

BEVEL ME MITER

Bevel Cut 2018-05 May

I bought my first miter saw about ten years ago, a ten-inch version I probably got at HD. After a few years, I sold it and upgraded to a 12-inch version from Hitachi, a unit that was on sale at the time. I liked the ability to cut through thicker boards, but also got hooked on the LCD digital readout on the miter setting and the embedded, included laser. This design had a back fence that rotated out of the way when needed. I eventually noticed that when the left fence was “down” it did not seat flush with the rest of the fence, rather it angled forward; I was also annoyed that the power switch must have shorted out so that the trigger started the blade even when the switch was in the off position, possibly an accident waiting to happen.

I mention all this because in March, at the Journal of Light Construction trade show in Providence, I accidentally ran into the Miter Saw product manager from Hitachi. What an opportunity. He was very interested in my story; asked me to send pictures, and later called me to say he was sending me a new switch (the switch never arrived). He also told me that they no longer make miter saws with digital readouts and that the fences now slide out of the way rather than rotate. I don't remember what he said about lasers. After the show I began reading all about miter saws online – both ads and numerous product reviews. Without trying, you can find many articles on “the best miter saw.”

It's also surprising, or maybe not surprising at all, at the price range available. As I am writing this column Harbor Freight has a 10-inch sliding compound miter saw on sale for \$89.99. Woodcraft is selling the Festool Kapex KS120 EB sliding compound miter (double bevel, 10-inch blade) saw for \$1475.

So, I'm still deciding on what to buy. I made the family decision tree to crystallize the options. A bigger blade gets you to thicker cuts; a slider allows longer cuts, although with a table saw I'm not sure I need longer cuts. Also, there is some controversy on slider designs. Most saws on the market, including Festool, use rails; Bosch and others use some type of articulated arm that some claim provides a more reliable or straight path as well as a more compact design. And of course, a double bevel capability means you don't have to worry about cutting boards upside down and backwards.

Whatever you buy, other than Festool, universal advice is to throw away the included blade and buy a good one. As Kurt Vonnegut said, “and so it goes.”

