



# Tips and Tricks from One-Man Pro Shops

These guys learned the hard way—over time and on the job—  
but you can skip ahead and simply reap the benefits of their labors.

**Y**ou don't have to be a professional woodworker to work like one. And you might be surprised to learn that the differences between you and someone making money in the shop are surprisingly few. As it does with you,

efficient use of time and materials plays better tools, get-there-quicker finishes, a daily role in every pro's routine. They and less time spent sanding. To let you perform regular tool maintenance, just in on some of their secrets, we visited as you must. And they crave the same four accomplished makers of custom things we all do: lower material prices, furniture and cabinets. We learned a spectacularly figured wood, newer and thing or two, and so will you.

# Matt Seiler: Getting it done in the garage

**1.** Because Matt's tablesaw outfeed support doubles as his workbench, he often has to **get creative when building a large project** on that surface. To make outfeed room for ripping long boards, he built a

set of I-beam riser blocks, mounted on 2" swivel casters, shown on the *previous page*. With the project resting on the risers, Matt can roll it out of the way or simply feed boards beneath it.

**2.** Matt says dedicating wall space to perforated hardboard for hanging tools on metal hooks underutilizes that space.

Instead, **build cabinets and shelves:** The depth gives you greater storage, and the doors keep out dust.



**3.** **Plan your schedule around glue-ups** to make efficient use of time and clamps. Schedule big glue-ups for the end of the day to give them 8–12 hours in clamps; they'll be ready the next morning.

**4.** **Use lots of rubber mats** on your shop floor. Besides protecting any dropped tools or project parts from damage, they also cut down on foot, leg, and back pain from standing all day.



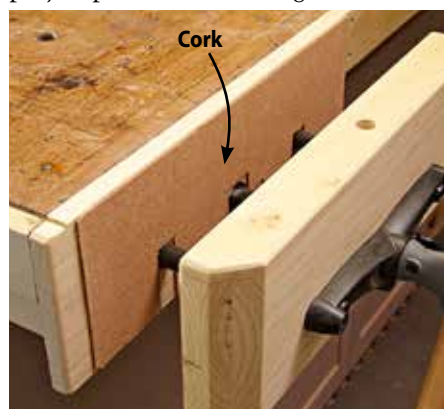
**5.** Anytime you're waiting on a clamp-up to dry before moving on to the next step in your project, **take advantage of the downtime** by sharpening a few tools or doing much-needed maintenance. Matt dedicates the first few hours of each Monday morning to tool maintenance, such as changing planer knives or aligning a tablesaw rip fence. That also gets him back into a woodworking frame of mind after the weekend.

**6.** **Buy supplies and tools on the Internet** to save time driving to a store; as a bonus, many sites don't charge sales tax. Take advantage of sites that offer free shipping for ordering a certain amount, even if it means adding to your order things that you use frequently but might not need at the moment, such as glue, sandpaper, screws, and finishes.

Matt custom-builds furniture from his two-car garage shop in suburban Chicago. Despite being in its fifth different layout, his shop still operates only on 110-volt circuits. But, Matt says, that keeps him "grounded," encouraging hand-tool use and often forcing him to think of more efficient ways to work. Visit his website at [mswoodcraft.com](http://mswoodcraft.com)



**7.** **Line the jaws of your bench vise** with thin, self-adhesive cork (available at office-supply and craft stores). The inexpensive sheets add grip and protect project parts from marring.



**8.** **Make efficient use of every square inch in your shop.** As shown *below*, Matt turned the base of his drill press 180° and then bolted it to the benchtop. Doing that freed up workpiece support space for his miter saw without affecting the functionality of the drill press.

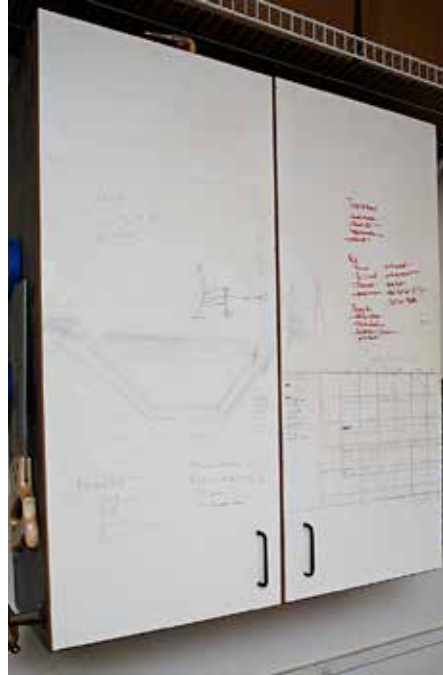


# Steve Lamberti: Good ideas no matter the shop size

**1. Keep control of large glue-ups.** When clamping up a large case by yourself, it's difficult to hold bar or pipe clamps in place until tightened, especially if you're using cauls, too. To get things under control, *lightly* (so you don't mar the wood) secure C-clamps or one-hand ratcheting clamps to the case and rest the cauls on them. Then simply tighten the larger clamps onto the cauls.



**2. Make shop-cabinet doors from melamine-coated particleboard or MDF.** Steve uses several of these in his shop for message boards, calendars, and even design doodles. Marker and pencil marks wipe off quickly with lacquer thinner and a rag.



