



Issue 46, April 2024

Hello woodworky friends!

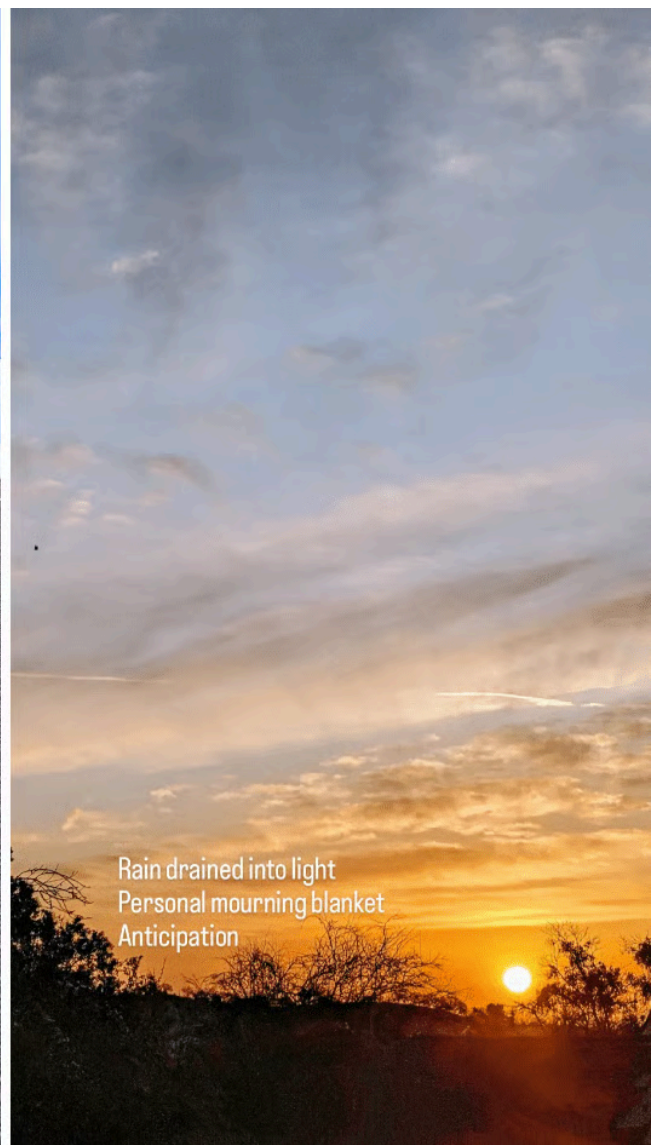
It was great meeting some of you at Workbenchcon (such an awkward name lol) a few weeks ago in Atlanta. It's kind of a crazy, disjointed event geared mainly toward producing "content", but the good side of it is striking up conversations with other makers and woodworkers and meeting new friends. Quite a few of you actually mentioned this newsletter, which felt really nice. One person told me they got lured into subscribing because they thought it was about woodworking and then stayed when they discovered that was only sorta true. I'll take it.

The following week, I spent some time with family in Colorado during one of its biggest blizzards in recent years. It was crazy! We had about 2 feet of snow, which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was the first time in years I spent time frolicking in snow. I had forgotten how beautiful and peaceful a snowstorm can be. It's gentle and soft, and sounds are muffled. I stood in the middle of a silent, empty field to simply breathe deeply, take it all in, and meditate on life. After a few minutes, I was freezing my ass off. Sometimes reality spoils everything. 😂

When I got home, I felt an urge to immediately get into my shop and make something. It's an odd feeling to return to my shop when it's been closed for a while. It's like it's been frozen in time; my sander right where I left it on the workbench, a can of blue paint from my last project, and cut-off scraps in my waste bucket. I don't know if you've ever experienced this feeling...like short-term nostalgia or something. At any rate, I opened the doors, let the sunshine in, and straightened everything up so I could begin working on a new project; a simple garden bench.

