between them.



Clamp the guide to the edge of your workbench and slide the workpiece into position. Clamp or nail a block behind the workpiece to hold it in place while drilling.

Taper jig

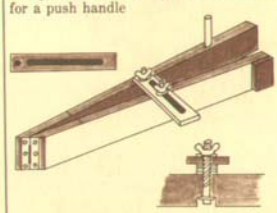
Picture this: you're working on a project that requires a taper cut (like on the base of the Trestle Table shown in this issue). You don't have a taper jig, so you drop everything, run out to Sears to buy one. Twelve dollars!

In the time it takes to drive to the store and buy one, you could have made one out of some scrap wood. Here's how I made mine. Find a piece of scrap 2 x 4 about 24" long. Rip two 1" wide (1½" high) pieces from it. Counterbore a 5/8" hole on the bottom of each piece, deep enough to accommodate a washer and the head of a machine bolt. (See detail in drawing.) Then drill a ¼" hole all the way through.

The bar is made from a piece of scrap about 3/8" thick, 1" to 1½" wide, and about 9" long. (If you don't have a piece of scrap like this laying around, you can cut one from the 2 x 4 waste.)

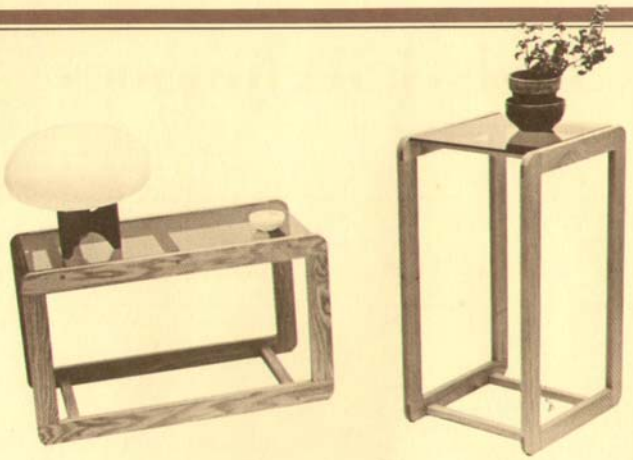
Drill a ¼" hole at one end, and then drill a series of 5/16" holes along the center of the bar (as shown in the detail). Clean out this series of 5/16" holes with a coping saw and a file.

Now slide a washer and a ¼" x 3" machine bolt up through the bottom. Add some spacing washers on top, put on the bar, another washer, and finally a wing nut. Tack a small block at the end of the jig to act as a stop. And, drill a 3/4" hole and glue in a short length of 3/4" dowel for a push handle



To determine the taper you want, draw a line across both arms of the jig 6" from the pivot end. If you want a taper of ½" per foot, open the arms ¼" at the lines. (Each ¼" equals ½" taper.) If your taper is given in degrees, each 1/10° is one degree.

The best time to make a taper jig is before you need it. You won't have to interrupt your project (as I did) to run out and buy one . . . and you'll save $12.



Double-Duty Table

It's contemporary in styling, yet at home with antiques. From this one design you'll have a table that's two tables in one . . . and it's surprisingly easy to build.

It's a lamp table. Or is it a plant stand? Maybe it's a coffee table. Once you've built this table, use your imagination to come up with all sorts of variations. Flip it around, on its side, any which way, and see what it will produce.

This is one of those projects I like to call ingenious, I'm not trying to toot my own horn (because it all kind of just happened) but, I must admit I like the results.

Both the tables shown here were built from 3/4" oak. The tops are smoked glass. For each table you'll need an eight-foot length of oak about 5" wide.

CUTTING THE WOOD

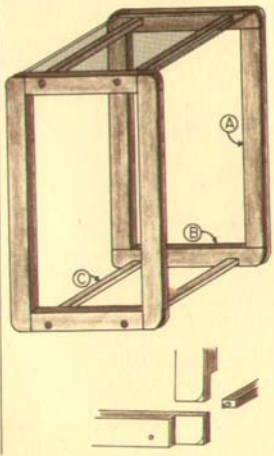
All cuts are very easy. Start by cutting two 27" lengths, and two 16" lengths. Rip all four of these to 2" widths. Rip the waste to 1" wide for the rungs.

Now, cut half-lap joints (3/8" x 2") at both ends of all the 2" wide pieces. You can use a universal jig to make these cuts, or see page 8 (Talking Shop) for an accurate way to cut lap joints without a jig.

ASSEMBLY OF THE TABLE

Smear some glue on the half-laps and clamp the pieces (A and B) together with four C-clamps to form a frame. Once the glue is dry, mark a 1½" diameter curve at each corner and cut it off with a band saw, sabre saw, or coping saw.

The number of rungs you need depends on whether you want the table upright (lamp table), or horizontal (coffee table). You'll need four rungs for the upright version and five for the horizontal version.



Drill holes for dowel pins in the ends of each rung. (The method shown on page 6 works well here.) The holes should be drilled deep enough so the dowel pins stick out about ½".

Then drill holes in the frames 3½" in from each side and down 5/8" from the top. (This allows room for the ¼" glass on the top.) For the coffee table version the spacing is the same except you need one more set of holes across the center of the frame on the top side.

Once the holes are drilled, apply some glue (I used a Q-Tip) and insert the dowel pins. Then clamp the frames and rungs together with pipe clamps.

