

"Master of Disguise" by Madelyn Cook

A Free Sample Article From the Pages of *The Scale Cabinetmaker* (Volume 7:3)

In 1992, the International Guild of Miniature Artisans (IGMA) awarded Jim and Helen Dorsett the Guild Crystal Award, established in 1988 to give "recognition to select individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the miniature field." They joined a growing list of early pioneers in the miniature hobby, including Caye MacLaren (Nutshell News), Mrs. James Ward Thorne (the Thorne Rooms), Allegra Mott (founder of N.A.M.E), and many others.

The magic of *TSC*, however, was that it was built around a multitude of voices rather than a few. While Jim and Helen's articles peppered the 20 years of the journal and Helen's roomboxes often defined the front cover of *TSC*, our contributors defined much the interior landscape of *The Scale Cabinetmaker*. Whether they were contributing editor (like Jim Jedlica, Madelyn Cook, or Kathy Sevebeck), were writing individual articles (like Bill Postman, Tam Brooks, the Hillhouses, Horace Cooke, Suzanne Russo, June Simpson, William Miller, or Ruth Armstrong), or were creating article series (like Pete Westcott and his roomboxes, Tom Steiger and his Wooten desk, Don Peck on bending or James Johnstone on finishing), the contributor's list reads like a who's who of the miniature field from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980's.

Over the years, *The Scale Cabinetmaker* featured a number of quarterly columns from folks like Madelyn Cook (you name it, she covered it). No subject or technique was too small. It was and is one of the reasons that *The Scale Cabinetmaker* has been called the encyclopedia of scale modeling for miniaturists. As Bill Roberson wrote in a recent IGMA forum:

"In the early years of scale miniatures Jim & Helen Dorsett produced *The Scale Cabinetmaker* Magazine and *The Cabinetmaker's Guides*. These were how-to publications that showed every detail, drawing, jig and fixture needed to make their projects. For over 20 years they produced and documented how to make hundreds of pieces of furniture."

TSC remains the only strictly how-to journal in the miniatures hobby. For nearly two decades after it ceased publication, the back issues were traded and resold over and over again. At most, Dorsett Publications only printed 3,000 copies of an issue (and 2,500 on average), so the hard copies were fairly rare the day they were released. With the release of *TSC* as digital downloads, the journal is now available to far more readers at the same price (\$6.00 per issue) as it cost in 1995 when it ceased publication.

The Scale Cabinetmaker is available in two formats: by the issue as pdf downloads (available from www.dpilconline.com) and by the volume (4 issues) as cd-roms (also in pdf format, available from www.dorsettpublications.com). *The Cabinetmaker's Guides* are still available in print and will soon be released as downloadable pdfs.

Madelyn Cook

MASTER OF DISGUISE



GIVE ME A BREAK!

Into the life of every miniaturist a little rain must fall, usually in the guise of breaks in furniture or one of the pieces to a kit. How you recover from such circumstances depends upon the type of break, the type of finish (or the lack of a finish) on the piece and where the break occurs.

Understanding the break helps. One type runs along the grain line of the wood. It is usually found on the larger,

flatter surfaces such as table tops, drawer fronts, doors and chairbacks. (This type of break is illustrated by the dotted lines in Figure 1.) These pieces are coaxed into breaking by the thinness of the wood, decorative detail and imperfections in the wood. They are usually very smooth and unless they can be lined up under pressure are the hardest to keep from slipping while the glue in the repair dries.

Another type of break occurs across the grain of the wood. Most typically this happens with chair and table legs where they are thinnest (Figure 2). These are far easier to repair and the finished repair is stronger because the break is usually jagged and fits together like interlocking teeth.