I've spoken at length about my continual quest to find simplicity in my woodworking projects, and well, life in general—how humans seem to be hardwired to begin any new endeavor from a place of complexity. When pertaining to woodworking, I value simplicity as a goal because I believe simpler designs are usually more aesthetically pleasing, and fewer components typically lead to sturdier, more robust projects. Simplifying involves sharp *reductive* thinking, a process we naturally resist when we consider building, a more *additive* process.

As an exercise in exploring simplicity, I've been writing a series of haiku poems, each paired with a photograph. I post these on [Instagram](#), a social media outlet I find very appealing because stories expire in 24 hours. It's a low-risk method of expressing an artistic vision for a very small audience, and then *poof* it's gone.



While traditional Japanese haiku is focused on describing nature or the seasons, I've adopted a broader approach to include topics about life's moments. I like the challenge of haiku because of its (typically) 17-syllable format. Usually, the first and third lines contain five syllables and the middle line has seven. The parameters of construction are defined and constrained. The craft lies in starting with a broad idea and paring it down to reveal its essence. I might spend an hour manipulating three lines, eliminating all superfluous words and articles to express a single concise emotion.

This is the same process I use when designing woodworking projects. I begin by considering the parameters of *function*:

1. I need a casual bench to nestle into a secluded part of my garden. It's not intended for spending hours on, only a few minutes at a

time to relax and enjoy the springtime blooms and listen to birds.
(And the freeway noise lol.)

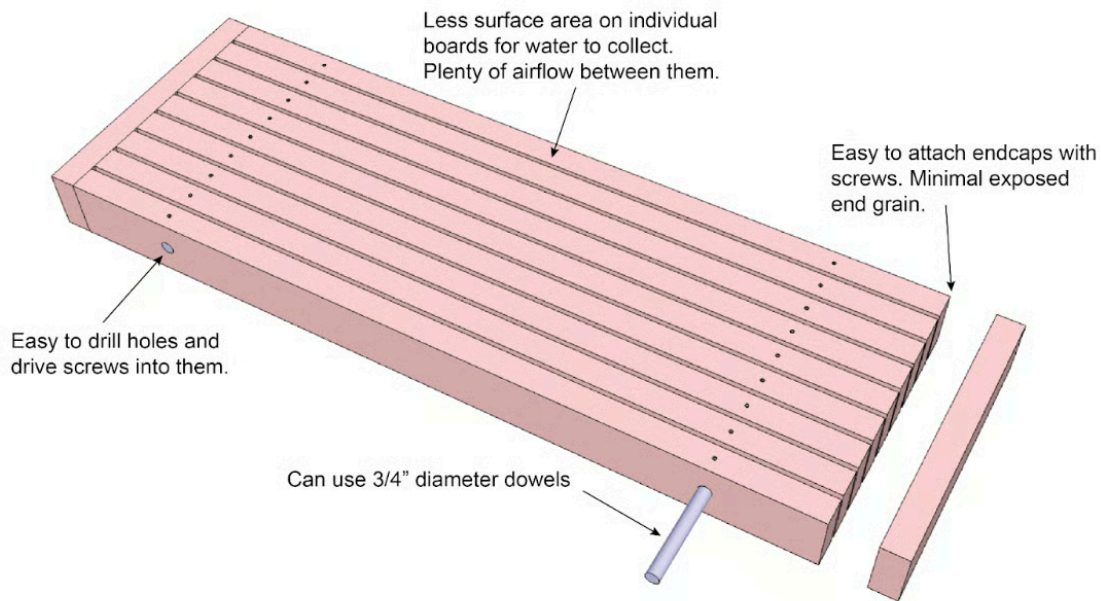
2. It needs to be sturdy enough to withstand the elements for at least a decade without maintenance.
3. I want it to be affordable and easy to build with limited tools.

As wisdom suggests, form follows function, so now I can begin to design something based on those three parameters.

