

# Cool Tools for 2012

by Bruce Greenlaw

The top products on display  
at the STAFDA show

Just when you think you've already seen the ultimate cordless drill, stepladder, and framing nailer, along comes the annual Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association trade show. At this event, hundreds of manufacturers show a mind-boggling array of construction products — including new stock-in-trade tools with surprising upgrades — to distributors and retailers. The latest show was held in November in San Antonio, and *JLC* made its usual pilgrimage to see what's noteworthy. Here are some of the products that really stood out.



## Radar Vision

To use Bosch's futuristic *Wallscanner D-tect 150* wall/floor scanner, you turn it on, select one of seven modes for scanning anything from deep concrete to drywall, and then roll the scanner slowly and continuously over the surface on its four rear wheels. The tool's "Ultra-Wide Band Radar Technology" detects wood and metal studs, live and nonlive wires, copper pipe, plastic pipe, rebar (including rebar up to 6 inches deep in cured concrete), and other materials. A backlit LCD screen indicates the type, depth, and width of the material. Four AA batteries provide power. The scanner (including batteries and a case) costs about \$1,000.

**Bosch**, 877/267-2499, [boschtools.com](http://boschtools.com).



## Ultra-Bright Penlight

Though the new water-resistant Megapro work light is only 6¼ inches long and clips to a pocket, it contains six white LED bulbs that generate a surprisingly bright light. Three AAA batteries furnish power at the click of a button. According to Megapro, alkaline batteries yield 12 to 14 hours of illumination, and lithium batteries 17 to 19 hours. The light costs \$15, alkaline batteries included.

**Megapro Marketing**, 866/522-3652, [megapro.net](http://megapro.net).



## Clean Cordless Rotary Hammer

Due to hit the market in late spring or early summer, Makita's 1-inch *LXRH01* 18-volt lithium-ion SDS-plus rotary hammer packs an easily removable HEPA mini-vacuum that shares the tool's battery but is driven by its own DC motor. The vacuum turns on when you squeeze the trigger, then stays on for two or three seconds after you let go, to capture more dust. The rotary hammer itself is powered by a brushless motor that's smaller and more efficient than standard brushed motors. With the vacuum running, Makita told me, the tool can drill 50 percent more holes on a single charge than the company's BHR241 7/8-inch SDS-plus rotary hammer, which has the same 18-volt battery, a brushed motor, and no vacuum. The new kit — including two batteries, a charger, and a case — will cost about \$650.

**Makita**, 800/462-5482, [makita.com](http://makita.com).

### Inspectable Fall Protection

Werner is rolling out its first line of fall-protection equipment this month, including harnesses, lifelines, lanyards, anchors, and complete kits that make it easier to comply with OSHA regulations. The *Blue Armor 1000* harness features WebAlert inspectable webbing, which uses contrasting fibers to indicate wear or damage at a glance. The manufacturer declined to provide pricing.

**Werner**, 888/523-3371, [us.wernerco.com](http://us.wernerco.com).



### Bar Talk

PacTool has been selling its *Roof Snake* composition-shingle replacement tool (top three photos) for several years, and now it has lengthened the tool for better leverage and added a demonstration video to its website. The tool substitutes for the traditional flat bar to make it easier to remove a shingle and install a new one without whacking your fingers or damaging the overlapping shingles. At one end, it has a crow's foot that breaks the adhesive seal between courses and removes existing nails. At the other, an offset head holds your replacement nails the required one inch up from the bottom edge of the overlapping course as you hammer them home. The tool is made in the U.S. and costs about \$25.

Stanley sold its first 55-099 Fubar functional utility bar in 2006. A cross between a wrecking bar and a hammer, it has a crow's foot at the base of the handle for pulling nails and prying, plus a pair of lumber-grabbing jaws right behind the hammer head so you can wrench a stud right out of a wall. There are now six Fubar models to choose from, including the new 14-inch 55-134 demolition bar displayed at the show. It resembles a flat bar but has a bi-material grip in the middle and a P-shaped chisel at one end, and three surfaces you can strike with a hammer so you can beat, pull, pry, chisel, or chop materials apart. It costs about \$20.

