



Cool Tools for 2013

The cream of
the crop from
the annual
STAFDA show

by Bruce Greenlaw

The Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association staged its 36th annual trade show this past November in Orlando. Open to STAFDA members only, the bustling event makes it easy for manufacturers to show a wealth of construction (and deconstruction) tools and related hardware to distributors and retailers. As usual, *JLC* pounded the exhibit-hall pavement for the allotted 12 hours to see what will be available over the coming year. And as usual, we weren't bored. Here's a sampler of the noteworthy things we saw, including something useful for just about any builder or remodeler.



1. Dual-Voltage Cordless Tools

Panasonic introduced a 1/2-inch drill/driver, an impact driver, an impact wrench, and a recip saw that can be powered by the company's existing 14.4-volt or 18-volt lithium-ion batteries or by its new 4.2 amp-hour ones for exceptional runtime. Like the other tools in Panasonic's *Tough IP* line, the dual-voltage tools have an IP56 rating, which means dust intrusion and powerful water jets have no ill effects. The drill/driver shown retails for about \$180 for the bare tool or \$460 for a kit that includes two of the new 18-volt 4.2 Ah batteries.

Panasonic, 800/338-0552, panasonic.com/cordlesstools.

2. Comfort Level

Stabila's new *R Beam* spirit levels are shaped like a handrail for an easy grip along their entire length. They have three continuous straightedges for scribing layout lines, guiding utility knives, or screeding, and the shock-absorbing end caps are removable so you can carry your layouts into corners. What's more, the levels are supposed to be 10% stronger on edge and 120% stronger when laid on their side than Stabila's Type 196 box-beam levels (while adding only about 10% to the weight). The levels come in lengths of 24, 48, 72, and 96 inches, with one plumb vial on the 4-footer positioned near the level vial for an extra viewing option. *R Beam* levels cost about 15% more than equivalent Type 196 levels, with prices ranging from about \$80 to \$260.

Stabila, 800/869-7460, stabila.com.



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3. Compact Ladders

Werner's new *D6200-3 Series* Type IA three-section compact fiberglass extension ladders are about 20% to 25% shorter than equivalent two-section models in the closed position. That makes them easier to store, transport, and maneuver around job sites. They come in five lengths ranging from 16 to 32 feet and cost around \$220 to \$600.

Werner, 888/523-3371, us.wernerco.com.

4. Value-Added Tool Bags

CLC calls its new *Tech Gear* line "the next generation of tool storage," which isn't a stretch. For instance, the model L234 15-inch open-top tool carrier has an LED light in the handle. The light is powered by two AAA batteries and offers a choice of three lighting levels. You can aim it at your work area or into the bag. And the Tech Gear model A233 18-inch zippered wide-mouth tool bag has two integrated stereo speakers that connect to your digital music player or smartphone, which in turn rides in a clear pocket between the speakers. You can plug the system into an AC receptacle or power it with four D-cell batteries. The L234 costs \$70, and the A233 costs \$120.

CLC, 800/325-0455, goclc.com.

5. Virtual Grade Rod

Spectra Precision's new *DR400 DigiRod* combines a laser receiver, a laser distance meter, and an angle sensor into a unique new tool that eliminates the need to use grade rods when checking grades with a red-beam rotary laser. Once you set up the rotary laser and follow simple steps with the DigiRod to establish the benchmark, you simply hold the DigiRod above the location you're checking, aim the tool's laser dot on your target, pick up the rotating laser beam anywhere on the 5-inch reception window, and read the elevation on the digital LCD

display. Thanks to the angle sensor, the DigiRod can be out of plumb by up to 30 degrees without affecting the results. The tool can also be used as a hand-held distance meter or can mount to grade rods with the included bracket for use as a stand-alone laser receiver. The kit includes a soft case and costs about \$700.

Spectra Precision, 888/527-3771, spectra-productivity.com.

6. Cordless Control Joints

BN Products claims that its new cordless *Robo Joiner* makes control joints in concrete slabs twice as fast as manual grooving tools and faster than a saw. Powered by a 20-volt lithium-ion battery, the variable-speed tool works by repeatedly plunging a stainless-steel blade into fresh concrete. I'm told that this up-and-down action and the accompanying vibration pushes down the aggregates and creates a nice cream fill in the bottom of the joint. You can get to work as soon as the concrete can support you, and can expect to run about 80 feet per charge. The kit costs around \$700 and includes two batteries, a charger, two bottom plates and blades that create a rolled edge or mimic a saw cut, a hand trowel for finishing, and a case. Visit the website to watch a demonstration.

