

Dutch Tool Chests

by Megan Fitzpatrick

with a foreword by Roy Underhill





First published by Lost Art Press LLC in 2024
837 Willard St., Covington, KY 41011, USA
Web: <http://lostartpress.com>

Title: Dutch Tools Chests
Author: Megan Fitzpatrick
Editor & Publisher: Christopher Schwarz
Copy editor: Kara Gebhart Uhl
Distribution: John Hoffman

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ISBN: 978-1-954697-22-5

First printing

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This book was printed and bound in the United States.

Signature Book Printing, Inc.

8041 Cessna Ave.

Gaithersburg, MD 20879

<http://signature-book.com>



Table of Contents

Foreword	1
1. Let's Go 'Dutch'	5
2. Materials	11
3. Parts Prep	23
4. Dovetails	29
5. Dados	49
6. Shelves	57
7. Top Angles	61
8. Assembly	65
9. Lock & Batten Notches	71
10. Bottom Lip	75
11. Front	79
12. Fall Front	83
13. Backboards	91
14. Lid	97
15. Hardware	111
16. Paint	121
17. Interior	127
18. Mobile Base	133
19. Gallery	139
Acknowledgments	185



10

Bottom Lip

It doesn't really matter if the front board or the bottom lip gets attached first – and on both sizes of chests, the process is the same. I'll start here with the lip, simply because there's less to do before we start hammering (or screwing).

Protect the Corner

At the top front corner of the bottom lip (and at the bottom front corner of the front), it's good practice to add a bead or bevel. That not only creates a nice shadow line and hides the gap between the fall front and its adjacent parts, it also protects the corners. A sharp corner is a fragile corner, and here it is in danger of being knocked into (and off) every time you remove and reinsert the fall front.

My protection of choice is usually a 3/16" bead (because that's the size my plane cuts). It's a traditional look, and I love any excuse to use my beading plane. If you don't have a beading plane, this is an excellent excuse to get one. (Warning: It is the gateway drug to all moulding planes.)

However, a beading plane (and all moulding planes) work best on only one corner of a board: the corner on which the grain is rising out on both faces in the direction of the cut (the plane cuts in

only one direction). Moulding planes also work better in softwoods.

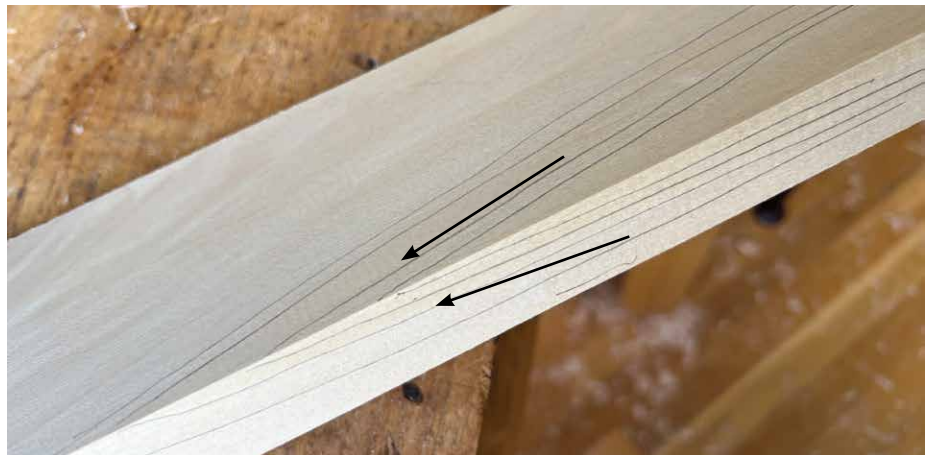
But know that you can often get away with breaking the bead rules – especially in mild grain and softer hardwoods, such as walnut and cherry.

So give it a go no matter your species – and if it looks terrible (i.e., it tears out), turn that ugly bead into a nice chamfer with a block plane. Or just start (and fin-

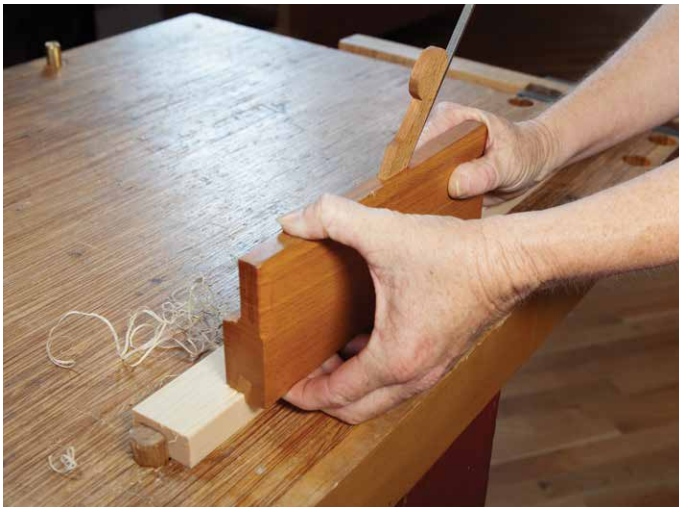
ish) with a chamfer if you're going for a more utilitarian look (or don't have a beading plane).

