

BY DREW DEPENNING

Factory Cart Coffee Table

This reproduction of an industrial workhorse will give you years of use in your living room.

At the turn-of-the-century, no factory existed without several industrial carts (also known as trucks) at its disposal. From hauling lumber to carrying crankshafts to serving city ice, these workhorses served many functions.

Today, many of these antique carts have been restored for another purpose – furniture.

But if you don't have several hundred dollars (or more) to spend on a restored antique cart, you can build one that will serve for years in your living room.

Reclaimed Timber

To give my table the look of 100 years of use, I built the top with the most distressed wood I could find – boards from shipping pallets that were in our storeroom.

Let me warn you: Bringing these boards back from the brink of the dumpster is more time-consuming than you might think. For that reason, the measurements found in this article are based on a “clean” top built with 1x6 dimensional lumber.

The goal is to have a top 27" deep and 44" wide. Two 1x6 x 10' boards of No. 2 pine will be enough lumber for the top (and it's easy to find at the home center).

But if you prefer a more rustic look, ask at your local grocery store if you can grab a few pallets (or check outside by your office



Century-old chic. Inspired by re-purposed factory carts, this coffee table is a modern design solution for supporting your favorite books – and the occasional pair of feet.

loading dock) and pry off more boards than you think you'll need.

Sand down a spot on each board to help you select wood of consistent color. Don't forget to wear a dust mask – your lungs and sinuses will thank you.

Now, using your jigsaw (the cut will result in pleasing irregularity), trim or cut the top boards to 27" in length. (If you want a perfect 27" and square cut on all the boards, set up a stop on your miter saw).

Build the Box

The base frame of the table is built from 2x6 dimensional lumber. Two 2x6 x 8' boards should suffice for this project.

Because I want the tabletop to overhang the base by 1" on all sides, I'll cut the length of the side pieces to 42".

If you're using random-width pallet wood for the top, arrange the boards how you like, then adjust the length of your side pieces as necessary to accommodate a longer or shorter overall cart length.

After your sides are measured and cut with your miter saw, cut two 22"-long end pieces from your second 2x6.

To determine the length of the center brace, arrange the sides and ends in a rectangle on the floor, then measure up the middle. That's the length to cut for the center brace.

After setting your pocket screw jig to work with 1½" stock, drill three pocket

holes at each end of both end pieces on the inside faces of these boards. Do the same for the center brace.

On your bench, slide the side piece against a square block of scrap and use this setup to hold your end pieces at 90° while you drive home the 2½" pocket screws.

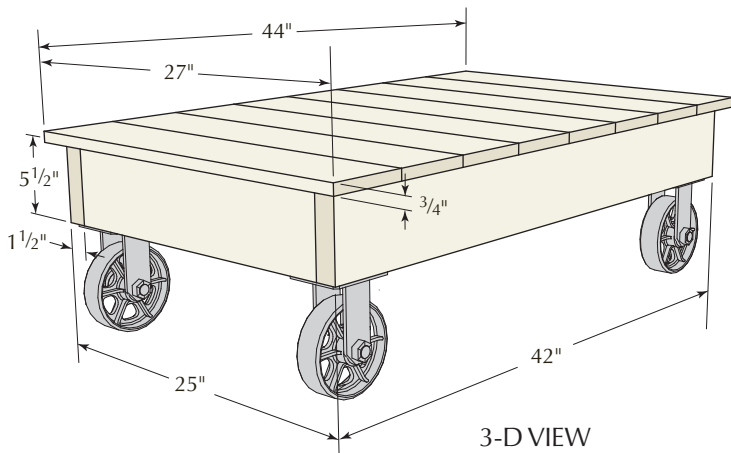
Once the outside frame is completed, cut two pieces of scrap to 10¼". Use these scraps to act as a shelf while you screw the center brace in place.

Distressed to Impress

If you're using pallet wood for the top, here's where you'll spend the extra time: bringing these boards back to life.



Scraps for a shelf. Use two 10¼" scraps to keep your brace centered and level.



Factory Cart Coffee Table

NO.	ITEM	DIMENSIONS (INCHES)			MATERIAL
		T	W	L	
2	Sides	1 1/2	5 1/2	42	SPF*
2	Ends	1 1/2	5 1/2	22	SPF
1	Center brace	1 1/2	5 1/2	39	SPF
8	Top boards	3/4	5 1/2	27	No. 2 Pine
8	Corner braces	1 1/2	5 1/2	4	No. 2 Pine

* Spruce, pine or fir

HARDWARE

4	Casters, 6" wheel diameter
16	Lag screws, 1/4" x 1"
16	Washers, 1/4"
18	Coarse pocket screws, 2 1/2"

Using #100-grit abrasive in your random-orbit sander, begin to remove the layer of grime. To expedite the process, you might want to use something more aggressive, such as a belt sander.

Again, don't forget your dust mask. If you don't use one, don't be surprised when your facial tissues look like cleanup rags from an oil spill.

Clean up the boards, but be sure to leave some of the nicks and saw marks – this is the character you want to keep.

If you're using new dimensional lumber, smacking it with a set of old keys is a great way to apply dings to the top to give it distressed character.

Take your top boards to some rough concrete (a sidewalk works great) and bang up the corners and sides. This will make the top look as if it's seen plenty of industrial action.

Finally, use a #120-grit disc on your random-orbit sander to knock down all the corners and smooth down the dents.

Finish with Charm

Original carts often had the name of a company or city printed on the side. You can add that touch by using stencils and black spray paint. Use plenty of blue tape to avoid over-spray.

Use a hair dryer to set the paint, then rough up the label with your sander.

Finish the frame and top boards with a few coats of amber shellac before nailing the top boards in place.

With the frame on the floor, place one top board at the end of the frame. Use a combination square to square up the 1" overhang then nail the board in place.

Here, you can use finish nails or even regular framing nails for an industrial look. (If you use cut nails, don't forget to first drill pilot holes.)

With this piece as your reference, square and nail the remaining boards.

Before you attach the casters, nail two blocks of 2x6 scraps at each of the inside corners of the frame. This will give the casters support on all four corners.

I purchased the steel casters for my project online from one of many industrial supply companies. At your home center, you'll probably find 6" casters with rubber wheels. They may not look old-fashioned, but they won't mark your floors, either.



Dust protection. The dust from pallet lumber is nasty stuff. Wear a dust mask to spare your sinuses and lungs.

To attach the casters, first drill pilot holes, then slip washers on your lag screws and use a wrench to drive the screws.

Finally, prop up your feet and enjoy your piece of custom furniture. And don't forget to use a coaster! **PWM**

Drew is the associate editor for the web for this magazine. Contact him at drew.depensing@fwmedia.com.

Go Online FOR MORE ...

You'll find links to all these online extras at:

► popularwoodworking.com/oct10

BLOG: Read more about the inspiration for this project and find additional tips on our Editors' Blog.

PLAN: Download the free SketchUp model for the Factory Cart Coffee Table.

ARTICLES: All the "I Can Do That" articles are free online.

Download the complete "I Can Do That" manual for free:

► popularwoodworking.com/icandothat

All of our products are available online at:

► WoodworkersBookShop.com

About This Column

Our "I Can Do That" column features projects that can be completed by any woodworker with a modest (but decent) kit of tools in less than two days of shop time, and using raw materials that are available at any home center. We offer a free online manual in PDF format that explains all the tools and



shows you how to perform the basic operations in a step-by-step format. Visit ICanDoThatExtras.com to download the free manual.