

# Enhance Any Room With a Window Seat

A simple design, jazzed up with molding, creates a cozy nook for less than \$200

BY GARY STRIEGLER

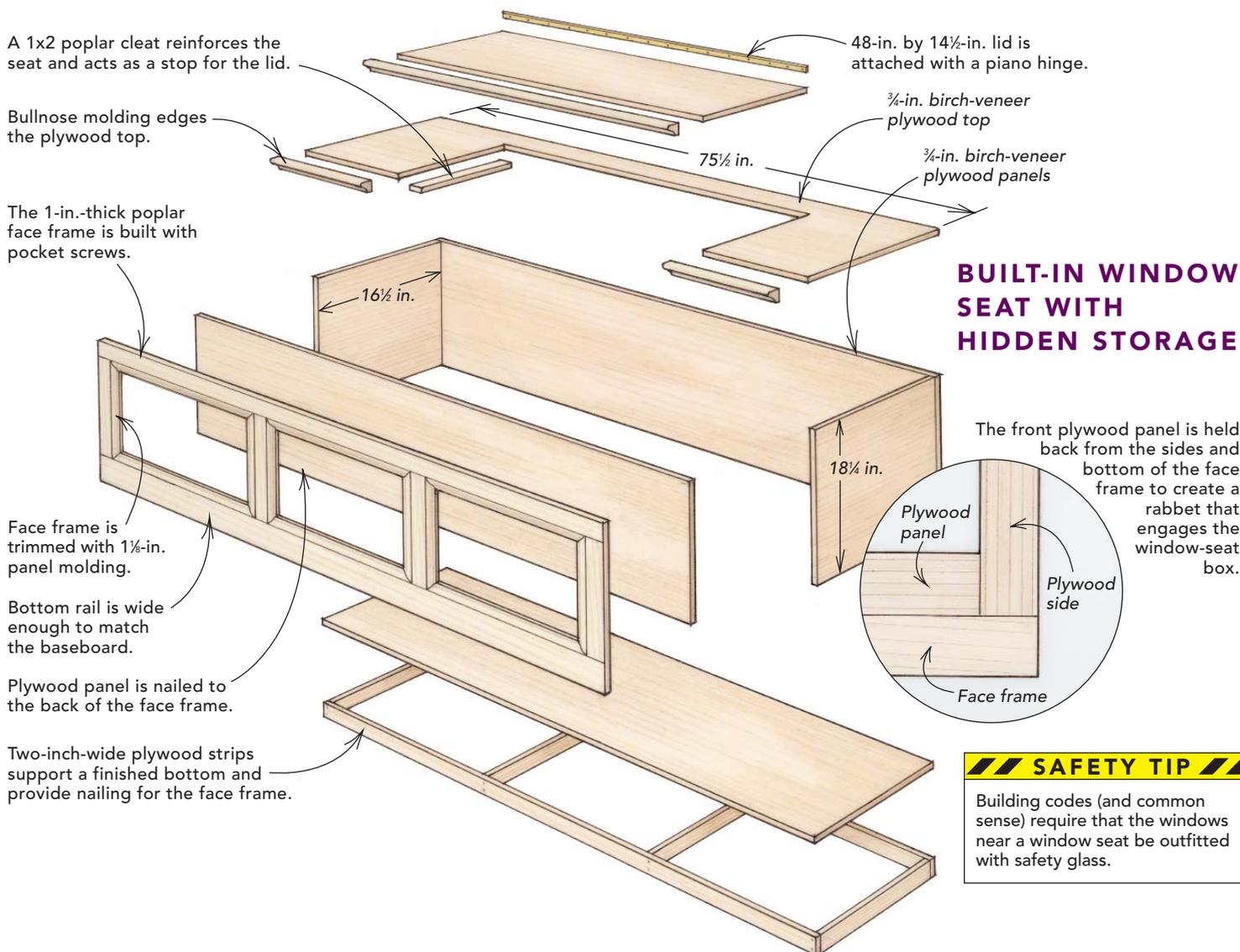
**L**ike a hammock strung between two trees or a porch swing hanging from chains, a window seat is appealing well beyond its usefulness. More than just a place to sit, it represents the promise of leisure. If you have a window seat, you also might have the time to sit there and read.