Identify the lip's best corner (if you're beading), then clamp the workpiece to your bench in an end vise or wagon vise, or use a sticking board. Bead the edge.

Hold the plane perpendicular to the work, with the iron on the wood and the fence pressed to the edge of the workpiece



Left: The beading plane will stop cutting when the depth stop (really it's a shoulder) reaches the face of the workpiece. It is important to make sure the fence is against the edge of the work; it's all too easy to jam the fragile exposed point of the boxing against it, and break it off (at which point the plane becomes suitable for display on the wall of a Cracker Barrel). Above: The grain lines are a bit difficult to see on this piece of linden, so I penciled in a few of them. The grain is rising out in the plane's direction of cut on both the face and edge at this corner only; this is the best corner on this board on which to cut a bead.



Note the hand positions. My right hand is pushing forward at the back of the plane; my left hand is pushing down and in to keep the plane in contact with the workpiece.



The beading plane's shavings are good at removing any fuzzies. But be wary – you can easily get a splinter under a fingernail while doing this. Make sure you have a handful of shavings to protect against it.

(it's easy to get the position wrong and push the plane's fragile boxing into the wood). Your right hand's job is to push forward. Your left hand's job is to hold the plane at the correct angle, and in contact with the workpiece from above and below the tool.

Push forward, following through on the cut. Keep the plane in the cut, pull straight back, then push forward again. Repeat until the depth stop contacts the wood and the plane stops cutting. Be careful as you pull back; that boxing can easily break off if you stress it by pulling sideways.

After the plane stops cutting, you might notice some fuzzy bits in the quirk; grab a handful of the plane shavings to burnish those away.

Fastener Layout

Clamp the bottom lip (bead facing up on the front edge) so it's flush with the bottom edge of the chest (you can add glue on both sides of the lock void(s) if you like). Now clamp the chest to the bench. You don't want anything moving as you drill and drive the fasteners. (I'm writing "nails" going forward, 'cause that's what I'm using, and it's fewer letters.)

Lay out the nail locations. Measure 3/8" up and in from the outside corners on both ends. You need a nail at each. Then use dividers or a tape measure to decide on the left-to-right locations (they are all 3/8" up from the bottom) of any nails in between. There's one caveat: You cannot (or at least should not) put one in the center on the one-bay chest; that will prevent the sliding lock from passing through. And obviously, you need to avoid the lock locations on the two-bay chest, too. (I've had more than one anal-retentive students cut off the most of the shaft of a nail



A jack plane makes quick work of cutting a chamfer – just hold it at 45° (or close to), then a few passes will do it. Follow up with a smooth plane if necessary. (You could also use a block plane, of course.)



Clamp the lip securely to the carcass while also clamping the entire assembly securely to the bench – you want no movement.



The 50mm Rivierre nails get a 1/8" pilot (and a 9/64" or 5/32" hole through the lip at both ends). The pilots for the 6d cut nails are 3/32".

so they could put one at center for the sake of symmetry without it blocking the lock notch. If that's you, add a dab of epoxy to the pilot hole before sinking that nail.)

I usually use four fasteners across (on either size chest), then I match that on the lower edge of the front board (the next chapter).

I'm using 50mm square-shanked nails; you could also use 6d cut nails or #10 x 2" screws. All of these require pilot holes, and the Rivierres might also require a clearance hole.

In theory, the pilot hole for the 50mm Rivierre nails is 1/8" – and that size pilot should work fine on the two (or more) nails in the middle. At the ends, where they are located only 3/8" in, the nails often cause splits in the top board (the lip). So I typically err on the side of caution and drill a larger pilot or a clearance hole – a hole big enough for the nail to drop in all the way to the head – through the top piece only. Most of the nail's holding power comes from its bite into the bottom board, so by weakening it a bit in the top board, you're not losing much strength, especially in comparison to wussy wire nails.

For the 6d cut nails, a 3/32" pilot should work, and there is rarely a need for clearance holes with the cut nails (but don't forget to insert them in the correct direction – wedge with the grain).

For screws, match the bit diameter to the screw shaft.

Drill the pilot holes through the top board and just a smidge into the bottom board for the nails, or the full length of the shaft for screws. Sink the nails.



Take a moment to admire your work – it's starting to look like a tool chest!