

USER REPORT

Gifkins 'Hand Cut' Dovetail Templates

by Neil Scobie

Roger Gifkins, the designer and manufacturer of the highly successful Gifkins Dovetail Jig, has released new upgrades to accompany his dovetail jig. These consist of two new templates to produce smaller more delicate joints, featuring narrower pins, which give a more 'hand cut' dovetail look (Photo.1).

The H10 template has 18mm pin spacings, and the H20 template has 26mm pin spacings. Both these templates are used with new cutters designed specifically for their purpose, and manufactured by the renowned Australian router bit manufacturer, Carb-I-Tool. The dovetail cutter has a catalogue number of TGHD12 and the straight cutter is TGHS12.

With the "Handcut" templates, you can dovetail timber up to 10mm in thickness and as thin as 2mm. I have been using the Gifkins Dovetail jig with the A and B templates for a number of years, so I am very familiar with the process of cutting dovetails. My new 'H' templates arrived with an extra jig body, so it was only a matter of screwing the H10 template in place on the bottom of the jig body and it was ready to test.

The templates have the same locating holes that are common to all the Gifkins templates, so it is easy to change from

one to another. If you are using the one jig body and swapping templates, you will need to place a new MDF packing board to suit the cutters being used. If you can afford it, it is well worth buying the extra jig body to save set up time.

I thickened some Jarrah and Silver Ash to 9.5mm and 6mm thick to make the test cuts. These timbers were chosen because they would contrast well. I then proceeded to cut dovetails with the H10 template on both thicknesses of timber.

The set up is exactly the same as for using the 'A' or 'B' templates. You use the fingers with the straight slots in conjunction with the TGHD12 dovetail cutter to cut the dovetails (Photo.2), firstly setting the height of the cutter slightly higher than the thickness of the timber. You can position your timber centrally on the jig fingers so that you have either half or full pins on the edges of your timber. Once you have positioned the timber, slide the stop up to the edge of the timber and lock it in place. You may notice in the photos of the jig that I have two stops, one located on each end of the jig. The second stop can be purchased as an optional extra — it saves lots of set up time.

After cutting the dovetails on the

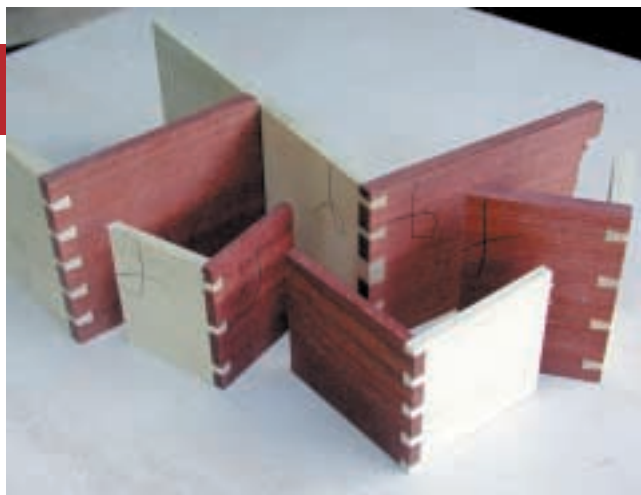


Photo.1: Some sample dovetails cut with the new templates.

9.5mm thick timber, I then swapped cutters, placing the straight TGHS12 cutter in the router to cut the pins. The pins have to be cut with the straight cutter and the other side of the jig, which has the tapered fingers.

As with all new jigs, it is important to make a trial cut to check how tight the joint is. I found that I had to remove two paper shims, but I won't have to adjust the shims again until I get the cutters sharpened, somewhere down the track.

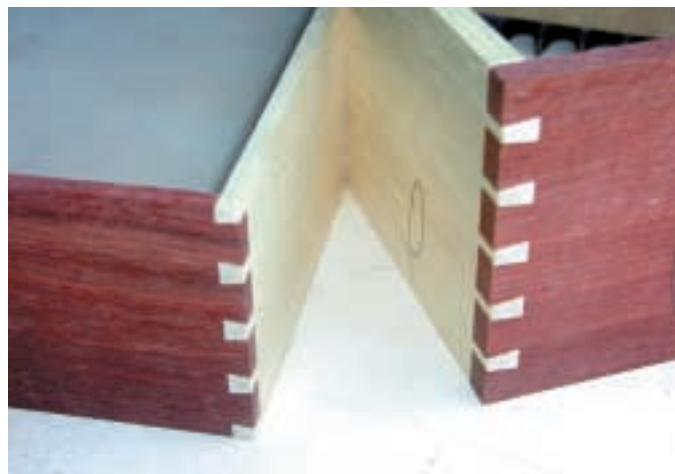
As I expected, the finished joints were absolutely perfect with no gaps, and the edges lined up exactly. I proceeded to cut a dovetail joint on the 6mm thick timber using the same process as mentioned above, and it, too, was faultless (Photo.3). You do need to remember to change the height of the cutters when swapping to different thickness timbers.

