

Eccentric Saw Hits the Bullseye

A custom sawmaker in Ohio makes a dovetail saw that approaches perfection.

Saws seem so simple. File teeth into a sheet of steel. Bolt a handle to it. If the tool is for precision work, then hammer on a metal spine to make the blade stiffer.

However, the truth is that the more you saw, the more you realize that these tools can be as scabrous or as sublime as their users. A good saw can make you feel like a god. A bad saw will make you fall in love with your router.

Like many woodworkers, my first eye-opening saw had a rattan-wrapped handle and it cut on the pull stroke. Blacksmith-made Japanese saws are amazing instruments.

And after a long dark age, North American sawmakers have also blossomed. You can now buy Western saws in any configuration needed for cabinetmaking, from a tiny 18th-century-style dovetail saw to a monster full-size rip saw.

Recently, a new kind of Western sawmaker has emerged—someone who makes saws in small batches, like a Japanese blacksmith or an American knife maker. These saws aren't so much manufactured as they are born and nurtured.

Last year I met Andrew Lunn, a 37-year-old sawmaker in Ohio (who makes saws during his days off as a paramedic) under the name of Eccentric Toolworks (eccentricwoodcraft.com). Lunn's saws look different than most saws on the market today; it's like looking at planes from Lie-Nielsen Toolworks sitting next to planes from custom toolmaker Konrad Sauer. Both look like a million bucks, but Sauer's planes look like they should come with a rider to your home insurance.

Lunn's saws are beautifully engraved and carved. And he etches his blades at times with intricate patterns. But how do they cut?

Let me say this: After years of testing tools I'm fairly jaded. But Lunn's dovetail saw was jaw-dropping in its performance. It is the easiest-starting dovetail saw I've ever wielded. It cuts as quickly as a coarser saw. And it never seems to stick in the work—an amazing feat.

Lunn's secret is that he's as obsessed with the



Custom sawmakers are coming into their own these days. Andrew Lunn of Eccentric Toolworks makes saws that are as highly tuned as an Italian sports car and cut as well as any Japanese saw.

physics of sawing as he is with the tools' appearance. And he's not afraid to build something a bit different. For example: His 9" dovetail saw has a thinner saw plate (.015") than any other Western saw on the market.

Conventional wisdom says the saw should buckle easily to become a \$350 mistake, but Lunn proves the critics wrong by massaging other details of the tool. The blade's cutting depth is shallow (just 1 1/4" at the toe). And it tapers from the toe to the heel, as does the brass back, which is smaller at the toe than at the heel. When you cut with the saw, you know it's not going to kink.

The teeth are a similar marvel of engineering. Lunn relaxes the rake of the 16 points-per-inch teeth at both the heel and the toe of the blade. Lunn found a sweet spot that made the saw start easily, cut quickly and never stick at the heel. And the kerf is as narrow as that of a Dozuki.

How does he do it? Lunn says he tunes every saw as highly as possible. He takes a few cuts, then files the teeth more. Then it's back to test-cutting. Nothing leaves his shop until it cuts perfectly.

The other advantage to having Lunn make you a saw is that the handle can be scaled to your hand. One interesting detail of his saws is that the totes are a shade thicker than other brands. At first, I thought the tote was too thick. But after some use I found it completely comfortable.

As of early 2009, Lunn was trying to reduce his duties as a paramedic to build more saws. And



Like old-school sawmakers, Lunn uses split nuts to attach the tote to the blade. And he adds a hand-engraved medallion for good measure.



Lunn's flowing engravings grace almost every tool that emerges from his Ohio workshop. Like filing sawteeth, engraving requires intense attention to small details.

Lunn is not alone. A quick Internet search uncovered other custom makers who live and breathe fleam, hammer-set teeth and Grobet files.

Of course, the \$350 question is if the saw lives up to its price tag; it's more than twice what you'd pay for a typical premium saw. As someone who has burned out more \$250 routers, \$150 cordless drills and \$70 sanders than I'd like to admit, I think Lunn's price is more than fair. **WM**

— Christopher Schwarz

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