

## Built-in banquettes

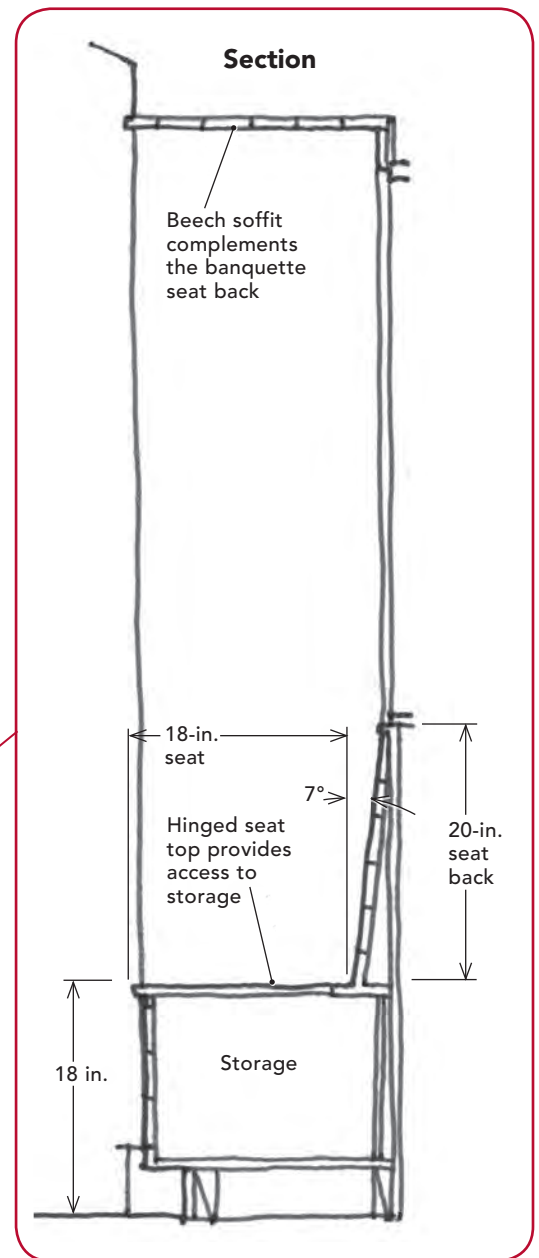
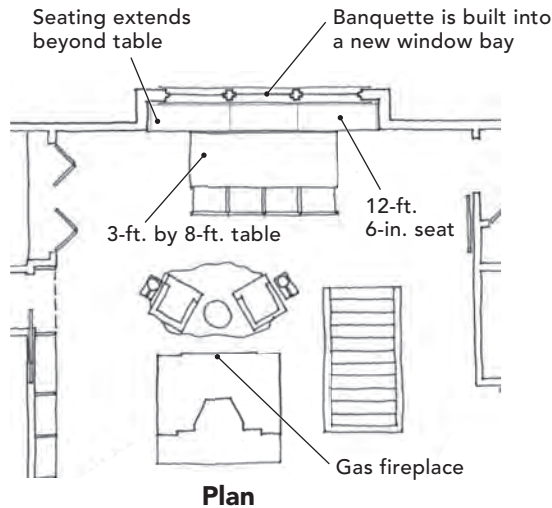
Looking back at three recent projects, I couldn't help but notice something they all had in common: a custom banquette. A banquette is a built-in bench that provides seating for a free-standing table, often with individual chairs on the opposite side. All three houses had small or narrow spaces that we wanted to

maximize, and a banquette is a great way to efficiently accommodate a table and seating in a space that would otherwise be too cramped for a more conventional dining table and chairs.

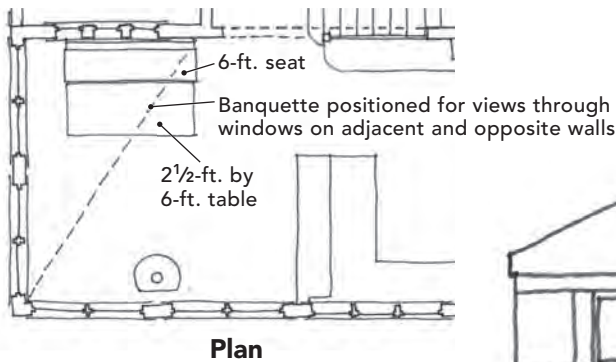
If space is especially tight, a banquette can bump out into a window bay, as shown in one example here, in order to provide

