

AROUND THE HOUSE WITH PHIL DAVY



What is it about woodworkers and hand tools? At the last count I had 15 bench planes, plus a similar number of more specialist planes. And that's just the metal ones. Some are old, one or two almost new. I've a handful of wooden versions, too, including some elderly moulding planes. But how many tools do we actually need, let alone use? I blame woodworking shows (a great opportunity to try out new kit), plus manufacturers, as the quality of many products tends to be far higher than a few decades ago. But this does make top end tools more of a luxury than a necessity for many of us, sadly. I'm sure chairmaker John Brown (the Anarchist Woodworker) would have had plenty to say on the matter!

DVD REVIEW: SELECTING AND USING HAND PLANES BY PETER SEFTON

These days there's no shortage of information out there for woodworkers that just wasn't available when I were a lad. Unless you had college training you either had to dip into books, enrol in an evening class or work it out for yourself. Early instructional videos could be painful to watch, a fast track to an afternoon nap, and even now some YouTube demos can be a bit dodgy. A happy exception is Peter Sefton's series of *Fine Furniture Making* DVDs, which are professional and certainly absorbing. Admittedly this is the first one I've watched, but if preceding discs are of the same standard (Andy King assures me they are), then you may want to reserve the DVD player for an evening or two.

Plane brands

Consisting of two discs, total run time is three hours. As you'd expect, the menu is easy to navigate and this DVD concentrates specifically on three tool brands: Veritas, Clifton and WoodRiver, which Peter also sells. Running a furniture school for several years has given him first hand experience of what to buy and what to avoid.

Contents are divided into 25 chapters, such as Anatomy of Planes, Bailey versus Bedrock, Low Angle Jack and Smoothers, as well as final sections on planing techniques and working with difficult grain. If you're unsure about what size of bench plane to buy, or are keen to know what makes so many modern planes better than old Record or Stanley equivalents, Mr Sefton is your guide.

Given the fact that for most of the duration he's simply standing at the bench describing differences between tools or focusing on specific components, things could get dull (no pun intended) fairly rapidly. But presentation is clear, relevant and occasionally light-hearted. His comments on engineering quality are enlightening. He compares depth adjuster backlash – for example, on budget and more upmarket tools, to the difference between steering an old bus or a BMW.

Sefton favours the scary sharp system when it comes to truing up a sole and honing, which involves sticking strips of abrasive to float glass. Another DVD in the series deals specifically with sharpening, so this is only covered briefly here.

Wild timber

If you're already a serious furniture or cabinetmaker then you probably won't learn a great deal here that's new. But if you're struggling to tame that timber with wild grain then there's some handy tips on blade honing angles. Graphics explaining these are particularly good.

For many woodworkers, I suspect the final few chapters on techniques for dealing with problem timbers will be the most valuable. Using woods such as gnarled ash, rippled sycamore and sapele, Peter demonstrates how three planes with varying pitch and set up with differing blade angles perform on the same piece. If you're wondering how to work that lump of timber with seemingly impossible grain, then you're bound to find the solution here.

Although it may not be an essential buy, this DVD could be worth adding to your woodworking collection. And I didn't fall asleep during viewing, honest!



THE GW VERDICT

- ▶ **RATING:** 4.5 out of 5
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