

# Radial Arm Refinements

**Radial Arm Saw Techniques** by Roger W. Cliffe; Sterling Publishing Co., New York, N.Y.; 1986; 343 pages; \$14.95, paperback.

**Fine Tuning Your Radial Saw** by Jon Eakes; Lee Valley Tools, Ottawa, Canada; 1987; 106 pages; \$14.95 (Canadian), paperback. (Distributed by Firefly Books, 3420 Pharmacy Ave., Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1W 2T8; also available through Popular Science Book Club.)

For the most part *Radial Arm Saw Techniques* provides the information and advice you might receive from your owner's manual, without being specific to any particular brand of saw. Six chapters cover a simplified introduction to the saw and its parts, controls, blades, and attachments, safety, and both basic and advanced operations. Two chapters on "useful information" and building accessories, along with a smattering of projects, round out the picture. The former is particularly good on purchasing and reconditioning a used saw.

Although you probably don't need most of the information *Techniques* provides, it can help you make the most of the radial arm saw's versatility—from simple cross-cutting to drilling and shaping cove moldings. The text is clear and the instructions are easy to follow, but sadly the photos lack clarity, and detract from the book.

*Fine Tuning Your Radial Arm Saw* by NEB contributor Jon Eakes, is not a general manual on working with a radial saw or related gadgetry. It is a detailed manual on how to get precision from your machine (as close as 1/128th of an inch, according to the author). In the very beginning Eakes admits that if you do production work primarily, or if you take your saw on-site, a table saw is a better choice. But for radial arm saw users, he provides a distillation from years of workshops he has given on this topic. And even though I don't own a radial arm saw, the result sparked my curiosity.

Eakes begins with six principles of precision and proceeds through practical procedures for stabilizing, cleaning, adjusting, and precision-testing Craftsman, DeWalt, and Rockwell machines, plus daily checkup advice. He does not suggest using a framing square to square the saw blade to the work as Cliffe does, noting that a wobbly blade can make a dead square cut (with a wider kerf).

But if you try to square such a blade, which part of the wobble will you use? Instead, he gives his own techniques, always pointing out how inaccuracies arise and how to correct them. A final chapter focuses on accessories for precision.

Eakes' text is both clear and concise, and his photos and drawings are sharp. The book reflects Eakes' background as a mechanical engineer, his training in Japan as a woodworker, and his success as a Canadian cabinetmaker and teacher. It will appeal to anyone who cares about striving for excellence in technology and craftsmanship especially those with radial arm saws. ■

—Paul Hanke

## Housing Trends and Trendiness

**American Houses** by Philip Langdon; Stewart, Tabori & Chang; New York, N.Y.; 1987; 256 pages; \$29.95 hardcover.

As Philip Langdon points out in his introduction to *American Houses*, the housing scene in the U.S. is in a state of flux, due in large measure to changing demographics and a changing view of housing. Recent years have witnessed the rise of singles housing, retirement housing, condos, and rehabbing of row houses in the inner city. Moreover, many Americans view a house not as a permanent family seat, but as a "commodity to be turned over quickly at some future date," to use Langdon's words. Still, he points out, the detached single family house lingers as part of the American Dream—although an increasingly less affordable part.

Another contemporary influence on America's houses is a concern for

energy and the environment. Langdon observes that major innovations in residential design (such as solar energy) which were once championed by only a few daring types, are now being blended in with tradition.

Langdon traces the current trends in American housing in a lavishly illustrated volume. The illustrations, which include examples from all corners of the nation, are accompanied by a well written, if not particularly deep, analysis of current housing trends. Over and over I found myself wishing that the subjects of Langdon's analysis weren't quite so trendy, and that the illustrations weren't quite so glitzy and obviously designed for the pages of *Record Houses*. This is partly my own taste. But despite Langdon's synopsis of what lies behind today's trends, he has somewhat missed the mark when trying to answer his own major question: "What constitutes an American house?" I sincerely hope that the answer does not lie in what is simply trendy or current.

Langdon's presentation of the current housing scene falls into five categories. In "Settings" he discusses the romantic designs of Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederic Law Olmstead, *cul-de-sacs*, planned-unit developments, zero-lot-line planning, the "creative rule breaking" of Village homes in Davis, Calif., and other current topics in land use planning, illustrated by both good and bad examples. "Forms and Features" opens with the 6,000-square-foot Foster House by Hartman-Cox Architects, and leads us through free-form ceilings, upscale kitchens (and bathrooms, and bedrooms), the revival of small panes in windows, the "smart house," and certain design blunders such as the "egregiously maudlin" use of picturesque elements that the author witnessed in his travels. (Haven't we all?)

