

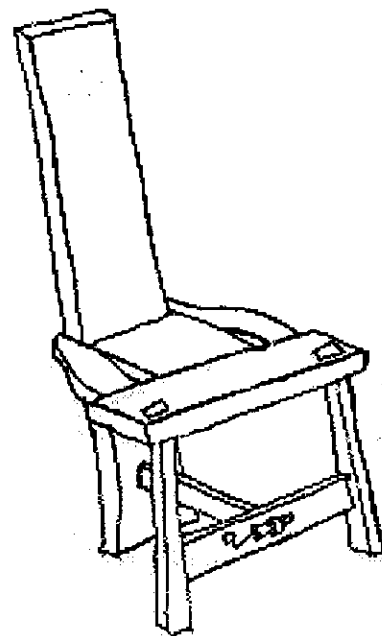
# Building the Irish Tuam

by Matthew Power

After building the early period cottage, I searched in vain for some examples of fifth century non-ecclesiastical furniture to clutter up the living space. After many frustrating hours, I came across a reference to the Tuam, an Irish adaptation of the three-legged stool.

According to my (he hangs his head in shame) one and only (see below) source, the Tuam has an ethnographic record stretching back to ancient times—in Ireland at least.

Whatever its origins, this chair is comfortable, unlike so many other rustic designs. And with the construction technique I've worked out, it breaks down flat, in four pieces, and goes together in about 30 seconds.



## Step 1: The seat back.

If you have limited woodworking skills, this will be the trickiest part of the project. The tuam has a curved back support cut from 2—2"X6" planks laminated together. Cut the planks to length, slather with carpenter's glue and clamp at intervals of about 6." Allow to dry overnight.

The best way to cut the seat back is with a bandsaw, but if you can't afford such monstrosities, you may cut it (carefully) using a

circular "Skilsaw." Just set the blade to maximum depth, clamp the wood to a table, or in a vise, and follow the dotted lines. Keep the blade perpendicular to the cut. You may need to finish the cut with a handsaw, and a belt sander (or some medium grit sandpaper) will remove any scars left by the saw blades.

Now drill a hole for your jigsaw blade and cut out the holes in the seat back. You're ready to start the seat.

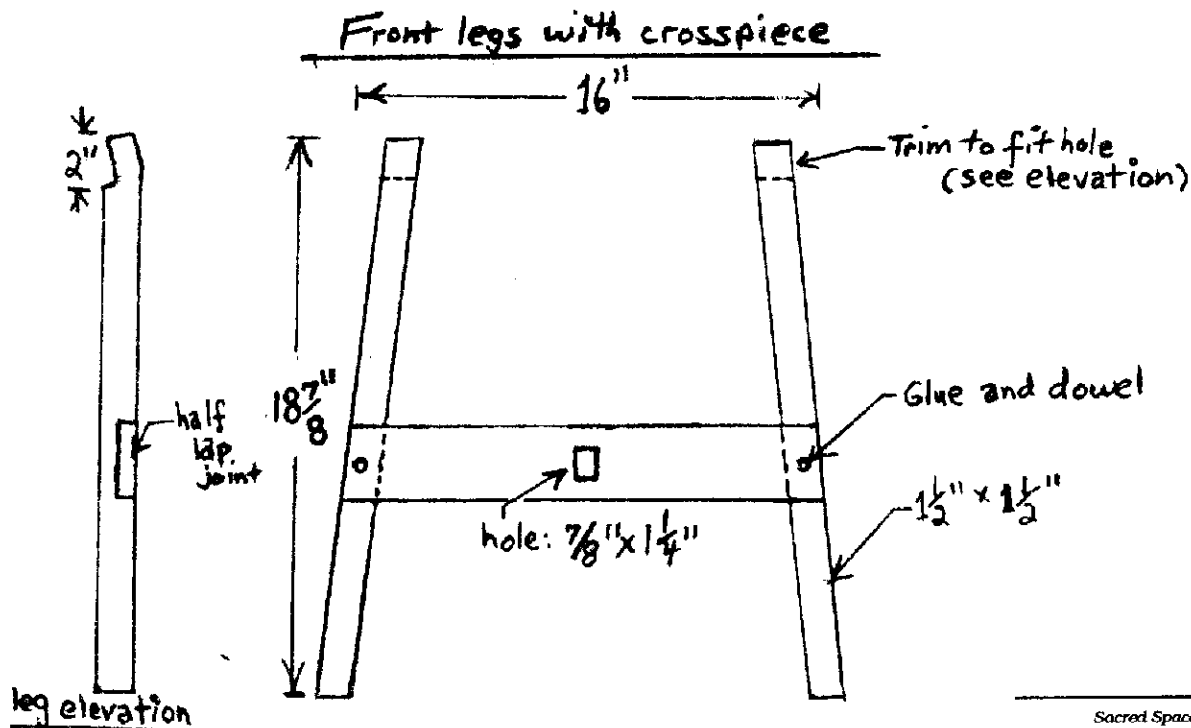
## Step 2: The seat.

Cut the four pieces as shown (go by the measurements, not the scale. I had to downsize the drawing to fit in the newsletter). Mark out the three notching areas on the underside of the front of the seat. Use a router or hand chisel to notch these areas to a depth of 3/4."

