A few notes on the design and making of a Clamped Front or "Hutch" style Chest for use as a Feast Gear Box

By
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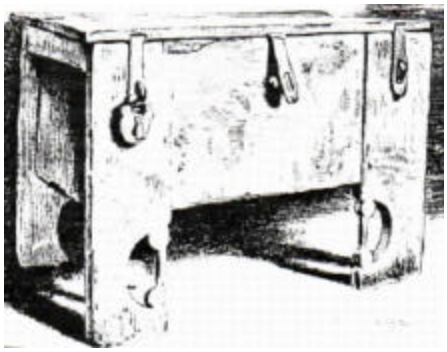
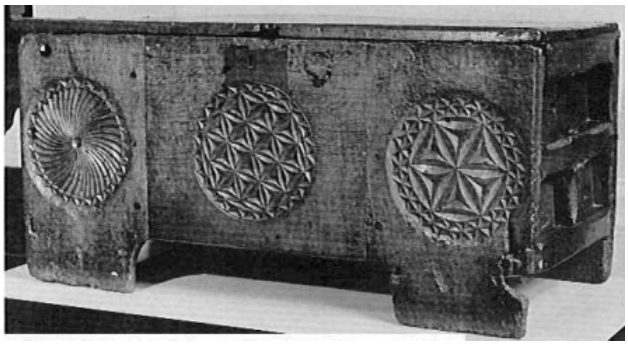
Midrealm



Canfield Abby Coffer, Canfield, England

Feast Gear Box by Capten Rhys, Midrealm

13th century Coffer, Germany



Probably 13th century chest, England

I decided to make a feast gear chest for a friend. Given no restrictions on design or style, I decided to make and attempt to redesign an existing period chest to fit my needs. One of the main concerns was size. It should be large enough to hold feast gear for up to four gentles, but small enough to transport in an average car. There was a need to be able to place the wooden chargers flat to prevent warping and to coat it with urethane to help prevent damage from the inevitable food spills. After much searching, I came across several examples of flat-topped coffers, which could be adapted to my purpose. I created a composite design, which met the requirements along with the advantage providing a smooth top to use as an additional short table or a bench to sit on 16 to 17 inches being fairly standard for the seat on a kitchen chair. Altering dimensions to fit my needs and changing the cut out designs on the legs to a different shape personalized the project.

Although the original was made from oak, clear aspen was chosen to make the chest due to availability, weight, and price. Due to my own personal feast gear, I settled on inside dimensions of 16x20x7½. Although shallow for a chest of this type, the size allowed my to use it as a seat and kept the weight down. This project only uses standard lumber available at any big-box store, (Home Depot, Menards, etc). It is always cheaper to buy rough lumber from the mill or dryer and plane it your self, or recycle from other sources such as old barn wood or used pallets. This project is for the beginner who doesn't have a big shop with a lot of extras yet.

Cost of this Project:

Total price of this project was under $50.00. Using pine would cut the cost to about $25.00.

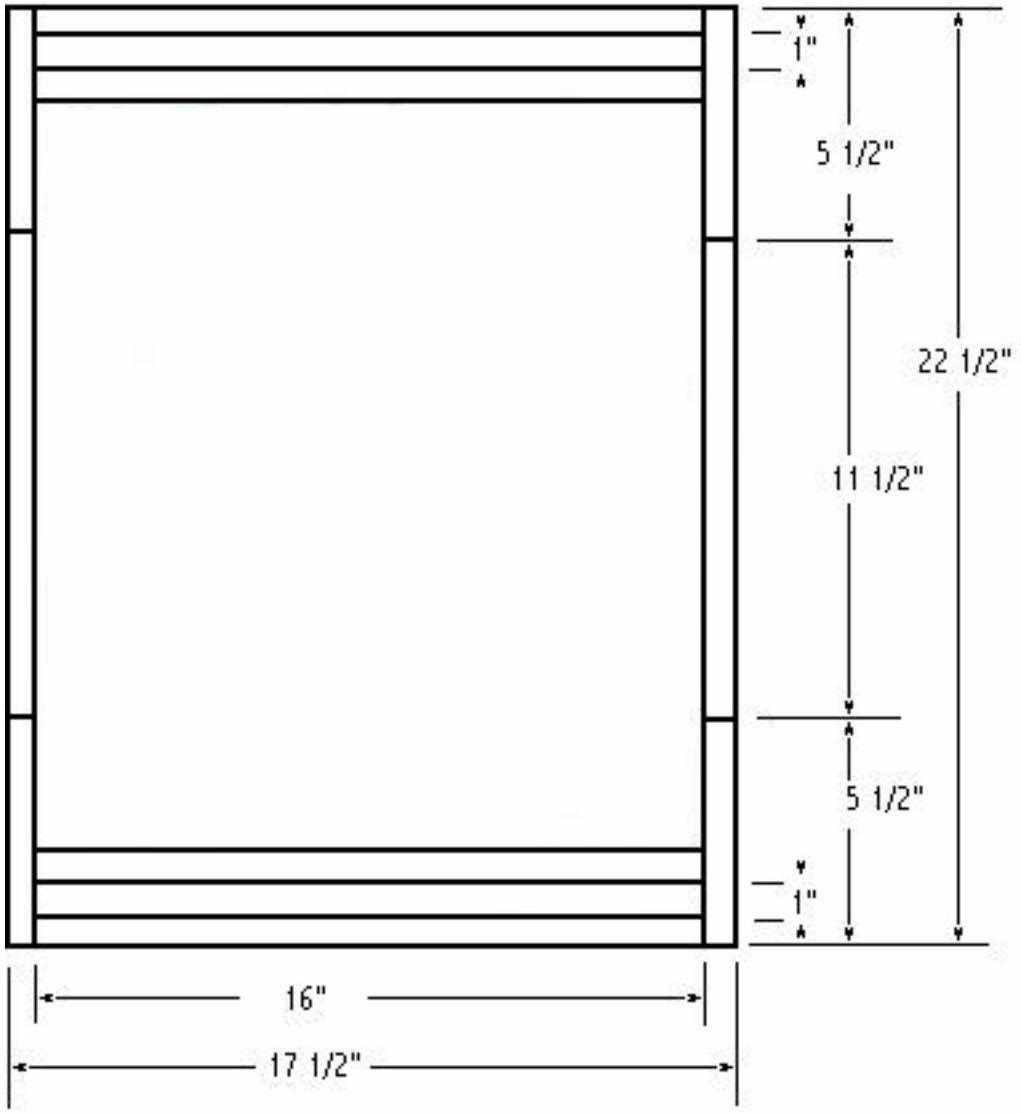
Materials List: This project uses standard boards except for the top and bottom.

