

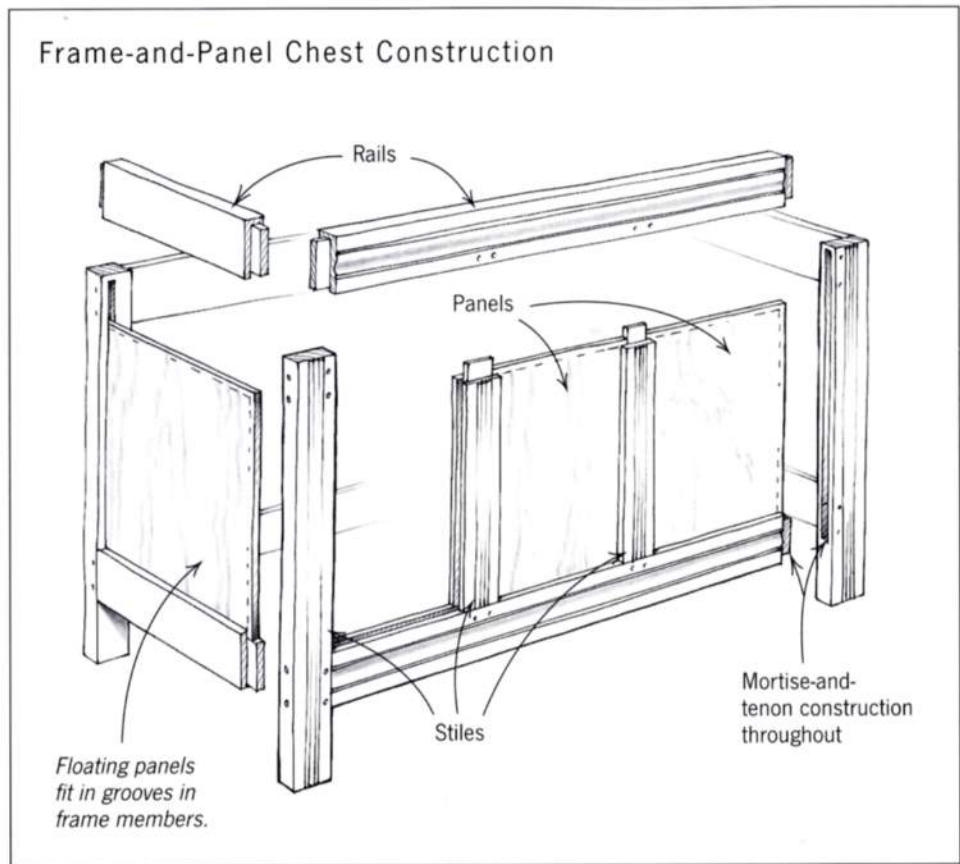
This prosperity extended beyond England itself. By mid-century the recently settled colonies in America were well established and thriving. During the 1630s, 60,000 Englishmen left for America, and 20,000 of them settled in New England. In 1634, colonist William Wood wrote of the need for "an ingenious Carpenter, a cunning Joyner, a handie Cooper, such a one as can make strong ware for the use of the countrie." A popular English song of the day was entitled *Summons to New England*. Skilled craftspeople and people from all walks of life came to America and brought with them their traditions, trades and a desire to carve out a new world.

The Restoration of Charles II

In May 1660, Charles II returned to England from the mainland of Europe. He had left England after the execution of his father, Charles I, in 1649. The execution had been preceded by six years of war, and was followed by eight years of Puritan rule under Oliver Cromwell. The Puritan regimen had brought what was left of the arts to a grinding halt and imposed a strict moral order that reduced daily living to an unending effort to avoid damnation. The restoration of the monarchy came as a great liberation from the burden of Puritan rule and the two years of virtual anarchy that had followed.

With the Restoration came a resurgence of art and culture. The ten years that Charles II had spent in Europe influenced the prevailing court tastes of the period. Two years after taking the throne, Charles married a Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza, whose dowry included the privilege of free trade with Portuguese possessions.