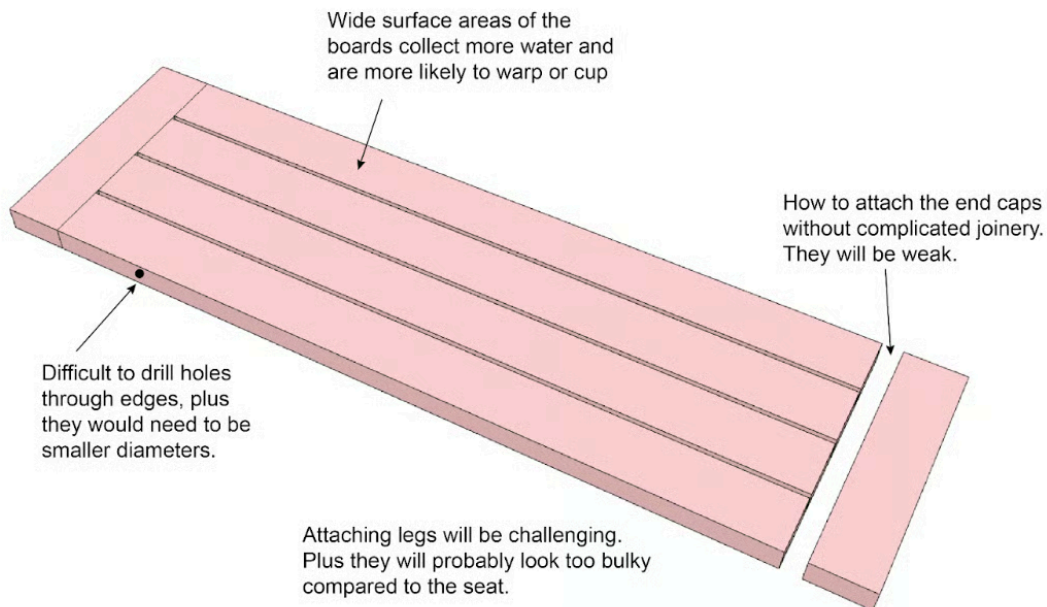
1. The secluded area is small and the bench will most likely only contain one butt at a time, but I'll design it for two cozy people. Since it's only going to be used for short periods, back support isn't necessary. This simplifies the design and appeals to function #3.
2. Durability is perhaps the biggest consideration for any outdoor project. To meet this function, I need to account for the effects of water. This means reducing areas that might accumulate moisture and making sure any end grain is concealed. To ensure maximum weather protection, I will paint the bench with exterior latex house paint.
3. Since it will be a painted project, I can keep costs down by using construction-grade 2x4 studs. These will also make it hefty and stable. And using *just* 2x4s allows me to design a project that only requires crosscuts. No rip cuts are necessary, just a miter saw.

With the parameters set, seventeen syllables of woodworking, I began designing the seat. To promote airflow and water drainage, I set the studs on their edges with spaces between them, reducing horizontal surface space. This also makes it look like a traditional slatted park bench. Orienting the studs this way makes it easy to drill holes through the faces of the boards that dowels can slide through to join the seat together. This also allows for screws to be driven in from the underside, to hide them and keep them away from water. I can cap off the ends of each board with shorter boards making for fewer exposed end-grain surfaces.

Edge-up slat orientation.



