



# Plane Speaking

## One man's guide

by Robert Sutter

Nowadays, when everything in a woodworking shop tends to go buzz, or whirr, or rat-a-tat-tat, or give off some, other harsh and less onomatopoeic sound, it is reassuring to hear the "snick" of a sharp plane slicing long thin curls off a piece of wood. Reassuring? Yes, for to me the sound and feel of handplaning stock to a smooth surface is a link to the craftsmanship of the past.

I agree it is faster and easier to push a chunk of wood through a machine which automatically makes it smooth, true and dimensioned. But what about the shop which hasn't got 1500 pounds of 18-inch planer squatting there waiting to be run, or a 62 by 9-inch jointer to zip off straight smooth edges? How will you handle the wide board which won't go through either? What to do to smooth a figured table top which the machines would tear to bits? Or fit a door, set in a box-bottom when the box is just the least bit cockeyed, widen a groove a little, or fit a tongue snugly? Easy! Just reach up on the shelf behind your bench and pick off the appropriate hand plane. And which one is that, you ask. Well, I'll tell you what I can about hand planes using the 18 different planes (and spokeshaves) in my own shop as examples. I've taken a family photograph so I can tout them one by one according to breeding and track record. You can assume availability unless otherwise specified.

**1.** Stanley #79 side rabbet is the only plane which will pare the side of a narrow groove or trim a doorstep in place. It may not be readily available, so buy one when you see it for this plane is most useful.

**2 and 3.** Stanley #71 and its little cousin, the #271 router, are just the ticket for cleaning up the bottom of lock mortises and hinge butts or truing up the bottom of grooves. The #71 can be used to rout out a groove or a stop-dado if the sides are first cut with a saw. The #271 is great for cleaning up flat backgrounds in carving. Both are designed for use in normal and bullnose positions and are adjustable for depth of cut. (Record, in England, used to make a similar router plane but has discontinued it. The two Stanley planes are still available, but I'd advise haste if you decide you must have them for your shop.

**4.** Record and Stanley block planes have irons angled at about one-half that of a bench plane and are set bevel up in an adjustable mouth, thus allowing a smooth cut on end or figured grain. The same features permit taking fine shavings with little or no chance of tearing side grain. Since the block plane fits nicely in the hand, it is useful where stock is held with one hand and worked with the other. Because of its adjustability, the block plane seems to me to be the easiest plane to use when making chamfers.

**5.** Stanley #130 is the same as (4) but hard to find. It's worth the hunt because a second bullnose-like blade position allows it to get into tight corners otherwise out of bounds to planes.

**6.** Stanley #90 is a bullnose plane, but also a "dandy shoulder rabbet plane since the sides are machined square to the sole. It can also be used as a chisel plane (with bullnose removed to expose the blade completely). I find the plane digs in unless there is a bearing surface ahead of the blade. It is a low-angle, bevel-up, adjustable-throat plane.

**7.** Record #073 shoulder rabbet plane, weighing in at a tad over four pounds, is the king of planes for accurate work in any situation. A 1-1/4-inch iron set at a low angle bevel-up, an adjustable throat, a micrometer smooth adjustment for depth of cut, beautiful machining and sufficient heft all combine to make a tool which gets a lot of use in my shop. With it I clean up projecting joints, fit tenons, trim edging, true miters, true joined surfaces and rabbets, and on and on.

**8.** Record #041 shoulder rabbet is just like #043 but only 5/8-inch wide with a fixed nose, and runs a close second for favorite status. Unfortunately, it is no longer available, having been replaced by the #042 (with a 3/4-inch sole but otherwise the same).

**9.** Stanley #78 rabbet — a workaday plane that somehow survived the Stanley blitzkrieg and is still in the current catalog. It does a creditable but coarser job of cutting and trimming rabbets than (7). Its built-in fence and depth gauge makes for easy, accurate use.

**10.** My Victor #20 compass plane with adjustable flexible sole is an antique. With it one can plane curved surfaces. A similar plane is now available.

**11 and 12.** These are both scrapers. The larger one, with a tote and plane-like sole, is the Stanley #112, now extinct. It has a toothing blade for veneering and working curly stock. The other is a Stanley #80 cabinet scraper. Note: wooden toothing planes are still available.

**13, 14, 15.** These three form the bench plane triumvirate. The foreplane or scrub plane (13) with convex blade will do a fast job of surface cleanup. The jack (14) eliminates most hills and hollows and prepares the surface for final truing with the try plane or jointer (15). I prefer wood planes, but you can get these three in iron with plain or corrugated soles. All work, so it's your choice.

**16.** This deluxe smoother comes from Ulmia in West Germany. Its lignum vitae sole glides over a surface, and because of an adjustable mouth, the plane can be set to take the thinnest of shavings. It is a finishing tool which leaves an almost polished surface in its wake. Note: wooden planes are now available with screw adjustments under the "Primus" name.

**17 and 18.** These spokeshaves are not planes, strictly speaking, yet they alone will produce a contoured surface or form and smooth work in the round. If you realize that they were used in earlier days to make spokes for wheels, then you'll know what they can do for you.

To be sure, there are a gaggle of other good and useful wood-paring tools I've neglected. But to tell the truth, I was abashed to find as many as I have in and around my bench. I feel that I've covered the most common ground and that perhaps this brief Baedeker to plane-land will help sort out some choices for you.