
Photo by Christine Polomsky

SHAKER

Blanket Chest

Get ready for the chilly winter nights with this faithful reproduction of a classic from Canaan, N.Y.

I was flipping through a copy of *The Magazine Antiques* one afternoon when I noticed an attractive blanket chest in an advertisement for an antiques dealer in New York. The ad said the Shaker chest was from the John Roberts house in Canaan, N.Y., and had been built in 1850. All I knew was I wanted to build one. With a bit of research on traditional Shaker joinery, it was off to the shop.

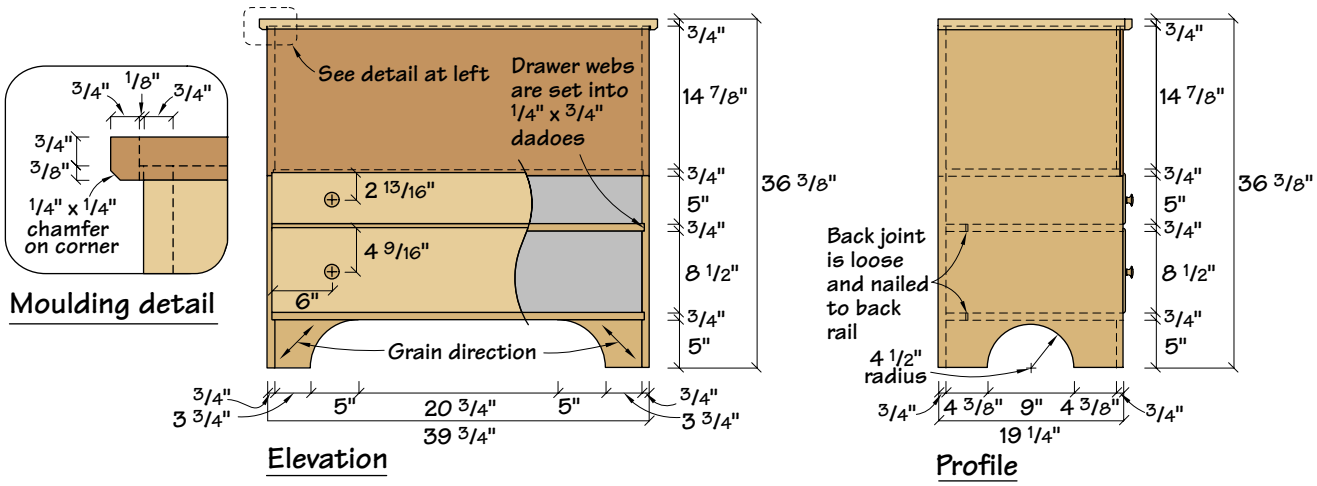
The chest is built exactly as Shakers did in the 19th century—with the notable exceptions of biscuits to attach the feet, aliphatic resin glue and a few power tools that would have shocked and excited the brethren. You'll probably need to glue up a few boards to create panels wide enough for the sides, front and top, unless you have access to some lumber in legendary 19th-century widths. Prepare the panels for the sides, front, upper back and top. You might also have to glue up panels for the larger drawer pieces.

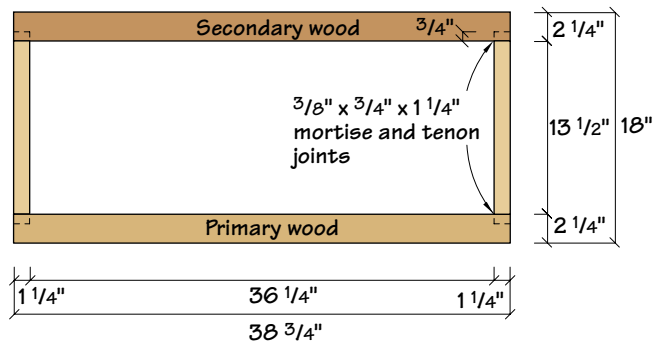
Start with the two sides. Determine the best face and mark it for the outside, then mark the location of the three dadoes for the bottom and the two drawer divider webs as shown in the diagram. The dadoes are $\frac{3}{4}$" wide and $\frac{1}{4}$" deep and run the entire width of the sides. With the dadoes cut, next turn to the $\frac{3}{4}$" x $\frac{5}{16}$" deep rabbet on the back edge of each side. This rabbet should stop 5" up from the bottom of each side to leave a solid gluing surface for the rear feet.

