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Blanket chest featured on new public TV show, p. 52

These handy tools will make your life easier and your shop time more productive

BY PATRICK McCOMBE

Two Nailers You

Brad nailers for heavier work

These nailers are right at home constructing and installing built-ins, face frames, and other tasks that require strong, fast connections. Use a colored wax pencil to fill the holes.

Photos: staff

Some woodworkers think there's no place for nails in fine furniture, but professionals like Gregory Paolini, ony O'Malley, and Roland Johnson all ıd small air nailers useful in their woodorking. Brads and pins can be a speedy ıbstitute for clamps and a great way to tach glue blocks, case backs, and other ırts where the nails won't show. Where e nail holes will be visible, colored wax ·ncils are a quick and effective fix. And ven those woodworkers who don't use em on their projects find nailers invalule for building jigs and shop fixtures. It's so a great tool to have around the house r trim work and improvement projects. There are two basic types of nailer apropriate for woodworking: pin and brad. n nailers are a relatively new breed, and e extremely small headless nails. They don't have a lot of holding power on their own, but they work great when the joint is backed up with some glue. And the hole is so small it practically disappears.

Brad nailers shoot a larger fastener, up to 2 in. long, and leave a larger hole, but offer more holding power than pins. Most of the woodworkers I spoke with think it makes sense to have both a brad and pin nailer, especially since they've become so inexpensive. But if you're just starting out, read on to see which type makes sense for you.

What to look for in a nailer

For brad nailers, you'll want an adjustable depth-of-drive. Without it, you'll have to control fastener depth by adjusting air pressure at the compressor. This can be inconvenient, especially if you're fastening materials of varying thickness or density. Pin nailers countersink every time, so they don't have a depth-of-drive adjustment.

Be sure to check out the nosepiece, as some have rather bulky rubber covers that make it tough to see where you're placing the nail. The best guns have slim rubber or plastic tips that protect the work and provide an unobstructed line of sight. You'll also want to decide between a conventional or oil-free model. This mostly applies to brad nailers. All the pin nailers I've seen require oil, but Porter-Cable just introduced what they claim is the first oil-free pin nailer (model PIN138). If you're considering an oil-lubricated model, look for one with a rear exhaust, which will direct any oil spray away from your project.

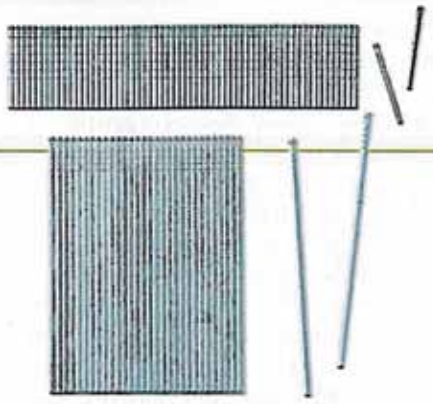
Patrick McCombe recently switched over from the FWW *staff to* Fine Homebuilding.

Veed

'in nailers for recise placement

n nailers, with their small nosepiece and ıy fasteners, are great for attaching small oldings and tacking parts while a glue joint ies. And the holes are so small that they ıually don't need filling.

18-gauge Brad nailer



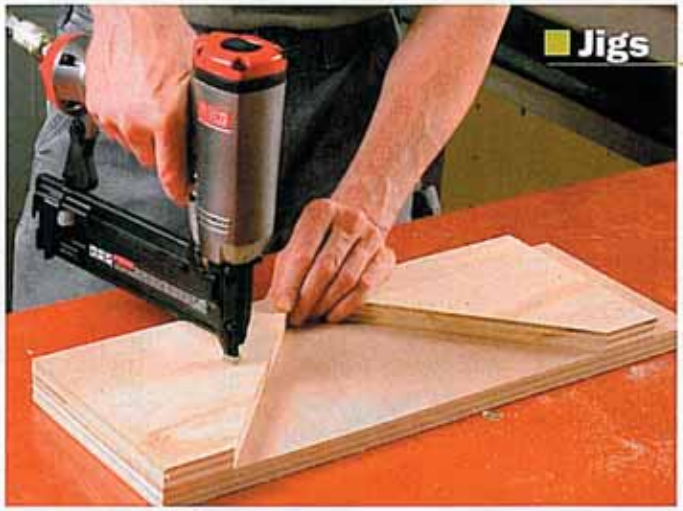
Fasteners for 18-gauge brad nailers range from 5/8 in. to 2 in. long.

