

# Shop on



## PLANES

*Rodríguez's traveling collection of tools includes four planes (from left): a block plane, a low-angle jack plane, a No. 4 smoothing plane and a 3/4-in. shoulder plane that he made.*



I often find myself far from a well-equipped shop, and when I reach my destination I typically need a good collection of woodworking tools that can help me tackle anything from basic joinery to furniture repair.

I've been a cabinetmaker for a long time, and I own lots of tools. When I travel, I can't lug everything, so I pare down my collection to the tools that give me the best results with the least weight and bulk. Although I routinely use a variety of stationary power tools when they are available, my travel kit allows me to make almost any small project from scratch when they are not. In my travels I've discovered that this set is really all I need and would serve as a good set of essentials for any shop.

In addition to being compact and portable, tools must have three qualities: each must be effective, versatile and of good quality. Ef-



# the Go

A travel kit  
of carefully chosen  
tools keeps a veteran  
cabinetmaker at work  
away from home

BY MARIO RODRIGUEZ



fectiveness means a tool must be well designed and well balanced, easy to adjust, comfortable to use and easy to sharpen and maintain. Versatile means that it should perform more than one task. Quality is important, too. This is about more than appearance: Top-quality tools work better. Everything in my travel kit meets these criteria, with one exception: a set of completely useless screwdrivers my daughter proudly gave to me on Father's Day when she was 7 years old. I never go anywhere without them.

## Key personal tools include planes and chisels

Personal tools are ones that I always carry. I never leave them lying around, and (sorry, buddy) I rarely lend them to anyone.

I used to laugh at people who bundled their pets in little jackets. Now I pack my planes in special socks. I carry four planes: a low-angle jack, a block plane, a No. 4 smoothing plane and a shoulder

plane. Three of my planes are made by Lie-Nielsen, where I work part-time as a consultant. The planes are well made, but they are expensive. In most cases, you could substitute another brand, such as Record or Stanley.

The low-angle jack plane is a copy of the Stanley No. 62. It is long enough to serve as a jointer yet short enough to double as a smoothing plane. It can cut with the grain, perpendicular to the grain, and it even handles end grain. It also works on very dense woods such as bird's-eye maple. Like most woodworkers, I can't do without a block plane. Mine is a Lie-Nielsen No. 103, but good block planes also are made by Stanley and Record. A No. 4 smoothing plane is rightfully regarded as an all-purpose bench plane. I use mine to smooth and flatten short and narrow pieces, to clean up edges and to remove saw marks and other surface blemishes. The last plane in my kit is a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. shoulder plane. I made this one myself, modeling it after one from the tool chest of famed 19th-century cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe. Unlike other planes, a



## CHISELS

*Paring chisels, from  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. to 2 in. wide, are protected by a heavy canvas roll during the rigors of travel. The kit also includes a turned carver's-style mallet.*

shoulder plane's blade extends the full width of the plane body, making it useful for trimming rabbets, tenons and shoulders. A good substitute is the Stanley No. 92.

I carry six paring chisels— $\frac{1}{8}$  in.,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.,  $\frac{1}{2}$  in.,  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., 1 in and 2 in.—although it would be possible to get by without the  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. and 2-in. chisels. I also bring a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. mortise chisel that doubles as a heavy-duty bench chisel (and I use my  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. chisel as a burnisher for my scrapers). I think Marples' Blue Chip is a good brand at a good price. And I have a small turned mallet for whacking chisels.

I admit to having a weakness for spokeshaves. I love the way they look and handle. Because they don't take up much room, I carry several, including 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. and 2-in. models. If you prefer the more common cast-iron style with a flat sole, either the Stanley No. 51 or the Record No. 501 will do nicely. Flat card scrapers don't take up much room, either, but they are great for smoothing surfaces, removing plane tracks and scraping finishes. I carry several.

## Layout and marking tools

I made my own marking knife. It has a slender, pointed blade and a full handle custom-shaped to fit my hand. It is very handy for



## SPOKESHAVES AND SCRAPERS

*Rodríguez packs three spokeshaves; the smallest has a 1½-in.-wide blade. Flat card scrapers take up virtually no room but are versatile performers for smoothing surfaces and removing plane marks. The Grobet detail file and Italian rasp are used for cleanup and shaping.*

scribing clean lines, scribing dovetail pins, trimming veneer, sharpening pencils and even removing splinters. I use an old Reed marking gauge that is no longer made. But Starrett makes a similar model.

A 12-in. combination square is essential for checking 90° and 45° angles and for general layout work. Although a 6-in. square would be more compact and accomplish the same basic function as a



## LAYOUT AND MARKING TOOLS

*A 12-in. combination square is essential, while a 3-in. engineer's square is useful for checking tools as well as for laying out joinery. Rodríguez also carries a sliding T-bevel for marking angles, a handmade marking knife, a folding ruler, a marking gauge and a compass.*

12-in. one, I prefer the bigger model because the base is sturdier and the ruler is longer. I think the extra capacity offsets the added weight. A 3-in. engineer's square is useful for checking the squareness of plane blades and chisel edges and for laying out joints.