### A BUMP-OUT AND A LITTLE EXTRA STORAGE

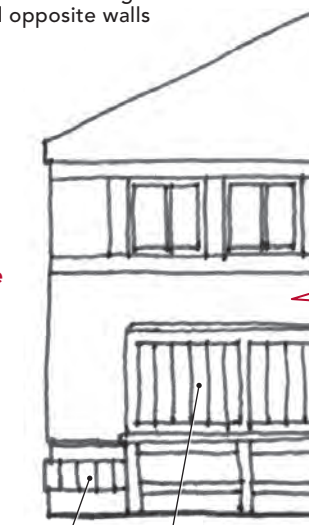
This project is part of a 1960s ranch remodel. We added a new window bay with a built-in banquette to accommodate dining in the living space, which we were reorganizing. Because this house is characterized by horizontal massing, we wanted the bay and banquette to be long enough to both make an impression on the exterior and also to accommodate a sizeable table with bonus bench seating extending beyond the table on both ends. We further emphasized the banquette's horizontal length with significant reveals between the tongue-and-groove boards on the seat back and seat front that run horizontally until they intersect with the vertical stiles that align with the window mullions. The reveals are also a nod to the clean and contemporary aesthetic. A banquette of this length can provide considerable storage in the base, which we chose to access with a hinged seat top. It is made of clear-finished beech and is complemented by a clear-finished beech soffit above. Together, they contrast the mostly white palette of the interior.



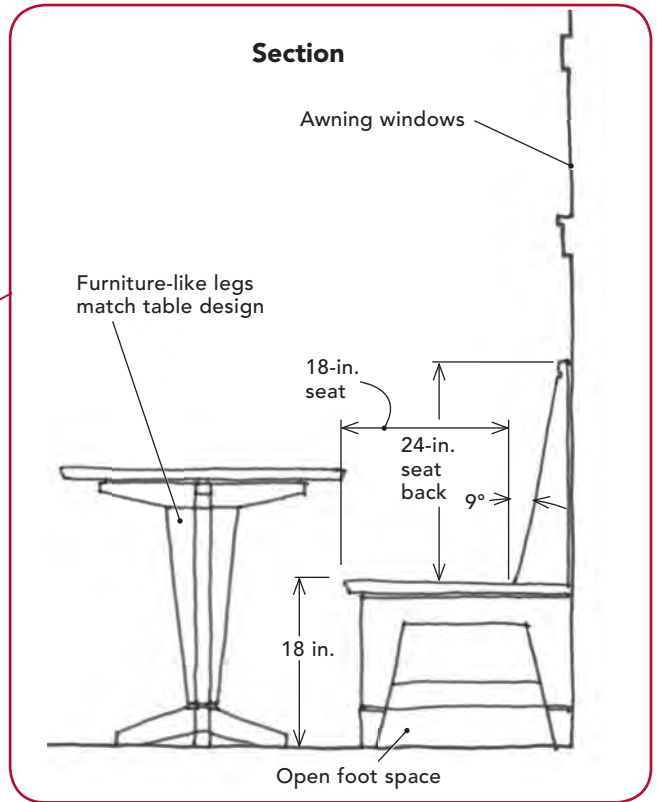
**A COMPACT BANQUETTE BRINGS STYLES TOGETHER**



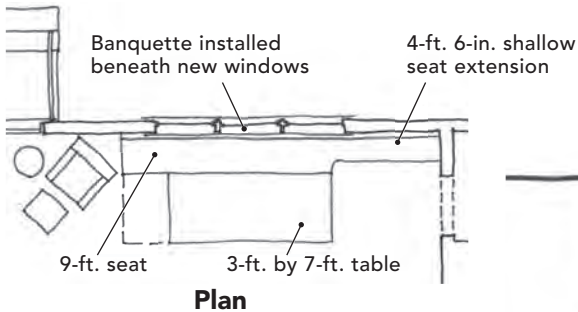
As part of a narrow addition, this banquette conserves space for furniture against the opposite wall. It is sized to match the length of the custom mahogany dinner table, and is easily accessed from both ends. The seat back has painted vertical 1x4s like those in the wainscot set within clear-finished mahogany rails and stiles. The pairing of clear-finished and painted paneling echoes the interior finishes often found on boats, a nod to the boatlike efficiency of this small space. Recessed mahogany panels in the base evoke the nearby Shaker-style kitchen cabinets while the tapered legs mimic the seat back and trestles.



