



### **CLOSING GAPS**

Brace the hand holding the plane against your chest and plane from the short point of the miter toward the long point.

Remove material from the short point to close the gap at the outside corner of the miter, and from the long point to close the gap at the inside corner of the miter.

Darkening the miter with a pencil shows where you're cutting. On end grain, take light cuts and dampen brittle woods with denatured alcohol.





# Tighten Up Your Trimwork

Though it doesn't have a cord or battery, a block plane is a powerful finish-carpentry tool

BY KIT CAMP

**A**fter many years working as a finish carpenter, I can tell a lot about someone by the tools in their tool belt. If I see them using a sharp chisel or block plane, I know we're probably going to get along fine, because it shows me that me that they're interested in producing the best work they can.

No other tools I own have attracted as much attention over the years as my block planes. I prefer the low-angle variation, which I keep in the front hammer loop of my tool belt. I use it for fitting casing, crown, and baseboard, and it's an ideal tool for making tapered extension jamba. It's also great for scribing stock to old plaster walls and it gives me great control when I'm flushing one surface to another (think edge banding, wood plugs, etc.). Keep in mind that planing is like petting a cat—planing in one direction generally produces a smooth surface, cutting and pushing the wood fibers down, while planing in the other direction (against the grain) does not. If your blade is sharp and you're taking a light cut and getting tearout, try reversing the planing direction.

My recommendations for block planes (See "Block plane best bets," pp. 46-47) come from my experience using these tools for many years. My favorites for job-site work are the Lie-Nielsen No. 102 and the Veritas Apron Plane from Lee Valley. Both are durable and have high-quality blades that are impeccably machined for easy honing, and their bodies are compact enough to carry easily. If I want a wider blade and an adjustable mouth—nice if you often work with figured or difficult woods, or if you are taking heavy cuts in softwood like cedar—my top choice is Lie-Nielsen's No. 60-1/2. Should a block plane be one of the first tools you buy when starting out as a carpenter? Maybe not. But if you're interested in working more precisely, breathing less dust, and getting out fewer tools at the beginning of the day, a block plane should be in your tool belt. □

Kit Camp is a finish carpenter and teaches middle- and high-school woodworking in Portland, Ore. Photos by Asa Christiana, except where noted.

# FIVE MORE TASKS WHERE



**1 BACKING OUT**  
Remove material strategically from the back of a piece to get it to lie flat—this is called “backing out.” Push the blade out far and take a heavy cut (it’s OK, the planed surface won’t show). If your plane has an adjustable mouth, open it wide to let the big shavings escape.



**2 EASING EDGES—  
A LITTLE OR A LOT**

Even simple flat-stock trim looks and feels better with its sharp edge broken slightly. One light pass will do, and should produce a tiny spiral shaving.

Chamfers take a few more passes; for cutting big ones, draw layout lines to help guide your cuts. These lines are especially important if the angle is anything other than a simple 45°. Roundovers are also possible, simply by planing a series of small bevels, which can be blended together into a smooth curve with some sanding.



**3 REMOVING SAW MARKS**  
Your block plane offers a fast and quiet way to remove saw marks from the edges of stock you have sawn to width. I do this task one-handed, and if I’m sawing the stock to width, right there on the tablesaw. Doing this work with a plane yields a crisper edge than you will get with sandpaper, and leaves you with a glass-smooth surface.

# A SHARP PLANE SHINES



# 5

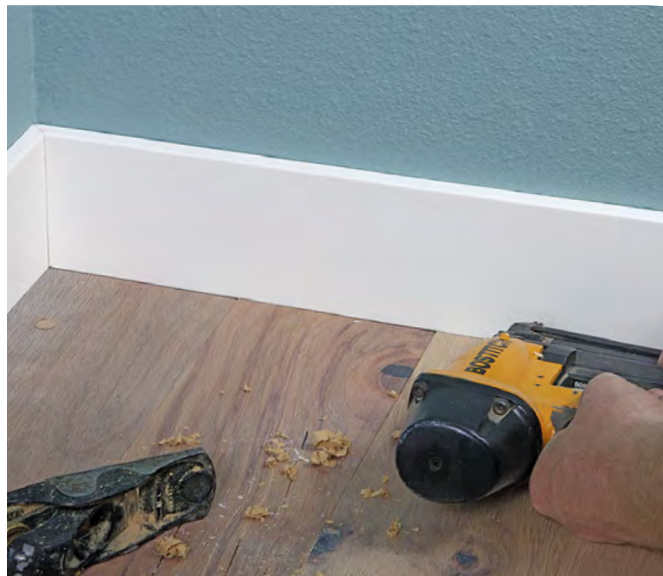
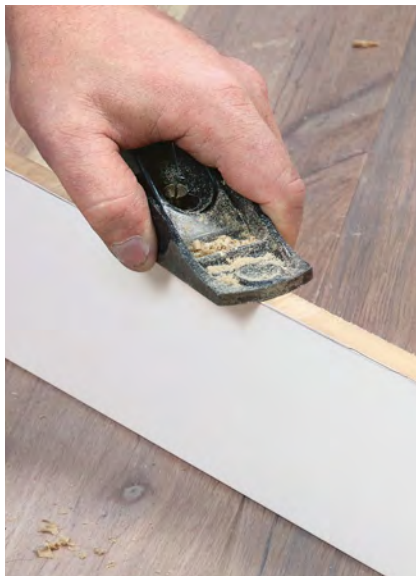
## FLUSHING UP

To flush up two pieces of stock glued together, like solid-wood edging glued to a plywood shelf, skew the plane so the toe rides on the plywood and the heel hangs off the work. This position may seem backward, but trust me, it's less likely to result in tearout. Be sure to switch to sandpaper when the edging is just a hair proud of the ply. The same technique works for wood plugs, too.

