

Cool Tools for 2011

A sampling of the best products on display at the STAFDA show

by Bruce Greenlaw

Free enterprise is alive and well, judging by the activity at the 34th annual STAFDA trade show in November, staged in Phoenix by the Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association. Business hummed along as hundreds of manufacturers showed off a breathtaking variety of construction tools and related products to distributors and retailers. A broad cross-section of makers was represented, from major brands to tiny companies with a narrow focus and a handful of employees. To get a sense of what tools are going to be available this year and who will be making them, *JLC* paid a visit to the show floor. Here are some of the products that stood out as especially innovative and useful.



Versatile Cutoff Saw • The 7-amp RotoZip *ZipSaw* is a cross between a flush-cut saw and an angle grinder, and it accepts RotoZip wheels or standard 4-inch grinder wheels. You can use it for everything from cutting curved notches in tile to flush-cutting a door jamb to accommodate new flooring. The saw lists for \$100 and includes a dust-collection kit and two wheels.

RotoZip, 877/768-6947, rotozip.com.

X-Ray Vision • Once you've used an inspection camera, it must be hard to live without one. These devices let you peer into walls, ductwork, pipes, and other inaccessible places, and the best ones can capture photos and videos for easy sharing and documentation. Two new cordless inspection cameras — the *12V Max* from DeWalt (DCT410S1) and the *Seeker 400* from General (DSC400) — have detachable 3½-inch wireless monitors for easier viewing. Both use micro SD memory cards for photo and video storage, have waterproof cables and probes, and include hooks and magnets to retrieve objects. And both companies offer extension cables and smaller probes as accessories. The DeWalt has a 17mm probe diameter and a 3-foot-long cable; the General has a 12mm probe diameter and a 3.28-foot-long cable. General also sells a USB video receiver that wirelessly connects the camera to Windows computers for viewing or video conferencing. The cameras cost \$300 apiece.

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

General, 800/697-8665, generaltools.com.

Handsaw Revisited • After making a couple of crosscuts and a short rip cut in a 2x4, I have a good first impression of Irwin's *Universal handsaw*. Its surprisingly small teeth made a clean cut that was easy to start, yet it cut far faster than my old Vermont American toolbox saw. According to Irwin, the saw took more than five years to develop. Given the name, I'm eager to see how well it cuts hardwood, laminate flooring, plastic pipe, and other building materials. It's made in Denmark and comes with a 15-inch or 20-inch blade for \$20 and \$22, respectively.

Irwin, 800/464-7946, irwin.com.



Pressure Cookers • High-pressure pneumatic nailers are lighter and more powerful than their standard counterparts, which is why high-pressure compressors are appearing on some job sites. Makita's oil-less *AC310H 400-psi compressor*, which hit the market last May, draws 13 amps and weighs 79.4 pounds. It has a 1.6-gallon air tank with the same capacity as a standard 5-gallon tank and two standard-pressure and two high-pressure outlets with a separate regulator for each pair. It operates at 69 decibels and lists for \$900.

Max's new oil-less *PowerLite AKHL1230E 500-psi compressor* draws 13 amps and weighs 46.3 pounds. It has a 2.6-gallon air tank with the same capacity as a standard 10-gallon tank and two standard-pressure and two high-pressure outlets with a separate regulator for each pair. In addition to normal and high-power modes, the unit offers a 68-decibel Quiet Mode; it also includes various warning lights and beeps, a maintenance LED, and a convenient drain lever. It lists for \$2,300.

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

Max USA, 800/223-4293, maxusacorp.com.



Light Shears • Bullet Tools has added a lightweight model to its line of manual cam-actuated shears. The *EZ Shear* weighs just 16½ pounds but will cut laminate and wood flooring, fiber-cement and wood siding, and other materials. It uses a super-sharp steel blade that you can hone in place, and because the blade is 13 inches long it can handle most angle cuts.

The company recommends this model for residential and light-commercial builders and remodelers; it also sells heavier-duty and pricier models with various accessories for flooring and siding subs. The EZ Shear costs \$250.

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



Compact Bolt Cutter • Alan Sipe, president of Knipex Tools, has tennis elbow.

