

# Make a small chisel for delicate detail work

BY CRAIG THIBODEAU

The small size of most inlay and stringing can require delicate tools to do tasks like cleaning and squaring up routed corners and edges. Even a  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. chisel is often too big, so I make my own small chisels, using jeweler's files for the blades.

The two I use the most are a  $\frac{1}{16}$ -in.-thick by  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in.-wide flat chisel and a  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-square chisel. Their diminutive size allows me to pare inside narrow grooves for stringing without damaging the walls of the grooves.

These chisels are not difficult to make. All you need is a grinder to remove the teeth from the file, shorten its length, and create a cutting bevel that is then honed on waterstones.

Like all chisels, these shopmade ones need handles. Any small piece of hardwood will do. After drilling a hole for the chisel tang and shaping the handle, I secure the chisel in the handle with cyanoacrylate glue. I do not bother hardening and tempering the blade, because the work these tools do isn't demanding. But if you decide to do so, make sure to do it before attaching the handle.

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## SMALL FILE BECOMES THE BLADE

Jeweler's files come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but the two most useful are a small, square one and one with a flat, rectangular body.



**Get rid of the teeth.** Gently hold the file flat against the side of a fine-grit grinding wheel. Let the wheel do its work to remove the teeth.



**Score the blade.** Use the wheel's corner to cut a notch in the blade, using a light touch and allowing the wheel to cut at its own speed.



**Snap it short.** Hold the file on either side of the notch and give it a crisp bend.



**Square the cutting edge.** Hold the file square to the wheel to create a blunt edge that's perpendicular to the sides.



**Grind the bevel.** The exact angle isn't critical, but one between 25° and 35° works best.



**Hone with a stone.** Because of the hollow grind, there's no difficulty in polishing the bevel freehand.

## GET A HANDLE ON IT

Any piece of scrapwood works for the handle. Start with a blank about ½ in. dia. by 3 in. long.



**Handle gets a hole.** Clamp the handle into a notched block so that it doesn't move while being drilled.



**Sand to shape.** Thibodeau tapers the front end to create a comfortable grip, then rounds over the back end.



**Drop in the glue.** All it takes is a few drops, guided into the hole with the help of a needle tip (left). Slide in the chisel, pushing it as far as it will go with hand pressure (right). While holding the chisel up off the bench, rap it firmly on the end of the handle (far right). Repeat until the blade bottoms out in the hole.

