

Hand Planes in the Modern Workshop

No hand tool that I am aware of has quite the mystique of the hand plane. You won't find avid collectors of table saws, fret saws, dovetail saws, chisels, screwdrivers, twist bits, or pliers, but hand planes have their own aura, and rich history, and followers. Sometimes hand planes are better than power tools, and most certainly, they give you that great feeling of success and pleasure when you've fit something perfectly by simply taking off a thin little shaving.

Experienced woodworkers claim that learning to tune and use a hand plane isn't difficult. The novices generally disagree. According to Garrett Hack,* the earliest known planes, dating from AD79 were found preserved in the ash at Pompeii. So, nothing is new under the sun.

The concept of a hand plane is simple: a metal chisel wedged into a solid body. But variations abound, generally aimed at specific tasks. Examples include bench planes for truing and sizing, planes for cutting and fitting joinery, for smoothing, and for shaping. The situation today is even more diverse with low angle and standard angle block planes (a one-handed tool), bevel up and bevel down planes, jack planes (big), smoothers, scrub and router planes, and of course an infinite variety of sizes and adjustment mechanisms.

I've bought a couple of planes in the past 3-4 years. What I'm finding is that the more I use them, the more uses I find for them. I just need to improve my sharpening skills – a subject for another day.

*Reference: The Hand plane Book by Garrett Hack, The Taunton Press, 1999.

Tom Silva of This Old House fame demonstrated the proper way to use hand planes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMSWSriUUWg>