

Weigh In!

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TOOLS

OF THE TRADE

Efficiently Working at Height

BY TONY BLUE

My favorite tool? Our yellow baker's scaffold because of the versatility and jobsite organization it provides. A disorganized site drives me crazy, and I have been known to show up on a job-site and immediately start stacking tools and supplies. Our baker's scaffold helps me satisfy this obsession.

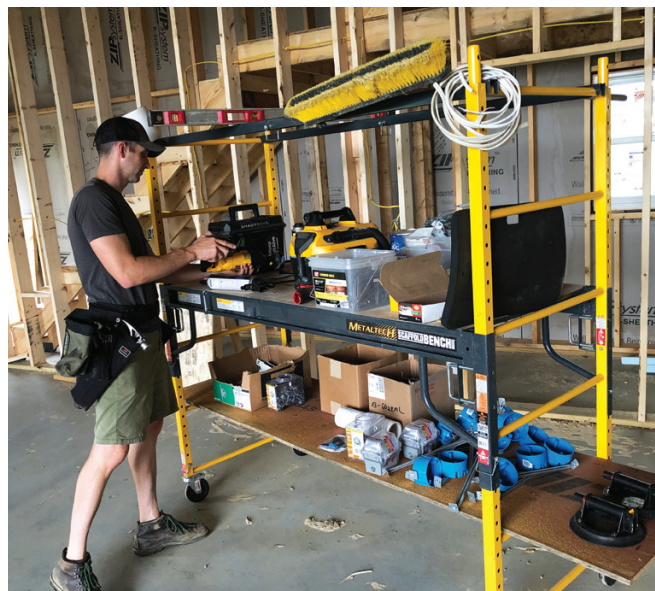
Metaltech ScaffoldBench. Of course, we also use our yellow scaffolding when working at height, such as when we need to rough-in ceiling boxes or tape drywall. Earlier this year, when working in the high-end home of one of our frequent customers, who wanted more lighting, we needed to hide some new wiring in a soffit box about 14 feet above the floor. This was a bit out of reach from our single section of scaffold, so one of our crew members checked his Home Depot app and found a Metaltech 4-in-1 ScaffoldBench in stock at a nearby store. Although made by a different manufacturer, the Metaltech scaffold was sized to fit on our Werner scaffolding and could be broken in half to give the crew the additional height they needed.

The ScaffoldBench has a 1,100-pound capacity and can be used in the traditional 6-foot-high configuration, with the ability to be stacked up to three levels high. But what makes it different from

standard scaffolding is its ability to become a miter saw station. Just flip the platform over (with the plywood facing down) to reveal rails that accommodate a set of four universal brackets (also included). These brackets fit different manufacturers' saws and come with uprights to help support the material that's being cut. To clear the space needed to bring long material in to your saw, simply remove the top half of the frame on the bench.

The scaffold also comes with a set of 200-pound-capacity rails that span the width of the frame, and a wire mesh platform that sits on the rails to provide another shelf. The rails are light and fold in half for easy transportation. Unfortunately, we found the mounting hooks for the wire mesh were not very sturdy, nor was it practical to cart the mesh around from job to job. So we tossed the mesh but still use the rails for a work shelf, placing long-handled items or sheet goods on it. There's nothing wrong with our ordinary baker's scaffold, but this Metaltech scaffold has been a good addition to our jobsites, giving us a little more height while having a couple of features the standard yellow frames don't have. It costs \$350. metaltech.co.com

Gorilla multi-position ladder. I can't discuss working at height without mentioning my ladder of choice, a Gorilla GLMPX-22



Metaltech's 4-in-1 ScaffoldBench doubles as a miter saw stand and has lockable wheels that allow it to be easily moved around the jobsite (above left). Gorilla's multi-position ladder can be used as both a stepladder and an extension ladder (above right).

Photos: Tony Blue

multi-position ladder that I always have with me in my truck bed, tucked safely underneath my cap. As I'm the business owner, my job typically involves doing whatever is needed to get the job done. I may need a ladder to complete a punch list task, or look at a customer's roof, or help the guys set a window. I like the versatility of having a single ladder that can do most of these tasks, by functioning either as a stepladder with a 13-foot reach or as an extension ladder with about a 22-foot reach. I also like that it weighs only about 40 pounds, even though it's a type IAA ladder with a 375-pound capacity.

All of my employees have their own multi-position ladder with them on-site, and 90% of the time, that is sufficient. Working with

the ladder they have with them is more efficient than having them drive back to the shop to pick up one of our specific A-frame or extension ladders. Made of aluminum, the Gorilla GLMPX-22 is slightly lighter than any of the equivalent multi-position ladders I've tried from other manufacturers, and it also has the most ergonomic locking handles. I've been using mine for the past couple of years, and it has proved to be durable and reliable. That's why it has become my go-to ladder. It costs \$250. gorillaladders.com

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

ToughBuilt TB-S550 Miter Saw Stand

BY MARK CLEMENT

The more work I can do at my miter saw, the better my life is. Sure, I can make cuts hunched over a lumber pile stacked on the floor, but standing up is better. So what I call a "cut station" is a full-on hub of how I cut. Hence my interest in miter-saw stands. I've seen enough of them to know that the ToughBuilt TB-S550 is the best one to come down the pike in a long time.

Length. Among its many attributes, this stand is long enough to support 124-inch-

long stock. To support that stretched-out length, the stand comes with four work supports, not just two stuck at either end. What this means is that I can support—on either side of the saw—both smaller pieces and the 16-footers whose very ends I need to be able to clip a miter off of. And this unit does that without my having to do anything to jury-rig the system.

