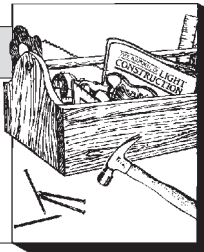


## Makita's Cordless Tile Saw

by Neil Momb



A tile saw is one of those remodeling tools that you don't ordinarily use enough to justify buying. Even a cheap tile-cutter costs about \$550, plus another \$150 for a diamond blade. And for small jobs, the rental fees, plus the time it takes to send a helper out to get one, can quickly eat into the always-too-slim profit margin.

To the rescue comes Makita's model 4190D cordless cutter. Makita equipped their 9.6 volt, 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-inch cordless circular saw with a diamond blade, and added a simple water reservoir with enough plumbing to deliver a trickle of water near the blade. Presto, they created the slickest, little tile saw you can imagine. It will even cut glass. Best of all, you can get it for about \$110, including the blade.

I'll admit I was skeptical at

first, so before buying one I made sure it could be returned. I couldn't believe a battery-powered tool would cut something as hard as ceramic tile in any reasonable time. But I got less than half way through the first cut before changing my mind.

The blade is so small, I was able to cut a hole for an electrical outlet right in the middle of one tile. And the floor I just finished had a number of octagon-shaped columns set at 22.5 degrees to the tile joints. This made for a lot of difficult shapes (see Figure 1). One tile had a U-shaped cut in it. And several pieces had very delicate notches. Without a doubt, the saw paid for itself on that one job.

The motor turns the blade at a slow 1,000 rpm, but delivers enough power to zing through tile at a nice, steady clip. In fact, the blade turns slow enough that it doesn't throw water all over the place. And since the saw is compact, it can be set up right in the work area.

Here's how I set mine up: First, I cut a 6-inch section from the bottom of a 5-gallon plastic bucket, and placed this inside a lightweight plastic mortar box. On top of the cut-off bucket are a pair of 1x2s that are long enough to span the bucket. The tile sits on these as it is cut (see Figure 2). I use another 1x2 under one end of the mortar box to slant the whole assembly so the water and cutting residue will be carried away from the cut. Most of the

water ends up in the bucket. The rest, along with the splatters and spray, is caught in the mortar box.

After several jobs, I've learned a few helpful hints for cutting tile:

- It's better to use too much, rather than too little water. At least in our part of the country, water is still cheaper than diamond blades.

### The blade is so small, I was able to cut a hole for an electrical outlet right in the middle of one tile.

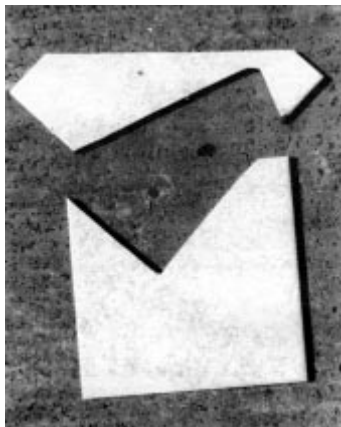
- On diagonal cuts, cut part way from each end of the tile, otherwise the point can break off as you finish the cut.
- Keep at least two batteries on hand so you don't have to wait for a re-charge (about one hour).
- Mark tile with a pencil. Felt-tip pen lines wash off in the water

as you cut. Also, ink can bleed into marble and unglazed tile, which can be disastrous.

