Traditional Sawbench

Plastic sawhorses are OK in a pinch. However, once you build a sawbench you will wonder how you ever worked wood without it.

PHOTO BY AL PARRISH

The reason sawbenches are so useful is the top. The fact that it is flat and has some width allows you to perform many operations on it. And the particular height of the sawbench unleashes the full effectiveness of full-size Western-style handsaws and panel saws.

Sawbenches are not sawhorses. Though both devices support your work, real sawbenches can be pressed to do so much more that they are worth building in a long afternoon in the shop.

The major difference between a sawbench and a sawhorse is the top. On a sawhorse, the top is generally long and skinny. It will not support anything on its own. A sawbench has a wide top: 7" is a common and useful width. And it's this detail alone that makes them worth building. The wide top allows you to cut many cabinet-sized parts using one sawbench alone. The top is also an excellent clamping surface, allowing you to secure work to it. The sawbench is a step stool for reaching up high. It's a mortising stool for hand-mortising operations – you secure the work over a leg and hold it down with a holdfast (hence the hole in the top). And then you sit on the sawbench astride or next to your work.

But, as they say on television, there's more. Much more. The shelf below holds your square and saw as you move your stock in position. The V-shaped mouth on the top – called a "ripping notch" – supports your work as you notch out corners with a handsaw or jigsaw. And the top is the traditional place for a craftsman to sit when eating lunch.

The sawbench shown here is based entirely on traditional English forms. If you choose to alter this plan, resist changing the height of the sawbench. The 20" height is key to using the bench in conjunction with a Western handsaw. The 20" height allows you to use your legs to secure your work without clamps and makes the handsaw work efficiently. The sawbench is high enough that a 26"-long saw at the proper cutting angle won't hit the floor and the saw won't be able to jump out of its kerf on the return stroke.

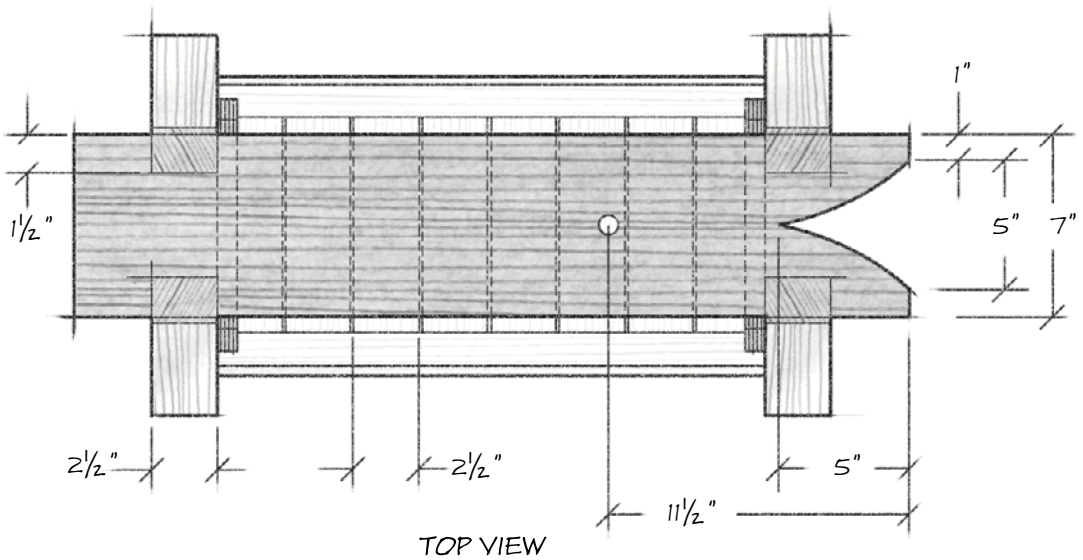
Build your sawbench out of any material that is plentiful, inexpensive and easy to work. The legs and lower braces are assembled much like the American Trestle Table in this issue: Create the through-mortise by cutting away the material before gluing the two pieces together that form each leg. If you like, chamfer all the edges of your components with a block plane or chamfer bit in a router.

Cut the ends of the legs at 10°, then cut a notch at the top of each leg that will allow it to nest into notches in the top piece. Each leg notch measures ½" x 2½" x 1¼". Cut your tenons on the lower braces then assemble the braces and legs. Drawbore the joints then wedge them using hardwood wedges and glue.