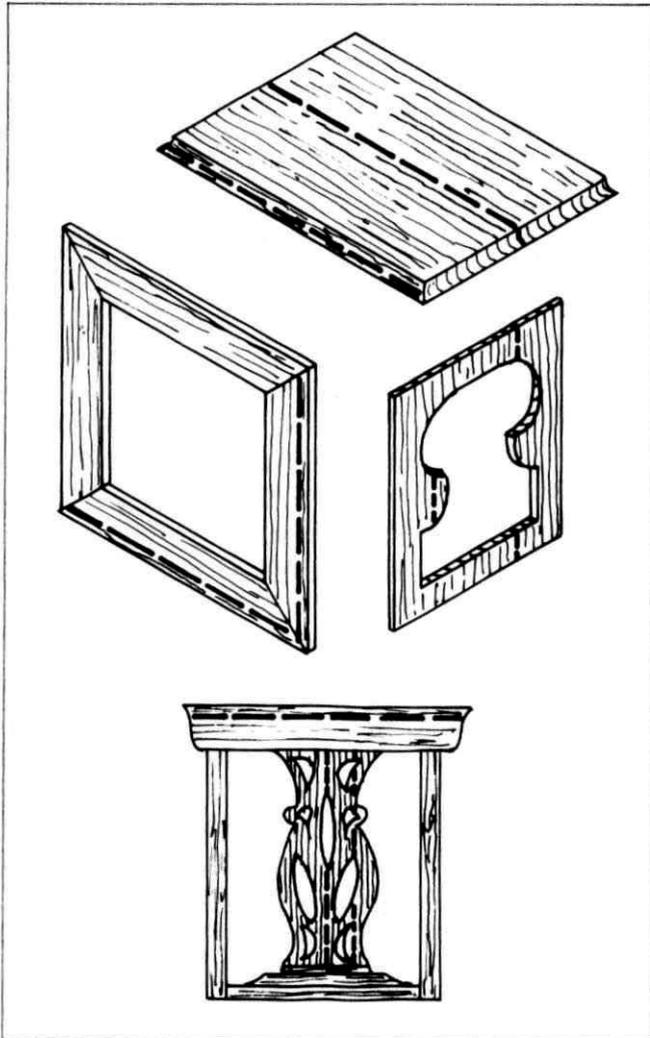


FIGURE 1. WOOD BREAKS WITH THE GRAIN

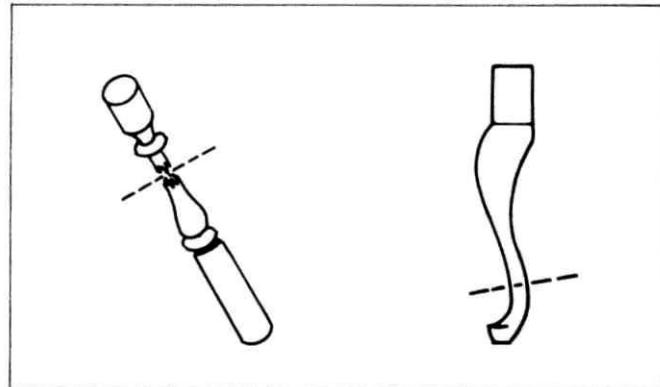


FIGURE 2. WOOD BREAKS ACROSS THE GRAIN

If your broken piece does not have a finish applied to it, the repair is easy. Stain all the pieces before gluing the repair and proceed with the normal building and finishing process.

Many repairs can be accomplished on a finished piece without the repair showing. If it is a stained piece of furniture, **always** stain the broken edges before repairing. This eliminates a light mark where some wood chips may be missing. Use the strongest glue for wood: an aliphatic resin type (yellow carpenter's glue). Have clamps, rubber bands or some type of clamping jig that will hold the pieces tightly together while they dry. Be sure to set up your clamps or jigs before hand and have them ready before you apply the glue. Glue that partially dries before the pieces are pressed together will act as a stubborn wedge that will prevent a tight fit. Wipe away excess glue as soon as everything is in place. When the glue is dry a very tiny dot of a cyanoacrylate-type glue (Crazy glue, Super-T, etc.) on the wrong side of your piece will reinforce the mend. Draw off any excess glue with a piece of paper towel. Don't smear it.

Fill any tiny cracks or pores with a sprackling compound like Dap. Rub off the excess with your fingertips

so you won't have to scrape or sand it later. Small amounts of sprackle, used to fill hairline cracks, will accept stain and not show. Unfortunately, larger amounts used as a filler will take a lighter stain than will the surrounding wood. So you must feather or layer the stain to hide the filler. A gentle rub with 0000 steel wool and a coat of wax will complete the repair.

Painted furniture will need some other form of disguise to hide the mend unless you can match the original color and plan to repaint the piece. If you glue the break as instructed above and sand or steel wool the break, it is ready to paint.

For major repairs it is best to strip the old finish off. But be forewarned; most wood refinishing products attack not only the finish but the glue as well. The furniture could fall apart and you will end up with an unassembled kit! In that case as it falls apart take careful note of how it goes back together.

The most effective repairs are those that use more drastic measures. Take to heart the credo that "the best work you ever do is caused by the worst mistakes you make". At the very least problems tend to unleash the most conniving and creative forces in us all. Many repairs show most obviously at the edge and/or on the surface of the repaired piece. Therefore, you must create new edges or surfaces.

New edges can be added to a table top, door or drawer in many ways. If the edge is square, you can rout a new molding along the edge, using Dremel router bits as shown by the profiles in Figure 3. (Notice that the profiles shown are accompanied by the number of the appropriate Dremel bit.) The square corner cut with bits No. 650, 652 and 654 can be used to support an inlaid or border strip of contrasting wood like ebony, rosadillo, birch or a strip of inlay purchased at a lumber yard or through a catalog.

