

Wardrobe office

Neil Lawton shows us what he really keeps behind closed doors...

I was brought up in a world of 'make do and mend'. This project may have been easier if an older-style, solid wood, flat-fronted wardrobe was available, but we had been gifted this MDF one so it was definitely a case of make do.

The office is to be the only permanent resident of a new garden building we have that is to be used in myriad ways.

Essentially the space can be set up as either a gallery of works or a workshop for educational purposes. The last thing we need is computers and paperwork hidden beneath a pile of shavings from the last turning course, hence the need for a closable space. The client here was my partner, who had already decided to cover the finished article with a 'photowall'-type wallpaper of her own choosing. ►



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEIL LAWTON



1 The generic MDF wardrobe. Any standard 'boxy' wardrobe will do, however if the doors are solid wood with frame and panel construction then you may need to adjust your conversion technique to take the framing into account.

2 The upper internal shelf is one of the few things holding this together, so it shall remain as a rather deep bookshelf. It is important to retain structural integrity and, besides, some storage space is essential.

3 With the furniture removed, the doors are cut in two. If you aren't fortunate enough to possess a tablesaw, a handsaw, portable circular saw or router will do the same job, but the edges may need cleaning up.

4 An extra hinge now needs adding to the upper doors. Each door needs two hinges in the right place. If an existing hinge is too far from the end of the door you will need to add another hinge. The original fitting is a 26mm diameter hole, with plugs to stop the screws pulling from the MDF.

5 The new hinge holes were drilled with a 1in (25.4mm) Forstner bit. It helps if you are lucky enough to have a hinge sinker as it cuts out step 6.

6 The holes were then enlarged using a rotary sander, taking care to keep the shape round for a good hinge fit.

7 The hinge now seated, and the mounting holes could be marked and drilled. Incidentally the hinges need to match the existing ones as closely as possible because there are different types available.

8 The top of a standard rawl plug cut down. This type has non-return ridges that will hold it firmly in door material.



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9 They become the screw anchors for the new hinges, giving a more reliable fixing than screwing directly into MDF or chipboard.

10 The hinge bracket locations are marked and the pilot holes drilled. The tape marks the required depth to be drilled, without exiting the carcass.

11 Although ostensibly the same, the newer hinge brackets were not the same as the originals. Some nuts were temporarily used as spacers to find the correct position, until wooden spacers could be made.

12 The doors were sanded to remove high spots and provide a better key surface for the glue which would hold the door coverings.

13 Contact adhesive was then applied to the whole surface, which would allow the detail to be hidden beneath some thin plywood giving flat surfaces to be decorated.

14 Once the glue was dry, the ply could be trimmed to size with a flush trim router cutter, using the door edges as the guide for running the bearing against.

15 The desk surface was to be mounted on two long drawer runners, allowing it to be pulled out and provide the workspace and adequate leg room beneath. The runners were screwed to projecting battens to ensure clearance of the doors.

16 Cutting the solid wood desktop to fit the width of the thicknesser. It isn't always necessary for a clean-up operation, but this one was heavily graffitied. ▶



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17 There was evidence of filling on the original piece, which needed colouring in before a finish was applied.



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18 A biscuit jointer seemed the ideal way to reassemble the desk top. A dry run was made to ensure everything lined up before the glue was applied.



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19 With the glue line sanded and the top cut to size, a Danish oil finish was applied. A quick coat of paint and a vintage drawer handle becomes the pull-out point for the desk.



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20 The finished desk top and a second narrower book shelf were fitted in the upper section.



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21 New handles fitted and small battens fixed to bottom and top of the doors. This made up for the material taken away by the initial saw cut.

23 Once the paper was dry the handles were refitted, completing the outside. The handles complete the transformation, making it a stylish and a dust-free work space.

22 After a light sand and wash-down of the carcass, the 'photowall' paper was applied using the supplied adhesive. Suddenly it looks very different to its old wardrobe self.

24 The office is now in use. An anti-surge extension lead runs in through the back to provide the power for the computer equipment. A neat and compact office solution. ■



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