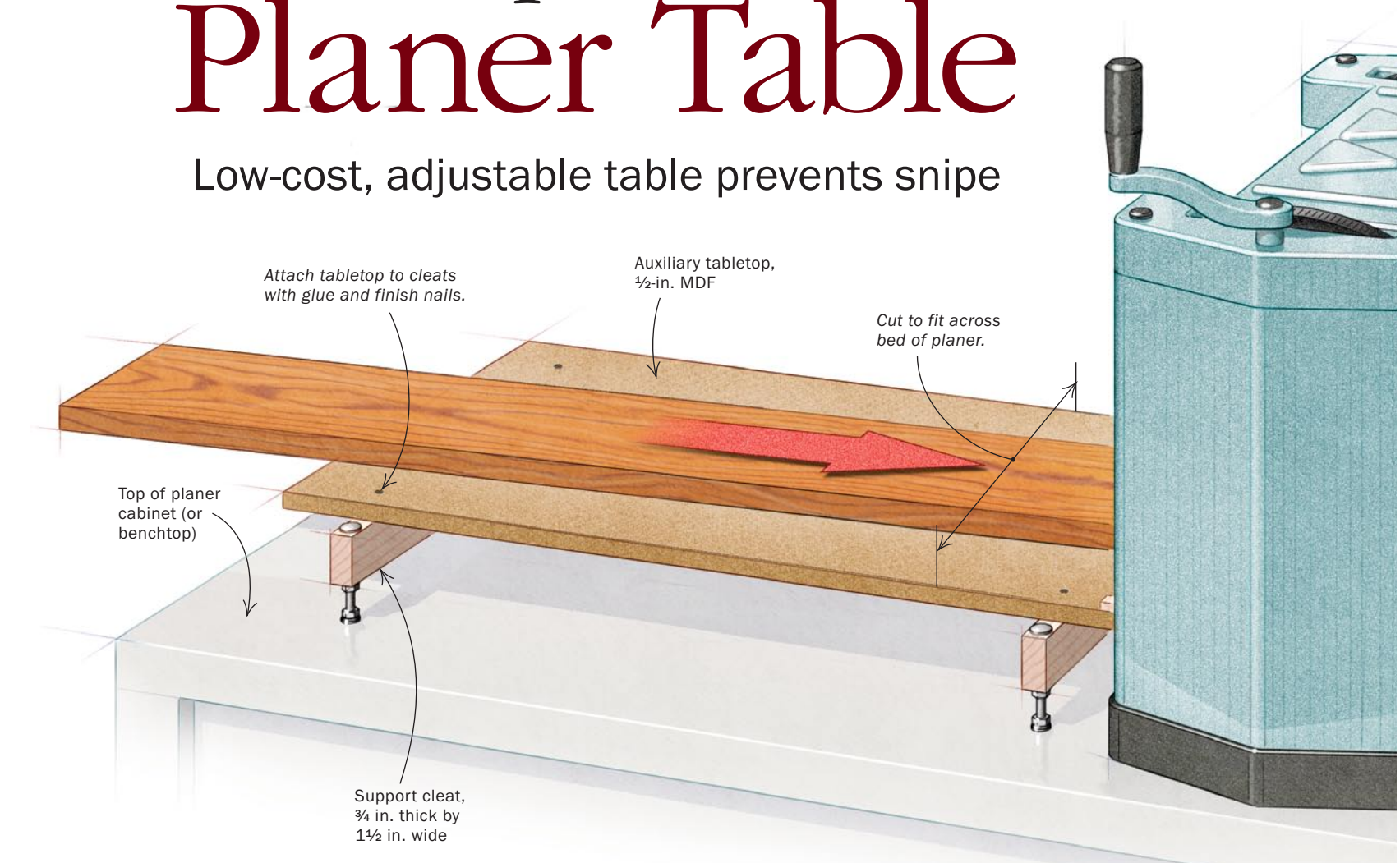
Shopmade Planer Table

Low-cost, adjustable table prevents snipe



BY ANDY BEASLEY

Benchtop thickness planers are compact workhorses that produce remarkably smooth wood surfaces. But, like any thickness planer, they often create snipe—that's the 2-in.-long (or so), slightly deeper cut at each end of a board. Granted, some newer models have made good strides at reducing the problem, but like the common cold, snipe defies eradication. Indeed, it's rare to find a thickness-planed board that's snipe-free.

