

ASK SMITTY

No woodworker (except *SMITTY*, of course) has ALL the answers. From time-to-time, everyone hits a snag, trying to figure out some sort of in-shop problem.

Don't worry. *SMITTY* can help. Just use the special e-mail link directly below to send your questions to *SMITTY*. He'll do his best to get back to you soon, with the answers to those questions.

Here are the questions...and *SMITTY*'s answers for this issue...

Making Butcher Blocks

From Susie Smith Phillips, Plano, TX

I'd like to build an old-fashioned butcher block but have no idea what kind of wood to use. Where can I find instructions on how to build it ?

I've made a number of cutting boards...as a rule, by laminating a bunch of boards together face-to-face, with their edge grain exposed on the top and bottom of the assembled board. Some folks prefer to make them with the end grain of the boards forming the cutting surface.

Typically, these are made using closed-grain hard woods such as cherry, maple or walnut. I don't think open grained woods such as oak are as good for these. Try alternating the boards for a striped look. Glue everything together using waterproof epoxy, polyurethane glue or two-part resorcinol glue.

For added protection against everything coming apart, I often run a 1/4" diameter, 20-pitch threaded rod through the laminated boards at both ends of the cutting board, then make a wood "cap" with counterbored holes on the insides that slip over the nuts on the exposed ends of the threaded rods...then glue the "caps" into position, covering-up the rod nuts.

Just be sure to allow everything to dry thoroughly before applying a non-toxic finish such as Salad Bowl Finish or Preserve Oil Finish.

Hope this info helps.

Repairing Blotchy Cherry Finish

From Cindy Jacoby, Mequon, WI

My husband built a fireplace mantel out of cherry wood. He sanded it and I pre-stained it before applying Minwax Early American stain. In some areas the staining is beautiful and the grain looks so nice and in other areas I have dark blotches that ruin the entire look of the cherry wood - it looks almost like stain applied to plywood. What can I do to get rid of the blotches and end up with the beautiful look that cherry wood is known for? I have applied mineral spirits to the dark areas with little results. HELP!

Unfortunately, you're going to have a difficult time. Depending on the way the wood has been cut from the log, Cherry is "notorious" for this problem. And, since you've used a penetrating stain such as Minwax, it's going to be very difficult to resolve the problem.

Before staining a tight-grained wood such as cherry or maple, you should ALWAYS first apply a stain blocker such as "PreStain" (available from Woodworker's Supply — www.woodworker.com) or a wash coat of shellac. Most readily available shellacs are of a "two-pound cut" variety. With a shellac such as this, you would mix it one-to-one with denatured alcohol and apply a thin coat of this mixture, then allow it to dry thoroughly prior to staining. My suggestion is that you "practice" with some scrap before applying it to the "real" mantelpiece.

The best answers I've found to this problem are in the June, 1998 issue of "Fine Woodworking" magazine (Issue # 130)...page 46...an article by Jeff Jewitt. Just go the Fine Woodworking website (www.finewoodworking.com), log in and access this article through the Archives area.

However, now that you have the problem, you have one of three possible solutions:

1) Plane the wood down until you're past the stain and start over. Depending on how much stain you've applied, and how long it's been on the wood, you may have to remove from 1/8" to 1/4" of the wood to get past the stained area. That's a lot, I know.

2) Apply a commercial "wood bleach" and start over. Unfortunately, this will remove the wonderful color and patina of the natural cherry...which you'll have to replace with some sort of stain.

3) Cover your mantelpiece with Cherry veneer

Wish I had better news for you. This is an often-encountered problem that has ruined many a project.

Cutting Crown Moldings Flat On Table Saw

From J. Burmeister (e-mail question — city/state unknown)

What angle settings are required when cutting crown moldings with the stock laid flat on the Table Saw Surface?

This depends on the angle of the molding. Crown moldings come in two primary "slopes". 45-degrees and 38-degrees. 45-degree sloped crown is, of course, the most common.

So....begin by determining the slope (tilt) of your molding...then follow these settings.

For 45-degree sloped molding...

30-degree bevel (table tilt) angle

35.3-degree miter (miter gauge) angle

For 38-degree sloped molding...

33.9-degree bevel angle

31.6-degree miter angle

Storage Ideas For TSIII “Ultra Fence System”

From Jerry Nutter (e-mail question — city/state unknown)

First, the new Incra TSIII Ultra Fence System is absolutely fantastic! I generally don't rant and rave about products, but this thing is really a great addition to the Shopsmith product line.

The question: Has anyone come up with a good way to store the System when not in use? I presume other Shopsmith owners have smaller shops and figuring out a storage space for the Incra has me a bit puzzled. Any ideas?

Quite frankly, Jerry, it's not a topic that has come up around here...YET. We agree that it's a great addition to the MARK V and provides loads of great new benefits. However, we've been so busy testing it out to see what ELSE we can do with it that it's never been off our test machine. As a result, we haven't given storage much thought...nor have we heard any ideas from the new owners.

