

Reclaimed rustic cupboard

Michael T Collins designs and makes 'on the fly'

I don't know about you, but I am loath to turn down an offer of wood and over the years I have acquire quite a collection from friends and colleagues this way. The wood on offer is sometimes good, sometimes bad and sometimes just plain ugly – I tend to find it hard to pass up any type of grain, whatever the state it's in. Generally, the wood that is left for me to peruse is wood that has been well picked over, the original owner perhaps couldn't see the potential in it, or it just looked so awful that they didn't even want to touch it.

This year is no exception to my adoption of unwanted wood. In fact, I acquired some very nice walnut boards from a dear friend who emailed saying: 'Michael, I have a load of old wood in the basement – any interest?' So I borrowed a truck and loaded what my wife and I could haul.

Among the pile were two very nice, almost book-matched, rough-sawn walnut boards about 100cm x 25cm.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL T COLLINS

Dealing with old wood

The first thing to do when making anything from wood that has been laying around for several years is to carefully clean off all the crud, always while wearing eye protection, gloves and respirator. There's no telling if rodents and other disease-carrying critters have inhabited the wood, so it's best to not take any chances.

First Hoover off all the dust. I do this in the open air and well away from the house and shop. A wire brush helps to loosen all the old rotten wood and brings out more of the grain structure so you can see what you're really working with.

Once the wood is free from detritus, clean it with a solution of bleach and water or disinfectant, rinse and allow to thoroughly dry.

The design

Most of my freethinking pieces start as a rough sketch – after that they are dictated by the size of the pieces available. When I first saw these boards, I immediately thought they'd make the sides of a wall cabinet or a small desktop book case, perhaps with a door and a shelf, maybe a drawer.

I decided that a wall cupboard with door and a drawer would give the most pleasing look.

1 Once I had these particular boards planed they were gorgeous.

Carcass

2 The first step was to rip the edge that would be against the wall and then all dimensions and layout would be made from this edge. The front would be a live edge.

3 Once the wall-facing edge was ripped, I jointed the edges and check for squareness.

4 After cutting the sides to length I laid out the housings for the top and bottom of the cupboard. I always lay out shelves in pairs so that the positions are a perfect match and I am not relying on measuring.

5 Using a marking gauge, I mark the depth of the housing – mine are approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ the thickness of the boards.

6 With a marking knife, the length of the housing was also marked from the back edge. ➤





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7 With a router and a 19mm flat-bottomed bit, the housing was routed up to the marking knife line.



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8 I also created a rebate at the back of the cupboard and cleaned up the curved ends with a chisel.

The shelves

I planed the shelves and squared them to final dimension. Again these were two short, rough boards.



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9 Because the side boards were about 25mm thick, I needed to measure the shelf tenons directly from the housings. I used a knife to indicate the amount to remove.



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10 You can remove the shoulders using your preferred method, I used my new cross-cut sled (see issue 50 for details).



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11 The tenon shoulders can be cleaned up with a chisel or a shoulder plane, bringing them to final size. Be careful to remove waste equally from both sides.



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12 The front ends of the tenons were rounded so they fitted the curved portion of the housing. It is much quicker to do this than to try to chop the end of the housing square and it gives a much cleaner finish.

I added a 45° chamfer on front bottom and top of the two shelves.



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13 I glued the top and bottom of the cupboard with hide glue and squared the case.



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The door

14 I had some walnut left over from the vanity I made in issue 41 (page 41) – it is, in fact, the section that was removed for the sink. The only issue was that it has cupped a little, so I ripped and jointed it again along the glue lines then used dominoes to align the boards. The original dominoes, that are visible, were removed when the door was cut to final length.



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15 Once the glue had dried, I cleaned up the squeeze-out and, with my plane iron ground to a 250mm arc, I set to work on planing the inside – I left the 'scalloped' surface on the inside. The outside was planed smooth. I added a 5° bevel to the leading edge of the door so that it would close nicely.



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16 The door was cut to length on the cross-cut sled.

