

Realizing the need to upgrade my shop I wondered how far I should go with building machine stands, storage cabinets, clamp racks, etc. only to move to a bigger space soon. I knew I wanted to buy a house, so I figured I should get started designing for a two-car garage shop. Later, I had to modify my design since I was lucky enough to find an affordable 1,700 sq. ft. house with a 3-car garage instead. Actually, it's a 30 ft. by 20 ft. woodshop, not really a garage for cars. The car gets the driveway out front.

I learned that things I glossed over in my initial design caused a few of my shop projects to be obsolete in my actual shop, such as item-specific shop cabinets, undersized dust collection ductwork, and improvements to my benchtop saw cabinet. I wanted to minimize this going forward. I realized that the thinking needed to be done before the building, just like with a complicated piece of furniture. So, I began to really consider my "ideal woodshop" design as soon as I moved in to my new house.



**“THE FEW MONTHS I TOOK
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My original bedroom shop. I didn't let my living situation stop me from woodworking. But it did highlight what an ideal shop should be.

Consider Future Needs

Considering your *ideal* woodshop design (future needs) before actually building your shop improvements will save you lots of time and money later on. You may not want to immediately spend the money and time to build your final dream shop, but incorporating as many future needs as possible at this design/ planning stage will prove **highly** useful. Just set aside several brainstorming sessions dedicated to woodshop design. This series of posts will show you how to revamp your shop by **design**, save time by helping you to prioritize your improvements, and understand what things will need to be done before others and why.

For example, estimate your future electrical requirements before you drywall your shop. Right now you may not want to install 15 electrical outlets, but in the future you may want them. You should develop an idea of where they ought to go, and route the appropriately sized wire to an electrical box. Even though I did not have any equipment that required a 220 V outlet, I knew that one day I might have a 220V bandsaw, so I ran the appropriate wiring to a convenient spot for one. Three years from now, I may save enough money to buy that bandsaw, and will easily be able to wire an outlet there and add a circuit breaker (without ripping out drywall). I also knew, based on my ideal

shop layout, I would need separate circuits for certain equipment. An air compressor should be on its own circuit since it can cycle on during another machine's operation (the same applies to a dust collector). So, I ran wire to those areas from their own circuit breaker.

Do things as “right” as you can now, drawing from your own and others’ shop experience as much as possible. That’s not to say you won’t forget something in your design, make further refinements later, or do something temporary. What I did is come up with my best “future” layout and design, and I make provisions for this as I do my shop improvement projects. A *much* better way to go.



You may not be able to afford a jointer now, but eventually you may get one. So, plan for future equipment in your dust collection and electrical plans.

Plan First, Build at Your Leisure

The few months I took to design my ideal woodshop didn’t mean I had to construct it all right away. I’ll never be totally done. But, now I know in what **order** I should start the various construction projects, and what **provisions** to include for the future. One thing that used to stop me from doing a shop project was the fear that once I finished it would be obsolete too soon, so why bother? Now I look far ahead and make sure my projects fit in the *ideal* design, and get them done to end the existing problem. The important thing to note is that by taking the time to design first means I don’t feel as bad about making a super-fancy jig or other costly project knowing that it will serve my needs for a long time.

When you get deep into your design, it’ll become apparent which 10% of all possible shop projects will have the *biggest impact*, and which projects *affect others*. Start with the important few.

WoodChip Tip: *Ignore the low-impact projects at first or you won’t have time for the critical ones.*

During one of your brainstorming sessions, list all of your current shop problems, frustrations, and inconveniences. Maybe go into your shop and have a notepad handy to add to this list over a few days. Then list the desired outcome of each, which will then become a project.

Example:

Problem: No room to assemble projects—workbench too cluttered

Desired Outcome: More horizontal table surfaces, place to put projects during assembly

Project/ Solution: Build a dedicated assembly table, incorporate drawers and shelves at workbench

The following can help you decide the shop projects to focus on first:

- Does the current problem limit or diminish your shop time?
- Does the current problem affect or cause other problems?
- Is the current problem holding back other shop projects?
- Does the current problem dramatically slow down a typical project's completion time?
- Is the current problem leading to unsafe practices?



Make a list of things in your shop that cause you to waste valuable shop time, or make you dread starting another project. Here you can see that additional horizontal surfaces and storage for specific items is badly needed.

Go ahead and get started on designing your ideal woodshop today. Using your mindmap and outline of your woodshop criteria ("wish list") sorted by category, begin with an 8-1/2" x 11 sketch of possible layouts, follow the guidelines on this site, and do some information-hunting to fill in the general outline with your particular details. Generate a list of priority projects. Then create your ideal shop, in the right order, focusing on one at a time, confident it fits into your overall plan.

In the next series of posts, we'll walk through exactly what to consider in your shop design so you'll be sure that all has been thought about before beginning to build.

Leave a comment below and let everyone know what shop improvements you've done that took time from doing one that was more critical for your day-to-day woodworking.

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