

2008 | BEST NEW TOOLS



The Winners:

Bosch
Bridge City Tools
Byrd Tool
Colt
Delta
Festool
Gramercy
Jet
Makita
Powermatic
Veritas

Before I started working at this magazine, I saw tools as things that came in boxes. But during the last 12 years, my view has changed. I now see tools as triumphs of marketing, engineering or both.

After you meet the people who make and sell your tools, you never look at the tools the same way again. I know the guy who designed my jack plane, and the man who came up with the idea for SawStop. Because we know these people, you might think that we cut them a lot of slack when selecting the winners of our Best New Tools award each year.

Nope. Today we wrapped up our selection process, and we spent most of that time ripping apart the candidates, exploring what we didn't like about them. It's a bit like telling your spouse that you don't like the way she gets her hair cut. But we have to do this. Not only for you, but for the engineers and marketing people who conceive of these tools, figure out how to make them and successfully bring them to market.

We owe it to these people to select the tools that are like nothing that anyone has ever made (such as the Jointmaker Pro). Or tools that have innovative features that revive an established form (such as the new Festool router). Or tools that take an old idea and use it to make a new tool that works better than we could have imagined (such as the Veritas skew rabbet planes and the Bosch jigsaw blades).

These tools might be manufactured of steel, glass-filled nylon and brass, but they really are made of guts, gray matter and gumption.

— Christopher Schwarz, editor

COLT MaxiCut Forstner Bits

It's taken more than 125 years, but it looks like the Germans have perfected the Forstner bit. The new Colt MaxiCut bits are virtually uncloggable and cut rapidly and cleanly through tough materials, even exotic woods. What more could you want?

The genius in these bits is that the cutting lip is designed to bust up the chips as they are severed. So you don't get big disc-shaped chips, which clog the works. Instead you get ribbon-like shavings, which eject easily, even from deep holes.

We tried to overfeed this bit, and we failed. Bravo to Colt. These bits cost a little more, but we think they're worth it.



COLT
■ Available this fall from specialty stores

POWERMATIC 18" Band Saw

If you've ever been to an automotive show, you know that those cars come fully loaded and tricked out with every option and good idea the manufacturer has to offer. And that's exactly what it felt like when Powermatic unveiled its new 18" monster band saw at the International Woodworking Fair in Atlanta.

The saw is overbuilt in every way you can imagine. The only plastic on the saw is the switch's cover. The cast wheels are beefy enough for a car. The saw's independently adjusted guides are planted on a rock-solid post. And the whole thing is powered by a 5-horsepower motor.

In addition to the cast iron, Powermatic added some sweet amenities: An intuitive blade-release mechanism, a clever way to tilt the saw's table both ways quickly, and a T-square fence that works like a Biesemeyer. The whole package is extremely well thought out with everything that you both want and need in a saw.

Priced at about \$4,000, it's at the upper end of the market, but it will be the last band saw you ever buy.



POWERMATIC
■ 800-274-6848 ■ powermatic.com

DELTA MACHINERY U.S.-made Unisaw

The biggest news in woodworking machinery this year was the redesigned Delta Unisaw. With a new look, new features and a new factory (in the United States), skeptical but excited woodworkers were clamoring for a first look at the saw.

After looking over the saw, we think Delta is delivering on its promise to build a new and better Unisaw in the United States. Here's what we saw:

■ **Better controls.** Delta has put both the bevel and the blade-height mechanisms in the front of the machine, where they belong.

■ **Better safety equipment.** Delta added a riving knife and removable blade cover, which everyone is adding these days. Delta also made it as simple as possible to add and remove the guard. Now there's little reason to leave the guard off your saw.