1x2	5'2"	(available in standard 6' lengths)
1x6	5'4"	(available in standard 6' lengths)
1x8	4'6"	(available in standard 6' lengths)
1x18	4'	(available in hobby sections will be edged glued out of smaller pieces, or you can make your own out of smaller pieces will be a true 18" across, ¾" thick)

#6 1 ½" Deck Screws
3/8" Wood Dowels
2 Decorative Hinges
2 Decorative Hasps

Tools you will need:

Circular Saw
Straight Edge Clamp (used to assure straight cuts on larger dimensions)
2 Clamps capable of a 23" dimension.
Screwdriver
Mallet
Drill
Scroll Saw
Countersink Bit
3/8" Drill Bit
(also to make life easier, but not required)
Jointer
Drill Press
Table Saw
Bisket Cutter



Clamped front or “hutch” style chest for use as a feast gear box
Top View
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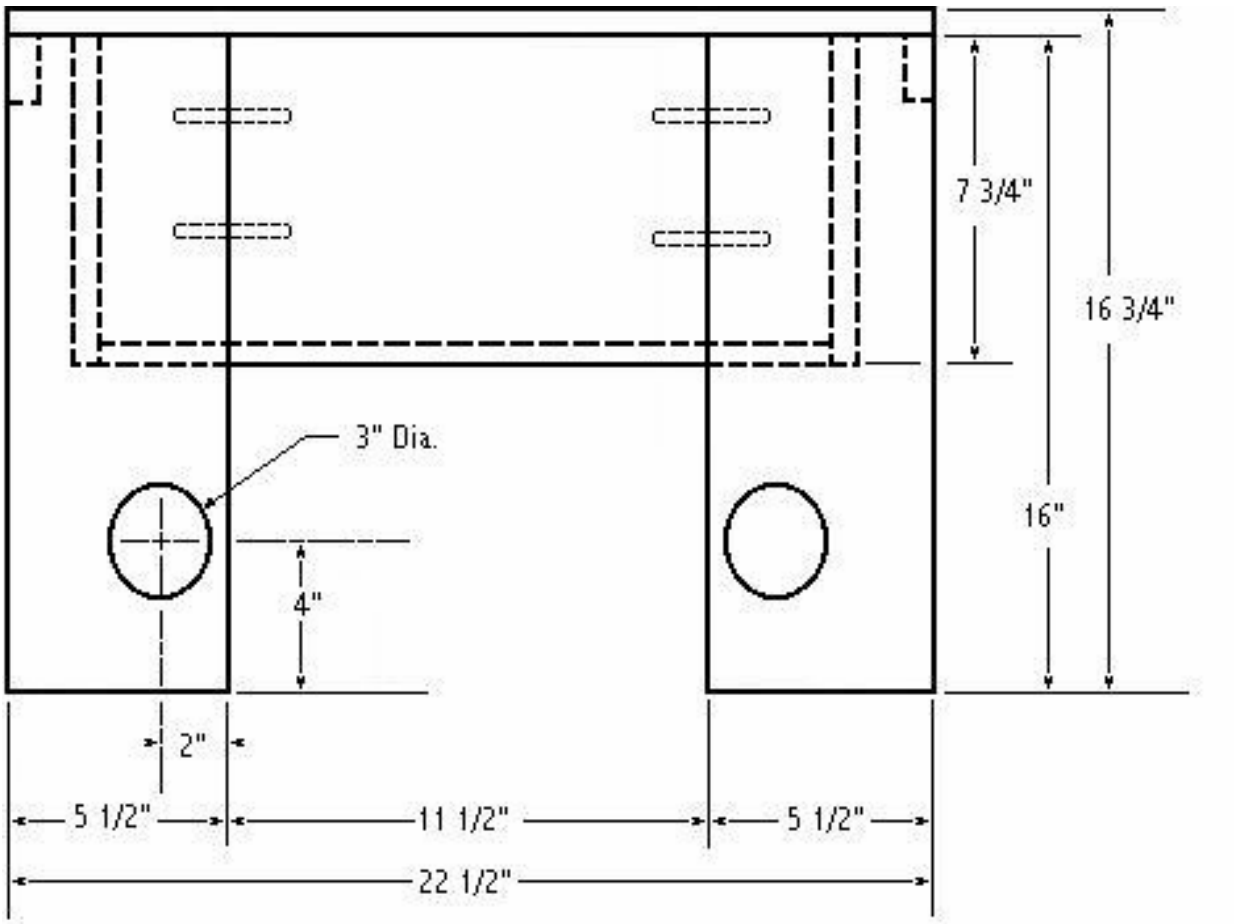

