

Faster, Stronger

BY JOHN SPIER

When I worked on my first production framing crew out West, I was roundly rebuked when I put some stock to be cut on sawhorses. Real carpenters made cuts right on the ground or lifted the stock on their work boots when they were setting up a cut. Sawhorses were just step-stools. Now that my mind is more flexible, and my body less so, I use sawhorses a lot more than I used to. Sometimes they're helpful, and other times they just slow you down. The trick is knowing the difference.

Different carpenters have their own methods and opinions on making sawhorses; I've been building mine the same way for more than 15 years. My sawhorses usually last a few years, getting carted from job site to job site. When they grow lame, I saw them up, or I toss them out a third-floor window and feed them into the burn barrel. Building a new pair takes 15 minutes or so.

The design of these horses is basic enough so that you should be able to adapt these Clydesdales to just about any task or situation you might face. To see some ways to get the most horsepower out of your horses, visit www.finehomebuilding.com. □

John Spier and his wife, Kerri, own Spier Construction on Block Island, R.I. Photos by Roe A. Osborn.



First cut: Make 70° tapered ends.



Second cut: Flip and cut through.



Third cut: Gang, mark, and cut to final length.

EIGHT LEGS IN THREE CUTS



When you gang together 2x4s, as shown here, you can make the legs in just three cuts. First, make a 70° mark on the edge and near the middle of four 2x4s roughly 6 ft. long. The 2xs don't have to be the same length. Square the line around, and mark the opposite edge as well.

First cut: Stagger the stock so that the diagonal marks line up. With a clamp or a crew member holding the boards together, saw down the line.

Second cut: Next, flip over the boards and follow the lines to cut through from the opposite side.

Third cut: Line up the angled cuts in a straight line, and cut the bottom ends at a 20° bevel. Your legs are done.

Horses

One carpenter's favorite sawhorses and how he makes them in 15 minutes



One line for the braces
While the legs are still lined up from the cut, snap a chalkline for the braces about halfway up.

Fasten leg to rail with six 8d ring-shank nails.

A 42-in. length for the braces and top rail offers versatility as well as portability.

Sturdy steeds

A pair of horses can support a chopsaw workstation, form a staging platform, or keep a stack of lumber high and dry. For more uses and a video tip, go to www.finehomebuilding.com.

Install 2x6 top rail vertically for maximum strength.

Optional plywood shelf joins braces.

Fasten brace to leg with five 10d nails.

70° bevel cut

Legs measure 32 in. end to end.

Fasten ½-in. plywood gusset to legs with eight 8d ring-shank nails.

Set the brace 16 in. from the bottom of the leg.

20° bevel cut



Braces join leg pairs

In assembly-line fashion, nail 2x4 braces between pairs of legs to create four side sections. Then nail the side sections to the 2x6 top rails, leaving space above the tops of the legs.



Gussied up for strength

Plywood gussets add strength and rigidity. After cutting the first one, use it as a template to cut three more.