

Bevel Cut

2018-01 January

There are plans, and then there are plans.

I don't like it when people ask me "how long did it take you to make that"? First of all because I am slow; second of all because I make mistakes; and third of all because I am typically making things up or calculating things as I move along. My typical approach was to see an object or a photo of an object I wanted to build and then start making sawdust. (Let's see, if my cabinet interior is 16 1/8" wide, and I need to allow 1" for the drawer sliders, but I want a 3/16 inch overhang over the frame on each side, how wide should the drawer false front be?) Not difficult mathematics for any junior high graduate, but nevertheless a serious opportunity for silly errors at the table saw.

Last year, I discovered that a hypothetical but significant advantage of building from plans is that all the arithmetic is done for you. You can just concentrate on the wood and the tools. I gather, however, that many readers of this column have had a similar experience to mine. I decided to build something based on an article in one of the many woodworking magazines available. Three quarters of the way through the project I discovered that one of the dimensions given was wrong – inevitably too short or too thin – the kind of error that is more difficult to hide or recover from (too long or too thick is obviously a more manageable error, though not always). More recently, I paid good money for some plans available from an on-line site. My frustration here was different – the directions were incomplete at best or confusing at worst. Where is the quality control? Who edits these documents?

I know Jim Russell is a fan of SketchUp. This is a viable option if a) you take the time to master the software and b) you know enough about design and about joinery. Or you can revert to old-fashioned graph paper. At a recent FIG meeting Jim showed some full-scale drawings of a complex table he was building. This is very helpful, but assumes a good plan (and access to a large printer if you need templates). I recently went one step further by building a smaller version of a bedroom bench I wanted but used the exact same (and original) joinery. In this step I learned some crucial lessons that saved me when building the larger (and more expensive) bench.

Now I'm contemplating a new project – a cradle for a friend's granddaughter. Lots of plans available on-line with styles running from Hungarian gothic to American Shaker to post-modern and beyond. Besides the price, one additional item that really annoys me is the \$4 shipping and handling charge. And based on past experience, I'm not even confident I will be able to use the plan.

Suggestions anyone?