# 4

## MAKING PERFECT SCRIBES

Scrives start by back-cutting the piece 10° to 15° on the tablesaw, so there's less stock to plane away. Begin planing where you need to remove the most material and gradually lengthen your cuts as you get closer to the scribe line. To create an inside curve, hold the plane at an angle to the stock. The more you angle it, the tighter the curve you can plane.



# TUNE UP AN OLD OR

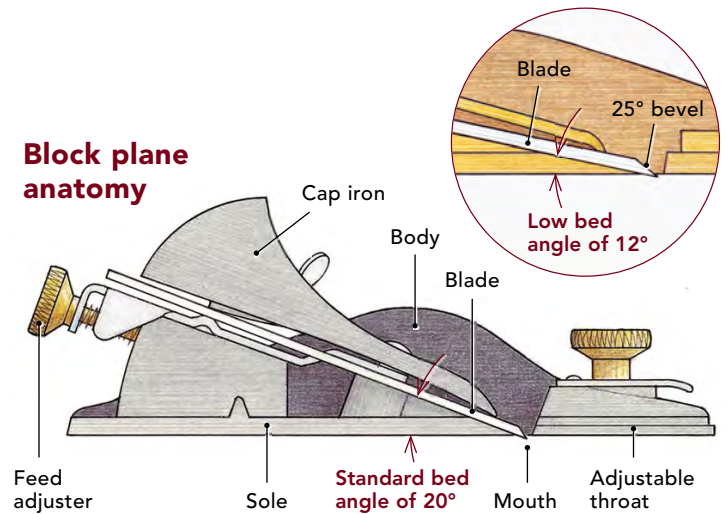
## FLATTENING



**Flatten the sole.** Retract the blade and lock it in place. Then, with even pressure, swipe the sole back and forth over 120-grit or 150-grit sandpaper adhered to a piece of glass or granite, or a cast-iron machine surface.

The new planes I recommend below will only require a quick honing of the blade before being put to work (See "Tune up a block plane," *FHB* #234). But a middle-of-the-road or vintage plane will require some initial rehab to produce fine results. So, in addition to flattening the back of the blade, you'll need to spend some time on the plane's sole, mouth, and edges.

## Block plane anatomy



**Focus on the mouth.** Ideally, the entire surface of the sole is evenly abraded. But at a minimum, you want the area directly in front of the cutting edge to be flat and a good percentage of the rest of the sole flat as well. When the bottom shows nearly uniform scratch marks, switch to 220-grit paper and sand again until the sole shows a uniform polish.

## BLOCK PLANE BEST BETS

The difference between a good plane and an average one is the quality of the machining. With a high-quality plane, you'll only need to hone the blade for perfect results. All of these are low-angle block planes, which is your best bet for the times you need to shave end grain, especially as the blade dulls with use. For most tasks, however, there is very little difference in performance between low-angle and standard-angle planes, as long as the blade has been properly sharpened.



Lie-Nielsen No. 102  
\$115 lie-nielsen.com

# INEXPENSIVE PLANE

## FILING



**Smooth the bed.** Burrs from the machining process and paint overspray will prevent the blade from sitting flat on the bed. Smooth these inconsistencies with a fine file. Also look at the bottom of the lever cap and file it flat where it contacts the blade. Finish by cleaning and oiling the adjustment screws.



**Soften the edges.** Unlike a larger plane, a block plane is small enough to fit in one hand. Make the planing experience more comfortable by easing the edges with a file. Doing this file work on the bottom edges will also help the plane glide more smoothly on the wood.



Veritas Apron Plane  
\$95 [leevalley.com](http://leevalley.com)

Lie-Nielsen  
No. 60 1/2  
\$165 [lie-nielsen.com](http://lie-nielsen.com)

Drawings: Vince Babak.  
Product photos: The Taunton Press staff.

## SHARPENING



**Hone the blade.** Once the plane body is tuned, hone the blade with diamond stones or water stones. If you want to soup up your old or less expensive plane, buy a replacement blade from Hock Tools ([hocktools.com](http://hocktools.com)). These high-carbon-steel replacement blades get sharper and hold an edge longer than most stock irons.



**Straighten the blade.** After sharpening, install the iron and either sight down the sole or feel with your fingers to be sure the cutting edge is parallel to the mouth. Some planes have an adjustment lever for this and others require tapping the blade to and fro until you get it parallel.



**Aim for thin shavings.** For best results, adjust the blade so it's a hair proud of the sole, and if your plane has an adjustable throat, set it to about 1/32 in. or so. Ninety-nine percent of the problems experienced by beginners come down to a dull blade or too heavy of a cut, so get in the habit of taking light cuts, and practice patience. It may take a few more passes, but you'll have to sharpen less and the finished surface will be better.