I guess if I were to come up with an idea on the spot, it would be based around some sort of pegboard set-up with long, straight hooks strategically placed to support everything. Wish I had a more specific plan for you. If we come up with something particularly nifty, I'll let you know.

Air Drying Lumber In A Garage

From “Patrick” (e-mail question — city/state unknown)

I'm planning to try air drying some lumber for the first time and would like to know if it's OK to dry it in an unheated garage?

Yes, it's OK to dry it in a garage. However, keep in mind that it will require about twice as much time to do so in a garage as it would to do so outdoors. For example, with 1" thick lumber, it would take about a year outdoors...two years in an enclosed garage. That's because you will get much better air circulation in an outdoor environment than in an enclosed garage.

Here are some important points for consideration:

- 1): Be sure to paint both ends of your boards to prevent checking.
- 2): Place 1" square “stickers” between each layer of boards to allow better air circulation...one “sticker” for every two-feet of board length
- 3): A disadvantage to indoor air drying is that you could experience a build-up of mold and humidity in your garage from the wet lumber.
- 4): Using a dehumidifier in the garage will cut the garage drying time in half. Running a fan (without a dehumidifier) will only move the damp air around. Running a dehumidifier AND a fan will cut your time in half again...however, it could easily speed things up too much, resulting in surface cracks and checks.
- 5): It's a good idea to stack a fair amount of weight on top of your pile...to keep the top two layers of boards from warping. On a 4' x 8' stack, about 24 concrete blocks, spaced evenly will do the trick.
- 6): If you decide to do the job outdoors...
 - ...Keep your first layer of boards off the ground by about a foot
 - ...Stack (with stickers) as described in point #2 above
 - ...Cover the top of your stack with OSB (oriented strand board...because it's “cheap”), so it hangs over all edges by about 2-feet, forming a “roof” over your stack...don't forget the concrete blocks on top.

Alignment Consistency With MARK V Set-Ups

From Drew Kelley (e-mail question — city/state unknown)

I have had my Mark V for 19 years and it still runs like new. Is there any way to consistently have the Sawblade and Worktable line up in the same relationship so the splitter and Saw Guard will line up.

Also, is there a way to do this so that homemade jigs that ride in the slots have the same distance from the slot to the blade, allowing the use of jigs such as panel cutters and the jigs in the “Power Tool Woodworking for Everyone” text?

If your machine has been set-up and aligned properly (which I’m sure it has been, after 19 years), everything should line-up consistently from set-up to set-up. There are three reasons why this may not be happening as it should:

1): Your Carriage Stop Ring (the o-ring like “rubber bumper” that fits around the operator-side upper Way Tube between the Table Carriage and Headstock) may be missing. This helps maintain the proper distance between these two components. If it’s missing, you need to replace it.

2): You’re not retracting the quill fully (and locking it into position at the retracted location) with each set-up.

3): You’re not being sure the blade (or cutter) is bottomed-out all the way against the MARK V spindle before tightening it in position.

Non-Toxic Finish For Child’s Cradle

From “Cindy” (e-mail question— city/state unknown)

I am building a cradle for my first grandchild and am really concerned about what kind of finish to use. Can you help?

As a rule, with a cradle or crib, any kind of stained finish with a clear “overcoat” such as varnish or polyurethane is OK. Typically, children don’t chew on cradles or cribs...perhaps that’s because most components of such projects are just too big to chew on.

However, you should be sure not to use any lead-based paints (I’m not sure they’re even available anymore). In fact, I’d probably not recommend using “paint” of any kind, as it could chip off.

If you’re still concerned, try staining, then “overcoating” with a non-toxic finish such as Salad Bowl Finish or “Preserve” Oil finish. Both of these products are designed for cutting boards and other items that will come in contact with foods. Once dried, either of these products are non-toxic. The Salad Bowl finish can even be applied in multiple coats, then buffed to a hard, high-gloss finish.

Covering “Stinky” Linseed Oil Finish

From “Fred” (e-mail question — city/state unknown)

My wife recently purchased a wooden box that appears to have been finished at one time with linseed oil. The wood is dry, but the odor is something else! I was wondering if I could apply a top coat of varnish to get rid of this odor? I have set this box, opened, out in the sunshine trying to get it to air out, but to no avail. The smell is still there. Any help would be appreciated.

If we’re assuming that you have a linseed oil finish on your box....varnish, shellac or polyurethane should “cure” over linseed oil nicely (lacquer will NOT). My suggestion is that you choose your favorite of these three and try it on the bottom or another spot where it won’t be seen. Your first objective is to see whether or not it will “cure” properly. If it does, finish the entire piece. If it doesn’t, try the next of these three. Just remember, shellac is not the most durable of finishes...so, I would try it last.