WOODWORKER'S JOURNAL

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MORE ON THE WEB

More Top-shelf Shop Helpers *by Bill Hylton*

These tips shop helpers are in addition to those recommended by the author in the "7 Top-shelf Shop Helpers" article from our March/April 2007 issue of *Woodworker's Journal* (pg. 64).

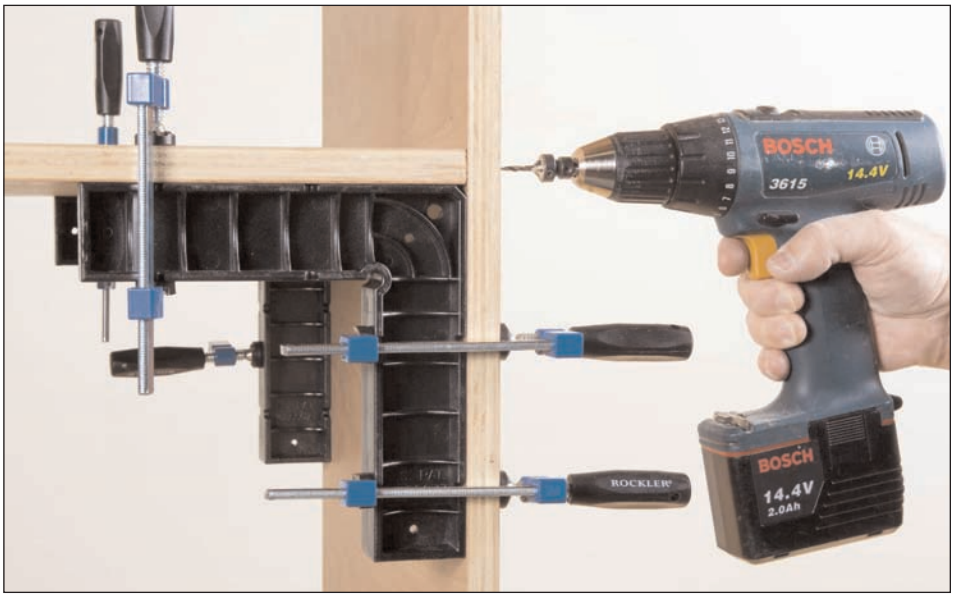
Clamp-it® Assembly Squares

Rockler's Clamp-It Assembly Square is a virtually unbreakable L-shaped polycarbonate block. It's the solution to the age-old problem of ensuring the case you are assembling — whether it's a cabinet or just a drawer — is square and remains that way until the glue sets or the fasteners are seated.

You simply clamp it at a corner of the assembly, one case part to each leg of the square. There are other techniques you can try, but don't be too proud to be practical. Assembly squares work.

Clamp-It squares won't scuff the wood and won't interact with glue to stain the wood (or get glued to the wood). The edges are softened, and the outside corner is chamfered.

The most economical package includes two large squares (8" along each leg) and two small ones (4" along each leg), together with four clamps scaled to each size.



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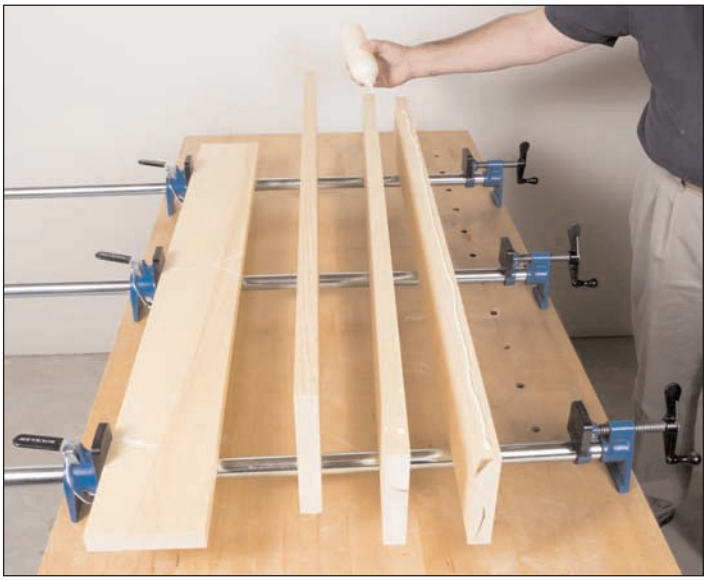
Sure-Foot Clamps

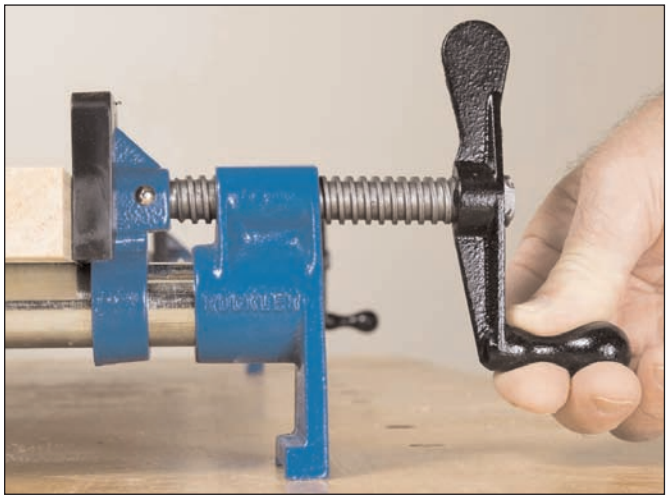


Pipe clamps aren't really the clamps you want. Think how maddening they are to arrange for a glue-up. At least one is going to roll, and that usually triggers a cascade of rolling clamps and tumbling boards. When you do get everything aligned, you turn the crank and bang your knuckles on the benchtop, triggering another round of clamp-rolling. But pipe clamps are what you can afford.