**PacTool International**, 800/297-7487, [pactool.us](http://pactool.us).

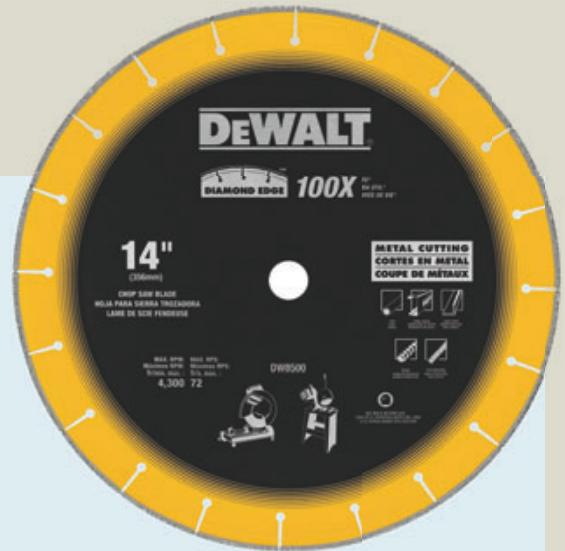
**Stanley**, 800/262-2161, [stanleytools.com](http://stanleytools.com).



## Long-Lasting Chop-Saw Blade

Abrasive metal-cutting chop-saw wheels tend to wear quickly and, in the process, shrink in diameter, reducing their cutting capacity. One solution is to use DeWalt's new 14-inch *DW8500 Diamond Edge* chop-saw blade. According to the company, the diamond-grit blade cuts like a standard abrasive wheel (with a little less dust and a little more heat) but lasts 100 times longer while holding its original diameter. Considering that DeWalt's standard 14-inch abrasive wheels go for about \$4 to \$12 apiece and the Diamond Edge blade costs \$250, the latter appears to be a bargain.

**DeWalt**, 800/433-9258, dewalt.com.



## Spirited Levels

Irwin has launched a complete new lineup of box-beam and I-beam spirit levels, including the *2500 Series* of premium nonmagnetic box beams. These levels have a thick-walled aluminum frame with a continuous edge that protects the center vial and allows nonstop scribing, plus rubber end caps that can be removed easily with one hand so they don't interfere with your layout. A "Plumb Site" window lets you view one of the plumb vials conventionally, or at the level's edge when you would otherwise have to strain for a side view. Six-foot and longer versions add an extra horizontal vial near one end. The *2550 Series* adds rare-earth magnets along one edge. The levels in both series range in size from 16 to 96 inches long and in price from \$50 to \$210.

**Irwin**, 800/464-7946, irwin.com.



## Bright Liners

Ergodyne continues to expand its N-Ferno line of cold-weather work wear, most recently with two new hardhat liners: the regular-length *6850LED* and the shoulder-length *6852LED*.

These cotton-twill shells lined with poly fleece are designed to keep your head warm while lighting your way. Two LEDs on the edge of the brim cast light up to 50 feet away, and two more LEDs underneath illuminate close-up work. Four CR2032 lithium button batteries ride in a rear interior pocket to provide more than 30 hours of runtime. In extreme cold, N-Ferno warming packs (sold separately) can be inserted near the ears; the packs generate heat for up to eight hours when exposed to air. The *6850LED* costs \$27 and the *6852LED* \$30.

**Ergodyne**, 800/225-8238, ergodyne.com.



### Get a Grip

There's nothing like wheeling a load of concrete or masonry downhill with cold or sweaty hands and having to hang on to the slick hardwood handles for dear life. Jackson Professional Tools' *Total Control Pro M6* wheelbarrow has a 6-cubic-foot steel tray and steel handles with closed-loop polypropylene grips at the ends that should make it easier to hang on when going up or downhill. The handles also make tilting and unloading easier, because you don't have to reposition your hands. The wheelbarrow costs \$120 to \$130.

**Jackson Professional Tools**, 800/807-2589, [jacksonprofessional.com](http://jacksonprofessional.com).



### Compact Caulking Gun

Newborn's new *Z-Lite* caulking gun is designed to apply low-viscosity materials like silicone and acrylic latex. It uses a flexible steel strap resembling a tape-measure blade to move the plunger. To load a cartridge, you press and hold the thumb release above the handle (without pulling the trigger) and slide the knob at the top of the tool all the way forward; this pulls back the plunger. The rod-free gun can fit into tight spaces and toolboxes more easily than conventional guns can. It has a belt hook and costs \$24.

**Newborn**, 800/638-3983, [newborncaulkguns.com](http://newborncaulkguns.com).



### Power Protractor

I first saw Starrett's 505A-12 12-inch aluminum ProSite protractor at the 2003 STAFDA show and was impressed by its simplicity. The tool has two vernier scales: a red scale for miter joints and a black one for butt joints. You simply measure the angle with the protractor and read the miter-saw setting directly off the appropriate scale with no math required. Now the company has introduced the *CP505E-12* 12-inch aluminum electronic protractor, which replaces the vernier scales with an LED display. This model also allows you to set miter and bevel angles for cutting crown moldings, including moldings with custom spring angles (see the company's website for an explanatory video). It costs \$150.

