

# Beading a Drawer

Applied molding disguises gaps, adds a sophisticated look

BY STEVE LATTA

Cock beading is a prime example of the design philosophy, “If you can’t hide it, accentuate it.”

As all woodworkers know, wood moves, and with components like drawers there is no real method to hold that movement in check. A nice flush and even gap probably won’t stay that way, especially on inset drawers. Cock beading distracts the eye from the gap, and by helping to break up large, dormant surfaces, adds visual distraction and consequently a little life. It can be used on many different styles of furniture, requires no special tools, and is a technique well worth acquiring.

I won’t cover beading that is incorporated into the case, but rather the method where the bead is applied directly to the drawer itself. If the front of the drawer happens to be veneered, as in this table, the beading does double duty by helping to protect the edge of the veneer.

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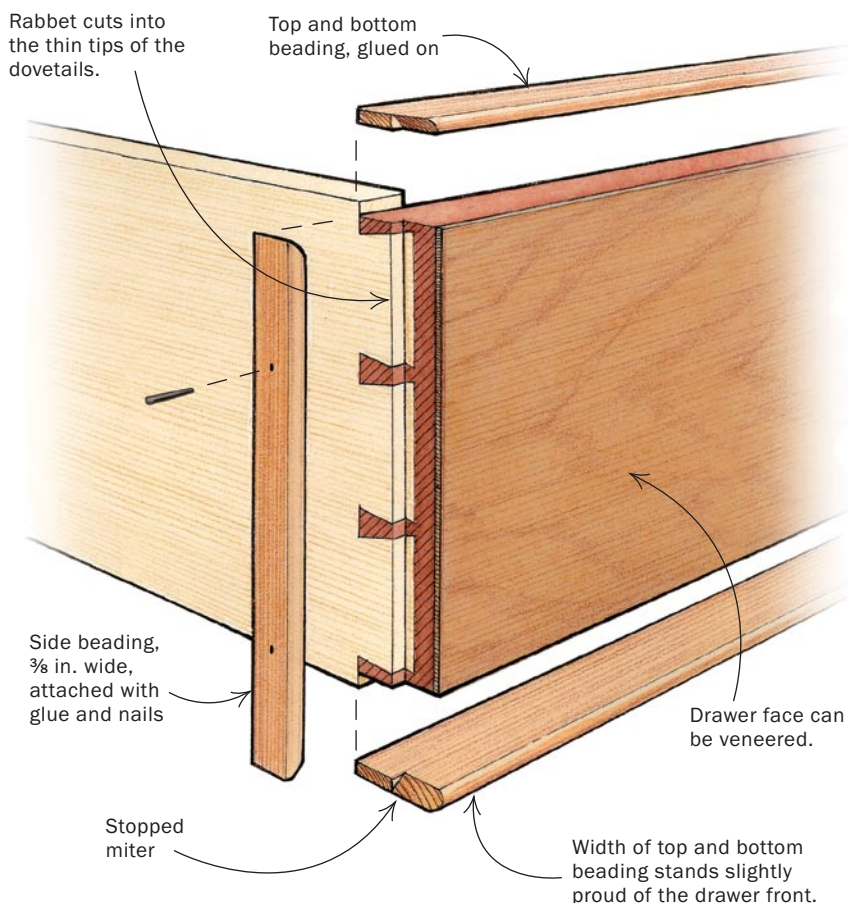
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Visit our Web site to see the author demonstrate how to apply cock beading.



## HOW COCK BEADING WRAPS AROUND A DRAWER FRONT

After the drawer has been fit to its opening, the edges of the drawer front are cut away so that the thin beading can be added. The bead completely covers the top and bottom edges of the drawer front but fits over the sides by only about  $\frac{3}{8}$  in., enough to cover the tips of the dovetails.





# 1. Make the beading

I always apply cock beading to a drawer after the drawer has been glued up and fitted to the opening. Sometimes the drawer dividers have a little twist or bow and the drawer front must be planed to fit the opening. If the bead was already on, it would lose a bit of its profile.

It's a good idea to make the beading before you trim down the drawer front to receive it. This way, you'll know the exact thickness.