Now Rockler's come to your assistance with the greatest advance in pipe-clamp design since they were first invented. The clamp is called the Sure-Foot, and its signal characteristic is its 2 1/2"-wide, 1 1/4"-high foot. This foot gives it wonderful stability, raises the jaws and has an integral lip that makes it easy to catch on any clamp rack. They are well made, with clean edges and a smooth-turning screw.

The obvious question is: Can I integrate these Sure-Foot clamps into my collection of pipe clamps? Or do I start over, dumping all the old ones? It's no sweat. When gluing boards edge-to-edge, use the Sure-Foot clamps on the bottom and use your older clamps across the top.

An alternative is to buy conversion pads for your old clamps. These slip-on plastic pads cover the clamp jaws and extend below the pipe, providing the broad base and the elevation integral to the Sure-Foot design.



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Bob's Rule

Whitechapel's Bob's Rule is for measuring in feet, inches and "bobs." A bob is 1/24", and on a Bob's Rule, the welter of fractions that an inch typically is divided into is replaced with bobs. No more halves, quarters, eighths, 16ths, or 32nds. Just 24 bobs.

"Is this a joke?" you ask. Certainly, it's whimsical, and I love it. It addresses one of woodworking's workaday vexations: those niggling little measurement increments.

The bob is the creation of Bob Dunstan, owner of Whitechapel, a kitchen and restoration hardware business. I've never met him, but I picture a guy with a mischievous grin and a twinkle in his eye. I admire his chutzpa: He's confronted shortcomings of the standard systems, suggested a better way, then put some money where his mouth is.

Dunstan's proposition — see his web site — is that both the imperial and metric systems make woodworking more difficult than necessary.

The imperial system breaks dimensions into a scale of increments —typically feet, inches, and fractions — that make even a long dimension easy to manage and remember. Six feet seven and three-quarter inches, we say. The shortcoming is the division of the inch. "Nobody," he says, "can quickly and reliably add 11 7/16" and 4 5/32" then divide the result by two, let alone three."

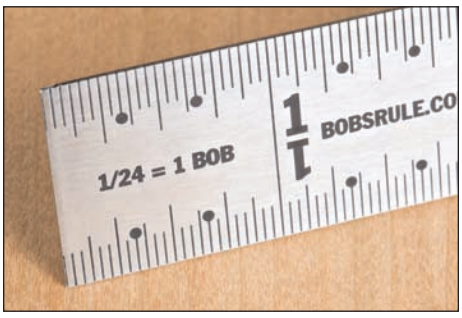
What Dunstan likes about the metric system is the millimeter, which he calls the "ideal 'small' unit of measure." The downside is that it's the only increment, so you have dimensions like 1034mm and 960mm and 2286mm. Hard to remember accurately, such dimensions easily become garbled (turning 2286mm into 2268mm, for example).

I know someone out there is going to say, "Yeah, but the metric system makes division easy." OK. Divide a centimeter — that's 10mm — into thirds. Hmm. That's 3.33333mm. Divide it into quarters. Yes, that's 2.5mm. Divide it into eighths. 1.25mm. Now locate those increments on a metric rule. Ah ha!

Which brings us back to the 24th of an inch. Dunstan thinks it is the ideal increment — bigger than a 32nd, smaller than a 16th, very, very close to a millimeter. Best of all, it makes dividing an inch into halves, thirds, quarters, sixths, eights, and 12ths a piece of cake.

To simplify notation (and mental recall), Dunstan dubs that 24th-of-an-inch increment a bob. Doing so eliminates the ever-changing fraction-of-a-inch element, supplanting it with a whole-number notation. A tabletop width would be given as two feet three inches and 11 bobs, or more simply two-foot-three-and-eleven. Compare that notation with two feet three and 15/32nds inch. Or 698 millimeters.

The big deterrent to a bob-based system's taking root in any shop is the commitment every woodworker's already made to either the imperial or metric standard. My tool cabinet is well-stocked with imperial rules, tapes and squares. I position my rip fence against an imperial tape. So, too, with my new Mast-R-Slide.



Another deterrent is the paucity of bob-based measuring tools. You get them only from Whitechapel. With three exceptions, they are breathtakingly expensive — as in $93 for an 18-inch rule. Exceptions are the $5.50 16' tape, an $8.50 steel 1' rule and a $7.35 6' self-adhesive tape.

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Pipe-Clamp Bench Blocks

Rockler's Pipe Clamp Bench Blocks are simple in concept. They hold clamps in position while you assemble and clamp boxes and frames.

The blocks work with any 3/4" pipe clamps and can be used freestanding or attached to a work surface. Each block holds a pair of clamps at right angles to one another. And the blocks really do "hold" the clamps. You've got to push hard to snap the pipe into the grip.

You won't use them for every assembly job, but when you need clamping pressure applied side to side and also end to end, they will save you from a lot of fumbling and frustration.