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Classic Project

In this plan you'll find:

- Step-by-step construction instruction.
- A complete bill of materials.
- Construction drawings and related photos.
- Tips to help you complete the project and become a better woodworker.

Country Pine Writing Desk

PROJECTS

Country Pine Writing Desk

A good solid desk is always a valued piece of furniture. This one, with its classic Early American styling, can be put to use almost anywhere. Consider it for a living room, bedroom, den, study, or hallway. If you're lucky enough to have a big country kitchen, it will look great in there also.

Ours is made from pine, except for the plywood drawer bottoms. The combination of an antique green paint and natural pine give the piece an especially charming look.

Begin by making the legs (A). You'll need four pieces of stock, each one measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. square by $29\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. Lay out and mark the location of the various mortises on each leg. Size them to fit the tenon dimensions shown on the drawing, keeping in mind that the aprons and the bottom front stretcher are inset $\frac{1}{8}$ in., while the top front stretcher is inset $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (see top view of leg). However, don't cut the dovetail that's on top of the two front legs just yet. That will be cut later, after the top front stretcher has been made.


Cut the mortises using the drill press and a $\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter drill bit. Bore a series of holes, one alongside the other, to remove most of the stock. What remains can be pared away with a chisel.

A bead is now cut along the outside corner of each leg. Use a router and a $\frac{1}{8}$ in. beading bit to make each one.

The legs are tapered on both inside edges. Note, as shown in the front view, that the taper starts $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the top of the leg. Lay out and mark the tapers on each leg. Once marked, use the hand saw to cut them out. When cutting, stay just outside the marked line, then use your hand plane to smooth the edge exactly to the line.

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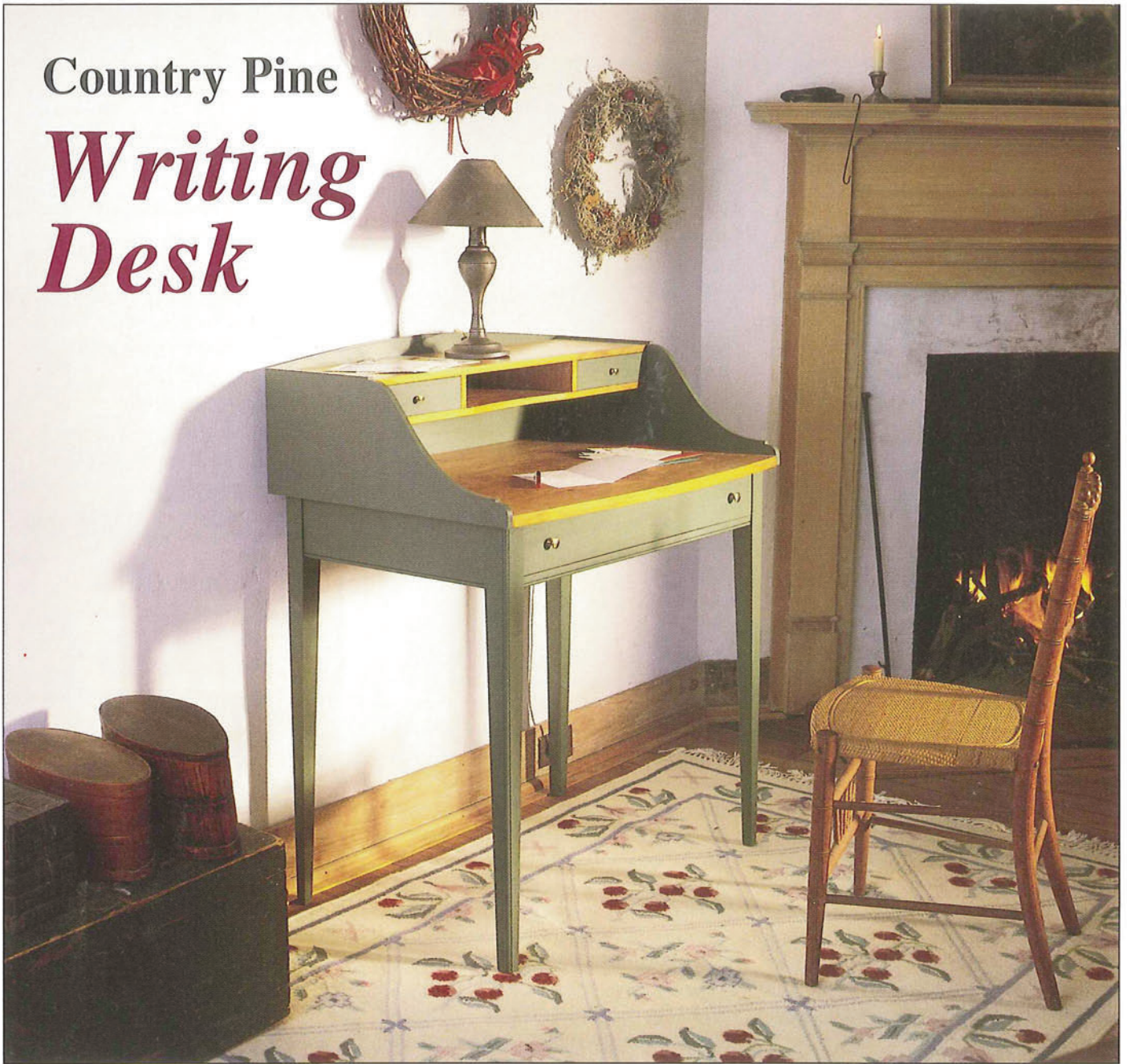
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Country Pine *Writing Desk*



