

Japanese Style Tea Tray



This classic style tea tray will add elegance to any service.
A complete set of plans from Consultingwoodworker.com



This classic tea tray will add an air of sophistication to “tea time” where ever it is used. Very easy to make, it is perfect for Christmas, housewarming and wedding gifts. You can set up and make one or a dozen of these very quickly, and the design makes it easy to customize for weddings, housewarmings, whatever!

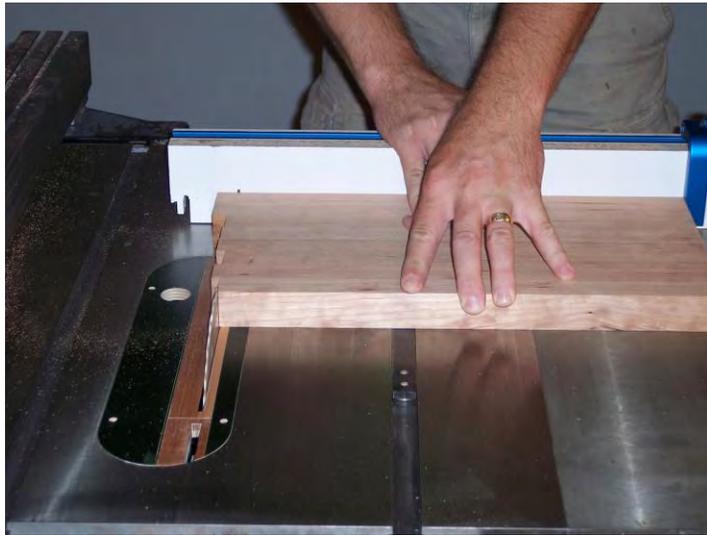
What sets this tray apart from most is the well and pierced lid. The well is a traditional feature that allows any liquid dripped to flow down into the well to be cleaned up later, so as not to spoil the Tea Ceremony with wiping up spills.

Building the Tray

The tray body is built just like a cutting board then milled to create the well and accept the lid. Cherry is the material of choice, although Bamboo would be an excellent substitute. The tray finishes at 8 x 16 x 1 ¼”. Prepare 8 strips at 1 5/16 x 16 1/4 x 1 inch thick, (11 strips at ¾”) and glue them face to face to form the tray blank. Careful preparation of the blanks will insure that the tray is water tight and will not split from washing. Use a waterproof glue such as polyurethane or epoxy for best results.



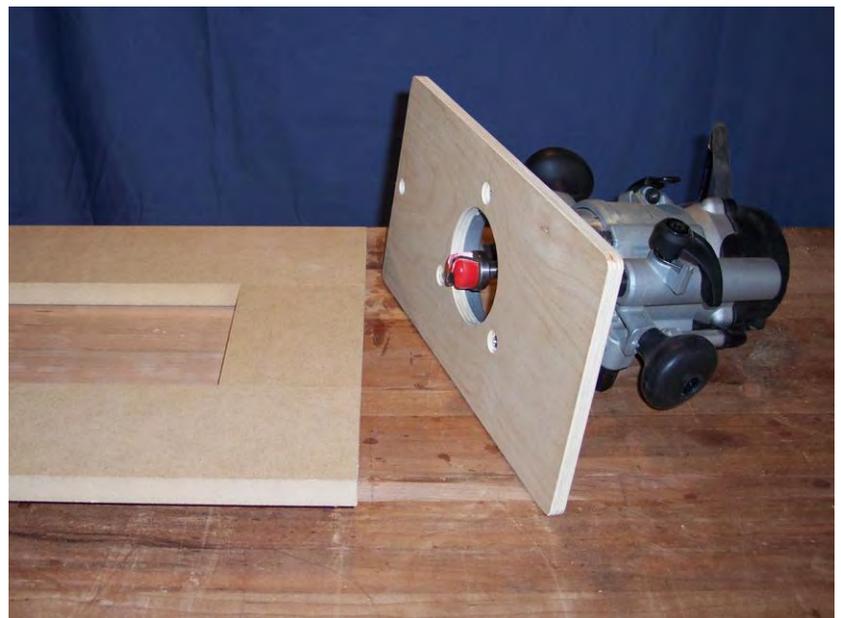
Keeping the parts as flat and square as possible during clamping will make cleaning up and milling the body much easier. Scrape any excess glue from the faces and flatten one face of the blank. This is most easily done with a jointer, but a few minutes with a sharp hand plane will do the trick too. Plane the blank to its final 1 ¼" thickness and crosscut it to 16".