**Starrett**, 800/541-8887, [starrett.com](http://starrett.com).



### Lithium-Ion Cordless Framing Nailer

Paslode introduced the first cordless framing nailer back in 1986 and has been improving it ever since. The new *CF325Li*, which is assembled in the U.S., is similar to the CF325 it's replacing: It uses an internal combustion engine powered by a disposable gas cartridge and a rechargeable battery to drive the company's RoundDrive 30-degree paper-collated nails ranging from 2 to 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches long. But the new model replaces the old nicad battery with a lithium-ion one that drives 50 percent more nails per charge while reducing the weight. Also, you can now adjust the depth of drive on the fly. The CF325Li — plus one battery, a charger, a case, and safety glasses — costs \$400.

**Paslode**, 800/222-6990, [paslode.com](http://paslode.com).



### Smooth-Cutting Blades

Freud continues to grow its Diablo line of saw blades for contractors and has introduced two new carbide-tipped Ultimate Flawless Finish blades for table and miter saws. The 10-inch *D1090X* has 90 teeth, and the 12-inch *D12100X* has 100 teeth. Both blades have a nonstick coating and an "Axial Shear Face" grind that promises to shear cleanly through the material. They also have a new ultrathin kerf that's supposed to reduce amp draw by 18 percent to 37 percent and allow portable job-site saws to perform like stationary ones. The *D1090X* costs about \$60, the *D12100X* about \$70.

**Freud**, 800/334-4107, [diablotools.com](http://diablotools.com).



### Lightweight Mud Boots

*Cruiser* 16-inch over-the-sock boots are built to handle concrete and other demanding wet work and have composite safety toes, yet weigh just 2.1 pounds per pair — or 60 percent less than equivalent PVC boots, says the manufacturer. The seamless insulating boots are composed of a UV- and chemical-resistant EVA closed-cell polymer that forms a self-cleaning, shock-absorbing lug sole and allegedly won't tear on rebar wire. Made in the U.S., they're available in brown or white and cost about \$80 per pair.

**Billy Boots**, 925/354-9908, [billybootsusa.com](http://billybootsusa.com).

### Classic Cordless Multi-Tool

According to Fein, the new 14.4-volt cordless MultiMaster oscillating multi-tool (*AFMM 14*) delivers the same performance as the corded version. The variable-speed tool is powered by 3-amp-hour lithium-ion batteries for extended runtime, has a push-button fuel gauge on every battery, and lets you swap accessories at the flip of a lever. A kit containing the tool, two batteries, a charger, an accessory package, and a plastic case costs \$500.

**Fein Power Tools**, 800/441-9878, [multimaster.info](http://multimaster.info).



### Hose Control

The PneuPower *ReCoiler* air-hose reel provides a clever solution to the problem of hose storage. Made in the U.S., it consists of a slender and rugged Lexan case with a 1/4-inch by 5-foot inlet hose on the outside and a 1/4-inch by 100-foot outlet hose coiled inside. You simply pull out as much hose as you need and crank it back in when you're done. The polyurethane hose supposedly won't try to recoil or tangle after you unreel it, won't kink, is flexible down to -40 degrees, and won't chafe on abrasive surfaces. The company says that models with a 5/16-inch by 75-foot outlet hose and a 3/8-inch by 50-foot outlet hose are coming in March. All three versions cost \$130.

**PneuPower**, [pneupowerus.com](http://pneupowerus.com).

### Polite Compressor

When Rolair fired up the new 39-pound model *JC10* compressor in its booth, I could barely hear it above the background noise. That's because the machine's 1,725-rpm motor and pump emit just 60 decibels, which is no louder than a normal conversation. The 2.5-gallon oilless compressor is supposed to start easily in cold weather and draws just 8 amps, so it won't trip breakers. If you unplug it while it's running, it relieves the head pressure so it can restart easily when you plug it back in. A roll cage protects the vitals. According to Rolair, the compressor will power one or two roofing nailers or two to four finish nailers. It costs about \$210.

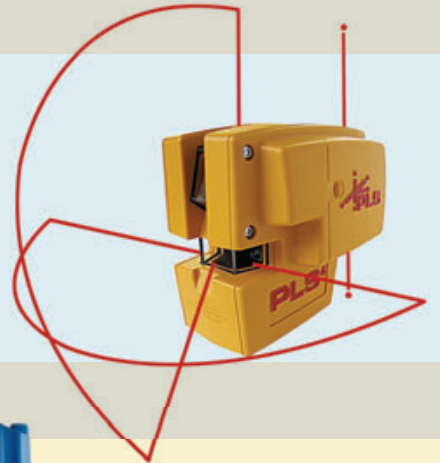
**Rolair**, 920/349-3281, [rolair.com](http://rolair.com).



