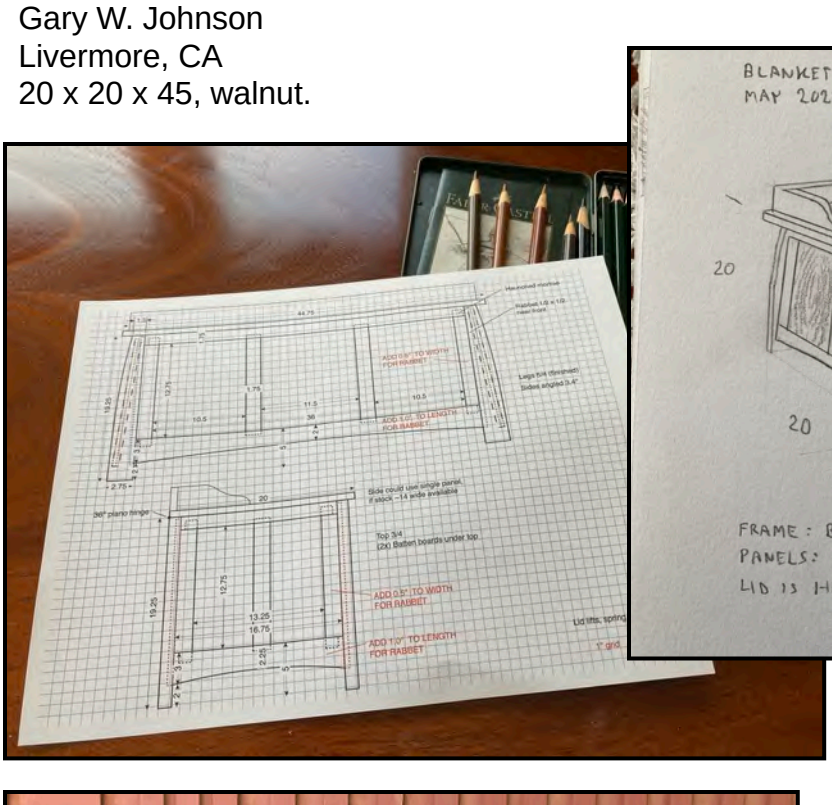
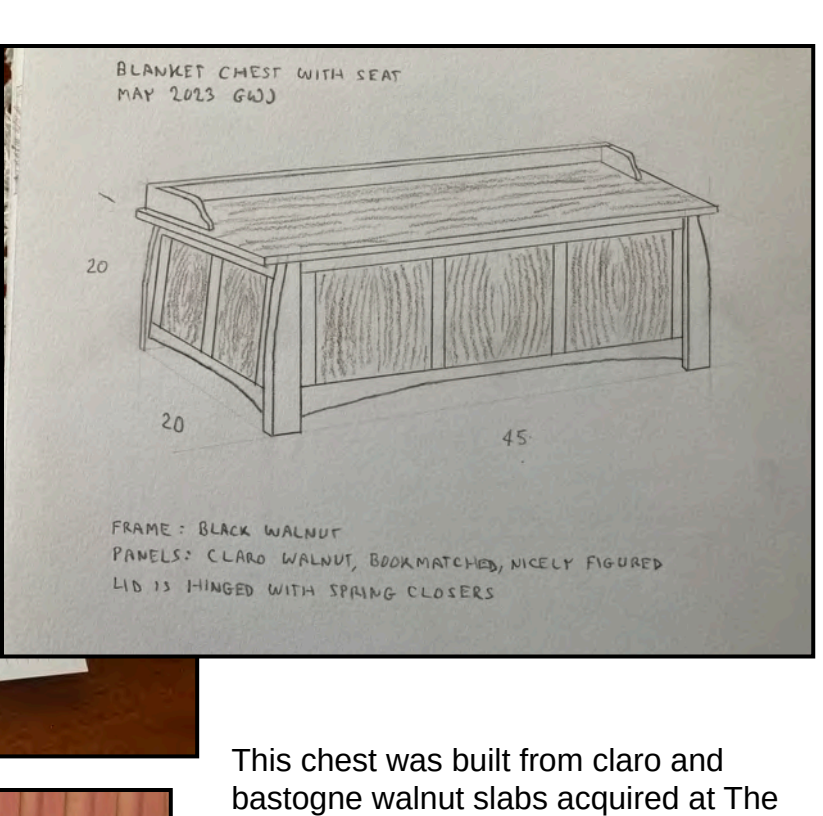
Blanket Chest (2023)

Gary W. Johnson
Livermore, CA
20 x 20 x 45, walnut.





