A Jewelry Box for Someone Special:
Three Great Plans
Jewelry Chest

Based on the proportions of full-size early American blanket chests, this project’s small size makes it easy to build.

Last year, the kids and I decided to surprise my wife, Terri, with a special woodworking project that we all worked on.

It’s usually easy to get children involved in building a project in the shop, but it’s hard to keep them interested. With the exception of birdhouses, most woodworking projects take a good deal of time and patience to produce something worthwhile.

And that’s why this jewelry chest is a great project. I developed the proportions directly from full-sized blanket chests, so it looks good and right to the eye. But the joinery and its small size make it a project that we could complete easily in a long afternoon. In fact, as you’ll see, this project turned out better than I could have imagined.

by Troy Sexton

Troy Sexton designs and builds custom furniture in Sunbury, Ohio, for his company, Sexton Classic American Furniture. Troy is a contributing editor for Popular Woodworking.
Dovetailed to Your Taste

The four sides of this box are joined using machine-cut through-dove-tails. But there's no reason you have to do it this way. If you have a machine that cuts half-blind dovetails in 1/2"-thick stock, that would be fine. Or if you hand-cut your joints, that's OK, too. And if you're just not ready for dovetails, you can always cut a 1/4" x 1/2" rabbet on the ends of the front and back pieces, and join your case using glue and nails.

To cut through-dovetails, I use my WoodRat (woodrat.com), a jig that you see quite a lot in England, but rarely in this country. I've had mine for years and have always relied on the accuracy and versatility of this jig. I often wonder why the WoodRat never caught on here. Dovetails are just one small function of this useful joinery system.

Cut your tails and pins and then finish sand the inside of the box. I start with 100-grit paper and work up to 180-grit.

Apply glue to the joints and clamp the box up. Measure the box from corner to corner to ensure it's square. A shove or a tap usually will knock things into place with a box this small. When your glue is dry, sand the outside of the case to its final grit.

Small is Simple

Because this box is small, there's no need to make the bottom complicated. In a full-size blanket chest, the solid-wood bottom would float in a groove cut into the four sides, or it would rest on cleats screwed to the sides. Either of these two strategies would allow for the expansion and contraction of the bottom and allow the chest to carry some serious weight. Luckily, this bottom doesn't need to carry much weight. And the bottom piece is so narrow that wood movement isn't much of a problem with this project.

There are two ways to do this. One way is to cut your bottom to fit exactly inside the sides and then rip off about 1/16" of the width. Then put the bottom in place and...
JEWELRY CHEST

Construction Notes:

A  Through-dovetail corner
B  Hinge mortise depth equal to combined thickness of hinge plates
C  Shiplapped bottom boards
D  \( \frac{1}{2} \)" thick x \( \frac{3}{8} \)" w. x \( \frac{1}{4} \)" l. back leg support block
E  Outline of base moulding
F  Miter mouldings at front corners

secure it with nails. Or make your bottom in two pieces (as shown in the diagrams) and cut a \( \frac{3}{4} \)" x \( \frac{1}{2} \)" shiplap to join the two pieces. Then nail the two pieces in place. The second way, while a little more complex, results in no gap in the bottom.

The base moulding also is simple. First rout a small cove on the top edge of your trim pieces using a \( \frac{3}{8} \)" core-box bit. Miter the three pieces as shown in the photos. Then cut the feet to shape as shown in the drawings at left using your band saw or jigsaw.

Finish sand the moulding and then glue and nail it in place. To reinforce the base moulding at the rear of the case, glue and nail two back leg support blocks as shown in the diagrams.

Attach the top to the base using small brass hinges, mortising the leaves into the case only. Make your hinge mortise as deep as both leaves of the hinge. This saves effort and is less likely to result in errors. I recommend you purchase high-quality hinges for this project. Hinges intended for jewelry boxes that open to 95° would be best.

Now prepare to attach the top moulding to the top. This moulding has the same small cove routed on its edge as the base moulding. Miter, glue and nail it in place just like the base moulding.

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When mitering the base moulding, first cut a couple miters and check to make sure your saw is set for the right angle to make an airtight fit.

Clamp a plywood spacer to the front that positions the base moulding exactly where you want it. I always find the cut line for my miters by placing the work on the piece and marking from the underside as shown in the photo. This is more accurate than measuring.

Once your miter is cut, check the fit before adding the glue and nails.