England had been languishing in a cultural depression and stylistic slump for nearly two decades. Its internal strife had kept its attention focused inward, in stark contrast with the commercial exuberance that characterized the first half of the century. With the Restoration, England was



able to embrace some extravagance, and it was suddenly inundated with the most fashionable tastes of the French court of Louis XIV, the Low Countries and the Portuguese and all their trading partners.

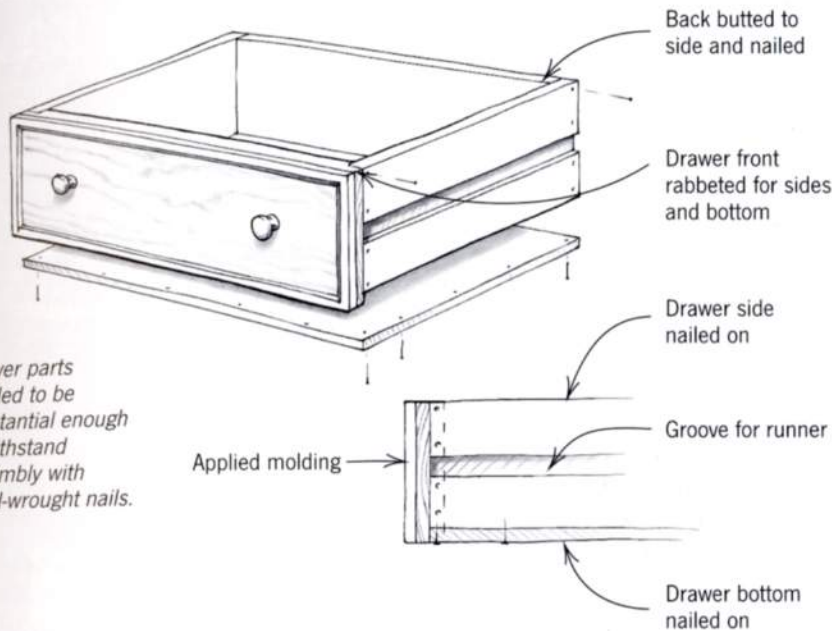
Of these various influences, the Dutch influence was most important. Not only had Holland been the refuge for many loyalists during the years of Cromwell's Protectorate government, but prosperity and power were shifting from Holland to England after the Restoration. Many Dutch craftsmen were following this change by moving to England, and many Dutch furniture makers who chose to remain were exporting their finished work to England. The English furniture-making business was suddenly busy supplying the prosperous and style-conscious English, and it was even busier after the Great Fire of London in 1666, which destroyed two-thirds of the city. London furniture makers were also exporting finished furniture to Norway and Denmark in exchange for high-quality, cabinet-grade wood.

Jacobean Furniture

Before the Restoration of Charles II, English furniture was built much as it had been for centuries. The construction of these pieces was not unlike that of the timber-frame houses of the period, with a framework of straight members, square, or nearly square, in cross section. These members were joined at right angles by mortise-and-tenon joints. Whereas timber-frame houses were covered by a sheathing that became the walls and roof, the flat sides of furniture were panels let into the stiles and rails of the structure (see the drawing above).

This frame-and-panel style as it was manifested in the 17th century has come to be known as Jacobean, from the Latin "of James." James I was king during the first quarter of the century and the predecessor of the ill-fated Charles I. As with most furniture-design trends named after royalty, the style includes many aspects that were introduced outside of the years of James's reign. In this case, what has come to be