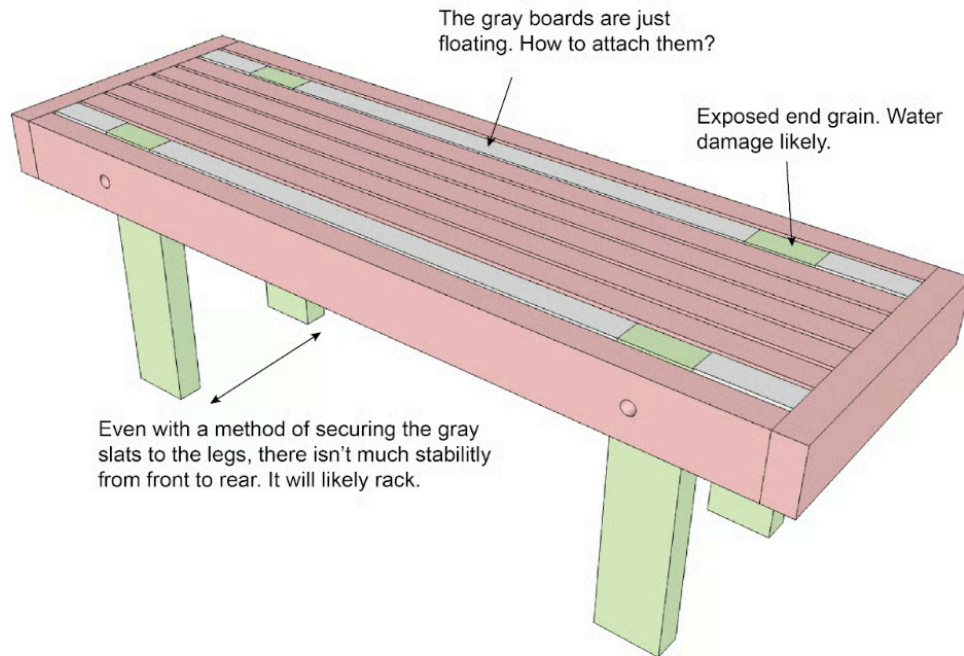
Problems with a face-up slat orientation.



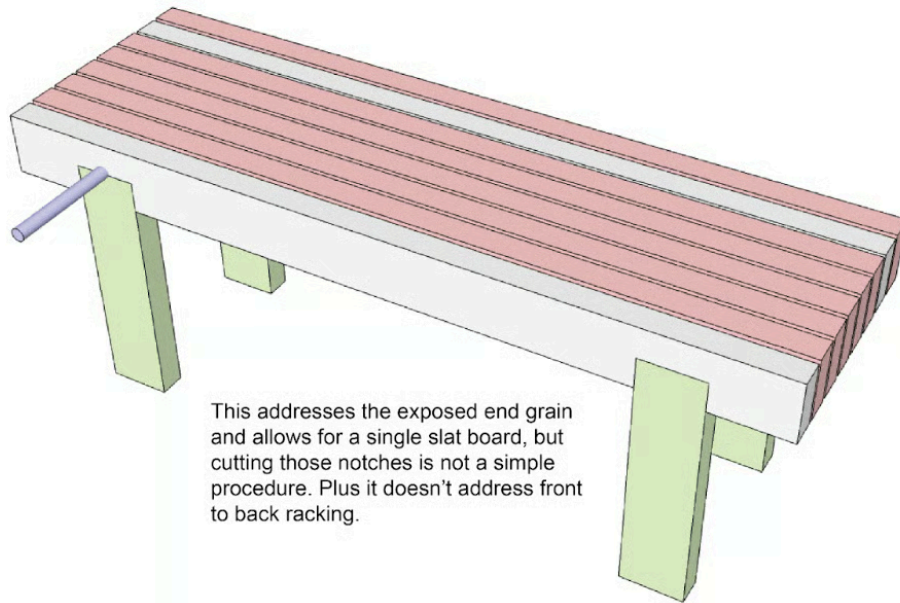
Now it was the important matter of making legs to support the heavy seat. Four single 2x4s on their ends are more than adequate to hold the downward force; it's the side-to-side racking that needs to be addressed. This was where I spent the most time on the design, starting with the most convoluted ideas.

