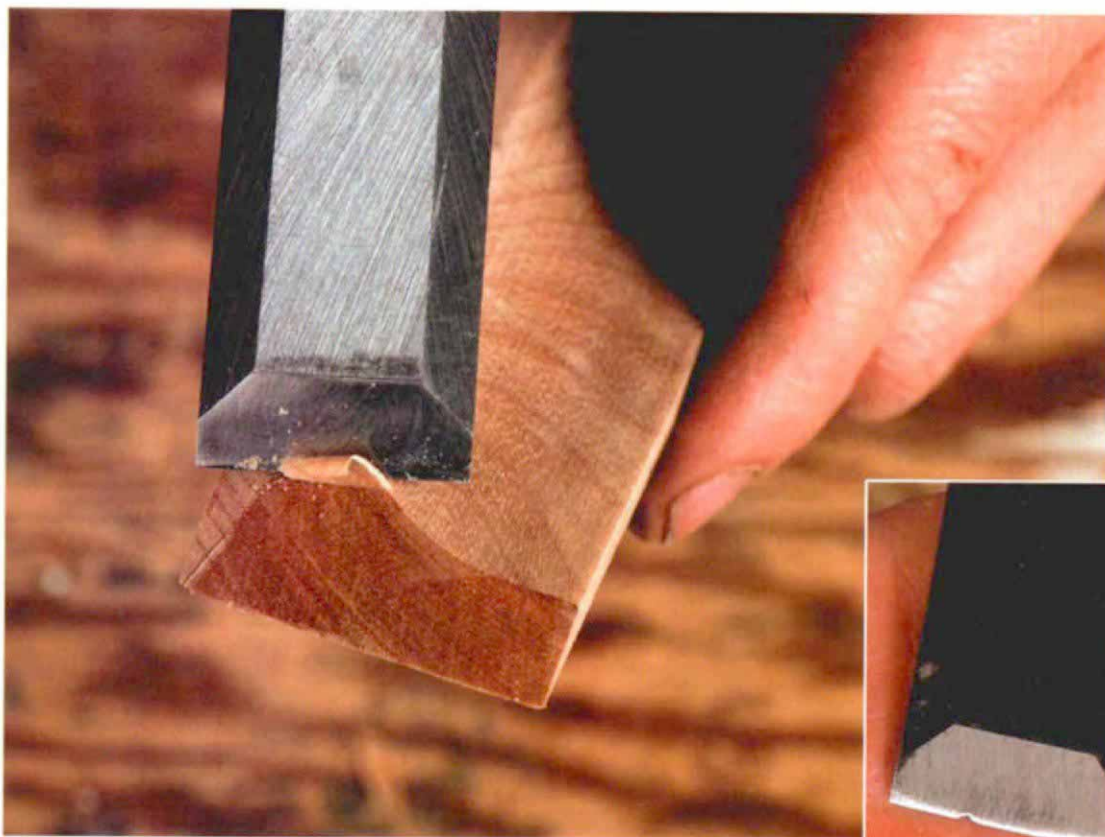


Job-Site Sharpening

Sandpaper makes a keen edge in a hurry

by Stephen Winchester



Sharp enough. *The author's sandpaper-sharpened chisel shaves curls off the end grain of a piece of birch molding. The dull chisel, with a 1/16-in.-deep nick, is shown at right.*



When I'm in my shop, I sharpen chisels and plane irons with a wet grinding wheel and waterstones. They do a great job, but they're not very portable. So when I'm on a job site installing cabinets, I leave the wheel and stones at home and use sandpaper to sharpen dull tools.

All I need for sharpening is a belt sander, a sheet of 120-grit sandpaper and two pieces of 3M's Microfinishing film. It may sound crude, but the edge I get will shave hair off my arm. More important, the edge will shave tight curls off any hardwood I encounter on the job (see the photo above).

"Never use a belt sander on a chisel or

a plane iron!" you say. Trust me. A belt sander grinds a bevel quickly, and it won't hurt the tool as long as you use a light touch. I put a 120-grit belt on my belt sander, set it upside down on a portable bench and take it easy with the grinding. Overheating the blade will destroy the temper, so I don't bear down on the tool. And I don't let the tool stay on the belt for more than a few seconds at a time.

Once I've eliminated any nicks and established the bevel, I hone my edge tools with the 120-grit paper and the Microfinishing film backed by a piece of scrapwood, as shown in the photos on the facing page. The wood doesn't have to be perfectly

flat—just free of large gouges or cracks.

After honing on the 120-grit sandpaper, I use 60-micron and 30-micron Microfinishing film. The grades get finer as the number goes lower. The 60 micron is equivalent to about 220-grit, and 30 micron is about the same as 400-grit paper.

This stuff lasts forever, too. I've been using the same pieces of film for two years. I get my Microfinishing film from a local auto-body supply store. Call 3M at (800) 742-9546 to find the nearest distributor. □

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Grind the bevel.
A 120-grit belt is usually as coarse as you'll need, but if there's a deep nick in the edge, go to 50-grit and then to 120-grit. Use a light touch, and don't let the chisel or plane iron stay on the belt for more than a few seconds at a time. If the tool becomes too hot to hold, it could lose its hardness. Let it cool before doing any further grinding.



Remove the burr by rubbing the back of the tool on 120-grit paper. Keep the tool perfectly flat on the paper.



Use 120-grit on the bevel When the bevel has a consistent polish, flip the tool over, and remove the burr again.



Continue honing with 60- and then 30-micron Microfinishingfilm. Remove the burr with the same grit.



Strop the bevel and back several times on any convenient piece of leather—a nail apron's tape holder, a belt or a work boot will do fine. Now you're ready to plane or pare.