

A Viking Box Chair

By Marc Rubinstein
Lord Aelric of Sarisberie

This box chair, as a piece from the Osenberg find, is highly documentable. Indeed, it is also an oddity in that most chairs in contemporary or medieval illustrations have so high a seat as to require a stool for a foot rest or a bar added for support and comfort. This chair was quite short at only fifteen and one-half inches. Today, chair seats are commonly eighteen inches, though sometimes as high as twenty-four before being considered a high-chair, stool or "Bar" height.

The chair, as originally constructed, consists of two equal sized boards about fifteen inches square for sides, a board about fifteen by fifteen by twenty for a front, and one of about twenty by thirty for a back. These were boards of between one-half and one inch in thickness tenoned into mortised stock of approximately two by two inches by sixteen and one half inches long for the front pair and two by two by thirty-one for the rear pair. The seat was of rawhide which passed through the sides, front and back and woven in the same way as commonly found in rope beds.

I have provided drawings should you wish to reproduce something very like the original. The corner posts should be of 2" x 2" stock (free of knots if you decide to make this of pine), the boards for the sides, front and back should be of one-by stock. I would suggest making it of "glued up" planks of hardwood, though plywood could be used. Hardwood veneer would be nice if the top edges are veneered or nosed with some extra one-by. Plainply could be used if you wish to save money or build a mock-up, which may be advisable if you plan to eventually use expensive cuts of hardwood, or if you have done little mortise and tenoning...or if you just need practice.

Just as a note, the Theatre source included a photograph which showed the chair utilizing pegs through the legs as well as the tenon, and the lacing was within the

carved borders. In addition the back was flush to the front of the legs to which it attached, and the top was a very graceful curve from one side to the other. The other source showed a line drawing which gave rise to this design, and in it the back seems more purposefully separated from the legs—visually—as I have shown by rounding the corners. I would, if I were constructing one now, opt for the design as per the photo instead of the drawing, even though the tenoning would be more tricky. Somehow it seems more pleasing to the eyes and the soul...

I have not shown pegging so that you can choose how you wish to construct the chair. Because of the top, it is probably best if the parts are glued and pegged, especially if this is to be a permanent piece of furniture,

but there are ways of making this travel better.

If you wish to build one that can be either broken down for storage and travel or one that can serve as a chest till it arrives in camp, follow the design minus the mortise and tenon scheme—unless you are permanently affixing the sides or front to the legs for strength as you attempt the following ploys. I am, I hope not foolishly, assuming that the reader has either basic woodworking skills or the wherewithal necessary to locate either another with such skills or someone that might

help teach them such.

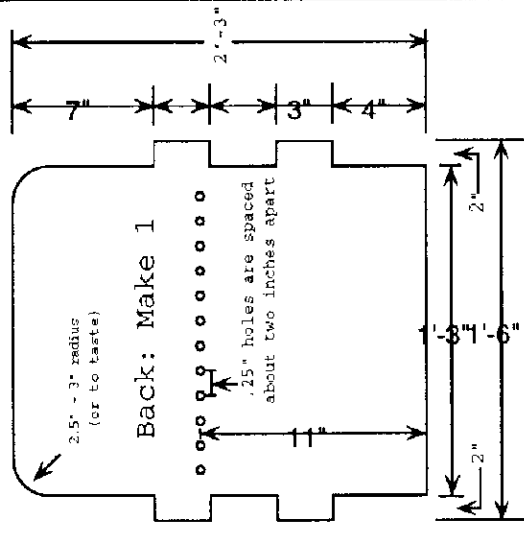
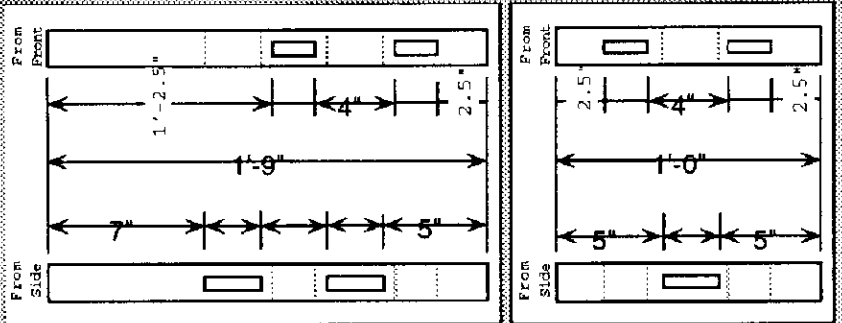
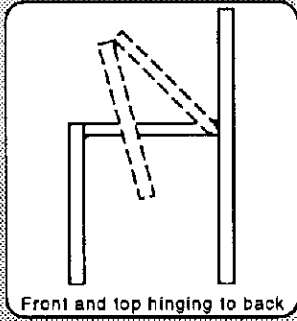
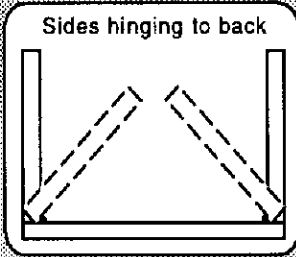
The seat can be made to drop in between the uprights on top of the sides and front, and upon a cleat added to the back, then the top can be hinged to drop over the seat or to be removed. The seat can be built as one piece and hinged to the top and the front hinged to the top. The sides then might hinge to the back to fold under the seat or even to store behind. I have included some basic sketches to show how various of these things might be attempted.

Good luck with your experiments.

Sources: Various eds. *The Vikings* (New York: Crescent Books, 1991), p. 186.

Russell, Douglas A. *Period Style for the Theatre* (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, Inc.), p. 97.

Plans:



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 (M. K. A. Marc L. Rubenstein)
 FOR
 SACRED SPACES