A brad nailer is great for building jigs and fixtures, attaching face frames to built-in cabinets, assembling plywood drawers, and fastening plywood cabinet backs

Brad nailers fire 18-gauge fasteners that sell for between $6 and $8 per 1,000. These tools have straight magazines that hold about 100 nails. Pneumatic brads have a small head and hot-melt adhesive on the nail shank. The adhesive heats up as the nail is driven, acting first as a lubricant and then, as the glue cools, as a boost to the nail's holding power.

Prices for pneumatic brad nailers start around $50, and there are more than a dozen high-quality models selling for less than $100. Cordless brad nailers are also an option. They're especially popular with remodelers, because they can be deployed quickly and provide freedom from a compressor. But with prices starting around $250, they're comparatively expensive and make less sense for a home shop.

Jigs



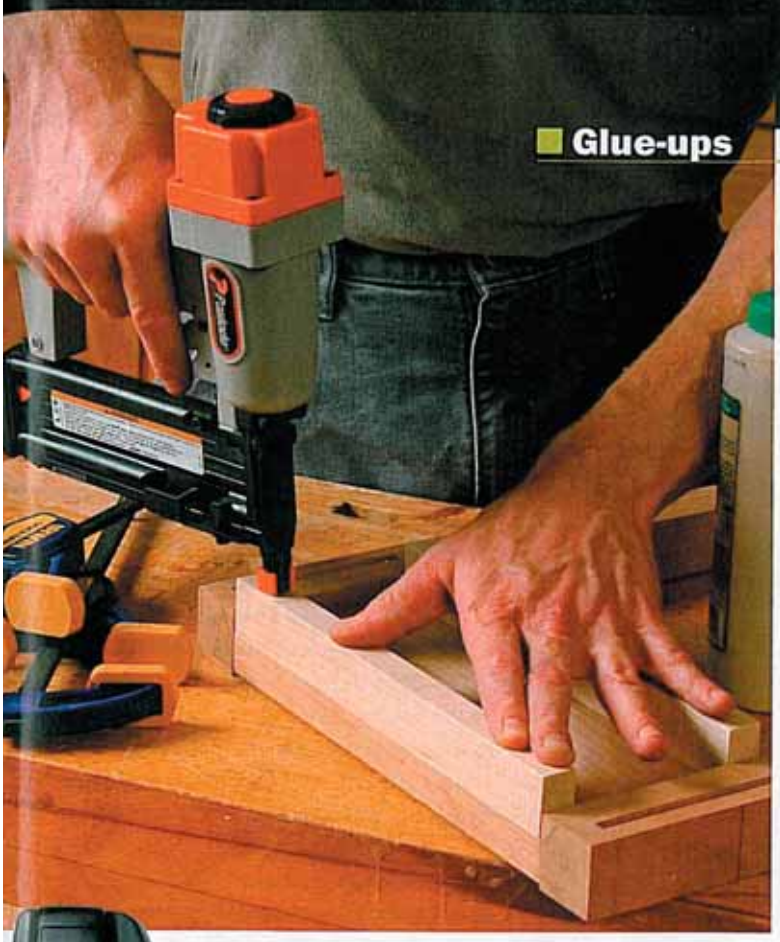
Quick work. *Building this spline jig took minutes and it went right to work without a wait. Keeping the brads about 3 in. above the table prevents them from hitting the sawblade. The metal is soft, so striking a nail is unlikely to damage carbide-tipped tools. But flying shrapnel is a danger.*

Trim work

Splits are unlikely. *Because they're made from such thin wire and move so fast when they're fired, 18-gauge brads are less likely to split hardwoods than hand-driven nails.*