Notch the sides on the front edge $\frac{3}{8}$" deep to allow the front to overlap the sides.

by Glen Huey

Glen Huey builds custom furniture in his shop in Middletown, Ohio, for Malcolm L. Huey & Sons and is a regular contributor to Popular Woodworking.





Best Foot Forward

The front feet are different than the back feet and are cut to allow the grain to run diagonally from the corner of the base area. In addition, the front feet are radius cut on the inside. Attach the feet first, then cut the radius to shape to ease glue up.

This notch will match the front width. Finally, cut a half-circle on each side to form the feet of the base. Use a 4½" radius to mark the half-circle then cut it out with a jigsaw.

With the sides complete, turn to the front piece and cut a ⅜" x ¾" rabbet on each end and the bottom. The rabbets allow the front to fit into the notches on the front edge of each side, and they also allow the bottom to fit snugly into the front. The last step before assembling the case is to prepare the drawer web frames. The drawer runners have a ¾"-long tenon cut on either end that fits into matching mortises cut in the front and rear dividers. Glue the front mortise-and-tenon joint but leave the back one loose to allow the frame to expand and contract.

Attach the front and rear feet to the bottom divider frame and case sides with biscuits. The Shakers might have used only glue at this joint, but because we have the technology, cut biscuit slots for all the feet.

The case is now ready to assemble, but I'd recommend first taking a couple of minutes to finish sand the interior of the blanket chest area. It's tough to get into those corners once the chest is together. Little glue should be used to assemble the chest. A dot of glue at the center of the bottom dado and a dot at the ends of the web frame dadoes is sufficient. Nail the web frames in place with a single nail through the sides and into the end of the dividers. Nail the front and back pieces in place without glue because the joints are long-grain to short-grain joints.

Complete the case assembly by gluing the front and rear feet in place. When the glue is dry, cut the radius on the front feet to match the curve on the sides and sand your handiwork. Finally, nail the shiplapped back pieces in place using nickels as spacers.

Next prepare the chest for the top. The chest top needs a stout hinge that requires more than the ¾" back to support it. To accomplish this, glue and nail build-up blocks to the chest back. Once fixed in place, use your router and a straight bit to cut a mortise in the back and block for the hinge leaf.

Lower Back Adjustment

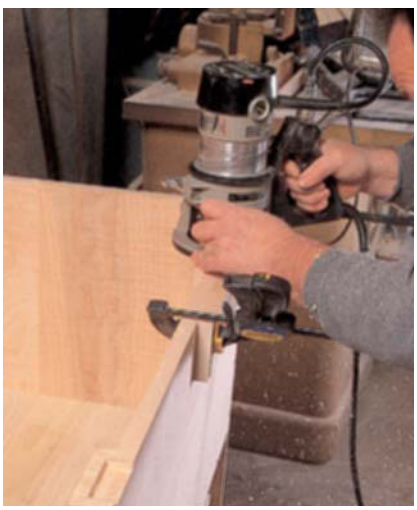
With the case glued up and the upper back in place, the loose lower back pieces are ready to be nailed in place. The half-lap design provides a closed back, but allows the wood to expand and contract with the wood movement.

Power Dovetails
The drawers are assembled in traditional Shaker fashion using half-blind dovetails on the front—but that doesn't mean you can't cheat on what tools you use. After marking and cutting the pins on the fronts, the band saw makes quick work of what would have been a lot of hand-cutting to create the tails.

