Sharp as a Chisel
Andrew Davis
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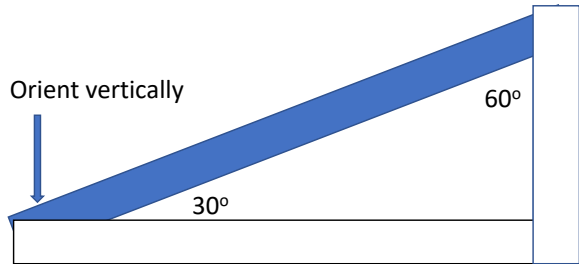
They say the first sign of Woodworker's Alzheimer Malady (WAM) is not when you chisel the mortise in the wrong side of your board, but when you forget what the chisel is for in the first place. I'm only partway there, but recently I've been struggling with what I call 3-D geometry puzzles. I'm not talking about calculating board feet, or the radius of a circle, or the tangent of an angle. Equations and algebra are my cup of tea. But figuring how to make a miter or bevel cut on my table saw is a whole different matter. Here are two examples from just the past 10 days.

I needed to make a 16-inch wide triangular ramp for my wife's kitchen drawer. I figured that the height should be about 2" and the ramp (the hypotenuse of the triangle) should be about 6" to hold her spice bottles. A 30-60-90 triangle looked to be a close fit. When you tilt your table saw (30 degrees to the left in my case) you always have 4 options, or in my case, 3 ways to screw it up. Workpiece on the left, workpiece on the right, top up, or top down? Cutting the piece with the 30-degree bevel was a piece of cake. But cutting a 60-degree angle so that it lies flat is a different matter. Turns out the solution is to leave the blade at 30 and run the workpiece vertically against the fence. It's obvious in hindsight, but if you're old enough to be retired and at the advanced-beginner stage, it took me a while to figure it out. Then of course I was upset that it took me so long to do so. You also need to be careful putting the fence very close to the blade.



More recently I started to tackle a project that has been on my list since pre-COVID times. The plan is from a magazine article and requires my learning some new joinery. The piece has four legs and two asymmetrical trapezoidal aprons that connect the front and back legs on each side via long and deep mortises. All the angles are 3 degrees off 90. The "bookcase" also has a top and bottom shelf that connects left and right sides via wedged through-tenons. The legs are not square in cross section, however. They are rectangular. I built a jig for the mortising operation. But then I almost routed the mortise on the wrong side of the first leg. (I started with five legs, my normal strategy if I have enough wood). In truth, it took me a long and nerve-wracking time to figure out which side was which. I thought I was losing my mind. Eventually, I labeled each leg as front or rear, left or right, with front facing and outward facing faces. Then I put tape down to mark where I need to route the mortises. Once again, in hindsight it looks obvious. Now, I'm off to the races and hope to not make any stupid mistakes.

Stupid mistakes in the workshop come in two categories. In one you wind up with scrap wood; in the other you get injured. In either case you can end up questioning your mental acuity. I do.

Stay sharp!