This chest was built from claro and bastogne walnut slabs acquired at The Walnut Place in Woodland, CA. All this lumber was locally harvested in and around Sacramento and a couple of the slabs were sequential, allowing a ready bookmatch.

The design is simple—basically Shaker—to balance the spectacular figure in this lumber.

I try to take advantage of natural flaws including knots, which are filled with clear epoxy casting resin. Even so, there can be much waste when "surprises" appear as a slab is opened.

Panels

Here are the bookmatched bastogne walnut slabs that were used for the panels. Lots of study goes into these before crosscutting.

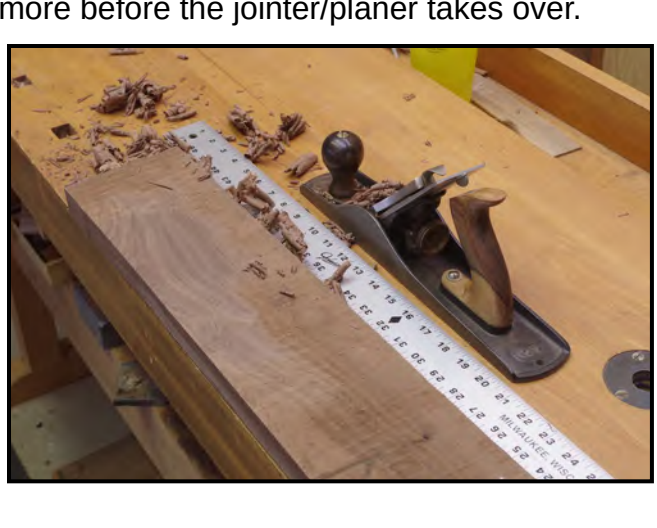
After that, they were all resawn again.

My wife always helps with selection of bookmatch arrangement. Some are interesting, some less so. Finding overall harmony is the goal.

Lid

Another bookmatched pair was uses for the lid. The first crosscut means I'm really committed!

Planks were severely warped and cupped. By ripping them, much thickness can be preserved. Hand planing for the initial flattening helps even more before the jointer/planer takes over.



Frames

Most of the lumber was resawn and after some consideration, cut to rough size for all the components, most of which were in the frames.

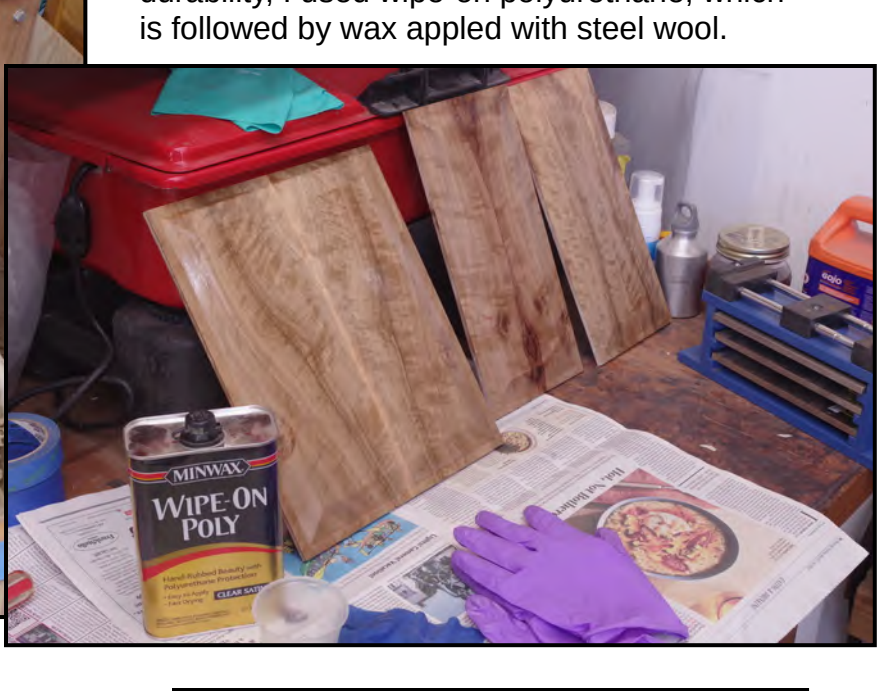
Grain patterns and orientations are studied to find the most pleasing arrangements. That's something you almost never see in commercial furniture anymore.

