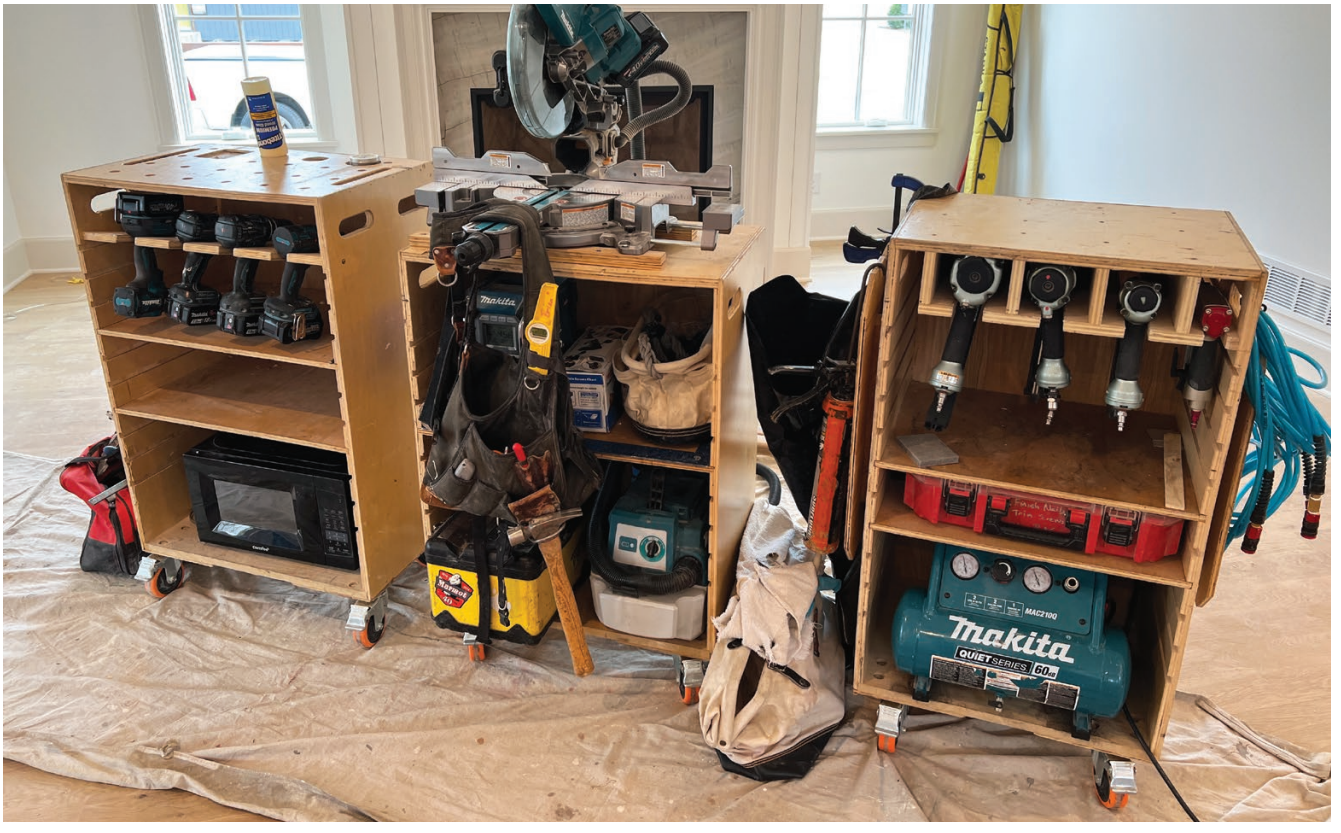


Jobsite Workstations

An idea book for setting up a well-appointed workshop on the jobsite

BY BRIAN CAMPBELL

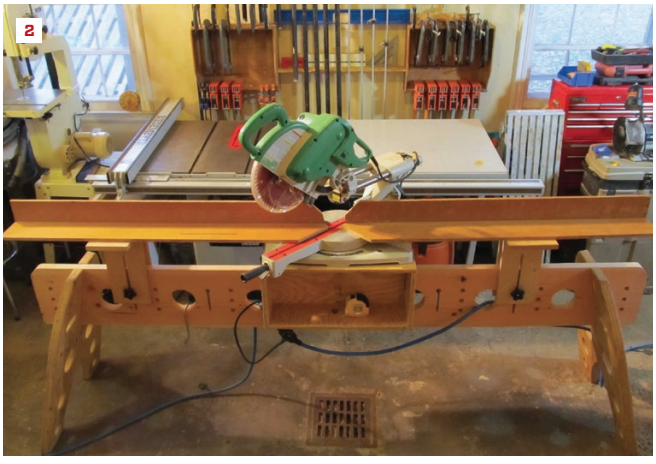
For as long as I've been a carpenter—some 30 years now—there have been two starkly different approaches to setting up a jobsite: One is the "get 'er done" style, and the other is the "gentlemanly" style. In the first approach, the carpenters want to get in and get out, and their setup is makeshift—a table saw and chop saw plunked down on a driveway or a floor—and they just "deal with it." Of course, there are always going to be jobs in which you are doing such a small task that it warrants setting a tool on the ground for one or two cuts. You don't need to spend half an hour setting up for a job that takes 10 minutes.

