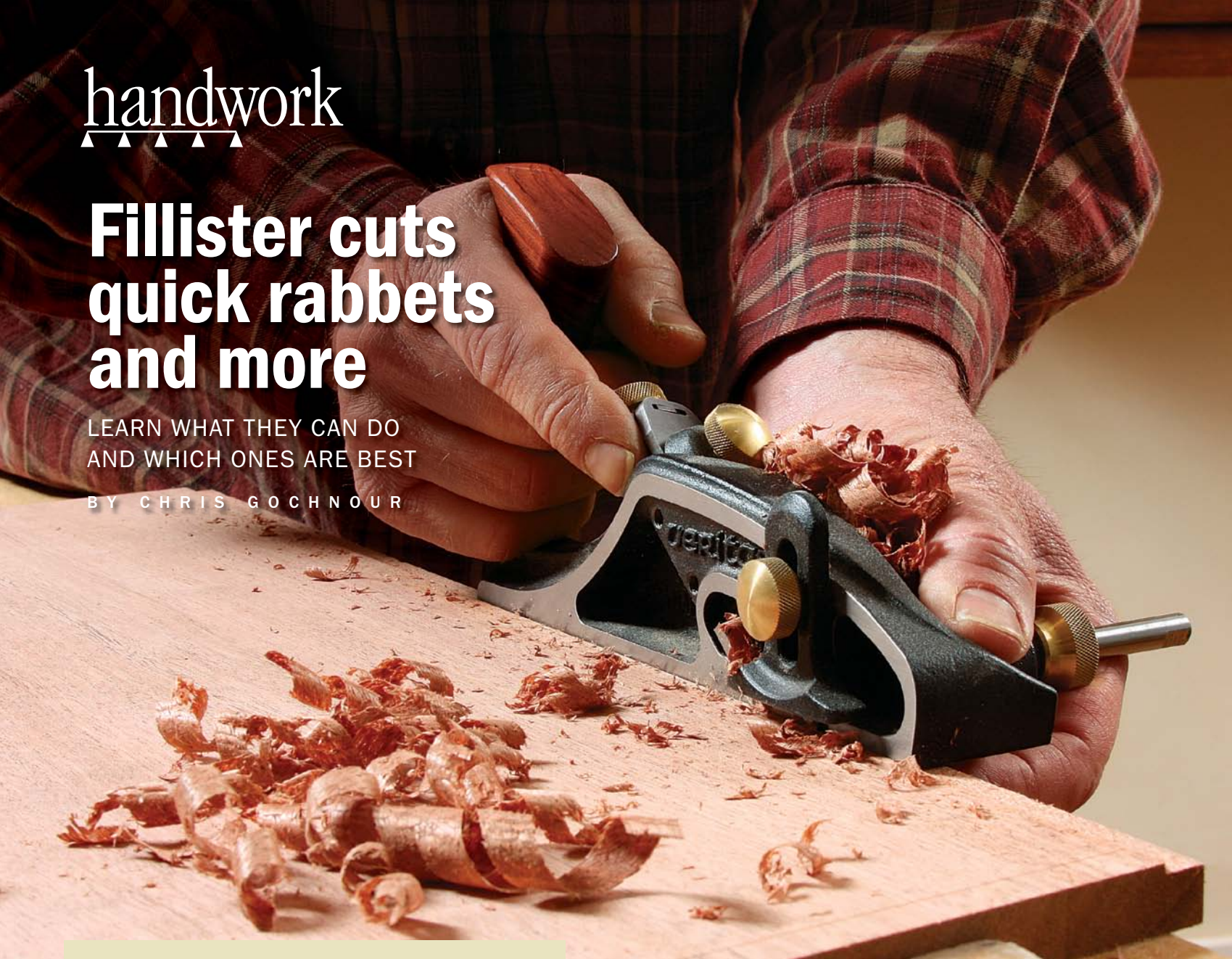


# Fillister cuts quick rabbets and more

LEARN WHAT THEY CAN DO  
AND WHICH ONES ARE BEST

BY CHRIS GOCHNOUR



## THREE JOBS THEY EXCEL AT



Perfectly suited to creating a rabbet from start to finish (top photo), the fillister plane is versatile enough to cut the angled rabbets on a raised panel (left) and to trim wide tenons, like those on a table with breadboard ends (right).