Innovations in the field of "Energy and Climate" haven't made much mass market penetration says Langdon, but he gives us an overview of such things as Tyvek, low-E glass, superinsulation, and regional responses to climate such as the Dog-trot house of the Southeast. No serious attention is given to the actual performance of the examples presented (except to pan active solar).

"In Construction and Craftsmanship" though, the author makes a serious inquiry into the quality of American house construction. If craftsmanship is suffering one would never suspect it from the examples in the book's photos, which generally represent the *creme-de-la-creme* of what's available. I also questioned the author's technical know-how when he said a No. 2 Southern Pine 2x4 will span 14 feet at 24-inch spacing under a 40 psf live load, or cited interweaving of valley shingles as inferior to exposed metal flashing when both could do the job. He does come down on some of the major flaws of manufactured housing though, and praises New Hampshire timber framer Tedd Benson for having the goal of "nothing less than the perpetuation of fine woodworking traditions of hundreds of years ago." Here too you'll find the Tiburon House by the extremely meticulous Len Brackett. In short, says Langdon, craftsmanship is still alive in house-building circles, it's just not too common in production building.

As a final example of quality, Langdon looks at restoration and adaptive reuse, where the quality of the past is being preserved. He then sums up with a chapter on the "Search for Richness" where you'll find the fascinating and bizarre houses of Bart Prince and other curious descendants of the "organic school" of architecture. Prince, who the author says, "ignores national trends" (to say the least), provides a refreshing counterpoint to the rest of the book.

The author asks if the post WWII raised ranches "create delight." "Not usually," but today's houses are "trying to be better," he concludes. In Langdon's mind the key to American houses is imagination and diversity. *American Houses* will give you a broad and pricey look at the surface of both. ■ —Paul Hanke

## FREE & CHEAP

**Power Tool Safety:** A 22-page guide to the safe operation of widely-used power tools entitled *Safety is Specific* is available from Power Tool Institute, 501 W. Algonquin Rd., Arlington Heights, IL 60005-4411; 312/593-8350.

**Hand Tool Catalog:** A 48-page catalog of hand tools and chemical products is available from Red Devil. Copies on request from the company at 2400 Vauxhall Road, Union, NJ 07083-1933.

**Choosing a Remodeler:** A 12-page booklet which offers advice to consumers on selecting a professional remodeling contractor contains information on what to look for in a contract, how to work with a contractor, how to finance a remodeling project, and how to avoid or resolve disputes. Free of charge from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Colorado 81009.

**Affordable Blueprints:** Available from HUD, *Blueprint Catalog* lists award-winning house plans designed to reduce construction and maintenance costs, and make the most of energy conservation. For the catalog, call HUD USER toll free at 800/245-2691 (301/251-5154 for callers in Maryland and the Washington, D.C. area).

**Saw Catalog:** A Wholesale/Trades catalog detailing the full line of Lenox saw blades and hand tool products is now available. For more information contact American Saw & Manufacturing Co., 301 Chestnut Street, East Longmeadow, MA 01028. Or call toll-free 800/628-3030. (800/332-3844 in Massachusetts).

**Fastener Reference:** A quick-reference guide showing which nail, staple, and brad should be used for which construction application according to building codes has been released by Spohnails, Inc., 1100 Hicks Rd., Rolling Meadows, IL, 60008.

**Mobile Weatherization:** Written for weatherization contractors, *Mobile Home Weatherization: A Guidebook for Installers*, is a reference guide for anyone who needs detailed information. Techniques and cost are discussed. From NCAT, P.O. Box 3838, Butte, MT 59702 for \$5 plus \$1 handling.

**Safety reference:** *Guide to Hand Tools* is a 90-page booklet prepared and published by hand tool manufacturers. Separate wall charts are available for frequently used tools. The charts are \$1.25 each, the booklet \$3, ppd. Write to Hand Tools Institute, 25 North Broadway, Tarrytown, NY 10591.

**Finishing Tips:** Copies of *Finishing Recommendations for New Construction* is available from NAHB's technical services department at 15th and M Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005, or call 202/822-0300.