There are a couple of ways to make the beading. If you need beading for several large drawers, take the time to set up a bullnose bit (Amana part No. 51540) in a router table. For just a couple of drawers, a scratch stock makes quick work of the job and can produce thinner, more delicate beading than a router bit. The wooden body of the scratch stock is shaped like an inverted "T" with a handsaw kerf across the top to hold the cutter. I made mine from a piece of an old scraper and shaped the profile with a small, round, needle file. A 2-in. C-clamp holds the cutter in place and doubles as a handle.

I bead opposite edges of a 1-in.-thick board (with jointed edges) and then rip away the bead on the tablesaw fitted with a combination blade, a zero-clearance insert, and a stub splitter. I use a long push stick and run it right through the blade. The low splitter stays out of the way and keeps the stock from twisting into the blade and getting unsightly burn marks.



**Router-cut beading.** The fastest way to cut large amounts of beading is with a bullnose bit in a router table. Set the bit within a sacrificial fence.

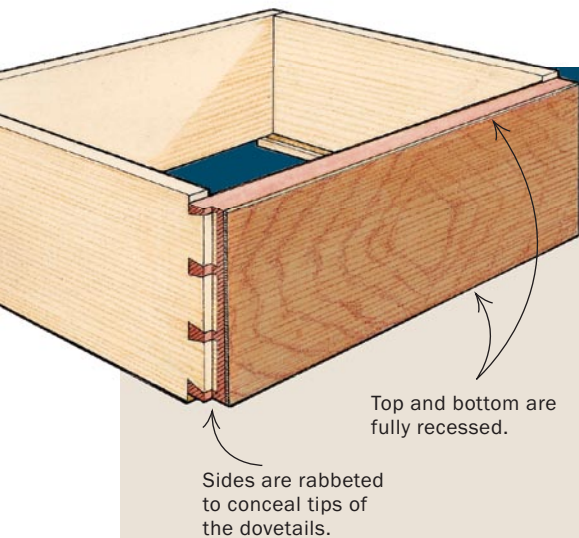


**A low-tech method.** A scratch stock made from a block of wood and a piece of scraper blade is an efficient way to create small amounts of beading.



**Rip the beading.** After the bullnose profile has been routed or scratched, rip the beading to width on the tablesaw. A splitter prevents saw-burn marks on the sides of the beading.

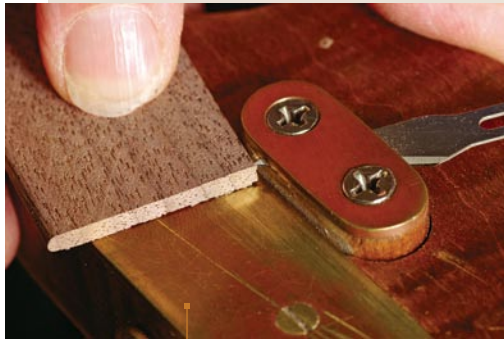




## 2. Prepare the drawer front

### MARK THE FACE, BACK, AND SIDES

With the drawer bottom removed, mark the drawer front: Set a slicing gauge to the thickness of the beading (about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in.) and score a line along all four edges of the face. Since the bead stock will completely cover the top and bottom edges of the drawer front, I also score a fairly deep line along those edges on the inside of the drawer front. Here an old plane iron serves as the perfect tool for extending the lines into the corner where the slicing gauge can't reach. Reset the gauge to about  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. and, referencing off the front, score a line across the sides of the drawer, making sure the ends of the dovetails are included in what will become the rabbet for the bead.



**1 Set your gauge.** The slicing gauge should be set to match the thickness of the beading. Unlike a marking gauge, which uses a pin to scratch a line, the blade of a slicing gauge cuts a clean line.



**2 Mark the drawer front.** Use the slicing gauge to mark all four edges of the drawer face.



**3 Mark the back, too.** Because the beading will extend the whole thickness of the top and bottom of the drawer front, don't forget to mark the inside edges, too.



**4 Cutting corners.** Because the slicing gauge can't reach into the corners, extend the line with a plane iron tapped by a hammer.



**5 Mark the drawer sides.** Reset the gauge to about  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. and scribe a line on both drawer sides.



