Left: Photo showing an elm trestle table (English) dated c. 1520.

Source: Macquoid, Percy. *A History of English Furniture* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1919), p. 90.

RECONSTRUCT A "TUDOR" TABLE OF THE YEAR A.D. 1520

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Syr Arlof O'Donovae, Count of Aranmor

Building medieval furniture doesn't get any better than this. When the photo above was taken in 1919, this rugged trestle table, built during Henry VIII's reign, looked as if it might last another 400 years.

In the plans that follow, I have transcribed the original measurements from this table, with the exception of the thickness of the table top, which will be slightly thinner than the original. I made this concession because it's difficult to find planks 2" thick any more, unless you get them roughcut from a saw mill. Lumber used to be cut in true thicknesses, so a 2" x 12" plank really measured 2" x 12", and not 1 1/2" x 11 1/4", like today's commercial lumber.

Note the thickness of the supporting pieces. In 1520, a builder could find single planks wide enough and thick enough to build a massive table like this. In the instructions, I will suggest two ways to duplicate this "weighty" appearance.

Also, the plans suggest a table top length of 9 feet—the length of the original. You may want to make the table shorter, depending on your intended method of transport. However, **be forewarned**: If you decide to save money or labor by making the supporting posts thinner (using a single thickness of 2" x 10"), you will lose the ambience of the piece entirely. It will look more colonial the medieval.

The Supporting Posts

Method 1) Laminated 2"x10"s: To build these massive vertical legs, you will need a double thickness of planks. In addition, the planks must be glued edge to edge.

Cut four 2" x 10" planks to length. Lay them in pairs on a flat surface and apply carpenter's wood glue to the edges. Use wood clamps (available at any hardware store) to squeeze the planks together. Let them dry overnight.

Now glue the two pairs together, to create a double thickness. Clamp, and again allow some drying time.

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You will need a template to help you transfer the scroll work (curves) onto the lumber. Mark a grid in 2" squares on a large piece of paper, then draw the curves as shown in the plans. Cut out the pattern, and use it to transfer the cut lines to the lumber.

Use a jigsaw or bandsaw to cut the supporting posts where you have marked. You will need a long jigsaw blade, and you may need to cut from both sides to get an even cut. Don't worry if it's a bit uneven. You will sand and finish the whole thing later.

Next, cut the holes where the stretchers will pass through the posts (You may find it easier to cut the notches **before** you glue the planks face to face.).

Method 2: Theatrical: For a lightweight version of the supporting posts, make the paper template as described above, but laminate two sets of 2" x 6"s face to face (instead of 2" x 10"s), and don't glue them edge to edge. These supports will have a hollow center.

Get some 1/8" paneling (unfinished side out) or plywood and cut four complete templates of the supporting posts. Sandwich and glue two sets of the 2"x 6"s between two pieces of paneling for each support.

When the glue has dried, use sandpaper (or a belt sander) to taper the paneling at the edge, where it meets the 2" x 6" s. You may want to coat the edge with resin to add smoothness before painting.

Cleats and Pegs

The cleats hold the table top together and give great stability to the frame. Cut them from a 2" x 6" plank as shown, and use a wood rasp to round the edges of the angled sections.

Next, prepare them for the dowels. First, drill pilot holes with a 1/4" bit; then use a 3/8" bit to finish.

The Pegs: Cut eight sections of 3/8" dowel about 5" long to be used as permanent pegs. Cut an additional six **hardwood pegs (see plans)** for use as assembly pegs in the ends of the stretchers. Sand them thoroughly.

The Table Top

Cut the 2" x 12" planks to length, lay them bottom-side-up on a flat surface, clamp and glue edge to edge with carpenter's wood glue. Set the cleats in their proper positions and mark where the outer dowel holes meet the table top. Drill pilot holes 1" deep into the table top for dowels. Drill to 3/8" and insert dowels. When the glue is dry, flip the table over and drill the two inner dowel holes. Insert the pegs.

(Note: Apply clamps or weight to hold the table and cleats in place after inserting the first two pegs. place. Be sure to smear some glue on the pegs, and don't worry if they're too long. You will cut off the excess and sand them down later.)

The Stretchers

Use standard 2" x 4"s to make three of these framing supports. At the end of each stretcher, you need to prepare the 2" x 4" to fit in the holes in the support posts.

Mark the lumber as shown, then use a handsaw (or skillsaw) to cut to the proper depth. Place a wide-bladed wood chisel on the end of the 2" x 4" at about the same depth as the cut. Tap it with a hammer and it should split away the unnecessary wood. Sand and adjust to fit.

Finishing

I prefer a time-worn look for this piece. Remember, medieval tables generally saw hard use. Sand away all sharp edges on the stretchers and posts, and apply a dark stain. You may want to beat some areas with a piece of chain to "distress" the wood. Applying wax to sanded areas has the effect of making sanded areas look like they have been smoothed by constant use. A coat of shellac might look nice as well.

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Material List

Lumber
3 - 10' x 2" x 4"
1 - 6' x 2" x 6"
2 - 10' x 2" x 10"
2 - 10' x 2" x 12"
1 - 48" x 3/4" dowel
(for permanent pegs)
Scrap Hardwood
(for assembly pegs)

Other
Carpenters' yellow wood glue

Plans ("Tudor" table)