

TUNING UP A VENEER SAW

Once at a wood-working show, I witnessed Frank Pollaro making up veneered chess boards. He must have produced more than 30 pieces and each was perfect. The seams were tight and clean; there was no tear-out or split veneer. What impressed me most was that he was getting these results straight from his veneer saw, with no fussing or cleaning up on a shooting board later. After that, I was determined to improve the performance of mine.

Here are the steps I take to “soup up” a veneer saw. It’s not necessary to do this to learn veneering, but it helps.



1 Straighten the tang. Most veneer saws have an uncomfortable hang (the angle of the handle to the blade). I found that by lowering the handle and placing it more in line with the saw blade, I got better control and improved results with less pressure.

After taking apart the saw, I placed the spine in a vise and with vise grips, gently straightened the tang. Be careful. The metal typically used for this part is soft and susceptible to breaking.



2 Flatten the spine. Any bumps or unevenness of the spine against the blade may result in a curved blade that won’t easily cut to a straight line. To establish a flat spine, flatten the back of the spine where it attaches to the blade on a coarse sharpening stone.



3 Flatten the back of the blade. On the same stone, flatten the back of the saw blade. You may want to advance to finer grit stones for a more polished blade. I find a smoother blade is easier to keep clean and rust-free.



4 Bevel the cutting edge. I use a 6” mill file to bevel the cutting edge on one side. Holding the file at an angle and working across the teeth, gently file until a bevel extends from the points to the gullets of the teeth. This (step) produces slender teeth that glide through veneer.



5 File the teeth. Using a 4” double extra-slim tapered saw file, I gently bring each tooth up to a nice point. I keep the file at 90° to the teeth and file it just like a rip saw. The exact angle of the teeth isn’t as important as their sharpness, so if your first effort isn’t perfect, don’t worry.

6 Replace the handle. This step is optional but I like to replace the short stubby grip with a slender, longer turned handle that I find easier and more comfortable to hold.

—MR