Custom Trays
Now you can build a few trays with dividers for all the jewelry. The trays simply rest on top of each other inside the chest. Butt joints, nails and glue are all that’s needed here. The bottoms can be covered in felt or flocked after finishing the trays.

Speaking of finishing, I finished this piece with three coats of lacquer using my HVLP system, sanding between coats.

We completed Terri’s jewelry box in record time, and the kids had a blast building it. In fact, the project turned out so well, we decided to sell some of these chests at a furniture show. And the kids are now helping me build the next batch – after the homework’s done, of course. PW
Yes, you could say building this box is like dancing. Your partner is that beautiful wood you’ve just found or have been secretly saving for the past decade, and the music is the sound your tools make.

This band-sawn box design is an intermediate project due to the number of drawers and amount and type of carving involved. The carving and shaping can be done quickly with coarse-through-fine sandpaper on a belt sander, oscillating spindle sander and with sanding drums on a portable drill, then refined with a finishing sander and hand sanding. Some of the carving — mainly at the saw kerfs — must be done with straight chisels and lots of coarse-through-fine sandpaper wrapped around dowels, flexible rubber sanding accessories if you have them, and, of course fingers. (You definitely need these, so take special care around a running band saw blade!)

When selecting wood, look for grain patterns that are exceptional. Burls, curls, spalting, unusual colors and yes, even cracks, splits, worm or bug holes and checks can be used to create a box that will truly be one of a kind.

When you cut a board into shorter lengths, inspect the end grain and match them to each other when gluing up a blank for your box, such as bookmatching. This can make your box sing a tune that no one has ever heard.

— LKV

Make the Carcase from a Block
The photos on the following pages will take you step by step through the building process, but an overview here will be helpful.

First select your wood, choosing a nice-looking grain pattern. You’ll probably need to glue up a sandwich to achieve your desired thickness (which can vary according to your likes). Wooden handscrews are the best clamp choice for this step, applying even pressure at all points on the glue-up.

Flatten the bottom squarely to the back of your box blank. A jointer is the easiest tool to use for this, but a handplane, disc sander or stationary belt sander will also work.

Twister. The organic curves and custom pulls in this eye-catching design can be made from any combination of woods.
Now cut a 1/4"-thick piece off the back of the blank. (This piece, which will be glued back on after you're done cutting the drawers out, will be the box's back.)

Make a copy of the pattern at right and attach it to the front of the box blank using spray adhesive. Follow the solid lines to cut out and remove the drawer blanks from the center of the box. Perform any finish sanding on the interior of the box at this time.

Next, glue the back you removed earlier back on the box. After the glue is dry, cut out the outside box shape and sand the exterior smooth.

**Drawer Cavities**

To form the drawers, a 1/2"-thick front and 1/4"-thick back are sliced from each blank. Then draw the cavity outline (the dotted line on the pattern) on the front of the remaining drawer blank.

To give the drawer cavity square corners, make the two side-cavity defining cuts first. Then start at one top corner of the cavity and cut diagonally toward the bottom of the cavity, cutting along the bottom toward the opposite corner. Cut back along the bottom line to finish creating the drawer cavity. Then glue the drawer backs and fronts back on the drawers.

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**Basic Tools List**

- table saw
- 14" band saw
- 3/16" band saw blades
- wood glue
- a variety of clamps
- stationary belt sander
- portable drill and 1" x 2" sanding drum
- finishing sander
- sheet sandpaper in #80, #120, #180 and #220 grits
- coarse-, medium- and fine-grit sleeves for drums and belts

**OPTIONAL TOOLS**

- 1/4" band saw blade
- oscillating spindle sander
- plunge router
- router table
- flocking kit

*Excerpted from “Sculpted Band Saw Boxes” © 2008 by Lois Keener Ventura. Used with permission of Popular Woodworking Books, an imprint of F+W Media, Inc. Visit your local bookseller or call 800-448-0915 to obtain a copy.*
**Shaping**
Shaping the edges of the box and drawer edges can be done several different ways. The safest way (in terms of not removing too much material at a time) is to use a wood rasp. I prefer a fine-cut rasp. A coarse rasp can tear out chunks of wood at the sharp corners and delicate edges of the box.

An oscillating spindle sander can be used to rough out areas where a fair amount of material needs to be removed. Final shaping can then be done with files and sandpaper.

A router mounted in a table or handheld (a trim router is just the right size) can be used to round over the edges of the boxes. A router is fast and unforgiving, so run test pieces to double-check your setup.