A good solid desk is always a valued piece of furniture. This one, with its classic Early American styling, can be put to use almost anywhere. Consider it for a living room, bedroom, den, study, or hallway. If you're lucky enough to have a big country kitchen, it will look great in there also.

Ours is made from pine, except for the plywood drawer bottoms. The combination of an antique green paint and natural pine give the piece an especially charming look.

Begin by making the legs (A). You'll

need four pieces of stock, each one measuring $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. square by $29\frac{1}{4}$ in. long. Lay out and mark the location of the various mortises on each leg. Size them to fit the tenon dimensions shown on the drawing, keeping in mind that the aprons and the bottom front stretcher are inset $\frac{1}{8}$ in., while the top front stretcher is inset $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (see top view of leg). However, don't cut the dovetail that's on top of the two front legs just yet. That will be cut later, after the top front stretcher has been made.

Cut the mortises using the drill press and a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. diameter drill bit. Bore a

series of holes, one alongside the other, to remove most of the stock. What remains can be pared away with a chisel.

A bead is now cut along the outside corner of each leg. Use a router and a $\frac{1}{4}$ in. beading bit to make each one.

The legs are tapered on both inside edges. Note, as shown in the front view, that the taper starts $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the top of the leg. Lay out and mark the tapers on each leg. Once marked, use the band saw to cut them out. When cutting, stay just outside the marked line, then use your hand plane to smooth the edge exactly to the line.

To further lighten the legs, a chamfer is applied to the inside corner of each one (see chamfer detail). A sharp hand plane will do the job in short order.

Next, cut the two end aprons (B), the back apron (C), the top front stretcher (D) and the bottom front stretcher (E) to the dimensions shown in the Bill of Materials. The tenons are best cut using a tenon jig.

The dovetail on the end of the top front stretcher can be cut with a dovetail saw. Once cut, use the dovetail as a template to mark the location of the dovetail cutout on the top of the front legs. Use a chisel to make the cutout.

A bead is now cut along the bottom edge of the aprons and the bottom front stretcher (see Molding Head Detail). We used a Sears molding head along with a Sears three-bead cutter (p/n 9-2352) to create the beads.

Also, a $\frac{3}{8}$ in. wide by $\frac{1}{4}$ in. deep groove is cut in each apron (see exploded view). Later, the cleats (H) will fit into this groove when the upper part of the desk is mounted. You can use a dado head here, but two or three passes with a regular saw blade will do the job just as well.

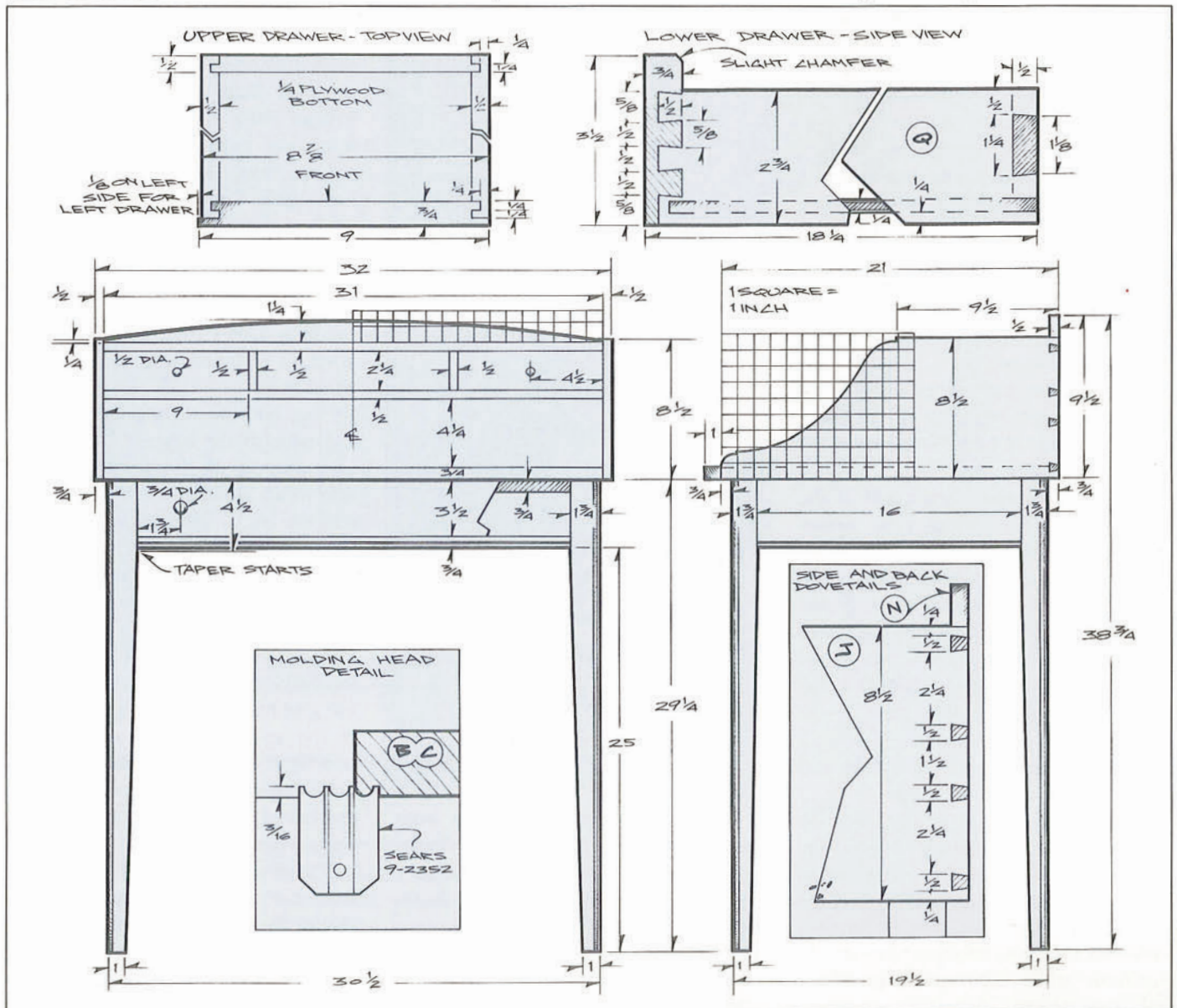
After giving the parts a thorough sanding, the legs, aprons and stretchers can be assembled. The assembly process is best done in two steps. In the first step, the legs are joined to the two end aprons. Add glue to the mortises and tenons, then use bar clamps to apply pressure to the joined parts. Check for squareness before setting aside to dry. In the second step, the leg/apron assemblies are joined to the back apron and the top and bottom front stretchers.