Steve learned the ropes in cabinet shops and as a furniture-maker's apprentice before breaking out on his own. He now specializes in Sam Maloof-inspired rockers and—what else?—cabinets. When we met with Steve he was working from his garage in Pleasant Hill, Iowa, while building a 30×40' dedicated shop. See his furniture at [elementwoodworking.com](http://elementwoodworking.com)



**4. Store seldom-used tools and supplies up high** on wire shelves, taking advantage of wall space that seldom gets used. Label each box with its contents so you can quickly locate what you need.



**5. Label cans of finish or stain to match the project** you've just finished (or the customer's name, in Steve's case), especially if they're custom-blended finishes. This will help in the future if you need to make repairs to that project or finish another piece to match.



**3. Top your workbench** with a sheet of 1/4"-thick hardboard. Flat and easy to mark on, it absorbs cuts, scratches, and

stains. When the surface wears out, simply replace it. If it scoots around more than you'd like, tack it with brads.



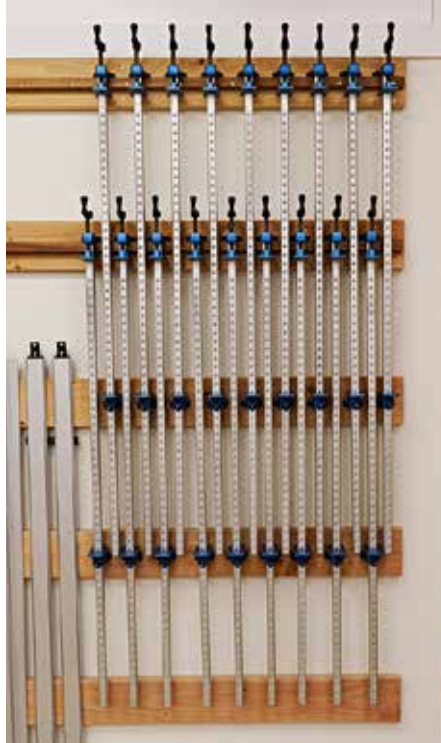
**6. Spray finish first thing in the morning** when there's no dust in the air. The night before, sweep and vacuum the floor and area around where you'll be spraying to avoid kicking up dust with your feet or the spray gun. Allow the finish to dry, or move the project to another location, before creating more dust.

# Todd Clippinger: A pro in two fields

**1. Keep jigs handy.** The more projects you build, the more jigs and templates you'll create and want to hold on to for future use. But where to store them all? Todd labels and hangs them on pegs along the tops of walls. This space goes unused in many shops.



**2. Economize wall space.** Rather than spacing bar and pipe clamps side-by-side on a single rack, Todd discovered he could hang a second rack, with the slots centered between the bars of the top clamps, and get more clamps in the same amount of wall space.



Todd worked as a trim carpenter, specializing in custom built-ins, before developing his skills as a furniture-maker and building his dream shop in Billings, Montana.



These days he takes on both types of jobs. He's also a prolific video blogger on his website: [americancraftsmanworkshop.com](http://americancraftsmanworkshop.com)

**3. Turn your tablesaw's extension table into a router table.** Whether you use a router lift or the router's base, this makes efficient use of a surface that too often ends up a *de facto* clutter catcher. And,

by building a simple router fence that clamps onto your tablesaw's rip fence, you'll be ready to rout in seconds. When not in use, stow the fence and lower the router below the table.



**4. Remove dried glue squeeze-out with a card scraper** before planing or sanding workpieces. This saves wear and tear on planer and jointer knives and sanding belts and discs, and the scraper won't gouge a board or lift grain the way a chisel can. Plus, you can quickly and easily sharpen a card scraper with no expense. (We have a video that shows how, available free for a limited time at [woodmagazine.com/freevideos](http://woodmagazine.com/freevideos))

**5. Use fast-drying finishes** (lacquer, shellac, or water-based polyurethane) when spraying projects in your shop so dust won't settle and become embedded.

# Matt Campbell: From DIY to pro

**1. When doing multiple identical clamps, mark the clamp locations** on the bench with masking tape. That makes

each subsequent assembly quicker to set up, saving you time and frustration, rather than scrambling while glue dries.



**2. Label project parts for easier identification** using masking tape and by writing letters or numbers on them. To avoid confusing parts that look similar, such

as rails and stiles for doors, use different colors of tape. This way, you won't accidentally cope the end of a stile or rout a profile on the wrong edge.



**3. Multitask when possible.** Working on two or three projects at a time might seem daunting or potentially confusing. But when possible, doing so can save

time by taking advantage of common machine setups for tasks such as cutting dados, box joints, or dovetails—jobs that take longer to set up than perform.

Growing up, Matt learned woodworking from his stepfather. An avid guitar player, Matt wanted to build his own. But after getting married, he began to build furniture and built-ins instead as he fixed up his first home. Over time, he began to sell pieces, and now builds commission furniture from his shop in Chattanooga, Tennessee. View his work at [nooga-wood.com](http://nooga-wood.com). (He still hasn't built that guitar, though.)



Photos: Dana Simpson

**4. When spray-finishing the inside of any case-type project, spray it with the back removed** to prevent overspray from bouncing back in your face. Spray the back separately—horizontally, to avoid runs—and attach it after finishing.



**5. Occasionally, cull your leftover wood** to a manageable amount. Don't let it build up and take over your shop. Throw out pieces you don't need or will likely never use, and organize the keepers so they're more accessible for future use. 🌳

Produced by **Bob Hunter**