I thought it would be cool to have the legs attached to the dowels somehow. This led to a series of problems. First, the end grain would be blatantly exposed to god, rain, and everything else. Plus, how would I attach the “cutaway” parts of the slat? More dowels? Screw them into the legs with pocket holes? I could cut a notch into a slat for the leg to fit into, but that’s definitely not simple. The deeper I considered this line of thinking, the more complicated it became. The solution to one problem required modifying something else. Plus, when it came down to it, the front-facing 2x4 legs just looked odd. So I scrapped all this and focused on simplicity.

Interesting form, but hard to achieve



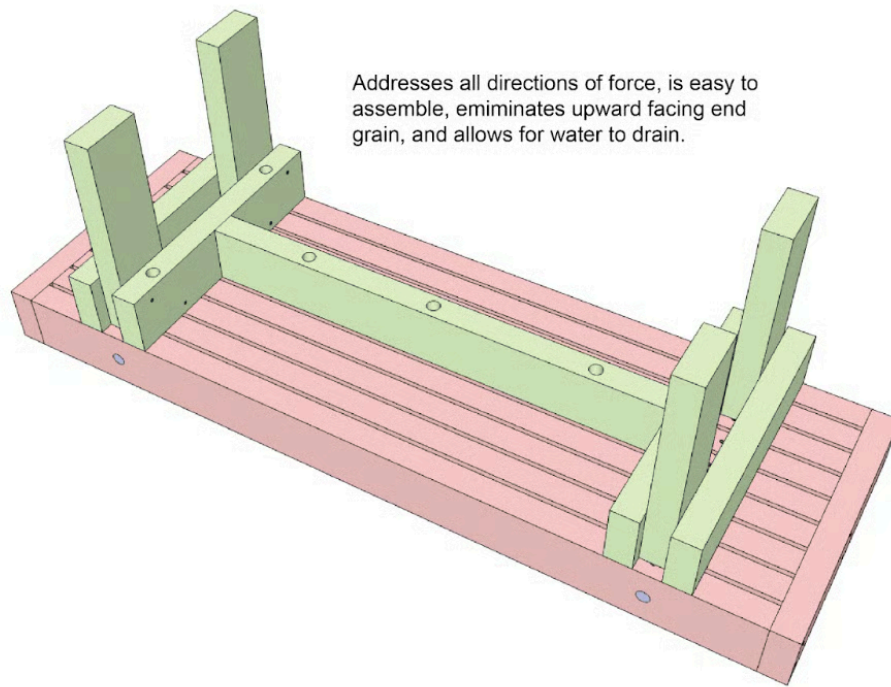
Set the legs in notches?



Ultimately, I came up with a design that functions well and is easy to build with inexpensive materials. It's a bench that is stable in all directions and will last for a long time.

Of course, the biggest compromise is its form. Aesthetically the leg assembly looks chunky, but from the top side, it doesn't bother me. There are plenty of creative ways this could be more elegant such as slimming down the cross members or adding some tapers to the legs, but I didn't want to compromise my goal of building this with just a miter saw, and didn't want to use any dimensional lumber.

Simple, functional solution



But the main feature of this bench—and why I call it the Springtime Garden Bench—is its bright paint. I wanted it to provide a dramatic, unexpected splash of color and a dash of whimsy to the garden. And *that's* what people notice and comment on, not the leg assembly. It's a simple expression of happiness in 17 syllables.



—Steve

Springtime Garden Bench



If you'd like to make your own, plans are available on a pay-what-you-want basis at [ShopWWMM](#). Add your own flair!

Flesh-sensing Technology May Soon be Required by Law on U.S. Tablesaws

The U.S. government is considering [mandating safer table saws](#) due to the high number of blade-contact injuries happening each year. Existing safety brakes like SawStop can prevent such injuries, but manufacturers haven't been required to add them yet.



What do you think? Will including this type of tech on all new table saws widely improve user safety? Or will the extra cost mean that more people will hang on to their old saws forever?

Creative Culture Conversations

I recently had my friend [CJ the X](#) on my podcast to talk about art. CJ is a creator and philosopher whose work explores the intersection of art and our cultural engagement with social media. One of my favorite conversations ever on the show. Check it out!



