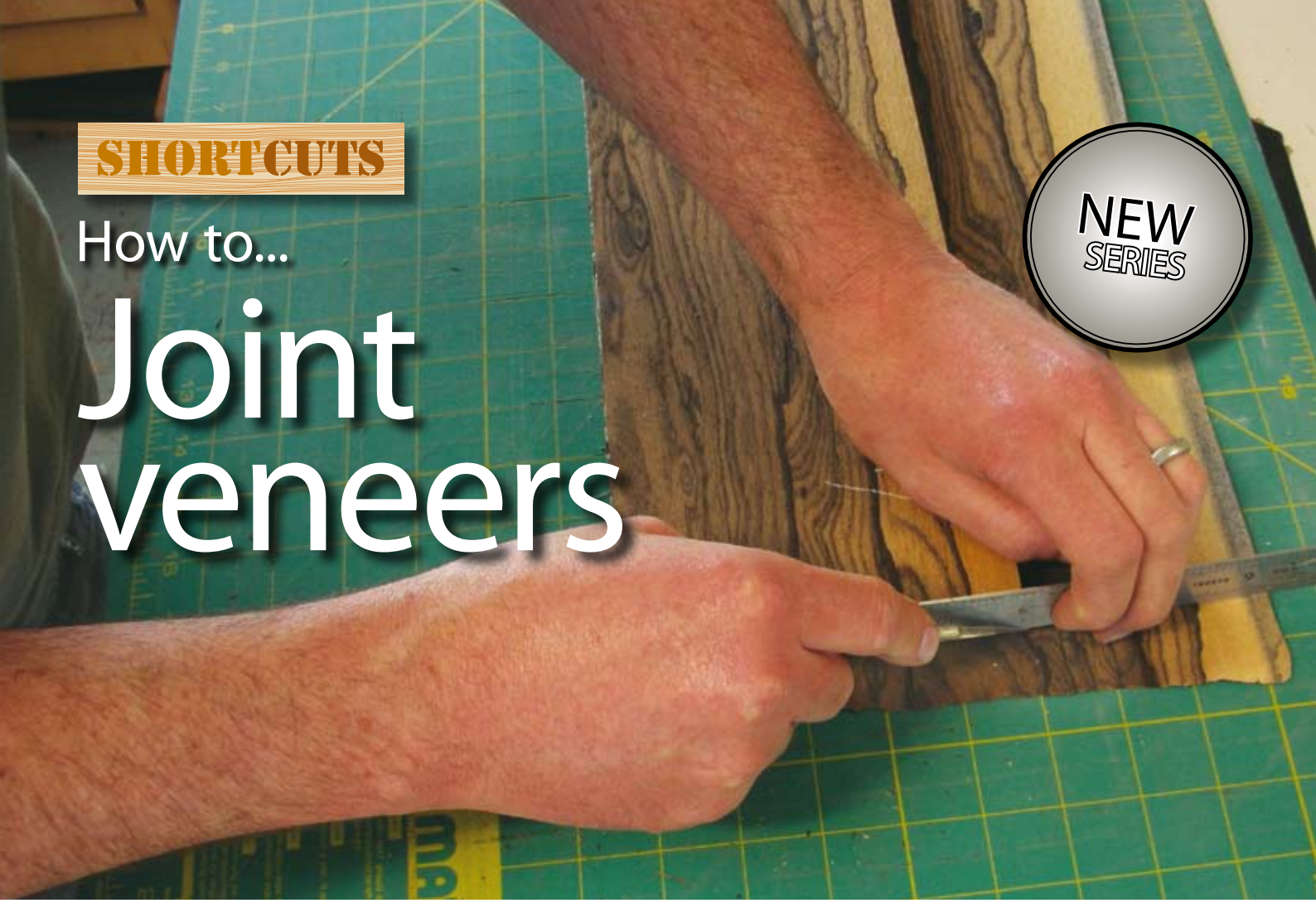


SHORTCUTS

NEW SERIES

How to...

Joint veneers

Marc Fish begins our new Short Cuts series by sharing his veneer-jointing methods, shooting edges by hand and machine

When I was asked to start writing articles for a new series to be called Short Cuts I had my concerns because this term can conjure up an image of poor quality, laziness and maybe a bodge.

These are not traits that I would like to use to describe me or my work, so why choose this title then?

What I hope to achieve is a professional's approach to some basic techniques that most makers will find themselves getting to grips with from time to time.

There is as they say more than one way to skin a cat and I am sure many makers have their own way of tackling these techniques. I can safely say that all these are not only tested and taught at my workshop but are also used commercially on the furniture I produce for clients.

This month's subject, veneer jointing, is one I struggled with when I started out – nothing looks worse than a black line on a joint in sycamore. So how do you get that elusive seamless join?

Preparation is the key. You must, of course, start with absolutely flat veneer,

Shooting veneer by hand is not as straightforward as it looks here

Shooting board clamping assembly

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARC FISH

Short Cuts series

- Dec 09 – Veneer jointing: including shooting edges by hand, planer, router
- Winter 09 – Wood edging: solid and veneered, trimming flush with chisel, block plane and router
- Jan 10 – Making round lengths: turning, hand planing, spokeshaving and routing
- Feb 10 – Dovetails: top tips, marking out, batch cutting, alignment jig to ensure tight fitting
- Mar 10 – Laminating: substrates, mould making with extruded polystyrene, MDF, laminate cutting and marking out
- Apr 10 – Tenons: cutting options, by hand, bandsaw, spindle moulder, milling machine, router
- May 10 – Hinge fitting: by hand and router jigs, hinge selection and prep, screw prep and fitting

but the edge is what we are considering here. In my experience this edge cannot be achieved by cutting against a straightedge with either a veneer saw or a scalpel because simply changing the angle on the tool will not provide a true straight, square edge.