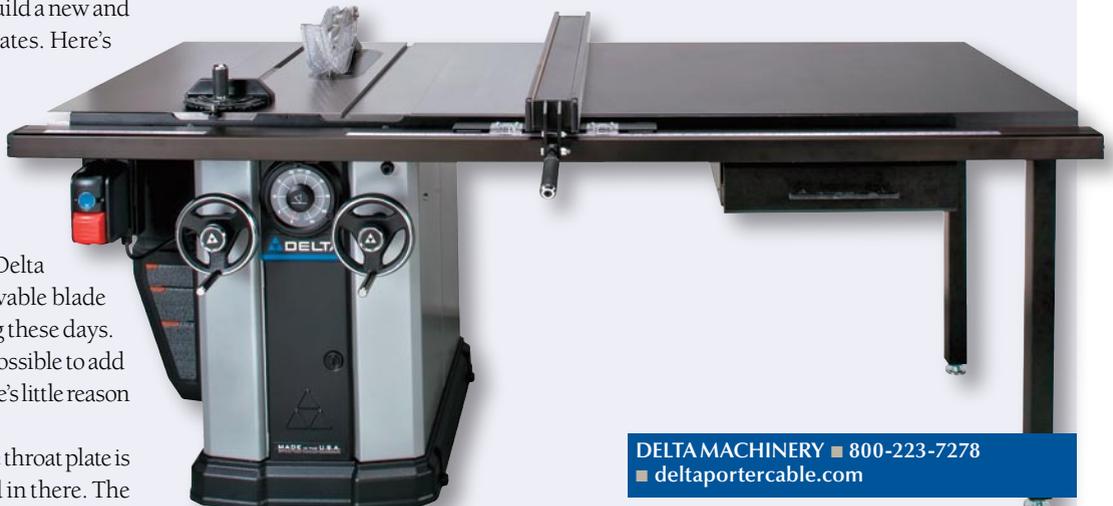
■ **Smart improvements.** The throat plate is bigger so you can get your hand in there. The

arbor locks so you can remove the blade with one wrench. The arbor nut is one piece instead of two (and there's a convenient front door on the saw in case you drop it). And there's more cast iron table in front of the blade.

■ **Better dust collection.** Now there are two

ports to keep your saw cleared of debris.

As long-time Unisaw users, we cannot wait to get our hands on the new model, which will be assembled in Tennessee from parts from all over the country (more details on this later). Welcome home Unisaw!



DELTA MACHINERY ■ 800-223-7278
■ deltaportercable.com

BRIDGE CITY *Jointmaker Pro*

When I saw the Bridge City Jointmaker Pro for the first time, it was hard to figure out exactly what it was. Was it a hand-powered table saw with a sliding table? An upside-down hand-powered miter saw? A precision joinery jig for a Japanese handsaw? It turns out that the Jointmaker Pro is all those things and more.

At its heart, the Jointmaker Pro is a precision sliding table and an adjustable Japanese-tooth blade. How you combine those two features can create surprising results.

It can simply be a precision crosscutting machine that makes the cleanest crosscuts

you have ever seen. It can make glass-smooth miters. Dovetails. Precision veneer for inlay. All without a power cord or more than a whisper of noise.

When the table saw was first invented, I'm sure its inventors were unable to imagine all the things that could be done with it. The Jointmaker Pro is like that. Every time we stepped up to the tool, we thought of something else new and different that could be done with the Jointmaker Pro with great precision.

The tool is made to exacting standards from high-quality and durable materials. The base model costs \$1,095.



BRIDGE CITY TOOLS
■ 800-253-3332 ■ bridgecitytools.com

FESTOOL *OF2200 Plunge Router*

Lots of people want to sell you plans for the "ultimate" router table. But wouldn't you rather own the ultimate router?

Now you can.

Festool's engineers pulled out all the stops when they designed the 15-amp OF2200

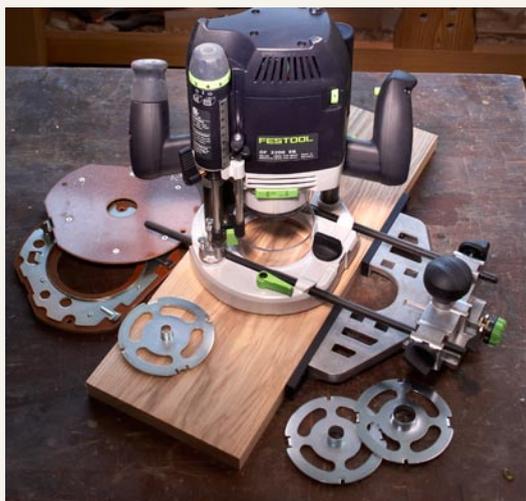
router. Let's begin at the collet, which is where you spend most of your time and frustration with a router. Festool has a ratcheting collet. Press a button to lock the collet, then use a single wrench to tighten or loosen the bit using the efficient ratcheting mechanism.

Don't you hate changing the baseplates on your routers? We do. Festool fixes this frustration with bases that clip on and off the tool in a second. No more odd screwdrivers or fasteners to lose.

Having different bases for big and little bits allows you to actually collect dust with the router, thanks also to the tool's spring-loaded retractable shroud.

