The Sligo Chair

History and construction details for a stylish variation on the Irish "Tuam"

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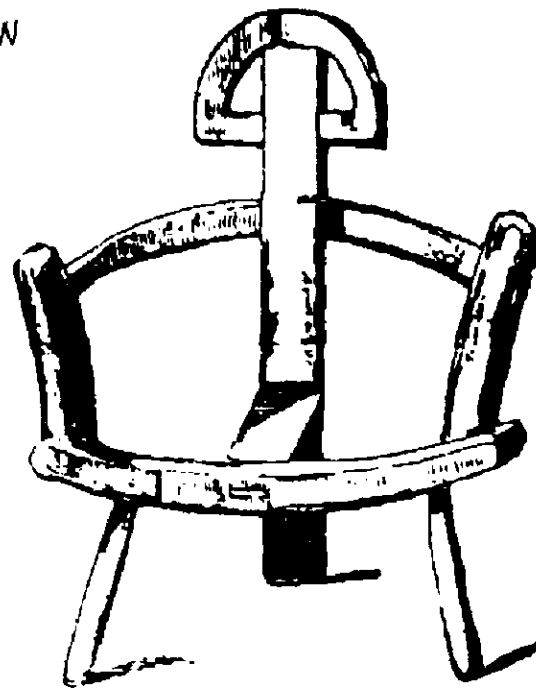


Although the Irish Tuam remains one of the most popular sets of plans I have included in *Sacred Spaces*, you may recall that in my previous article, I confessed to having little research to support its existence – aside from a photo I had found in a book on ancient Irish crafts.

Well, all that has changed, with the publication of a densely researched book titled *Irish Country Furniture* by Claudia Kinmonth (1993). In this book, the author clarifies several points about the "Tuam chair," and mentions that the Irish National Museum's collection of these chairs includes several reproductions made for Yeat's tower house at *Thoor Ballylee.* Describing the reproductions, she explains that they are "made of pine rather than a local hardwood, their backs disappointingly straight."

Kinmoth suggests that because the majority of these chairs now in the museum originate from the area around the County Galway town of Tuam – they have gained that name only recently. She adds that "comparatively elaborate, oak examples may be traced back to the 16th century, when such *Caquetoire* types were known in France, England and Scotland." She also suggests that the Tuam may not have migrated to Ireland until about the 17th century.

The Tuam chair also has been known as a "Sligo chair," a nomenclature that often leads to confusion, because the Sligo chair has been described with or without arms. One writer describes "a singularly primitive chair which is very commonly used throughout Connaught. It is roughly made of elm, the pieces being nailed together. There is evidence that this piece of furniture has undergone little change during the last eight or ten centuries."

Kinmoth also tells us how a maker of the chairs in the 1930s insisted that "no nails or screws are used and no glue." The same man asserted that "[in the old time] there were no other kinds of chairs and that there should be seven different kinds of wood in it – the seven woods of the cross: ash, alder, etc." This would suggest a link with early Pagan Ireland.

Construction

This reproduction may be created with pine or spruce lumber, but for more permanent settings, consider using oak, elm, or a combination of hardwoods. You may use either hand tools, power tools or a combination of each. These chairs are pegged and glued together.

Seat Back and Headrest

As you may recall from the Tuam plans, the seat back is the most difficult part of these chairs. Ideally, it should be cut from a single piece of wood with a natural bend, but it may also be created from a pair of 2x6 boards that have been laminated (glued) together using a strong, water-resistant adhesive such as Weldwood Plastic Cement. Cut the headrest from a single length of 2x12, and notch both the headrest and seat back so that the headrest lies flush with

the back.

Make a 1/2"-deep notch for the seat on the front face. Mortise notches to receive the curved armrests (using a chisel and/or drill).

Seat

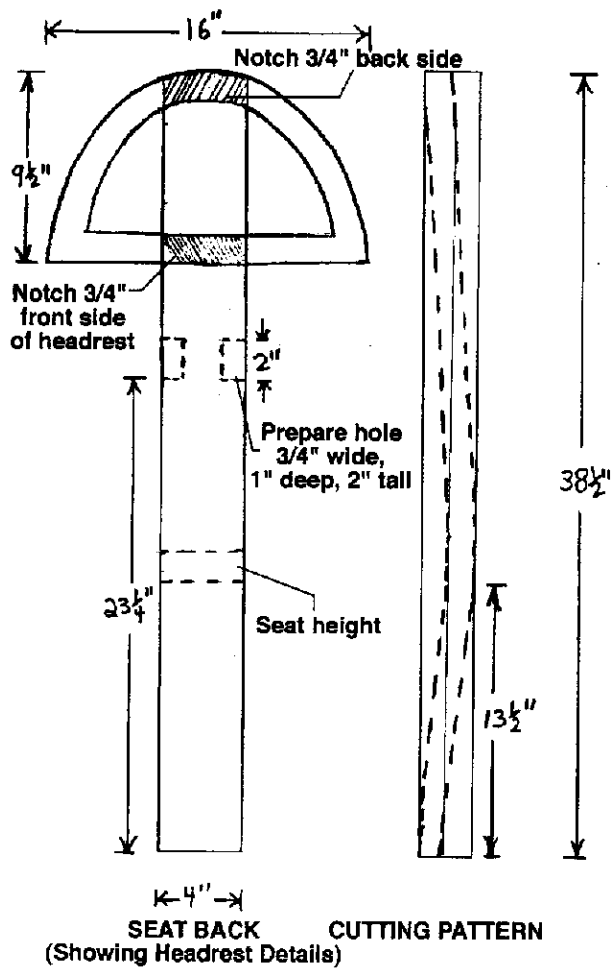
I've diverged a little from the sketch here, to create a more comfortable seat using scrolled bows. Cut it from a 2x12 board as shown. Notch the front end 3/4" on the top face to fit into the seat's bowed front piece. The back end will fit into a 1/2" notch cut into the seat back in the location shown. Both ends should be glued and pegged in place.

The bowed front piece can be cut from a 2x8, and should include notches as shown on both top and bottom to receive the arm posts and legs, respectively.

Arm Posts and Curved Armrests

Cut two posts from a lenth of 2x4, leaving a smaller, square tenon at the base of each that will fit into the bowed seat piece. Notch each post to receive the curved arm pieces.

If you lack the equipment to steam-bend the arm pieces, you can rip lengths of lumber to 1/4" thickness, then glue and clamp them together in a bent formation. Build them up to 3/4" thick, and the whole width will fit into the notches in the seat back and arm posts. Peg and glue them permanently into position.



Legs

Cut the two front legs from 2x2 stocks, and chisel or shave away about 1 and 1/2" at the top as shown, to fit into the notch in the base of the bowed seat piece. The legs, like the arms, should splay outward slightly. Glue in place.