17th-Century Drawer Construction



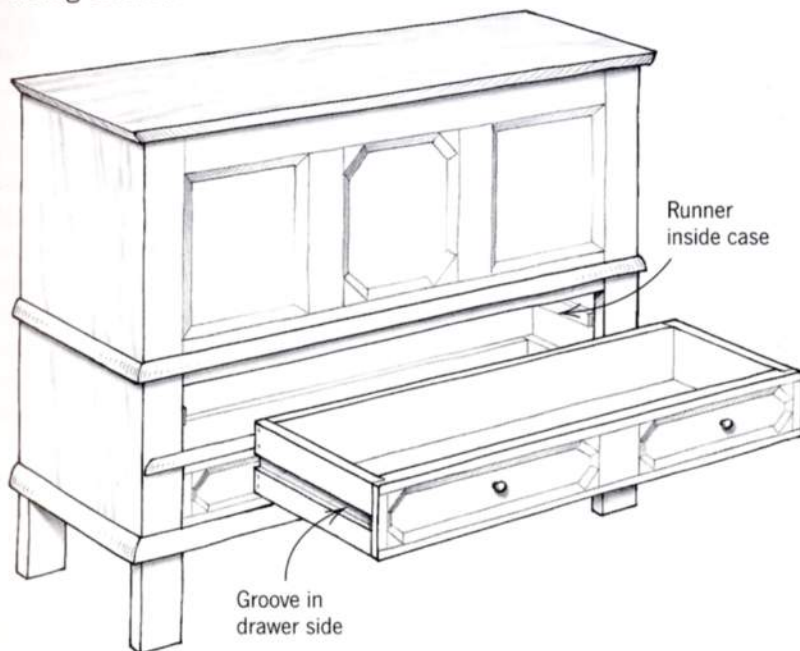
Drawer parts needed to be substantial enough to withstand assembly with hand-wrought nails.

bottoms and backs were often nailed in place, as were hinges and any other hardware that was attached. Until near the end of the century, drawers were also nailed together (see the top drawing at left). The sides were nailed to the front and back, and the bottom was nailed on as well.

The standard method of suspending a drawer in a case was to have a groove cut along the center of the drawer side from front to back, which rode on two runners nailed to the inside of the case. These are known as side-hung drawers (see the bottom drawing at left). To accommodate the grooves and the nails, the drawer parts needed to be thick. Some examples have drawer parts as thick as 1 in. Since the wood of choice was usually oak, the drawers were very heavy.

The mass of these thick drawers, along with that of frame-and-panel construction, did not facilitate the building of tall or delicate furniture. By its very structure, Jacobean furniture was obliged to maintain the low, solid and horizontal format that was indicative of the style.

