

My Ice Chest to Humidor Conversion

By Mark Steinberg

A few weeks ago I found a thread on Cigar Weekly titled: "Show me your humi". I saw something I really liked.

It was an old ice chest which member "Thomkm" had converted into a humidor.



This humidor is so fantastic that I had to have something like it. I certainly don't have the room, nor did I have the budget for something this big. I figured I'd look for a smaller unit.

I've seen many of these items at antique auctions, but never thought about converting one into a humidor. I did some internet searches and found some antique dealers selling ice chests for quite a bit of money. The ones I saw online

were priced anywhere from \$400 to \$1000. I certainly didn't want to spend that much money on this project right out of the gate so I searched ebay for ice chests, ice boxes and antique wood ice chests. After a diligent search I found a nice box that was located about 2 hours away from where I live.

I bid on and won an auction for the ice chest pictured below.



I brought the cabinet home and started my project. The first thing I noticed was that it had a nasty perfume smell to it. I think it was detergent or something similar and it was really in the wood. I decided to take the thing down to the shell so I could clean it out and start from scratch.

I did a search online and found a thread on "Cigar Live" written by my pal "MTMouse" (Tim from Ontario, Canada). I had done a cigar trade with him and thought it ironic that he had done a similar project. He had written a descriptive thread and posted many pictures of his project. Tim's thread provided a wealth of information for my upcoming project.

Here are photographs of Tim's completed Cabinet:



The bar had been set very high so I hoped I could live up to his standard of work. That being said I started my job.

Shots of the cabinet insides as the item was found:



The first thing I did was remove the existing interior out of the chest. I pulled the tin insides out of the cabinet so I could get the smell out of the cabinet.

Here are the progress photos:

Cabinet insides:



Above are shots of the inside after I tore out the tin lining.

I washed the entire inside of the cabinet and this helped eliminate the odors.

Above right is the bottom of the cabinet with new floor and leg supports. The old





ones were in rough shape and I needed to replace them to stabilize the cabinet. Above are pictures of what I did to the inside. I decide to insulate with Styrofoam to help stabilize inside temperature levels.

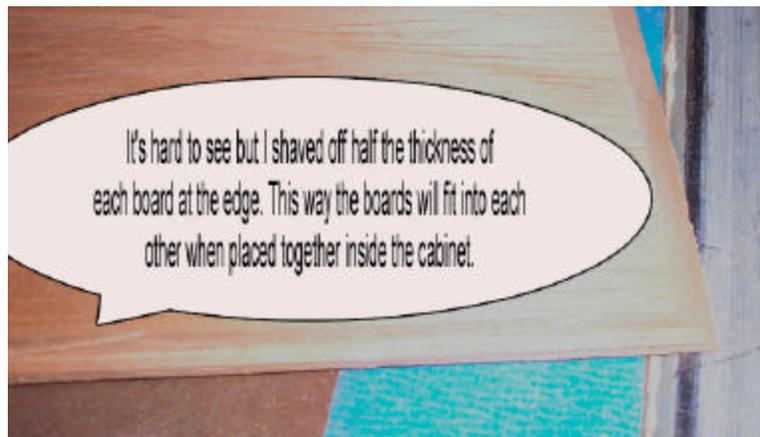
After Insulating I followed what Tim had done, I decide to build an interior box to help solidify the cabinet and create a better seal for when I line with Spanish cedar.

Finding the proper Spanish cedar at a good price turned into a major project in itself. There are many different places that sell Spanish cedar online but I felt they were too expensive and I really wanted to find a local lumberyard to deal with. Around Christmas time I was in Mamaroneck, New York and went into a new B & M Cigar shop there called "Doc James". The proprietor had recently built a fantastic, brand spanking new walk-in humidor. I asked him where he obtained his Spanish cedar. He gave me the name of a lumberyard in White Plains, New York called "Maurice L. Condon". I called them and was quoted a price for 1/4" boards of \$3.75 per board foot. I measured out the cabinet and figured in what I would need to build shelves and Cigar trays. I drove two hours to go to Condon's and it was a wise move. When I got to the establishment I knew I had made the proper move buying in person. Spanish cedar is a very sappy wood and most of the boards I went through were covered in sap. I went through all the wood to find the best 1/4" boards for my project and also picked out one 1-1/2" x 1-1/2" x 10' board and a 3-1/2" x 3/4" x 10' board.

Here is the wood I purchased:



I was now ready to start working on lining the inside of the cabinet. All the nice humidors I own have are lined with Spanish cedar that is tightly fit inside the box without glue or nails. The builders used 45 degree beveled edges to Accomplish this so that is what I decided to do.



The boards I purchased were of various widths, so I figured if I made a lip on each board then they would overlap each other to make a tight fit while providing an almost seamless presentation. I made dado cuts on the edge of each interior board. This work took quite a while but I was really looking for a nice presentation here. Part of the problem with this project was the fact that I was retrofitting an antique and some of the edges weren't exactly flush. I was really glad I followed Tim's lead at this point by having made a box inside the cabinet. That helped in making the measurements more consistent.



There were some tricky spots however; I wound up having to nail a few pieces into tight areas.



This particular spot was on the inside front of the cabinet, above is the photo of the latch side. I did the same thing on the opposite "hinge side".

Once the inside was fully lined with Spanish cedar I sliced some slats out of the 1-1/2" board to make a shelf to separate the bottom portion of the cabinet from the top. I screwed cedar boards to the sidewalls to provide support and then screwed the shelf boards to them.



Next I cut a hole in the bottom of the cabinet to place a gang box into for the GFI outlet.



Then I wired the outlet to the GFI and sealed the gang box with caulk.



I then fashioned a GFI outlet cover out of Spanish cedar.



With the inside of the cabinet finished, it was time to start replacing the top.



I built edge seals and started on the lid and front door inserts.

The front door seal was a bit tricky, as I really wanted this to be a tight seal.

I then removed all the existing wood forms from the front door.

I closed the door and used a carpenter's pencil to trace the edge of the inner door seals onto the closed door. Once I'd done that I measured the size of the tracings and started to fashion a "plug" which I could then attach to the door. I used the 1-1/2" square board to build the frame and routed a 1/4" slot along the inside edge to slide the 1/4" slats into.

Here is the "plug".



I made the inside able to hold some of the same Styrofoam I had used to insulate the cabinet walls. Once this piece was made I had to custom sand the edges so that it would fit tightly and close with ease.

Here is the door plug in place on the cabinet door.



I did a similar thing to fashion the top plug.

With all these steps completed the cabinet was now sealed and finished.

I then worked on installing the humidifier unit.

I bought the new “Hydra” unit to humidify my cabinet, as it seemed like the best for the job. The fact that I could use additional fans on this unit weighed heavily in my decision making process. I already had some spare computer fans lying around and decided that I would mount them underneath my separating shelf.

I place one directly above the corner I am using for the Hydra and one facing down on the opposite side of the cabinet.



I then measured the top hole and figured out what size trays I could make.



I made three trays out of the Spanish cedar.

Here are pictures of the completed Ice Chest Humidor.





The finished trays I made from scratch:

Thanks to “Thomkm” and “MTMouse” for providing the inspiration and construction ideas.



Mark Steinberg is a professional sound engineer & Cigar aficionado.