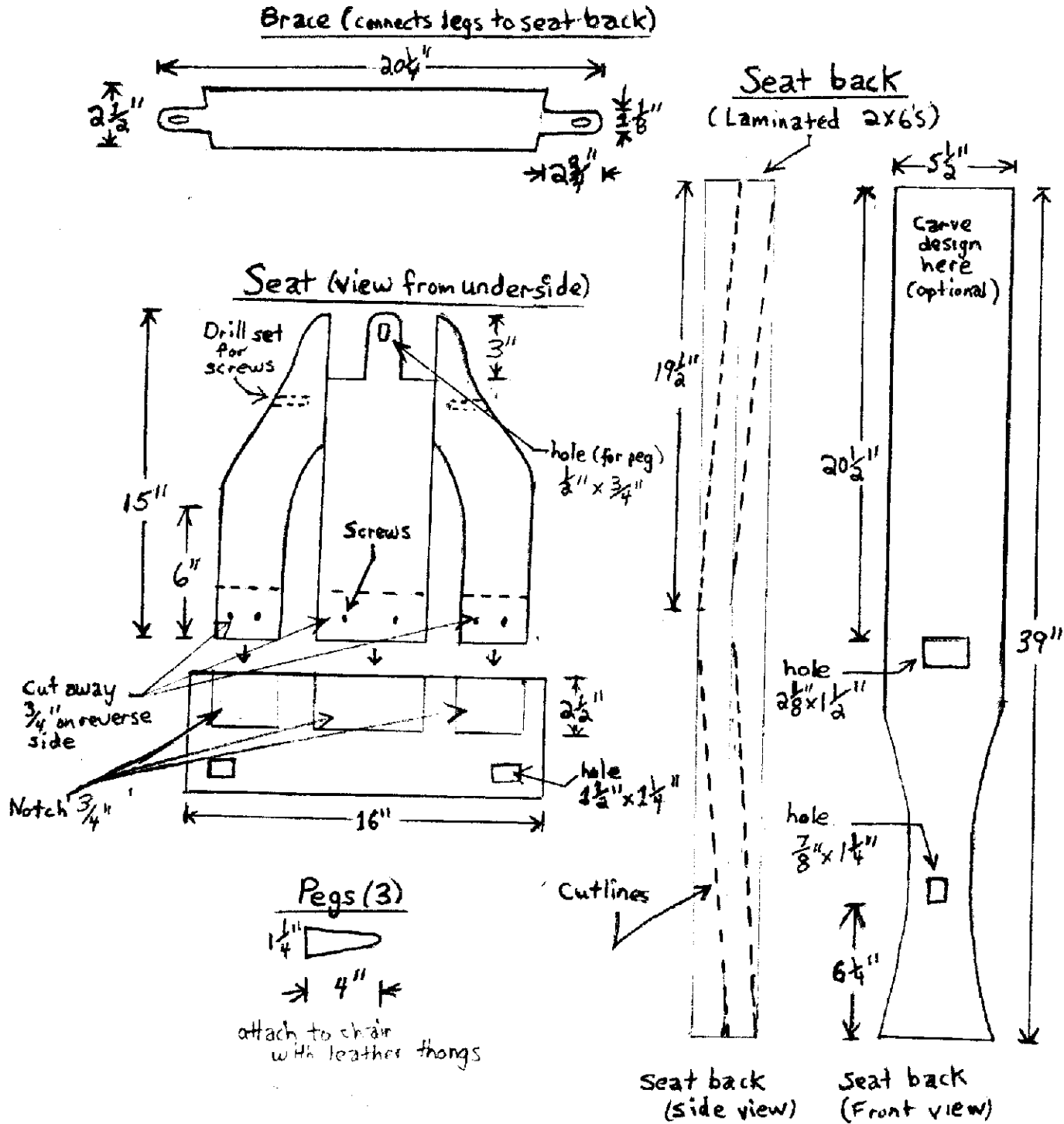
On the TOP side of the other three cut pieces, repeat the process, so that the sections overlap and fit together flush.

Once you have a good fit,

*Continued on page 12*



# Plans:



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## Tuam (cont.)

apply glue, clamps and wood screws (or dowels if you prefer. You will need to drill set holes for the screws that attach the side pieces to the center piece. Now use your drill and jigsaw to cut the three holes shown in the sketch.

### **Step 3: The front legs and brace**

Cut the two 1 1/2" sections to length, and refer to the sketch. To make the legs fit the chair properly and protrude in the front, you will need to backcut them slightly (about 7 degrees). You will also need to trim the left and right side of each leg, to allow for the outward splay. Don't worry. Just use your chisel or rasp, take your time, and *use the force*.

Once you have them about right, leave them in the chair. Hold the crosspiece at the proper height on each leg and mark the legs for notching. Chisel or rout a 3/4" cavity, then glue and dowel the crosspiece to the legs.

Now cut out the brace connecting the legs to the seat back and check the fit.

### **Step 4: Pegs**

Be sure to use a hardwood for the three pegs. You may need to rip a 1" thick piece of hardwood lengthwise. Use a rasp and sandpaper to smooth the edges of the pegs, then attach rawhide laces to their wide end. Tack the other end of the lace to a nearby section of the chair. These laces will prevent you from losing the pegs. Adjust the pegs individually as needed.

Now you're ready to sand, stain and finish the chair as you wish. You may want to try some carving on the seat back. Enjoy!

**(For a good photo of several tuams, see *Ireland's Traditional Crafts*, ed. by David Shaw Smith, (New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984), p. 76.**

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