

easel

In eighth-grade shop I built a wooden jewelry box, but the lid wasn't flush with the base and the latch wouldn't close. That's probably about the last time I built something from scratch. But being in a new home for nearly a year and dreaming of crafting built-in, wrap-around bookcases, I decided to use my hands for something other than stripping wallpaper, painting and ripping up carpet. An easel seemed like a good place to start — a simple, fun, creative, educational toy for the kids. If only it had been that easy.

The plan was sickeningly basic. Two big pieces of plywood fused together with a piano hinge, linked with small chains, and some boxes attached for supplies. I found the plans from Georgia Pacific (www.gp.com), headed to the hardware store and was ready to start my evening career as a carpenter. So, in relative order, here are some things that I learned the hard way:

1. Don't buy the cheapest plywood. The fellow at the hardware store asked me if I wanted pre-sanded plywood, which would run about \$8-\$10 more than the \$16 sheet I was looking at. That would have been great advice and saved me from learning that cheap plywood really doesn't sand.

2. Let the hardware store help. Most places will give you two free cuts on wood purchases and extras for \$1 a

IF YOU REALLY WANT TO
CUT JUST ONCE ON THIS
PROJECT, MEASURE TWICE

AND REMEMBER THE KERF

BY MARK LUCE

cut. Take advantage of this. For this project I needed two 30-inch by 47 3/4-inch panels. Having them handle it (in mere seconds) would have saved me time and learning about the evils of kerf.

3. Kerf is a four-letter word. The kerf is the width of the saw cut. If you do not account for it, your cuts will be off. It wasn't until I discovered one of my panels was about one-fourth-inch longer than the other that I met Mr. Kerf. This boneheaded move also led to the requirement of a shorter piano hinge (I had 30 inches for the width of the panel). The hinge was too long because of my bad cuts and the kerf.

4. You should be respectfully scared of saws. Enough said.

5. Paint before you construct. You would think this would be self-evident.

6. Always drill pilot holes and make sure your drill is charged fully. If you say you think this tip is nonsense, you'll soon hear the unmistakable sound of splitting wood.

7. Don't be afraid to improvise. After I split the pieces that were supposed to be the containers for paints and markers, I nearly lost it. Instead of wooden holders, I mounted two silver mesh pencil trays on each side of the easel that look super.

8. Think outside the plan. Since the crappy plywood surface was too rough, I decided to mount whiteboard on one side, chalkboard on the other (not called for in the plan). This was perhaps the only remotely smart thing I did. This time at the hardware store, I let them make the cuts.

While it took entirely too long, the final product isn't too bad, and the kids have gotten good use out of it. Next up — a train table. Should be a breeze ... right?

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where he likes to wear his tool belt.



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