I include a window seat in most of the homes that I build. It adds a cozy focal point to a room, plus useful storage beneath the hinged lid. Of course, you can forgo the operable lid for cabinet-style doors or even drawers built into the face frame to gain access to the inside of the seat. That's a much more involved process. I prefer the traditional lid because it's faster and easier, and because it satisfies people's expectations.

The simple design shown here took me an afternoon to build and used less than \$200 worth of materials. □

Gary Striegler is a custom-home builder in Fayetteville, Ark. Photos by James Kidd, except where noted.





## BUILD THE BOX IN PLACE

Because the window seat is built in place and attaches to the walls, the construction is fast without any special joinery. The plywood panels are far more resilient than dry-wall, and they give the interior a finished look while acting as support for the top. A plywood floor hides any gaps under the side panels.



**Secure the plywood panels to the studs** with 15-ga. 2 1/2-in. finishing nails, or 8ds if you're hand-nailing. The side panels are held back 3/4 in. so that the face frame will be flush with the wall.



**The floor doesn't need to be level.** A frame for the window seat's floor is constructed of 2-in.-wide plywood strips and is nailed to the side and back panels.

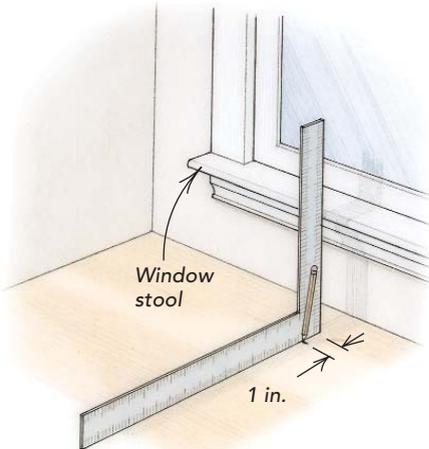
## GETTING THE LID JUST RIGHT



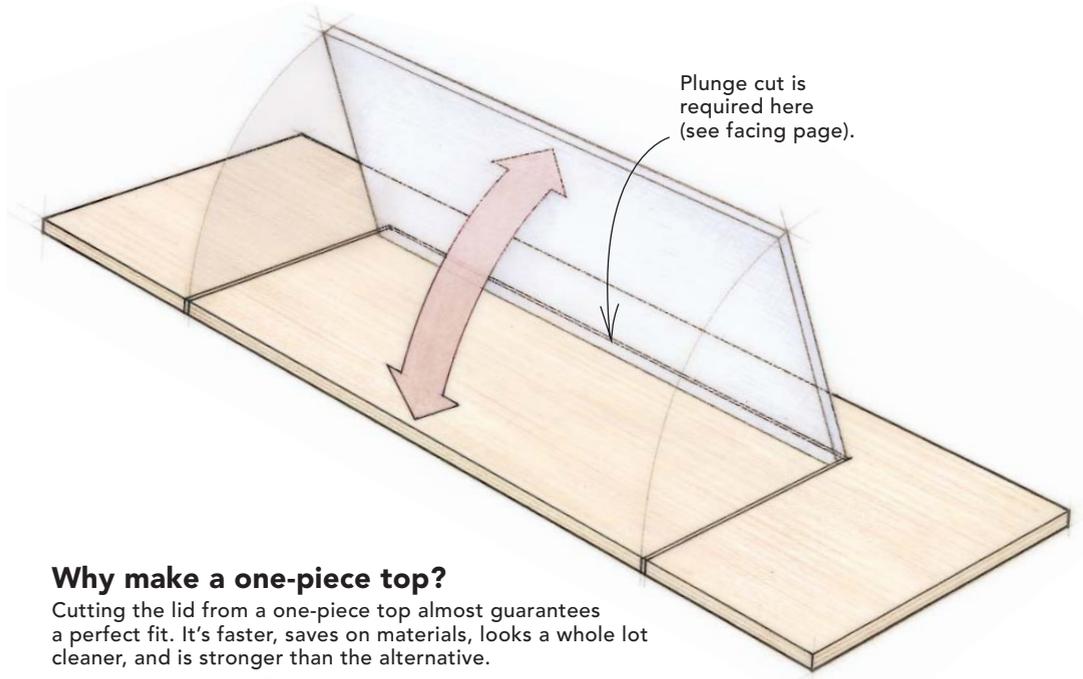
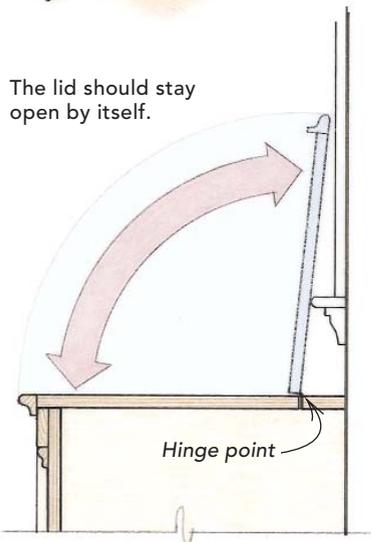
If the alcove is square, making the top and its hinged lid from one piece of plywood is the most efficient approach but requires a plunge cut along the hinged edge, which is tricky to do. A plunge cut can be made with a tablesaw or with a circular saw, which takes a little more time and skill. If the alcove is out of square, it will be tough to fit a one-piece top without scarring the drywall. In that case, a four-piece top (bottom drawing) is the best bet.