A sliding T-bevel makes it easy to lay out and copy angles. I use a compact Shinwa model that folds down to the size of a ball-point pen. A small compass is used for drawing circles and curves and also for scribing trim or the edge of a cabinet that fits against an irregular or tapered surface.

## Tools for filing and sharpening

I always have 6-in. and 8-in. mill files and sometimes a 10-in. file as well. I use them not only for jointing scrapers and sawteeth but also for filing down nail heads and for removing burrs from metal tools and parts. In a pinch, these files also can be used on wood to



## SHARPENING

*For the inevitable sharpening, Rodríguez prefers waterstones. But he also carries a coarse diamond stone for quick removal of dings and chips in tool edges. A honing guide speeds up the process.*

obtain a smooth finish, for cutting light chamfers and for flushing the protruding ends of dovetails.

A Grobet detail file is a tapered, half-round file originally designed for carving wax in the jewelry trade. One end is used for rough work, and the other is for fine work. I use it for cleaning up carvings, for trimming veneer and sometimes as a lathe tool. A companion to the Grobet is a 6-in. Italian rasp, which has a compact design for fine shaping. It cuts more aggressively than the Grobet, but the cut and the finish can be controlled by how much pressure is applied to the work.

Because I sharpen my own saws, I also carry a good selection of saw files, starting with a 4-in. double extra-tapered slim for my dovetail saws up to a 6-in. extra slim for my crosscut saw.

Sharpening is a fact of life, and I like to have a 1,000/6,000 combination stone on hand. I prefer waterstones over oilstones. I also like to have a coarse diamond stone with me. It's dead flat and cuts quickly, and it's helpful for removing dings and chips that are too much for the 1,000/6,000 stone. A Veritas honing guide may not be





## SAWS

Used for joinery and cutting stock to size, handsaws are essential travel companions. They include (from left): a backsaw, two dovetail saws, two crosscutting saws and a ripsaw. A jeweler's saw (bottom) is useful for cutting veneer inlays and for removing waste from dovetails.

essential (some woodworkers refer to these jigs as “training wheels”), but it helps me restore dull edges quickly without thinking too hard about it.

### Saws and odds and ends

Handsaws are fundamental and especially important if you don't have access to a tablesaw or chopsaw. I carry six saws: a 10-in. dovetail saw with 18 tpi that I use for general tasks; a 10-in. modified dovetail saw that I've refiled from a crosscut to an 11-tpi rip pattern; a 10-in. backsaw for cutting mortise-and-tenon joints and for crosscutting small boards; two crosscut saws for cutting solid wood and veneered panels; and, finally, a 26-in. ripsaw (5 tpi).

Tools that don't fit any particular category but manage to fill some important niche include: a 13-oz. hammer (you must have one hammer); screwdrivers, including a #1 and #2 Phillips and a standard flat tip; a pair of wire clippers (great for clipping off

nail heads); a pair of 6-in. locking pliers, indispensable for holding small parts and as a quick-release clamp; a set of folding metric and standard Allen keys; and a flexible 1-in. putty knife for applying epoxy and wood filler.

### Special-purpose tools

In addition to the tools I carry most of the time, there also is a set of special-purpose tools. I don't need them every day, but they are essential for studio or shop work: a No. 8 jointer plane, because nothing beats the heft and weight of this tool for flattening surfaces or shooting long edges; a saw vise and saw set; veneer saw and veneer hammer; a quad electrical box with an 8-ft. cord (useful for situations where there aren't enough outlets, or where you have to share scarce outlets with other workers); a jeweler's saw, similar to a coping saw but with a finer blade, which is used to cut veneer inlays and for cleaning waste from dovetails. □

Mario Rodríguez is a contributing editor.



## ODDS AND ENDS

A process of trial and error has helped Rodríguez add a selection of tools that don't fit any particular category but are essential all the same. Among them: screwdrivers, a putty knife, Allen wrenches, magnifiers and pliers.

## Portable power tools



If there's room, the kit includes a router, cordless drill, jigsaw, biscuit joiner and a shopmade quad power box.

Portable power tools increase my speed and accuracy, and I carry several if I have the room. Some brands are tedious and difficult to adjust, and some have fragile plastic parts. Over time, I've come to like Bosch tools, but you may have your own favorite. Whatever the brand, the tool should not make your work harder than it already is. The power tools I use the most include:

- A 12-volt cordless drill, which has a good power-to-weight ratio
- A barrel-style jigsaw
- A 1½-hp router with a soft-start feature
- A DeWalt biscuit joiner (this model comes close to the performance of a Lamello at a third of the price)
- A quad electrical box with an 8-ft. cord.