

A Woodworker's Apron

Keeping essential tools within reach makes you a more efficient woodworker

BY STEVE LATTA

At the shop I apprenticed in, all of the cabinetmakers wore shop aprons. I soon figured out why, and my productivity took a giant leap forward. A lot less time got wasted chasing down misplaced tape measures, safety glasses, pencils and the other basic essentials. Because the tools I needed most often were within immediate reach, the quality of my work improved as well. Today, I still wear an apron, even when I'm teaching, and I advise students to do likewise.

The size of your shop, its tooling and the nature of your work will determine what tools find their way into your apron pockets. But for starters, I suggest stocking your apron with basic marking and measuring tools. I've chosen light, compact and high-quality measuring tools. Among my favorite brands are Starrett, Lufkin and Lee Valley. My students often balk at the prices of top-end tools, such as the \$75 Starrett adjustable bevel. But if you're going to do accurate work and carry around this stuff all day, choose tools built to high tolerances that are light in weight and bulk. In the long haul, you'll be glad you did.

Tools aren't the only items that belong in a shop apron. A lot of cabinetwork involves boring small holes and fitting screws for hinges and hardware, usually #6 or #8 sizes. Many jigs may also be constructed with screws. So I keep bits, drivers and various screws on hand. Used prescription or film canisters make good storage devices for small items.

Years ago, I had a batch of five aprons custom made, because I



MECHANICAL DRAFTING PENCIL
Use 2mm lead size.

SCREWS
Fill an old prescription bottle with screws of differing lengths for jig setups.

BIB-STYLE APRON
The long front provides plenty of pockets for storage.

EARPLUGS
Foam plugs are a good backup when your muffs are out of reach.

4-IN. PRECISION DOUBLE SQUARE
Shown is the Starrett No. 4R.

COUNTERSINK
Models that use an Allen wrench to adjust the depth of the drill bit are more versatile.



prefer flaps on the upper pockets, which keep out most sawdust (and small squares from falling in front of spinning tablesaw blades), and shoulder straps that crisscross in back, which, at the end of the day, prevent an aching neck. But the commercially made shop aprons, such as those sold by Duluth Trading Co. (800-505-8888) work well as long as you don't overload them. What you decide to carry around in your apron is ultimately an individual decision, but once you start wearing one, I think you'll find it a real timesaver. □

Steve Latta is an instructor at the Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology in Lancaster, Pa.

SAFETY GLASSES

Choose eyewear that offers plenty of protection to the sides as well as to the front.

ADJUSTABLE BEVEL

The Starrett #47 is compact and precise.

LAMINATE SCRAPS

These make perfect shims for fitting doors with just the right amount of reveal.

6-IN. RULER

Choose one with $\frac{1}{16}$ -in. graduations.

LUMBER CRAYONS

Use multiple colors to label stock for multiple runs.

FINGER PADS

These are great at protecting your fingers from heat buildup when using a card scraper.

STOP BLOCK

This shopmade block is hinged, which allows it to swing out of the way when making the first cut to square an end.

C-CLAMP

Use this small one primarily for clamping a stop block to a fence.

MAGNETIC BIT HOLDER WITH MULTIPLE TIPS

Phillips #1 and #2, a #2 square drive and a few slotted tips should cover most situations.

PARAFFIN WAX

A small chunk is good for lubricating such things as screw threads and miter-gauge slots.

TAPE MEASURE

Choose a good-quality 12-ft. or 16-ft. measure with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -in.-wide blade.

DRILL BITS

Keep small bits on hand to drill pilot holes for hardware and jigs. A small tube makes a practical storage container.

KNIFE

Cover with the cap when returning the knife to your apron.