For most jobs that last a full day or more, however, I have always preferred the second approach: to bring the civilization, so to speak, of a well-appointed workshop to the jobsite so I don't have to crawl around on the ground to make my cuts. "Work like a gentleman," I would joke with others but only half in jest. Toward this more gentlemanly approach, I'm constantly adapting my on-site shop setup to make my day run as smoothly and stress-free as possible. I think this quest to remain organized and efficient on the jobsite lends itself to efficiently producing clean work.

SAW STATION

My first foray into making a jobsite workstation came soon after I got my first miter saw and before miter saw stands were commercially available. This first stand **(1)** was a short table on casters

Photos by Brian Campbell



The author's original miter saw stand **(1)** worked well but had limited other uses and was bulky. He replaced it with a plywood sawhorse system that can be broken down into flat pieces for transport **(2)**.

with folding wings for stock supports. It did the job but was bulky and took up a lot of room in the truck. Also, the wings weren't that stable and had limited use as a work surface for other tools. (This is a downside to many commercially available units, too. The supports function perfectly to support the stock, but that's all they can do.) The main feature I strive for is adaptability. I want a setup that can be configured to fit the space I'm working in and serve as a workstation for a wide variety of tools. Often, my miter saw and small jobsite table saw are central to the setup. But I also need a surface for using a track saw, routers, and a circular saw and doing glue-ups, sanding, and so forth.

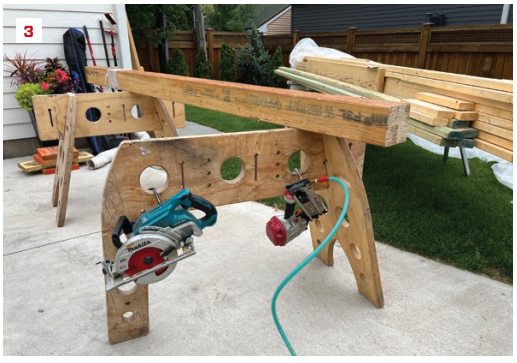
Toward making a more adaptable station that could be broken down flat for easy transport, my next venture was to experiment with the "Tri-horse"—a set of three-legged sawhorses I invented that are made from 3/4-inch plywood **(2)**. The rail and legs join with slots so they can be set up quickly. The three-legged design lends a distinct advantage over traditional sawhorses: It won't rock when placed over uneven terrain. In the middle third of the rail and legs, I cut holes and slots that reduce the weight without compromising strength; provide places to hang and hold tools; and accommodate accessories that extend the functionality of the horses **(3–6)**. For example, sawhorse support brackets from Rockler on the ends of 2x4s allow me to connect two different size Tri-horse units together in varying configurations that can expand and contract to accommodate the size stock I'm using and space I have available **(10)**. The slots are also helpful when I'm using track saw clamps.

For stock supports, I made "T" brackets from plywood. These have two legs spaced an inch apart so they can be slipped over the top rail, adjusted to the height I need, and tightened in place with a bolt with a star knob inserted through a slot in the rail **(7)**. These T-brackets come in handy for a variety of other uses, independent of the workstation: I use one to clamp doors on edge when working on either the hinge side or the latch side of a door. I can also use one to hold a vertical length of 2x4 to serve as a "dead man" to support handrail or other material that I need to hold in position at a fixed height to join or scribe.

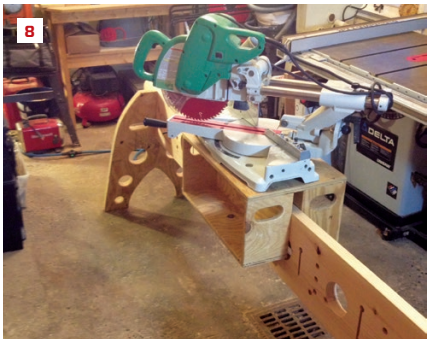
For a table to hold my miter saw on the Tri-horse, I made a "saddle box" from two plywood boxes joined by a piece of plywood on top. I leave a 1-inch slot between the two boxes so the assembly can slip over the top rail of the Tri-horse, creating a small table to support the miter saw **(8)**. For later versions of this stand, I use clamp brackets from a Trojan Work Center **(9)**. These work well, though the brackets are no longer readily available. I also add dog holes to the saw table so it can function as an effective work surface for planing and clamping material.

