

Is This Really Going To Work?

18 January, 2018

I was working on the legs and stretchers of a 3-legged stool of design made famous by renowned woodworker Tag Frid. This can be tricky since the front legs are at a compound angle (splayed outward and forward and the third, rear, leg is splayed backward at a different angle). Tricky, but with the able help of my Mentor, Jim Russell, and after following the examples of fellow struggler woodworker, Jeff Clunie, the mortises (holes) got drilled in the legs using a tool I hadn't used since I was a kid, a bit brace and auger bit.

I was skeptical at first. Can't we make a jig to hold the leg at the right angle and use the drill press? I always thought of a bit brace as a carpenter's tool, and an old carpenter at that (mine belonged to my father), not a tool for furniture or fine woodworking. Here the goal is a round mortise in the leg and a through-tenon on the stretcher that doesn't show gaps or spaces (or, in my usual case, shims) around the edges of the joint when assembled. So, with the chair braced, I put the auger point in the leg, put the back of the brace against my sternum. I'm lining the tool up horizontally by looking back and forth between the left leg I'm drilling and the right leg. The vertical is controlled by watching an image in a mirror set alongside the legs and a guide stick clamped between the legs. Rube who?



Jeff Clunie mortising stool leg with auger, mirror, and guide stick while displaying supreme calm.

I started to turn. Wobble, wobble. Soon, however, I saw that as long as the brace stayed in the desired orientation, in this case level and aiming at the mortise in the far leg, all with the help of (smoke and) mirrors, the hole progressed straight and true once the teeth of the bit had entered the wood. Phew! All the while Mentor Jim is looking at me with the same look you give a 4 yr old when he asks why he can't have another cookie.

So much for the mortises; now for the tenons. Stay tuned.

Don Michael, PN (Perpetual Novice)