### First, find the hinge point

Ideally, you'll want a large lid that tilts back and stays open but doesn't rest on the window glass. Dry-fit the top and place a framing square so that the tongue (short leg) rests against the window's stool. Measure forward about 1 in.; this is where you'll hinge the lid.

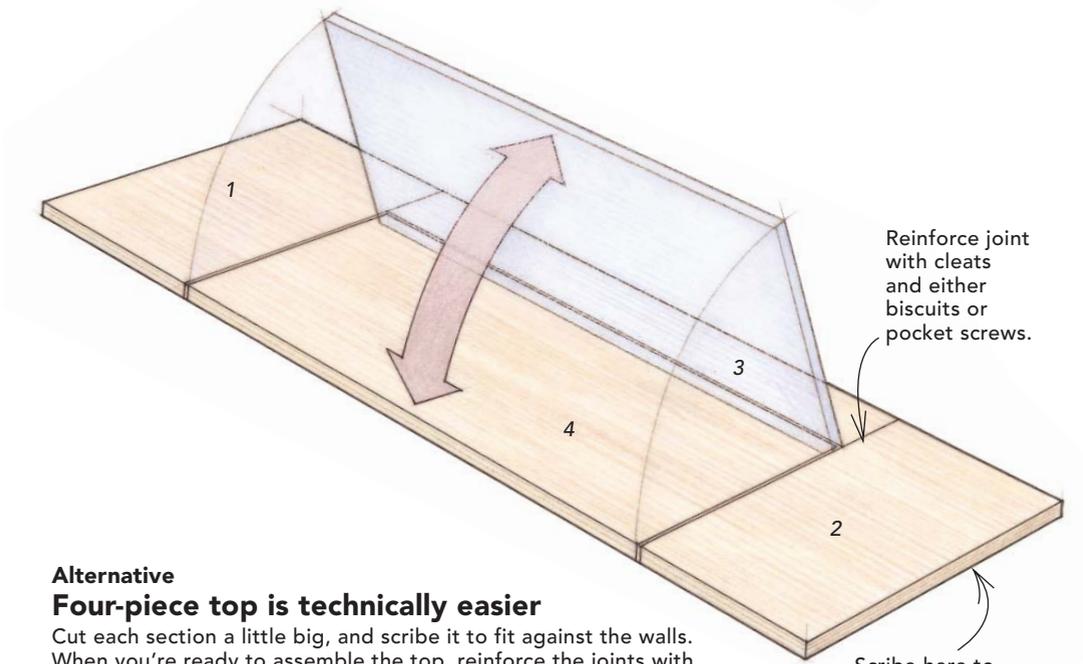


The lid should stay open by itself.



### Why make a one-piece top?

Cutting the lid from a one-piece top almost guarantees a perfect fit. It's faster, saves on materials, looks a whole lot cleaner, and is stronger than the alternative.



### Alternative Four-piece top is technically easier

Cut each section a little big, and scribe it to fit against the walls. When you're ready to assemble the top, reinforce the joints with cleats. It's important that the opening is square so that the lid opens and closes cleanly.

