

BEST NEW TOOLS OF 2004

Every year, the Best New Tools article is the one that everyone on the staff looks forward to. Each editor picks his or her favorite tools introduced during the calendar year and makes a list that's passed around.

Then we have to defend our recommendations to the other staff members. Frustrations rise, tempers flare and then (inevitably) a fistfight breaks out. Luckily we're all pretty fairly matched so you still get a balanced presentation of our favorite tools.

This year was no exception. And while there are other tools and machinery that were in hot contention that didn't make the cut (someone who shall go unnamed started biting) we're proud of this year's list.

There's something for everyone, including machinery from Grizzly and Jet, some fine precision power hand tools from Bosch, some value-added tooling from Infinity and some excellent hand tools from Lee Valley/Veritas, Lie-Nielsen and a French company new to our pages – Auriou.

We also call out a couple hot items that will improve the tools you already own, including a slick new router lift from Jointech and a simple splitter for your table saw from Micro Jig.

And each year there are a number of tools that are just too new

to fully evaluate but that seem likely to prove worthy of recognition next year. So we give you a sneak peak of some of these upcoming developments at the end of the article.

We hope you approve of this year's selection and I know a couple editors that will be training all year to get ready for next year's Best New Tools selections.

by the Popular Woodworking Staff

Comments or questions? Contact David Thiel at 513-531-2690 ext. 1255 or david.thiel@fwpubs.com.



THE WINNERS

AURIOU

BOSCH

GRIZZLY

INFINITY

JET

JOINTECH

LEE VALLEY

LIE-NIELSEN

MICRO JIG

VERITAS

MICRO JIG Table Saw Splitter

This year the price of safety has been lowered to just \$20. And the number of reasons for not having a splitter on your table saw has been reduced to zero.

The Micro Jig Splitter is the simple answer to a variety of problems with current table saw designs. Stock splitters are flimsy, hard to adjust and nigh impossible to remove and replace. Most aftermarket splitters are pricey (up to \$130). Many of us have vowed to make a homemade splitter, few ever do.

In just 30 minutes you can make your saw 30 times safer with the Micro Jig. The splitter is a small wafer of tough polycarbonate plastic, and it

fits snugly behind your blade to greatly reduce the chance of kickback. And – most importantly – it's easy to remove and replace when you need to make dado, bevel or through-cuts. And it costs only about \$20 (a thin-kerf version sells for \$25 to \$30).

Here's the not-so-good news: the Micro Jig Splitter works only with saws that have a zero-clearance insert. So if you're still using a stock throat insert, you'll have to upgrade to make this work.

The Micro Jig package includes everything you need to install the jig (even the drill bit), good instructions and a second splitter that's configured to work like a small featherboard. There are no more good excuses. Get safe. Get a Micro Jig Splitter.

—CS



Micro Jig
407-696-6695 or microjig.com

VERITAS Low Angle Jack Plane

Veritas planes get better with every new model the company introduces. The Veritas Low-angle Jack plane might just be the company's best tool yet (until next year, of course).

From a manufacturing standpoint, everything about this tool is spot-on. The sole was dead flat, the sides were ground perfectly square to the sole and everything moved smoothly and positively. Here's more proof that well-made tools are not a thing of the past. (If I could make one change, it would be to make the handles a bit smoother, but this is something you can do at home.)

Apart from the excellent manufacturing specs, there are two real standout features of this tool that will make you sit up and pay attention. The mouth of

the plane is 5" back from the toe. This novel arrangement allows you to accurately edge-joint longer pieces than you'd normally be able to do with a 15"-long plane. Also, there's a small knob behind the movable front shoe that you're gonna like. That knob acts as an adjustable stop for the shoe. You'll never bang the shoe against the blade again. And you'll be able to clear the mouth of shavings quickly and easily.

The plane is heavy (6 pounds), made of unbreakable ductile iron, equipped with a nice 3/16"-thick A2 steel blade and a precise Norris-style adjuster.

In a modern shop that uses both power and hand tools, this plane is ideal for truing edges and even final smoothing. And it's an excellent value at \$179.

—CS



Lee Valley
800-871-8158 or leevalley.com

NEXT YEAR'S BEST NEW TOOLS?

DeWalt Cordless Nailer Line

New from DeWalt is a line of four 16-gauge cordless nailers. The big news here is the ability to fire as fast as you want, with no pause for recycle time. We're waiting for a more woodworking-friendly 18-gauge nailer, but we like the speed! • **DeWalt:** 800-433-9258, or dewalt.com

Freud Avanti Router Bit Line

New from Freud is the Avanti 15-piece set (the most common profiles) of router bits offering Freud quality at an affordable price (\$200). These uncoated bits are manufactured with carbide designed for one or two sharpenings (rather than five or six) to keep the price affordable. • **Freud:** 800-334-4107 or freudtools.com

Grizzly/General spray booths

Just out this year are a handful of easily stored finishing booths from Grizzly and General International. These are designed for the small

shop or serious hobbyist who wants to spray finish. Four models are in the pipe, starting at about \$1,000. We'll keep you informed.

• **Grizzly:** 800-523-4777 or grizzly.com; **General:** 514-326-1161 or general.ca

Hitachi Router kit

Hitachi is launching a 2 1/4 hp single- or variable-speed router with both a fixed and plunge base in a kit, priced about \$200. It's not a new concept, but we're anxious to see what Hitachi has done with the idea.

• **Hitachi:** 800-829-4752 or hitachi.com/hpt

Ryobi 18-volt One+ System

Ryobi recently announced a new cordless tool system that will offer all of its 18-volt tools without a battery or charger. This keeps the price of the tools low, and a pair of batteries will cost less than \$40, while a one-hour diagnostic charger runs \$20. Buy exactly the tools you need – not bad.

• **Ryobi:** 800-525-2579 or ryobitools.com PW