Listen to Creative Culture on all podcast platforms, [YouTube](#), or [Creative Culture website](#)!

Reader Mail

“I cried reading your last newsletter. I struggle so hard with my projects, trying to be perfect all the time and being embarrassed at my blunders. Your writing just hit home and made me feel so much better and I really really appreciate your wisdom that allows me to see my projects in a completely different light. You made my day.

Out to the shed I go to create and be the best I can be today. Thank you for being you and thank you for this newsletter that I will pin up on the wall of my workshop.” —Jana K.

Thank you, Jana! I think woodworking would get boring without our blunders. Perfection isn't all it's cracked up to be lol. — Steve

“I want to thank you for the inspiration to change my health. I have followed and appreciated your woodworking videos for many many years. You have so much great content for the hobbyist which resonates with me and many. Thank you for all the tips, tricks, and project ideas over the years. I’ve always appreciated your content—keep up the great work.

That however is not what inspired me to reach out to you. Though your woodworking content has always inspired me as a hobbyist, I want to thank you for an episode you did about changing your health habits and diet. It inspired a life change for me. I’m trailing you by just a couple of years in age and your episode struck a chord. It referenced changes in the food you ate (and beer you drank) which very much resonated with me. I had been drinking too much beer, and eating indiscriminately whatever crap seemed to jump out at me from the pantry. I’d be halfway through a bag of potato chips before I decided what I was going to eat for lunch. I also started paying attention to photos of myself and frankly, I was bloated and overweight. It’s now especially obvious looking back at comparisons to today. Your video was the spark for me, and I only realized this retroactively after I had completed my own transformation. I watched your video sometime in the Fall of 2022 and by Spring of 2023, I had dropped ~25 lbs. 195 to 170. Today I just weighed in at 166 and my target is 165.

Again, thank you for the inspiration. Who knew watching woodworking videos could create such healthy changes for someone.

Be well.” —Eric T.

*Oh wow, thank you for that, and congratulations on your life changes!
We all have the power to become the phoenix at any stage of our lives.
It’s liberating to embrace change without worrying how others will react.
—Steve*

“Your selfie looks like a lobby still from SKINAMARINK.

Take care.” —Steve C.

OMG, you're right! 🤪 —Steve



Thoughts on this month's newsletter? Drop me a line by replying to this email!

What You're Working On

“My long-time buddy Tim and I love your show. My wife and I have been watching for years. Anyway, Tim and I are making 50 of your airplanes to be given to the Salvation Army for distribution to kids in December. The picture shows the first batch...not done yet...with more behind me. When we are done with planes, we will start on the 2x4 trucks. Thanks for the plans. Easy to download/pay. Have a great day!” —George C.