Small touches can add a great deal to the look and style of a piece. I ripped a five degree bevel on the long edges and cut a 30 degree angle into the bottom of the ends to give loft to the tray and keep it from looking like a cutting board. The 30 degree cuts on the ends can be done safely with a tenon jig or on the bandsaw.

Creating the Well

Now the tray cavity is milled out. A template and Dish Carving Bit are used. The template is just four pieces of MDF pocket screwed together. The Dish Carving Bit has a guide bearing the same size as the cutter, so the inside dimension of the template is the same as the well cavity.





The Dish Carving Bit will leave not only a radius in the corners of the well, but also where the sides meet the bottom. A round nosed bit can do the same, but since it has no flat at the tip it does not tend to leave a clean, flat bottom in the dished area.

The well is going to end up 5 ½" x 12". This is too big for the router base to span, so an auxiliary base is added to the router. Nothing fancy, just a wide piece of ply to span the template and keep the router steady.

Attach the template to the tray blank and mill out the well. Don't try to take too deep a pass at once, and clear the chips often so the bearing makes clean contact with the template. Your well will be deeper than the bit cutting edge, but don't worry. The bearing will guide off the freshly cut well sides which are the same as the template.



With the well milled out, a shoulder needs to be cut around the perimeter of the well for the lid panel to sit in. Simply chuck a Rabbet Bit in the router, and mill a ½ inch wide, ¼ inch deep rabbet around the edge of the well.



The rabbet bit will leave rounded corners that will need to be squared up. A sharp chisel and mallet will make short work of this.

The Lid

With the tray body complete, the lid can be made. The lid measures 6 x 12 ½" to fit the rabbet and is ¼" thick. Resaw your stock to just over ¼" thick and glue up the lid blank. Butt joints are fine, but I like to use V-Groove Bits to align the parts and increase the surface area of the joint.



When dry, clean up the glue lines and trim the blank to fit the rabbet. The lid does not want to be too snug in the opening, room needs to be left for the natural movement of the wood. Leave about 1/16" overall. The rabbet is ¼" deep and the lid was resawn to a bit over ¼". I found that sanding it in place on the body made it easy to hold and insured that it flushed out.

Piercing the Lid



The lid exists to allow any spilled liquid to collect in the well, so it needs to be pierced to let the liquid through. Commercial versions typically have slots cut into the lid. The tray shown uses the Japanese symbol for 'Chai' (tea) milled on each side to give an elegant and exotic look. The piercing is an opportunity to customize the tray. As a wedding gift, the names and date can be cut into the lid. A short verse or quotes are also good ideas for gifts with meaning.

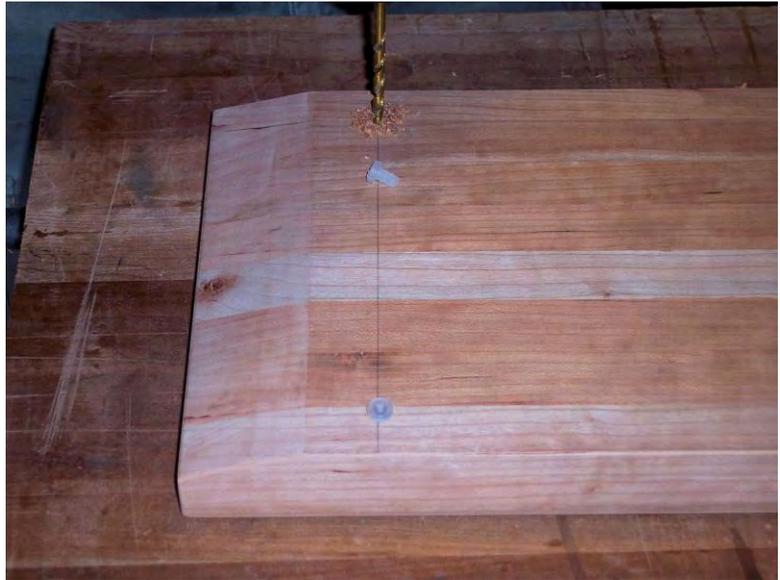
Print out your design and attach it to the lid. Spray adhesive works well. Spray only the paper, stick it on when tacky and it will remove easily. Drill holes at the ends of each cut. This makes for smooth ends and consistent line thickness. A scroll saw or fret saw is used to remove the remaining print. The symbols were mounted facing in opposite directions so the symbol is readable from either side of the tray. Lastly, a $\frac{3}{4}$ " hole is drilled in the center of the lid for a finger hole.



