

Top 10 Tools for a Tough Economy

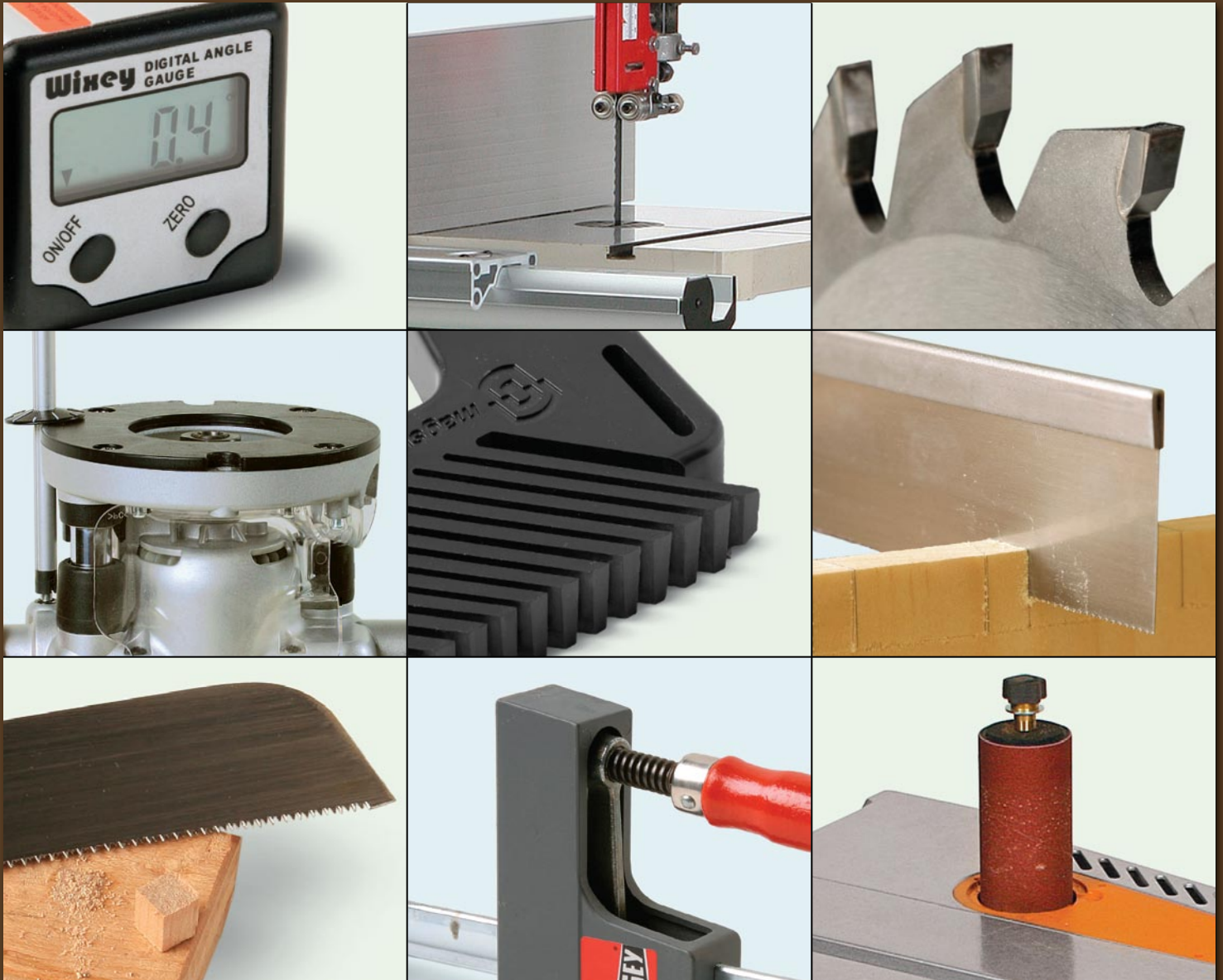
Editors, experts uncover today's best values

It never fails. Put a few woodworkers in the same room for an hour and, almost certainly, the talk gravitates toward favorite tools. And at *Fine Woodworking*, there are always a few woodworkers in the same room, so the discussion happens daily.

With that in mind, we thought readers might like to know which tools are our favorites. We asked staff

editors, contributing editors, and regular contributors to tell us about the tool they'd hate to lose.

We had only two rules: The tool had to be a relatively new one, so readers could find it easily in a store or online. And, because our current economy is less than robust, we asked them to make sure the tool was also a good value.





