

## Moroubo Woodworking Bench

The Moroubo woodworking bench is the product of 8 years of working behind my old workbench - hastily put together when I set up my workshop. Old, worn and abused as it looked, it was time for a new and improved 'mark II'. I knew exactly what I wanted, a result of years of refining my own style, techniques and identifying the furniture range and style in which I would be specializing.



## Moroubo Workbench

### My Original Woodworking Bench

Made from 4 sheets of 18mm birch ply (2400mm x 1200mm), pressed together to form the top, and a large 5x3 oak under-carriage complete with a pattern-makers vice. This met my original needs perfectly as it was used mostly for large furniture and doubling up as a flat top for glue ups. As I progressed to smaller, more intricate designs, I adapted my bench size down to 2400mm x 700mm. Over time I have come to this key conclusion: The more space you have on your desk, the more tools end up cluttering your woodworking bench and the less productive and efficient you end up being as a result! *So take heart, those of you still sneaking the use of your dining room table or kitchen counters while your other half is away; you don't need a massive or complicated bench.* While I still make use of my original woodworking bench, it is for less refined work. I've come to the conclusion that the ideal woodworking bench size is about 1800mm x 600mm and the ideal height is relative and personal to the user. And what you want is a good, solid bench, you trust to be flat, that presents your tools to you within easy reach and forces you to keep disciplined in putting those tools back where they live.

### Bench Requirements

These are the main requirements I identified for a woodworking bench:

- Sturdy, solid and stable – enough for all hand tool techniques including hand-planing and sawing to fine furniture tolerances.
- Easy to dismantle and transport – a desirable for me but an essential for many woodworkers out there short on space or working from areas with poor access and skinny door frames.

- Integral work holding – an effective woodworking bench should help minimise the number of clamps you require.
- Practical and simple – as few components as possible to minimise hassle of transport.
- Allow for add-ons if required.

*So in a bid to thwart my osteopath, who I am sure smiled inwardly to himself when I recounted my need to shift 5 x student benches around the workshop, I set out to find a design which could feasibly allow a student to easily dismantle, load into a little Ford KA, carry home with a beam of pride about his/her face, sneak into the house, and annex the spare bedroom, allowing for continued evening and weekend progressive work. So, I called on the different strengths of existing designs.*



**Moroubo Workbench with Tool Holder**

### **Moravian Woodworking Bench**

The first was the [Moravian bench](#) brought back to modern existence by a faithful reproduction by Will Myers. It dates back to the 17th century when Moravian craftsmen emigrated to the USA. These craftsmen moved from house to house to work on the interior joinery and they needed a woodworking bench that was easily portable (bearing in mind these were horse and cart days). These were easy to set up but also substantial enough to take the heavy stresses and strains involved with all of the hand woodworking techniques. You can imagine those heavy wooden jack planes of their time shaving large pieces of roughly sawn board down to finished components.

### **Roubo Woodworking Bench**

The second was the [Roubo bench](#), a design from the French cabinet maker André Roubo. So many variations of this type now exist and I literally lost days of my life looking at the endless stream of these on the net. Some of these, to me, are works of art and while I admire the craftsmanship in these, I still believe a workbench is just another tool in your arsenal – it should be practical, fine-tuned, beautiful in its own right but it is predominantly there to allow you to create furniture. In this design, I admire the robust and tank-like solidity with the thick top and heavy set legs, as well as some of the practical features including the modern split top variation. For my needs the smallest of these benches would be too heavy so I concentrated on combining the best of the two.

## The Moroubo Bench

This bench was designed with fine furniture makers and students in mind. I wanted to remove an obstacle for those people with limited space and access, allowing them to continue learning and practicing at home. It is also useful in a busy workshop, to be able to move benches around at will to make space for larger projects. All this without sacrificing the required structural integrity. This has the under carriage of the Moravian bench, allowing for the combination of portability and stability (which is far better than any previous bench), the split top of the Roubo bench (a central divider that doubles as a tool holder and work stop allowing for additional support for hand planning), and a 90mm thick bench top on both sides of the divider creating additional stability through gravitational force on the splayed legs, as well as maintaining a dead flat surface.