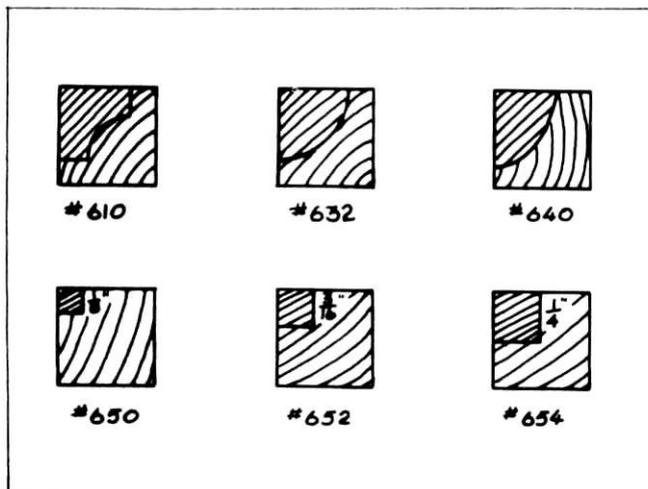


FIGURE 3. EDGE MOLDINGS WITH DREMEL ROUTER BITS

Another solution is to add a picture frame molding, chair rail molding, half-round or quarter-round in the same or a contrasting wood (cf. profiles in Figure 4). Many styles are available from Northeastern Scale Models or Midwest Products.

By cutting the overall dimensions smaller you can add a thicker wood as a border to give a two-dimensional look.

