

Woodriver Block Planes
\$90 each
at Woodcraft.com

■ HAND TOOLS

WoodRiver rebounds with high-quality block planes

WHEN I FIRST REVIEWED WoodRiver's new handplanes (Tools & Materials, FWW #206), I was disappointed with the initial fit and finish of the tools. They required a good amount of tuning to perform adequately for fine work.

But it looks like the company raised its game with these new block planes (low angle and standard angle), creating a pair of flawlessly made tools with fine machining and great performance.

The two planes are virtually identical, except for the bed angle. The low-angle plane, modeled after the Stanley No. 65, has the blade bedded at 12°, making it ideal for end-grain and cross-grain work, such as cleaning up dovetail joints after assembly. The standard-angle plane is similar to Stanley's No. 18 and has the blade bedded at 20°. This makes it a great general-purpose plane, ideal for trimming tasks, such as fitting drawers and doors.

The first thing I noticed about the planes was their heft. My vintage Stanley No. 65 weighs 1 lb. 4 oz., while each WoodRiver is 1 lb. 14 oz., more than a half-pound of extra inertia that can see the plane through rigorous use.

The WoodRiver block planes are the only ones on the market that incorporate a knuckle-joint lever cap. The design means blade changes are quick and easy, and the blade is held rock solid with a spring tension that closes with a snap. The beautiful nickel-plated lever cap fills the palm of your hand with great comfort.

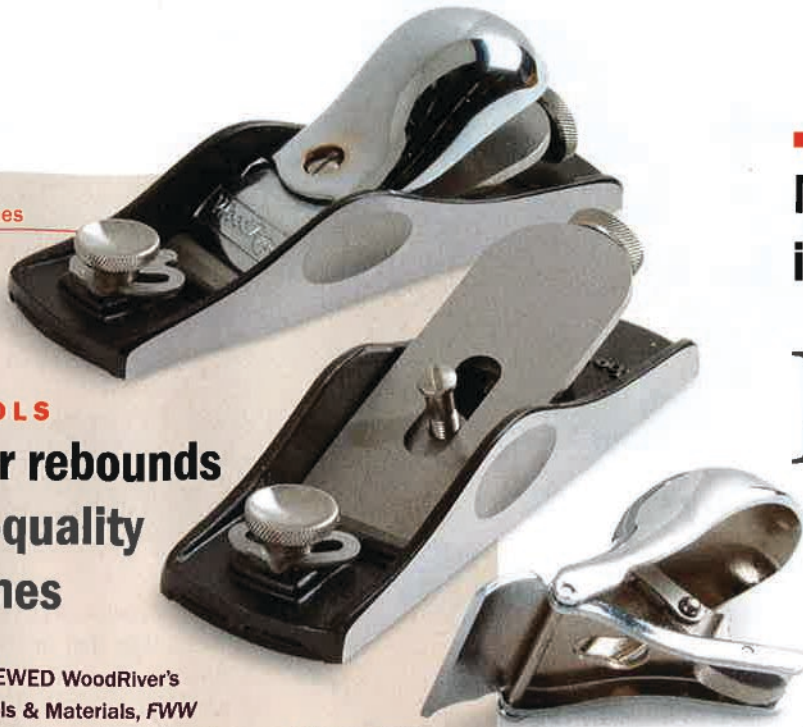
The blades are made of high-carbon steel and are a stout 3/8 in. thick. They give a solid feel to the planes and eliminate chatter. The plane bodies are cast from durable ductile iron. Each plane has an adjustable mouth, and the finely ground sole stays dead-flat when an adjustment is made.

The backs of the blades were also flat out of the box. After just a couple of minutes honing, each plane was ready to go to work.

I was impressed with the planes' performance. The blades took a keen edge, and they performed right on a par with other premium block planes, for less money, making them a great buy.

—Chris Gochnour is a furniture maker and hand-tool expert near Salt Lake City.

Unique lever cap. The WoodRiver block planes are the only ones that incorporate a knuckle joint lever cap. These caps make blade changes a snap—literally.



■ ROUTER BITS

Mini bearing bits are ideal for boxmakers

I DON'T OFTEN GET VERY EXCITED about router bits, but I was intrigued when I heard about the new miniature bearing bits from Amana.

These bits originally were intended for sign makers, giving them the capacity to rout the tiny spaces inside letters, numbers, and the like. But I was curious to know whether they would help in making the fine boxes I like to build.

The new bits have 3/16-in.-dia. bearings that guide the cutter smoothly along edges. There are five bits available: rabbeting, flush-trimming, Roman ogee, chamfer, and roundover.

To give the bits a good run, I used a few of them to make a Greene-and-Greene-inspired box (below). The chamfer bit cut clean, delicate chamfers, and the rabbeting bit took care of the lid rabbet with ease. But the most useful bit turned out to be the 3/32-in.-radius roundover. I used it to round over the finger joints, a task that I would have done with sanding blocks. But the roundover bit did the job infinitely faster, and without the need for further sanding.

I probably would not buy the whole set, but boxmakers and instrument makers could easily find a home for at least a few of these handy bits.

—Doug Stowe is a boxmaker and woodworking instructor in Eureka Springs, Ark.

Great in close quarters. These mini bits are ideal for detail work on small boxes.

Amana Miniature Bearing Bits
\$16 to \$27 at
Toolstoday.com

