

Faster Drywall



3-in. Nail Spotter
Coats screw heads with compound, \$300

14-in. Flat Box
For ceilings with raking light, \$340

12-in. Flat Box
Applies second and third coats to seams, \$330

8-in. Angle Box
Works with angle heads (\$350 ea.) to coat corners, \$389

Angle Head
Smooths corners after taping and rolling, \$350

Corner Roller
Fully embeds tape in corners, \$200

Automatic Taper
Applies compound and tape to seams and corners, \$1300

Loading Pump
Fills taping tools with compound, \$390


Finishing

Automatic tools produce better walls in less time


BY BRIAN KITCHIN AND NICK AITCHISON



Festool Planex
Dust-collecting
drywall sander, \$1150



15-in. to 23-in. Drywall Stilts
Brings high work
within reach, \$280



Festool CT 36
Tool-triggered
dust-collecting
vacuum, \$756



Whenever we see professional drywall finishers hand-taping a new home or addition, we wonder how the builder who hired them can afford to lose so much time on the job. With modern taping tools—most of ours are made by Columbia (columbiatools.com)—the two of us can tape and finish an entire 2,400-sq.-ft. house in about four-and-a-half days. The same work with hand-taping tools would easily take two or three times as long.

So why do some drywallers stubbornly refuse to use automatic tools? Our guess is they're intimidated by the learning curve—it takes a few jobs to become truly proficient—or they're scared off by the price of a setup.

If you're not willing to spend \$3,200 or more to buy the tools all at once, you can significantly boost your efficiency with a pair of flat boxes and a loading pump to fill them, which adds up to about \$1,300. In a second round of purchases, get an automatic taper (\$1,300) and an angle box with 3-in. and 3½-in. angle heads (\$750) for finishing corners. Another option is to rent equipment from drywall tool manufacturers. □

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LOAD THE TAPE AND MIX THE MUD

Automatic taping tools all require thinned mud to work properly, so we use a sopping-wet grout sponge to add water to lightweight all-purpose joint compound. Then we mix the thinned mud for a few minutes with a heavy-duty drill and a mud paddle. Mud for the automatic taper gets 5 to 6 sponge squeezes, mud for angle boxes gets 4 to 5 squeezes, and mud for flat boxes gets 2 to 3 squeezes.



Better tape. Though it costs more than paper joint tape (\$5 vs. \$2 per 250-ft. roll), FibaFuse tape bonds tenaciously and doesn't bubble.



Just add water. Compound must be thinned and thoroughly mixed before you can use it in automatic taping tools.



Quicker corners. When taping inside corners, flip a lever on the tool's housing to deploy the creaser wheel, which folds the tape and pushes it into the corner.





Faster taping. Loaded with joint tape and thinned compound, an automatic taper can tape seams and corners quickly. As the tool advances, it rolls out the tape and dispenses the compound at the same time. Another finisher on the three-person crew follows behind with a taping knife to fully embed the tape and smooth the joint.



Go tall. Adjustable and available in multiple heights, stilts allow you to safely reach tall ceilings with the automatic taper without having to stop and move a stepladder or rolling scaffold.



Go long. Angle heads, flushers, rollers, and spotters can be equipped with extension handles to reach tall walls and ceilings. Most tools have universal mounts that make the handles and heads interchangeable between manufacturers.

FINISH COATS FEATHER OUT FASTER



Flat boxes fill seams. Equipped with a brake that holds the box parallel to the wall during positioning, flat boxes are used to coat and smooth seams. Once the box is in place, release the brake and the box will pivot on the handle.

Like with hand-taping, joints and corners get progressively wider with the second and third coats of compound. Most drywall contractors who rely on automatic tools have flat boxes and angle heads in two or three widths.



Adjust the flow. The eccentric cam adjusts the flow, so you can determine the amount of compound to dispense. The idea is to fully coat the seam without excess and leave a smooth finish free of voids as you go.



Spotters fill screws. Made in 2-in. and 3-in. widths, screw spotters are used to lay down a stripe of compound to cover drywall nails and screws.

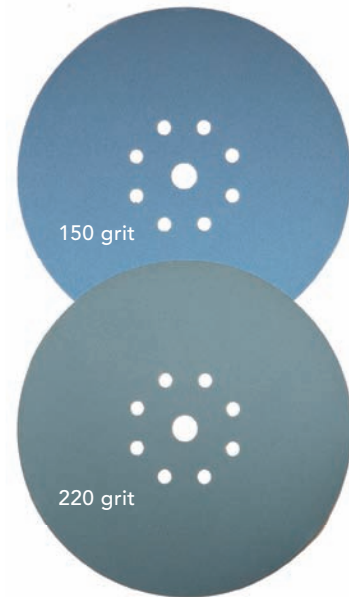


Angle box for corners. Adaptable to angle heads of various sizes, an angle box dispenses an even coat of compound to both sides of an inside corner.



Handwork is still required. Automatic tools can finish a large part of the job, but you still need to know how to use hand tools for corner beads, repairs, and tight spots, like this AV equipment built-in.

Faster, easier sanding. Attached to a tool-triggered vacuum, a drywall sander captures nearly all the dust. It's also less taxing because the orbital sanding disc is doing much of the work and the suction helps hold the sanding head to the drywall.



Blue grit

Before applying the final coat of compound, sand the joints and corners with 150-grit sandpaper. The final coat of compound is sanded with 220-grit paper. Festool's 8½-in. discs are color-coded for easy identification.

TOOLBOX



Hand-sand corners. Drywall sanders don't reach all the way into inside corners and tight spots, so these areas must be touched up by hand with a traditional pole sander.