

Measure 9 Times, Then Measure Again

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Without wanting to infringe on “MTCO,” Rob Carver’s monthly version of Zen and the Art of Woodworking, I have been reflecting on the art, science, and practice of measuring more than once before firing up the table saw. Truth be told, I’ve made a few mistakes in this arena in the past year, and when four score and seven years isn’t that far away, you begin to wonder about such mental errors. Since when are 3 feet equal to 34 inches? But I digress.

Like most of the readers of this column, I get inundated daily with woodworking offers, some of them claiming to be NEW tools. When I get the urge to buy, I try to lie down until the urge passes. But a recent promotion for a NEW Mini in-Dexable double square, got me thinking: How many tools do I already have for marking a 90-degree crosscut line 5 inches from one edge of a board?

My toolbox included:

- Three tape measures
- One 12” combination square (Starrett) and one 6” combo square
- A stainless steel square
- One cheap 6” hook rule
- One low-cost engineer’s square
- One 12” woodworking ruler
- One 18” metal ruler
- A double square
- One T-marking square
- One Layout square
- One Bench square

As you can see, my strategy to overcome the urge has been only marginally successful.

But I can list what I didn’t have:

- Precision woodworking protractor head
- Mini in-Dexable combination square
- Mini in-Dexable double square
- Delve square
- A Precision woodworking square
- A Cabinetmaker’s ruler

So, all is not lost.

According to Blue Spruce Toolworks, “Today’s craftsman has hundreds, if not thousands, of squares to choose from. Unfortunately, most are designed for mass production, not

outstanding performance.” Some of these products straddle the border between being a practical tool and being a fine work of art. I’ve at least avoided the art trap. I just wish my performance in the shop was better. I need to measure more than twice, and pay attention each time. Maybe even writing the measurement down, so I won’t forget it by the time I get to the table saw.

I am not an Iranian woodworker. But I know why Iranians are so good at measuring stuff: They have a supreme ruler. I wonder if he follows the MTCO rule.