

Hall Entry Table in Flame Birch, Pearwood, and Ebony

Featured Piece of the Month – April 2022

Bob McKee

When we decamped from Boston to the Burbs we brought along a cast iron Victorian fire grate that didn't quite fit the fireplace. So for 33 years that fire grate sat inside our front door serving as a catchall for dog leashes, boots, and mittens. It took a long time but finally, embarrassed by how bad it looked, I decided to build the entry table shown here. (It actually lives in our house, not on the porch as shown here.)



Following my normal clunky process I searched the Internet for designs, selected this Cherry Shaker style table as a model, and drew full sized plans. Cherry is an attractive choice for Shaker furniture, but I decided to go with Flame Birch to add some spark. A guitar maker in Amesbury sells locally sawn lumber from his shop, so on a Sunday afternoon my wife and I drove to that lovely town and came home with a Flame Birch slab.



My first step after milling the wood was to glue up the top. The result was disappointing. Attempts to plane the heavily figured wood left trails of tearout. After remedying that on the reverse side by using a heavy panel plane and card scrapers, I was still unhappy with the grain and color match. So the board pictured below will be cut down for another project. Luckily, I had some highly figured Flame Birch in my woodpile and one of the boards became the top.



The rest of the table is all cut from the slab except for the drawer fronts, which are Pearwood from a slab purchased newly-sawn several years ago. It's a pretty salmon color that I thought might show well with Ebony cockbeading. After making the cockbeading, I wondered if the contrast was too much and decided to soften the effect by inlaying a strip of Cocobolo at each end of the drawer. But in fact the Cocobolo hardly shows unless one is really looking. So my



table might have been better without the cockbeading or made with cockbeading from a lighter wood, but cockbeading can really add to a piece as on this Applewood chest seen below.

Cockbeading was originally used to protect the veneering on drawer fronts, but it is also used for decorative purposes on solid wood drawers.



To make cockbeading you cut strips of wood about 1/8" thick, round the top edges with a block plane and a scratch bead profile, cut the faces of the drawers around their perimeters and affix the beading so it's about 1/8" proud of the drawer face. Here is my setup – a simple jig to hold the wood in my workbench vise along with my Stanley No. 66 beader fitted with a 1/8" cutter.



My go-to finish has become Liberon Finishing Oil, which the manufacturer recommends brushing on then wiping down after letting it soak for ten minutes. An alternative method that works well for me is wiping the Liberon on with a cloth in very thin coats, letting it dry for 5 hours as recommended, and rubbing lightly with 0000 steel wool between applications. Starting with a first coat in the morning allows for three applications in a day. I use about 8 coats for a lustrous satin finish.

This was a fun project, but unfortunately the table will never be used for its intended purpose. My wife doesn't want "stuff" going on it, nor to risk having it dinged by our front door!

Bob McKee