

Bandsawn Dovetails

Tilt, saw and chop

by Tage Frid

Routers and tablesaws aren't the only way to make through dovetails with a machine. I use my bandsaw to cut the pins and tails, and the results aren't much different from cutting the joint by hand. Start by using a marking gauge to scribe the baselines of pins and tails on both boards. Cut the pins first. Tilt the bandsaw table 10° (or whatever angle you wish your pins to be) to the right, and clamp a fence parallel to the blade and slightly farther away from it than half the width of the stock, as in drawing A. (If your table won't tilt in both directions, see *FWW* #17, p. 15, for a jig to solve this problem.) Clamp a stop to the fence so that the blade will cut just to the baseline. All the cuts for this method should be made with the inside face of the board up. Mark your stock so that you won't lose track. Make the first cut, which will be one side of a center pin, then turn the stock end-for-end and make the second cut, one side of the other center pin.

Between the stock and the fence, place a spacer equal in width to the pin spacing. For this example, you'll cut one center pin and two half-pins at each edge. Cut the half-pin on one end of the stock, then turn the board end-for-end and cut the other half-pin (B).

Now tilt the table 10° to the left, move the fence to the opposite side of the table, and use the spacer to cut the other two half-pins (C). Then remove the spacer and cut the other side of the two center pins (D). Chisel out the waste in the pin boards, just as you would in making hand dovetails.

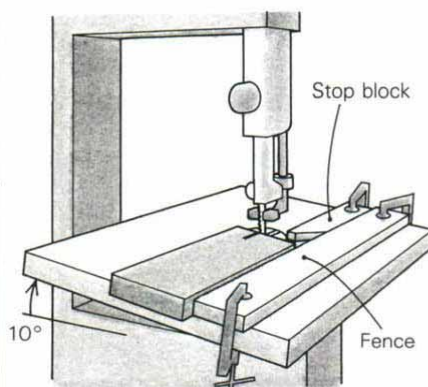
With the pins chiseled out, scribe their location directly on the tail board (E). Return the bandsaw to the horizontal position and saw freehand to the waste side of the lines that mark the tails. To remove the waste where the center pins will fit, saw up to the baseline repeatedly (F), shifting the stock sideways each time, before cleaning to the line with a chisel. To waste the area where the half-pins will fit, saw right up the baseline (G). Try the joint and adjust its fit with a chisel where necessary. This method will work with wider boards, but you'll need more spacers to locate the other pins. □

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Bandsawn dovetails

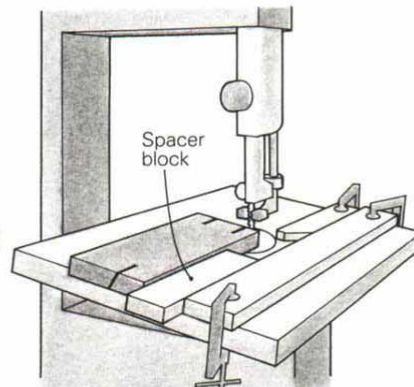
A

To cut one side of the center pins, tilt the bandsaw to 10° . Clamp a fence to the saw table slightly more than half the stock width from the blade. Make one pin cut; turn the board end-for-end for the other.



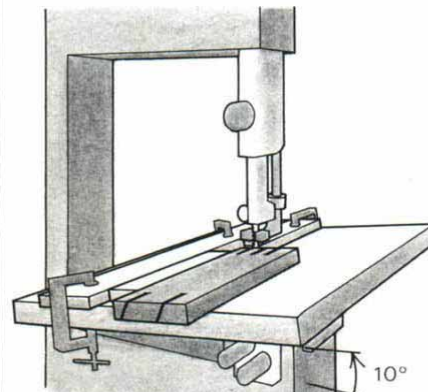
B

To cut the half-pins, put a spacer block between the fence and stock, and cut one half-pin. Turn end-for-end and repeat. Make the width of the spacer block equal to the pin spacing.



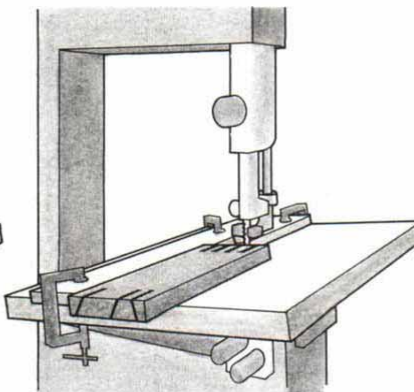
C

Tilt the table to the opposite angle and move the fence to the opposite side; using the spacer block, cut the other two half-pins.



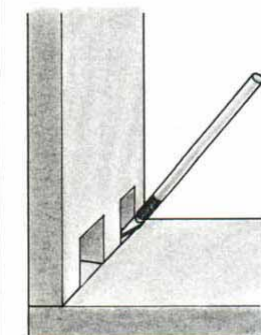
D

Remove the spacer block and cut the other side of the center pins. Chisel out the waste, as with hand-dovetailing.



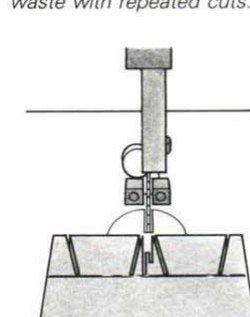
E

To cut the tails, mark them out directly from the pins.



F

With the saw table horizontal, saw the outer edges of the tails, then nibble out the waste with repeated cuts.



G

Saw the half-pin shoulders, then pare with a chisel until the joint fits correctly.