MORE THAN JUST A SAW STAND

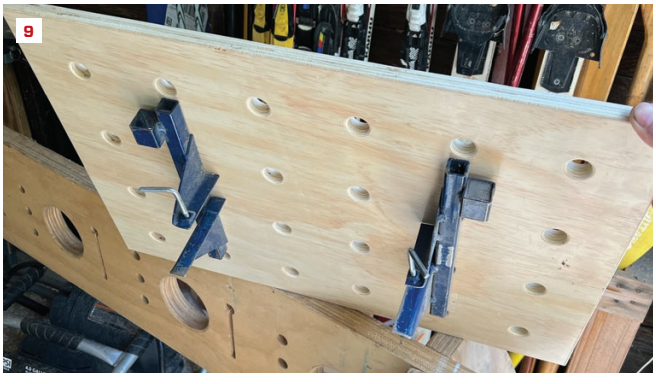
For some jobs, I just need a saw stand, but for most jobs, I want to accommodate a wide range of tools and material sizes or allow other carpenters working with me to use it. Versatility is key in any workstation because I do many different types of jobs. For deck work, where I need stock support for long material, I join two different size Tri-horses end-to-end—overlapping the rails to extend stock support—and supplement with folding roller supports **(11)**.



The holes in the rails of the author's "Tri-horse" sawhorses reduce the weight but also serve as places to hang and hold tools **(3, 4)**, including "difficult" items, such as a framing square **(5)** and a 4-foot drywall square (see **(6)**, below).



The adjustment bolt for the stock support can also be placed above the rail to hold the support where there isn't a slot **(7)**. The author cut handholds in the saddle box to make it easier to lift the miter saw on and off the Tri-horse rail **(8)**.



The miter saw table can also be secured to the rail with Trojan Work Center clamps **(9)**. Metal brackets for holding 2x4s clip into the rail holes **(10)** to create a support table where the author typically places a table saw. The disks on the right-hand rail are rubber-topped Rockler "bench cookies," which clip to the rail to provide an additional work surface.

For deck work, the author configures the workstation to support long material **(11)**. When space is tight, the workstation can be configured to take up a small footprint **(12)**. This configuration **(13)** allows one carpenter to work efficiently. When two carpenters are using the workstation at the same time, the author configures it so they can work comfortably without getting in each other's way **(14)**.

I don't like to use roller supports alone with floppy, heavy deck boards because they move around too much; the fixed T-bracket on the Tri-horse rail helps keep the material steady. (Husky makes a folding "glide support" that's like a roller support but holds long, floppy material steady. I use more heavy-duty ones made by Ryobi, which have been discontinued but can still be found used.)

On the flip side, with a shorter rail, I can form what I call the world's smallest workstation for use in tight spaces **(12)**.

While I typically set up the workstation for a miter saw and a table saw, I can remove the table saw and throw a piece of plywood over the top when I need to create a larger assembly table or a track-saw station **(15)**.

When I'm working by myself, I usually set up the miter saw and table saw at right angles so I can use either tool without having to take extra steps **(13)**. When working with this configuration, I try to set up sawhorses behind me to stage my material, so

By removing the table saw and placing a piece of plywood over the top, the author can create a track-saw station **(15)** or large assembly table. Bora's Centipede expanding table offers a useful worktable that sets up quickly **(16)**. For a small work vehicle, the author built rolling drawers—one the width of a miter saw **(17)** and one the width of a table saw **(18)**—that can serve as workstations for small jobs.

I can turn around and grab it when I need it, without walking too far. When more than one carpenter needs to access the workstation, I turn the tools so that two people can work without being in each other's way, and I make sure that both saws shoot sawdust into the same pile (and not on the other guy) **(14)**.

One note on setting up a cut station: Consider orienting the station at a diagonal to the area you are working on. Many times, carpenters will set up facing the area where the trim or siding or whatever is being involved, with one person cutting and handing the material over to the people installing it. But to hand the material back and forth in that setup, you have to walk around the workstation. If you set it up diagonally, transferring material back and forth is easier. Also, when you're set up in a room, orienting the station diagonally allows you to work with the longest material possible. The key is to think through the efficiency of your setup as you would if you were setting up a permanent workshop.

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