The two filler blocks (F) are made next. Keep in mind that for the drawer to

operate smoothly, you'll want the inside edge of the filler block flush with the inside edge of the legs. It's best to start with stock slightly thicker than $\frac{7}{8}$ in. Rip it to a width of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in., then cut it to a length that results in a snug fit between the legs. Once cut to length, you can plane the thickness down until you get a satisfactory fit. When you are happy with the fit, glue and clamp it in place so that the bottom edge is flush with the bottom edge of the end apron.

The runner (G) fits between the back apron and the bottom front stretcher. Use glue to secure it to the filler block. In order for the drawer to slide smoothly, make sure the top edge of the runner is flush with the top edge of the bottom front stretcher.

You'll need to edge-glue three or four boards to get the $21\frac{1}{2}$ in. width for the writing surface (I). It's best to cut the



boards so that the glued-up stock will be slightly wider and longer than necessary. To edge glue, apply a thin coat of glue to the mating surfaces, then clamp firmly with bar clamps and set aside to dry. There is no need to add dowels or splines here as this joint matches long grain-to-long grain, a joint that is as strong as the wood itself. However, if the edges start to slide out of alignment, clamp a few waxed cleats (made from hardwood stock that measures about 1 1/4 in. square by 22 in. long) across the boards about every 8 to 10 inches. The cleats will keep the boards flush while the wax prevents the cleats from sticking.

The sides (J), top shelf (K), bottom shelf (L), dividers (M) and back (N) are all made from 1/2 in. thick stock. If you don't have a thickness planer, check with your local lumberyard or millwork shop as they will often plane down thicker stock for a nominal charge. Should you need to edge-glue any of the stock, follow the same basic procedure that was used to glue-up the top.

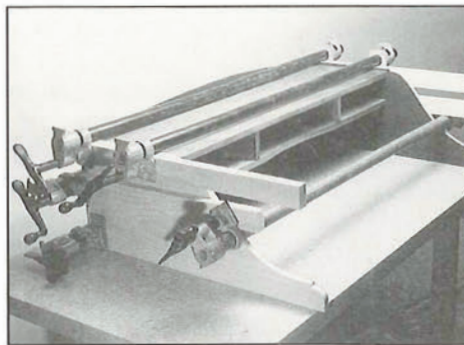
Cut the two sides and the back to length and width, then lay out and cut the dovetails on each end (see Side and Back Dovetails Detail). Also cut the top and bottom shelves to size. A band saw will cut the shallow curve on the front edge of the bottom shelf. Use the router to cut the 1/4 in. wide by 1/4 in. deep stopped dados in the sides and also in the top and bottom shelves.

Next, cut the side curves and also the curve along the top edge of the back. Grid patterns for both these curves are shown on the drawing.

Now, cut tenons on each end of the top and bottom shelves. The tenons should fit snugly in the side grooves. Also cut tenons on each end of the dividers (M) to fit into the shelf dados.

The writing surface, which was glued up earlier, can now be cut to length and width. The front curve is identical to the curve on the top edge of the back, so you can use the back as a template. Cut it out with the band saw and use files and sandpaper to smooth the edge.

For a piece like this, we liked the look of both stained and painted surfaces. The writing surface, top shelf, bottom shelf, and dividers are stained - the rest of the project is painted. Later, when the drawers are made, only the fronts will be painted, while the remaining drawer parts are stained.



The sides and back are joined to the shelf/divider assembly.

Bill of Materials (all dimensions actual)

