

Woodworking Magazine Weblog Best \$9 Handsaw
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Sometimes the laws of time, space and economics get bent. And, in the case of two little Zona saws I've been testing this week in the shop, sometimes these laws get broken.

A couple weeks ago I picked up the latest Lee Valley catalog and there was a new listing for a pair of razor saws, made in the United States, that were quite inexpensive. The bigger one is a 24 tpi backsaw with a 6-1/2" long blade, 1-3/4" maximum depth of cut, and a straight handle with a shiny red finish. The teeth are filed rip and cut on the pull stroke; the sawplate is .01" thick. The smaller saw has eleventy billion tpi (actually 52 tpi) with a 4-1/2"-long blade, 3/8" depth of cut, and a straight handle with a not-as-nice brownish finish. I assume the teeth are cut rip (you cannot find fleam on them at 30x) and they cut on the pull stroke as well. The sawplate is .008" thick, according to my calipers.

Here is the kicker. The big saw is \$8.95. The little one is \$4.95. (Posted 11/15/2006)

Get out your credit cards, because Senior Editor Robert Lang and I were both floored by how sweet these saws are. Both of the saws cut slowly, which is to be expected, but the surface finish left behind is so clean that it shone like it had been planed. And when used in white oak (a difficult ring-porous wood for fine saws) the saws excelled. They both severed the surface fibers cleanly with no tearing whatsoever.

I used both saws to trim up a bunch of muntin material and found that I could get right on the pencil line and cut so cleanly that I generally didn't have to shoot the edge for fitting or appearance. Overall, I'd rate the fit and finish on these tools to be equal to a mid-range Japanese



saw, which is to say, quite good. The handle on the larger saw is well-finished and this saw is particularly well-balanced. I'm not as wild about the finish on the handle of the smaller saw and it feels more like you are holding a round dowel than a saw handle. But at \$5, I should pipe down. The steel backs of both saws are folded over the blades

I've seen these Zona saws in some stores and at shows for years and never gave them a second thought. They looked like saws for model makers – people who need to cut little balsa parts. And that's indeed one of the big markets for these tools. But the saws are excellent to have on hand (at this price, why not?) for detail work. Need to cut stringing or inlay banding? These saws will do the job. Trim a dowel. Define the limits of a hinge mortise. Rip or crosscut wedges before driving them into a joint.

Zona is, perhaps surprisingly, a U.S. company based in Bethel, Conn. According to the company's web site, Zona was founded in Arizona prior to 1955. In 1991, Zona joined the Blackstone Industries Inc. group of tools, which also includes the Olson Saw Co. (which makes my favorite coping saw); the Foredom Electric Co., which makes the flexible shaft rotary tools for carving, dentistry and jewelry; and the Edge Finisher Co., which makes plastic fabricating equipment.

A quick dip into Zona's web site indicates the company makes a wide range of small-scale saws in addition to these two excellent specimens. You should check it out yourself. I see a few more saws there that I would like to try. And at those prices, even a writer can easily afford them.

So sometimes you do get more than what you pay for.

— Christopher Schwarz

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