Shop Notes

Bookbinder's Press

Called a standing press and usually of cast iron and steel, presses like this are widely used in hand binding and plant collecting. They are still made, and also turn up in garage and estate sales, but are simple enough that it is easy to make a substitute.

The main frame is laminated from three layers of hardwood, glued and bolted together.

Small "wings" to support the lower platen are secured to the sides of the main frame with glue and screws.

This design uses veneer press screws commonly available from mail-order suppliers. The dimensions were set by what was in the scrap bin and the 12 inch press screws I had on hand. The press could as easily be built with a single press screw, but I felt the double screws would spread the pressure a bit more evenly. I was aiming for a capacity of 11X14 inches, as that covered about 95 percent of my needs and wouldn't pose much of a storage problem.

The main load-bearing part of the press is a rectangular frame laminated from three layers of hardwood. A small frame is attached to either side of this larger piece to support the lower platen. This platen is a layer of edge-glued hardwood. The upper platen is simply a cross-laminated wood slab. I chose not to attach it to the press screws because it would be difficult to coordinate two screws when opening and closing the press, and also because I find it awkward to place things between the platens with the upper one in the way. With this design it is a simple matter to assemble a stack of work on the lower platen, set the upper platen in place, and apply pressure.

Assembly is straightforward. I found it easiest to build the main frame by first creating three pocket-screw secured frames. Dry fit the three layers, clamp securely, and drill four tightly-fitting holes through the layers for the carriage bolts. Disassemble, glue, and reassemble using the carriage bolts as registration pins. Snug tight with washers and nuts, then clamp securely until the glue has set. Bore the holes for the press screws.

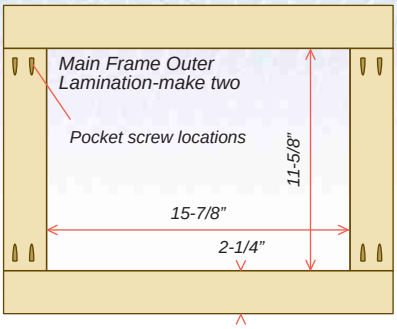
The lower platen supports are built separately and attached to the main frame with glue and screws. The lower platen is cut to size, then the edges are softened with a router and roundover bit, or planed and sanded. The platen is secured to the supports with glue and pocket screws from below. The upper platen is laminated from two layers of 3/4" stock set at right angles to each other. Its edges are also rounded over slightly.

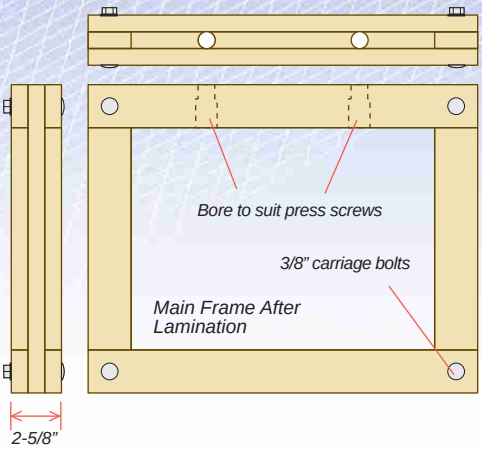
This press is finished with three applications of a homemade wiping varnish. Any durable finish that produces a hard, dry surface will do. When it has cured, the only task remaining is to secure the press screws in their openings.

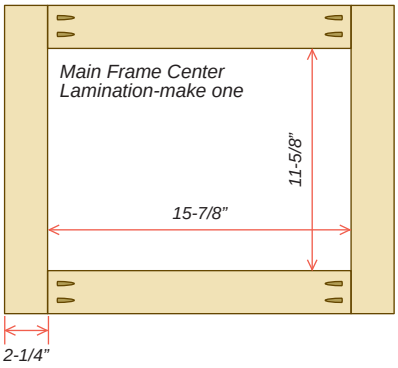
It is a good idea to make some pressboards to go along with the press. Pressboards isolate the platens from any glue leakage and spread the pressure out over different size pieces. If the press will only be used for a single project at a time, then these can be quite thin. One of the better materials is two layers of plastic countertop laminate glued together back to back with contact cement and

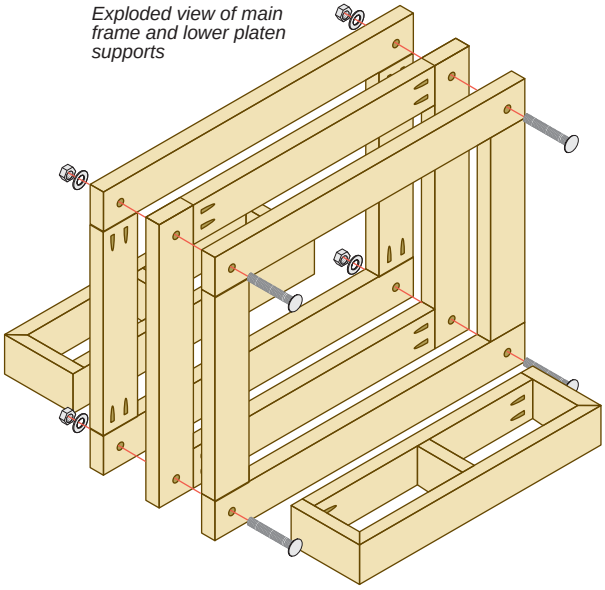
trimmed to match the upper platen. For thicker press board, I glue a layer of hardboard to both sides of a piece of 1/2 inch plywood. Rather than cutting the pieces to an exact fit beforehand, I prefer to laminate oversized pieces, then cut to final size on a tablesaw. The edges are beveled slightly and sanded smooth. Wood and hardboard pressboards should be sealed with two coats of varnish. The first is varnish thinned about 25%. After this had dried it is sanded smooth with fine sandpaper, then varnished again. When dried, treat the faces with a good paste wax, applied sparingly and well buffed. Excess wax residue as well as paste waxes containing silicone should be avoided, as they will transfer to the work.

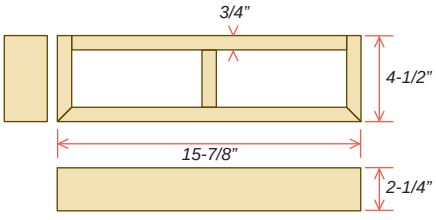
The lower platen is slightly larger than the platform it rests upon and is notched to fit around the main frame. It is secured with glue and pocket screws from below.











Lower Platen Support-make two