Part	Description	Size	No. Req'd.
Desk			
A	Leg	1 3/4 x 1 3/4 x 29 1/4	4
B	End Apron	3/4 x 4 1/4 x 18 *	2
C	Back Apron	3/4 x 4 1/4 x 29 *	1
D	Top Front Stretcher	3/4 x 1 3/4 x 28 **	1
E	Btm. Front Stretcher	3/4 x 1 5/8 x 28 *	1
F	Filler Block	7/8 x 1 1/2 x 16	2
G	Runner	3/4 x 3/4 x 16 7/8	2
H	Cleat	3/4 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4	6
I	Writing Surface	3/4 x 21 1/2 x 31	1
J	Side	1/2 x 8 1/2 x 21	2
K	Top Shelf	1/2 x 8 3/4 x 31 1/2 *	1
L	Bottom Shelf	1/2 x 8 3/4 x 31 1/2 *	1
M	Divider	1/2 x 8 3/4 x 2 3/4 *	2
N	Back	1/2 x 9 1/2 x 32 **	1
O	Spacer	1/8 x 1 3/8 x 8	2
Lower Drawer (one req'd)			
P	Front	3/4 x 3 1/2 x 27	1
Q	Side	1/2 x 2 3/4 x 18 **	2
R	Back	1/2 x 2 1/4 x 27 **	1
S	Bottom	1/4 x 17 3/4 x 26 1/2	1
T	Knob	3/4 dia.	2
Upper Drawer (two req'd)			
U	Front	3/4 x 2 1/4 x 9	1
V	Side	1/2 x 2 1/4 x 8 1/2	2
W	Back	1/2 x 1 3/4 x 8 1/2 *	1
X	Bottom	1/4 x 8 1/4 x 8 3/8	1
Y	Knob	1/2 dia.	1

* Length includes tenons

** Length includes dovetails

*** Available from Paxton Hardware, 7818 Bradshaw Road, Upper Falls, MD 21156; tel. (301) 592-8505. Knobs are solid brass with a screw back. For the 1/2 dia. knob order p/n 913 (\$1.81 each); for the 3/4 dia. knob order p/n 915 (\$2.13 each). Add \$2.00 shipping and handling for orders under \$10.00.

Because the upper desk has both stained and painted surfaces, the finishing process can be simplified if the parts are assembled in a specific order. Begin by final sanding all the upper desk parts, then join the top shelf to the two dividers. Use glue, clamp firmly and check for squareness before setting aside

to dry. We found it was easier to apply clamp pressure if the bottom shelf was temporarily added.

