

Gifkins Deluxe Dovetail Jig

£235.00 ☎ **01697 746698**

Most dovetail jigs generally suffer from one of two faults. Either they cut only basic lapped joints that are very obviously machine-made, or, if they're capable of through dovetails, they produce uniform tail and pin spacings that don't retain the elegance of a hand-cut joint. The Leigh and Katie jigs are perhaps the only exceptions to the latter, if we discount the Woodrat which works in an entirely different way. And virtually all these jigs are used with a hand-held router.

The new Australian Gifkins jig changes all that. On the one hand it is designed for use with a router table, with jig and attached timber passed over the cutter rather than vice versa – more of this later. On the other, it enables you to cut slender joints with a traditional wide tail and narrow pin design. It also allows variable spacings, if required, for an even more authentic look, and to accommodate differing widths of timber, often a problem with constrained templates. A table in the manual denotes ideal board widths for individual templates (there are six available). If a component falls between a set of figures, a packer to take it to the next size can be used, which cuts a wider tail within the layout. This can be incorporated to good effect as a design feature or within a box lid, for example, where allowing for a saw kerf line reduces the tails to uniform sizes once it's cut through.

The actual pin and tail template which forms the business end of the jig looks similar to the simplistic DIY Keller jig (GW 86), but the Gifkins comes as a complete kit with a clamping/backing board and setting stop, plus both pin and tail cutters. Each template (and clamping board) is made from 13mm thick Tufnol-type material. Replaceable MDF backing boards prevent breakout while machining.

Unlike most jigs, the Gifkins is used on a router table, with the template bearing on the surface and the work standing up. Using a router hand-held can sometimes be awkward, with any slight rocking in the progress through a cut creating a bad joint. Inverting the whole procedure minimises

this problem, the 130x400mm template fingers becoming the base area on which the work travels through the cutter. The jig is designed for boxes and smaller work, but will manage components up to 310mm wide and 1000mm long. Anything longer may become unstable, resulting in both poor joints and possible template damage.

A small box in maple and sapele took me no more than five minutes to cut the joints once the stock was sized. That included changing the bits. Contrasting timbers show off the accurate joints produced to stunning

effect. Tails and pins are quickly cut, and a complete set of drawers can be made in no time. Results should be perfect every time so long as initial preparation is accurate. Angled joints for splayed sides can also be made. Standard dovetails are foolproof, and the variable-spaced ones can be achieved easily as long as you are methodical in your approach.

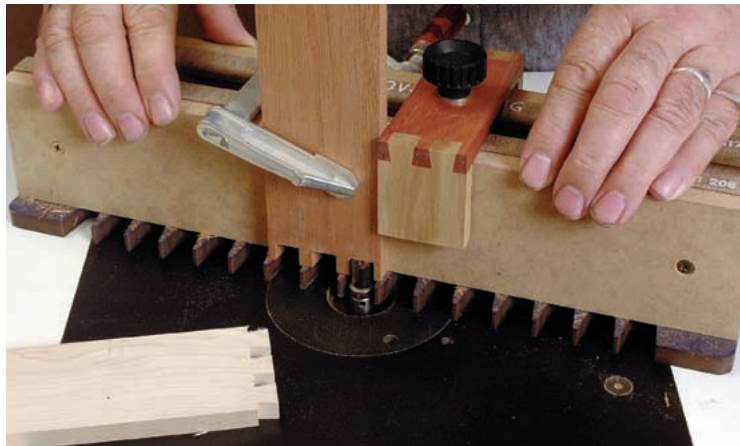
Set-up is blindingly simple. The tapered side is used with the straight cutter to cut the pins, and the straight one with the dovetail bit for the tails. A component is offered up to its appropriate set of teeth to give a

symmetrical overhang at either end for the half-pin profiles (packers may be needed here). A sliding stop is brought alongside one edge and clamped off. You set the cutters to the thickness of the work, using the actual components as depth gauges. Unlike normal jigs, there is no need for pinpoint accuracy, as long as the bit is either flush or slightly above the thickness, and the bearing on the bit projects at least 3mm through the table.

With the first half of the joints made, you change cutters and flip the jig round. Place the second piece of the joint on the opposite side of the jig, using the same edge of the stop as the reference face. A perfect joint should result, but adjustments can be made to the factory settings by slipping thin cardboard shims (10 supplied) between the face of the jig block and the replaceable facings. Each shim makes as little as 0.08mm of adjustment, so really fine tuning is easy. I found joints absolutely perfect with the jig straight from the box.

The sliding stop gives an idea of what to expect from this jig. It's made from dovetailed contrasting timbers. Joints are beautiful, and absolutely perfect.

The Gifkins jig is available in standard format with one template of your choice (six are available) and two cutters for £157. There are options for different template profiles for bigger or smaller pin spacings and timber thicknesses. Timber from 10 to 22mm thick can be cut dependent on the jig selected. Cost for a single template and cutter set isn't too bad, but rises steeply for luxury that additional templates offer. Six templates and cutters will set you back £445... However, this jig should last a lifetime if looked after, and is a sound investment for the serious woodworker wanting machine-cut efficiency with the elegance of hand-cut dovetails.



The workpiece is cramped to the template, with sliding stop tight alongside (top).

Gifkins templates offer spacings closer to traditional hand-cut dovetails than most other jigs (centre).

Joints can be made quickly and accurately (bottom). There are various upgrade and template options. P+P is £13 for the Deluxe jig

GW verdict

- ➕ Accurate, foolproof joints
- ➖ No half blind dovetail option

Value for money
Performance