The tool holder is particularly important to me, as when I am hand cutting joints I like to have my Dovetail saw and my Gent saw, along with a selection of chisels that I use regularly at arm's reach, while still having maximum workable bench space free on which to move the work around. Unlike the Moravian bench, I chose not to have a tool well. I appreciate that the majority of hand skill work is done on the first 300mm of the bench, however, I have found that tool wells end up simply collecting tools (*with better homes to go to*) and dust/shavings. I would much sooner have the extra flat working area for glue ups. This affords me a 640 x 1850mm area for this function and I have found that most furniture items fit within this space.



## The Vice

When choosing a vice I went for a reconditioned old Record No 52 with quick release. 5 more of these benches were required for the students in my workshop and more importantly, I want others to be able to build their own bench (*without having to bargain off their first born*) in order to obtain a suitable vice. I investigated numerous companies and modern vices during my planning and found that even some of the new contemporary models are not up to the task for which they are required. The old record vices however, while not the prettiest show horse in the stable, I know to be hard working and hard wearing beasts (*the shire horse of the vice community if we stick with the horse analysis*) and can be picked up second hand for very reasonable prices. The tail vice, I felt, could be an optional add on at a later date, should it be required. I have found the option of using the [Veritas® Wonder Pups®](#) alongside the standard 19mm bench dogs to be more than adequate. With an increased budget, the way forward would definitely be a wagon wheel vice. However, having spent an unhealthy time drooling over the [Benchcrafted](#) versions...



## Materials

I looked at various options for the materials. Beech and Ash, for the top and under carriage respectively, were cost effective yet pleasing to the eye. I quite liked the idea of reclaimed material for the under carriage too. After some searching, I found some pitch pine beams for sale near Oxford. Hefty beams, they were 14 x 15 inch and 3 metres in length. It was a bit of a story when it came to picking them up though. Having implied they would be cut to size, the seller demanded more money for the service and insisted on pay before viewing. I'm not a great fan of negotiation but neither am I going to roll over to this kind of individual so after some extensive 'discussions' we were back to the original price, paid in full on site and the materials cut to size. He then took great delight in telling me about the several Roman coins recently found in the area and the possibility of finding some hidden in the old beams. It was worth the hassle to watch his greedy little eyes widen when I pointed out that as I had already paid for the timber, that anything found within would belong to me! *Unfortunately, my Irish heritage failed me that day and no gold was found.* For the top, I found a little timber yard in Peterborough called [Mac Timbers](#). They were running an auction for two thirds of their stock and they had some very nice native logs planked up for five or ten years, air drying. Like a child in a sweet

shop I rifled through whole trees of English Walnut, Monkeypuzzle and Brown Oak. I happened to win an auction for some slightly spalted Beech, Rippled Ash and Sycamore. More than enough to make my five bench tops.



My first woodworking bench top was to be made with the Spalted Beech. Having planed the first couple of planks I realized it was better than just Spalted Beech, it was actually Flamed Beech with a slight hint of spalting in it. The board showed up the true intense coloring of the red and green hues with the black marble lines. The colored faded a little, after a few hours of oxidizing. I never cease to be amazed, every time I cut a new piece of timber, by what I find inside. It's one of the best things in furniture making and an element I try to preserve in the final object.

### Bench Break down

The Moroubo bench splits into the following sections:

- 2 x leg assemblies
- 2 x leg rails
- 2 x bench top halves
- 1 x center split top tool holder

The leg assembly feature bridle joints at the very top, mortise/tenon joints at the center and large dovetails at the bottom. These leg assemblies are bound together by the 2 x rails of Spalted Beech and fastened with removable Loose Wedge Tenons. These leg assemblies sit flush with the benchtop and use a series of dog holes and a holdfast to allow for the ability to secure larger panels.



### **Art in Action and Workbench Making Course**

I decided to use the Moroubo woodworking bench for a demonstration at [Art in Action](#) earlier this year where it received very positive feedback. The apparent demand got me thinking, and it was then when I decided to make this workbench available. I now include the [Workbench Making Course](#) as part of my different training modules. This way my students would have the option to create their own, benefiting both their skill progression and ability to continue their training at home. These woodworking bench will use the same Flamed Beech, Brown Oak combination but will have an alternative to the reclaimed Pitch Pine – possibly Douglas Fir.

### **Conclusion**

A woodworking bench should never be a limiting factor when pursuing a dream of woodworking. Many a fine craftsman has started on a bench cobbled together with what was at hand. However, you may find that as you grow with experience and skill, your bench, like the shedding of a skin, will change with you. This bench is what I would consider finely tuned, and I am keen to share it with others.