

5 tools that will Change the Way You Work



▲ A hollow-chisel mortiser makes quick work of cutting square, accurate mortises in one step.

1 Hollow Chisel Mortiser

Over the years, we've cut quite a few mortise and tenon joints for the projects you see in the magazine. To make the mortises, I usually use a drill press and Forstner bit to drill them out. Then I clean the sides and ends with a chisel. It's a simple, reliable method. But if there are a lot of mortises to cut, this technique can be a bit time consuming.

With a hollow-chisel mortiser, you can cut half of this traditional joint much quicker. Quite simply, a

hollow-chisel mortiser makes cutting mortises an accurate, one-step operation. Start by setting the fence and workpiece hold-downs. Then all you have to do is drill a series of "square" holes to define the mortise. Since, there's little or no clean up afterward, cutting mortises takes less time with a lot less hassle.

Best of all, these tools are becoming more affordable. So if you cut a lot of mortise and tenon joints, you may want to pick up one of these machines.

2 Biscuit Joiner

Some tools, like the mortiser shown above, make woodworking tasks faster and easier. But others, like a biscuit joiner, can change the way you design and build a project altogether.

With most joinery methods, you need to factor in the joinery when sizing parts. But with biscuit or plate joinery, you just cut the parts as if they were going to be butt jointed and the biscuit joiner takes care of the rest. The joiner cuts a shallow slot in each of the mating edges of the workpieces. A short, compressed wood "biscuit" is then glued in the slots. The biscuit acts like a spline to hold the two parts together.

Biscuit joinery is a fast, accurate, and easy way to build cabinet cases. But you'll probably find a lot of other uses for it too — like building face frames, attaching fixed shelves, or reinforcing miter joints, as illustrated in the photo at right.



▲ A biscuit joiner makes assembling projects fast and easy. Designing is easier too, since parts are cut to finished size without having to account for joinery.

3 Brad Nailer

I get impatient waiting for glue to set up while attaching trim molding to a project. It seems to take forever before you can take the clamps off and move on. That's why it's nice to have a brad nailer around. Not only does it speed up assembly time, but it's faster than trying to pound in brads with a hammer.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not about to throw out my clamps or use nails on every project. But a brad nailer can do some jobs better and faster than using clamps or a hammer and nails.

For instance, installing molding. Who hasn't had a hammer slip and ding a workpiece? Brad nailers are

great for applying molding, as you can see in the photo at right. Thin molding can be hard to hold in place with clamps and the delicate profiles can be easily damaged. But with a few well-placed brads, all you have are a few tiny holes to fill.

A brad nailer will come in handy for more than just pinning molding in place though. You can use it to quickly build a jig — or even shop cabinets — and get right back to work. Once expensive, you can now find top-notch nailers packaged in kits that include an air compressor and all the accessories you need at many hardware stores and home centers.



▲ Speed and accuracy are the name of the game with a brad nailer. You'll spend less time assembling projects, and use fewer clamps with one of these in your hand.



▲ Whether it's routing hinge mortises, chamfers or simple roundovers, a trim router is never far from my workbench.

4 Trim Router

The first time I picked up a trim router, it seemed more like a toy than a "real" woodworking tool. Too small. Too wimpy. But after using one for a while, you couldn't tear it away from me.

So what makes these pocket-sized routers so great? First off, they're the perfect size for routing those final details on a project like chamfers and roundovers. I can even do it one handed (not something I'd try with a full-size router).

On small decorative details, you're not removing a lot of material so lots of horsepower isn't too

important. And it's easier to control a small trim router than trying to balance a larger, full-size router. I usually keep a roundover or chamfer bit in the trim router ready to go at a moment's notice. This way, I don't have to take extra time messing around with changing bits on my full-size router.

Another job where a trim router really comes in handy is routing a hinge mortise, as shown in the photo at left. The small size and greater control of the trim router provides accurate results and less cleanup when I'm done.

5 Spray Equipment

When you think of spray finishing, you usually think of the great results that come from professional furniture and cabinet shops. But the truth is, you can get those same results in your shop without spending a lot of money. High-quality spray equipment is now available (and affordable) for the average woodworker.

So why would you go out and get spray equipment? Speed for one. Spray finishing is perfect for large projects. You're able to spray on several coats in the time it

would take to brush on one. Best of all, it's easier to get into tight corners with a spray gun than a brush.

Spraying on finishes allows you to use fast-drying finishes that are problematic for brushing. But what I like best are the consistent results. A good sprayed-on finish is flatter and more even without leaving any tell-tale brush marks.

If you're like me, you'd rather be building a project than applying finish. So investing in some spray equipment will get you back to the shop building projects sooner. **W**



▲ A basic spray system and fast-drying finishes make quick work of finishing large projects.