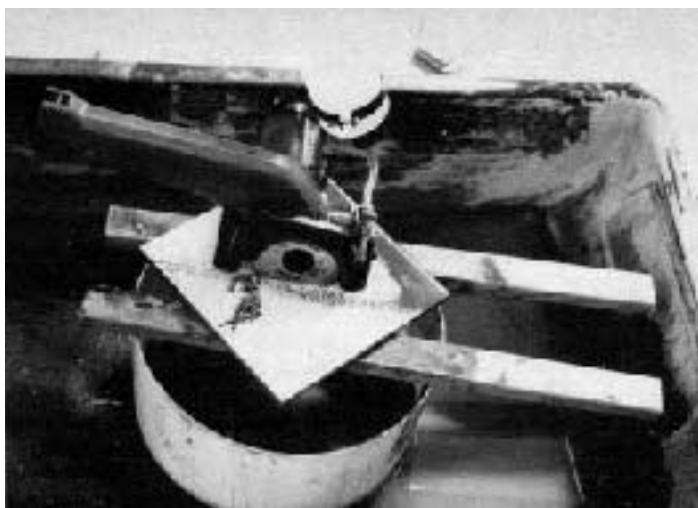
- Some tiles are nearly impossible to mark on the front, but are easily marked on the unglazed back. Often it works better to cut from the backside, anyway.
- Use a large squeeze-bottle to fill up the reservoir. The opening in the reservoir is ridiculously small and without the squeeze bottle you risk giving the motor a bath.

I now think this tiny saw is not just "adequate." It's a cut above other tile saws, if for no other reason than it will make complicated cuts that I just don't think I could make with any other saw. And for most remodeling work, versatility is everything. ■

*Guest columnist Neil Momb is a builder and remodeler from Issaquah, Wash., with 40 years experience under his toolbelt, in just about every aspect of construction. If you have a question, or would like to share your views on a new and inspiring tool, please send your comments to Toolbox, JLC, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.*



**Figure 1.** Two tricky tile cuts made with a Makita 4190D cordless cutter.



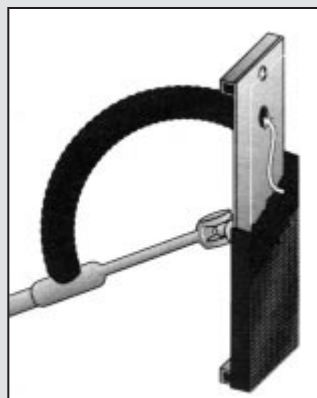
**Figure 2.** The Makita cordless circular saw — equipped with a diamond blade and water reservoir — makes a versatile tile saw. To catch the splatter and spray, the author sets up the saw over a cut-off mud bucket placed in a lightweight mortar box.

## TOOLBITS

**Without the tile-cutting apparatus,** Makita's tiny cordless circ saw seems a useful siding saw. Joseph Dealmeida of Custom Craft Remodelers in Somerville, Mass., uses a **Makita 5090D** for trimming vinyl siding, wood clapboards, shingles, and soffit material. Since the saw is so maneuverable, Dealmeida likes using it up on scaffolds and ladders, eliminating a lot of passing of material back down to his cut-man. But, according to Dealmeida, the blade needs a little customizing. He regrinds the 3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-inch steel blades from 50 to 100 teeth to get a smooth cut in vinyl.

**For dust-free drywall sanding,** the **Yarborough VacuSand** — a pole sander that hooks up to a vacuum

cleaner — looks like the way to go (Yarborough Industries, PO Box 104, Enon, OH 45323; 800/837-7401 or 513/864-7778 in Ohio). The sander has 36 ports on the pad which suck dust away from the surface through a sanding screen (it won't work with paper). According to the manufacturer, as long as you're sanding, no dust gets into the air, though a little will fall away from the pad when you pull off the wall. The VacuSand comes with six feet of hose for about \$80. The manufacturer also makes a hand VacuSand with a 12-foot hose for about \$70. And, since drywall dust is such insidious stuff that it bypasses most standard vacuum filters, Yarborough Industries makes the **Aquair Filter** — an in-line reservoir that filters the dust through five gallons of water. The filter with a 12-foot hose sells for \$68.



The VacuSand — available as a pole sander or a hand sander (not shown) — might make drywall sanding a little more pleasant.

**Duro Enterprises makes a great pair of wirestrippers** that self-adjust for the size of the wire (Duro Enterprises, 4415 W. Harrison St., Hillside, IL 60162; 708/449-0236). As you squeeze these strippers together, a jaw grips the wire; additional pressure clips the casing and pulls it off without damaging the conductor. The strippers self-adjust for 12 to 26-gauge wire. I used a pair for stripping stranded bell wire and solid Romex with equal success. I was even able to strip all four wires in a telephone cable at once. ■

— Clayton DeKorne