The Practical Bench

By Roberta Lavadour

This summer, my husband and I had a new studio raised on our property just east of Pendleton, Oregon. I was determined to create a workspace that would be highly functional and organized and when it came to a workbench, it was about creating the proper balance between uncluttered flat space and easy access to tools.

My work style can best be described as chaotic. There are always a dozen projects in progress, and I like it that way. What I've concluded is that instead of trying to change my nature, I just need to create a structure within which I can function most effectively.

Enter the pegboard. My father, as many dads of the day did, had them around the garage and even spray-painted outlines of his tools on them to leave no question as to where things went. I realize now it wasn't because he was organized, it was because he was so unorganized he had to literally had to draw himself a picture of where to put things back. Today the home improvement craze has elevated the pegboard from dumpy garage storage to trendy home decor.

But the problem with installing a wall-mounted pegboard behind a deep workspace, one that can accommodate large papers, stacks of edition parts and various binding accessories, is that you can't quite reach the needed tool without executing that 'just beyond your grasp' stretch which, when combined with the slightest twist, can lead to one of those scary popping noises, followed by searing pain.

The answer to this dilemma came as I browsed the thrift store. An old computer desk had been disassembled and the bracket assembly that once allowed the keyboard tray to be stowed underneath or pulled out and up for use was the only part left. This proved to be the perfect solution.

First, a 2x2" wood frame with two center supports was built and attached to the back of a 2' x 4' foot pegboard with screws and wood glue, then two short sections of 2x2 were attached to the bottom of the frame. The heavy springs were removed from the brackets, which were then mounted in the opposite orientation from their original use. The side that was originally mounted to the desk was attached to the pegboard frame and the side that was originally mounted to the keyboard shelf was attached to the wall with long screws sunk into the studs.

When the board is in the "up" position, tools can easily be accessed when standing in front of the bench. The two short sections of 2x2 function as handles, allowing the board to be pulled out and down to a position just behind my bench hook (a slight nudge towards the wall releases the stops). The 2x2s also provide footing that keeps the board at the right height and keeps the full weight of the board from pulling on the wall attachment. The unique movement of the brackets allows the board to clear the items at the back of the workbench, in this case a "box-box" and paper dispenser.
Obtaining the brackets can be a bit of a challenge. I've seen similar hardware used on other items, namely under the counter knife holders and shelves, but those from computer desks seem to be the most easily adapted for this project. But unless you're going to be there anyway, time spent perusing thrift stores in search of obscure items may render any in-studio time-savings moot. Woodworker's Hardware (<http://www.wwhardware.com/>) offers similar brackets for a Swing-Up Under-Drawer Shelf under the product number WM16 for $34 plus shipping.

A quick trip to the hardware store can arm you with a range of helpful pegboard accessories, from jars for adhesive to trays for screw-punch bits to racks for reference books. Other quick tricks can further adapt the storage area for binding tools. A small square of Styrofoam can be covered with fabric and pushed over a two-pronged hook for storing needles. Wine corks neatly and snugly fit between the openings of screwdriver racks for storing awls.

After working with this system for the past several weeks, I'm left wondering what I ever did without it.

Robertia Lavadour lives and works in eastern Oregon, near the foothills of the Blue Mountains. She credits the time she spent playing alone outside as a kid - the exploration that emerged after being truly bored - with developing the rampant curiosity that marks her work today. She dabbled in making books in high school and as a young adult, then in 1997 began pursuing book arts full time. She has worked with many fine book artists practitioners in workshop settings over the years and has maintained a steady schedule of self-directed independent study. She operates a private studio, Mission Creek Press (<http://www.missioncreekpress.com/>) where she publishes her own artist's books and takes on a small number of custom binding and papermaking clients. Robertia is currently newsletter editor for the Northwest Chapter of the Guild of Book Workers.

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