

Dutch Tool Chest

For hybrid woodworkers

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Through my entire time being a woodworker, I've always struggled with the romanticised version of a woodworker versus the pragmatic, practical woodworker. Too often I've got in my own way, thinking, "*Oh, it has to be this or kind of nothing"* because it's only worth doing this romanticised, ideal version of a hand tool woodworker.

But I'm not a hand tool woodworker.

I am a hybrid woodworker at best -- I use machines, I use hand tools.

I like both of them equally for different tasks. I'm *never* going to own a giant panel saw. I'm never going to own a number eight jointing plane because it's just not, to me, practical in the work that I do and how I go about things.

My journey for hand tool storage has always been stunted by trying to appeal to this ideal version of a woodworker that I just am never going to be, because that doesn't interest me

At first it was having the giant tool wall in the backdrop, hanging saws and plane tills and all of that. And in my workshops, it's just never been feasible or never been a high priority.

My first workshop was a two-car garage with a roller door - big roller door - at the front, and a smaller roller door at the back, with a large window also on the back. With only two walls that could hang the tool wall from, in a workshop that has machinery it became just too tricky to balance - the table saw needs to go somewhere, dust collector and fittings along the wall, the jointer floor space is is optimised to be along the middle of a wall. And suddenly there was nowhere for the workbench to be close to the tools.

If the workbench isn't close to the tool, what's the point of having them on the wall?

The obvious answer (to my brain) was to have tools in drawers underneath the workbench, but in turn that's then shaped my opinions of workbenches.

Years ago I proclaimed that I'd never build another roubo, as I perceived the issues with drawer-based-tool storage to be a 'fault' of roubos. Drawers underneath the workbench in a roubo caused all sorts of compromises - you compromise on bench dogs, on hold fasts, on the sliding dead man, on other bits and pieces because if you use those, you're then in the way of the drawers.

And it's just a cycle of talking myself in and out of different things.

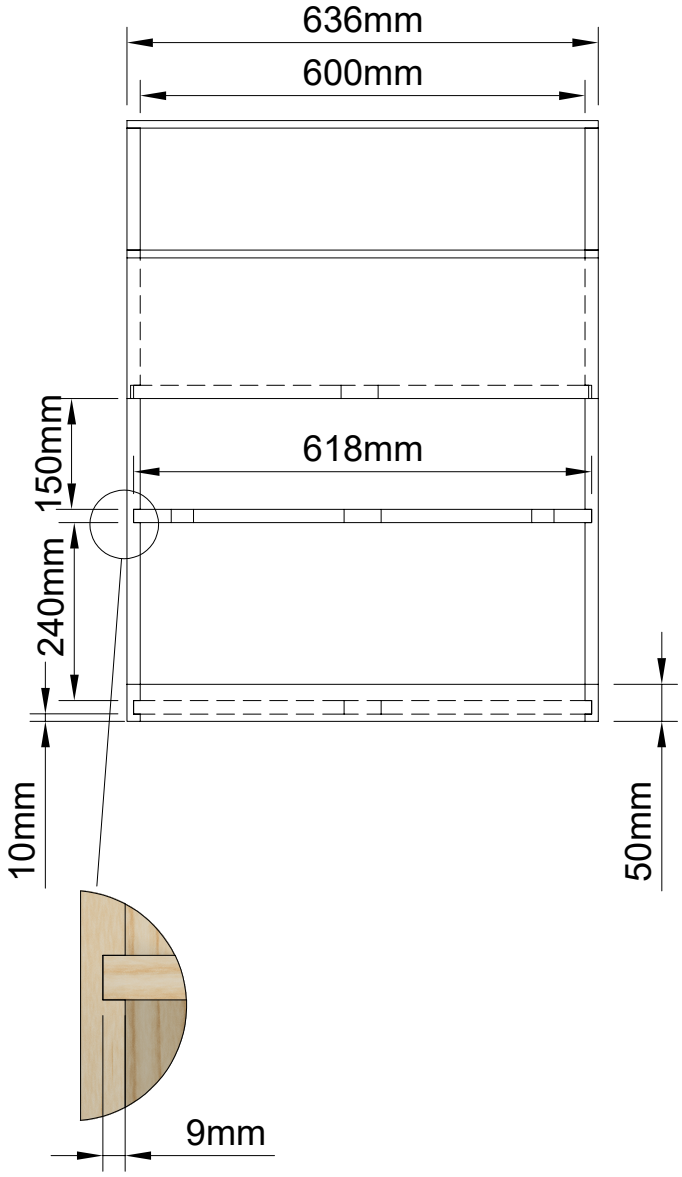
As I've gotten to know myself a little bit better, I've been able to take a bit more of a step back and think "*what is it about woodworking that I like? What is it that I want out of the hand tools? What do I need in a workbench?*" and past-Paul would be sad to learn that a roubo is the answer to those questions. ***It's the storage that's the issue*** and that's when we get into tool chests.