### Combo Laser

Pacific Laser's new *PLS 4* laser projects a level and vertical layout line, just like the popular *PLS 180*. But the *PLS 4* also projects up and down plumb points and can handle almost any layout challenge except a 3-4-5. It's powered by three AA batteries that come with the tool. Also included are a magnetic wall bracket, a floor stand, a pouch, and a case. The *PLS 4* System adds a laser detector for outdoor use. The tool costs around \$380 and the system around \$480.

**Pacific Laser Systems**, 800/601-4500, [plslaser.com](http://plslaser.com).



### Triple-Duty Framing Nailer

Due to launch this summer, Fasco's *F58AC RHN20-90 SCR* strip nailer will drive three types of 20-degree plastic-collated fasteners: full round-head nails ranging from 1 inch to 3½ inches long, concrete pins ranging from 1 inch to 2½ inches long, and a variety of Fasco's hybrid Scrail fasteners ranging up to 3 inches long. Scrail fasteners sink like nails but can be adjusted or removed like screws, and they're used for installing subfloors and decking, assembling concrete forms, and more. The new nailer will also prevent dry-firing and feature a removable magazine for clearing jams. The maker declined to provide pricing.

**Fasco America**, 800/239-8665, [fascoamerica.com](http://fascoamerica.com).



### Simple Hinge Jig

I've made my share of router jigs over the years for quickly mortising doors and jambs for hinges, but the Trend full-length aluminum-box-beam contractor hinge jig I saw at the show might have saved me some time and trouble. At a glance, it appeared to be almost as uncomplicated as my plywood jigs, but it adjusts easily to accommodate various hinge sizes and breaks down into two parts for easy storage and transport. For \$285 you get the jig, a fabric case, a router bit, a guide bushing, and other accessories.

**Trend Routing Technology**, 877/918-7363, [trend-usa.com](http://trend-usa.com).





## Next-Generation Framing Gloves

When Ironclad introduced the first Framer work gloves in 1998 to protect carpenters' hands without sacrificing dexterity, it launched a new trend. An amazing variety of task-specific gloves are now available. The Framer gloves will be upgraded this spring. According to Ironclad, the gloves will still expose the tips of your middle finger, index finger, and thumb so you can easily manipulate tools and materials, and they'll still have a terry-cloth sweat wipe behind the thumb. But they'll also have better knuckle protection than their predecessors, a hybrid cuff for quick removal if they get caught on something, and extra reinforcement throughout. (See the company's website for a printable sizing chart.) They'll sell for \$27 a pair.

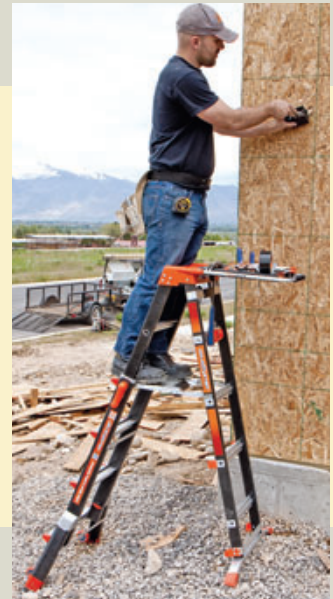
**Ironclad**, 888/314-3197, [ironclad.com](http://ironclad.com).



## Adjustable Fiberglass Stepladder

Little Giant's new Type IA *Select Step Fiberglass Model 5-8* stepladder is a combination 5-, 6-, 7-, and 8-footer, with telescoping front and back rails that allow you to work on stairs and uneven surfaces or position the back rails vertically to work against a wall. The spreader itself serves as a standing platform. An optional "AirDeck" workstation attaches to the top cap in two different positions to hold up to 15 pounds of tools and materials and provide a high handrail when needed; it also clips to the back rails for storage. The ladder weighs 31 pounds for easy lifting and has a pair of wheels so you can tip and roll. It costs \$230, plus \$40 for the AirDeck workstation.