## CUT AWAY THE WASTE

Fitting the drawer to the opening sometimes leaves edges that aren't perfectly straight, and the recess for the bead must match this profile. A handheld router with a short fence works well. Because I tend to use small routers that can't take a lot of load, I remove much of the waste on the tablesaw first. This extra step takes just a minute but greatly adds to personal safety and radically reduces the possibility that the router will grab the stock and chew up the front. Having gone to the trouble of building the drawer, it would be a shame to wreck it at this point.

The sawblade must be partly buried in an auxiliary fence and set so that the cut is just a hair away from the scribe lines in both width and height. Rabbet both sides using a miter gauge to guide the drawer. Reset the blade height and groove the top and bottom edges of the drawer front, leaving only about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. of stock for the router fence to ride along.

Set a straight bit to the width and depth of the side rabbet and bury it into an auxiliary fence clamped to the router base. After rabbeting both drawer sides, reset the depth of the bit so that it matches the depth of the sawcut, and with the router fence riding against the lip you left when sawing, rabbet the top and bottom edges. Place the drawer on its face, and with a couple of hammer blows on a plane iron, make short work of the lip.



**1 Saw away most of the waste.** Use a tablesaw to cut the sides of the drawer front and then the top and bottom. Leave a  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. lip on the latter two edges for the router fence to ride against during the next step.



**2 Cut almost to the line.** Removing the bulk of the waste on the tablesaw makes the final cut with the router easier and cleaner.



**3 Finish cut with a router.** Use a straight bit buried in an auxiliary fence to cut the sides. Then rout the top and bottom rabbets to their final depth, leaving the small lip at the bottom.

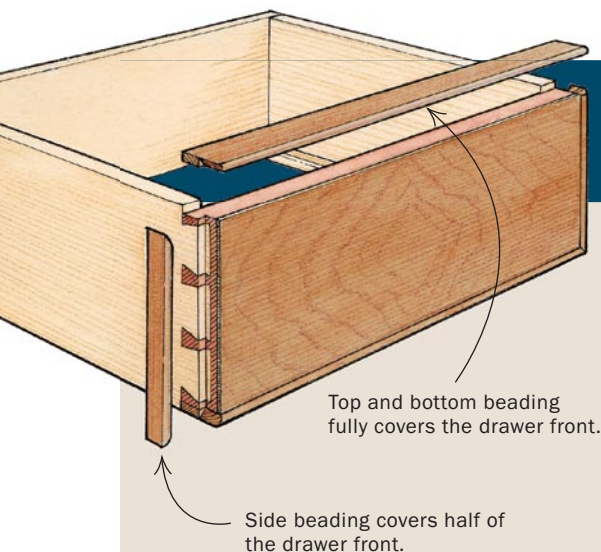


**4 Remove the lip.** Use a plane iron or wide chisel to remove the lip on the top and bottom rear edges.



**5 Clean up the lip.** Use the same iron or chisel to pare away any remnants of the lip.





### 3. Miter and apply the beading

#### DRY-FIT ALL THE PIECES

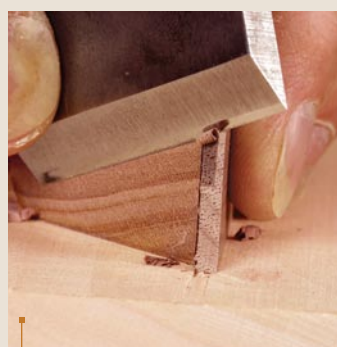
Square an end of the top bead stock and line it up with the end of the drawer. Referencing off the side rabbet, mark where the stopped miter needs to end by slicing in carefully with a plane iron or a chisel. Cut the miters on both adjoining pieces using a guide block with 45° corners. Repeat this process at the diagonal corner of the drawer front. With

these two mitered corners properly fitted, cut the top and bottom pieces to length and miter the other two corners, fitting the side pieces last.

