

Time-Saving Tools

FOR FRAMERS AND FINISH CARPENTERS

Trying to speed production and increase accuracy on the job? These tools deserve a look.

The Mother of all Hole Saws

One of the great things about I-joists is that you can cut monstrous holes for ductwork and other mechanicals. But using a recip saw to make those holes is slow, and there's always a risk of cutting into a flange. A better method is the *Matrix Xtreme* hole saw. Its billet aluminum frame holds three easily replaceable blades that, according to the manufacturer, resist binding and cut faster than the teeth on conventional hole saws. In addition, the cutters are mounted about $\frac{3}{8}$ inch from the outside edge, which prevents the blades from getting too close to flanges. They'll work with an ordinary heavy-duty $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch drill because the small cutters require less torque than the continuous teeth on conventional, large-diameter hole saws. Sizes go from $3\frac{5}{8}$ (\$88) to $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches (\$167).

Matrix Xtreme, 866/320-5340, www.matrixxtreme.com.



by Patrick McCombe



Don't Forget To Flush

Making flush cuts with a recip saw usually requires dragging your knuckles and bending the blade — a blood-letting practice that can damage materials you want to salvage and greatly reduce a blade's lifespan. But the *Flush Cut Adapter* does the same thing without the knuckle dragging or broken blades. The add-on blade holder has a $1\frac{5}{8}$ -inch offset and uses the saw's existing blade clamp assembly. The company also makes rasp and file adapters for recip saws that can get you into a tight spot. The Flush Cut Adapter goes for \$40, and the rasp and sander attachments sell for \$30 each.

Flush Cut, 707/632-6854, www.theflushcut.biz.





Wood Razor

Comparing a *Microplane* rasp to a Surform rasp is like comparing a Ferrari to a Checker cab — they'll both get you where you're going, but one can do it a lot faster. After trying a Microplane a few weeks ago, I would guess that the stainless-steel blades are twice as sharp as the blue steel blade on a Surform. They're sold in round, half-round, and flat varieties. They also make drum-shaped versions for your drill press as well as replacement blades to boost the performance of your Surform. A single-handle flat rasp sells for about \$12. **Grace Manufacturing**, 479/968-5455, www.microplane.com.

Better Blade

I was under the impression that knives with breakaway blades were only for scrapbooks until I saw these *utility knives* from Olfa. The pro-grade tools not only give you a new edge in seconds, but a blade with a few segments left can be extended a couple inches for cutting thicker materials like rigid insulation. There are many models to choose from, but the L2 shown sells for about \$9. The company also makes the nicest circle cutter I've come across. The CMP-2 has a comfortable handle and also uses break-away blades. It looks perfect for cutting in can lights and round fixture boxes in drywall. It goes for \$39.

Olfa, 800/962-6532, www.olfa.com.

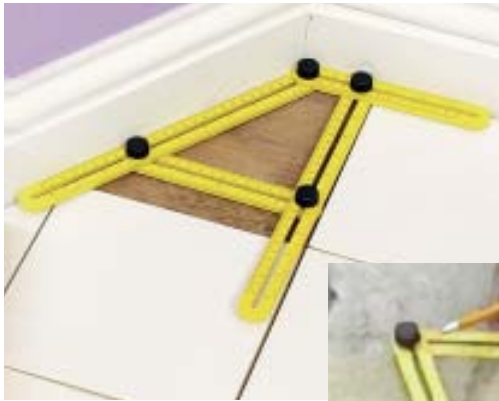


A New Angle on Mitters

Determining accurate miter settings for crown molding and inside and outside corners can involve a lot of trial and error, but a new tool from Starrett can speed the process considerably. The sturdy aluminum *ProSite Protractor* gives you both the actual angle in degrees and the miter setting on your saw. I was especially impressed with the tight tolerances of the rotating joint where the two legs meet. It holds its position firmly and can be adjusted with an Allen wrench. The tool measures 12 inches long and costs about \$40.

Starrett, 978-249-3551, www.starrett.com.

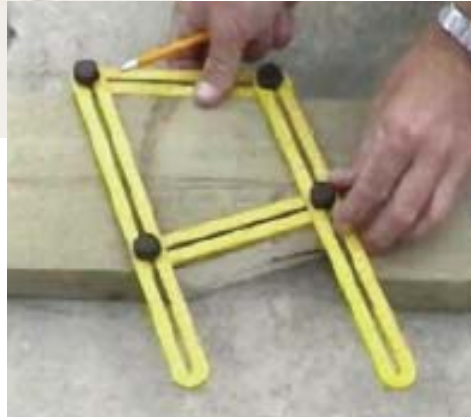




Copy Machine

A template is often the fastest and most accurate way to make complicated cuts on floor tile or trim. If you don't feel like carrying scraps of plywood in your toolbelt, you could use the *Angleizer*. It's a four-sided adjustable template made from a sturdy but flexible plastic material. Measurements are imprinted on all four sides and will hold up when scraped with a utility knife. It sells for about \$20.

General Tools, 212/431-6100, www.generaltools.com.