BN Products, 800/992-3833, bnproducts.com.

7. Tight Ratchets

Ratchet handles have either a round head or a pear head. Pear-heads generally have beefier internal components that can transmit higher torque without breaking, but round-heads typically can advance sockets with a shorter back swing, which is handy for working in tight quarters. In fact, most round-heads boast a ratcheting arc (the number of degrees between ratchet clicks) of 4 to 10 degrees, while most pear-heads range from 8 to 18 degrees. The new GearWrench *120XP* low-profile pear-head ratchets, how-



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ever, use two stacked pawls to engage a 60-tooth gear, yielding an extremely short 3-degree ratcheting arc while exceeding ASME torque-performance requirements. Drive sizes of $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch are available, with prices from about \$25 to \$50.

GearWrench, 800/688-8949, gearwrench.com.

8. Double Vision

Fading eyesight is a big issue for today's aging workforce. Several manufacturers now make bifocal safety glasses with magnification diopters molded into the bottoms of the lenses so you can clearly see fine print and details without sacrificing impact protection. Lift Safety's new *Style Series Bifocals* — which cost \$25 — offer diopter strengths of +1.50, +2.00, +2.50, and +3.00. Two frame styles are available, including the Alias frame shown. Hopefully all the hardware stores out there will get the hint and start stocking these bifocals or their equivalents.

Lift Safety, 877/543-8444, liftsafety.com.

9. Sun-Smart Hard Hats

According to 3M, the sun's UV rays can cause hard hats to become brittle over time and reduce their impact resistance. The company's *H-700* series short-brim and *H-800* series full-brim hard hats that include "UV" in their product numbers have a red "Uvicator" sensor on the back that incrementally changes from red to white as the hard hat accumulates UV exposure. When the sensor turns white, it's time to replace the hard hat. The hats are also supposed to weigh 10% to 15% less than competing models. They come in several colors and have ratchet suspensions, replaceable brow pads, and slots for various accessories. Short-brim models cost about \$13 and full-brim models about \$18.

3M, 800/243-4630, 3m.com/occsafety.



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10. Composite-Decking Blades

Freud and Trex have teamed up to develop the first saw blade designed specifically for cutting composite decking. According to Freud, the new *Diablo/Trex* carbide-tipped, super thin-kerf blade makes clean melt-free cuts in composite decking and cellular PVC and requires less cutting power than normal. The blade is available with diameters of 7 $\frac{1}{4}$, 10, or 12 inches, and costs about \$30 to \$70.

Freud, 800/334-4107, diablotools.com.

11. Versatile Job-Site Clamp

I can envision installing Stanley's new *2x4 Clamp* on the crossbar of one of my Trojan sawhorses and using it as a vise for various carpentry tasks. I could do it easily without removing sawhorse legs. To mount it that way, you simply slide the clamp heads out of the yellow brackets, slip the brackets over the 2x4, reinsert the heads, and tighten the brackets from below. Screw the brackets to the wood, and you can apply more clamping force. The tool can also serve as a job-site bar clamp with an almost unlimited jaw capacity. It's scheduled to hit the market this spring and will cost about \$20 per set.

Stanley, 800/262-2161, stanleytools.com.

12. Autofeed Upgrade

Over the next few months, Senco is recharging its lineup of autofeed screw guns with several new 2-inch and 3-inch corded and cordless models that appear to be a big improvement over their predecessors. The intriguing cordless model *DS215-18V*, for example, is designed primarily for drywall pros. Powered by the same 18-volt lithium-ion battery used by Senco's Fusion cordless nailers, it drives plastic-collated screws from 1 to 2 inches long at a blazing top speed of 5,000 rpm, and is supposed to drive 500 to 700 screws per charge. Deluxe features

include a "corner fit" nosepiece that promises to drive screws into corners and tight spaces where competing models can't reach. Available in April, the kit will include two batteries, a one-hour charger, a drywall and wood nosepiece, two drive bits, and a nylon bag. It will cost about \$260.