Adjusting your plunge depth is fast, intuitive and precise. And the plunge lock is right where you want it (on the left handle).

Festool just forced the plunge router to evolve again. Now watch everyone else try to keep up.



FESTOOL USA
■ 888-337-8600 ■ festoolusa.com

MAKITA *10.8v Lithium-ion Compact Drill-Driver*

For years we've been railing against high-voltage cordless drills (36 volts? Give us a break! Actually, give us a broken wrist!). So we used to tell woodworkers to buy 9.6-volt drills, instead.

Now—thank goodness—the world is changing. Manufacturers are using new battery technology to make smaller and more powerful tools instead of making bigger tools that mimic corded tools.

Our favorite of the new crop is the Makita 10.8-volt Lithium-ion compact driver, the DF030D. It has the right set of features for woodworking. It's small (of course), about 7" high and 6" long. And it delivers a powerful punch—195 in./lbs. of torque.

But what we really like is the tool's two-speed gearbox (0-350 and 0-1,300 rpm) and its 18-position clutch. These are the two features you need to drive screws and drill bits effectively.

The drill features a 1/4" hex-head chuck. Some woodworkers prefer a standard chuck, but I've become fond of this sort of tooling because you can switch quickly from drilling to driving.

Makita also makes a pint-size impact driver in this format that you might be interested in. Though we prefer the standard drill/drivers in our shop, many woodworkers like the extra driving power provided by an impact driver. If this describes you, then check out Makita's TD090D. It's also a high-quality, compact tool.



MAKITA
■ 800-462-5482 ■ makita.com

JET Resaw Band Saw

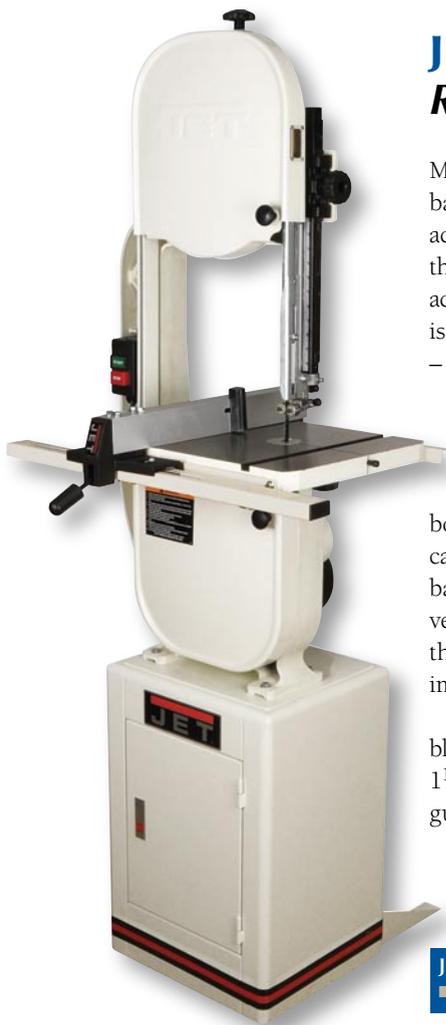
Many woodworkers who buy a 14" cast-frame band saw modify the machine by adding an accessory riser-block kit. This about doubles the maximum height of the material the saw can accommodate. But the cost of this modification is that the saw's frame loses some of its rigidity – a critical feature for a precision setup.

Jet Tools solved this problem by creating an entirely new 14" cast iron frame for its JWB-14 ProDX saw (710116K) that gives you 12" of resaw capacity right out of the box – without losing rigidity. This new frame casting is significantly beefier than on standard band saws and helps ensure a smooth cut in very thick materials. Jet officials demonstrated the saw for us this summer, and we were very impressed with the whole package.

At \$899 the saw is a good deal with a quick blade-release mechanism, high-tension spring, 1¹/₄-hp motor and a rack-and-pinion blade-guide post.

If you want a 14" cast iron saw to use for resawing, we think this machine should be your top choice.

JET TOOLS
■ 800-274-6848 ■ woodworking.jettools.com



BOSCH Xtra-clean Jigsaw Blades for Wood

Most woodworkers separate jigsaw blades into two categories: sharp and charred. Now there's a third kind of jigsaw blade: the Xtra-clean blade from Bosch.

When we first started using these blades, we were skeptical. Now my fellow editors are hoarding them in their toolboxes. Thanks to some very clever tooth geometry, these blades cut cleaner than any jigsaw blade we have ever used – hands down. Senior Editor Robert W. Lang used them to cut lap dovetails when building his workbench and the joints went together right from the saw. Throw your old blades out and get some Xtra-clean ones. Enough said.



