

How to Drill Fretboard Side Dots

Drilling side dots accurately requires a reliable way to hold the workpiece and guide the bit. In this article, we'll show how to drill side dot holes in a guitar neck or fretboard using the Fretboard Side Dot Drill Jig.

This Jig is best suited to necks with a flat peghead and a tapered fretboard, such as those commonly found on Fender[®]-style guitars. It also works with tapered slotted fingerboards before they are glued to the neck.

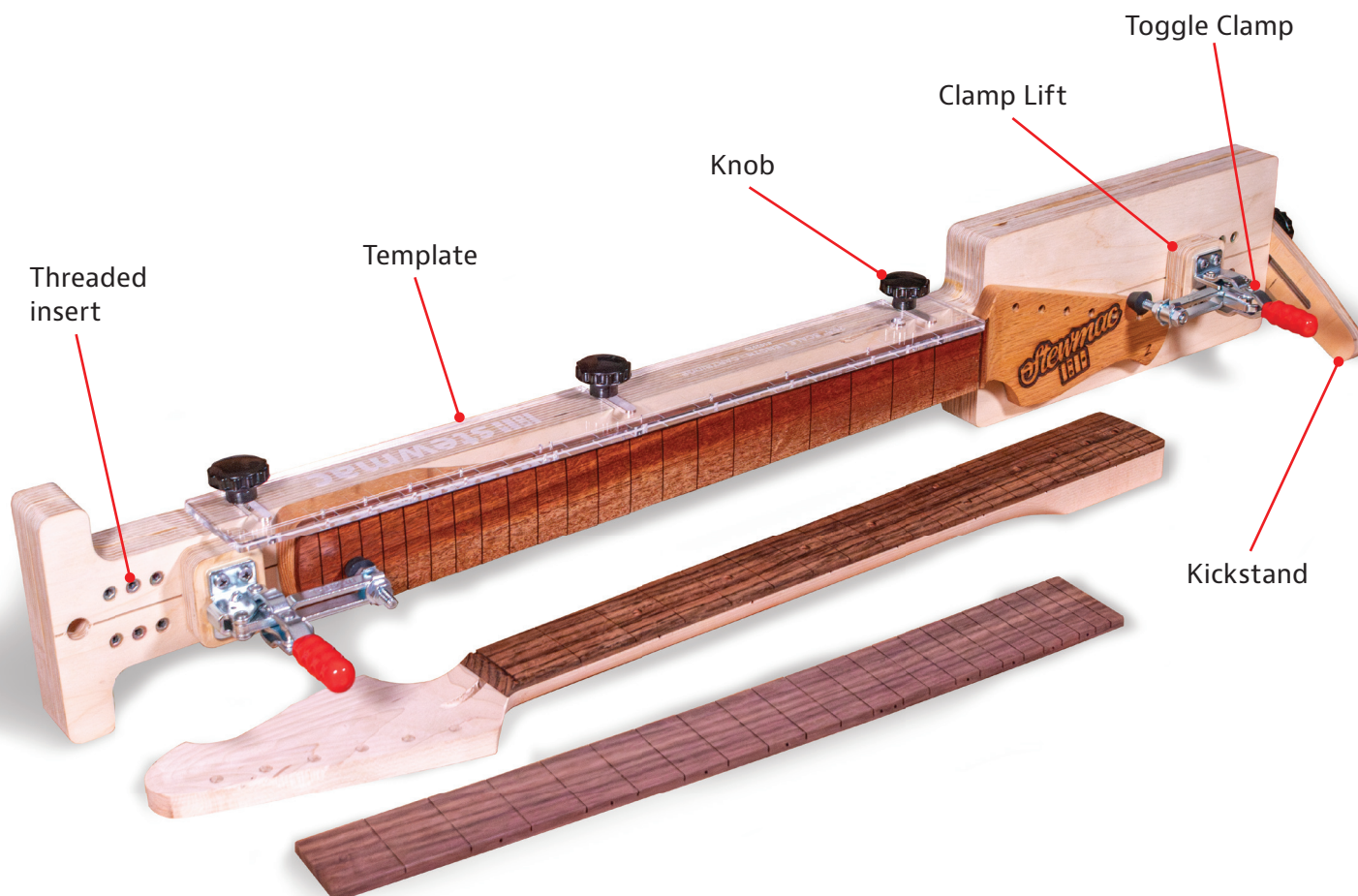
The jig secures the neck or fretboard via toggle clamps. Acrylic templates align with the fret slots, ensuring proper drilling positions. The Templates are available for several scale lengths to match your build.

Once everything is aligned and secured, drilling clean, consistent side dot holes is quick and repeatable.

