

A hand plane starter set

Q: *I've been a woodworker for a few years, primarily making cabinets and furniture. But I've only used power tools and would like to try hand planes. Where should I start?*

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Block plane

#4 smoothing plane

Shoulder plane

A: Having worked wood for a while now, you know the value of smooth surfaces and tight joinery. But as you may have discovered, power tools can only get you so far. It often takes hand tools such as chisels and planes to finesse surfaces and joinery. Hand planes are among woodworking's most time-honored tools for good reason. A properly sharpened and adjusted plane can precisely flatten and smooth surfaces and refine joinery, removing as little as .002" or so when necessary. You need them.

Keep in mind that any plane will work with precision only if it's precisely made itself. Steer clear of hardware store and other cheap versions; they're junk. And although a flea market classic can be rehabbed, it's not typically work for a newbie. But you don't need a \$500 boutique model either. Just buy the best versions you can afford and expect to spend some time learning to use and sharpen them. (See onlineEXTRAS.) The expense and efforts will pay off big-time.

Block plane

Begin by introducing yourself to a block plane. This small stalwart is great for lots of smoothing and trimming operations, including removing saw marks from edges, easing corners, creating chamfers, fitting moldings, leveling edging, and numerous other daily shop chores. You'll use it more than any other plane. Block planes are available in standard and low angle versions. Go with the latter, as it excels at trimming end grain. I'd expect to pay at least \$100 for something worthwhile.

Smoothing plane

In my experience, the next most useful plane is a #4 smoothing plane. True to its name, its primary purpose is removing machine marks, burns, and other imperfections from the faces and edges of workpieces. At the same time, it's useful for everything from flushing up face frames to finessing the fit of inset doors and drawers. In brief, a good smoothing plane will save you a lot of sanding, producing a cleaner, flatter surface in the process. I've found that decent versions start at about \$150.

Shoulder plane

To complete a well-rounded trio, add a shoulder plane, sometimes called a rabbet plane. The blade on this narrow, open-sided trimmer reaches into corners, making it ideal for finessing tenon shoulders and cheeks, as well as the edges of rabbets and dadoes. You won't use this plane as often as the others, but when you need something deft at tweaking these joints into perfection, there's nothing like it. A good 1/2" or 3/4" version will handle most jobs, starting at about \$100. ■



Craig Bentzley
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onlineEXTRAS

For further information, download these free articles:

- Mastering the Hand Plane
- The Essential Block Plane
- The Shoulder Plane

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