

Panel Door Headboard

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This project requires access to some power tools; at a minimum a circular saw and a sander are required. Optionally a miter saw and 18-gauge nail gun will make fabrication easier. The project requires the cutting and installation of crown molding.




Step 1 — Panel Door Headboard

- Locate your local building recycler and plan on spending some time there being amazed at all the cool things saved from demolished old buildings.
- Head over to the door area and start looking for a suitable door for your headboard. You want some interesting detail on the woodwork. Panels are great but be sure you choose a door with symmetrical panels, like a single- or 5-panel door.
- I was lucky to find a swinging door (no doorknob hole to fill) that was unpainted on one side.




Step 2

- After getting your door home you need to even out the top and bottom (doors rarely have the same space between the panels and the top and bottom of the door)
- OLD DOORS HAVE A HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF CONTAINING LEAD PAINT. PLEASE USE THE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS WHEN CUTTING OR SANDING LEAD PAINT. 
- Clamp down a straightedge to your door and cut off the longer edge to even out the door. Save the cut-off piece; you will use it to match wood types, test stain and varnish.



Step 3

- If the door is in rough shape it will need to be refinished.
- OLD DOORS HAVE A HIGH LIKELIHOOD OF CONTAINING LEAD PAINT. PLEASE USE THE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS WHEN CUTTING AND SANDING LEAD PAINT. 
- Check if your door is solid wood or a veneer (a thin layer of pretty wood glued over strong but not-so-pretty wood). Check the edges. If you have a veneer, make sure it is thick enough to sand off the finish. Do some test sanding on your cut-off piece.
- Sand off the old varnish and stain. Start with 100-grit sandpaper, then 180, then 220. You may need to make some sanding jigs to sand around your molding.
- Sand down a piece of the part you cut off earlier for testing stains. I used a 1/4-sheet palm sander for most of my work and a wood block and sanding jigs for the smaller areas.



Step 4

- This step is optional. Take a look at the (former) top and bottom edges of your door. These were not visible in its prior life, but will be now. If they're ugly (like mine), you can veneer over them.
- Sand the top and bottom edges of your door with 100-grit sandpaper to clean them up. Take your sanded sample cutoff down to the wood yard and purchase some matching veneer and contact cement.
- Using scissors cut two strips larger than your door edges. Following the directions on the contact cement can, paint two coats of contact cement on the veneer strips and the door edges.



Step 5

- Once the contact cement is dry, carefully put the cement side of the veneer in contact with the cemented door edges. You only have one chance to make contact; there is NO adjustment once they touch. Press the veneer against the door with 25lbs/square inch of pressure. This is done with a hard rubber roller (if you have one). I used my roll of blue masking tape and pressed hard.
- Trim the edges carefully with a very sharp knife. Clean all the sawdust off the door with a damp rag. Use painter's tape to hold down the veneer and allow to cure overnight.
- Sand the edges with a wooden block and sandpaper to finish the edges.



Step 6

- Take your sample cutoff down to the lumberyard and pick up some crown molding. Buy more than you think you need if you've never cut crown molding before. Practice on scraps if you can.
- You will need a miter box or miter saw for this step. Hold the molding at a 45-degree angle when cutting.



Step 7

- Glue and nail your crown to the door. I used an 18-gauge nail gun and my son to help me hold things together.
- Fill your nail holes with plastic wood. After it dries, sand the patches with 220-grit sandpaper.



Step 8

- Test out the old cans of stain you have in storage on your sanded cutoff, then decide you need something new. Test the new stain to make sure you like it.
- Clean your door one more time with a damp cloth. Let dry and apply stain per the directions (do not apply stain on wood that has been in the sun; trust me).
- Once the stain is dry you can apply your first coat of varnish. I selected a satin finish. Sand lightly with 220-grit sandpaper between coats. Clean dust off with a clean damp rag before applying second coat.
- Let the second coat cure for a week before moving your new headboard into your bedroom. This will prevent you from breathing varnish fumes.



Step 9

- You want to make a cleat at least 24 inches long to be able to screw into two studs in your wall.
- Get a 6-foot pine 1 x 4.
- Set your circular saw to a 45-degree angle (or use a table saw). Clamp the board to a work surface and rip it lengthwise.
- Cut some 6-inch scraps to use as spacers at the bottom of the headboard.
- Drill and countersink four holes in the headboard cleat and two holes in each spacer.
- I used 1 5/8-inch deck screws to attach the cleats. Do not use drywall screws; they are brittle and can snap off.



Step 10

- Find the center of the headboard and the center of the cleat. Line them up and attach the headboard cleat and spacers to the headboard. Check the orientation of the cleat before screwing it down.
- Find the studs in the wall at the head of your bed. Mark the wall cleat. Drill and countersink holes in the wall cleat.
- Measure from the bottom of the headboard to the bottom of the headboard cleat. Mark a line on the wall this distance above the level of your mattress.
- Align the top of the wall cleat with the studs and the height line. Drive one screw into a stud and level the wall cleat. Attach the second wall cleat screw.



Step 11

- Hang the headboard on the wall cleat. Admire your handiwork.
- Realize you need a larger bed (bed shown here is a queen mattress).

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