

# Small Bench for a Shed

Taking a radical new approach to workbenches

The recent fascination with Roubo has led many woodworkers to assume a huge workbench is essential. Considering many benches I see appear to be covered in tools most of the time, I have always had a suspicion that this is unnecessary and that in a small workshop or shed, something less enormous might be better. Having for years used a square-ended bench, like everyone else, it has crossed my mind that this might not be the only way forward. Perhaps only when one is recovering from a head injury might doing something slightly mad be understandable, but this has seemed like a great opportunity to redesign my bench to an obscure angle, to give me more space in the shed and to make my tools more accessible.

Ever since I saw James Mursell's square chairmaking bench, with integral foot-operated shaving vice, I have wondered about the real need for a long workbench. I suspect I am about to find out with my new angled version. It is a development of a

crude bench I made quickly for the Haynes book I was supposed to have finished in July (*How to Make Your Own Furniture*), but have yet to complete. It is now expected to be published in autumn 2015, and finished by April/May next year. I made the workbench from old bits of blockboard from a skip, and decided to cut it down. The angles were a bit of a guess and a fiddle, with the vice attached to the front edge.

Though Adrian O'Connor has kindly made me an amazing handle for my Veritas Inset Vice, which has now been fitted into my Dad's old bench and will be used at my next workshop in Malmesbury, I am not a big fan of end vices, and instead have drilled the worktop for a Veritas Bench Blade (which is superb) to work with a vice-held planing stop I made years ago. This won't allow me to hand plane very long boards, so I will have to think again when I start making larger projects, but for the moment it works well. I'd be fascinated to hear what anyone thinks about this.



*New* The small bench with angled ends holds a thickener to weigh it down. The little tree on the top is from friend Hugh Thompson



*Hex* Nick is trying to see if he can survive in the shed with only a hex-drive Bosch 10.8V cordless driver, using a small Trend chuck when necessary to reduce the amount of space used up with too many tools. With the Bench Blade in position and a home-made stop in the vice you can plane short boards on a small vice easily (below)



*Assembly* Cutting the angles on the back board which holds the bench together (above). It wasn't easy, and if the bench is any use Nick will probably have another go to tidy up the joints. Drilling a hole for a Bench Blade (left)



the patient they are alive and well. I was almost immediately convinced I was as healthy as ever, wanting to rid myself of a catheter and to go home to read my emails. I tried pulling wires and tubes from my body, and my arms had to be tied to the bed rails to restrain my aggressiveness.

I had extraordinary dreams, most of which are still vivid, and stronger than any I have ever had before. I even have a fleeting suspicion some of them were real, though I'm told I was never treated in a golf club and did not sleep in a hi-tech Welsh kitchen. They are quite disconcerting to remember, and I can almost speak to some of the people I met in my sleep.

I was annoyed that I didn't know what was going on, although I've since learnt that I was regularly informed, and as I started walking around I searched for ways to escape the hospital, looking through the windows to guess which way I'd need to traipse the many miles to Cirencester. One night I wrapped myself in blankets and was stopped by security guards at the ICU entrance, having already been cajoled by a doctor and nurse that there was no way I was ready to be discharged. So I sat crossed legged in the hallway, protesting that I should be free to leave, like an anti-war demonstrator or H-block prisoner.

## Paranoia

It became a frightening time, my mental fragility swinging between times of paranoia and peace. This continued in hospital for days, and elsewhere to a lesser extent for weeks. I am still vulnerable now. The NHS staff were amazing, but the strict regulations within that service can also lead to doubts and fears for a weak patient like me, especially when I wasn't allowed to read my hospital notes. I was saved for a few days by Dave Dallas, who acted as my nurse shortly before my move from the ICU ward to a recovery section. He and I had such fun, learning about each other and singing rude Derek and Clive songs. I had my mattress moved onto the floor to sleep

*TreeFest* Nick's nephew Tim, daughter Sasha and her boyfriend Sam 'manning' the Freshwood Publishing Hand-Made Helicopters stand at Westonbirt's TreeFest. Nick could only last one day of the show, in fabulous weather and great crowds. TreeFest may not be for woodies these days, but has become an interesting day out for families



*Youth* Young neighbourly friends, Starim and Ojaywin practising some drilling while Nick is in the shed doing some woodworking. The boys, their parents and grandparents prayed for Nick while he was in hospital, in a coma, and the pair are regular visitors to the Shed

better, and my surgeon friend Jim came to see me and to check I wasn't trying to leave again. Dave Dallas had a previous career as an RAF engineer, and I have since sent him an Airfix Harrier Jump Jet model as a small thank-you for his friendship.

I have strange fluttering memories of those weeks in Southmead Hospital, and my daughters often add details I either never knew or misinterpreted. Then, on Wednesday 9th July I was moved down to Recovery for a few more weeks and to attempt yet more escapes, though I was now banned from leaving the hospital by a Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard, an order signed a few days earlier to inhibit my grand aim to find freedom. I thought I'd been there for months, and was tough on my parents, annoyed that my mother wouldn't bring in my penknife so I could make a poncho from blankets for further attempts to escape at night, and that my father wouldn't find my cordless drill for

removing the louvred panel to get out of the window. With no Internet in my room I asked my daughter Lara to bring all my computers, and even a wi-fi router to link to the phone socket I'd spied so that I could get emails. I tried releasing the louvres with the end of a spoon and drew plans for a wooden bath to replace the terrible shower I had next to my room. I imagined a woodturning seminar was being held in the ward, and that I'd been given a single room as a bonus for having made a speech. I saw turners I knew lying on beds in the ward and I couldn't understand why no one seemed to be drinking beer in the evening.

With time, and once that was over, I became friendly with other patients, but the nurses repeatedly feared my attempts to escape, and though I'd often open the main doors for visitors to arrive, whenever I appeared to be making a dash for it someone would pretend the switch no longer worked. I nearly made it out one time, only to be rugby-tackled by a security guard just near the Costa coffee bar in the main atrium.

There wasn't much the recovery ward could do for a mad but gradually improving patient like me. Most people seemed to enjoy my walks up and down the corridor, strumming the cigar box guitar I made for *British Woodworking* a few years ago, but there was no way for them to assess any potential damage to my brain or to judge what might happen to me next. I reshaped my room, tried sleeping on the floor and kept moving my bed to numerous positions, but finally, after a week or so, was moved by ambulance to the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit (Biru) at the old Frenchay Hospital a few miles away. I was