Senco, 800/543-4596, senco.com.

13. Pinpoint Caulk Nozzles

One way to caulk hard-to-reach places is to tape a length of plastic tubing to the caulk-tube nozzle. But various extension nozzles are also commercially available, including the new disposable *FlexNozzle* and *Klose Kaulk* nozzles displayed at the show. The former can accordion up to a length of 12 inches and costs about \$10 per three-pack. The latter is rigid, but curves to a length of about 7 inches. It costs about \$4 for the black holder and one nozzle, and replacement nozzles cost about \$4 per five-pack.

Newborn, 800/638-3983, newborncaulkguns.com.

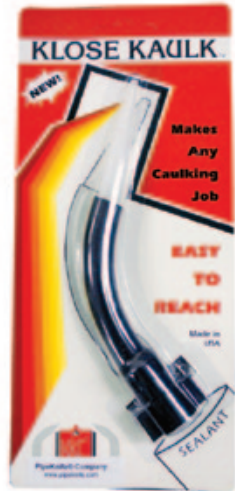
14. Potent Pinner

Bosch says its new 2.3-pound 23-gauge pin nailer (model *FNS138-23*) has 10% more power than the competition so it can consistently sink long nails into hardwood. It's also advertised as the first pin nailer to feature a dry-fire lockout mechanism that doesn't kick in until the magazine is empty. Other pin nailers with dry-fire lockout leave some nails in the magazine, which can cause problems. The tool's self-adjusting magazine holds headless nails from 1 to 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches long. Other deluxe features include a narrow nose for improved access and visibility, a self-cleaning air filter, and plenty of overmold to protect your work. The kit — which includes safety glasses, an Allen wrench, and a case — costs about \$160.

Bosch, 877/267-2499, boschfullforce.com.



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15. Aggressive Deck Clips

Hidden deck fasteners typically allow deck boards to move. According to Grabber Construction Products, that's a big mistake. The company argues that the boards should in fact be held securely to provide extra resistance to racking and help prevent decks from collapsing. The new Grabber powder-coated *Deckmaster* deck clips are designed to lock deck boards in place like top screws do, and are installed with beefy #9x1⁵/₈-inch screws. Deckmaster G5 deck clips work with any 1/8-inch grooved decking, GTT5 clips work with TimberTech, and the GW5 clips shown work with softwoods and hardwoods. Before you can install the GW5 clips, you need to use the Deckmaster PowerBlade router bit to cut the grooves. Deckmaster clips cost \$90 to \$105 per 100 square feet of decking, and the router bit costs \$25.

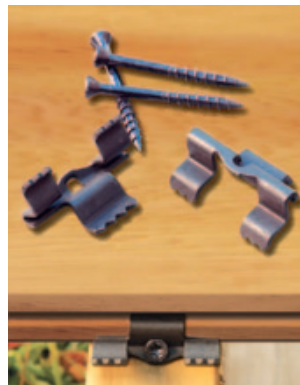
Grabber Construction Products, 800/477-8876, grabberman.com.

16. Manual Demo Hammer

Judging by the booth demonstration I saw, Goldblatt's new spring-loaded *Ram Rod* impact tool can break hard materials with minimal effort. You just insert the spike, chisel, or scraper bit of your choice into the quick-change chuck, place the bit where you want it, and push the spring-loaded handle so the "ram sledge" on the shaft delivers a blow to the bit. The tool locks in the closed position for storage and transport. According to Goldblatt, you can use this tool for removing floor tiles, chipping concrete, breaking bricks, and much more. It ships with a 1-inch chisel bit and costs about \$150. The other bits cost about \$14 to \$20. For about \$40, you can buy a collar that adds extra weight to the sledge.

Goldblatt Tool Co., 877/876-7562, goldblatttool.com.

