

Keep Your Tools Out



Make tools visible and keep them orderly for a beautiful and more efficient shop

BY JIM PUTERBAUGH

The notion of workflow always seems to come up when woodworkers discuss shop design, but it's mostly limited to machinery and workbenches. This is a mistake because workflow also involves smaller things like routers, hand-planes, chisels, layout tools, sandpaper, scrapers, and even safety glasses. Where those are located and how accessible they are can have a significant impact on how smoothly your work progresses.

This is why I organized my shop so that as much as possible is visible. With everything out in the open, there's no time wasted trying to remember which drawer holds my countersinks, or where exactly I put those 1¼-in.-long screws. As a result, I can work faster and more smoothly because I can quickly grab a tool and use it.

Don't confuse an open shop with a messy one. To be successful, an open shop must be reasonably organized: a place for everything and everything in its place. A bit of clutter is fine, but too much and the shop no longer functions as it should. I divided my tools into common-sense groups and arranged them around the shop so that they are close to where I use them. Lathe tools are at the lathe, in a wall-hung bracket that has a spot for each tool. Planes are within reach of the bench.

In addition to these practical reasons in favor of the open shop, there is another reason I prefer it over a shop full of cabinets and drawers. Tools and the other trappings of woodworking are beautiful, especially when laid out in a lovely array. An open shop puts that beauty on display where it can inspire you.

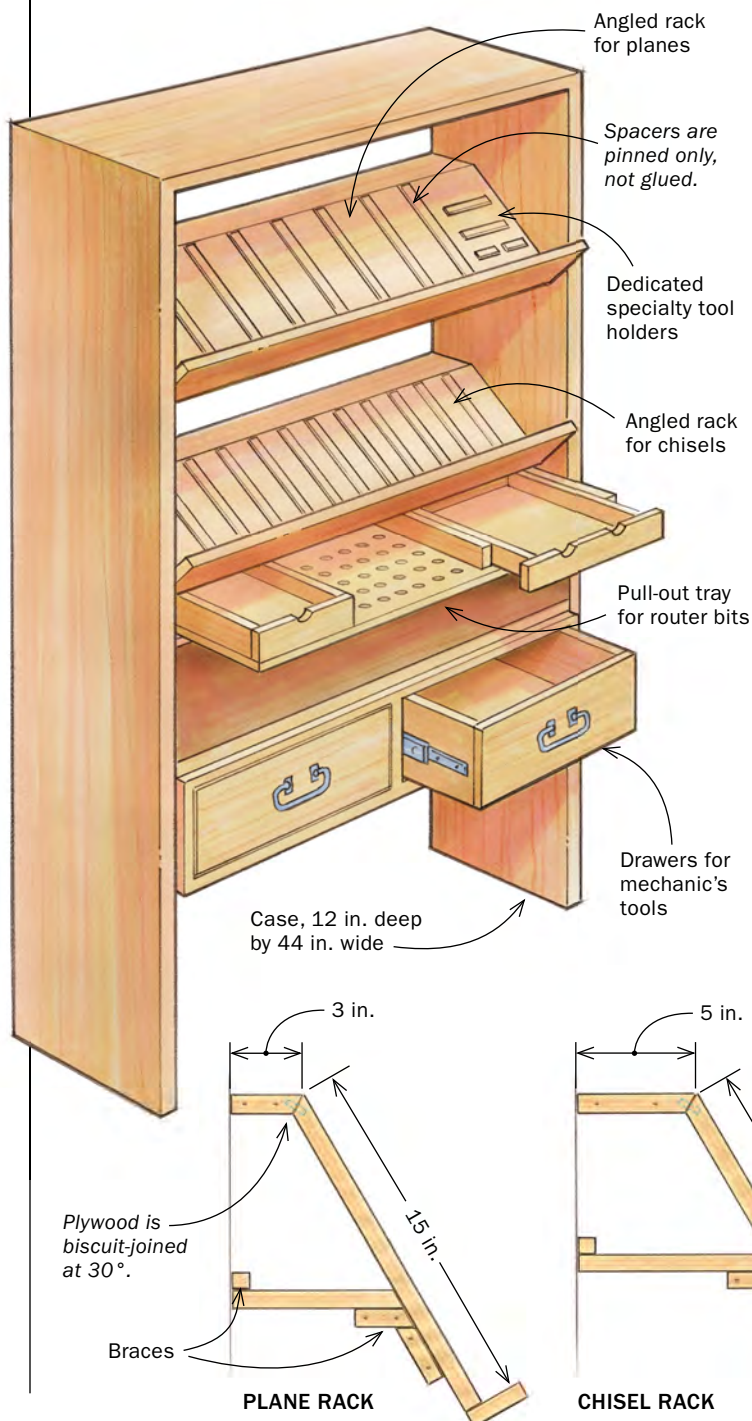
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in the Open

Simple storage solutions

RACK FOR HAND TOOLS

Organization is critical in an open shop. The best way to organize hand tools in the open is with a shelving unit. I have an angled rack for my planes, and another for my chisels. The tools run across the rack in a line with dividers between them. There also are dedicated holders for scrapers, spokeshaves, a drawknife, and a variety of other tools. A pull-out tray holds router bits and a pair of drawers houses mechanic's tools. I added shelves on the outside of the case for cordless drills, and I store air tools below the drawers.