## Two ways to plunge-cut

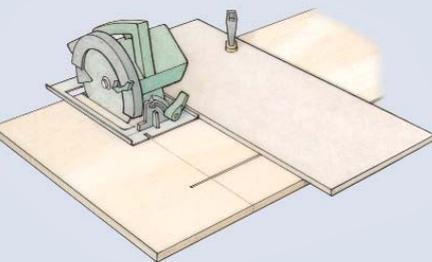
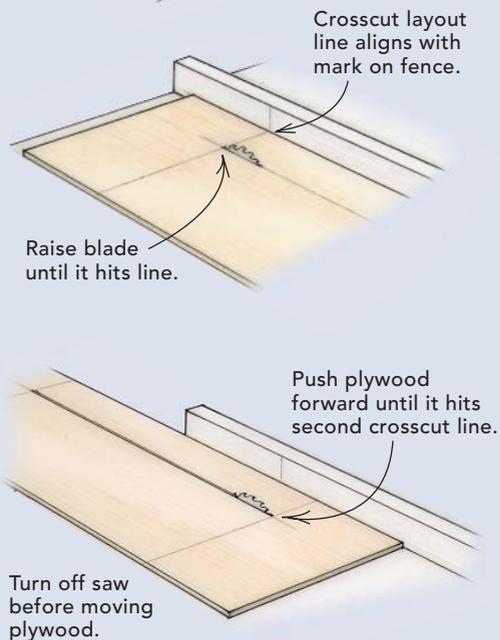
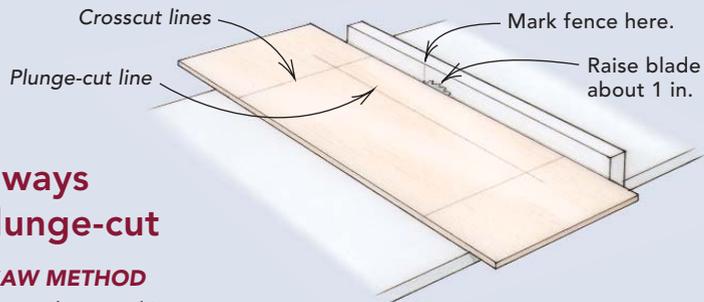
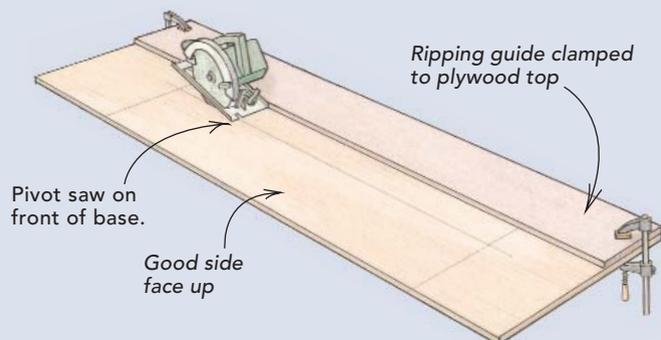
### TABLESAW METHOD

Don't lower the wood into the spinning blade; instead, raise the blade into the wood. With the saw turned off, raise the blade about 1 in., and mark the fence where the leading edge of the blade will clear the plywood. Then lower the blade and set the fence at the proper distance from the blade. Position the plywood so that the layout line for the lid's crosscut aligns with the mark on the fence. Turn on the saw, and raise the blade until it hits the layout line. Push the plywood into the saw until the blade reaches the second crosscut line. Keeping one hand on the plywood to steady it, carefully reach down and shut off the saw.

Turn the plywood over (top side facing down), and make the crosscuts with a circular saw. Score the layout lines with a knife to minimize chipping. Overcut slightly at the end (it won't show), or finish the cut with a handsaw.

### CIRCULAR-SAW METHOD

Secure the plywood top to sawhorses and use a rip guide. Set the blade depth slightly deeper than the plywood. While holding the guard up, slowly lower the running saw into the plywood by pivoting on the front of the base. Kickback is a possibility, so always stand to the side of the blade and never pull back the saw. Lower the saw and move forward to the far end of the plunge cut.



## MOLDING BECOMES A HANDLE FOR THE LID

In most cases, biscuits aren't necessary to attach a bullnose molding. But because this bullnose is acting as a handle for lifting the window seat's lid, it needs some reinforcement. Using biscuits here makes a clean, strong joint without visible fasteners.