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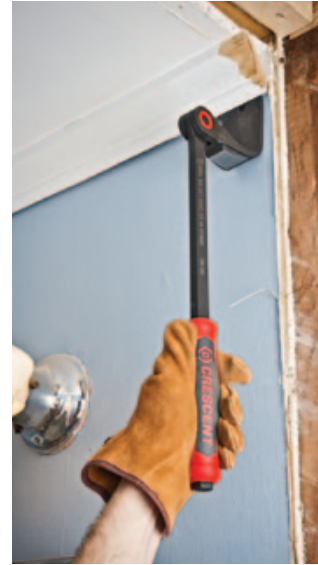




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17. Dual-Battery Rotary Hammer

Makita's new model *HRH01ZX2* 36-volt 1-inch SDS-plus rotary hammer is powered by two batteries from the company's flagship 18-volt LXT lithium-ion platform. If you've already bought into that platform, which now includes more than 60 tools, you can add a 36-volt tool that performs like its corded counterparts. The kit costs about \$350 and includes a side handle, a depth gauge, a tool bag, and an adapter that has a separate fuel gauge for each of the two batteries (Makita assumes you already have the batteries and charger). If you remove the adapter, you can power the tool with Makita's 36-volt pack instead to reduce the weight of the tool from 11.3 pounds to 9.9 pounds.

Makita, 800/462-5482, makita.com.

18. Portable Dump Truck

The *Hopper Dump Cart* (model C27-10A) displayed by Granite Industries costs \$1,825, but my back tells me I want one. Made in Ohio, it's powered by a lead-acid battery that's supposed to deliver about four to six hours of runtime per charge and recharge in about six to eight hours using a built-in charger. It has a 10-cubic-foot high-density polyethylene hopper that can haul 750 pounds on flat ground or 500 pounds up a 1:3 slope; a forward/reverse switch and emergency stop; and airless tires. The hopper tilts manually. Granite also offers an extended-range battery that delivers about five to seven hours of runtime, and other carts are available.

Granite Industries, 877/447-2648, graniteind.com.

19. Raising the Bar

Two new Crescent *Code Red* adjustable pry bars appear to make common demolition chores much less awkward, not to mention more fun. The indexing flat pry bar has a long handle and a pivoting head that locks into 14 positions so you can get the best angle and leverage on your work. It comes in lengths of 18 and 30 inches, and costs about \$20 to \$25. The adjustable pry bar and

nail puller has a crow's foot on one end for pulling nails and prying, plus one fixed and one sliding jaw on the other so you can twist and pull lumber, club drywall, yank long nails more easily, and so on. It comes in lengths of 16 and 24 inches, and also costs about \$20 to \$25.

Crescent, 800/688-8949, apexhandtools.com.

20. High-Capacity Siding Shear

According to Bullet Tools, its new manual cam-actuated *EZ Shear SST 26* is the only tool that can cut a 4-in-12 pitch on 8-inch fiber-cement siding while producing a clean edge and no airborne dust. That's possible because the tool has a super-sharp 26-inch-long steel blade coupled with an infinitely adjustable fence. The blade is made of a high chromium-vanadium tool steel alloy, and you keep it sharp by honing it in place with the included stone. Besides fiber-cement siding and trim, the tool also cuts vinyl siding (including foam-backed vinyl), cedar siding, and other materials. At the recent *JLC Live* show in Portland, Ore., held a month after the *STAFDA* show, James Hardie used the *SST 26* to demonstrate an efficient way to cut its fiber-cement siding products. The tool costs about \$800.

Bullet Tools, 800/406-8998, bullettools.com.

21. Power Caulking

I remember a union carpenter from Iowa raving several years ago about how Milwaukee cordless caulk guns had been terrific for caulking a 10-story exterior rehab. After seeing Milwaukee's new model *2441-21* 12-volt lithium-ion cordless caulk and adhesive gun at the show, I'm anxious to try one. This tool allegedly weighs 40% less than competing models, has the power to dispense all common construction sealants and adhesives, and can empty up to 150 10-ounce cartridges per charge. It has a speed dial and variable speed for applying a consistent bead at a rate of up to 28 inches per minute, and it automatically backs up the plunger to prevent dripping when you release the trigger. It also



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has a built-in spike for puncturing cartridge seals and a hang hook. The kit costs about \$150 and includes one M12 battery and a 30-minute charger. You can also buy conversion kits for dispensing quart cartridges or 20-ounce sausage packs. Other kit options and the bare tool are available as well.

Milwaukee, 800/729-3878, milwaukeetool.com.

