Writing Table

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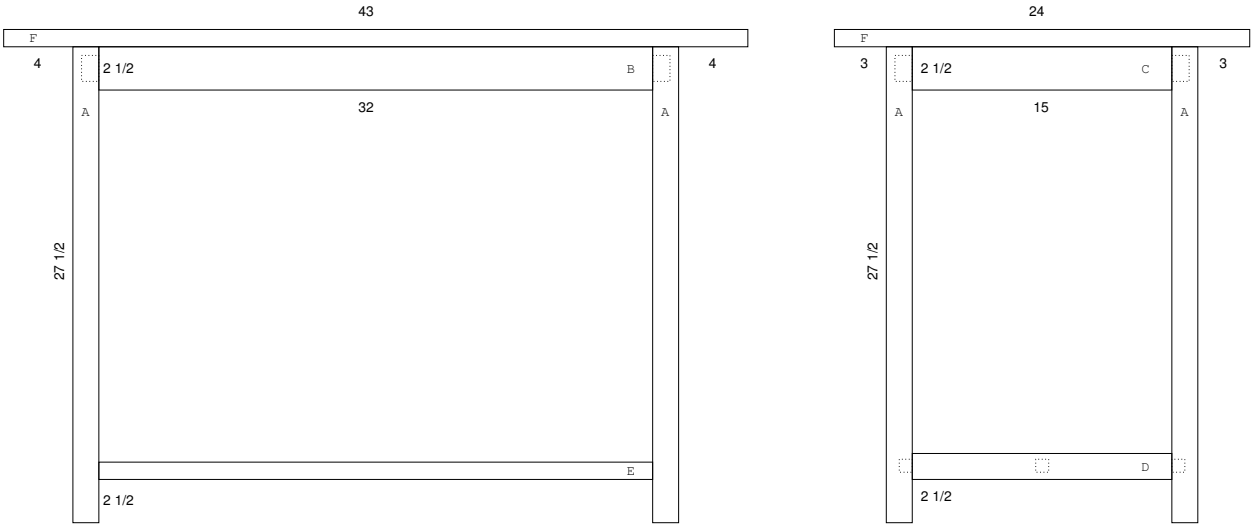
Introduction

Here is an easy to build version of the "monastery table" Norm Abrams built during the 2003 season of *This Old House*. The plans are simplified by not turning the legs, and using a solid top for the table.

Plans

These plans show the design of the table. The height should be adjusted to a comfortable working height for you.



The base construction is mortise and tenon joinery and the table top can be held to the base using any method that allows for wood movement. I used buttons that ride in grooves milled in the top rails.

Cut List

Key	Qty	Description	T	W	L	Notes
A	4	Legs	1 1/2	1 1/2	27 1/2	Mortises for rails on top and bottom.
B	2	Long Rails	1	2 1/2	32	1×1 1/2 inch tenons on ends.
C	2	Short Rails	1	2 1/2	15	1×1 1/2 inch tenons on ends.
D	2	Bottom Rails	1 1/2	1 1/2	15	3/4× 3/4 inch tenons on ends, mortise for foot rail.
E	1	Foot Rail	1	1 1/2	32	1/2× 3/4 inch tenons on ends.
F	1	Top	1	24	43	Edge jointed from narrower boards.

All dimensions are in inches.

Tools Used

Tool	Uses	Substitutes
Saws		
Disston D-23, 8 tpi	· Cutting all lumber to size	Crosscut handsaw
H. Peace, 5 1/2 tpi rip	· Cutting all lumber to size	Rip handsaw
IT dovetail saw	· Cutting tenon cheeks	Backsaw, filed rip
Disston #4 backsaw	· Cutting tenon shoulders	Backsaw, filed crosscut
Handplanes		
Wooden jack plane	· Initial sizing of rough cut lumber	Stanley #40
Wooden try plane	· Sizing of rough cut lumber	Stanley #5 1/2
Wooden fore plane	· Sizing of rough cut lumber	Stanley #6
Wooden jointer plane	· Jointing edges of top pieces	Stanley #7
Coffin bodied smooth plane	· Initial smoothing of all surfaces	Stanley #4
Clark & Williams smoother	· Final smoothing of surfaces	Stanley #3
Lie-Nielsen #164	· Squaring, smoothing end grain	Stanley #60 1/2
Stanley #60 1/2	· Rounding, chamfering edges	Any block plane
Lie-Nielsen #60 1/2–R	· Tuning tenon cheeks and shoulders	
Chisels		
Marples Blue chisels	· Squaring mortise walls	Any wide chisel
Sorby 1/2″ mortise chisel	· Cutting mortises	Use the bore and chop method
Miscellaneous		
Starrett folding rule	· All measurements	Your favorite measuring tool
Veritas wheel gauge	· Squaring up boards	Your favorite marking gauge

Construction Notes

For my version of the writing table I started with several rough cut white spruce slabs left over from the sawyer who sawed my siding. Pieces were approximately two inches thick, and eight inches wide. The legs were sawn from a single plank and planed to approximate dimension using a jack / fore / jack combination of wooden planes. The first jack plane used has a deeply cambered iron, set to take a deep cut. The fore plane has a shallower camber and is set to take a thinner shaving, and the final plane uses a very gradual camber and is set fine.

The rails were cut to the appropriate width and then resawn in half to yield the thickness shown on the cut list and plans. The same planing procedure was used on these pieces.

All pieces were trued on one side first, using a pair of winding sticks with parallel edges. When one side is flat and straight, use a marking gauge with it's face on the side you just flattented to mark the opposite side. By planing down to these lines, you should have a board that is the same thickness in one dimension, and has no twist. From there, work on flattening one of the other two edges, but in addition to keeping the edge flat and without twist, make sure that it is 90 degrees to one of the two faces you've already flattened. Finally, use the marking gauge again to mark the thickness for planing the opposite side. The end result is a board with all four sides flat, without twist, parallel to the oppsite face, and perpendicular to adjacent sides.

Cut all pieces to length, remembering to add the length of the tenons to the rail dimensions, and leave an inch or two extra on the legs to protect the ends from blowing out when chopping the mortises (especially the upper mortises).

I chop my mortises before cutting the tenons. Mark all the mortises (three on each leg, two at the top for the top rails, one on the bottom for the lower rail) with a marking gauge set to the thickness of the chisel you will be using to chop the mortises. The upper mortises should be placed toward the outer sides of the

legs to allow for longer tenons on the rails. Be sure to carefully lay these out on all four legs, and make sure you've got them located properly before chopping.

Chop the mortises with a mortising chisel

Notes