

Bench story

This is a simple bench made by a simple woodworker who has become enamored with live edge pieces and slabs in general. I wrote a few months ago about dowels and EMGW central asked me if I could contribute a “featured piece of the month” story with a dowel aspect, so here it is. I’m not in the same league as Jim Russel or many of the other guild members; I’m probably best described as “the perpetual novice,” but someone else in the guild has claimed that title.

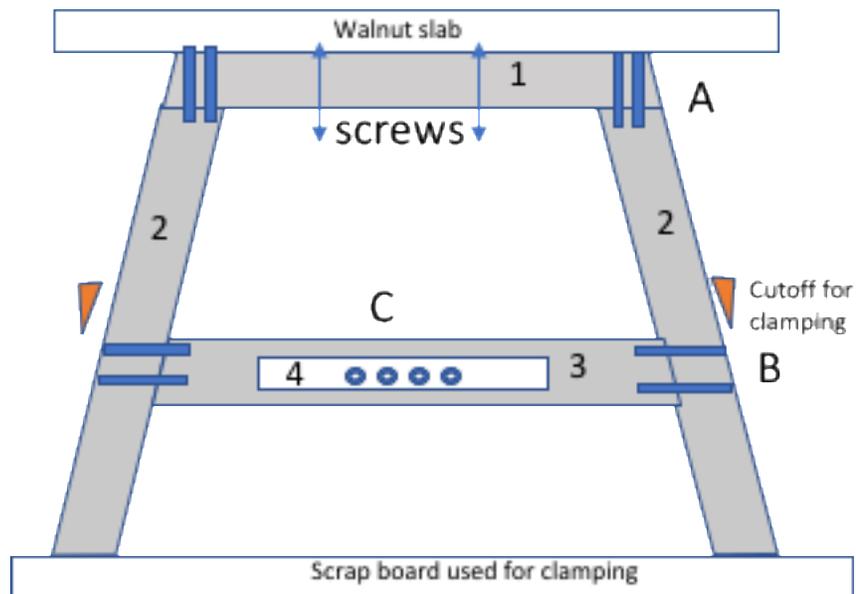
As can be seen in the photos, the bench is simply a walnut slab held up by two legs that are joined by a stretcher. Most of the guild members could turn this bench out in their sleep. But here’s how I did it with dowels.



First of all, given the height desired and width of the slab, I calculated (I am indeed a high school graduate!) that I needed a 6-degree slope to the leg pieces. After making parts #1-4 (see my non-scale drawing below) from 1 ½ x 1 ½ mystery wood – most likely mahogany of some species, I saved a cut-off so I could tilt wood at the same angle on the base of my drill press. Connection A between pieces #1 and #2 was easy; I simply drilled ¼ inch holes from the top of part #1. I actually did these at 90 degrees, making sure that in the end the holes or dowels would not come through the sides of the sides #2. To do this, I clamped part #1 to #2 and #3 (using an extra board on the far side to provide a parallel clamping surface) and then drilled all the 2 ½ inch holes to make joint A on both sides. I was not concerned about exposed holes on the top of part #1 since this would be covered by the walnut slab.

Using two cutoff pieces with the same 6-degree bevel I was then able to clamp the assembly together (with ordinary F clamps) in order to drill the dowel holes to connect the sides #2 to the brace #3. The trick here came from being a dowel expert (ha ha). Rather than drill holes in parts #2 and then try to match them with holes in part #3, a nearly impossible alignment task, I just clamped up the assembly and drilled the holes together. I drilled right through the sides and into the brace. This guaranteed a perfect fit, but meant that the holes on the outside of the sides would be visible. My holes were 2 ½ inches deep and I used 2-inch dowels, so I filled the last ½ inch with a piece of walnut dowel and then cut/sanded flush. The result is a nearly

invisible dowel joint; I was tempted to use a pine or maple dowel that would have added a nice contrast, but I laid down and rested until the temptation passed.



The trickier part was connecting the stretcher #4 to the two braces #3. The dowels oriented on the z axis on both ends have to be aligned in both planes X and Y. I took an easy route out. I drilled holes in both ends of the stretcher and then used dowel centers to mark the locations on both of the leg braces, being careful first to label which leg was left and which end of the stretcher was the left end. I also labeled which side of the stretcher was up vs. down – perpetual oversights that have cost me plenty. In the end, the bench came out great.

I finished the piece using a 1/3-1/3-1/3 blend of BLO, mineral spirits, and Watco natural-tinted oil. I've always liked the Watco varnishes, although I've also had trouble with evenness and stickiness when using them at full strength. I've used BLO by itself in the past also. This was the first time I tried this mixture approach and it worked out great, IMHO