

Music of a Fluted Cabinet

BY TIMOTHY COLEMAN

The beginning is still clear to me. A persistent image of concave shapes on a convex cabinet. A bicycle ride with my wife, trying to describe this idea. Needing my hands to explain, letting go of the handlebars, veering off the road.

Weeks later, with winter setting in, I hibernate and search for a starting point. I try a full-size mock-up in cardboard. A friend visits. He gives me a funny look and says it looks like a coal-burning stove. My heart sinks, but I say, "You can't see inside my head." I seldom work from detailed drawings, choosing instead to work full scale, feeling my way through the piece. This is not always a fluid process.

Playing the flute. Convex doors composed of concave flutes of varying widths gave Coleman just the tone he wanted in his white oak and maple cabinet.



Coved and coopered. Coleman handplaned the solid maple upper door. The white oak lower doors are veneered coopered panels.



Defining details. Subtle scallops in the lower edge of the waist molding reflect the graduated curves of the doors below.

I know that the door on the upper cabinet is critical to the piece. It entices me with its handcut flutes. It entices me with its handcut flutes. I have made a special handplane for this work, but I resist the urge to dive right in. I want to bring the upper and lower cabinets along together to keep the whole piece unified. I cut up veneer for the lower doors (see *How They Did It*, p. 76). How many panels—four, five, six, seven? I make the sides, leave them long, stand things up, just held together with tape, balancing, precarious.

For several weeks the cabinet is untamed, a wild horse trying to flee the paddock. I carefully lay out a curve only to have it look exaggerated and out of proportion. Always I am trying to rein it in, to bring it to a point of balance between opposing forces—concave and convex, straight lines and curving lines, tension and repose.

Once finished, the cabinet inspires a range of reactions. One person is re-

minded of a school girl in a pleated uniform. Some see it as light and breezy, ready to waltz across the room; to others it is as solid and rooted as a marble column. To me it is winter in my first independent studio, up to my knees in shavings from the fluted door. It is going home late in the day exhausted, waking early and eager. It is a time when I am bound so lightly to my work that days go by unnoticed. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

DIMENSIONS

23½ in. wide, 10½ in. deep and 55 in. high.

MATERIALS

White oak and maple.

FINISH

Shellac.