Shooting by hand

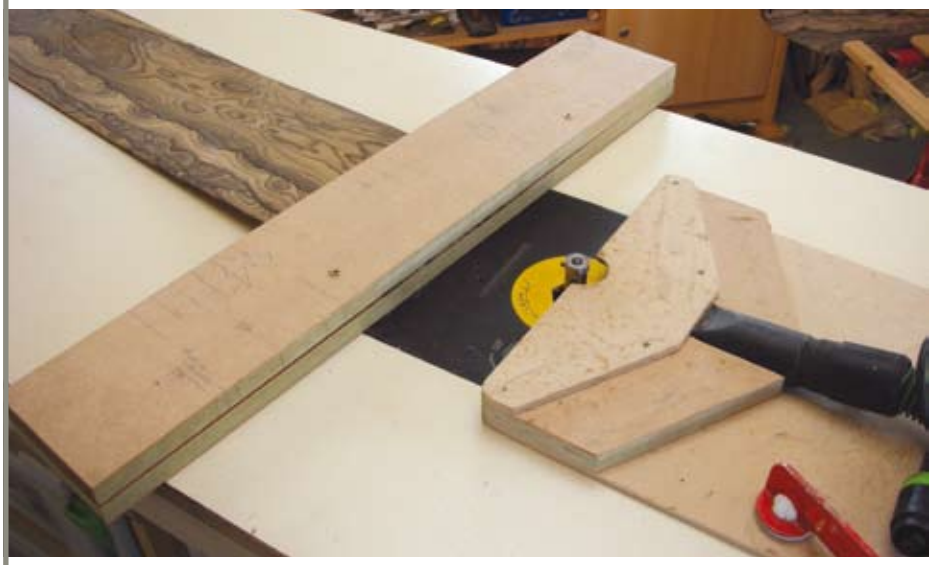
Most makers will shoot a single leaf or pack of veneers with a long hand plane rested on its side. This technique will get good results and the longer the plane – a No. 8 is my favourite – the better the results will be. It is not without its disadvantages, however, the first being that some sort of shooting board will need to be fabricated beforehand.

Mine is made from ply and is hollow to allow clamps access to the centre of the veneer. A piece of MDF is used to pack down the veneer and ensure a good straight joint. This technique can be difficult because the veneer that is exposed can bend over as it is being planed and then spring back after the plane has passed, almost in defiance.

This led me to think of a way of improving veneer shooting, so I started looking at methods involving machines.

Using router or spindle moulder

Using a hand-held router to shoot a board



Veneer can be clamped between two layers of MDF and the router bearing run against one of them...

A bearing-guided router cutter or spindle moulder will produce perpendicular cuts that are flush with the template. Using this information we can clamp our veneer between two layers of MDF and run our bearing against one of them. This can be done with a hand-held router, router table or spindle moulder. Machine choice will be determined by the veneer leaf size.

I can use the hollow shooting board I mentioned earlier with my hand-held router. This technique is very quick and I use it all the time; in fact I cannot >

... for a perfectly matched join

Using router or spindle moulder - continued

remember the last time I hand-shot some veneer.

I will hand plane or surface plane the MDF that will be used as the template for the bearing to run against and this technique can be used to trim veneer for all sorts of patterns.

Even small pieces of veneer can be trimmed to a template. Tape the veneer between two pieces of MDF; if the veneer is small and you need to trim all the sides, just rout through the tape on each side and replace it before going on to the next side. This is great for starburst effects and the template can even be CNC machined for increased accuracy.

Using the MDF templates, this technique can be used for all sorts of effects...

... like this starburst

Using surface planer

Set up the surface planer like this for tackling short lengths of veneer

Another way of machining veneer joints is on your surface planer.

As with the other techniques, secure the veneer in F-clamps between two pieces of MDF slightly longer than the veneer, pointing the clamp handles towards you as these become your handles when planing.

For safety's sake, before attempting this bring the fence forward right over the bed, leaving only just enough room to position the jig over the blade.

While a small section of the blade is exposed and cannot be guarded, your hands are firmly on the F-clamp handles and, therefore, nowhere near the hazardous rotating cutter.

Only relatively short lengths of veneer can be catered for with this technique.

Keep your hands on the clamp handles where they will be nowhere near the rotating cutter...

... to cut neat veneers in safety

Joining veneers

Once you have your veneer cut and trimmed then the final job of actually joining these together needs tackling. I have tried gum tape and veneer tape and I'm not a fan of either – introducing water anywhere near the veneer either before or after joining the veneer seems risky because you do not want veneer expanding or contracting.

I have tested many tapes and have found genuine Sellotape to be the best for me as I vacuum press all my veneering. It does not leave a sticky residue and is easy to remove as long as you fold over a corner before attaching it to the veneer; however, take care when removing the tape as it can pick out some of the grain.

If you need to join many sections together or it is a complicated piece of veneering, the material can be glued together and treated as one large sheet. This technique is also particularly useful when using heated presses as the tape will melt on the veneer, making it very difficult to remove and/or leaving an impression where the tape was.

When taping the veneer together, space the Sellotape strips about 25mm apart and stretch it across the join. When the whole join is taped run a continuous length along the join.

If you want to glue the join do this now by first folding down the two leaves, then applying the glue with a small brush or roller. Fold back the leaves and put a weight over the join until the glue dries.

Remove the tape carefully to reveal a large sheet of veneer. Whether you glue the join or not, the veneer sheet can now be pressed on the substrate, but that's another story. F&C

Sellotape does not leave a sticky residue

Remove the tape carefully, using a pre-folded corner

Material can be glued together and treated as one sheet

Use a scraper to clean off the excess glue