

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at jlctools@hanleywood.com.

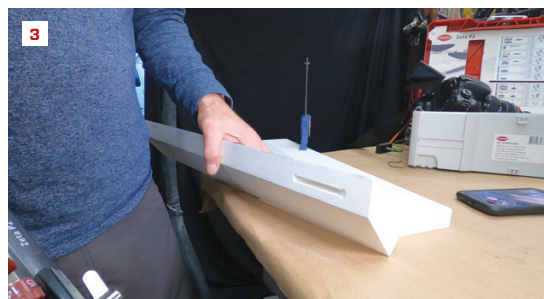
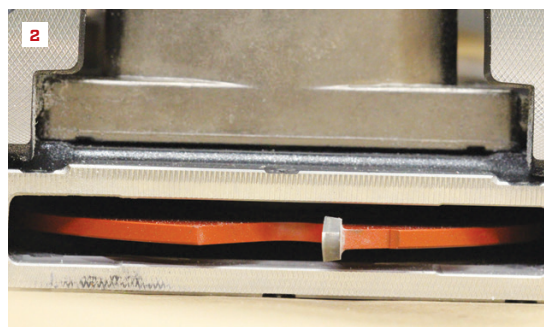


TOOLS

OF THE TRADE



The Lamello Zeta P2 (1) features a unique vertical mechanical drive on the cutting spindle that creates a profiled groove. This function can be deactivated for standard biscuit installation.



A 7-mm carbide-tipped cutter (2) is used to cut the grooves needed for P-System connectors (3). For installation of wooden biscuits, the 7-mm cutter is replaced with a 4-mm groove cutter.

Photos by Mike Sloggatt

Lamello Zeta P2 Profile Biscuit Joiner

BY MIKE SLOGGATT

I've owned some form of biscuit joiner for over 30 years. I recall the first job I needed it for, a book-matched teak wall panel for the library of a boating enthusiast. I still remember taking the client to a specialty lumberyard to pick out the panels. With 20 sheets of 4x8 teak lined up against the lumber racks to choose from, my client had the poor yard man moving them around like playing cards as he matched up each panel's grain patterns.

The assembly on that job required me to install the 4x8 panels vertically and stitch them seamlessly together on the wall. Using a biscuit joiner was the only way to align the panel faces, and both the homeowner and I were very happy with the results.

Fast forward some years to the Domino, Festool's mortise-and-tenon joiner, which works similarly to a biscuit joiner. This was a great advancement in technology, and I've used my Domino to build countless projects.

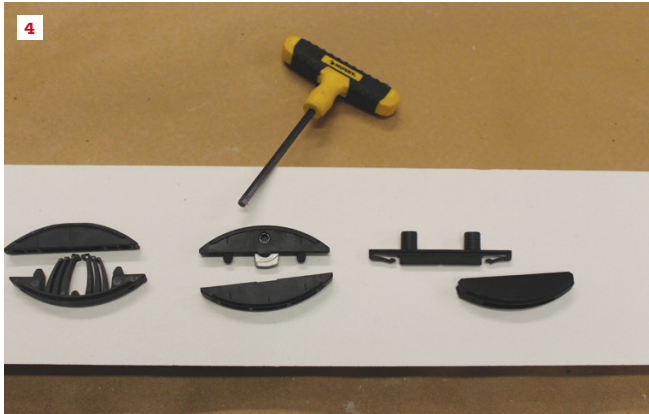
Then last year, I discovered the Lamello Zeta P2 (1), the great-great-grandchild of the original biscuit joiner, which was invented by a Swiss engineer and amateur cabinetmaker named Herman Steiner in 1956. In 1968, Steiner built the first portable biscuit joiner, called the Lamello, and variants of this design are now manufactured by many tool companies.

The new Lamello—the Zeta P2—is a biscuit joiner on steroids. What makes it so special is its ability to oscillate and cut a kerf at the end of the plunge cut (2, 3). This kerf allows the user to slide in half of a mechanical “biscuit” made of plastic in one of several configurations. When you join the two mating sides of a P-System biscuit together, you get alignment and a built-in clamp as well.

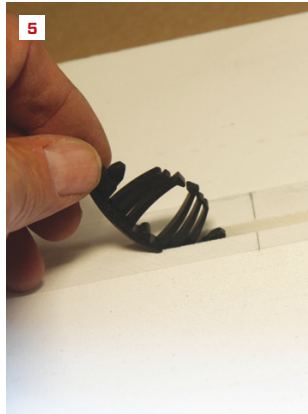
P-SYSTEM CONNECTORS

This tool is a game changer because the P-System connectors allow for the temporary alignment and assembly of joinery, with the ability to disassemble, assemble, and then permanently glue the pieces together when you are ready to finish the project. Or, if desired, you can have a joint that can be disabled and reassembled at any time.

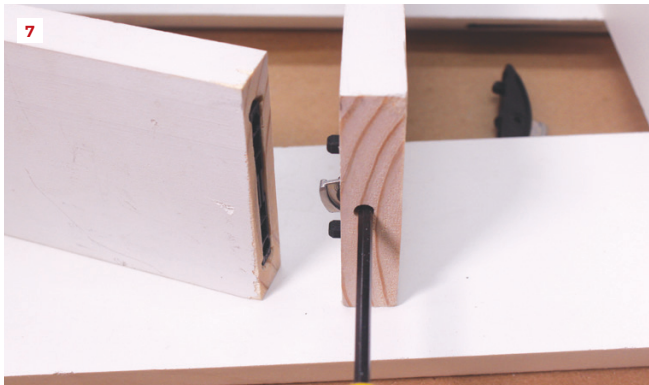
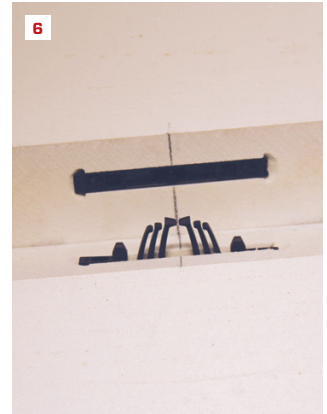
One connector, called the Tenso, is self-clamping, an incredibly useful feature when I'm working with exterior PVC trim. With the Tenso connector, I find it easy to align and clamp butt joints, miter joints, and compound miter joints with incredible precision; not having to nail or screw pieces together results in cleaner looks and almost one-handed assembly in the field. It allows me to field fit a joint and make sure it looks good before committing to the final glue-up (4, 5, 6).



