

## Curved-Front Cabinet-on-Stand

Featured Piece of the Month – February 2022

Bob McKee

My vintage block planes were gathering dust on shelves in my shop and needed a cabinet to house them. Knowing that no one really cares about a plane collection except its owner, I wanted a showcase that would draw people in, which a curved piece can do. My solution was a curved cabinet-on-stand with design elements of James Krenov's wonderful small cabinets.

Krenov's books are inspirational but unfortunately lack anything resembling actual plans and none of the cabinet plans by Krenov disciples appealed to me. Fortunately one of his books had pictures of a curved front cabinet that included its height and width from which I calculated the other measurements. I increased the dimensions a bit and incorporated elements I especially like from a number of James Krenov's pieces, then drew full sized plans.

Articles in Fine Woodworking by students of Krenov's provided useful information about construction details such as making legs that flare at the top and bottom and fitting stretchers between flared legs. Numerous other articles in American and British magazines gave insights on topics like laminating curved rails for the doors, fitting stiles to curved rails for the door, making mullions, installing the windows in a curved cabinet, and fashioning handles.

In fact, I spent about a month making all sorts of different handles before rereading a section in one of Krenov's books about carving the handle, which I did using Apple and Walnut.





The cabinet is Applewood, which is not often used for furniture because large apple trees are uncommon and the waste factor is high due to knots, cracks, and twists. I love the color, figure, and texture of Applewood and search it out in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states.

The stand is Black Walnut. Its legs were cut from a 12/4 board with attention to the grain structure. Krenov's shaped legs, with their tapered centers and flared feet, were my main reason for choosing this design. The back panel and shelves of the cabinet are light, curly maple so the planes on display stand out, but I undercut the fronts of the shelves and faced them with strips of Applewood so horizontal slashes of white wouldn't overwhelm other design features.



The curved door rails were formed by resawing an Applewood board into 1/8" thick veneer strips and laminating the rails in the curved jig shown below. Having no experience making concave furniture I erred on the side of caution and drew only a 1" curve across the 30" width. My next curved cabinet will have a more pronounced curve. The straight door stiles are joined



to curved rails using bridle joints. My first attempt was out of square and had to be discarded. Seeing what I did wrong was instructive and my second effort came out well. One of the door's bridle joints is visible in the first picture. The door is mounted with knife hinges from EC Shepherd Company set into the top and bottom of the cabinet and secured forever when the case was glued.

Forming the curves on the door and the cabinet front required using my old Stanley No. 113 compass plane as well as a curved bottom shave made by Veritas and a Millers Falls No. 1 “cigar” shaped shave, whose specialized cuts no other tool can make as well.

Building the case was straight forward except that my limited stock of Applewood was depleted by my mistakes on the first door, which made for some hard choices when laying out the side panels. When gluing up the case I followed Krenov’s practice of joining the side panels to the top and bottom with dowels.

After looking at the options for installing curved windows I settled on PETG, which is said to stay clear and was easy to cut. The finish on the cabinet is a British product called Liberon Finishing Oil, which left a smooth satin finish after several wiped-on coats. I used 000 steel wool between applications. A couple coats of Butcher’s Wax finished the job and my prized block planes now occupy a sunny corner of my home office.