Then I swapped templates and placed the H20 on the jig and completed trial cuts on both thicknesses of timber. The process was exactly the same,

Photo.2: Cutting dovetails with the H10 template.



Photo.3: Some sample dovetails cut with the H10 template.



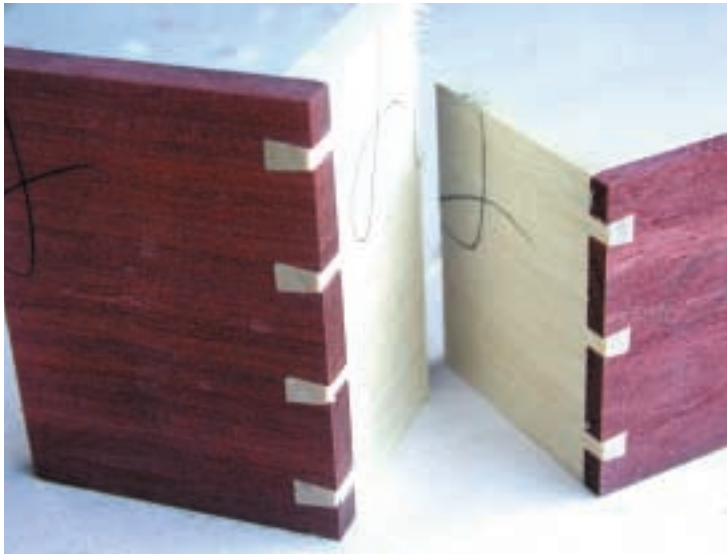


Photo.5: The accessory spacers used to create the variable spacing between pins with the new templates.

Photo.4: Some sample dovetails cut with the H20 template. Note the extra spacing between pins.

the only difference being the width of the spaces between the dovetails (Photo.4). The space between the pins is 20mm for the H20 template and 12mm for the H10 template, while the pins remain at 6mm for both the H10 and H20 templates.

The templates give the look of hand-cut dovetails with the narrower pins and larger gaps between them. Both will have their use in my workshop, particularly in drawer construction. I am quite happy to use 10mm thick drawer sides and add a drawer slip to provide the extra bearing surface. I can also see enormous potential in making smaller jewel boxes, as the smaller dovetails will look much more classy and professional.

The second upgrade released for use in conjunction with the Gifkins dovetail jig is a set of spacers which allow variable spaced dovetails to be cut. The four spacers are made from phenolic resin and measure 2mm, 3mm, 4mm, 5mm and 8mm in thickness (Photo.5). They have been shaped to go over the jig

body next to the stop (Photo.6). The purpose of these spacers is to allow you to cut uneven spaced dovetails where you can have either wider spaced pins in the middle of the joint, or a wider space between the pins, depending on how you set up your timber on the jig.

This option is excellent for when you want to make a box and saw it in half on the saw bench, as you can set the jig up so that you will have a half pin on either side of the top and bottom half of the box. I should mention that the spacer set can be used with any of the Gifkins Jig templates. I only tested them with the H10 template and they worked extremely well (Photo.7).

As with all the Gifkins Dovetail Jigs and upgrades, Roger supplies a set of easy-to-follow clear and concise instructions. I followed them and had no problems cutting a joint with a wider pin in the middle.

You do not have to have the wider pin or pin space in the middle. You can

vary all the spaces if you want to. I will not go through the whole process of using the spacers, suffice to say they work very well and give you lots of options.

The upgrade kits are available from Roger and Jenny Gifkins, 619 Belmore River Road, Via Kempsey NSW 2440, Ph: 02 65 674313, Fax: 02 65 674681, e-mail gifkins@midcoast.com.au, and web site, www.gifkins.com.au. The "Handcut" upgrade is \$164 for one template and one pair of cutters or \$239 for both templates and one pair of cutters. The variable space upgrade is \$29 including instructions. These prices include GST.

I have no hesitation in recommending these upgrades to the Gifkins Dovetail Jig, as I know they are precision made and backed up with a great set of instructions and warranty (although I point out that the small dovetail cutter is not covered for breakage, because of its size). W

Photo.6: Cutting uneven spaces.



Photo.7: A sample of dovetails cut using uneven spacing — ideal for many uses including cutting boxes into top and bottom halves.

