

Tea Boxes

A perfect gift!

Tea boxes are a great gift idea for family and friends. They provide a memorable gift that will endure as an heirloom piece, one that will appreciate in intrinsic worth long after we move on!

Construction techniques are basic box making, with wood selection and care the key ingredients. If you are not confident about your abilities, but have the desire, join one of Manningham's box making groups or workshops and enjoy the journey.

This is the provenance of a recent wedding gift that I built for Monique and Aaron Spinley, daughter and son in law of long time friends Mike and Vicki Weber, local Manningham residents for many decades.

The Gallery of our web site (www.woodcraft-manningham.org.au/index.htm) has many other tea boxes built by club members to provide inspiration for your special piece.



A Tea Box built by the author, Geoff Birtles, from Casuarina Sheoak and Huon Pine.

Size & Design

Essentially the size was dictated by the size of Twining tea sachets and the small amount of exotic wood available for the lid.

However, I found it was just possible to construct the box lid close to the traditional proportions of the Golden Ratio ($L = W \times 1.618$) and the overall box structure "close enough" to the Golden Rectangular Solid ($W = H \times 1.618$, $H + W = L$). This was a formula used extensively by classical cultures to arrive at pleasing dimensions. The architects of the Parthenon used this ratio throughout the structure, they called them Golden Rules. The Egyptians called them Sacred Ratios, which they used for the design of temples and tombs. I know this is a loose connection, but it's interesting

trivia and woodworkers have used similar proportions for years in striving to achieve aesthetically pleasing joinery.

My primary objective was to show off the stunning Casuarina Sheoak used for the

lid. A simple uncontrived flat lid, splined box mitres and pedestal feet were used to give it a practical look (slightly 50's, and appropriate for daily use). Huon Pine was chosen for the carcass because its hue is complimentary to the Sheoak and its lightness dramatises the lid and splines.

Construction

Lid

I "resawed" a small turning block into 12mm leaves, then "book matched" two adjoining faces (ie. flipped and joined them together along their length) to get the flame effect on top of the lid. (You can detect this on the underside of the lid where the grain is not matched). I then drum sanded back to 9.5mm thickness.

Carcass

The sides of the box make use of 45 degree splined mitres. ie, each corner has a hidden vertical spline and three exposed horizontal splines. The hidden splines are used for dimensional stability during glue up, the exposed splines are both decorative and an important element for

strength (end grain joins have no reliable strength without reinforcement).

The bottom of the carcass is router rebated to fit the 3mm Huon bottom panel.

The four feet each have been assembled from two 45 degree mitre cut and rebated pieces so that they show off the visually appealing long grain from front and back.

Finish

Lid and carcass are both machined, then handsanded to #320 grit, rubbed with #000(3) steel wool, spray sealed with two pack catalysed lacquer, sanded lightly with #400 grit and burnished with #0000(4) steel wool. Then finished with a natural wax and polished.

Restoration/Rejuvenation

Restoration, if ever needed, is simply a light rub with wax impregnated #0000 steel wool, wipe off excess, polish with soft rag after 2 days.

Rejuvenation, usually worthwhile after 6 months (once only), is wipe on wax, wipe off excess, let harden, and light polish. (I use Mirotone's Mirowax #738, an industrial product).

gbirtles@bigpond.net.au