The hinge

17 I wanted a hidden hinge, so the first thing to do was lay out the location.



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18 A 9mm hole was drilled in the top and bottom of the door for the hinge pivots.

19 Accurate measurement was required to line up the door pivot points with the shelf holes. I used a block cut and drilled exactly to act as a guide and keep the drill vertical.



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20 The door fit was checked using temporary 9mm steel dowels and the door disassembled to tweak the fit and chamfer the edges. ▶



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Dovetail drawer

21 All parts of the drawer were measured directly from the cupboard and cut to length.

22 I always cut tails first and once laid out I ganged them together and sawed on the waste side.

23 I removed the waste with the largest chisel that fitted without damaging the tails.

24 The tails were then brought down to the scribe lines with a chisel.

25 The tails were used to lay out the half-blind dovetails – it is important to make sure that the pieces are perpendicular to each other.

26 The waste was chopped out and the corners cleaned up and test fitted. The back of the drawer had through dovetails. (For an in-depth introduction to making dovetails refer to issue 27 page 68).

27 A 6mm groove was planed in all four sides of the drawer at a height so that the groove was hidden within the lower dovetail. I used a piece of 6mm ply, and although expansion was not a concern, I did make the ply fit loosely in the groove.

28 The drawer was glued up and then the joint planed to create a perfect fit.



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29 A sheet of very old 13mm poplar ply was used for the back of the cupboard and glued and pin nailed into place.

Shelf fit

As is the nature of working on the fly, I changed my mind as to how the drawer would slide in and out. Originally, I had envisioned having 'rails' on the cupboard sides that slid in hidden housings on the drawer sides. However, at this point I decided to add another shelf and have the drawer slide on that – much simpler.

30 I ripped a piece of walnut to the thickness of the cupboard shelf and measured the location using the drawer for size. Then, using some shims, I positioned the drawer shelf into the correct location.

31 This after-thought shelf needed to be secured and it was at this point I decided to add an additional design touch by drilling counter-bored holes and screwing the sides into all the cross boards. The holes were then covered with walnut plugs. I can't tell you how many times I have used these plug cutters – they are an indispensable tool. Just remember to make and insert your plugs with the same grain direction.

32 The plugs were pared and then planed flush.

Fitting and finishing

33 To give the right spacing of the door from the frame I used a stainless steel washer.

34 I wanted the locking mechanism to be unique and so routed a 1in slot into the face of the door then drilled a hole parallel to this slot through the edge of the door. The bolt mechanism was then inserted and secured in place.

All that was then needed was to put some chalk on the end of the bolt, close the door and push the bolt closed, leaving a chalk mark on the wall of the cabinet. It was then a simple matter to drill a hole in the side of the cabinet that lined up with the bolt.

I gave the whole piece a final hand sanding with 220 grit.

The piece was then given a generous coat of Danish oil and allowed to dry for about 15 minutes, after which the excess oil was wiped off.



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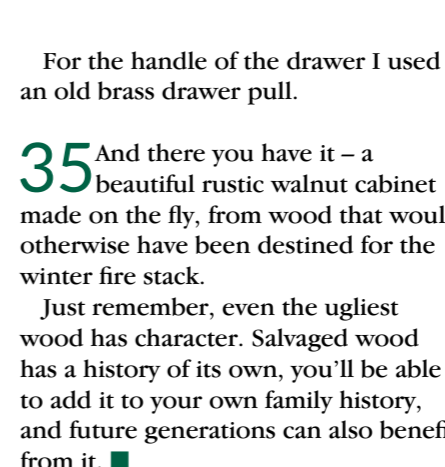
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For the handle of the drawer I used an old brass drawer pull.

35 And there you have it – a beautiful rustic walnut cabinet made on the fly, from wood that would otherwise have been destined for the winter fire stack.

Just remember, even the ugliest wood has character. Salvaged wood has a history of its own, you'll be able to add it to your own family history, and future generations can also benefit from it. ■



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