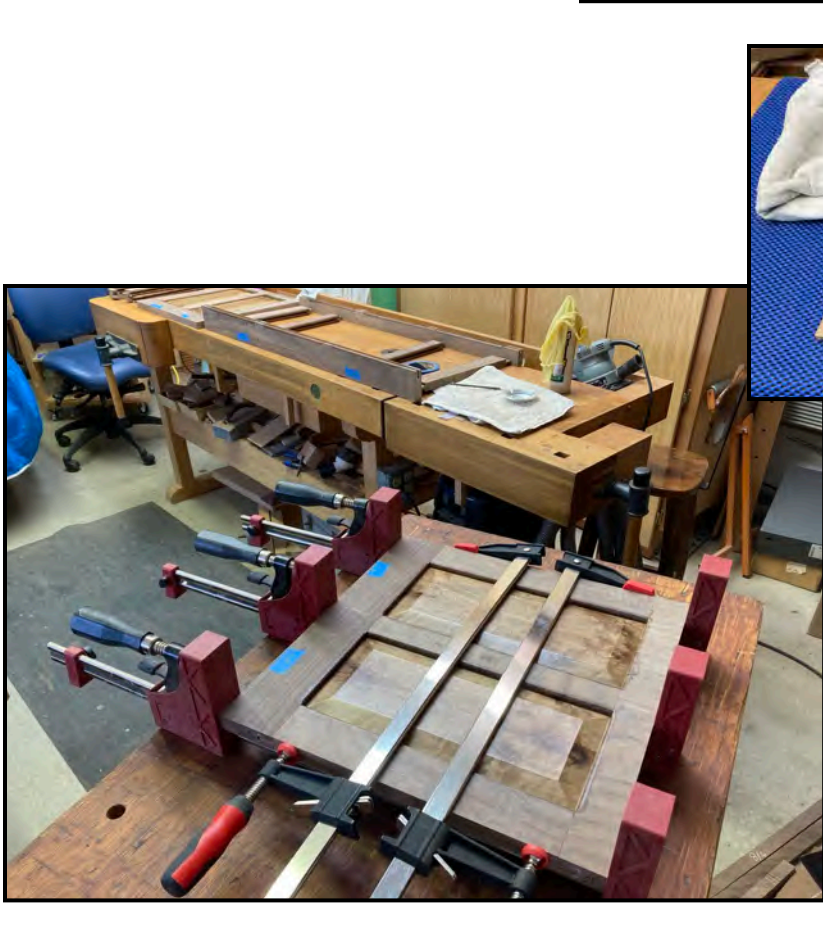
Mortise and tenon joints are made by a combination of machining and hand work.

Frame and Panel Assembly

Raised panels are formed on the router table with a big, scarey cutter that doubles as an artificial snow machine!

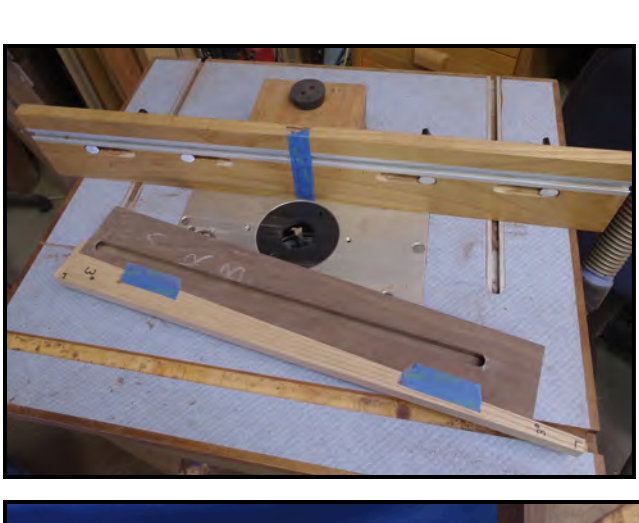
Panels are prefinished before assembly which really makes for a cleaner, easier job. For durability, I used wipe-on polyurethane, which is followed by wax appled with steel wool.



