Shop-Built Craftsman-Style Vanity

BY GARY STRIEGLER

I know some amazing furniture makers, but I'm not one of them. Still, I enjoy building small, custom projects for my clients, especially if it means I get to spend a day working in the shop (though don't stop reading if you don't have a shop; the project shown here could easily be built on a well-equipped jobsite). Most of these projects require only common trim carpentry tools and can be built in a day. Usually, the inspiration for them is a few pictures that a client has found on the internet, or something not being available in quite the right size. In this case, my client had found photos of a couple of vanities that were similar, and we agreed on a design that blended the two options and that I could build quickly using pocket-hole joinery.

Design. My biggest concern was getting the height right, because the vanity would feature a vessel sink that would sit on a stone countertop. So I waited until we had the sink on the jobsite before deciding on a 33-inch vanity height and starting to build the vanity.

The design includes four exposed square posts, each with a slight taper at the bottom, and an exposed shelf made of slats about 5 inches up from the bottom of the vanity. There's a single, wide drawer front with matching side insets between the posts at the top. All of the parts that are visible are made from poplar.

Post construction. Everything fits between the posts, so I glued them up first, starting with one oversized glue-up that I ripped into oversized blanks. That gave me room to straighten the

Photos by Gary Striegler

After gluing up poplar blanks for the vanity's corner posts, the author scraped off dried glue **(1)**, then planed the blanks to finish size. The posts have tapered legs, which the author cut with the help of a plywood jig **(2, 3)**. After cutting the tapers in the 2x2 posts, the author used a belt sander to smooth away kerf marks **(4)**.

With the help of a Kreg Multi-Mark layout tool and blocks and clamps to position the rails accurately **(5)**, the author joined the rails to the posts with pocket screws **(6)**. The posts are connected by three sets of rails **(7)**. The slats that make up the bottom shelf were milled down from 3/4 inch to 5/8 inch thick, then rounded over along their edges **(8)**.

legs, plane them to their final dimension (2x2 inches in this case), and cut off any snipes at the end.

I made a simple sled jig for the table saw to cut the bottom leg tapers, setting it up to cut from 3/8 inch to zero over 3 inches. To cut safely, I made the jig extra long to keep my fingers away from the blade and turned the saw off after each cut, waiting for the blade to stop before resetting for the next cut. For smooth cuts, I use a Tenryu combo blade on my table saw, but I still had to touch up each cut with a belt sander.

Rails. The posts are connected to each other by three sets of rails. The bottom rails support the bottom shelf; another set of rails is located at the top of the cabinet; and a third set sits below the drawer and fixed side panels. I made the rails out of 1-by S4S poplar, with the exception of the upper back rail, which I cut from 3/4-inch plywood. After ripping the rail material to rough width, I set the pieces on edge and ran them all at the same time through a benchtop planer with sharp knives to mill them to their final width of 2 1/4 inches.

This is a simple cabinet to build, but it is critical to cut the rails accurately, so I set up a stop on a miter saw and cut each set of rails at the same time. Then I drilled each end of the rails for a pair of pocket screws to fasten the rails to the corner posts. I wanted to make the slat shelf as strong as possible, so I added pocket screw holes to the front and back bottom rails for attaching the slats to them.

Pocket screws make fast, strong joints, but keeping the correct alignment can be challenging. I used clamps and spacer blocks to maintain accuracy and a Kreg Multi-Mark measuring and marking tool to pinpoint the locations of the bottom rails.

I started out by making the front and back panels, screwing the long rails between the posts. Then I screwed the shorter side rails to the back panel. Working off the top of a workbench, I used pipe clamps to hold the front section in place when I installed the last pocket screws.

Slat shelf. Like the rails, I ran the 2-inch-wide bottom shelf slats on edge through the planer to get rid of saw kerfs. I also ran them through the planer to thin them to 5/8 inch thick, then rounded over the corners. I suppose the slats could be left at 3/4 inch thick, but I think the thinner, 5/8-inch-thick slats look a lot better.

The author tacked the shelf slats to the bottom rails **(9)**, then secured them with pocket screws driven up through the rails **(10)**. The author used a beading bit **(11)** to shape the edges of a length of poplar, then ripped the bead detail to size on his table saw **(12)** in order to trim the edges of vanity's inset drawer front **(13)**.

After cutting all the slats to length, I did a test layout to get the spacing right, then tacked each one in place with a 21-gauge pin. I notched the first one around the legs, then went from left to right; next time, though, I think it will be easier to start in the middle and work toward each end. The pins were strong enough to keep the slats in place until I added the pocket screws from the bottom.

Drawer. I added a 3/4-inch-thick poplar filler to each side of the drawer opening to install the side-mount CSH full-extension metal drawer slides. The front edges of the fillers double as stops for the drawer front.

Because the one large drawer would have a cutout to fit around the drain, my normal 1/4-inch-plywood drawer bottom wouldn't work. For strength, I instead used a full 3/4-inch-thick MDF bottom, which I pocket-screwed into the 1/2-inch Baltic birch drawer sides. I filled in the front and mitered around the back with more Baltic birch plywood using 21-gauge pins at the joints.

The drawer front and side panels are plywood with a simple bead detail—a molding that I make with a Whiteside beading bit mitered around the plywood. To size the plywood panels, I subtract two times the molding thickness plus 1/8 inch for a slight reveal. I nailed plywood scraps behind the side rails to serve as mounting cleats.

I attached the drawer hardware and adjusted the drawer to sit level and square in the opening. My final challenge was fitting the inset drawer front. I used shims to center it (this is where cutting all the parts carefully pays off) and ran screws in from the back.

I really enjoyed building the cabinet. It didn't take a lot of material, and I probably could have built two in close to the same time as it took to build one, but there is only so much storage room in my shop. Besides that, I wouldn't want to mess up the chance to spend another day working there.

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