

Coffee table



Good hardware is a real workshop timesaver. Turn the table over for a look at the hidden drawer slides?an easy solution for smooth, quiet, self-closing drawers

As a professional furniture maker working with clients, I've learnt that it's the quality of relationship I have, almost as much as the quality of what I build, that keeps them coming back. The idea for this project came from a client who had very specific ideas of what he wanted. Someone else already built a large wall unit for him -- a beautiful, dominating piece of furniture that was dark, strong and stately. While this fellow was very happy with the end result, he hadn't enjoyed the process of working with the builder, so for a companion coffee table he came to me. He knew he wanted an oak pedestal coffee table that expanded with a table leaf, and he wanted it as strong and massive as the wall unit. He also wanted a silky-smooth, hidden drawer at each end. We collaborated on the design, step by step. I started with sketches, then a cardboard model to get proportions right, and then a model in cheap pine to settle all the details.

This careful planning process yielded a table that met his criteria. From the 1 1/4"-thick top to the 6" octagonal pedestals, it's nothing if not substantial. It's not difficult to build, but demands a good tablesaw, jointer and thickness planer because of the robust parts involved. To make the drawers exceptionally smooth I chose mechanical slides that are completely concealed and have a spring action that actually pulls the drawer in as it closes.

On The Pedestal

There are different ways to make table pedestals, and I chose to laminate solid stock for mine. It's the easiest way to get flawless results, with no chance that joints will open up later, as hollow, coopered pedestals sometimes do. Solid construction also gives the sturdiest results.

I dressed enough boards to make a 6 1/2" x 6 1/2" blank, roughly 24" long-enough for both pedestals. I then milled this down to near its finished thickness of 6" x 6" by jointing

two sides square before ripping each opposite side with two passes on the tablesaw, one from each rough face. If your tablesaw blade can't extend high enough to slice through wood this wide in two passes, do what you can then use a hand saw to finish the job before jointing the sawn edges clean and straight.

The pedestals aren't regular octagons since their sides aren't equal in width. The plans show how the sides that accept the feet are 3" wide, while the open sides are 2 1/8" wide. I drew this outline on one end of the pedestal blank, then made a temporary fence on my saw and rough-cut the waste before jointing the pedestal blank down to final size and trimming to final length of 11 1/2".

Leg Work

The leg shape is a condensed replica of the leg on a 1930s pedestal table I own. For strength, it's critical that you orient the grain as shown in the plan. After laminating enough stock to get the 2 1/2" leg thickness, I used a bandsaw to cut as close to the outline as possible, then sanded the edges smooth with an edge sander and oscillating spindle sander. Final smoothing is best done with a random orbit sander. All the edges except the ones that join with the pedestal are also softened with a 1/4" radius roundover bit in a table-mounted router.

While you're at it, cut the stretcher that connects the pedestals, then sand and round its exposed edges, too.

Make The Tabletop

Start putting the tabletop together by edge-gluing enough wood to make the three pieces of the tabletop, with the grain running across the width. Once the top is glued, sanded and trimmed to final size, continue by jigsawing a 3 3/4" radius curve on each corner, then sand all edges smooth. I used a 3/4" radius roundover bit with a 3/16" shoulder on top to soften the table edge even more, followed by a 1/4" roundover bit used on the bottom edge, without a shoulder. The plans show the profile, though the details are up to you. Whatever you choose, rout the top profile in several passes. There's a lot of tough wood to be removed, and you don't want to overtax your router or burn the tabletop edges.

Supporting Members

Ease the bottom edges of the pedestal slightly with 100-grit sandpaper before setting the

pedestals upright on a piece of 2 5/8"-thick scrap. Supporting the pedestals like this raises them to their final height off the floor and makes it a lot easier to position and join the legs. The bottom of each leg doesn't line up with the pedestal bottom, but joins 1/8" up. Attach the legs to the pedestals with glue, three screws and a couple of biscuits for good measure. Two screws go through the bottom of the pedestal into the legs (first drill a large counterbore with a Forstner bit), and one screw goes through the top of the leg into the pedestal (counterbored and later plugged).

You could also fasten each leg with four 1/2" dia. x 2 1/2" fluted dowels, shopmade splines or two pairs of #20 biscuits. This joint takes a lot of stress, and the stress will tend to pull the joint apart, so it needs to be strong. In this design, the massive feet conveniently give a large surface area for gluing. If I ever redesign this with thinner, more delicate feet, I'll give extra thought to engineering this joint so it's rock solid.

With feet installed, join the two pedestals to the stretcher, using a single #20 biscuit (for alignment) and two #8 x 2 1/2" screws driven diagonally from the top and bottom edges. Don't forget to place the bottom edge of the stretcher 3/4" higher than the bottom edge of pedestal.

Complete this part of the project by fastening the table slide mounting boards to the pedestal tops with screws. Make sure these are square to the stretcher and parallel to each other.