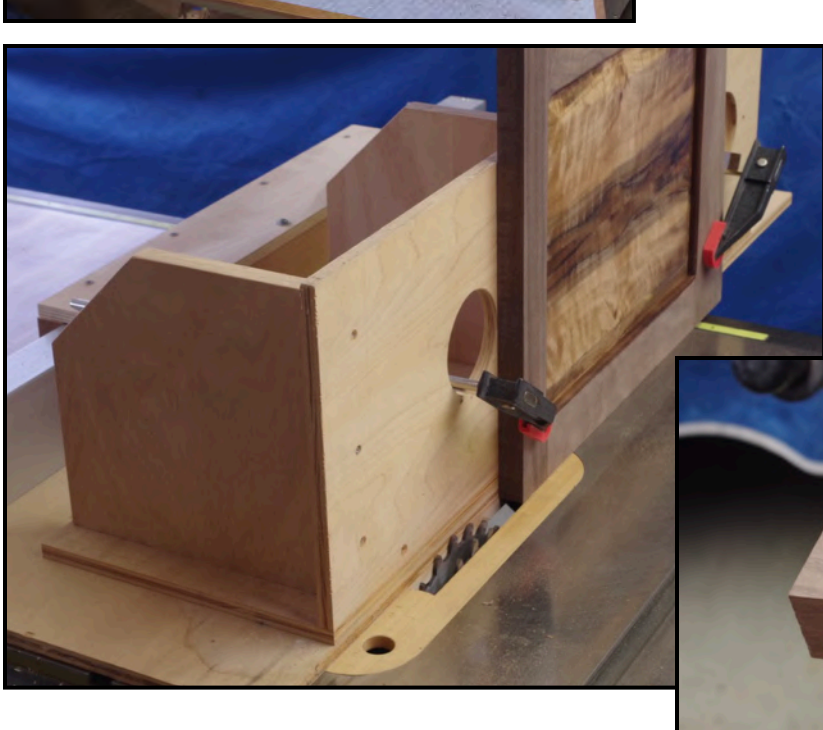


The glue-up is always the most perilous time. Sometimes there are so many joints, and the glue is drying too fast, and something doesn't want to go together quite right... Panic is avoided by dry runs, making sure everything is 100% ready and close at hand.

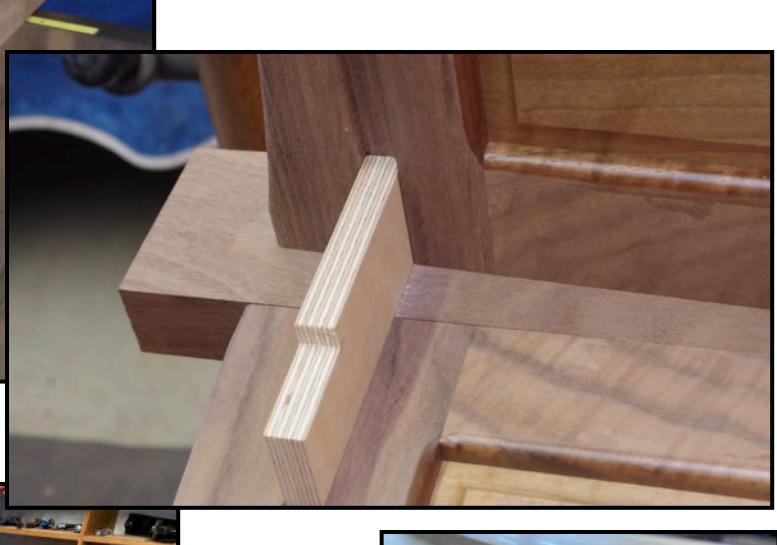
Carcase Preparation



Joints are cut in the sub-assemblies, in a quest for the perfect fit with good strength. Panels on the ends are canted at 3 degrees and even though it's a small angle, some thought is required to obtain that magic fit everywhere.