**Custom Pulls Finish the Box**
Drawer pulls can add a dramatic effect to your boxes. Cutting them can be done safely on the band saw. There is no kickback—the work is held tightly to the table by the downward sweep of the blade.

Shaping drawer pulls can be done using the same tools used to sand the boxes. Again, a power sander removes material quickly, so unless you’re a safecracker, you will want to keep your fingerprints.

Hand sanding is the final step.
After your pulls are cut out, shaped and sanded, and, when the box is ready, you can attach them to the drawer fronts. A little dab of glue will do.

The box featured here is mahogany with ebony pulls, and is finished with three sprayed coats of semi-gloss lacquer—but you can customize yours however you like.

— JS

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1. **In and out.** This box is a great-looking design, but it does require you to back the blade out of the pattern a number of times. This is caused by the peaks on the drawers. If there’s a sharp peak, you can’t turn sharply enough to create the point. The look is worth the effort, but be aware. The first cut starts at the bottom of the box and undulates up to the peak of the lower drawer.

2. **The other side.** When I’d completed the cut in step one, there was enough inner tension in the wood to close the opening gap, making it very difficult to back the blade out. I eventually tapped a wooden wedge into the gap to make enough room to back the blade out.

3. **Free.** When the second cut is complete, the drawer will be free of the box. Stop the saw and lift the box slightly to make sure the drawer is loose.

4. **Pop and drop.** With the machine off, raise the guide bar and lift the box above the drawer.

5. **One down.** There’s no need to back the blade out this time, just let the box settle back onto the band saw table. The drawer is free and you’re set up to make the next cut.

6. **Round two.** Start into the second drawer from the rounded left edge of the first box. Make this as smooth a transition as you can. It will pay off in the look of the piece.

7. **Point to the left.** The rest of the box is a series of turns along one side of the box, ending in the top point.

8. **Point to the right.** Then you back out of that cut, re-enter the cut and swing around to the other side to finish at the point again.
10 Good clamps. Wooden handscrews are often seen as archaic and interesting, but not often used. Part of the problem, I believe, is that they take some getting used to for the perfect adjustment. It’s worth the effort. These clamps are perfect for working with band-sawn boxes. The wide, long and flat faces allow even pressure across a number of awkward locations. As seen here, the clamps easily reach across each of the drawer dividers to make sure the box is strong and the seams are tight.

9 Smooth curves. With the drawers separated from the box, it’s time to move to the spindle sander. These openings are a nice size to accommodate a spindle drum of a larger diameter, making it an easier sanding operation.

11 Front … While the glue on the box dries, head back to the band saw to work on the drawers. Set the fence for a 1/2" spacing and cut each of the fronts from the drawers.

12 … and back. Reset the fence for 1/4" and repeat the process to remove the backs of all four drawers. Check twice before you make the cut to ensure you’re actually cutting off the back and not the front. Easy mistake.

13 Other clamps. The other perfect clamp for band-sawn boxes is a one-handed, fast-adjust clamp. It only takes a little pressure to hold the drawers together, but the real benefit is in their one-handed operation. You need the other hand to adjust the pieces so they’re aligned properly. Otherwise you add a lot of sanding and end up with a misshapen drawer. The wide, soft pads on the clamps are pretty useful, too.

14 Handles. I opted for a different handle than Lois had drawn, feeling that the grain of the mahogany was so attractive that I didn’t want to hide it with a larger handle. I was looking around the shop and found a leftover strip of ebony and decided that would do nicely. I first cut the handles to size (3/8" × 3/8" × 3/4").

15 Trapezoid. A rectangle didn’t work for the look, so I decided on a trapezoid shape for the handles. This also makes them better handles, so two good reasons to get the fingers close to the sanding disc.

16 Pull! For the longer side of the handles, I moved to the belt sander. Do be cautious here, because it doesn’t take much to launch the handle across the room. It makes sense to make an extra handle or two, just in case. PW — DT
Dovetailed Keepsake Box

BY GLEN D. HUEY

Shortcuts learned as you build this classic box help you become a better joiner.

This box is chock-full, but don’t look on the inside. Check out the outside. It’s loaded with dovetail joinery—through dovetails on the front and half-blind dovetails on the back. It’s an ideal practice project for the finer points of the dovetail joint and when you’re finished you’ll have a great-looking keepsake box that can be built on the cheap using offcuts.

Prep the Parts, Layout & Pins
Mill the material for the top and bottom panels, and prepare the box front and sides. Mill the back, but don’t cut it to length at this time.