For the amount of hand tools that I have and the size of the hand tools I have, a Dutch Tool Chest (DTC) is more appropriate than the girthy English joiners chests (EJC). The size tools I have will fit in the DTC, or they'd float around with far too much space in the EJC

I'm going to go for the very practical pragmatic approach because that's me - I want to be more practical. I'm going to make it out of plywood. I'm not going to make it out of solid pine or hardwood, because the cost and effort is so much greater doing it.

This is really going to be all about that practical approach to hand tool storage using machines, because it's <u>okay</u> to be a hybrid woodworker rather than being machinist or hand tool romanticised woodworker.

At the end of the day, I just want something ***done*** rather than obsessing over doing it the historically correct way.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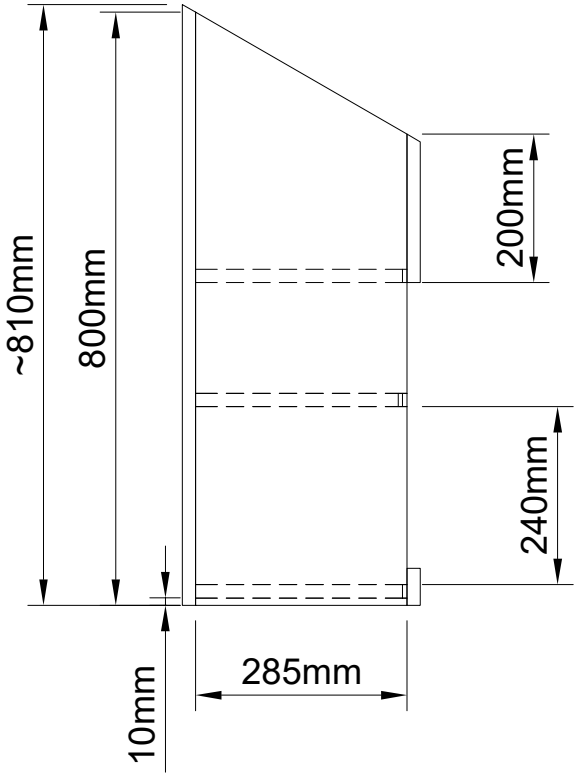
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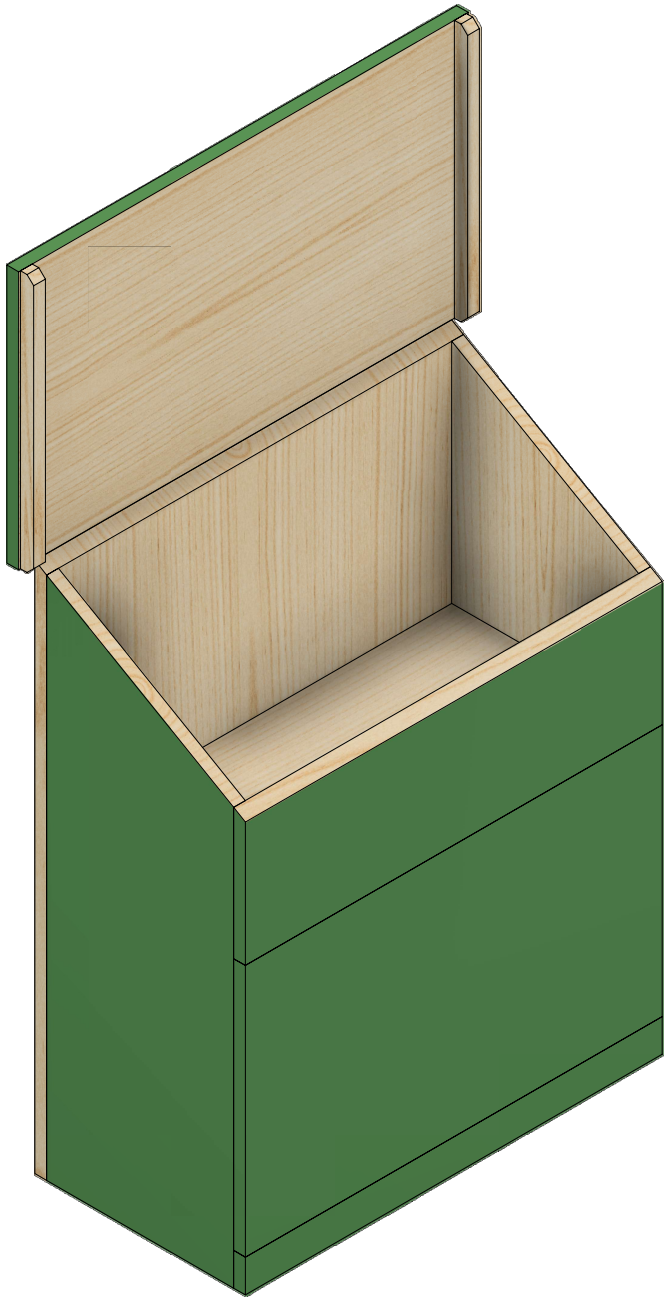
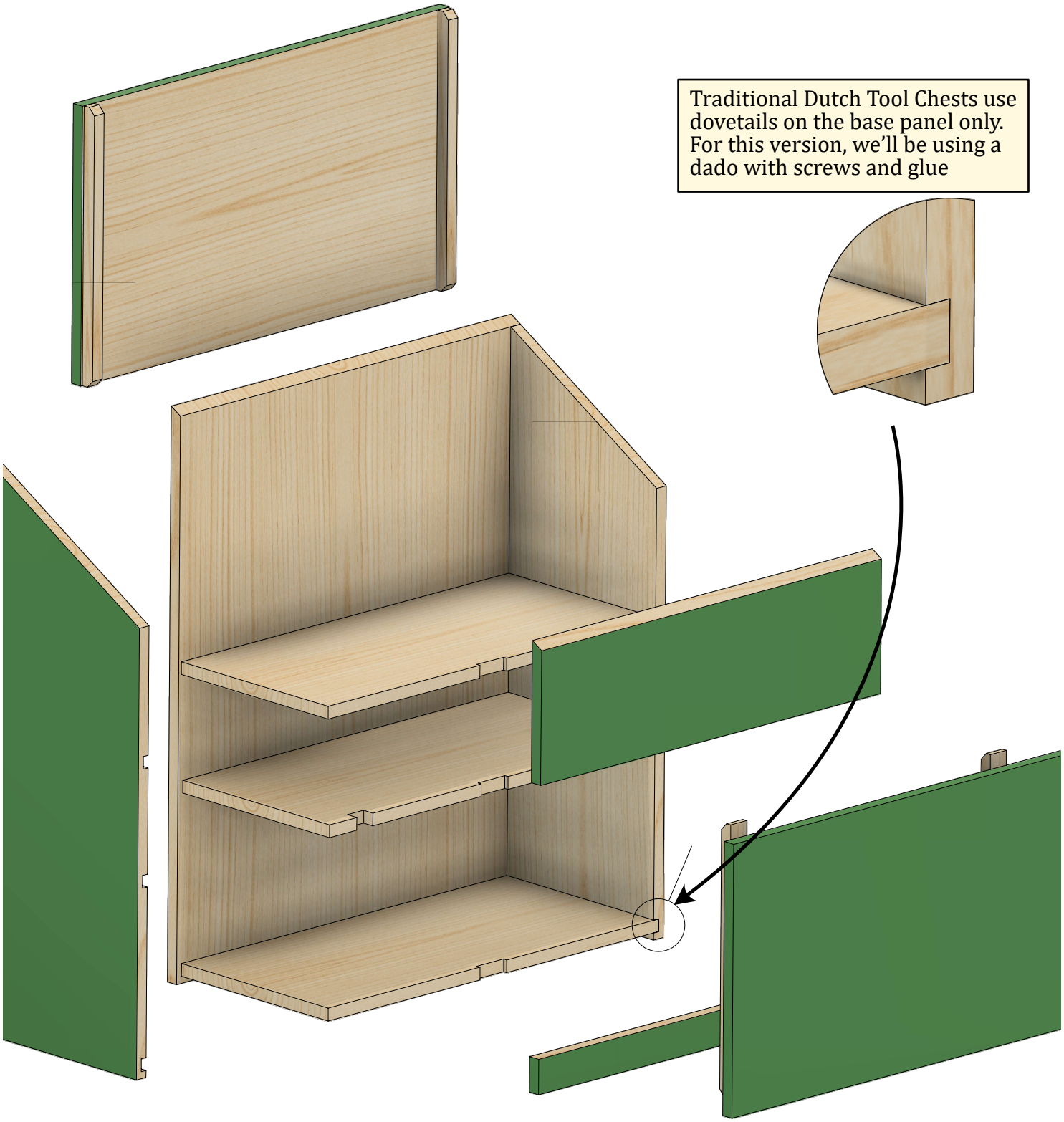


Exploded View



Cut List

The carcass comes from a single metric sized sheet of 18mm plywood - 2400x1200mm.

If you're using an imperial 8x4' (2440x1220) sized sheet, it will work without issue however you may choose to optimise it a little differently.