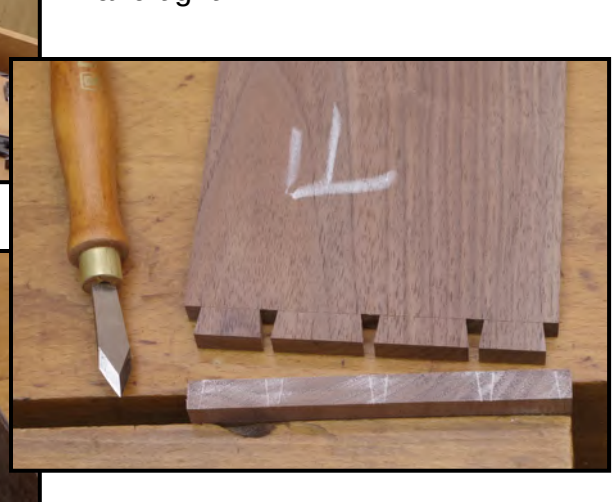
Special guides and fixtures make otherwise-perilous cuts safe and accurate. And the fit is spot-on.

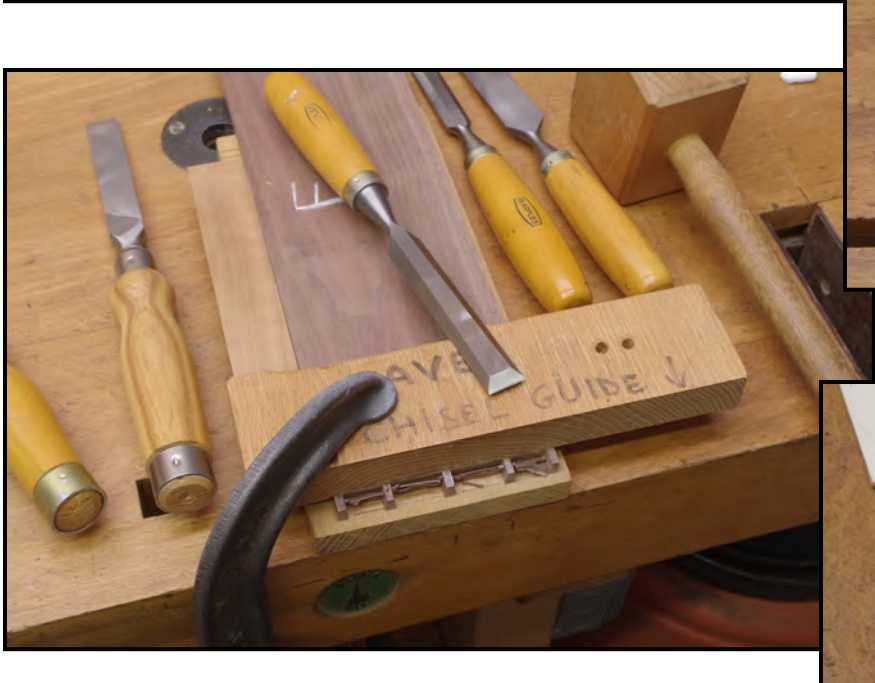


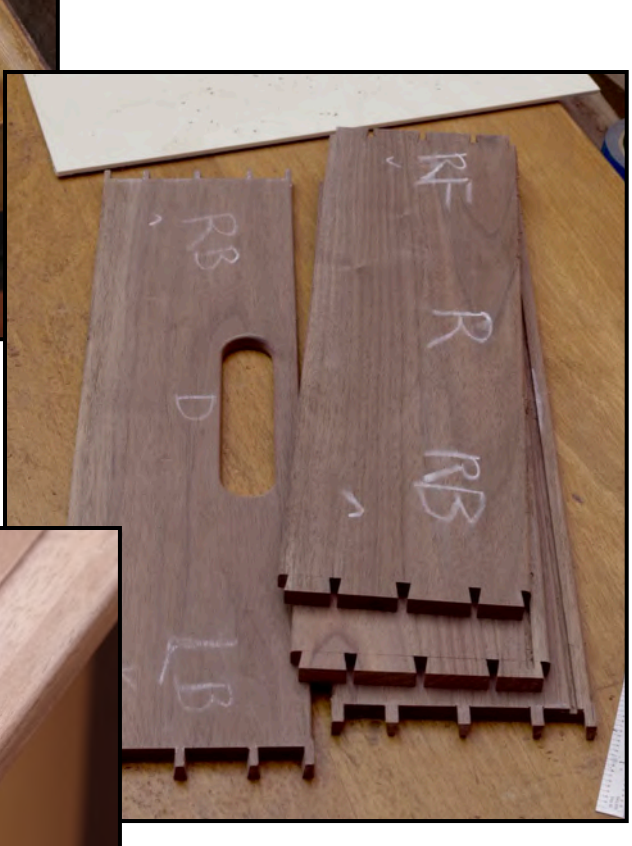
First dry-fit of all the components. Now we know it's all going to work!