That made his demonstration of the company's *CoBolt 8-inch compact bolt cutter* all the more impressive. The cutter, which is made in Germany, has a ¼-inch capacity and, according to Sipe, applies 20 times more force than traditional compact bolt cutters. Using his temporarily handicapped right hand, he easily snapped a 16d sinker with one of these cutters. The tool comes with a straight head or — for flush cutting — an angled head and fits in a tool belt.

It should work well not only for clipping fasteners, but also for cutting welded-wire mesh and wire fencing. It costs about \$50.

Knipex, 847/398-8520, knipex.com.



Gentle Nailers • At the Hitachi booth, I used the *NP35A 23-gauge pin nailer* to fasten a flat toothpick to a panel, firing a headless pin through both the wide and the narrow end. The toothpick didn't split, and the pins left almost invisible holes. No wonder pins are getting popular for delicate architectural woodworking and finish work. This 2-pounder drives pins from ⅝ inch to 1⅜ inches long. On the downside, there's a visual reload indicator rather than a lockout mechanism to prevent dry-firing, and there's no belt hook — but the tool costs only about \$100.

Meanwhile, Cadex showed its 2.2-pound *V1/23.35*, which sinks 23-gauge headless pins and brad nails from ½ inch to 1⅜ inches long. Deluxe features include dry-fire lockout, a belt hook, a blowgun for getting sawdust out of the way, and a swivel coupler. It costs \$230 and ships with 4,000 fasteners.

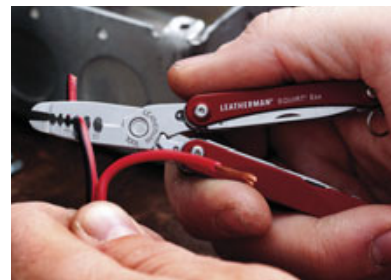
Hitachi, 800/706-7337, hitachipowertools.com.

Cadex, 604/876-9909, cadextools.com.



Pocket Tool Kit • I've carried a Leatherman Squirt P4 keychain multi-tool in my pocket since 2002. It weighs 2 ounces and is 2¼ inches long when closed, but packs spring-loaded needle-nose pliers and wire cutters, an awl, a file, a knife blade, a bottle opener, and three screwdrivers. I use it all the time in a pinch, and it's still as good as new. The next-generation *Squirt PS4*, which hit the market last May, substitutes scissors for the awl and one of the screwdrivers, which should make it even more useful. Also available is the *ES4*, which has pliers with wire strippers but is otherwise the same. Both have a 25-year warranty and come in red, black, or blue for \$30 apiece.

Leatherman, 800/847-8665, leatherman.com.



Record Breakers • Brute breaker hammers have been around since 1966. According to Bosch, a 1978 model 11304 that had been rented 2,076 times over 21 years still worked when it was donated back to the manufacturer.



Seeing the new 15-amp *Brute BH2760VC* at the show made me want to pick it up and go annihilate some concrete. The 65-pounder is supposed to deliver up to 60 percent more impact energy than the 11304 it's replacing while reducing vibration by up to 50 percent (without adding the weight of a counterbalance). The tool shuts off automatically when it needs critical maintenance. It costs \$1,540.

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

Standard Bearers • I noticed at the show that some lasers, inspection cameras, cordless drills, digital box levels, and other electronic and power tools had double-

digit IP ratings, either stamped on the tool itself or listed in the specs. I've since learned that the IP code — created by the International Electrotechnical Commission — is used to classify a tool's resistance to dust and water. Panasonic's *ToughIP 14.4-volt, 21.6-volt, and 28.8-volt lithium-ion cordless tools* have a rating of IP56, which means they're "dust protected" (first number) and "protected against powerful water jets" (second number). According to Panasonic, they're the first IP-rated cordless power tools. The 14.4-volt drill/driver (EY7441LZ2S) shown here is powered by a 3.1-amp-hour battery that supposedly delivers 25 percent more power than its predecessor. It has a belt hook and costs \$319.



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

New Ways to Keep Warm • For warmth without weight, Ergodyne's nylon *N-Ferno 6900 warming vest* is inflated with nontoxic and nonflammable argon gas. A valve in the chest pocket lets you adjust the insulating value. The vest with three refill canisters costs \$234.