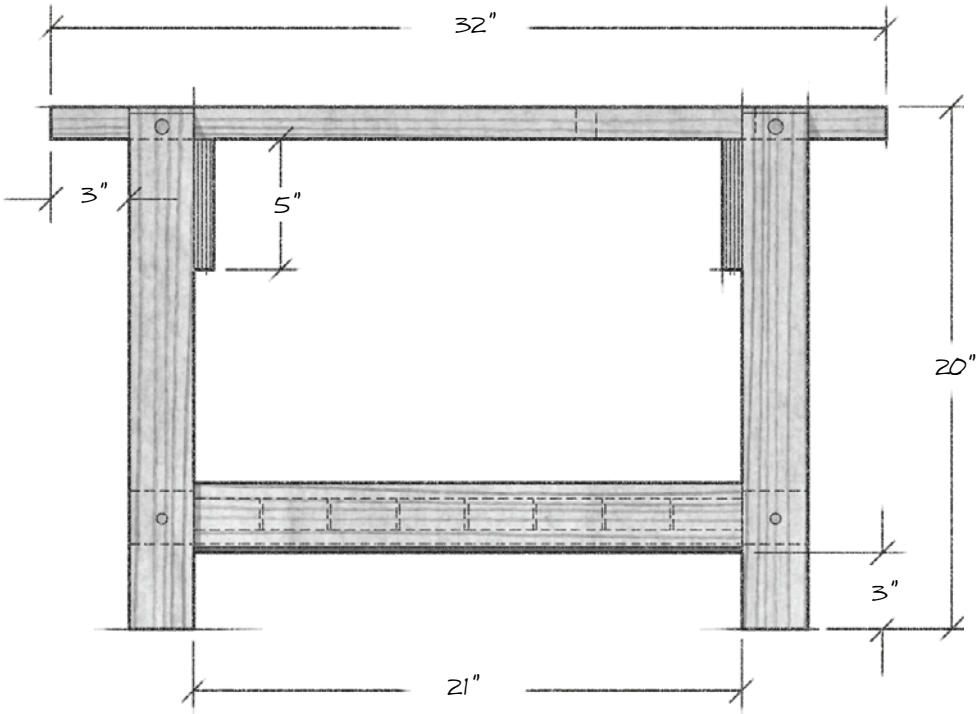
With the legs and braces assembled, clamp them temporarily to the top and mark precisely where they intersect the edges of the top. Take the clamps off and mark out the 1½" x 2½" notches in the top that will receive the legs. Saw out the notches and cut the ripping notch. Glue the leg assemblies to the top and reinforce the joint with a ½"-diameter dowel or Miller Dowel.

Clamp the plywood top braces in place and trace the angle of the legs on the braces. Unclamp the braces and saw each one to shape. Glue and screw the braces to the legs using three #8 x 2" wood screws in each leg. If you want to add a shelf, first rip a 10° bevel on the shelf braces and cut the ends of the shelf pieces at 10°. With the sawbench upside down on your bench, place the shelf pieces against the lower braces. Now glue the shelf braces against the shelf pieces and nail everything in place.

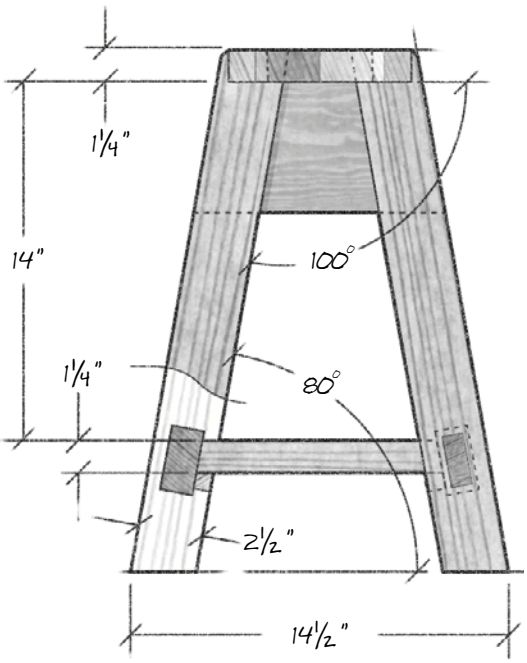
Bore a ¾"-diameter hole in the top for a holdfast or holddown. Position the hole so the pad of the holdfast will touch the tops of the legs. Mine is positioned to accommodate the Veritas hold-down. WM — *Christopher Schwarz*



TOP VIEW



FRONT VIEW



END VIEW

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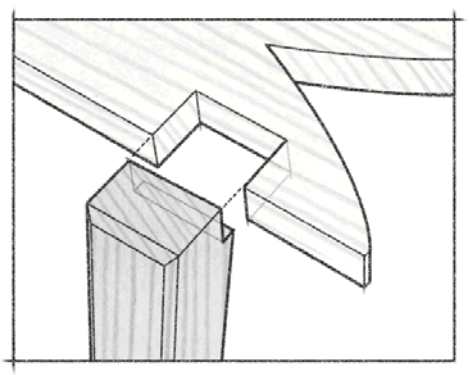
	NO.	PART	SIZES (INCHES) T	W	L	MATERIAL	NOTES
❑	1	Top	1¼	7	32	Pine	
❑	4	Legs	2½	2½	21	Pine	Includes extra length for trimming
❑	2	Lower braces	1¼	2½	26¼	Pine	2⅝"-long tenon, both ends
❑	2	Shelf braces	¾	¾	21	Pine	10° bevel on one long edge
❑	8	Shelf pieces	1¼	2½	9¼	Pine	10° bevel both ends, cut to fit
❑	2	Top braces	¾	5	9½	Plywood	10° angle on edges, cut to fit



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