The pin boards are the sides while the tail boards are the box’s front and back. From a pins-first perspective, set your marking or cutting gauge to the thickness of the front, then scribe a baseline onto both faces of one end of each side piece. To mark the layout for two half pins and two full pins, equally space the tail sockets and use a square to pull the lines from the edge to the baseline on the inside (non-show) face. Then grab your dovetail saw and cut on the waste side of the lines, as shown in the photo at right.

To chisel out the waste, it’s best to begin with the face of the pin board up so you remove the wider portion of the tail socket first. Work halfway through the thickness before flipping the board to complete the pins.

One area that creates problems with the pin-to-tail fit is the back of the tail sockets. Woodworkers often leave end grain protruding into the socket. Make sure to undercut the bottom of the socket. The bottom of the socket has a V-shape to it when it’s complete. Fine-tune your pins; they become the pattern for your tail board.

Tail Match
Next, set your marking gauge to the thickness of the side pieces to scribe a line onto both ends of the box front. Align a side with the scribe line, and the top and bottom edges, then transfer the pin layout onto the tail board. To confirm that your parts are oriented correctly, check that the tails are widest at the end of the box front.

Saw on the waste side of your lines. For this, you can turn to power tools such as a band saw without sacrificing the hand-cut look.

How close should you cut to your lines? A good rule of thumb is: The harder your material and the more pins and tails in your layout, the closer you

Skill builder box. There’s more to dovetails than basic techniques. Learn the tricks and uncover the secrets to improve your dovetail joinery skills whether you’re building for strength or for show.

Waste side. The trick to accurate saw cuts is to follow both lines as you cut. Once you reach the scribe line, move the saw to perpendicular and it will follow the already-cut kerf.

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How close should you cut to your lines? A good rule of thumb is: The harder your material and the more pins and tails in your layout, the closer you
cut to your lines. If you're working with pine, stay a skosh farther from your lines than if cherry or another hardwood is your material of choice.

Remove the waste of the pin sockets just as you did for the tail sockets. Keep the back wall of the pin sockets V-shaped. Test-fit the joints.

**Half-blinds are More Work**

Half-blind dovetails require many of the same techniques as through-dovetails, but there is a major difference in layout and execution. Again, the side pieces are your pin boards and that’s where to begin.

Take a look at the layout photo above center; your layout should be similar. Notice that the lines are sawn well past the scribeline – working beyond the scribeline allows for easier waste removal due to the material being cut as opposed to spending more time on chisel work (and it’s appropriate for period reproductions).

Care needs to be taken as you remove the waste to create the tail sockets. Because you bring waste up through the narrow part of the tail socket, the corners of the pins are easily broken off as you excavate the waste. To prevent that, remove a small amount of waste from each corner before hogging out the center. Set your chisel, bevel side up, across a corner of the tail area then lightly tap the chisel moving in an upward motion.

As you work, the small corner rides up the bevel of the pin side. Repeat these steps a couple times to make sure the pin corners stay put.

There’s extra work removing the waste deep in the corners, and it’s especially important to keep not only the back of the socket beveled (pare any protruding end grain), but to also slope the bottom of the socket, too. If the bot-

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**Dovetailed Keepsake Box**

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* Take actual length from partially assembled box.
Dovetail Saw Selection: Don’t Get Bogged Down by Minutiae

I t you’re about to hand cut your first set of dovetails, you’re going to need a saw. Which should you select? It’s my opinion that we get mired in details. The saying is “Paralysis through analysis.” This seems to be the flavor of the month in anything woodworking, especially when choosing saws.

Any dovetail saw will do the job. If you have one, use it. As you gain experience you’ll be in a better position to understand and evaluate available saws. That’s the time to change or upgrade your tool. However, if you need to purchase a saw, here are some basics.

I began hand cutting dovetails using a Japanese saw. I felt comfortable using it and continued to do so for many years. The problem I discovered was that the teeth often broke. (I had saws that looked like Jack-o-Lantern teeth carved by 6-year-olds.) While brittleness is a characteristic of Japanese saws, my breakage was most likely due to the fact that I used that saw for everything in the shop. It was the only saw I owned. I changed the blades a couple times — replaceable blades are nice when considering Japanese saws — and I switched saws along the way. Eventually I purchased and dedicated one saw to dovetails while my older saw handled everything else.

As I became better at pins and tails, I purchased a new Western saw, but was unhappy with the way it cut (I didn’t try it before I bought it). What eventually got me to adopt an Western saw for dovetailing was when I was handed a saw that felt great in my hand and cut as I expected a good saw to cut — maybe experience helped, too.