What You'll Need:

- StewMac Fretboard Side Dot Drill Jig (#102932)
- StewMac Fretboard Side Dot Drill Template to match your scale length (#102925-102930)
- Slotted fretboard or glued-up neck
- #2 x 4" Phillips screwdriver
- 7/16" (11 mm) wrenches for Clamp adjustment
- Awl
- Handheld drill
- 3/32" drill bit or 1/16" bit for 25.34" scale length

StewMac Fretboard Side Dot Drill Jig #102932



Set up the Jig and secure the neck

Right- or left-handed necks are supported in playing position, with the peghead on the large end of the Jig. The thin middle portion of the Jig secures the neck or fretboard.

Configure the Jig

- Screw a Knob into each insert on the edge that orients your neck into playing position.
- Insert the Template for your fret scale length facing out, aligning its slots with the Knobs' threads.
- Once the Template edge is nearly flush with the Jig's rear face, tighten the Knobs enough to secure it while still allowing adjustability.

Position the neck

- Place your guitar neck on the Jig, abutting it to the Template, and align your fret slots with the fret lines on the Template.
- Set a Lift at the body end of your neck, aligning its screw holes with the threaded inserts in the face of the Jig.
- Set a Toggle Clamp on the Lift and thread the screws through the Clamp's base, the Lift, and into the Jig's inserts. Tighten the screws snug, but not overly tight. (To secure a fretboard only, omit the Lifts.)
- Ensure your fret slots align with the Template fret lines and that the Template's holes are where you want them on the fretboard and/or neck. Make any necessary adjustments before engaging the Toggle Clamp to secure the neck. Repeat this procedure for the peghead end.
- Depending on the shape of your peghead, only a portion of the Clamp's tip may make contact. Nevertheless, the neck should be secure at both ends.

Install the Kickstand

- Set the Jig upright with the neck in playing position, and tighten the Knobs.
- Feed the remaining Knob through the Kickstand's slot and into the threaded insert at the peghead end of the jig. Orient the narrow end of the Kickstand toward the front of the Jig and onto your bench.
- With the Template, neck, and Kickstand installed, it's time to drill.



Drill precise side dot holes

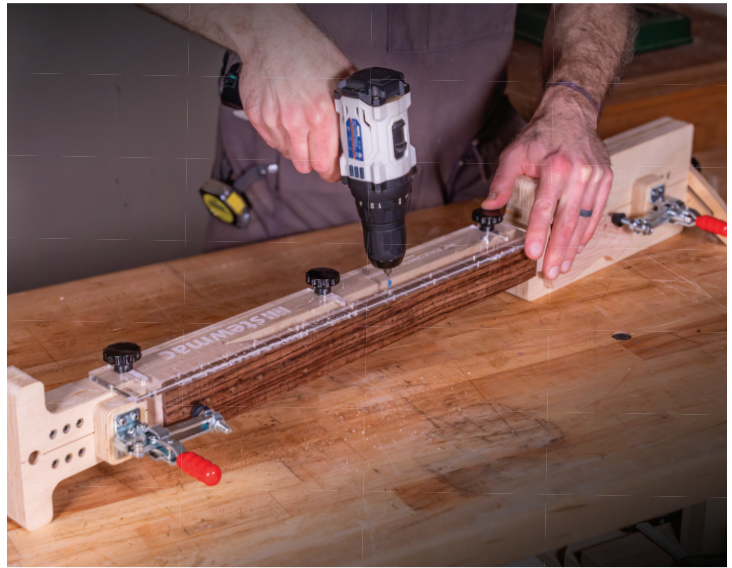
Before drilling, confirm the setup:

- Ensure that your guitar neck is secure.
- Verify that your fret slots are precisely aligned with the Template.
- Make sure the Kickstand is engaged and tightened.

Mark the hole locations and drill

The holes in the Template represent your dot locations. Its thickness helps prevent the bit from wandering off course.

- Use an awl to mark the drill locations.
- Chuck a drill bit into your handheld drill. Use a bit the exact size of your dot material, which corresponds with the scale length of the Template.
- Drill a hole approximately 1/8" deep. Wrap your drill bit with tape to mark the depth.
- Drill each hole in turn, keeping your drill perfectly perpendicular to the work.



Alternate setups

To drill slotted fretboards that haven't yet been glued to necks, leave out the Lifts. Set up the Jig and secure the work in the same fashion as with a guitar neck. But install the Toggle Clamps directly to the Jig face.

If you prefer drilling horizontally, the Jig provides plenty of clamping surface. After setting up, lay the Jig face up and near the edge of your bench and use an F-style clamp to secure it at each end.

While the Jig may still be usable on necks with a tilt-back peghead, the geometry is not ideal and setup may be less stable. In these cases, use the Template without the Jig. Secure the neck and then align the Template with your fret slots before affixing it to your neck using double-stick tape.

