

Handy Hand Tools

by Dave Crosby

Good tools don't need to be complex or expensive — sometimes the best tools are those inexpensive ones that just make your life a little easier. And sometimes good tool innovations are the result of a tradesperson realizing, "There has to be a better way," and inventing it. Here are three tools designed by creative individuals who recognized a common problem and came up with an innovative solution. I haven't spent much time with these tools, but even a cursory look tells me they'd all be welcome in my toolbox.

Multi-Purpose Ruler

The *RascalRule* was invented by a former miner who needed to measure angles, slopes, and dimensions quickly and accurately under difficult conditions. One leg of this durable 2-foot folding rule has a bubble vial, so you can use it as a level or to determine slope. You can also lay out or duplicate virtually any angle using either the degree markings on one side or your choice of roof pitch or percent grade markings on the other. A positive friction



A built-in vial in the RascalRule makes it easy to measure slope in rise/run, percent, or degrees (left). The 2-foot-long folding rule also serves as a bevel gauge and protractor (right).

lock with detents at 45, 90, and 135 degrees provides accurate, secure settings, and the numbers read left to right on one side and right to left on the other side — handy for finding centerlines and figuring layout. The RascalRule fits in your pocket and appears to be well worth the \$19.95 purchase price from Giza Industrial (112 S. Turner St., Victoria, B.C., Canada V8V 2J8; 888/972-7225; www.rascalrule.com).

Handsaver Angle-Stop Wrench

Angle stops weren't designed to make remodelers miserable; it just feels that way. It's bad enough that age and corrosion make the valves hard to turn, but the stops are almost always out of reach in the back of a cabinet. Even if you can get pliers or a wrench on the pot-metal handle (which has usually been mauled by the last person who worked on it), you then run the risk of breaking the handle the rest of the way off.

The simplest solution I've ever seen to this aggravation is called *The Gordon Wrench*, named after Bob Gordon, who

invented the tool after he was unable to find what he needed in hardware stores. Made of durable ABS plastic, the wrench has oval depressions that are designed to fit perfectly over even badly misshapen angle-stop handles. The 90-degree offset provides the leverage you need in tight spaces, and the comfortable, secure grip is easy on your hand.

A deal at \$5 each (plus \$2.50 S&H), quantity discounts are available from the Gordon Tool Company (14851 Jeffery Rd. #22, Irvine, CA 92618; 949/552-7613; gordontool@aol.com).

Way Strong Sawhorses

In some circles, job-site folklore has it that sawhorses reflect the skill and experience — even the personality — of the carpenter who builds them. More likely, what you use for sawhorses reflects how much room you have in the back of your truck, how busy you are, and how tired you are of helpers turning them into firewood.



The two oval depressions in the ABS-plastic Gordon Wrench fit angle-stop handles perfectly; the 90-degree offset ensures good leverage at awkward angles.



Clyde&Dale sawhorse legs fit into a saw kerf cut into dimensional lumber and can be snugged up with a wood shim if necessary. A pair of horses is rated for 3,000 pounds.

For those willing to pay a premium at just under \$100 for two pairs of legs, *Clyde&Dale* sawhorse legs could be the answer. The one-piece aluminum tubing legs terminate at the top in flat plates that slide into a saw kerf at either end of a piece of dimensional lumber. A pair of horses will support 3,000 pounds, but can still be put together or disassembled in seconds. The lightweight horses also stack flat, and it's no big deal if you forget to set your blade depth. Order directly from Clyde&Dale's Products (110 Skinner Lane, Longview, TX 75605; 800/390-5303; www.clydeanddales.com).