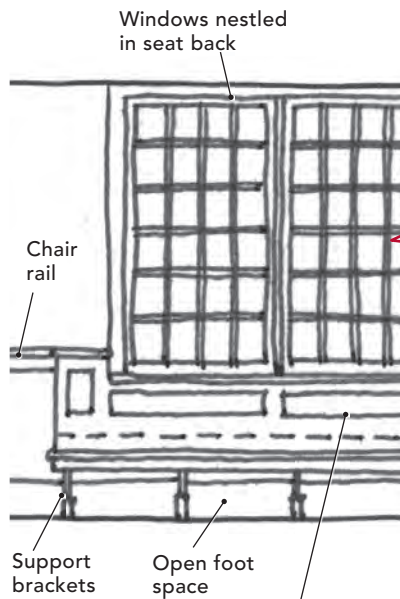
Low wainscot  
Painted vertical paneling framed by clear-finished rails and stiles  
**Elevation**



**LOTS OF SEATING POTENTIAL NESTLED IN THE WINDOWS**

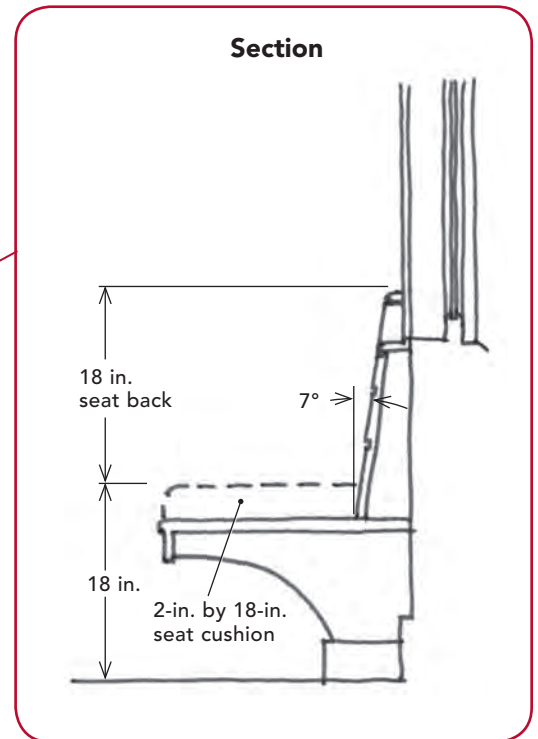


We found just enough space in this narrow footprint for a banquette backed against an existing window opening. The banquette extends beyond one end of the table for additional full-depth seating. At the opposite end, the seat narrows to accommodate an existing door opening. The banquette's seat back wraps around the windowsills, so the windows appear nestled in the banquette. A chair rail then picks up at the 36-in. mark, which ties the banquette to the room. Furniture-like brackets support the bench and create an openness that lends a spacious feel. The seat back is detailed with reveals that suggest panels while offering a comfortable, flat surface to lean against.



Reveals in flush seat back complement the Shaker-style panels of kitchen cabinetry

**Elevation**



adequate circulation behind the chair side of the table. When a window bay isn't an option or a desirable exterior feature, a banquette can still conserve space in a room when integrated along an interior wall.

A banquette also creates an opportunity to add character with a custom built-in. The examples here highlight the aesthetic of the spaces they occupy, whether it be ranch-house contemporary, Craftsman inspired, or a transitional Shaker style. Each displays attention to craft and creates a unique accent feature. Plus, a banquette is cozy and offers diners a choice between bench seating with a boothlike feel or individual chairs to suit their preference.

The banquettes illustrated here share common seat dimensions and a similar seat-back angle: Each has an 18-in. seat depth and a seat-back angle of 7° to 9°. Though one has a seat cushion and two do not, the finished seat height of all three (including the cushion on that particular project) is 18 in. The banquette lengths and seat-back heights vary, as do the table sizes that accompany them, but all have trestle tables. In general, a banquette works best with a trestle table since trestle supports don't interfere with banquette access the way a four-legged table would. These banquettes were also designed with open ends to allow easy access from both sides and to reduce the number of landlocked diners.

If having a middle landlocked diner is a concern, then consider a banquette that only seats two on the bench side, and includes open ends. If you like the flexibility of accommodating a group of diners in different locations or configurations, a banquette may not be for you. A banquette, like any other built-in, requires a commitment to a fixed location. However, since the table isn't fixed in place, it can be removed or relocated if you want to open the space for a large group of standing guests for cocktails or dancing. The built-in bench can remain an asset in the absence of the table. And when it serves as a table, a banquette can offer a clean, uncluttered look that efficiently accommodates seating that can be surprisingly versatile.

*Katie Hutchison is an architect based in Warren, R.I., and the author of The New Small House from The Taunton Press (katie-hutchison.com). Drawings by the author.*



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