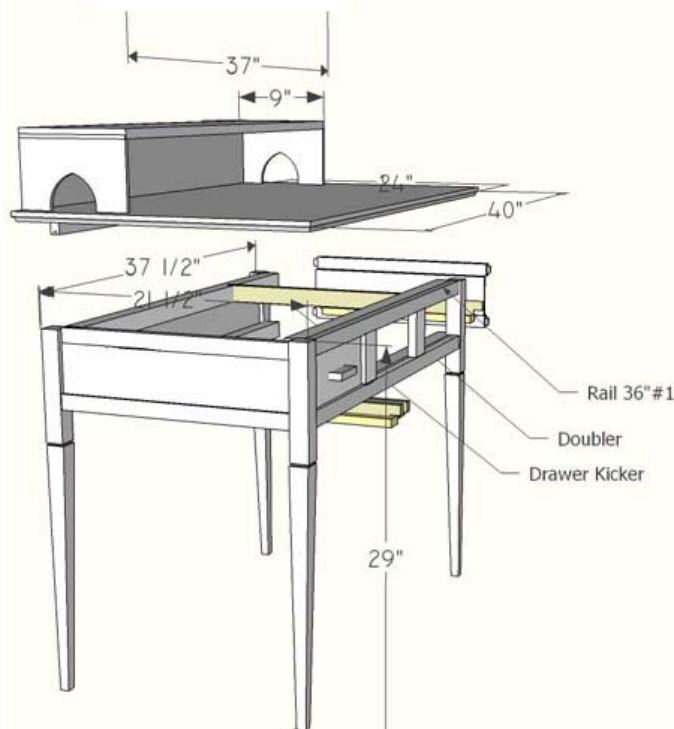


Notes and Reflections While Shaving Wood

Getting From Conception to Completion

Charles D. Hepler



Preface

The facts of my life surely affect how I see things, so you deserve to know the context in which I write.

I'll make them brief. I was born just before World War II and grew up in good times of economic prosperity, optimism, and social reform. I've had lots of different jobs. I started working as a casual farm laborer and golf caddy at 14, before I was old enough to get a work permit. Later, I was a dishwasher (by hand) in a delicatessen for two days until I was fired for being too slow (said the owner) or getting the dishes too clean (said I). I was a rod man on a survey crew when I was 15. Later, I was a soda jerk, life-guard, and water safety instructor. I sold menswear for a while. My career, until I retired, was hospital pharmacist, university professor and health services researcher.

I'm a husband, father of three, foster father of one. The Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, wrote some lines that say a lot about who I am. This motif has run through my life for years, from well before I became an "aged man".

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress,
Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence.

I love five things about woodworking

1. Woodworking reminds me to live every day in preparation for a bright future, just as much now as I did when I was younger. My life has been enriched by study, practice, reflection and discipline. I believe that the world around us can be improved by those four practices, and by the craftsmanship that results from them. This may sound trite, because many profound truths are given lip service instead of the respect they deserve. They become painless, pious cliches instead of being enacted every day. I enact these every day in my shop.

2. Woodworking engages my mind, body and spirit. It lets me "clap my hands and sing, and louder sing". It challenges me and lets me feel competent and useful, two of my very favorite feelings. It keeps me away from the TV, off the golf course and out of bars.

3. I enjoy learning and being useful, especially when they are combined in ways that require particular competence. During two decades of study and practice, I have made many useful and attractive pieces. I have also overcome many problems and endured disappointments, including some that I caused. I have learned a lot, and look forward to learning more.

4. Woodworking combines the joy of doing with the pride of accomplishment, and it is real. Its blunt reality acts as a great counter-balance for my overly theoretical mind. There is very little room for hype in a piece I have made. It *is* what it *is*. Woodworking reminds me of the values I grew up with, before clever marketers convinced us that we can "spin" reality. In my woodworking, reality is reality.

5. Woodworking connects my past, present and future. My *past*, because I remember my father and uncle, especially when I use tools that they once used, and because I can see how much I have improved over the years; my *present* because I am engaged in an ancient and honorable activity that I enjoy; and my *future* because I imagine my work will last longer than I will, and that generations yet unborn will use pieces that I have made, even if they don't know who I was.

I am grateful to my parents, who taught me to respect learning, to seek the best in myself and others, and to persist until I reached my goals. My wife, Barb, has always motivated me to be the man that she thought I was (or would become) when she married me.

I have benefitted greatly from real mentors like the late Bill Tester at the University of Iowa, who validated my tendency toward idealism and modelled persistence in the face of skepticism when the outcome really mattered; and from virtual mentors like Tage Frid, Gary Rogowski and many others whose works I have read over the years. Sincere thanks to them and to all the other authors whose souls have clapped their hands and sung.

Charles Douglas Hepler
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