

# Shavings

By Glen Friesen

Well, as I am starting to write the March edition, the weather has changed from deep cold, in the -40's at night last week to the snow melting off of my yard today. Such is life in Saskatchewan. The nice weather gives one hope that nice weather is on the way and the winter of 2024 and 2025 is just a memory.

In the middle of January, I started my yearly house renovation. The goal is to have the original construction of our house perfectly match the addition that I completed a couple of years ago. Last winter, I tackled our bathroom and I actually have a towel cabinet left to build for that room. The most recent build that I completed for our main bathroom was the built-in medicine cabinet. About a month ago, I mounted the beveled-edge mirrors to the Baltic birch doors which completed the construction.

Well, that brings us to this winter's house renovation project which is the hallway that allows access to the bedrooms and newly renovated bathroom. While I am still committed to finishing the towel cabinet in the bathroom, the hallway renovation is a "lighter" project. Now, I never have just one project going at one time, so at about the time I started the hallway renovation, I started constructing an eight-foot-long section of shop cabinet for storing a lot of the stuff that I have that is to this day, homeless.

I discussed the construction of this cabinet in the February issue of Shavings. I continue to work on this OSB cabinet, among other things. With the cabinet boxes and a drawer prototyped, I spent some time completing and installing the five drawers in the first bank to see how everything works. So, as I worked on installing the drawers last week, I got to thinking about my choice of drawer slides and the different options one has when constructing drawers. If you are interested in following my shop cabinet and drawer installation process, check out chapters 16, 17, 19, 105, 106 and

116 on my RLDR Custom Creations Youtube channel.

Mounting drawers in a cabinet means using some type of drawer slide. There are basically four types of slides that are commonly used. They are wooden slides, side bottom mount slides, side mount slides and undermount slides. There are several alternate features such as full extension and soft close. Each type has their place and use.

## Wooden Slides:

The simplest type of slide is the wood slide. These are often shop built and potentially the cheapest of the selections. In early shop cabinets that I constructed, I would cut a 3/4" dado in the sides of the drawer. Then I mounted a piece of wood slightly smaller than the dado. This allowed the drawer to slide on the piece attached to the inside of the cabinet. While these slides were nothing fancy, they get the job done and are quite durable. A cabinet that I made and equipped with this type of slide 25 years ago is still useful in my shop today.



(A very simple slide that has lasted 20 years, but lacks modern amenities.)

There are many types of wooden slides, but I used to make this type as they are quite strong and easy to make. Another advantage to this type of slide is that the drawer can be constructed with the bottom of the drawer can be inserted into a dado cut into the drawer sides. While there are other styles of the wood slide, most to my knowledge would accommodate the recessed bottom drawer style.

But there are two major disadvantages to this type of slide. First, they usually lack some type of stop that prevents the drawer from being pulled completely out of the opening. While a stop can be made, it often makes taking the drawer out when needed quite cumbersome. Also, they are not true full extension, in my mind. The risk of pull out makes full extension risky and were definitely soft close.



(Definitely not full extension and no stop to prevent over extension.)

#### **Side Bottom Mounted Slides:**

The cheapest metal and nylon roller slide is the metal ones that mount on the bottom side of the drawer sides. During my whole teaching career, students chose these types of slides because they were cheap and worked quite well for drawers that did not have to carry a lot of weight. While I have used these slides for shop cabinets, I don't feel that they are robust enough for continuous use.



(A lot of these slides were installed in the 80's and 90's. In my opinion, they are too light for shop drawers.)

Many kitchens constructed during the 80's and 90's came with these types of slides. These slides, in my opinion, were a part of the cheapening of custom cabinets. With these slides, the drawer became a very simple box. There was absolutely no real joinery with butt joint corners and the drawer bottom simply stapled to the bottom of the sides.



(For light work, these slides work, but I am getting rid of this cabinet in my shop.)