And of all the tools in Milwaukee's subcompact M12 cordless line (there are 30), none is more innovative than the comfortable *cordless heated softshell jacket* I tried on at the show. Water- and wind-resistant, it's powered by the company's 12-volt Red Lithium battery, which hides in a rear pocket and is supposed to deliver up to six hours of continuous heat per charge. The heat is delivered to three carbon-fiber zones, and you can choose between three heat settings by touching a button just below your left collarbone. The jacket alone costs \$119; with a charger and battery it's \$169.

Ergodyne, 800/225-8238, ergodyne.com.

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





Cutting-Edge Blades •

You can buy carbon-steel, induction-heat-treated carbon-steel, and bi-metal utility-knife blades — including bi-metal blades with a golden titanium-nitride edge coating. But Stanley says its *Carbide 11-800 carbide-tipped blades*, due out in February, will last five times longer than the best of them. Expect to pay about \$5 for a five-pack, \$8 for a 10-pack, and \$27 for a 50-pack.

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

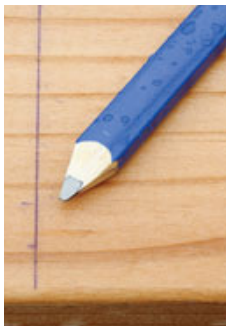
Quick Grips • C.H. Hanson's *Automatic locking pliers and clamps* adjust on the fly to grip any material that doesn't exceed their capacity; there's no traditional adjustment knob at the end of the top handle. You just turn the screw between the handles to dial in the clamping pressure you want, and until you readjust the screw, the same pressure will be applied every time. The Automatic line is a relaunch of the little-known LockJaw brand that C.H. Hanson acquired two years ago and has fine-tuned since. Sixteen tools are available, including an 11-inch C-clamp with swivel pads that costs \$30 and 10-inch curved-jaw pliers that cost \$20.

C.H. Hanson, 800/827-3398, chhanson.com.



Lighter Ladders • Thanks to AirTruss rails made of a unique fiberglass-resin composite, Little Giant's 28-foot *Lunar Type IA* and *IAA ladders* are the lightest industrial-rated fiberglass extension ladders around, says the company. The Type IA weighs about 49½ pounds and the Type IAA a half-pound more. The ladders have cable hooks and a padded V-rung up top and cost \$600 to \$700.

Little Giant, 800/453-1192, littlegiantladders.com.



Wet/Dry Pencils • Sola, an Austrian company that makes high-end spirit levels, had a 9½-inch-long wet/dry carpenter pencil — the *KB 24* — on display at its booth. I drew some lines and scribbled on a wet 2-by with both it and a normal carpenter pencil. The KB 24 made a darker blue line that didn't rub off. Lines made by the two pencils on a dry 2x4 were almost indistinguishable. The KB 24 currently costs \$1.25 at fastoolnow.com; a 13-pack is \$20 at sears.com.

Sola Levels USA, 414/471-3883, sola.us.

Star Power • After sinking hundreds of square-drive and star-drive screws on a recent deck job, I'm sold on the star-drive format. Both types of screw sockets are designed to prevent cam-out, but no matter how hard

I leaned on my cordless driver, the square-drive bits repeatedly climbed out, which wore out several bits while leaving sharp burrs on the screw heads. I drove all of the star-drive screws with zero cam-out and little bit wear. That's why the Screw Products booth attracted my attention. The company offers a wide range of *star-drive screws* (including stainless-steel and composite-decking ones) and will sell direct if you can't find a retailer in your area.

Screw Products, 877/844-8880, screw-products.com.



Straight Shooter • Strong-Tie's *Quik Drive PRO300S* stand-up auto-feed screwdriving kit comes with an unusual new decking nose clip that centers each screw over the joist below while placing it $\frac{3}{4}$ inch from the edge of the deck board. The kit costs \$369 and includes a DeWalt or Makita screw gun. The decking nose clip (QDDECKCLIP-RC), which you can buy separately for \$33, also fits the Quik Drive PRO200 and PRO250.

Simpson Strong-Tie, 800/999-5099, strongtie.com.



Work Grabbers • At the Rockler booth, VP John Otto set four *Bench Cookies* on a sawdust-sprinkled work bench, placed a board on top, and then belt-sanded with 60-grit paper. The board didn't move. Not only are the lightweight rubber-faced pucks a quick substitute for clamps and stops,



but they also protect the bottom of your workpieces and create clearance for edge-routing and finishing. They're sold at Sears, Lowe's, amazon.com, and elsewhere under the Bench Dog Tools brand, and at rockler.com under the Rockler brand. A four-pack costs \$12.