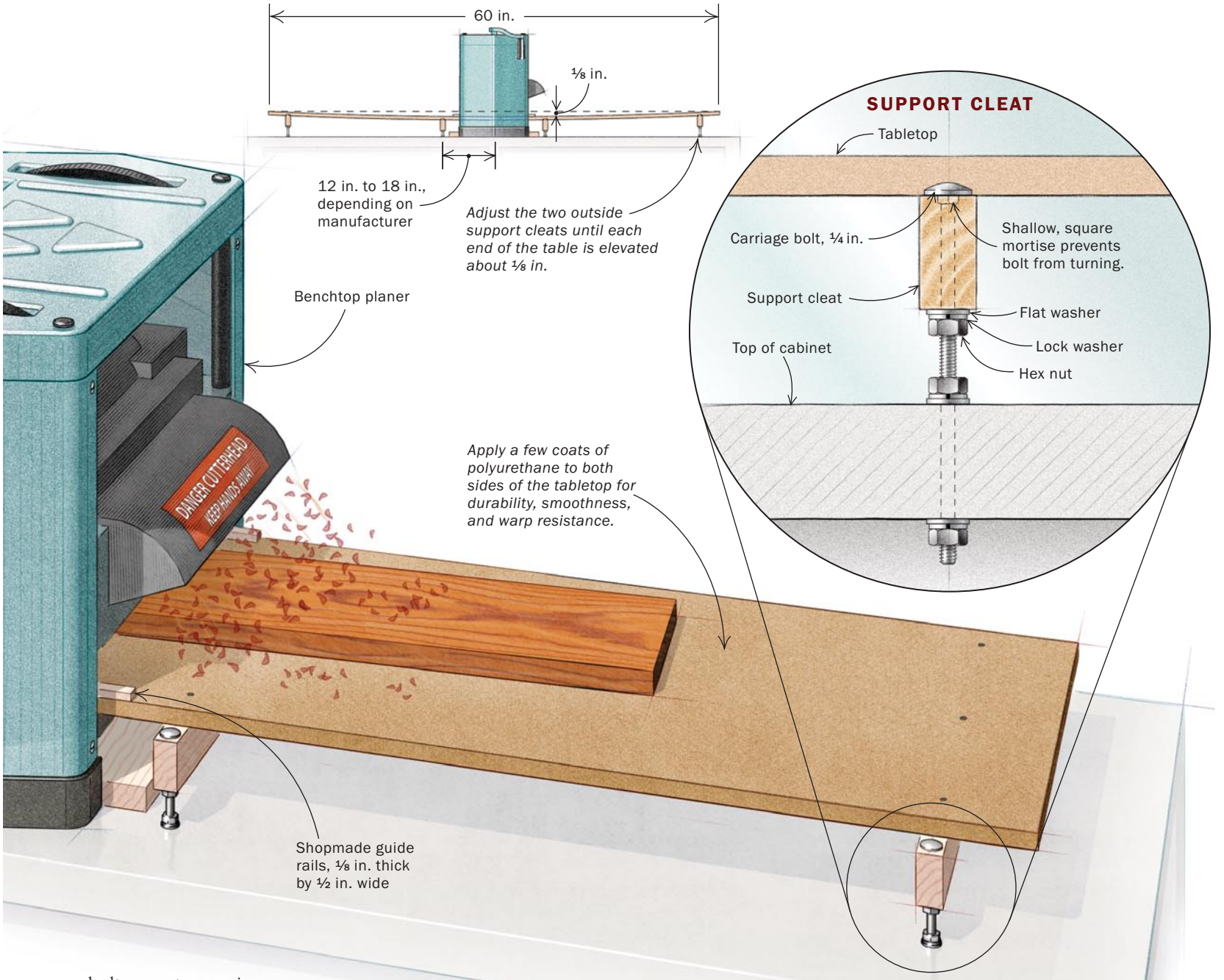
However, adding an adjustable table to a benchtop thickness planer can help make snipe a non-issue—if not by eliminating the problem, then at least by keeping it to a bare minimum. Snipe that measures less than, say, 0.004 in. is rarely a problem.

This adjustable table has only a handful of parts. Four support cleats—two in front of the planer, two behind—mount under a length of ½-in.-thick medium-density fiberboard (MDF) that serves as the tabletop. The cleats attach to the top of the planer cabinet with a few carriage bolts and washers. The bolts allow me to elevate the ends of the tabletop slightly, giving it a subtle bow. This slight rise at each end is the secret to reducing snipe.

I should mention that the adjustable table reduces the thickness capacity of my planer by ½ in., from 6 in. to 5½ in. But since 3½ in. is about the thickest stock I've ever planed, I don't expect the reduced capacity to be a problem. Also, you'll need to remove the folding infeed and outfeed table extensions that are attached to the saw.

After cutting the tabletop to width and length, attach the support cleats to the underside. First, though, drill both ends of each cleat to accept a carriage bolt. The

Photo: Tom Begnal; drawings: John Hartman



bolt accepts a series of flat washers, lock washers, and hex nuts that attach the table to the cabinet below.

Mount the two middle support cleats securely to form a stiff, flat table through the planer. Two wood guide rails keep stock on course as it travels through the machine. Then, with a 6-ft.-long level placed lengthwise on the bed, adjust the two outside support cleats until each end of the table is elevated about ⅛ in. above the level of the table under the cutterheads.

Fine-tune for best results

I ran test boards through the planer until I found the elevation of the tabletop ends that would best minimize snipe. Adjusting the outside support cleats is easy: After loosening the hex nuts adjacent to the cabinet, simply tighten the upper nut to raise the bed, or tighten the bottom nut to lower it. Because there are two bolts on each support cleat, both must be adjusted the same amount to avoid twisting the surface.

Once I determined the best table elevation, I locked the support cleats in place for good. Keep in mind that if you switch to stock that's thicker than about 2 in., you might need to readjust the elevation of the tabletop ends. That's because thicker stock can't flex as much and will not conform to as much of a bow in the table.

Try a test piece before committing an expensive board to the planer. □

Andy Beasley retired a few years ago from the Air Force, where he served as an instructor pilot in a variety of locations, including the Air Force Academy. He lives in Hillside, Colo.