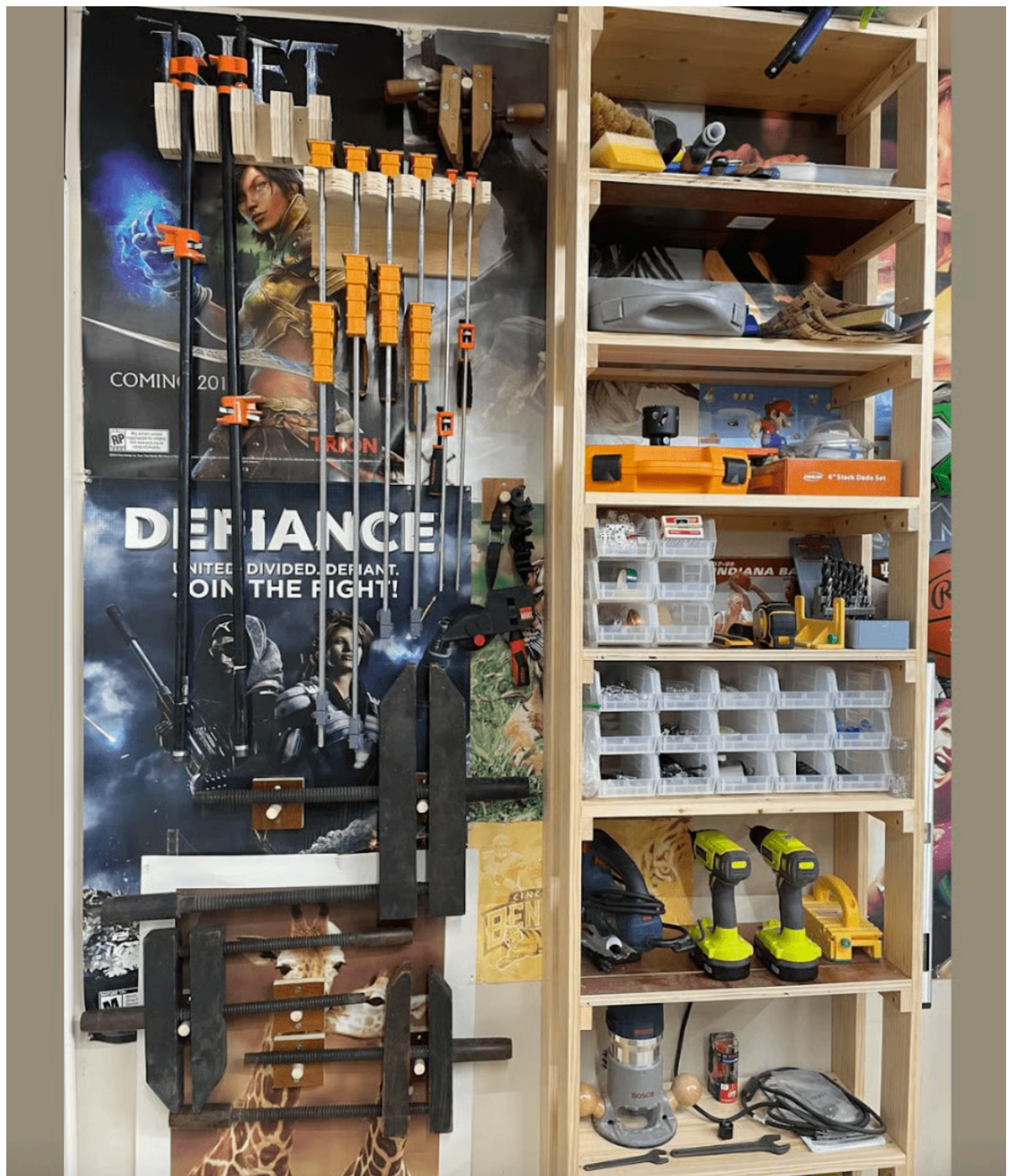
WOW! 50 airplanes! Thanks for such a thoughtful donation to kids for Christmas. —Steve

“Steve: I see some wonderful work by you, of course, but also folks who submit photos. This is a bit different take. I took up the scroll saw a bit more than two years ago. There have been some epic foul-ups, bleeps and blunders, and some that seem tolerable. Here are two.” —Tim G.



*Scrollsawing seems to be having a moment, and I love it! Great work.
—Steve*

“Pay no never mind to the silly poster wallpapering. The RIO shelf and clamp situation is so dang space-efficient now. It made me rethink my whole shelving deal. I got rid of a huge shelf that was twice as deep as it needed to be and was just gathering crap I don’t need to keep. It pushed me to purge so much nonsense. The new lighting is also a game changer.” —Jenna J.



Haha...I love the posters! So glad you like the RIO shelves! —Steve



Absolutely love this mod of the Harmony Garden Bench from [The Weekend Woodworker](#) course by Eric M. —Steve

Have you made something you want over a quarter million people to see in next month's newsletter? Just hit reply and send me a pic!

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