Side-Hung Drawer



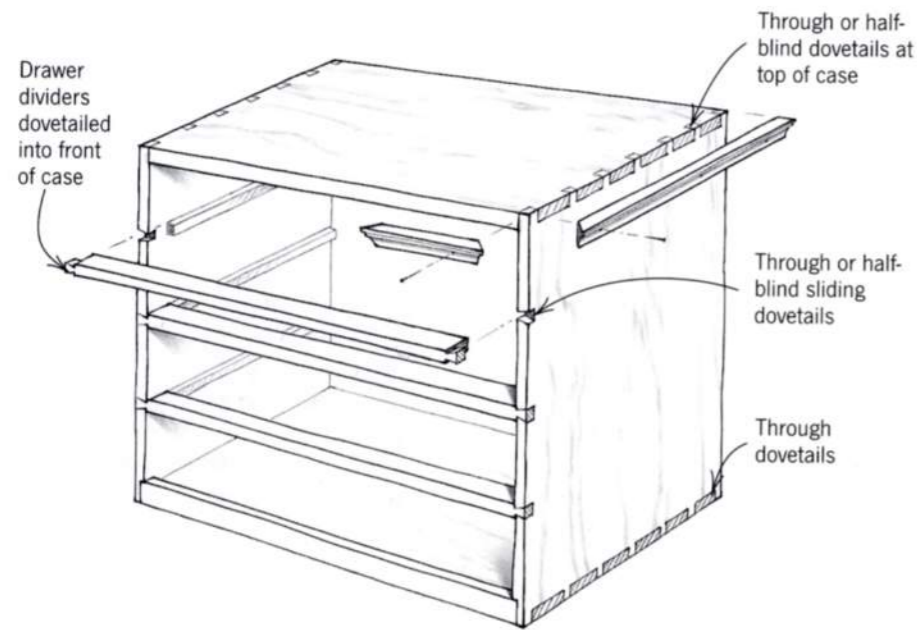
Seventeenth-Century Decoration

The solidity and practicality of early Jacobean pieces did not preclude them from being handsome, decorative and well proportioned. With a simple lathe, the joiner could produce turnings for table legs and stretchers as well as chair and bed parts, and thereby add some decorative embellishment to otherwise utilitarian forms. The flat panels of Jacobean pieces were also well suited to shallow carving, a style of decoration used widely during the period.

TURNINGS

Seventeenth-century turnings are noted for being robust, often bordering on stout, though some turnings of great delicacy and refinement appeared as ornamentation on chairs and bedsteads. Half-turnings were applied to chest and cupboard surfaces as an alternative or addition to carved panels. The distinctive shapes of turnings

Dovetailed Case Construction



On low cases, top-case dovetails can be covered by moldings.

William and Mary Structure

The structure that is the basis for William and Mary pieces revolutionized the way furniture was to be built for the rest of the 18th century and beyond. As discussed earlier, the dovetail joint had rendered the frame-and-panel method of construction obsolete. The lightness of drawers and cases afforded by dovetail joinery allowed for the more vertical forms of the William and Mary period.

CASE CONSTRUCTION

The cases of chests, including the upper half of high chests and desks, shared similar structures. In each of these examples, the cases consisted of two sides, a top and a bottom. The beginnings of these cases resembled a vertical box without a front or back. Rather than being a panel set inside a frame, each of the parts was one wide board or two glued side to side. They were joined to each other at the corners by a row of

dovetail joints, as shown in the drawing above. Since the grain ran along the length of each piece, they all expanded and contracted in unison with changes in humidity. The resulting case was very light, strong and easily built.

Drawer dividers were let into the front of the case with sliding dovetail joints that often extended through the sides to the outside of the case. Runners to support the drawers were nailed to the inside of the case behind the dividers, sometimes in shallow dadoes to hold them in position. The back of the case consisted of thin boards of secondary wood nailed into rabbets in the back of the case. The moldings at the top and bottom were nailed in place on the sides and front. Ball feet, if they were included, were fastened with a round tenon, turned as part of the foot, glued and inserted into a hole drilled into the case bottom.

The use of attached parts, like moldings and feet, seems to reflect an increased acceptance of glue and nails, which were no doubt more readily available and of better quality than they had been in the previous

century. In Jacobean forms, both moldings and feet tended to be built into the structure of the piece, which limited their use as visually important components of the overall design.

