



Mockup leads to a masterful piece

EVOLUTION OF A CHEST ON STAND

BY MIKE KORSAK



TOOLS OF FINE DESIGN

Korsak's chest on stand began as a taller, two-door cabinet. Dissatisfied with that, he sketched a six-drawer chest with a scalloped case, then stretched the piece out to its current three-drawer format. He made templates from his full-scale drawings to guide shaping. The proving ground for his drawn concepts was a mockup made of MDF.

This chest began as a response to seeing a lot of cabinets-on-stand, all very similar and clearly inspired by the work of James Krenov. I admire Krenov's cabinets, and I was interested in building a cabinet-on-stand, but I wanted to deviate from this familiar form. I was also intent on designing a stand whose legs and base were "just right." In some of my past pieces, the legs had not quite met that elusive standard. Building them, I learned that a design can look fine on paper but totally different in three dimensions. So this time, to guide the design process, I invested the time in building a leg prototype and a full-size mockup.

My initial idea was for an upright piece with two asymmetrical doors that would open to reveal shelves or drawers inside. At some point it hit me that the overall design of the piece closely resembled the work of other makers—the very opposite of what I had intended. I scrapped it.

Going back to the sketchbook, I roughed out an idea for a wider base, borrowing some of the shapes from the original concept. My new case design began as something more complex with fluted, or undulating, sides and top, and multiple rows of drawers. Through more concept sketching and some rough full-scale drawings, I arrived at a simpler case that seemed to harmonize better with the relatively quiet base. I liked the contrast between the two—a rectilinear case atop a curvaceous base.

Once I had a full-scale front elevation that looked right, I made a template of the leg profile out of thin quartersawn cherry. I then used the template to lay



Study in contrast. Korsak paired a curvy base with a straight-lined case, and used the wood to heighten the contrast: ebonized walnut for the base and pulls, and curly maple for the case. The edging is rosewood.

out a prototype leg in solid wood. My aim was to shape the prototype to the same extent as an actual leg, minus any joinery. In areas that needed refinement, I modified both the prototype and template, because later I would use the template to shape the actual legs.

Next came the full-scale mockup. I built it using the prototype leg and three legs made of 3/4-in. MDF. I cut out the MDF legs quickly on the bandsaw, with no cleanup of the cuts. For the aprons, I attached 3/4-in. MDF to the legs with pocket screws. I built the case with 1/4-in. MDF over a skeleton of scrap solid stock.

When I had the mockup built, the piece seemed a bit tall and narrow. So I

stretched the width, increasing the apron length by about 3 in. and tacking more 1/4-in. MDF to one end of the case. Now the piece looked too wide. I trimmed 1 in. off the width, then 2 in., where I thought it looked good. Satisfied with the width, I cut the height of the case down by about 1 in. Now I was happy. To make the mockup more realistic, I dyed the base black and drew lines on the front of the case to represent the drawer fronts. I used a Sharpie along the corners of the case to represent the rosewood edging.

I probably spent about four hours building the mockup and another four making the sample leg. It was time well spent, allowing me to dial in the shapes, dimensions, and proportions, and providing visual affirmation that I was on the path to a successful finished piece. □

Mike Korsak builds custom furniture in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Online Extra

For a closer look into Mike Korsak's sketchbooks, plans, and design process, go to FineWoodworking.com/262.