Rockler, 800/279-4441, rockler.com.



Instant Straps • IMMI's crash-tested *CargoBuckle Ladder Rack Tie-Downs* mount permanently to most lumber racks. To secure a load, you push a button and lift the ratcheting lever, pull out the web you need, push the lever back down to prevent the web from retracting, throw the web around the load and hook it to the reel, push the button again to automatically take up the slack, and then ratchet the web tight. To release, you push the button and lift the lever, unhook the web, lower the lever, unwrap the web, and then push the button again to retract the web back into the reel. Both operations take seconds. Visit the website to watch the video. The tie-downs (with mounting brackets) cost \$100 per pair.

IMMI, 888/937-4626, cargobuckle.com.

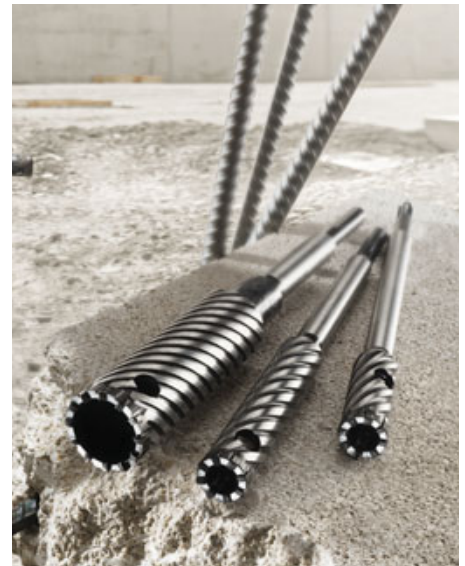
Roll Model • The *SkatePlate* rolling base plate replaces the stock plates on Skil and Bosch 7¼-inch wormdrive saws. It's designed to make cutting easier — as well as friendlier to delicate surfaces like doors and plastic-laminated shelves. The frame is made of a glass-fiber-reinforced urethane resin and holds two replaceable polyurethane rollers that spin on shielded ball bearings. The rollers lift the plate a hair above the work surface and help steer the saw in a straight line. If you need to cut curves, you can pop the rollers out in seconds. The optional *SkateGuide* rolling rip fence is 2 inches longer than normal for ripping stock up to 12 inches wide. Made in the U.S., the *SkatePlate* costs \$70 and the *SkateGuide* \$20. **Woodman Tools**, 888/828-4852, woodmantools.com.



Double-Take Recip Blade • No, there's nothing wrong with the photo. Lenox's *Diamond double-tang recip blade* is designed to cut cast-iron pipe, tile, stone, plaster, fiber-cement siding, laminate flooring, and other abrasive materials. Lenox also makes a single-tang version but says it has found that only part of that blade wears when cutting pipes. Flipping the new blade doubles its life, the company says. Two sizes are available — 9 inches and 11 inches — for about \$16 and \$22.



Lenox, 800/628-8810, lenoxtools.com.



Cool Carpet Seaming • The *KoolGlide Pro-W carpet-seaming tool* is an alternative to the traditional hot seaming iron, which at its worst can distort, discolor, burn, and drip glue on the carpet. With the *KoolGlide*, you simply install a special tape under the carpet seam, then move the tool over the top of the carpet rather than directly on the tape. The tape's adhesive is activated remotely, by induction heating. The bond can be reversed minutes or years later for rework or repair. Retail price is \$400.



KoolGlide, 888/486-6342, kool-glide.com.

Steel Eaters • Most masonry bits can't bore through rebar without damaging their carbide cutters. When you hit rebar and have to get through, your best bet is to switch to a rotary rebar cutter, gnaw through the steel, and then switch back to the masonry bit. Bosch now offers SDS-plus *rebar cutters* for rotary hammers and straight-shank ones for hammer and rotary drills. Both types come in 12-inch lengths with diameters ranging from 3/8 inch to 1½ inches. You also can buy 18-inch-long straight-shank rebar cutters with 1/2-, 5/8-, or 3/4-inch diameters and straight-shank 6-inch and 12-inch extensions. The cutters cost up to \$66.

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