The cleats, lock, and other organisers could be made from plywood, but I'll be using scraps of hardwood rather than ordering a separate thinner sheet of plywood.

The first step for any sheetgood project is to cut the material down into manageable portions. For this project, cutting along the red dotted line with a tracksaw (or circular saw with a guide) gives three manageable chunks that can be easily taken to the table saw to break down into the final sizes.

With three more-manageable portions of plywood, the final size can be ripped and crosscut using a table saw, however **do not separate the two side pieces.**

It is much easier to have all the grooves line up perfectly if they are cut first, and then cut into the individual side pieces.



Part	Length	Width	Qty
Shelf	610mm	285mm	3
Side	800mm	285mm	2
Back	810mm	636mm	1
Lid	686mm	395mm	1
Fall Front	636mm	385mm	1
Fixed Front	686mm	200mm	1
Lower Batten	636mm	50mm	1

Video

This article is a companion to the video. If you want more details on how to make the dang thing, watch the video.



Joinery

The traditional/solid wood dutch tool chest goes together pretty rapidly as it is, with dovetails only on the base-to-side connections, and the shelves being held in dados. Everything else is just glue and nails.



Screw Size Matters. *Use a 38mm screw, or if you have them these 50mm confirmat screws are even better*

For the plywood version, we can drop the dovetails entirely (dovetails in plywood are going to be a bad time anyway), use dados for all three "shelves" and switch out the nails for screws.

By leaving the two side pieces as one larger piece, it allows us to cut the dados/joinery in both pieces at the same time which guarantees they'll line up.

The Lock

The lock is 6mm thick by 50mm wide. I'm choosing hardwood for mine, but if you have thin



The two sides being split after all dados are added

enough plywood, that'd be OK too. In truth, you could use much thicker material but the thicker it is the more space you lose in all sections.

Hardware

A Note On Hinges

Megan Fitzpatrick and Chris Schwarz recommend *Lee Valley*'s very affordably priced unequal strap hinges. Unfortunately shipping from *Lee Valley* to Australia on those hinges is troublesome in 2025, as *Lee Valley* no longer provide estimates of postage and require custom quotes.

Chris uses handmade blacksmith forged hinges and while I love that for him, at the time of the article they were around USD$250. A few years on and the land of Faraway-Island-Tax, I'm not looking to take out a mortgage for my tool chest hinges.

If you can get either of the above options, go for it. If you can't, it's time to make the best of Hammerbarn hinges.

I went with *Pinnacle's 200mm Zinc Strap Hinges* - while they might not look stunning, at AUD$12.78 they're hard to go past for functionality. They do come with included screws, but throw them out, they're too long for 18mm plywood

Wheelie Good

Look for castors with a wheel at least 75mm in diameter. Larger wheels roll easier, particularly in a workshop where sawdust and wood chips are strewn around. The last thing you want is for your tool chest to tip as the

wheels jam on waste from a dovetail.

Bunnings sell *Move It 75mm PVC Castor - 4 Pack*, they're cheap, they're PVC, but they're under $15 for a 4-pack, and are rated for 40kg per castor - even if you were to fill this to the brim with tools, it won't weigh in 160kg.

They're the bare minimum that I would recommend, but I have used these exactly castors for shop carts and mobile tool bases for years without issues, so I expect they'll be more than adequate for the as-much-as 50m per year travel the tool chest will do, while doing donuts in the workshop.

Paint

Tradition demands paint to finish the outside of tool chests, and nothing on the insides.

Why paint? It's the most durable finish and easiest to repair. A scuff or chip from moving the tool chest around is easily brushed over.

Tradition aside, painting workshop furniture makes a lot of sense to make it stand out in a sea of wood and ongoing projects.

Brushed on milk paint is the more traditional approach, but I'm setup to spray and I have a lot of acrylic paint so there is no surprise with my approach. One coat of primer, then two of the desired colour creates a very opaque outer shell.

Specifically, I'm using Haymes (Australian made!) UltraTrim Acrylic Enamel in "Towering Pine" green.

The insides traditionally receives somewhere between no finish, wax or shellac - usually left raw otherwise it will take an age to fully cure. I'll be sticking with unfinished pine ply.

Tool Holders

There is no universal best layout of tools, nor best way to store individual tools, because it's such a personal decision - the type of tool, the brand/shape of each tool, the type of work you do, and even what particular tools you like using all effect it.

I would strongly encourage you to attach whatever tool holders you come up with to your tool chest with screws, rather than glue (or even nails). As tools change, as your preferences for how you work changes, it's nice to be able to replace or modify the tool holder easily by unscrewing a couple of screws.



Simple drilled holes manage chisels and rasps



Simple dividers stop the planes from sliding around



Gravity defying. *Magnets hold small marking tools to the lid*