



From bed frame to bench seat

Michael T Collins gives us a lesson in upcycling old furniture

There is one constant in my woodworking life and it's not the wood or the tools – it's my wife, Lisa. After a long morning in the woodshop, she'll be at the door saying: 'Thought you might like a cuppa,' with a plate of digestives in hand and: 'Let's go sit for a while on the bench' – no, not the woodworking bench, although I have done that many a time...

And so we walk into what has lovingly become known as the 'English garden', a small corner in our 'yard' that features a hedgerow and other traditionally English plants. Nestled in among the growth is our garden bench. And what is a garden without a bench?

1 In this article I'll be showing you how to turn the wooden head and foot boards of an old double bed frame into a charming garden bench. In this part of the world, one can regularly find old wooden headboards and

footboards propped against a mailbox at the end of someone's driveway with a big FREE sign taped to the side. These days, people want modern and new furniture, so they're quick to throw away great pieces. You might not have the same ease of access to old bed frames and cast-offs, but with the likes of Gumtree and Freecycle the world over, old furniture in need of a new design spin is easy to come by. If you do happen to have an old bed that you want to remake into something more suited to your lifestyle, this project is perfect.

EQUIPMENT USED

Tools

- Router or use dowels to connect parts
- Selection of chisels
- Crosscut saw



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Method

At the outset, it is important to understand that because each bed is distinct, the construction techniques will vary for each project, but the basic principles are the same. Therefore, this article has been created as a guide to take you through some of the design

elements you might want to include. The headboard will form the back of the bench and the footboard will make up the arms. Begin with the headboard and footboard, setting the rails aside for the time being. If your frame does not have rails use pine boards. The first step is to determine the height and depth of the finished bench. The length is governed by the width of the original bed, while the depth is somewhat determined by half the length of the footboard. Obviously a queen bed's footboard will need to be shortened considerably. This bench is going to be 480mm deep with a height of 460mm. This is a little deeper than a chair at 380-430mm, but it allows for pillows as back rests. As we are working to upcycle a piece of existing furniture, the height of the bench will be governed by the layout of the head and footboard rails. Most benches or chairs are about 460mm high. You may need to alter the height of either the headboard or the footboard pieces to create the correct height. To achieve this optimal height, cut the legs of the headboard down a few inches so the arms intersect the back at a better location. With a standard single bed 920mm wide you just need to cut the footboard in half so it can become your arm rests at approximately 460mm. If you are going to mortise the parts together remember to add an additional 40mm to parts with tenons

Dissassembly

2 In my frame all the existing tenons were very loose, so I had to pull them apart and clean them up – the bed had been repaired several times in its history and various nails and screws needed to be removed..

3 I had a standard double bed at 1370mm so I needed to trim the footboard down more from the centre to achieve the desired depth.

Side note: You will be left with two sides as arms for your bench. My bed frame had just the right configuration to allow me to use the headboard's rail as is and the footboard rail as the front skirt of the bench. If that is not the case with your frame, just take one of the side rails and cut that down to size for the front skirt of your bench. Simply measure the distance of your headboard from post to post if using dowels, add 40mm if going the mortise

route. If you are using dowels, you might want to add an additional step and make an inner frame from 50 x 100mm studs for increased stability. This frame needs to be able to fit between the front skirt (side rail cut to size) and the back of your bench (the headboard).



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Attaching the arms

4 Locate the position of the arms in the headboard posts and use a router to cut mortises that match the configuration of the footboard.

5 I made my mortises 25mm deep, using clamps to act as stops so that the mortises were only as long as needed.

6 Use a rasp to round over the ends of the footboard tenons to match the curved ends of the mortises. ➤



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7 Test fit the joint before machining the others.

8 Repeat the router process for the mortises in the posts for the front skirt. It is important to make sure that the top of the front skirt is level with the headboard's back skirt.

9 Lightly sand all the parts. I did not want to remove the wonderful patina that had developed on the maple over the years, so I took care to give the wood a fresh look without losing the wood's history. The dirt came off with soapy water.

10 Dry fit the sides together to check all is well.

The glue up

11 Start with the arms – I used two-part epoxy, mixing some sawdust in to act as filler for the original loose mortises.

12 Check for squareness when clamping up.

13 Epoxy gives you plenty of time to work, which is perfect for a project such as this. Allow the side to fully dry – clean up any glue ooze out. Next, glue the arms to the headboard and footboard skirt. I used clamps and tie-down straps to support the glue up – check for squareness.

Adding the seat

14 The seat needs to be supported at the back, so I added a piece of 25 x 50mm wood to the headboard skirt at the same height as the front skirt.

15 Due to the width of the bench, the side rails of the bed did not offer enough wood for the seat. To complement the original style of the frame, I used old 250 x 19mm wide pine boards that I ran through a planer.

16 The seat boards were arranged to match, as far as possible, the backrest. The boards were spaced and cut to length, adding an additional 25mm overhang.

17 Cut notches in the boards around the back posts, if required. Here, I wanted to emphasise the fit around the corner of the front posts, and did so by cutting a curve using a coping saw to match the existing profile of the arm rests.



18 I added a slight chamfer to each of the boards, again to mimic the backrest boards. The boards were nailed in place and a 6.4mm quarter round moulding was added to where the seat met the back.

The finish

19 I gave the whole bench a coat of amber shellac to bring out the natural character in the wood – this matched perfectly with the original colour of the maple. If you are going to be placing your bench in the garden, you may want to add two coats of spar varnish – this will give a weather and UV-resistant finish to the bench.

The beauty of this project is its economy, its simplicity, and its endless variation. No two benches will be alike. So grab a cuppa and head to the garden to enjoy your one-of-a-kind creation. ■

