Weekend Project

tile-top Craftsman Table

A simple design with no-nonsense mortise and tenon joinery makes this table an irresistible project.

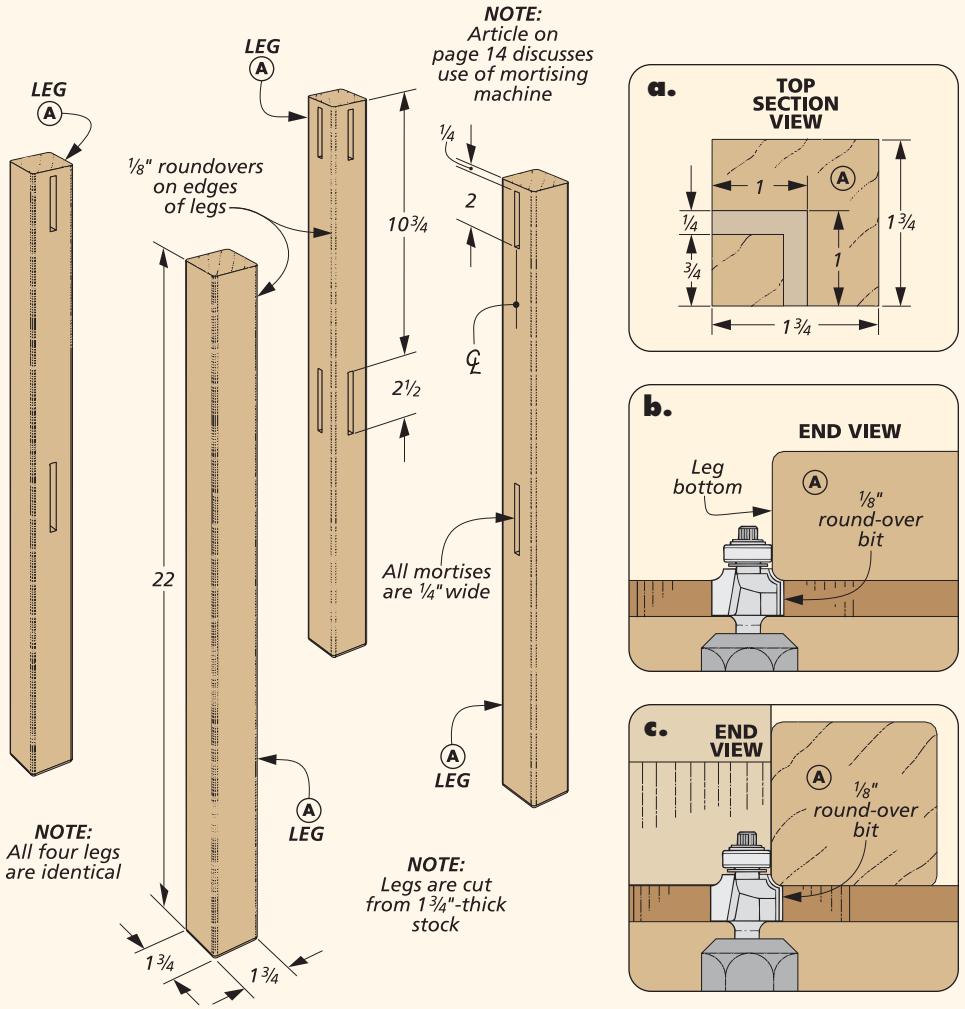
You say you've never tried to cut a mortise and tenon joint before? Well this attractive Craftsman-style table might be a great place to start.

Like most Craftsman-style pieces, this table sticks to the basics. It's mostly just straight lines and straightforward joinery. Mortise and tenon joinery is one of the cornerstones of woodworking. And once you get a good feel for it, you're well on your way to building this classic little table.

Let's break it down for a quick look at what's going on. You start with four, square legs and then join the upper and lower rails with "mitered-end" mortise and tenon joints. Next, you add some vertical slats on three sides. They're joined to the rails with a shallow mortise and tenon. And then to top it off, you build a mortise and tenon frame into which is set a ceramic tile panel. You get the picture?

The best news is that the joinery here isn't the least bit difficult. Whether you decide to cut your mortises by hand, the way I like to do it, or maybe invest in a mortiser like those discussed on page 44, you'll get some good practice with a great end result.

making the LEGS



I like to start work on a table by making the legs, and if you take a look at the drawing at right, you'll see that this is a straightforward task.

GETTING STARTED. The first thing you'll need to do is to cut four identical *legs (A)* to size from $1^3/_4$"-thick stock at the table saw. When this job is complete, it's a good idea to take time to pair up the legs for the best look (front and back) and then mark them clearly on the top.

THE MORTISES. The box below shows you the steps to hand mortising. With the legs cut to size, you begin by laying out the four mortises on each leg. I like to "gang them up" and mark them all at once as shown below.

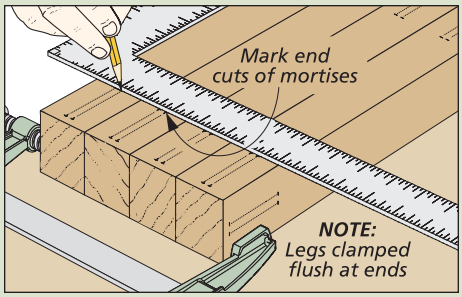
With the layout completed, the next step is to gather up the four legs and take them to the drill press. Here, I drill a series of overlapping holes to remove most of the waste from the mortises.

Take a look at detail 'a' and you'll see how the two adjacent mortises meet in the leg. What this means is that when drilling the second mortise into the previously drilled mortise, you'll need to go slow to avoid splintering.

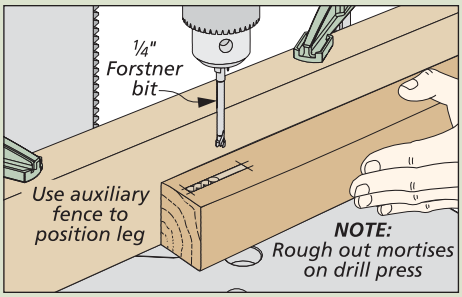
After roughing out the mortises at the drill press, I moved to the workbench to complete the job. Using a sharp chisel, I pared away the peaks between the holes and squared the ends of the mortise.

EASE THE EDGES. To wrap up the work on the legs, I took them to the router table. I didn't want to leave sharp edges that could be easily damaged, so I installed a $^1/_8$" round-over bit to ease all four long edges and the bottom edges as shown in details 'b' and 'c.'

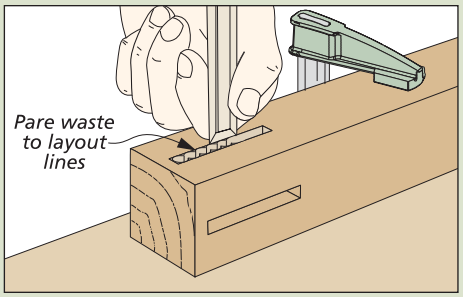
How-To: Make a Mortise



Lay Out the Mortises. *Since the mortises are positioned identically in each leg, just mark one leg and then use a square as a guide to transfer the marks to the other legs.*



Drill Out the Waste. *Once the mortises are laid out on the legs, you can take them to the drill press. Drilling a series of overlapping holes will remove most of the waste.*



Back to the Bench. *The final step is to clean up the mortise with a chisel. Smooth the cheeks by paring back the peaks left by the drill press and then square the ends.*