

# SLIDING DOORS

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**T**he concept of a tambour door has always had a particular appeal. It has a distinctive texture and look, and also offers the flexibility of not being a solid, hinged block. In doing so, it allows the door to retract into an area that would not be physically possible with a solid surface.

The other attraction is that the door is also the mechanism – there is no hinge to attach, and the form and function of the door are completely interrelated.

Tambour doors can be made with pieces of timber attached to a cloth backing, or wired together, but the door with the most appeal is one where the slats themselves interlock. The mechanism is basically an over-long ball and socket.

The key to making a tambour door is a router bit set, such as this one from Toolstoday.com. I have not come across any retailer in Australia who has a tambour door router bit set, so fortunately Toolstoday will ship to you.

The set Toolstoday sell is produced by Amana Tool, and include plans for a very American concept: the “appliance garage” – which is exactly what it sounds like. I think it’s a concept we should definitely poach!

I decided to use Tasmanian Oak (a commonly available hardwood) for the tambour door. It needs to be dressed (squared up and straight) and although you may be able to source timber ready to use, you are either paying a real premium, or having to accept some compromise in sizing or wastage.

Being able to size and dress your own timber is a real asset when taking your woodworking to the next level. These days, it doesn’t even have to be overly expensive to be able to do so (quality tools obviously still have costs, but entry level is surprisingly affordable). ■

**TOP RIGHT:** Tambour doors have been used for centuries, such as this ornate writing desk.

**RIGHT:** Much of the work is done with a number of different router bits.

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**A** The original stock was ripped, planed and thickened to 12.5mm thick and 50mm wide. For this job, it doesn't hurt to be slightly oversized.

**B** Once you have your stock ready-to-go, it is time for the real machining to produce the tambour door slats. The majority of the operation requires a router table. The router table allows the router to be mounted upside down and, along with a secure fence, allows timber to be bought to the tool rather than the other way around. Also, a couple of featherboards to hold the workpiece against the fence is a real asset for this operation.

Despite the apparent complexity of the final product, it is surprisingly easy to make. The steps are straightforward, and even the setup is uncomplicated.

With four passes, the slats are formed. The board is run through the bit, flipped end over end, and the top is also done. Next, turn it around again and cut the other side, final flip and all four sides are routed.

**C** Each board has become two slats, joined at the ball end. Before separating them, the socket needs to be created. This is done with a ball router bit. As the ball bit can only take a moderate load (even though it is machined out of a solid piece of carbide), a slot is first cut on the tablesaw. This removes a significant portion of the timber from the socket, without affecting the resulting shape.

**D** Due to the shape, it has to be done with a single pass over the router bit.

**E** With the sockets cut, it is time to split the boards into the individual slats on the tablesaw. This may result in a slight flattening of the top of the ball, but this does not affect the tambour door operation in any way, and is not seen once the door is installed.

**F** With a brief sand and oil (or wax), the slats are ready to be slotted together. When I had finished it, and assembled all the slats, it was surprising to see just how flexible the tambour door was.

The next step in the project will be to route a slot for the tambour door to operate in. With the flexibility of the door, it can curve over (or around) the area it is covering, or follow a combination of convex and concave curves, such as can be found on the front of a traditional writing desk.

There you have it – the tambour door; adding a traditional element to your projects.

