

Handsaw Resources

If you know nothing about handsaws (and even if you know a lot), a good (if not quick) resource is the video from Shannon Rogers (The Renaissance Woodworker). Shannon has posted a barely edited video of his two-hour (+) class at Woodworking in America in September 2016. Shannon also runs “The Hand Tool School,” so he knows both the material and how to get it across. The full video can be found at: <http://www.renaissancewoodworker.com/handsaws-and-what-you-need-to-know/> Beware of demos – he’s a lefty.

Before you delve into any discussion of tooth geometry or sharpening, I recommend that you download the PDF <https://www.toolsforworkingwood.com/store/blog/86/title/Saw%20Spectra> (also referenced below). It’s an excellent intro to the nomenclature of saws. A slightly more detailed presentation is given by Isaac Smith at <http://www.blackburntools.com/articles/saw-tooth-geometry/index.html> which includes material about sloped gullets. Both are excellent.

Disstonian Institute: <http://www.disstonianinstitute.com/> “Online Reference of Disston Saws.” Pretty complete guide to Disston models, identification, etc. More general saw info in the section <http://www.disstonianinstitute.com/articles.html>

Pete Taran’s site: <http://www.vintagesaws.com/> Pete Taran (along with Patrick Leach) made the Independence dovetail saws, which later (1998) became the Lie-Nielsen dovetail saws. Chris Schwarz once detailed the history: <http://www.popularwoodworking.com/woodworking-blogs/chris-schwarz-blog/premium-backsaws-a-history-lesson>. Go to the Library tab for lots of info, a sharpening tutorial, a restoration tutorial and a lot more.

Isaac Smith’s site: <http://www.blackburntools.com/> Isaac builds saws and saw kits and offers all sorts of saw building supplies for sale. The “Articles & Reference” tab will take you to one of the most complete references on saw tooth geometry available anywhere. If you want info on all sorts of old tools, Isaac took over the Rose Tools Archive of scanned tool catalogs. This is truly an invaluable resource.

Two Guys in a Garage Tool Works: <http://www.tgiag.com/index.html> Dominic Greco’s saw-making site (along with his fellow engineer, Mike). You may know him as Blacky’s Boy on the WoodNet forums. If you have any desire to build your own saw, you’ve got to know these guys. They offer saw nuts and medallions, saw plates (with or without teeth punched to your specs), folded saw backs in both steel and brass, and scrapers and scraper stock. They have templates for lots of saw handle designs and their “How-to Articles” section is worthwhile.

Ron Bontz: <http://www.bontzsawworks.net/> Ron builds unusual and very beautiful saws, both on spec and to customer orders. He is apparently covered up at the moment, but the “Some Previous Saws” tab will blow your mind. He offers some kits and parts, and sharpening services (sometimes).

Matt Cianci: <http://www.thesawwright.com/index.html> Matt is a recognized master of all things saw related. He offers saw sharpening and restoration services, but prices and backlogs are both

large. He has a couple of videos out that might be useful, and he appears at Lie-Nielsen Hand Tool Events (which are free) with some regularity.

Bad Axe Tool Works: <http://www.badaxetoolworks.com/> Mark Harrell and his crew put out a wide range of premium backsaws. Their selection of handle, saw nut and blade back materials is unmatched. They offer a line of stock saws ready to ship, but every saw is available built to order in a reasonable amount of time. Some saws are also available through Lee Valley. Fully restored vintage saws are offered from time to time, along with restoration and sharpening services. The “Reviews and Articles” on the website has a ton of information on saw tooth geometry, plate and handle restoration, etc.

Mike Wenzloff: Mike was one of the pioneers of the boutique saw makers, and apparently makes a wonderful saw. He has been plagued by health and family problems, and delivery has been very sketchy for a very long time. The safest way to get a Wenzloff saw is to buy it from Lee Valley, where you can check stock as you order.

Tools for Working Wood: <https://www.toolsforworkingwood.com/store/index.php> Joel Moskowitz runs an excellent outfit catering primarily to the hand tool woodworker. They offer their own line of backsaws and a bowsaw, along with kits to build each of these saws. They have all sorts of traditional handsaws from other makers, Japanese saws, and specialty saws like their veneer saws. Saw sets, saw vises and other sharpening supplies are also available. The site includes a “Knowledge” tab which has sections entitled “Articles,” “Plans,” and “Downloads.” There is saw info in all three. The last section includes <https://www.toolsforworkingwood.com/store/blog/86/title/Saw%20Spectra>, a very complete and compact (two pages) guide to saw tooth geometry and its relation to saw performance.

Lee Valley: <http://www.leevalley.com/us/> Rob Lee and company offer their own line of innovative backsaws, their “molded spine” saws, and a wide range of saws by other makers. The molded spine saws are, by all accounts, very fine saws and extremely economical. They are too “zoomy” looking for some, but are solid performers at very reasonable prices. Sharpening supplies include a full range of Bahco saw files, needle files, saw sets, a saw file holder to help you control rake & fleam, and a jointer-edger for saws and scrapers.

Lie-Nielsen: <https://www.lie-nielsen.com/> L-N makes a range of backsaws and panel saws with the same level of precision and performance that their planes are known for. They also make a couple of sizes of big backsaws intended for miter box use. Beware their use of the word “tapered” in describing their saws. Generally, this term applied to a saw blade means that the saw plate is thickest at the tooth line and tapers toward the back (top of the blade) to avoid binding in the cut (which lets you get by with much less set). L-N uses the term to describe backsaws which are shorter at the toe (less blade height under the back) than they are at the heel (near the handle). The traditional term for this is a “canted” blade. L-N saw plates are constant thickness, not tapered, but some are indeed canted.

If your interest is in bow saws, a number of blades can be had from The Traditional Woodworker, <http://www.traditionalwoodworker.com/>, along with a few complete saws. They carry a fair range of other saws, too. Highland Woodworking, a complete source for

woodworking tools and supplies (<http://www.highlandwoodworking.com/>) carries several bow saws and blades, including a pretty little 12 inch British bowsaw. Isaac Smith, referenced above, has just started offering “Danish frame saw” parts, in the style of Tage Frid. He also sells big bow saw blades (and hardware) for “Roubo” style framed rip/veneer saws.

If you are in the market for vintage saws, it’s hard to beat Patrick Leach and his Superior Works, www.supertool.com/ or Josh Clark at Hyperkitten Tools, www.hyperkitten.com. Patrick puts out a monthly list (click on the “Old Tools” tab to sign up), and Josh posts new tools at random intervals. Both are excellent guys to deal with. Flea markets and antique malls usually have lots of handsaws, most well under \$10. Learn what to look for before going, and don’t settle for junk.

Two of the best videos available on hand sharpening are from Ron Herman (sold by Popular Woodworking) and the late Tom Law (carried by Highland Woodworking and probably others). Search using these guys’ names with “saw sharpening video.”

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