

## Slab Mania by Andrew Davis February, 2019

I don't know where working with slabs fit in to the woodworking hierarchy or status ladder, but I built my first slab piece of furniture when I got started in woodworking by building a large desk (photo) from walnut slabs found on craigslist. Looking at the desk today, I would say it is functional, but a bit clunky; I could have made the base more interesting. I've also built a few benches in the interim, including one from ambrosia maple found at a yard sale. This project was actually too easy because the slab had been finished by the seller. My creative work was involved in designing an original base for the bench (dowelled), a challenge I brought up at two Monday night FIG meetings. I've since built a bench from walnut (shown) and one from a large pine slab, both of which were from different Craigslist listings. I had about 12 inches left over from the walnut slab and that made a nice cutting board. I am currently working on a coffee table made from two maple slabs more or less bookmatched.

I never thought about live edge slabs much until I began to see so many advertisements for slab lumber. Is this a new trend – I'm not sure but I would guess yes. The coup de gras on my query is the recent announcement by Woodpeckers of their slab flattening mill, slick but pricey (\$999). There must be demand for slab flattening tools. The one I have is homemade, based on a FWW article by Nick Offerman. I've seen versions of his router-based flattening mill in several EMGW and other workshops. Turned out for me that building my own device was a little more tricky than first thought, but I made it work in the end.



So, after having built a few slab products, here are my takeaways.

- A slab is a slab, but not all slabs are interesting. Look for one that has an interesting shape. Of course, what is "interesting" and usable will depend on what you are building.
- Some slabs are wide enough to serve as a one-piece top – no panel layup needed. Saves time.
- Most of the time, if you are looking for a top that is of dimensions A x B, a board layup will cost less than a slab, but not always.

- If you are gluing up two slabs (see desk photo) clamping can be tricky since you don't want to damage the live edge.
- The slabs for my current project (maple coffee table) are showing multiple hairline cracks and I'm not sure what I can do about this; they don't seem big enough to warrant butterflies, but maybe trouble lies ahead. Need to be careful when selecting a slab for purchase.
- The edges can be beautiful (see the ambrosia photo) but you need to remove all the bark and sand carefully.