Clamped front or “hutch” style chest for use as a feast gear box
Front View
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Cutting the pieces:

Cut List:

Size	Length	Quantity
1x2	16”	2 each
1x2	15”	2 each
1x6	16”	4 each
1x8	11 ½”	2 each
1x8	16”	2 each
1x16	20	1 each (cut from 1x18)
1x18	22 1/5”	1 each

Measure twice cut once. If you have a jointer cut slightly over sized and use the jointer to give you a more perfectly square edge. Once all the pieces are cut, cut designs in the legs as you would like them. I used circles to personalize my chest. A scroll saw will allow you to cut in just about any thing you would like. Alternatively woodcarving can be done at this time.

Assembly:

Step One:

Lay the front legs (with designs cut in them) and cross member out on your table checking for square cuts. Use a straight edge to draw a pair of pencil lines across each of the joints evenly spaced. Using a square extend that straight line around the edge to the ¾” side layout a hole in the exact center of that side. Drill 3/8” holes 1” deep on the sides. Use a drill press if possible as these holes must be exact. Note, a bisket cutter can be used to join these boards if you happen to own one. This will save you a lot of time and headaches and will not be noticeable in the final product.

Step Two:

Insert dowels into holes drilled and put the pieces together before gluing to check fit. Once satisfied with the fit, and you have checked for square. Take the pieces apart and apply a good quality wood glue to all surfaces and fit together. Clamp and check square by measuring corner to corner. The project is square when these measurements are the same. Adjust clamps to square the project if necessary. Leave everything overnight to dry. Repeat steps one and two for the back of the project with the undecorated legs.

Step Three:

Take the bottom of the chest, 1x16x20, and attach the sides, 1x8x16, using the countersink bit and deck screws. Don’t tighten anything completely until fully assembled as you might need some adjustments to make everything square. This gives you a U-shaped piece. Turn it upside down and attach the front assembly to the bottom only at the cross member. Do the same with the back. Turn the project right side up and check to make sure the sides are square. When satisfied with the sides drill and screw them to the front and back. Attach 1x2x16 at the outside edges of the sides with drill and screws. This will give you handles to carry the finished chest. Tighten all screws at this time. This project can also be done completely with the methods in step two using hidden dowels to put everything together. Take the 1x2x15 and cut the ends at a 45 deg bevel. Turn the chest upside down and place on the top. Mark the holes between the sides and the handles. The 15” pieces get attached to the undersides of the top as to slide in between when closed. If you used hobby wood, it is fairly stable and this piece is not absolutely essential. If you pieced together the top, you must use this cleat to prevent warping.

Step Four:

Here you have two choices. Obviously you do not wish to have modern screws showing on your project. You can either cover them with plugs, which are available from any hardware store. Or, you can replace them with dowels (recommended). Take one screw out of the project and use a 3/8” drill bit to

enlarge the hole. Glue in a wood dowel leaving a small amount above the surface. Repeat until all screws are replaced. By pulling only one screw at a time the chest will stay tight and square.

Finishing:

Sand all surfaces smooth. This will remove the tips of dowels or plugs. Finish with a stain of your choice. And give at least two coats on Polyurethane to protect the wood. Hinges and hasps should be centered over the legs. Many church chests had three hasps and locks to represent the Trinity.

Sources:

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Dr. Hermann Schmitz, *The Encyclopedia of Furniture* (Frederick A Praeger, NY 1957) Lib. of Congress #57-9791, p. 31

I hope you enjoy making this as much as I did.

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