This was about the time that the explosion in new dovetail saws began. In what was seemingly overnight, we have way too many from which to choose. Beyond the simple Japanese or Western choice, we now need to decide between thin and thick blades, the points per inch (PPI) and even the weight of the back of the saw. Experience will best answer these questions.

If I were looking to purchase my first dovetail saw, I would shy away from thin saw plates. It’s true these saws take less effort to use and may be a bit quicker as you cut, but without experience it’s very easy to kink the blade, possibly ruining the saw. It’s true that Japanese saws are thin, but it’s more difficult to kink the Dozuki because you cut on the pull stroke as opposed to the push stroke as with American saws.

Points per inch on a dovetail saw is where your workpiece best dictates a choice. If you’re cutting into thick wood such as when dovetailing case pieces, a saw with fewer points per inch is better. The larger gullets between the teeth carry waste from the cut making the work easier.

If, on the other hand, you find yourself dovetailing drawer boxes, then a higher PPI would work better. Carrying large amounts of waste from the cut is not important because the teeth are not in the cut as long. Also, a saw with more PPI is easier to start in the cut.

Given this information, do you need two dovetail saws? No — a middle-of-the-road PPI will cut just fine.

To me, all this information is great to understand and will become useful with experience and as your woodworking budget grows, but as a beginner the selection of a dovetail saw should come down to just two questions. 1) Is the saw comfortable in your hand? (Try the saw prior to purchase if at all possible.) 2) Can I make a clean cut using this saw?

Don’t worry about purchasing your last dovetail saw. It may be that your first saw is the saw you use throughout your woodworking career, maybe one of the high-end saws is the answer to your dreams, or you might not take kindly to pins and tails only to revert back to nails or routers. You’ll be better off to purchase a quality saw and get busy dovetailing. Gain experience, then step up to a new saw (if you feel the need). — GH
Mill and size the material for the feet. Form another box before separating the individual feet. This keeps you from working with pieces too small to handle easily and it assures that you have four sets of feet that match the dovetails on the box. Cut through-dovetail pins and tails (pins on the sides and tails at the front and back).

Transfer the foot design onto each piece and label the feet to easily match up the pairs later. A 3/4" bit at a drill press forms the spur, then cut and sand the profiles. Pair each set according to your labels, add a spring clamp to the foot's pin board as you slip the dovetail together—it's easy to split the foot as the joint is joined—then glue and assemble the feet.

**Shapely Bottom**

Mill the top and bottom panels to size (1" longer than your box and 1/2" wider). Attach the feet to the bottom with glue and a couple spring clamps. As the glue dries, sand your box to #180 grit then sand the box bottom and flush the feet even with the bottom's edges.

To add interest and shadow lines, profile the edge of the bottom's front and two sides. (Don't shape the back edge.) Limit your profile to 7/16" wide.

Position and center your box on the base then draw a light pencil line around the inside and outside edges of the box. With the box set aside, drill pilot holes centered between the two lines. Use two screws at the front of the box, and cut nails at the sides and back.

Position the box to the base, add a clamp to hold things secure then flip the unit over to attach the two.

**The Finishing Touch**

Ease the sharp corners of the top, then attach it to the box with inexpensive hinges from a hardware store that are mortised into the box and top.

To dress up the finished box, add a nice escutcheon. If you drill out behind the keyhole and paint the area black, the look is more authentic.

After a few coats of amber shellac to warm the cherry's appearance, all that's left is to load the inside with special items you wish to keep—Popular Woodworking Magazine fits perfectly into the keepsake box. **PWM**

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**Supplies**

**Ball & Ball**

ballandball.com or 610-363-7330

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*Price correct at time of publication.*

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**Planning ahead.** Choose your edge profile carefully so your box continues to fit the base after the edges are moulded and make sure the pilot holes fit centered in the box frame.

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**They're better paired.** While scraps the length of the feet may be prevalent in your shop, working with longer pieces is easier. It also keeps the feet pins and tails matching those on the box.

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**For links to all these online extras, go to:**

popularwoodworking.com/apr11

**VIDEO:** Learn how to turn inexpensive hardware into dark, grungy hinges.

**VIDEO:** Watch Frank Klausz pound out dovetails in three minutes.

**WEB SITE:** Read Roy Underhill's “tails first” take on dovetails.

**IN OUR STORE:** “New Masters of the Wooden Box” by Oscar Fitzgerald.

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