To keep the bead from sliding around during final fitting and gluing, tack three or four brads into the top and bottom edges of the drawer front, and clip the heads off close to the surface with the jaws of

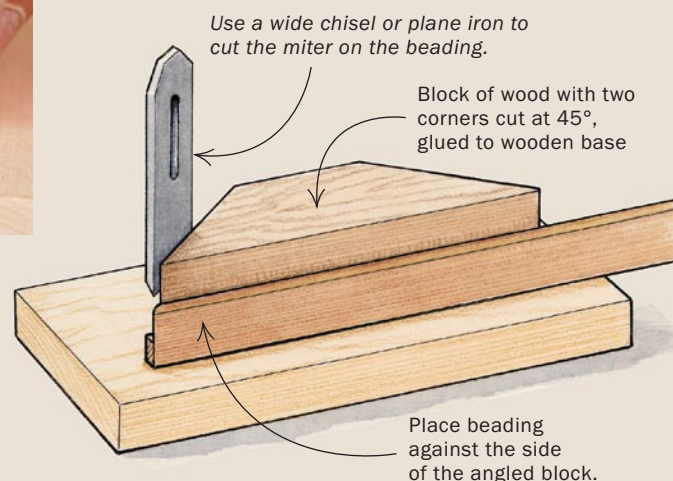


**1 Mark the miters' depth.** Use a plane iron resting on the bottom of the side rabbets to mark where the miters stop.



**2 Slice the miters.** Use an angled cutting block (see drawing, right) to guide the plane iron or chisel when cutting the stopped miters.

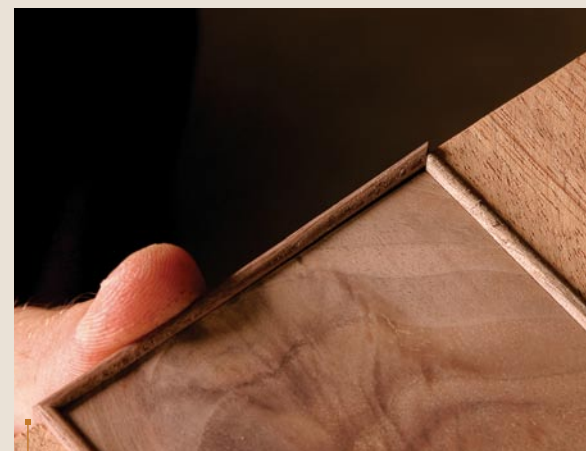
#### ANGLED CUTTING BLOCK FOR MITERING THE BEADING



**4 Clipped brads prevent sliding during fitting.** Tap three brads into the top and bottom of the drawer front, and then remove the heads close to the surface.



**5 Fit the top and bottom beading.** Press the beading onto the headless brads, starting in the middle and then at either end.



**6 Fit the sides.** With the top and bottom beads dry-fitted and clamped with cauls, fit the side beading.

the cutter parallel to the edge. Positioning the jaws this way gives you a little sideways movement when fitting the bead.

Press the beading into the brads and test-fit it. Then fit the side beading, and secure its location by attaching the pieces to the drawer sides with clear tape.



**3 A perfect fit.** The miters on the top and bottom beading should stop where the rabbets on the drawer sides end.



**7 Secure the location of the ends.** To keep the final location of the side beading, attach the pieces with clear tape, then proceed to gluing.

## ATTACH WITH GLUE AND BRADS

Apply a thin film of glue and then press on the top and bottom beading, working from front to back. Apply pressure using two pieces of  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-thick stock trimmed about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. shorter than the length of the beading. Run the clamps under the drawer front so that the side beads can be clamped across the face.

Apply a thin coat of glue to all the end grain. This will prevent the end grain from absorbing the main application of glue and starving the joint. Then glue on the taped side beading. As cauls I use two blocks, each cut with a small groove to straddle the joint. The groove helps provide even pressure, even if the bead stands a little proud of, or shy from, the drawer side. Let any squeeze-out dry about 20 minutes and then carefully peel it away with a chisel. After everything is dry, unclamped, and cleaned up with sandpaper, I use a few small Tremont brads ([www.tremontnail.com](http://www.tremontnail.com)) to secure the side beads in case the glue lets go due to seasonal movement.



**1 Minimize squeeze-out.** To reduce squeeze-out on the front face of the drawer, roll on the top and bottom beading from front to back.



**2 Glue the sides.** Pre-glue the end grain on the miters, glue the whole surface, and then flip up the taped side beading.



**3 Clamp the beading.** Place the clamps for the top and bottom beading around the back of the drawer front and place the clamp for the side beads across the top. A block of wood supports the clamp while it is being fitted.



**4 Nail the side beads.** To reinforce the cross-grain glue joint, use a couple of brads to secure the side beads. Predrill the holes to avoid splitting the thin stock.