BOSCH
■ 877-267-2499 ■ boschtools.com

JET OSC Drum Sander

Drum sanders are great for leveling glued-up panels and surfacing figured woods, but they have their downsides. A little dried glue on your panel can gum up and ruin your sandpaper (an expensive problem). Also, changing grits a lot to get to your final finish can be time-consuming.

Jet Tools has introduced a new 22" open-end drum sander (the 22-44 OSC) that remedies both of these problems. Unlike other drum sanders, the head can be set to oscillate back and forth by 1" as it spins. This oscillation (a patented design) increases the life of your sanding belt, decreases the chance of it getting gummed up and leaves a superior finish, even at coarse grits.

Jet officials demonstrated the sander for us with #80-grit paper loaded on the machine's single drum. With the oscillation function turned off, the sanding scratches were clearly visible. With the oscillation turned on, the scratches were dramatically reduced. You could get away with a lot fewer grits with this machine.

Priced right above \$2,000, this is a serious machine with lots of impressive features (it automatically adjusts your feed rate). If you would like to sand less and you work a lot with panels, the Jet is an ideal machine.



JET TOOLS
■ 800-274-6848 ■ woodworking.jettools.com

GRAMERCY

Crosscut Carcase Saw

The carcase saw is one of the three essential backsaws when cutting joints by hand (you'll also want a dovetail and tenon saw). The carcase saw is useful for all manner of precision crosscuts, from simply getting a board to the exact length to cutting high-tolerance tenon shoulders. You need a good one.

The new Gramercy Tools carcase saw stands up against the other premium brands and has some extra features that we like. The saw is exceptionally smooth-cutting, thanks to its hand-filed and hand-set teeth. Plus the saw has a bit more fleam than others, which also contributes to its smoothness. ("Fleam" is the bevel on the front of each saw tooth.)

The saw's blade is a little longer than most at 12", and it has a blade that tapers in width from heel to toe, like old saws. And it's quite lightweight (12.6 ounces), which makes it easy to wield. I was impressed by the prototype, which I used during the summer; the first production models are even nicer. I particularly like the tool's delicate and traditional look (and the crisp etch on its blade).

The market for premium backsaws has been getting fierce, with several new boutique makers entering the fray this year (and more

to come). The Gramercy is definitely not an also-ran. Its distinct set of features have launched it into the very top tier of makers and it deserves your careful consideration.



TOOLS FOR WORKING WOOD
■ 800-426-4613 ■ toolsforworkingwood.com

VERITAS

Skew Rabbet Planes

Veritas continues to fill out the line of essential planes that woodworkers need to do joinery by hand. Last year, Veritas released its excellent plow plane. This year, the company hit a home run with its skew rabbet planes.

These planes come in right- and left-hand versions (having both allows you to work with varying grain directions). And the tools have every detail and adjustment you need to make clean rabbets both with and across the grain.

The tool's iron is skewed, which pulls the tool into the cut and results in cleaner cuts overall. The fence uses router-collet technology to ensure the fence locks square. And the cross-grain nicker is fully adjustable and easy to sharpen.

In use, the plane is comfortable to hold and easy to wield. I had the tool making crisp rabbets in less than 25 minutes out of the box (and that included sharpening). That's saying something for rabbet planes, which are complex tools.

If you like cutting joints by hand (or you perhaps want to learn), a rabbeting plane is essential. And you can't do better than the Veritas.

Need more proof? Then check out our full review of this tool in the Tool Test column of this issue on page 36.



LEE VALLEY TOOLS
■ 800-267-8735 ■ leevalley.com

BYRD TOOL

Shelix Cutterheads for Portable Planers

Byrd Tool makes amazing spiral cutterheads for machinery that are quiet, clear the chips efficiently and leave a fantastic surface, even in difficult woods. The cutterhead technology—called Shelix—also allows you to use small carbide inserts that you can easily replace if you hit a nail. Plus, the carbide lasts a long time.

Until now, these cutterheads were available only for bigger machines. Now Byrd Tool has begun making aftermarket Shelix heads for some portable planers, including the DeWalt 13" DW735. And others are in the works, including Ridgid and Delta planers. At about \$410 for a Shelix replacement head, it might be better to update your existing planer than replace it. **PW**



BYRD TOOL
■ 800-441-2973 ■ byrdtool.com