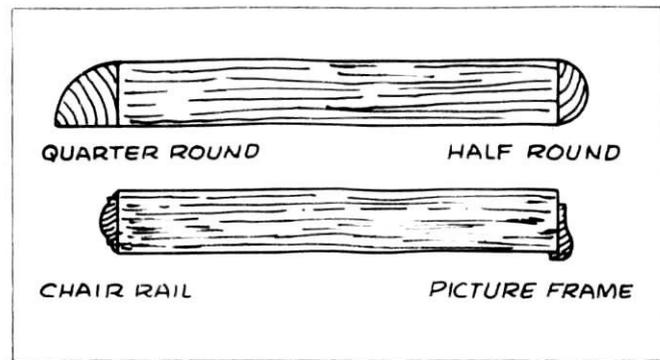


FIGURE 4. EDGING WITH COMMERCIAL MOLDINGS

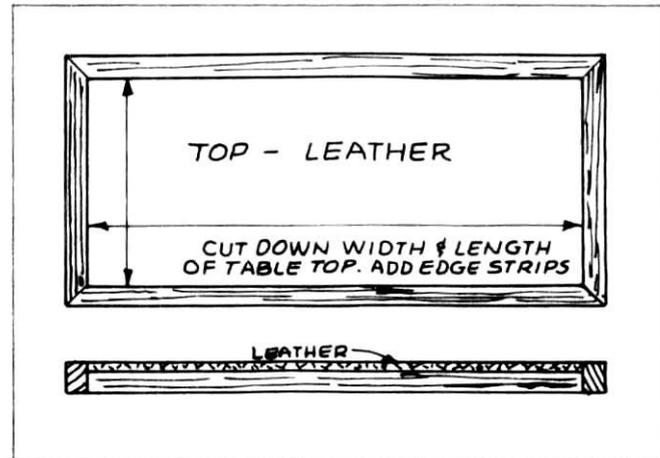


FIGURE 5. REPAIR WITH OVERLAID EDGING STRIPS

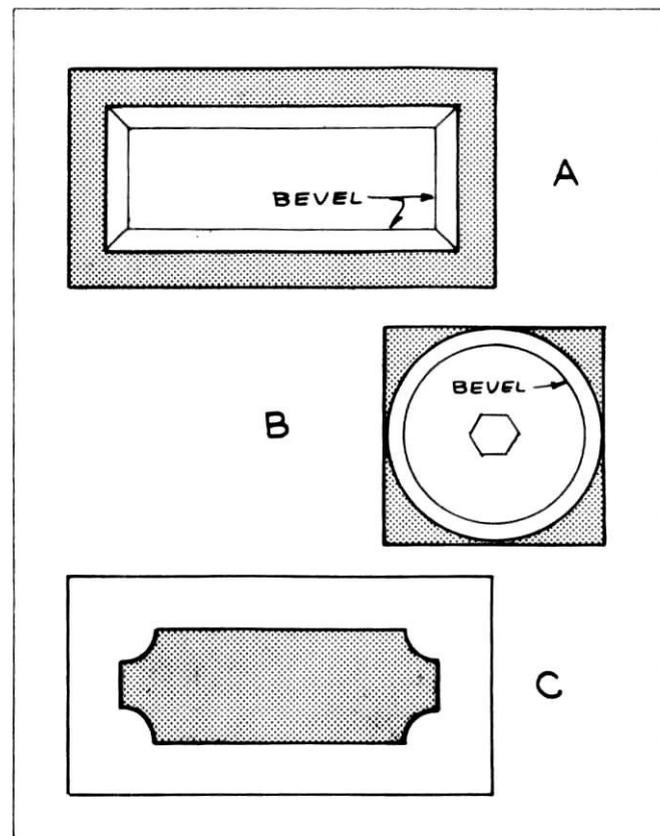


FIGURE 6. OVERLAID SURFACE REPAIRS

The same method of bordering will give you a recessed center into which you could place a piece of leather for a table or desk top (Figure 5).

When the edges of your repair are hidden by their placement in a doorway or cabinet, you only need to worry about the top surface. In Figures 6A-C the broken (shaded) areas can be painted black, gold or any color coordinating with your room. The added pieces are stained to match the original finish. Thus, the painted part hides the repair and acts as a border or pattern in contrast with the added part. In Figure 6A a center rectangle, cut with a beveled edge, is added. In Figure 6B a circle, medallion or rosette is centered on the repaired surface. The design in 6C adds a patterned border with the painted surface viewed as a recessed center. This design works well in reverse with the center raised.

If all else fails, you can distress or mar the surface to match the repair. It will look abused, used or perhaps "antique".

When repair and disguise are applied to turned and cabriole legs you have some simple options. The easiest is to repair the leg and place it to the back, out of your line of vision. A turned leg is repaired by drilling holes into the corresponding parts and inserting a metal pin when you glue the parts together (Figure 7A). The best you can hope for with a cabriole leg break is that it can be glued and stained to hide the repair. If not, add jewelry findings to trim the break's surface in a French style (Fig. 7B).

Often tables were designed with straight or tapered legs in the back so that the table could be placed flat against a wall. Therefore, you can use two good cabriole legs in front and replace the back ones. A last thought on tables with irreparable or missing legs: cut the edge off one length of the table and use it as a console table against the wall (Figure 8A). Or cut the table into a triangle (Fig. 8B) and use it as a corner table.

Whatever happens with repair work you are gaining experience. And standing in the shadows is a small child who won't notice breaks and repairs.

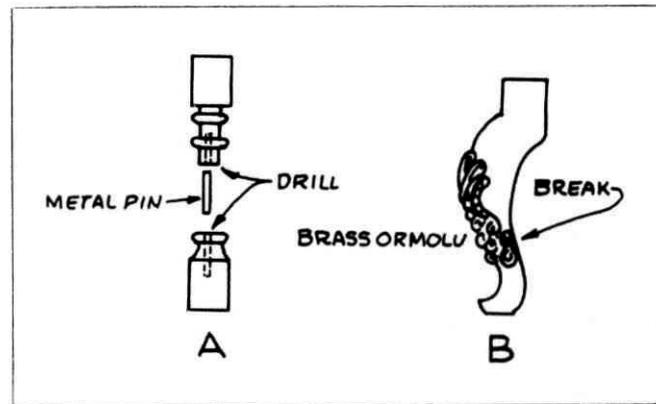


FIGURE 7. LEG REPAIRS WITH PINS & FINDINGS

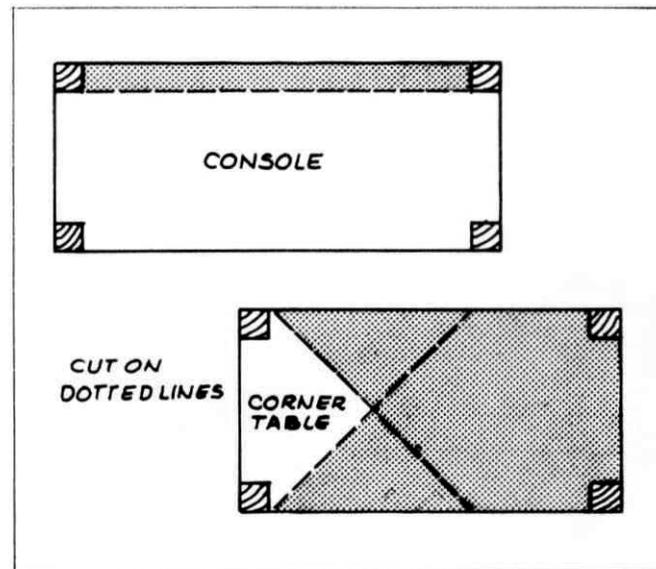


FIGURE 8. SALVAGING TABLES