Available connectors for the P-System include (left to right) the self-clamping Tenso, the Clamex detachable furniture connector, and the Divario sliding connector for shelving (4).



The Tenso and other P-System connectors are inserted by hand (5) into the T-shaped slot, which locks them into place without glue or screws (6).



Available in a couple of sizes, the Clamex connector has a lever that is operated with a hex key, which allows the joint to be disassembled if desired (7). A small, 6-mm hole is required for access to the lever mechanism (8).

For example, when fitting 90-degree outside corners with PVC trim, I typically would hand-align the outside miter after applying PVC glue, then pin the joint together. Now, it's literally a "snap." Any angle joinery can be quickly conquered by the versatile options for setup.

For cabinetmakers who need a knock-down assembly, the Clamex is a clamped, two-part mechanical joint that's assembled and disassembled with a small Allen key. It comes in different sizes for different applications (7, 8).

Another interesting fastener, the Divario, is self-clamping and allows for slide-in fastening for blind applications, such as shelving.

VERSATILE APPLICATION

I initially envisioned that this tool would find a home in a cabinetmaker's shop, where it would be used for joining fine trim and cabinetry. However, once I brought the Zeta P2 to the jobsite, I

found all sorts of uses for it, including outside trim. That's partly because the Zeta P2 offers the ability to change the blade to a standard biscuit blade and use it as a traditional joiner.

The Zeta P2 is well-built, and the versatility of the available attachments, such as positioning pins, spacers, and a stop square, makes for precise placement of joinery. The only negative thing I can say about it is the learning curve. It took me a while to figure out how to set it up for the various applications. The instruction book is a generic, multilanguage, illustrated paperback, but once I discovered the videos on the company's website (csaw.com/lamello), I buried the manual in the bottom of the Systainer it came in. If you are into high-end trim and cabinetry work, this is a solid investment (\$1,550) you won't regret.

Mike Sloggatt has been remodeling old homes on Long Island for 42 years and is a member of the JLC Live construction demonstration team.

Senco F-35XP Cordless Framing Nailer

BY TONY BLUE

“Senco makes cordless tools?!” That was my response when *JLC* asked me to review the Senco F-35XP, the latest battery-operated framing nailer to hit the market. I was interested in trying it out; my company does a lot of remodeling work, and we rarely sub anything out, which means we might be rewiring or tiling on one job, then framing an entire garage or outdoor deck the next. Especially on the smaller jobs, setting up a compressor for one hour for a pneumatic framing nailer isn’t efficient, so we were eager to see how this battery-powered alternative would compare. I provide a monthly tool allowance to my employees, which means they own a lot of quality tools, so I put this nailer in their hands as well to get their opinions.

Overall, we found the F-35XP to be a powerful nailer capable of sinking 34-degree paper-taped nails into anything we used. Unlike the flywheel-style drive mechanism found in many other battery-powered nailers, Senco employs a brushless motor to set the piston within a pressurized cylinder filled with nitrogen (Senco calls it “Fusion air-power technology”). Pulling the trigger releases the piston, which drives the nail. This results in no ramp-up time and the power to shoot into engineered lumber with ease.

While we haven’t had this nailer long enough to speak to the longevity of the company’s battery-operated lineup, this nailer feels well put together, without any cheap plastic parts that might break off. We worked it hard, nailing into both dimensional and engineered lumber, and it never jammed or overheated. As fast as we were able to bump the tool along, it always kept up.

The nailer has a handy, bright-green indicator light that informs you if the tool is on and shows you what mode it is in. Another nice feature is the easy, no-tool depth adjustment.

At 11.37 pounds with a battery, this nailer is hefty, though comparable to other battery-operated framing nailers. One of my employees owns a Milwaukee M18 Fuel framing gun, which is similar in size and power and weighs in at 11.3 pounds, while another crew member owns a gas-powered Paslode, which weighs less than 8 pounds (without the fuel). Because of that weight difference, I don’t see this—or any battery-operated framing nailer—replacing a pneumatic on a full-fledged framing job yet.

Initially I thought to myself, why does this nailer come with a bag and not a hard case? But with the way we use this tool, performing many small tasks in different hands and on different sites, the additional bag space was convenient, allowing us to have a handful of sheathing and framing nails at the ready, along with the nailer. The F-35XP runs on an 18-volt battery, and the kit comes with a charger. The weight and \$550 price tag may scare off those who are on another battery platform and are shopping bare tool only. But if you are thinking about going mobile with your next framing nailer, you should give the F-35XP a look. The quality, power, and features are there. senco.com

Tony Blue owns @SquaredAwayContracting in Greenwich, N.Y. He is a general contractor who enjoys nerdy energy efficiency and moisture management details.



Comparable in size to other cordless nailers, Senco’s 18-volt F-35XP has a 60-nail magazine that accommodates nails up to 3 1/2 inches long and 0.148 inch in diameter (top). The kit includes two 3.0-Ah batteries, a 5-amp quick charger, and a carrying bag.