TIP

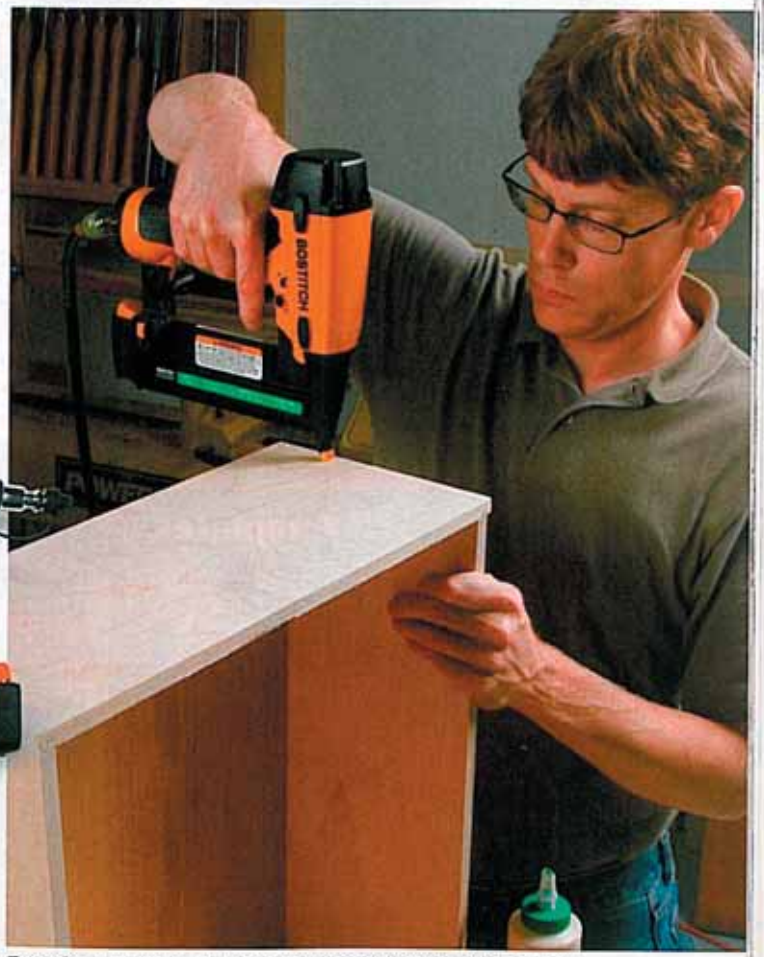
Fill visible holes with a colored-wax pencil or putty.



Hold steady. *Tacking parts with brads is a great way to prevent them from moving while they're glued together. Once tacked in place, the part can be clamped firmly along its length for a furniture-quality joint.*

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

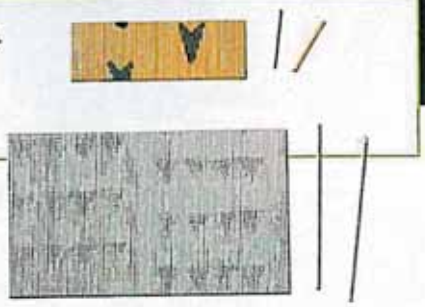
With slim, lightweight housings, adjustable depth-of-drive, and easy-to-load, side-access magazines, both the Bostitch BT1855K ($90) and the Paslode T200 F18 ($90) have all the features you want in a brad nailer. The Paslode accepts nails from ⅝ in. to 2 in. long, the Bostitch takes nails from ⅝ in. to 2⅛ in.



Fuss-free drawers. *For shop storage and other utility cabinets, it's tough to find a faster construction method than a brad nailer. Combined with glue, it makes for very strong joints.*

23-gauge Pin nailer

Several models use pins from ½ in. to 1⅜ in. long, although some start at ⅜ in. or ⅝ in. and others go up to 1¾ or even 2-in. pins.

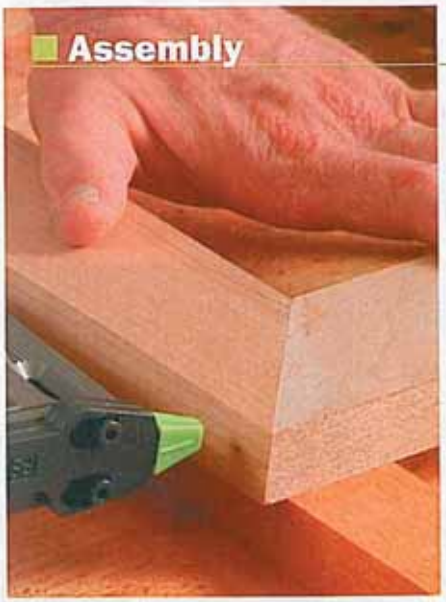


With a headless fastener that's about the same diameter as a straight pin for sewing, pin nailers leave a hole that's nearly invisible—even under finish. Johnson says this quality makes a pin nailer his most-used nail gun. Of course, such a skinny nail without a head offers little holding power on its own, but when combined with glue, this slimmest of fasteners is very useful. Many woodworkers use them for attaching moldings or tacking on glue blocks. They're especially valuable for holding odd-shaped parts that are difficult to clamp, and for attaching glass stop and other tiny moldings.

Paolini uses his to attach patterns and templates to workpieces. "A couple of pins are a lot more secure than double-sided tape, and they pop right out of the pattern and workpiece when I'm finished routing," he says. He also uses his pin nailer to temporarily hold banding on plywood edges while the glue sets.