Insert dowel plugs, sand everything, and apply the finish of your choice. I used an oil finish (Watco Danish Oil).

ORDERING THE GLASS

Don't order the glass until the unit is assembled so you're sure of the dimensions. The width of the glass should be 11-7/8" and the length will be either 14" (upright version) or 25" (horizontal).

LIST OF MATERIALS

A	Leg	¾ x 2 x 27
B	Upright	¾ x 2 x 16
C	Rung	¾ x 1 x 12

What was life really like in 1805? Eric Sloane's "Diary Of An Early American Boy" (Ballantine Books, $2.95) presents an accurate, informative and tender account of the life of an early American farm family.

FROM THE BOOK SHELF

On March 25th, 1805 Noah Blake celebrated his 15th birthday, and on that day started a diary of his daily routine. During the summer of 1805 Noah and his father planted the year's crop, built America's second covered bridge, erected a mill, and split rails for a new fence.

Sloane expands on Noah's notes, filling us in on all ther terms, tools, and ways of doing things that Noah mentions.

Sloane's writing is warm and human. His drawings are beautiful and informative. The combination provides a priceless glimpse of early American life.

To give you an example: Noah writes that he built a "plumping mill" for his mother. Sloane includes a drawing of how that mill might have worked and writes:

"In modern times when everything a person needs may be bought in a store, there are very few hand-made things left. So we are robbed of that rare and wonderful satisfaction that comes with personal accomplishment. In Noah's time, nearly every single thing a person touched was the result of his own efforts."

One of my favorite passages in the book concerns the craftsmanship of Colonial carpentry and engineering. Noah and his father were laying freshly split boards on their bridge:

"Do we nail the boards down soon?" asked Noah.

"No," said his father. "The trick is just to lay them down loosely so they won't warp. Then you place a roadway going the opposite way across the top. Nails would only split boards and rust the cracks into rot. Loose boards weather best."

"I know," said Noah, "that a good carpenter doesn't use nails unless he has to. I just forgot."

I highly recommend the book.

Talking Shop

Since this is the first issue of Woodsmith, the postman hasn't yet delivered bags of mail saying, "Great . . . keep up the good work." Or, "Here's a tip you can pass on to other readers . . ." Or, "You goofed when you said . . ." But when those cards and letters start rolling in, they will be printed here in Talking Shop.

I want this to be your column (I get a chance to say whatever I want in the Sawdust column). So, if you have any comments, suggestions, criticisms, questions, or tips you'd like to pass along, this is the place to do it.

TIPS TO OTHER READERS

In the area of tips, don't overlook the things you do and take for granted. Just like the old saying that no question is dumb, no tip is dumb or too small. In fact, it's sometimes the little thing that's the biggest help. At the end of this column are two tips that I learned from friends. Both are simple, but helpful.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE EDITOR

Woodsmith won't be much good if the projects and information aren't what you want. So, I welcome your suggestions. However, I should mention two things: First, I'm trying to keep Woodsmith limited to self-contained woodworking projects. By that I mean, I won't be including articles like "How to remodel your kitchen" or "How to build a garage." Second, as things stand right now, I'm doing all the designing, building, and writing. All that takes time, and of course, I'm limited by my own abilities. That doesn't mean I won't try my level best to design something you suggest. But if it doesn't work out, I can't in good conscience publish it in Woodsmith.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

From time to time we all run into snags, or have questions that seem to defy answering. If you have a question, send it in. If I know the answer I'll print it here in this column. If I don't know the answer, I'll try to find someone who does, or I'll publish the question in Talking Shop and hopefully someone out there will write in and enlighten all of us.

CRITICISMS

A lot of people don't take well to criticism. I encourage it. If there's an error in Woodsmith, don't hesitate to let me know. That's the only way corrections can be made and save a lot of headaches later. On the other hand, don't go overboard. There are a lot of ways of doing things and I'm not too enthusiastic about hearing, "You should have done it this way" kind of comments. Some of that is OK, but keep in mind that every way can't be the best way for everyone.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU

I belong to a small woodworking club. Some of the guys in the club haven't built anything since high school shop class, others have sawdust in the veins. But the really nice thing about the class is how everyone helps the other guy.

That's the kind of thing I hope will happen in Woodsmith.

I've noticed one thing about the men and women I've met who work with wood: they are more than willing to share their knowledge and expertise. Maybe it's just a natural result of the joy of woodworking. I think people truly enjoy seeing something useful, or beautiful, or even whimsical made out of wood. And they're usually willing (in fact, eager) to help in its creation. So, if you want to join in on the creation of Woodsmith, feel free.

TIP ONE

I was watching a friend make some half-lap joints one day. To get the proper setting for the blade height, he found a piece of scrap and set the blade on his table saw at approximately half way up (instead of measuring, he just eye-balled it). Then he made a couple of passes on one end of the scrap, flipped it over and made a pass at the same end. There was a thin "tongue" left after these passes. So he cranked up the blade about a quarter turn and started the process again. This time when he flipped the scrap wood over, the blade just barely trimmed the end clean. That was exactly the half-way setting for the half-lap joint.

TIP TWO

Whenever I wanted to open or close a C-clamp to an approximate setting I would just twirl the handle at the end of the screw with one finger. Then I saw a friend hold the C-clamp down by his side and twirl the "C" end around until it was at the approximate opening he wanted. This method saves time as well as wear and tear on your fingers.

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