Go-anywhere featherboard

Ripcuts, especially narrow ones, can be dangerous because you have to hold the workpiece firmly against the fence while pushing it through the blade. One slip-up, and the blade can catch the piece and kick it back at you, potentially pulling your hand into the blade. A featherboard makes the task safer and easier. Positioned just in front of the blade, a featherboard keeps the workpiece firmly against the rip fence. With the featherboard on duty—and with a splitter behind the blade—there's no need to put your fingers anywhere near the blade.

A featherboard can be made in the shop without much fuss. But clamping it to the top of the tablesaw is always a challenge. You can buy versions that lock into the miter-gauge slot, but they can't be used when the workpiece is narrower than about 2½ in.

My favorite featherboard option, by far, is the relatively new Magswitch Magnetic Tablesaw Featherboard. It features a pair of powerful magnets that hold the featherboard anywhere on the table-top (it doesn't work on aluminum or granite). Place the featherboard where you want it, then turn the two knobs clockwise to lock it in place in an instant. Removing the featherboard is just as quick.

The Magswitch Magnetic Tablesaw Featherboard sells for about \$55. Go to www.magswitch.com.au for more information. It is available from numerous woodworking retailers, including Woodcraft (www.woodcraft.com).



Not a featherweight. The Magswitch featherboard uses super-strong magnets to attach to the saw table. Because it doesn't rely on clamps or the miter slot, it can be mounted anywhere on the table.

Tom Begnal recently retired from Fine Woodworking.

Small parallel clamp works great

Whenever I needed a short clamp, my first choice used to be a small bar clamp or a one-handed, Quick-Grip-style clamp. Either one got the job done, but the pads could be a problem. The small pivoting pad on my bar clamp would sometimes shift out of position as I tightened the clamp, or it would mar the workpiece. The squishy pads on my Quick-Grip-style clamp tended to shift parts out of alignment during a glue-up.

Recently, I replaced those clamps with the UniKlamp, a light-duty parallel-jaw clamp from Bessey. The UniKlamp has added precision to my glue-ups and removed a lot of the stress. It's easy to adjust, and the broad, flat jaws offer plenty of even pressure without shifting or denting the work. No longer do I fuss with clamp blocks while my workpiece slips and slides. I prefer the 6½-in. clamp, but it's also available in 12-in. and 18-in. lengths. At about \$20 (www.leevalley.com), the 6½-in. UniKlamp costs more than other small clamps, but it's money well spent.

Michael Pekovich is the art director.



Precise glue-ups. The Bessey UniKlamp puts all the benefits of a parallel-jaw clamp in a small, lightweight package.



The last bandsaw you'll need

A 14-in. bandsaw is the most common size we see in home shops. These machines typically have the perfect package of power, performance, and affordability for most woodworkers. Many of the latest models also have more resaw capacity.

Of the saws I reviewed in 2007 (*FWW* #193), I thought the Grizzly G0457 (www.grizzly.com) was the best value. The price has since gone up to \$895, but it's still a great price for what you get.

The saw has a large table (19¾ in. by 14 in.) and a 2-hp motor. But what sets it apart from many other 14-in. saws is a resaw capacity of more than 10 in. Resawing saves money, letting you get a number of thin boards out of a thick one, and frees you from standard lumberyard thicknesses.

The G0457 not only makes resawing accurate and easy, but it also handles both tight and gradual curves with aplomb. For most woodworkers, the G0457 is the last bandsaw you'll ever need.

Tom McKenna is the senior editor.



Resaw beast. The Grizzly 14-in. bandsaw comes with a tall fence and plenty of muscle to resaw wide stock.

Perfect router for router tables

It seems as if the Triton 2¼-hp plunge router was made to be used upside down—in a router table, that is. This powerful router allows above-the-table bit changes and height adjustments, eliminating the need to buy an expensive router lift or a commercial router table.

Although coarse height adjustments can be made quickly under the table, the above-table crank works so well that I make all my adjustments with it. What's more, there is no slop in the height adjustment, which means I don't need to tighten the motor lock from under the table to maintain bit height.

However, there is one small annoyance: The spindle lock that allows single-wrench bit changes also locks the power switch in the off position. I have to reach under the table to turn it back on after every bit change. But I overlook this because I saved so much money by not having to buy a router and a lift. The router sells for about \$210 at Woodworker's Supply (www.woodworker.com).

