A Compact Job-Site Shop

by Paul Turpin

I used to maintain a 1,000-square-foot shop to prepare millwork for my kitchen and bath remodeling jobs, but found I was spending too much time there when I needed to be at the job site. Gradually, I started moving the shop operations to the site, experimenting with jigs and worktables to make the job easier. Now I can do on site most of what I used to do in the shop, using the rigs described here.

A Miter Saw Stand on Wheels

Chopsaws are great tools, but they are heavy and awkward to lug around. Also, the extension wings don't provide nearly enough support for cutting one end of a long board. This simple pine stand solves both problems. It's on wheels so it's easy to move. The block attached between the wheels serves as a stop so the saw can stand on end and be leaned against a wall without rolling away. The compartments under the saw provide extra room for small hand tools. The handle, at the left end, and the block between the wheels, at the right end, double as extension supports. I keep the saw bolted to the pine stand. I've found the wood stand very useful for attaching stops, special jigs, and so forth.

A Versatile Workbench

This is my version of a multipurpose, portable workbench. It's made from a solid-core door blank and is about 2 feet wide by 6 feet long. I faced it with tempered hardboard and glued 2x2-inch oak to the edges. The ends are capped with 1/2-inch birch plywood. I have a simple Sears woodworking vise bolted on one end.

The workbench itself sits on sawhorses. It's heavy enough that I usually don't even need to screw it down. To save my back, I made a little double-wheel assembly (shown being removed in the photo) that enables me to stand the bench on one corner and wheel it around. To make it as versatile as possible, I've set it up to hold both my power plane and plunge router. I also added a floating fence/stop system that includes quick-release hold-down clamps for such tasks as plate-joining and drilling.

Poor Man's Jointer

This arrangement transforms my workbench into a simple jointer. I use the 3 1/4-inch Makita 1100 power planer. This comes with a two-post, heavy-duty adjustable fence that I mount to the underside of the bench. Then I just slide the power planer onto it. The outfeed fence is permanently bolted to the bench edge; the infeed fence is shimmed and held by bolts. I can adjust the infeed fence with some effort, but I normally leave it set to take off 1/32 inch in one pass.

Most of the time I use this setup to dress the edges of 3/4-inch-thick stock. I really like the stability of jointing my workpiece flat instead of up on edge, and I can always get a good look at the line of the cut. I'm able to run stock 12 to 15 inches wide by 8 to 10 feet long without any extra supports.

I use a couple of 2-inch ABS plastic elbows for a dust chute, with one end shaved a little and padded with foam and duct tape to friction-fit the planer's odd-shaped ejector hood. My guard is a simple cam-shaped piece of acrylic whose top pivots to ride up over the workpiece. I always use push blocks, of course.

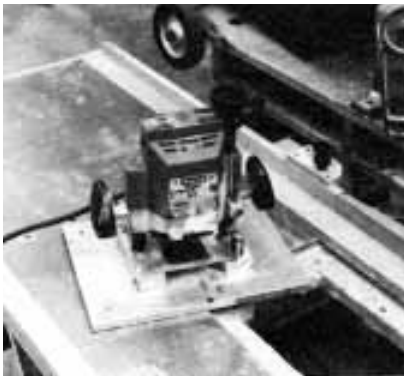
Benchtop Hold-Down

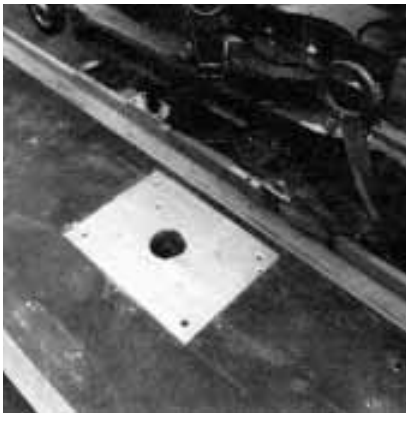
This hold-down assembly has the same type of adjustable fence as the router fence. I customized the hold-down clamps by putting a longer machine screw at the clamp end (the end with the black tip) with a wing nut on top so that I can adjust the vertical depth of the clamp capacity. With this setup, I can clamp down anything from a sheet of paper to 2-inch stock.

Initially I had a problem with the fences sliding on the bench top when I pushed too hard. I solved this by doubling over a few pieces of 80-grit sandpaper (the white squares in the photos) and placing them between the assembly and the bench near the hold-down screws.

This portable chopsaw station and versatile workbench make on-site millwork easy

Workbench Router Table





Tiny router tables have always driven me batty. The ads always show someone milling a piece about 18 inches long, but I often run pieces 12 to 16 feet long if I'm making custom molding.

I use my workbench top as a router table. I bought an extra base for my plunge router and attached it to a 1/2-inch-thick aluminum plate, which drops into a mortised recess in the bench top. Countersunk 1/4-20 machine screws thread into T-nuts in the bench bottom to secure the whole assembly.

The fence is a piece of 1x6 oak, with slots for adjusting its position (shown in place behind hold-down in bottom right photo, previous page). The slots take 5/16-18 machine screws, to which I epoxied knurled plastic caps. These screw into threaded inserts set into the tabletop. I spaced the inserts so that the slots would allow me to set the clamp anywhere on the width of the bench. The round holes are for hanging the guides up when I'm not using them.

A ring-guard for the router bit completes the setup. A piece of 1/2-inch birch plywood fills the recess when the router is in use elsewhere. The hole in the bench top also comes in handy when I use the jigsaw or through-drill a large workpiece that needs tabletop support.

Drill Press Table

A bench-mounted drill press completes my jobsite setup. An oversized adjustable table, held to the drill press table with two 3/8-inch carriage bolts and wing nuts below, enables me to position the fence where I need it. The fence is cut out in the center to fit back against the support column. The width of the table gives me better support for drilling the ends of long pieces.

I use the drill press primarily for cutting plugs for countersunk screw holes and for drilling cabinet doors for Euro-style hinges. It's also nice to have a drill press for any metal drilling I may have to do. ■

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