Feet

The final step before finishing is to drill for the feet.

Rockler's clear bumpers are unobtrusive and don't require any fasteners, simply mark and drill 3/16" holes in each corner being sure not to drill into the well area. Don't insert the feet until after finishing.



Finishing

Having carefully chosen the stock for this tray, no stain was used. The whole project is carefully sanded to 220 including the well area and both sides of the lid. Salad bowl finish was used for its durability, ease of use, and food safe qualities. A hand rubbed oil finish is also acceptable, but only if the end user is likely to maintain it.

The feet are pressed into the holes drilled for them, and the tray is ready to add an elegant touch to any table.

I welcome your questions and comments on this project. I would also love to see photos of your results as well. –Ralph Bagnall

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Sources

[Dish Carving Bit](#)



[Rabbet Bit](#)



[“V” Edging Bits](#)



[Rubber Bumper Feet](#)

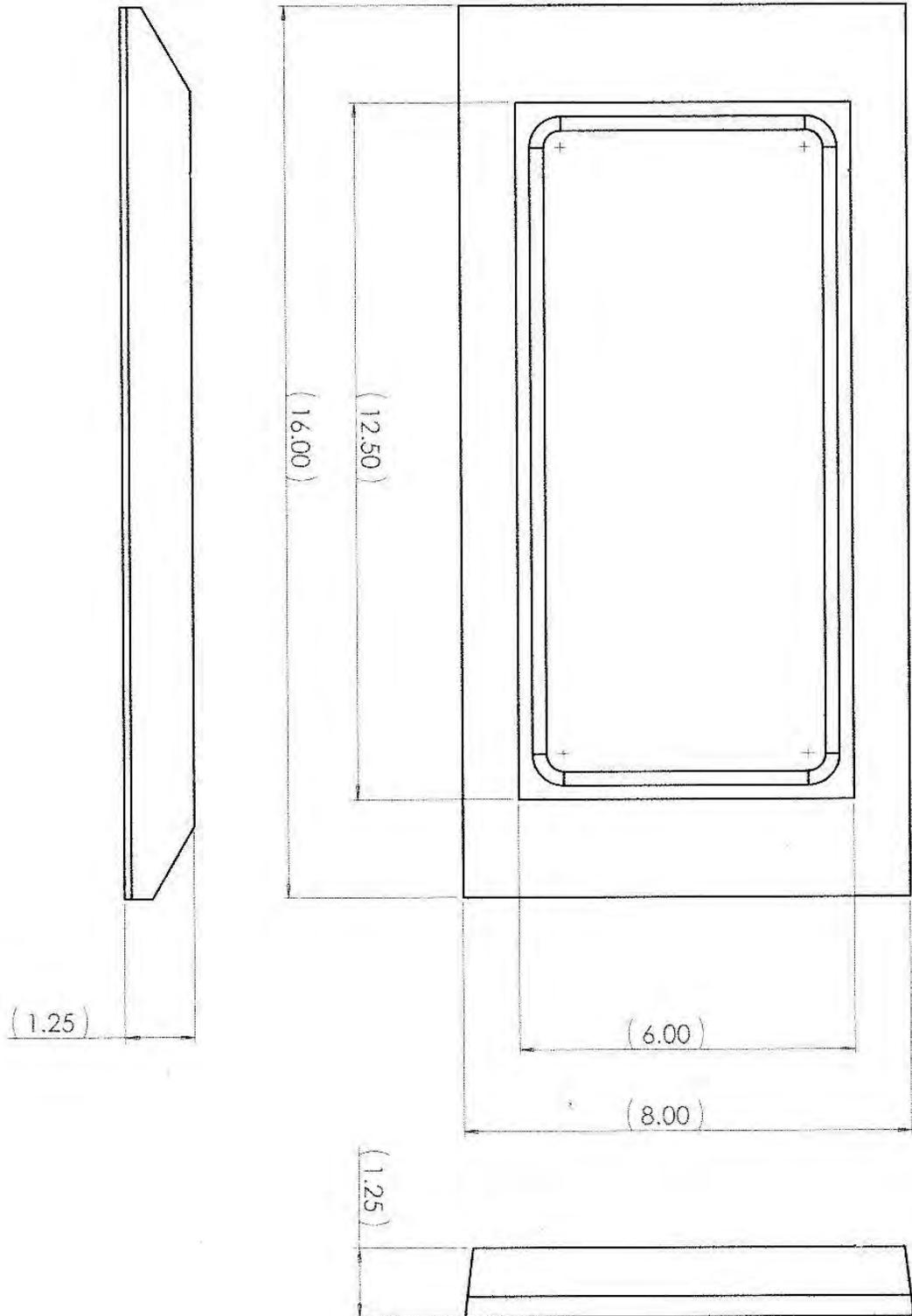


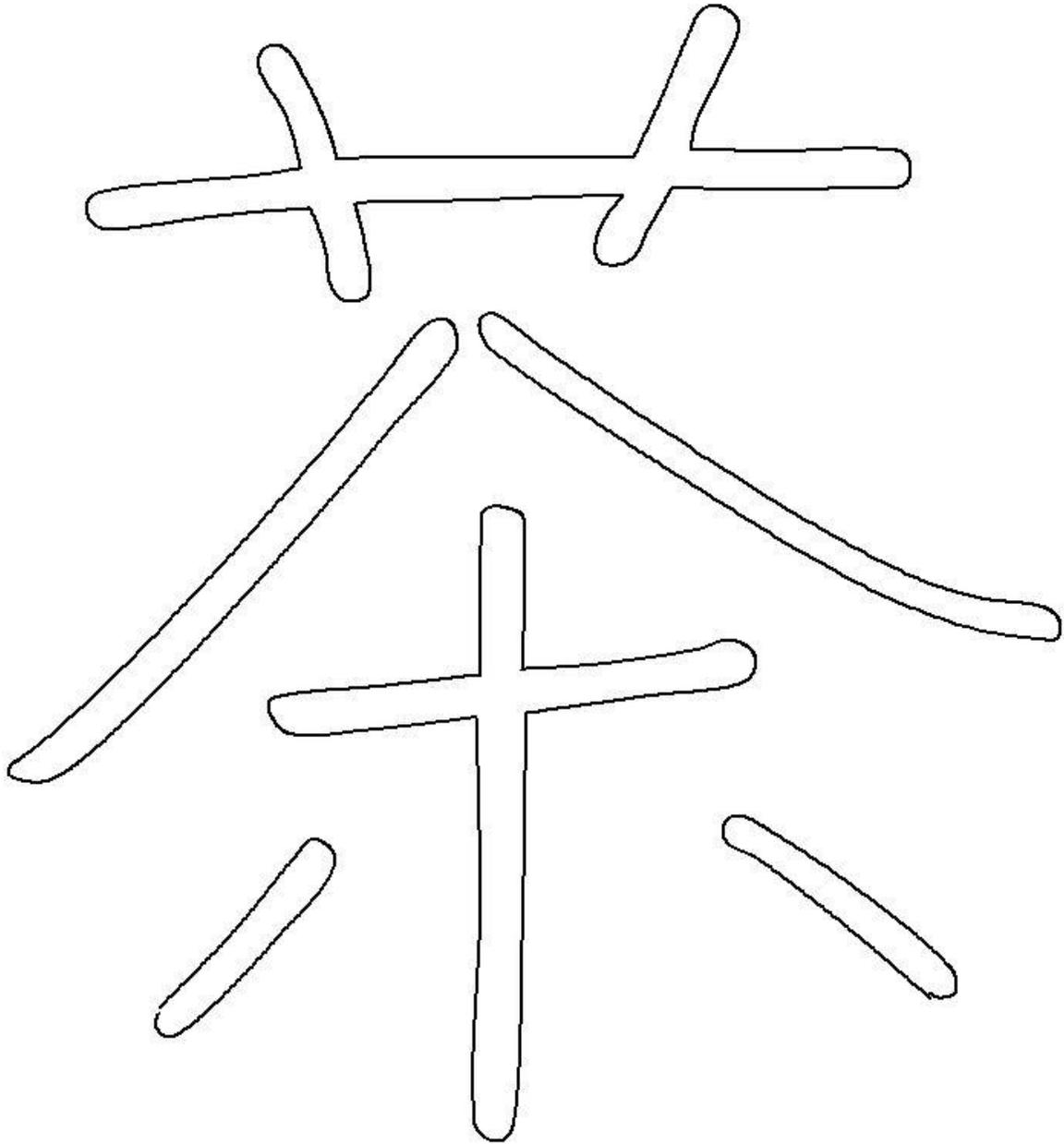
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Chi Symbol