Matt Kenney is an associate editor.



Crank and lift. The Triton comes with its own lift system for above-the-table height adjustment and bit changes.





One finish that does it all

If I could have only one finish, it would be Zinsser's SealCoat Universal Sanding Sealer. This premixed 2-lb. cut of blond shellac is dewaxed and thus compatible with any finish applied before or after it.

SealCoat works as a sealer on bare wood before applying a clear finish, as a stain controller on blotch-prone woods such as cherry, and as a clear finish. It can be sprayed, brushed, or wiped on. Dry to the touch in 10 minutes, it's perfect for dusty shops, and can be recoated in an hour. Unlike shellac from flakes, SealCoat is ready once you open the can, and its shelf life is at least three years versus about six months for dissolved flakes. Priced at around \$11 a quart or \$33 a gallon, SealCoat is available at hardware stores and home centers.

Mark Schofield is the managing editor.

Dirt-cheap dovetail saw cuts like a champ

There are lots of great high-end dovetail saws, both Western-style and Japanese, that cost from \$40 to well over \$100. But I've found a cheap saw that cuts dovetails as well as any expensive saw I've used. The Zona Universal Fine Kerf Razor Saw (No. 35-500) sells for \$6.50 (replacement blades are \$1.50). It cuts on the pull stroke, has 32 teeth per inch, and produces a super-thin kerf (0.010 in.). Visit www.zonatool.net for more information.

Anissa Kapsales is an associate editor.



Wixey Digital Angle Gauge does the math for you



Every angle's the right angle. The Wixey Digital Angle Gauge measures angles precisely for all kinds of machine setups, including tablesawn miters.

If the Wixey Digital Angle Gauge cost three times as much, I'd still buy it and consider it a great value. This handy gadget measures angles to within 0.1° and displays them in digital format.

The Wixey's strong magnet lets it mount to any ferrous metal surface. That makes it great for machine setups, such as setting the blade on a tablesaw or miter saw, the fence on a jointer, or the table on a bandsaw or drill press.



Useful for hand tools, too. The gauge helps position chisels and plane irons at the correct angle in a honing guide.

I also use the Wixey when sharpening chisels or plane irons. With it, I can determine pre-existing bevel angles, set up the grinder tool rest, and set tools at the correct angle in a honing guide. In furniture work, angles, tapers, and bevels are all made simpler with the Wixey, which sells for \$40 (www.rockler.com).

Chris Gochnour is a regular contributor.



Buy a rip blade for joinery cuts

Combination sawblades create a kerf with shallow “ears” at the corners of the bottom. That’s fine for most cuts.

But sometimes, like when cutting an exposed groove or dado, I want a kerf with a square bottom. That’s when I replace my combination blade with a rip blade.

On rip blades, the tops of the teeth are ground flat, so the bottom of the kerf ends up flat, too. So, when making a stub-tenon frame, there’s no need to square the bottom of the groove with a chisel. Slots for key splines, which are cut across the corners of miter joints, also look great. Rip blades cost about \$30 to \$70. Look for them wherever tablesaw blades are sold.

Gary Rogowski is a contributing editor.



Ideal for tablesaw joinery. The rip blade’s teeth are ground with no rake across the top, leaving a cut with a flat bottom, ideal for dados and grooves.

Sander offers unmatched versatility

For sanding curved edges, especially inside curved edges, an oscillating spindle sander is my first choice. Because the drum both spins and goes up and



Spindle sander handles curves and flats. The Ridgid oscillating spindle sander is great for curved work. It offers a belt-sanding attachment for flat edges and outside curves.

down, you end up with fewer scratches and the sandpaper lasts longer.

I especially like the Ridgid Oscillating Spindle Sander because it also quickly converts to a 4-in. by 24-in. oscillating belt sander for working flat edges and outside curves.

The Ridgid is sold by The Home Depot (\$200). For more information, go to www.ridgid.com.

T.B.



Flush-cutting saw treads lightly

Flush-cutting saws save time, and my favorite is the Japanese Kugihiki. With its fine teeth (22 tpi), the saw trims a peg flush without scoring or otherwise damaging the adjacent surface. All

that’s needed to perfect the surface is a quick swipe with a block plane. A flush-cutting saw is only used to cut small pieces of wood, so it stays sharp for a very long time.

The Kugihiki is available at Woodcraft (part No. 12F24) for about \$27.

John Tetreault is an associate art director.