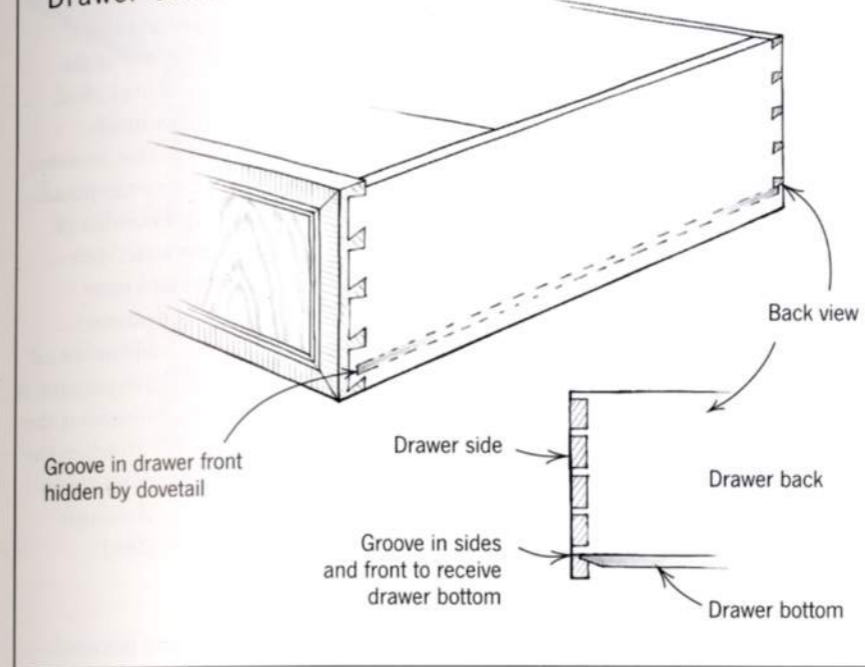
The cases of dressing tables and high-chest bases were structurally similar but differed from those of chest and desk cases. In these cases, the grain ran horizontally on the four pieces that comprised the sides, front and back (see the top drawing on p. 140). The pieces were dovetailed at all four corners, with the row of dovetails running vertically. The bare case was essentially a horizontal box with no top or bottom. Like chest cases, the components expanded and contracted together, allowing the joinery to retain its integrity. For aesthetic reasons, the dovetails were usually half-blind, that is, they did not extend through the case sides. Runners and guides for drawers were mortised into the front and back. As with other case pieces, horizontal and vertical drawer dividers were dovetailed in place.

This light case construction did not provide a convenient place to attach the turned legs used on dressing tables and high chests. Therefore, large blocks were glued inside the corners of the cases, which were then bored to receive the tenons of the turnings. Since the legs were not an integral part of the case, and since William and Mary turnings were very thin in some places, flat stretchers connecting the legs, just above the feet, were structurally necessary.

DRAWER CONSTRUCTION

Drawer construction saw a great evolution during the William and Mary period. At the beginning of the 18th century, drawer components were thick, heavy and joined by a few large dovetails. The drawer bottoms were nailed in place. By 1725, the components were light, thin and elegantly joined by a series of finer dovetails. Drawer bottoms were glued and nailed into a rabbeted drawer, or slid into grooves from the back. Drawer development was a microcosm of construction techniques as

Drawer Construction



a whole. It represented the introduction of a new method of joinery and the evolution that ensued to optimize the details of the new furniture forms.

TABLES AND CHAIRS

Tables and chairs continued to be made with mortise-and-tenon construction, since most were comprised of turned or narrow elements. With the notable exception of dressing tables, table aprons were tenoned into the legs. Like the turnings on case pieces, the legs required stretchers to tie them together. On chairs and tables, these stretchers were usually turned to familiar William and Mary profiles and tenoned into leg mortises.

Decorative Elements

The decorative details of William and Mary designs fall into three main categories: the use of figured veneers, deep carving and dramatic turnings. Figured veneers allowed the cabinetmakers of the period to achieve striking surfaces but necessitated the use of varnishes to protect and enhance the wood. Carving, in the manner of Gibbons, became an important embellishment for chairs.

Turnings were important decorative focal points for many case pieces and offered a simple and effective method of ornament for a variety of other pieces. Moldings, previously integral to frame-and-panel construction, were now added to dovetailed cases, offering a new flexibility in their design and placement.

FIGURED VENEERS

Figured veneers were the primary surface decoration of the period. The use of veneers superseded the Jacobean penchant for intricate but shallow surface carving on the front face of case pieces. The very word "veneer" has become a pejorative term from its use in the late 19th and 20th centuries. It implies a thin layer of high-quality material over a base of inferior quality, and it earned a poor connotation when it was used for that purpose.



HIGH CHEST OF DRAWERS. NEW ENGLAND. PROBABLY MASSACHUSETTS. 1700-1725.

The highly figured veneer of this piece is its most important decorative element. To extend the effect, the cabinetmaker simulated the figured pattern with paint on the turned legs of the base. (COURTESY WINTERTHUR MUSEUM)