No Knuckle Dragging

Nailing off subfloor with a framing nailer is fast and easy, but bending over a nail-gun with your knuckles dragging won't do much for your image, and it certainly won't help your back. You can make the whole process a lot more civilized and easier on your back with a *Pneumatic Nailgun Extension* from Sure Drive. According to the manufacturer, the steel extension fits on "virtually" any framing gun and permits standing upright while you're nailing subfloors and decking. Comfortable rubber grips for both hands help with accuracy, and a wire hook near the top holds the hose. The suggested retail price is \$90.

Sure Drive USA, 888/219-1700, www.suredrive.com.



Board Bender

I've found that, unless you're a deck builder, most board straighteners aren't very useful. They're big and bulky and rely on some method to grab the joist — not much good if you're installing hardwood over a subfloor. The *Bow/Jak* is the one board-straightener that I think is worth its salt. It's small enough to keep in your toolbelt and allows you to pry against a wedge driven into the subfloor or framing member — instead of a joist. I found it on the web for \$32.

Vaughan & Bushnell, 815/648-2446, www.vaughanmfg.com.

Fall-Arrest for Tools

If you've ever watched your cordless drill take a suicidal leap from two stories high, you know that there's little you can do except pick up the pieces after it hits the ground. But you can prevent such a needless tragedy with the *MultiHoldit*. What's cool about this product is it's a lot more versatile than a holster: You can use it for nailers, cordless recip saws, and caulking guns. It sells for about \$20.

Captn's Products, 620/432-0101, www.multipholdit.com.



Miter Marker

We all know that the world is built from miters other than 45 and 90 degrees. The *Accur-8 Folding Miter Square* from Swanson not only gives you the most common 45- and 90-degree angles, it also shows 22½, 67½, 112½, 135, and 157½ degrees. Strong detents hold the polished stainless blade firmly in position. Laser-etched markings are easy to see and won't wear off. An 8-inch version sells for \$30, and the 12-inch sells for \$5 more.

Swanson Tool Co, 815/469-9453, www.swansontoolco.com.



Angle Finder

Determining the angle of trim, roof pitches, and sloping ceilings is a lot easier with a new tool from Tajima. The *Slant AL200* has a rotating bubble level controlled by a thumbwheel on the housing. By rotating the level you can determine the angle measured in degrees, and you can even do it one-handed (not possible when improvising with a T-bevel and torpedo level). Magnets on the housing allow you to attach it to ferrous surfaces while you take a reading. Oddly, the scale doesn't include roof pitches expressed in rise over 12. It sells for \$40.

Tajima, 888/482-5462, www.tajimatool.com.



Job-Site Jaws

Few tools have as many practical uses as a pair of locking pliers. But getting the proper jaw adjustment usually takes a few tries. The new *SeberGrip* pliers, however, automatically adjust the jaws to the right size without the trial and error required by conventional locking pliers. Adjustable jaw tension allows you to fine-tune the amount of grip, and you can turn off the self-locking feature if you want to use them like channel locks. Laminated jaws open to a maximum of 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches and use opposing teeth that provide a good grip on a variety of materials. Among other things, I used them to remove a rounded-off blade bolt on my coworker's circular saw — they worked great. They sell for about \$30. **SeberTech**, 760/598-8888, www.sebertech.com.



King Kong's Carrier

The half-dozen panel carriers I've seen come and go at the local lumberyard all required that you lift the panel and put the carrier at the bottom. At that point you've already lifted the panel, so why not keep going? The *Gorilla Gripper* is different. It grabs the panel from the top, so you don't have to bend over or hold the panel while you ready the carrier. The aluminum tool seems well made, and it sells for about \$30.

Cole Scientific, 805/523-1800, www.gorillagripper.com.



Cabinet Caddy

Carrying and placing a kitchen's worth of cabinets can be tough on your back, but the *Speed Dollie* from FastCap can make it easier. The aluminum dolly allows you to scoop up a cabinet and roll it into place on rubber wheels that won't mar finished flooring. The dolly folds flat for storage, has a 250-pound capacity, and sells for \$80.

FastCap, 888/443-3748, www.fastcap.com.



Space Makers

I can't think of too many on-site projects that take up more space than painting an entire home's worth of trim or interior doors. There's also the challenge of finding a place that's clean and won't see any other activity. If such a place proves elusive on your job sites, you might consider these new painting tools from Pivot-Pro. The *Trim-Tree*, at left, is a sturdy drying rack that the manufacturer claims will hold 2,500 lineal feet of trim and sets up in 1 minute. The *WS-300*, below, is a rotating workstand for painting interior and cabinet doors, balusters, and shutters. Locking pivots hold the door flat or on edge. The system includes a drying rack that mounts on your saw horses and holds seven doors. Freestanding Trim-Trees start at \$400; wall-mounted versions sell for \$190. The WS-300 sells for \$490.

Pivot-Pro, 989/736-8930, www.pivot-pro.com.



Keep Your Cool

Working in hot weather can really slow production and can be downright dangerous. If the troops need a space to cool off or you want to be a little more comfortable indoors, you might consider the *Port-a-Cool*. The portable evaporative cooler uses a fan to blow air through a water-saturated medium, which can lower ambient temperature as much as 20 degrees in warm, dry climates. Just keep in mind that the units require 110 volts and a cold-water connection from a garden hose for operation. It will also raise the humidity level when used indoors. The 36-inch size shown starts at \$2,600.

General Shelters, 800/695-2942, www.port-a-cool.com.