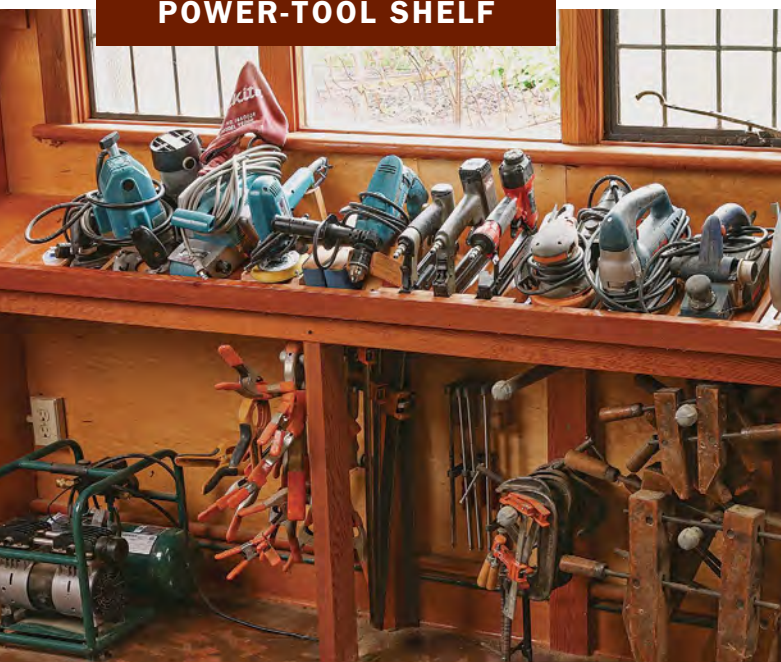
Hand tools at hand. A few steps from his bench, Puterbaugh's planes and chisels are ready for action. Pleasantly displayed, they add to the shop's romance, too.



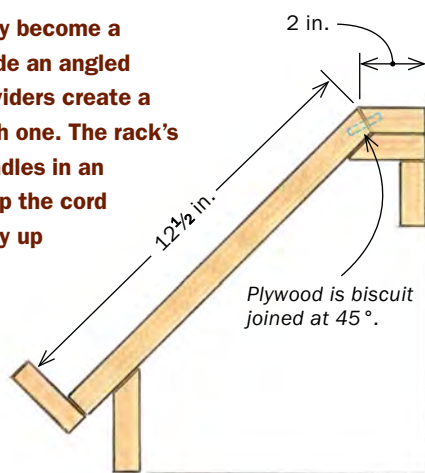
Make a place for every tool. The best way to stay organized is to create a dedicated space for each tool. Open shelves hold power tools (left), while drawers with slotted racks keep wrenches orderly (below).



POWER-TOOL SHELF



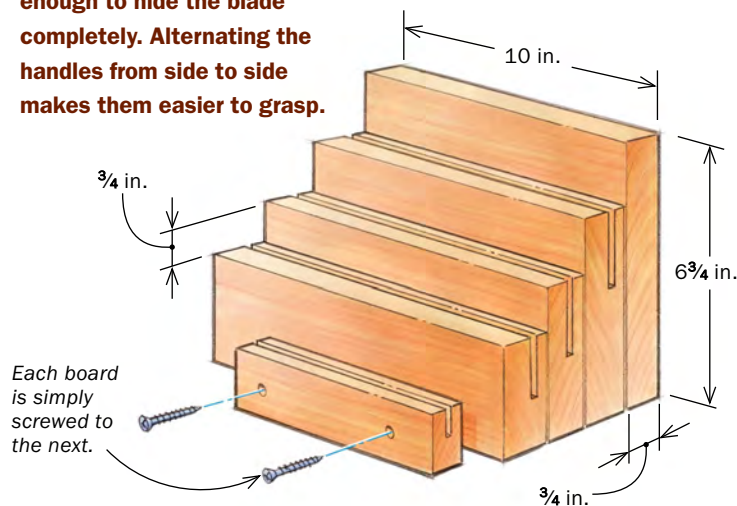
Power tools can quickly become a jumbled mess, so I made an angled rack to store them. Dividers create a dedicated spot for each one. The rack's angle presents the handles in an easy-to-grab way. I wrap the cord around each tool to tidy up the space even more.



HANGING SAW BLOCK



Handsaw blades need protection, so I buried them in a block. Screwed to the wall, the block is a convenient way to store multiple saws within easy reach of my bench. The simplest way to cut a snug slot is to use the saw itself. Cut a kerf deep enough to hide the blade completely. Alternating the handles from side to side makes them easier to grasp.



LATHE TOOL RACK



The most convenient place to have your lathe tools is near the lathe, which is why I built a dedicated rack and hung it on the wall behind mine. The rack is long enough so all the long-handled tools can be spread out in a single row. The rack has no dividers, so tools are quickly removed and replaced.