These slides require the cabinet box to be quite exact. The drawer needs to be exactly one inch smaller than the opening. I have not used these for personal use for a very long time. A major disadvantage is that these slides are commonly not full extension or soft close. In my opinion, they are light and cheesy. However, they work and they are relatively inexpensive.

#### **Side-Mount Slides:**

In my opinion, these slides are the best option for shop drawers. These slides mount directly to the side of the drawer and the corresponding piece mounts to the inside of the cabinet box. While the difference between the outside of the drawer and the cabinet box needs to be an accurate one inch, installing these drawer slides is quite straight forward. Like all the previously mentioned slide systems, these are also commonly available in 2-inch increments from 12 inches to 28 inches. These slides are



also available in different weight categories. So, if you have a drawer that needs to hold a lot of weight, a slide of this type can often be found to accommodate it.



(These slides can be purchased almost anywhere. These are from Princess Auto.)

While these slides are rugged and durable, their price has come down dramatically. I am using what I would refer to as a “base” model in my current shop cabinet build and I purchased them on sale at Princess Auto for \$9.95 per drawer set. A necessity, in my opinion for a shop drawer slide is that they open to full extension. In the shop situation, this will save your knees as you can see what is in the back of the drawer without taking a knee.



(I like these slides. They are robust, durable and easy to install.)

These slides are also available in soft close and in the 2000's, these were premium high-end slides. I feel that soft close is not necessary for shop use. However, maybe soft

close slides in the shop is a good idea because when anger takes over it would make slamming the drawer shut more difficult. Just follow the manufactures instructions for installation and you will have a tough, durable easy to use drawer slide.



(With these slides, I can install the drawer bottom in a dado which is much more durable.)

### **Under Mount Drawer Slides:**

These are the Cadillacs of drawer slides. They are what I would consider as the premium drawer slides for custom cabinetry. In my opinion, they are unnecessary and overpriced to use in shop drawers. These slides are completely hidden under the drawer bottom and allow you to “show off” the material and joinery that you used on the drawer slides. On the drawers on my bathroom vanity, I made them from Baltic birch plywood with box joints on the corners. Personally, I like the look of Baltic birch edges and how the plys accent the box joinery. It was one of the factors when choosing these slides for my vanity.



(I like this look. In my opinion, craftsmanship is visible.)

These premium slides are available in 2-inch increments in common drawer depths. The slides are full extension and soft close. What sets these slides apart aside from their invisibility is the fact that they are able to be adjusted much more than any other type of slide that I am aware of. The rear of the slide has up and down adjustment and if you purchase the more expensive clips, the drawer front has up and down and side to side adjustment. This is especially useful when using flush mount drawer faces. Another necessity when using these slides is that the drawer bottom must be  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in thickness. This adds to the drawer cost over  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch bottoms.



(The whole slide is hidden under the drawer. The orange parts are the clips. I used the cheaper ones.)

In my opinion, these drawer slides carry a couple of significant disadvantages. First of all, they way that they are packaged and sold. When I purchased the first batch that I bought,

I asked my local lumberyard for a pair of slides. I was confused as to why they were significantly cheaper than at other sources. It turns out that their price was without the clips. The sliders are useless without the clips. I was unaware that they did not come as a unit for outfitting a drawer. Well, I figured that part out and that leads to the next problem. They are expensive! To outfit a 22-inch-deep drawer with the most adjustable clips is in the \$70 - \$80 range per drawer. That is a bit of sticker shock.

### **The Best Shop Alternative?**

Well, I have used all of these types of drawer slides and I feel confident with using the side mount slides for my 8-foot section of shop cabinets. In my opinion, the wooden slides and the side undermount slides are not durable enough and suffer from easily sliding in and out issues. On the other side of the argument, the undermount slides price themselves out of relevance for shop cabinets. Whatever you do, consider building your next set of shop cabinets. Regardless of the slide system you decide to use, make it work and enjoy.