Pin nailers have few rules with regard to the length of fasteners they accept (see above). It's tempting to consider a pinner that accepts 2-in. pins as a replacement for a brad nailer, but pins will follow the grain quite readily, sometimes blowing right out the side of a project. So it's best to use the shortest pins that will do the job. The least-expensive pinners, like the Porter-Cable Pin100, sell for as little as $100. The pins sell for between $3 and $5 per 1,000.

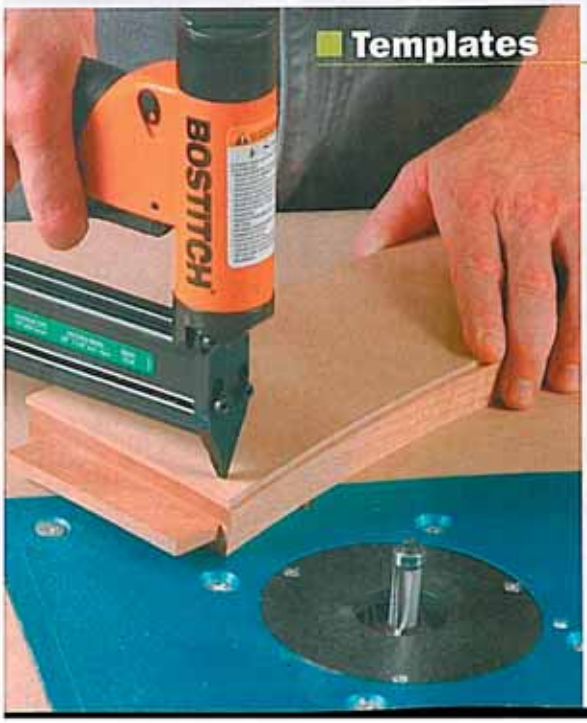
Assembly

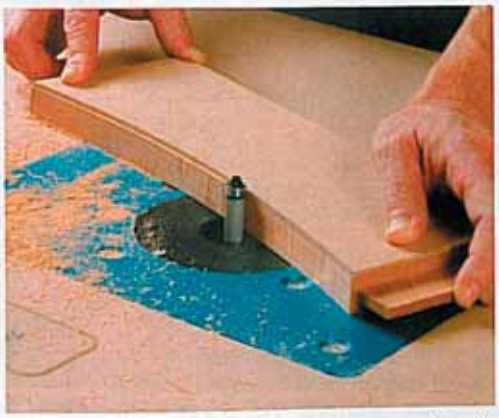


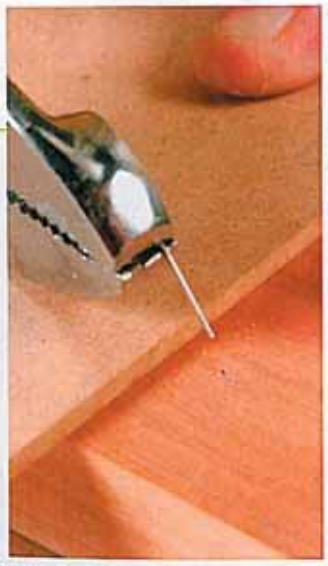
Non-slip miters. *Mitered corners on boxes and frames can move around as they're clamped, but a few well-placed pins make glue-ups much easier.*

A bit of flex. *Both pins and brads are thin enough to allow movement with changes in seasonal humidity, making them ideal for attaching back slats.*

Templates







Non-stick router templates. *You can use a pin nailer instead of double-sided tape to secure router templates to workpieces. Pins leave almost invisible holes in the workpiece when they're removed, but in most cases you can place them in spots that will be hidden.*

Moldings

Perfect for glass stop. *An errant hammer swing can destroy a glass door with a single blow, but a pin nailer almost eliminates that possibility.*

Precise placement. *Small applied moldings are tough to glue and clamp, but a pin nailer with its tiny nosepiece makes it easy to hold and fasten even the smallest moldings.*

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR

With a swivel air-fitting and a built-in blower for clearing dust, the recently introduced Cadex V1/23.35 ($230) accepts pins from ½ in. to 1⅜ in. The Porter Cable Pin 100 has a tiny nosepiece for precise pin placement and an auto-adjusting magazine for pins from ½ in. to 1 in.

Small compressors are fine

The minimal air required by brad and pin nailers means you need only a small compressor. These can be found for less than $200. One example is the 6-gal. Porter-Cable C2002-WK ($180). This model includes useful accessories like an air hose, tire inflator, blow gun, and quick-connect fittings.