Out of the box. Assembly is easy. My 12-year-old son and I had it unpacked and

up and running in less than an hour. While assembling it, I could immediately tell that the 2½-inch square tube frame would give this unit the core strength needed to support the arms when extended—and allow it to collapse into a sensibly transportable cube, both on the jobsite and in the back of my truck.

What was also immediately apparent was that the quick release/ball catch/lever locks on the legs to splay them would require no fussing with; there'd be no issue with dirt getting in them or a slight bend crippling the ball-catch catching. Or un-catching. The legs deployed and collapsed nicely on setup and have not failed since. After several months of use, a couple of the ball-catch retainer clips have released, and I've found springs and parts rolling around in the back of my truck. Fortunately, they are easily re-assembled if you can find the parts; if not, the legs seem to function fine without them.

The legs themselves are beefy, consisting of 2-inch tube steel with round, plastic bases that set up easily whether on a basement remodel or on a paver patio. There's no "adjustment" leg either, which I like; if you need to set it up on grass or dirt that is out of level, just hack a hole out and go to town.

Material supports. The stand is equipped with enough supports to make most cuts without reconfiguring them. But more importantly, the supports are round,



ToughBuilt's TB-S550 miter-saw stand's work supports extend to 124 inches. The stand includes two quick-release universal tool mounts and a pair of rubber wheels for easy portability (above left). The stand doubles as a workstation (above right).



Photos: Mark Clement

so that when I'm sliding long stock into the saw fence for positioning and it sags a bit between supports, it doesn't catch as it reaches the farthest outtrigger.

The unit also comes with stops. Obviously, ToughBuilt sees a reason for this feature, but I don't. And that's me, not ToughBuilt. The twist lock that secures them doesn't secure them quite square (it holds them still; I'm not saying it doesn't work), which bugs me. But, again, it's me, not the tool.

Limitations. The legs have fold-down holders for materials, and while they definitely work, I found them to be a bit awkward. I'm not sure if there's an engineering reason—top-heaviness for example, or to allow the legs to fold—but when there's a stack of lumber resting on the stand, it feels like I'm standing at a cabinet whose toe-kick is not quite deep enough. I'm aware there is a barrier at my shins.

There's a bit of a barrier at my stomach too, because of the knobs that lock the saw mount to the stand. It's not a deal-killer, and the knobs work well to lock everything in place, but I like to stand *at* the saw, not away from it. The knobs seem to stick out a bit too far for comfort, and I've also found myself snagging my nail bags on them.

And despite the stand's generous wingspan, long stock that extends much past the end of the outboard support still sags. A recent project, for which I had to trim to length and square up the ends of lots of cedar 4x4x10s, probably pushed up against the stand's maximum load capacity. And I've found that I have to make sure all the adjustments are tight, even when cutting lighter trim stock.

The ToughBuilt weighs 55 pounds (without a saw), and while it comes with wheels, I usually just fold it up and carry it when I have to move it to another jobsite. On the other hand, if you move around all the time (I don't), the wheels work great and will never go flat. If you're a "wheel it in, extend the arms" carpenter, I'm not sure there is a better alternative. It sells online for \$176. toughbuilt.com

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Max HN120 PowerLite High Pressure Concrete Pinner

BY TIM UHLER

The older I get, the more I realize just how much tunnel vision I have. For many years, we fastened wood to concrete using a Hilti powder-actuated gun, but I got sick of cleaning it and worrying about the potential fines for consumables being left out. Plus, the need for safety training for our crew and the potential for injury turned me away from that gun. Instead, we resorted to drilling and using split-drive anchors when we needed to fasten treated wood to concrete—a slow method to be sure, but safe and strong.

This is where Instagram opened my eyes. A couple of framers I follow (@morton.ben and @shevcon_custom_homes) had recently invested in the Max High Pressure system and kept telling me to look into the Max concrete pinner. Having already invested in the Max system compressor and framing nailers in 2008, it made a lot of sense for us to buy the gun if it worked as well as advertised.

I've written about 500-psi high-pressure systems from Max and Makita in the past but had used the system only for framing and siding. I had even tried out an earlier version of Max's concrete pinner in 2012, but we never adopted it for use by our crew. See what I mean about tunnel vision?

The Max HN120 will shoot nails into both concrete and steel, no powder charges needed. All that's needed is the Max 500-psi compressor. The gun comes with the different tips needed to fasten metal track to both concrete and steel and to fasten wood to concrete and steel I-beams with fasteners up to 2½ inches long. It's a coil

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nailer—the magazine holds up to 50 nails—and it features the standard Max swivel fitting and air filter.

I'll be honest—I was a little nervous at first about using the gun, even though it doesn't require a license or powder loads to operate it. Max claims that the 6.4-pound gun shoots with 2,231 inch-pounds of driving force, so I was expecting a lot of recoil. After getting a little more familiar with its operation, I felt more comfortable using it and found that it was easier on my wrist than a powder-actuated gun. When shooting into concrete less than a year old (our typical job), I found no difference in fastener performance between this gun and our old Hilti.

This gun isn't cheap at \$991, but then again, the Max 500-psi system isn't cheap either. A Hilti DX 460-MX gas-actuated fastening tool, which works with either single fasteners or collated strips of 10 fasteners, costs about \$1,380. Since we're already invested in the Max system, the HN120 gun is a no brainer for us. The fasteners we use with this gun cost about \$0.10 each, while the Hilti runs \$0.14 per fastener and \$0.41 per powder cartridge. maxusacorp.com

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Designed for use with the Max 500-psi compressor, the Max HN120 PowerLite nailer shoots fasteners up to 2 1/2 inches long into both concrete and steel. The gun comes with different tips for different materials and has a coil magazine that holds up to 50 fasteners.

Photo: Tim Uhler