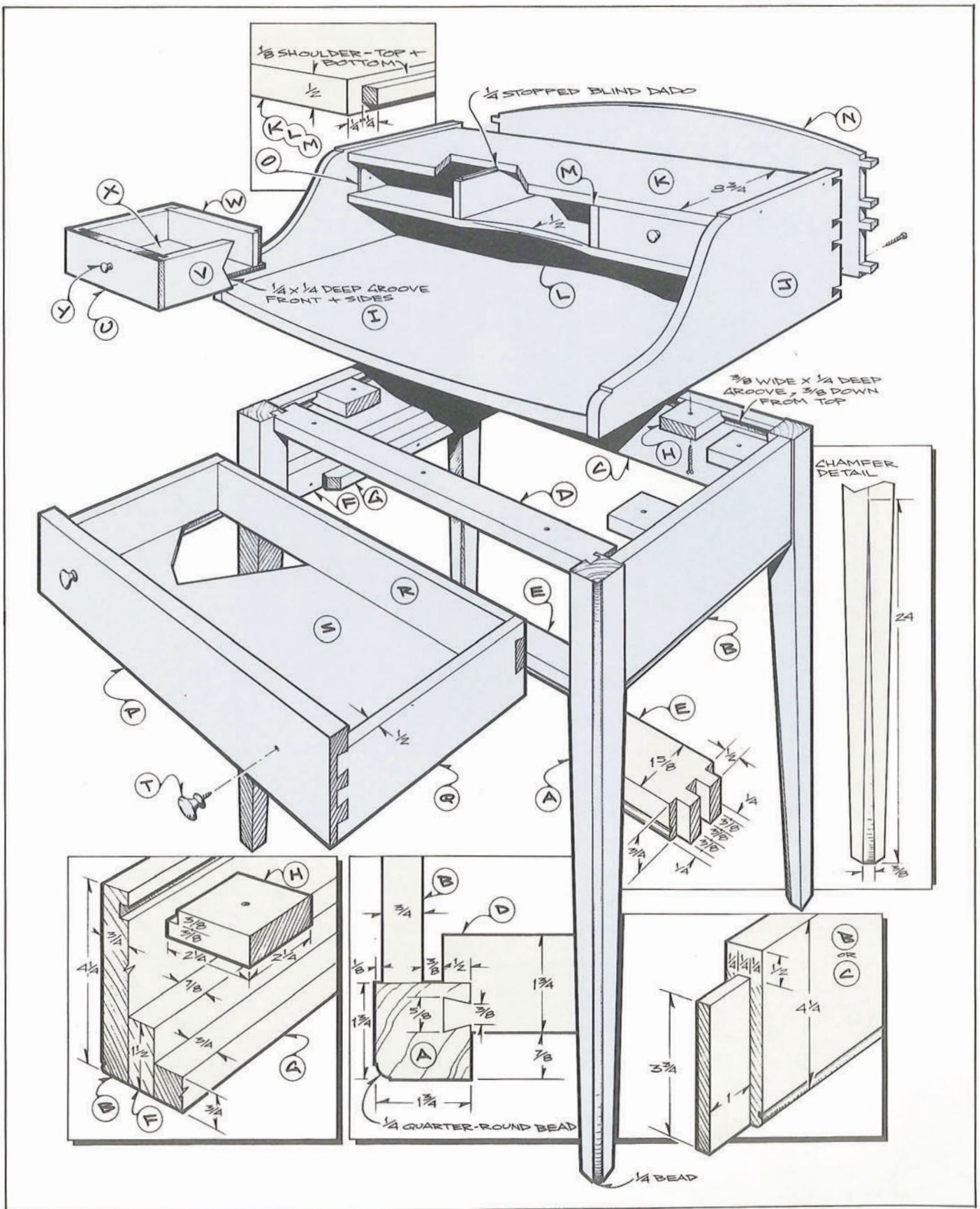
Once dry, remove the clamps and stain the top shelf/divider assembly and the bottom shelf with one coat of Minwax Puritan Pine followed by two coats of orange shellac. Rub out the final coat of shellac with 0000 steel wool, then add a coat of McCloskey's Eggshell varnish. This results in a warm amber patina that we especially like. (Take care to avoid getting any finish in the dado grooves or on the corresponding tenons.) Keep in mind that not all varnishes are compatible with shellac, so check the labels if you use any brands other than those mentioned.

The bottom shelf is now glued to the top shelf/divider assembly. Once again, use glue, clamp firmly and check for squareness.

Next, paint only the inside surfaces of the sides and back. Two coats will be needed for complete coverage. For paint we used Stulb's Wild Bayberry Old Village Paint Color. If not available from your local paint store, it can be ordered from Shaker Workshops, P.O. Box 1028, Concord, MA 01742; tel. (617) 646-8985. Order part number A951. A pint (which should be more than enough for the project) will cost you \$7.15 plus \$2.65 shipping and handling. Don't paint areas around the dovetails or tenon grooves that will be glued later.

Now, add the writing surface, sides, and back to the top and bottom shelf assembly. To do this, first mount one side to the shelf/divider assembly, then add the back, followed by the second side (there is no way to add the shelf/divider assembly once the dovetails have been assembled). Clamp as shown in the photo. Next, the sides are joined to the writing surface with finishing nails, countersunk and filled. Don't use glue here as the writing surface must be free to move with changes in moisture content. The finishing nails will have enough flexibility to allow some movement to occur yet still hold the parts securely together.

The outside surfaces of the sides and back can now be painted. When dry, mount the upper part of the desk to the base. Use 1 1/4 in. long by no. 10 flat head wood screws driven up through the six cleats (H) and the top front stretcher.



Make the lower drawer (parts P, Q, R, S and T) and the two upper drawers (parts U, V, W, X and Y) as shown. The fronts are painted before assembly. A source for the knobs is listed in the Bill of Materials.

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Cut the two spacers (O) to fit and tack them in place with several small brads. Note that the upper drawers are constructed with a 1/8 in. space on the side facing the spacer. Without this space, the drawer would scrape against the side

each time it was opened. Eventually, this would wear the paint away and look rather unsightly.

To complete the project, add a light coat of paste wax to all the drawer runners, cleats, and spacers.

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