**Space biscuits closely for strength.** Register the biscuit joiner's fence on the top of the bullnose molding, and cut a series of slots every 6 in. or so.



**Protect the molding from the clamps.** A scrap of plywood protects the bullnose from the clamps and evenly distributes the clamping pressure. The author marks the time on the lid so that he'll know when the glue has cured. He pulls the clamps after an hour has passed.

## SIMPLE FACE FRAME AND PANELS DRESS UP THE BOX

The author creates a traditional frame-and-panel look by assembling a face frame with pocket screws and attaching plywood to the back side of it. Molding run around the inside of the panels adds an elegant touch.



**Pocket screws join the face frames from behind.** The low angle of the screw draws the joint together without compromising alignment and works faster than biscuits.



**A bead of glue ensures a long-lasting, tight joint.** Carpenters' glue is spread on the face frame to attach the plywood panel. The brads act like clamps. The plywood panel is held back from the side and bottom edges of the face frame to create a rabbet that engages the window-seat box.



**Molding dresses up the face frame.** After the plywood is attached to the back of the face frame, molding run around the inside creates a traditional frame-and-panel look.



**Attach the face frame with nails.** The face frame is affixed to the plywood box with 15-ga. finishing nails (or 8ds if you're hand-nailing) and a bead of glue. The top then is nailed around the seat, strengthening the seat.

## A PIANO HINGE KEEPS THE LID FROM CUPPING

The lid is attached with a piano hinge to prevent cupping. Its thickness matches the kerf made cutting the lid, so the face of the seat aligns perfectly.

**The piano hinge is attached to the seat's lid.** The author secures one end of the hinge, then aligns and secures the other end before driving the screws in the middle. Working from one end to the other could mean a crooked installation.

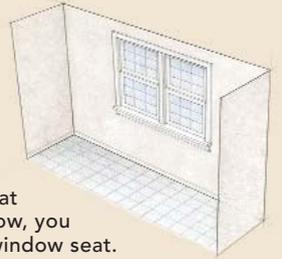


**Attaching the lid completes construction.** After using the piano hinge as a guide for drilling pilot holes into the hinged edge of the top, the author quickly connects the lid to the window seat.

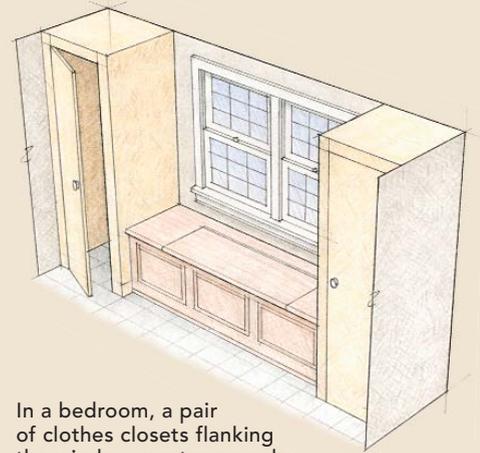


## No nook? No problem.

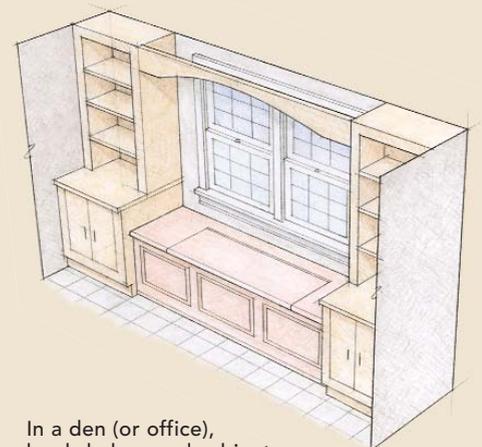
In the project featured in this article, the window seat was built into an existing nook, or alcove. If you don't have a nook, you can create one in a variety of ways. Shown below are two examples, one for a bedroom and one for a den or office.



If you've got a flat wall with a window, you still can have a window seat.



In a bedroom, a pair of clothes closets flanking the window creates a nook for a window seat.



In a den (or office), bookshelves and cabinets—perhaps with a valance connecting them—create the space for a window seat.