

Small Shop Woodworking

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The plan

This article describes the planning, considerations and build of a Craftsman style workbench.

As Christmas approached in the autumn of 2021, I decided to make a gift for a family member that enjoyed hand tool woodworking. These benches, especially to the grade of this build, are very expensive and unaffordable for most hobbyists. The Length is 86 1/2", width 26 1/4" and the height is 35 7/8" I estimate that the bench weighs a little over 200 lbs.

When one thinks of gifts for family members, we hope that a gift that is given will be treasured and used for many years. I think that this will be the case with this gift. The build took me a little over a year to complete but in actual build time it was likely a couple of months.

Ha-ha, it ended up being a Christmas gift that was a year late.

Woodworkers Workbench Build

By Larry Sellers (Small Shop Woodworking)

Southern yellow pine woodworker's workbench build: two dog hole planes supporting a wagon vise and a front vise.



Completed workbench in its final home



Just after final assembly

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Disclaimer: I am not a professional woodworker. I am just a hobbyist and I am sure that the methods I used may not be a fit for the hard-core woodworkers or professionals. I made many errors and wasted some lumber in the process of building this bench but, in the end, it exceeded my expectations and is a solid and functional bench that will last for many years.

The plan

When considering the build, I had to do a lot of reading. Questions I needed to answer were what style bench, thickness of the work surface, type of wood, types of vises etc. In retrospect, I think that I spent too much time on these matters. In the end, my decisions were: Type of bench - functional, work surface thickness 4"+, type of wood - southern yellow pine, type of vises - front vise and wagon vise.

The reason that I selected these was simple practicality. I chose to make a bench that met the needs of the user. The function had to support hand woodworking on mostly smaller projects. I wanted the bench to be heavy...real heavy, to support hard planing. So, the thickness of the bench top and the carriage assembly needed to be stout. I chose southern yellow pine as a matter of cost and durability. For a soft wood, southern yellow is one of the hardest. And for the vises, my two choices support the crafting of longer pieces and that of small parts.

Plans

Several people have asked me if I have plans for the bench and my answer is no. I had a general build concept but wanted to keep my design choices fluid. I just need to be consistent after I started milling the wood. My joinery was to be mortise and tenon and I needed to be consistent with every component so assembly would go smoothly. I tried to minimize the use of mechanical fasteners, but I have a few in the build. I'll explain as I go.



2x10x8 raw stock



Wood Selection

After I decided to use Southern Yellow Pine, I started shopping for lumber. I knew that buying straight wood would reduce my milling so I did this with care. At one point, I had several big-box employees taking every single piece of lumber off the rack to find only the best and straightest boards. I chose to use 2x10x8 boards and figured that I would rip and mill them to the size I needed. Buying this size also saved me quite a bit of money on the project.

The milling

I trimmed the rounds off of the boards with the table saw and ripped the remaining pieces for the legs and the bench surface in half. This produced stock of approximately 1.4x4.5 minus half the width of my saw blade. I reserved three boards at their original width for the stringers on the leg assembly. (I'll get to that process in a bit)

From there, I was off to the jointer and the planer and I took special caution to ensure that all pieces were exactly the same width and depth. This is where the consistency paid huge dividends.

I decided that the legs of the bench were going to be approximately 4x4 thick and my milling process would likely produce this thickness if I joined three boards together, leaving an extra 2 inches in the length of the center board of the three, I would have a natural tenon to support the bench surface.

Precise measurements and milling



Natural Tenon in the legs