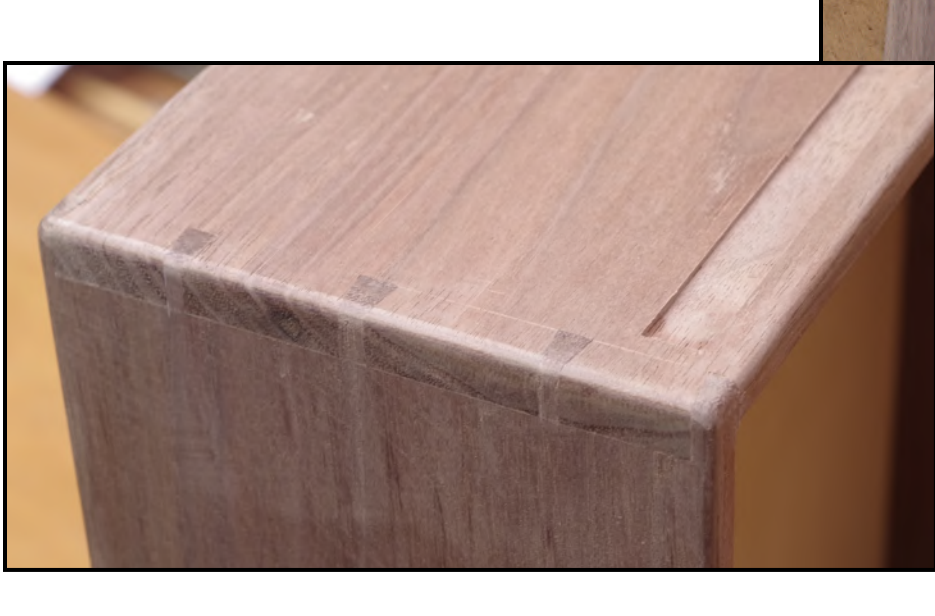
Tray

A drop-in tray for small items was made by resawing some lumber into thin sections. These were dovetailed together. Making dovetails by hand is my favorite part and it's very rewarding when they come out clean and tight.









Yep, that will do.

Final Steps

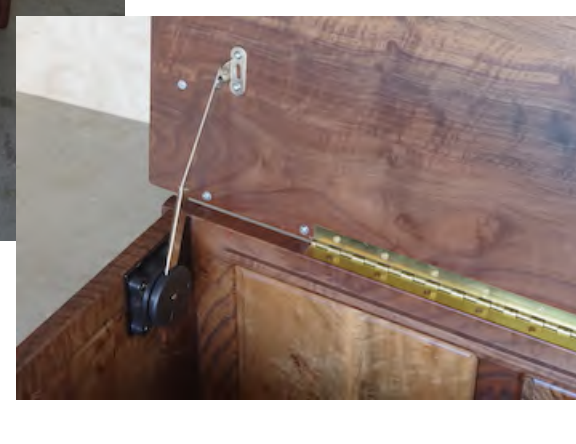
There's a rail along the back that is half-blind dovetailed. I was almost out of lumber but managed to find one more interesting piece that was just long enough.

Top pieces get the standard finish.

And at last, the big glue-up. This definitely was a two-person job. The fit was critical. Because the joints are all straight and tight, minimal clamping was required.

And There She Is

Soft-closing mechanism and a nice brass piano hinge. The tray slides back and forth and lifts out.



Ship it.

After all that effort, it's NOT going to get damaged in shipping. So I built a proper crate from plywood and 2x2s, nailed, glued, and screwed together and sitting on a skid in case they want to use a forklift. Packing material is Ethafoam which is a fairly high density polyehtylene.

UPS turned out to be the cheapest way to ship the beast. I got quotes from UShip.com but they were much higher this time.