**Little Giant**, 800/453-1192, [littlegiantladders.com](http://littlegiantladders.com).



## Metal-Cutting Saw

BN Products began as a sheet-metal fabricator in 1925, and claims that it once made thousands of telephone booths, some of which are still standing. It now offers specialty tools and related products to the trades. At its STAFDA booth, the company demonstrated the new corded flush-cutting *BNCE-20 Cutting Edge Saw* by making burr-free cuts through  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch grade-60 rebar in about four seconds per cut. I was told that you can typically make 200 to 300 of these cuts on site before you have to replace the  $4\frac{3}{8}$ -inch carbide-tipped saw blade. The tool also cuts threaded rod up to  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in diameter,  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch EMT conduit, and other metallic materials; and has a rotating trigger handle for added maneuverability. The kit costs about \$350 and includes two blades, a chip collector, and a blow-molded case. Replacement blades cost \$25.

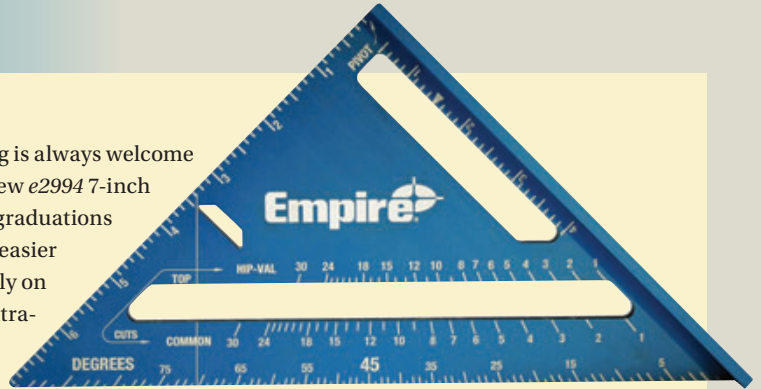
**BN Products**, 800/992-3833, [bnproducts.com](http://bnproducts.com).



### Easy-Read Rafter Square

The introduction of a layout tool designed for easy viewing is always welcome news to those of us with fading eyesight. Empire Level's new e2994 7-inch anodized-aluminum rafter square has fine, laser-etched graduations and tables with a blue background, which should make it easier to read than traditional silver-colored squares — especially on dusty job sites or in bright light. The square also has an extra-wide flange for hooking board edges. It costs \$17.

**Empire Level**, 800/558-0722, empirelevel.com.



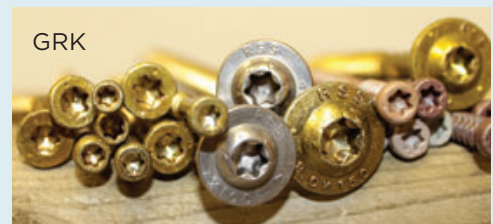
### High-Performance Fasteners

Several GRK screws featuring the company's proprietary all-weather Climatek coating — including *RSS*, *R4*, *Kameleon*, and *Trim screws* — have now been tested in an ICC-accredited lab and approved for structural use in pressure-treated lumber. The information is indicated on the fastener labels so you can show your building inspector. Search “AC257 Information” at the company's website to view a video. Prices are also shown on the website.

Simpson Strong-Tie's new *Strong-Drive* structural wood screws range from 3 to 10 inches long and have a “4Cut” point that eliminates most predrilling, a knurl above the threads to reduce driving friction, and a double-barrier coating that allegedly matches the performance of hot-dip galvanization. The SDWS version has a .22-inch shank diameter and a star-drive screw socket, while the SDWH version has a .195-inch shank and a hex head. I recently drove several 10-inch SDWS screws into engineered lumber with full-size 18-volt drill/drivers, and no pilot holes were required. A 12-pack for fastening deck ledgers costs around \$10 to \$12.

**GRK Fasteners**, 800/263-0463, grkfasteners.com.

**Simpson Strong-Tie**, 800/999-5099, strongtie.com.



GRK



Simpson

### Fuel Economy

Milwaukee's *M18 Fuel* 18-volt lithium-ion drill/driver is scheduled to hit the market this spring. The current top-of-the-line M18 model — the 2610-24 — is powered by a conventional brushed motor and a 3-amp-hour lithium-ion battery, weighs 6.15 pounds with its side handle attached, delivers 750 inch-pounds of torque, and costs about \$320. The new model will be powered by a brushless motor that's smaller and more efficient than a brushed motor. It will come with 1.5-amp-hour or 3-amp-hour batteries, weigh just 4.3 or 4.9 pounds with the side handle attached, deliver 650 or 725 inch-pounds of torque, and measure a mere 7.9 inches long. Judging by a proprietary runtime test I witnessed at the show, the 3-amp-hour battery just might let you work all day on a single charge. The new tool will cost \$230 with 1.5-amp-hour batteries (2603-22CT) and \$280 with 3-amp-hour batteries (2603-22). An M18 Fuel hammer drill will be released simultaneously.

**Milwaukee**, 800/729-3878, milwaukeetool.com.