22. Rebuildable Chalk Boxes

A *JLC* forum thread awhile back discussed clever ways to replace a missing chalk-line hook (beer-can tabs apparently work). A visit to the Tajima booth reminded me that this company's Chalk-Rite boxes can be completely rebuilt, from the hooks and handles to the nosepieces and gears. The *Chalk-Rite II* shown (model CR202B-P) has a 100-foot ultra-thin braided line that's supposed to be ideal for precision work like finish carpentry and tile setting. It has 3x gearing for quick line retrieval, and its aluminum case is sealed with a gasket to prevent chalk leakage. It comes with a trial-size bottle of blue Micro Chalk and costs about \$30. Other versions that snap bolder multiple lines are also available.

Tajima, 888/482-5462, tajimatool.com.

23. Fuel-Free Cordless Framing Nailer

DeWalt has yet to publish all the details about the new *DCN690 20V Max* cordless framing nailer displayed at the show. But I did learn that it's the first cordless model powered by a battery only, with no fuel cells required. It has a brushless motor, drives paper-tape fasteners from 2 to 3½ inches long, sinks up to about 650 3-inch nails per charge, can fire in the sequential mode or can bump-fire, and has dry-fire lockout. It also has a rafter/belt hook, is less than 13¾ inches tall so it fits between most framing members, and weighs 9 pounds (which is a bit heavier than the competition). The tool will roll out sometime this spring or early summer with a price tag of about \$550.

DeWalt, 800/433-9258, dewalt.com.



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24. A Lighter Wormdrive

Due to launch in April, the Skilsaw *MAG77LT* 15-amp, 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch wormdrive saw weighs just 13.2 pounds including the cord and blade. That's 2 pounds less than the *MAG77* and 4 pounds less than the *SHD77*. To eliminate weight, Skil says it reduced the length of the motor (by $\frac{3}{8}$ inch), reshaped the motor housing, used more magnesium, and made other careful modifications without sacrificing performance. The maximum bevel cut has increased from 51 to 53 degrees, and a multi-function blade wrench stores conveniently in the base. The saw will cost about \$220.

Skil, 877/754-5999, skiltools.com.



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25. Mixing Machine

One way to mix powdered joint compounds with water is to use a heavy-duty $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch corded drill with a mixing paddle. But veteran drywall contractor Myron Ferguson, a regular presenter at *JLC Live*, prefers to use a *Collomix* hand-held paddle mixer. Made in Germany, the two-handled mixers are easier to control, and they have a motor and transmission designed to endure the rigors of mixing. Equipped with the appropriate quick-change paddle, they can mix joint compound, thin-bed mortar, grout, epoxy, paint, and much more. According to the new U.S. distributor, the new 10-amp *Collomix* model *Xo1* is more comfortable to hold, is more powerful, vibrates less, and is quieter than the model it's replacing. It comes with a universal paddle that handles the majority of applications and costs about \$320. The *KR120HF* "bird-cage" paddle shown is ideal for mixing drywall compounds and costs about \$50. More-powerful mixers and other paddles are also available.

Sola Collomix USA, 414/471-3883, collomix.us.



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26. Fast and Strong Hot-Melt Glue

At the Pam Fastening Technology booth, marketing manager Bill Strother claimed that the company's nontoxic, odorless, and waterproof *PamTite* hot-melt adhesive can bond carpet tack strips to concrete slabs so fast the carpet can be power-stretched in just five minutes. Strother demonstrated the bond strength by gluing a piece of crown molding to tile; within seconds, the bond was so strong the crown split when I tried to remove it. *PamTite* has a working time of one minute. It has instant tack and fully cures within five minutes. The new *PamTite Plus* resembles *PamTite* but has a working time of three minutes and is more resistant to heat and cold. If you make a mistake with either of these thermoplastic adhesives, you can simply melt them with a heat gun and reposition your work. The adhesives are recommended for use in controlled environments, bond to a wide variety of porous and nonporous materials, and appear to have plenty of applications for *JLC* readers. *PamTite* costs about \$13 per pound and *PamTite Plus* about \$17 per pound. The *HB 220* hot-melt glue gun for these adhesives costs about \$110.

Pam Fastening Technology, 800/699-2674, pamfast.com.