When you think “hand-cut,” you probably envision dovetails and mortise-and-tenon joinery. But you may be surprised by how easy it can be to cut rabbets by hand, too—as long as you have the right tool. That, my friends, is the fillister plane, sometimes called a rabbet plane. With it you can cut a rabbet very quickly, without all the hassle of changing blades or bits and setting up the tablesaw or router table. But the fillister plane isn't a one-trick pony. You also can use one to create a raised panel and to trim tenons.

A few years ago, finding a fillister plane was often difficult, as you had to scour flea markets, antique stores, or auctions. But not any more. There are at least four companies manufacturing fillister planes. I recently tested them, and I'll tell you what I learned (see p. 26). I'll also demonstrate how to cut a rabbet, from setting up the plane to cutting to depth accurately and consistently.

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## Set up the blade and nicker

To work properly, the nicker and blade must be set up to work in unison: The nicker cuts ahead of the blade, severing the fibers to reduce tearout, essential on crossgrain cuts. It should be set slightly deeper than the blade is cutting and perfectly in line with its outside edge.



**Line them up.** On some planes, the nicker is proud of the body. On these, lay a pocket rule on the nicker and blade, and adjust the blade until the rule is parallel to the body. If the nicker is flush with the plane body, just make the blade flush, too.



**Set the depth.** After setting the blade to its typical cutting depth, adjust the nicker to cut about 0.003 in. deeper. Any deeper and it acts like a depth stop, preventing you from cutting the rabbet. If it's shallower than the blade, it won't sever the wood fibers deeply enough and tearout is likely. To check the setting, pull the plane backward. The nicker should cut a very shallow line, while the blade should lightly burnish the wood.

## How to cut perfect rabbets

The same basic technique applies to cross-grain rabbets, raising panels, and trimming tenons.

**Set the fence.** Use a marking gauge to lay out both the width and the depth of the rabbet (right). Now place the plane on the board, with the nicker in the scribed line. Press the fence against the board's edge and lock it in place (far right).



**Cut the first rabbet and set the depth.** Don't use the depth stop at first, just work down to the gauged line marking the rabbet's depth (right). After you hit the line, put the plane in the rabbet, lower the depth stop to the board's surface, and tighten the knob or screw that holds it in place (far right). Now you can cut yards of identical rabbets.





## Fillister planes put to the test

A fillister is a rabbeting plane equipped with width and depth stops. How easy it is to adjust that fence and stop is just as important as how well the plane cuts. So, I evaluated

these planes for ease of setup, as well as how they performed when cutting long- and crossgrain rabbets. I also considered fit and finish.



**Veritas  
Skew Rabbet Plane**  
\$240  
leevalley.com

The Veritas plane is comfortable to hold and use. It has the best fence and depth-stop adjustability of all the planes tested. After the blade has been aligned with the nicker once, setscrews in the body make it easy to return the blade into alignment after sharpening. Finally, the skewed blade cuts with minimal resistance and pulls the plane into the cut. Available in a right- or left-handed versions.



**Stanley 78**  
\$56  
amazon.com

The 78 has been around for decades. It's comfortable, and did a good job at every task given to it. The machining on the sole was flat, but coarse. Everything else was clean and accurate. It's not as refined as the Veritas, but it is a very good value.



**Anant A078**  
\$140  
highlandwoodworking.com

This plane came up short because of poor manufacturing. The fence was misdrilled and out of alignment with the body, making the tool unable to perform its most basic task.



**Anant 78**  
\$90  
highlandwoodworking.com

The sole on this plane slanted 0.015 in., which made the blade project unevenly and the nicker too deep.



**E. C. Emmerich  
Moving Fillister  
Plane**  
\$180  
leevalley.com

The Emmerich's wooden body is comfortable to hold, but adjustments to the fence and depth stop are inconvenient, requiring a screwdriver. The blade's depth of cut is set with a hammer. The throat clogged easily.