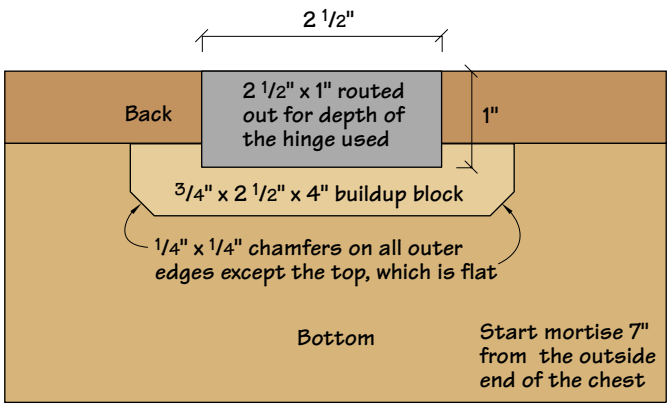
Schedule of Materials: Shaker Blanket Chest

No.	Item	Dimensions T W L	Material
2	Sides	3/4" x 19 1/4" x 35 5/8"	P
1	Front	3/4" x 16" x 39 3/4"	P
1	Back	3/4" x 16" x 39 1/8"	P
1	Bottom	3/4" x 18 1/8" x 38 3/4"	S
1	Top	3/4" x 19 3/8" x 40"	P
4	Drawer dividers	3/4" x 2 1/4" x 38 3/4"	P/S
4	Drawer runners*	3/4" x 1 1/4" x 15 3/8"	S
2	Rear feet	3/4" x 5" x 5"	S
2	Front feet	3/4" x 6 1/2" x 14 1/2"	P
2	Build-up blocks	3/4" x 2 1/2" x 4"	P
1	Small drwr front †	13/16" x 5 5/16" x 38 7/8"	P
1	Large drwr front †	13/16" x 8 13/16" x 38 7/8"	P
1	Small drwr back	9/16" x 4 7/8" x 38 1/4"	S
1	Large drwr back	9/16" x 8 3/8" x 38 1/4"	S
2	Small drwr sides	9/16" x 4 7/8" x 17"	S
2	Large drwr sides	9/16" x 8 3/8" x 17"	S
2	Drawer bottoms	5/8" x 17 1/4" x 37 1/2"	S
	Back boards ‡	5/8" x 15" x 39 1/8"	S
6 lineal feet of 5/8" x 1 1/16" bevel edged top moulding			
1	Pair, 8" strap hinges, #HF-9, Horton Brass 800-754-9127		
1	Box lock, #TJI-062, Ball and Ball 800-257-3711		
4	1 1/2" diameter wooden knobs		

* 3/4" tenon on both ends
† 5/16" lip side and top, 1/8" bottom
‡ Size given is size of complete, half-lapped back
P = Primary wood - Maple • S = Secondary wood - Poplar



Un-Shaker-Like Help
With the hinge blocks glued in place against the cabinet back, mark the hinge shape on the top of the block and the back. Next rout out the hinge mortise to the full depth of both hinge leaves.



Plan detail of hinge buildup

Now prepare the moulding that's attached to the front edge and sides of the top. The moulding is more than decorative, it also forms a dust seal across the lid. First bevel the moulding on the bottom edge to soften the corner, miter the pieces, and then nail it flush to the top edge.

Position the top on the chest with the back edges flush. Mark the hinge location on the top, then attach the hinges.

Now it's time to work on the drawers. The drawers are assembled using rabbeted half-blind dovetails at the front and through-dovetails at the rear. First rabbet the drawer fronts to form a 5/16" lip on the top and sides, and an 1/8" lip on the bottom edge. The dovetail joint attaches to the rear of the lip formed by the rabbets. To keep the work traditional, the drawer bottoms are made from 5/8"-thick solid wood, and the three sides of the bottom are beveled to reduce the thickness in order to slide into the 1/4" x 1/4" grooves in the sides and drawer fronts. Next tack the bottom into the drawer back to square up the drawer.

Some final hardware and you're ready to finish the piece. Check the instructions (if any) on mounting the chest lock and install the locking hardware. Drill and attach the knobs to the drawers.

To give the piece an appropriate 19th century finish, I used Moser's Early American Cherry aniline dye and applied a couple of coats of lacquer to protect it.

My wife isn't always happy with the number of magazine subscriptions I have. But when I can turn up an idea like this chest from a magazine ad, I'm allowed to keep those subscriptions current. **PW**