

11/2005

Tom Bleasdale of Phoenix submitted the following customer review of DMT diamond stones and Norton water stones. We appreciate customer reviews and if you would like to submit a review of any of our products please contact us.

My formal introduction to sharpening hand tools was in the early seventies. About 1973, I invested a year learning to make violins, violas and guitars. At that time I met Owen Shaw, a luthier from England. Both of us worked together in the old Chickering piano factory in Boston, Massachusetts. To do our work, very sharp tools were needed! I bought a medium sized white Washita stone and a black hard Arkansas. I still have both stones and I loved them. Owen taught me the traditional back and forth technique plus a figure eight sharpening method. We used light oil on the stones as a lubricant. It was slow and a bit messy, but I had sharp tools. As I re-call, Owen had several sharpening guides that I learned on, but, as I learned, I outgrew them.

Today, when I sharpen hand tools I use a combination of DMT diamond stones and Norton waterstones. My sharpening techniques have evolved through my own woodworking experience and in teaching other people to sharpen.

The combination of diamond stones and waterstones offers many benefits:

- Diamonds are fast and clean for creating the geometry that a tool needs
- The coarsest diamond stones can be used in place of a grinder for shaping an edge or removing a deep nick, without risking the temper of an expensive chisel or plane blade.
- Diamonds have the most longevity and can be used to flatten all other stones, both natural and manmade, regardless of their hardness.
- The Norton waterstones are harder than most waterstones; they cut quickly and need to be flattened less often.
- The Norton 8000 stone quickly produces a mirror finish and has a very tactile feel. You can feel it cutting and polishing beneath the heaviest blade.

Over the years I have acquired at least thirty different stones, sandpaper and plate glass, diamond paste and a hundred pound black granite surface plate. There are many ways to sharpen! Yet, I find myself turning to the diamonds and waterstones when I want the best possible edge quickly.

I must say that my particular style of sharpening is different than most. I sharpen sideways. For example, if my number 8 Bedrock plane is leaving tiny parallel raised tracks on the board I am flattening then I remove the blade and start working the cutting face on my coarse diamond stone. I keep the blade parallel to the sides of the large plate, not at a right-angle. That allows me about two and five-eighths inches of control (the width of the blade) versus about three-eighths if I pushed it back and forth.

I generally sharpen without the aid of guides because I have practiced a great deal and it is faster for me. However, I do use guides at times on narrow chisels. Through practice I have come to trust my hand and eye. Every few strokes I will check the geometry. As soon as I have created a fine burr I move to my fine diamond stone. I am still working only on the cutting face. I should note that the backs of all my cutting tools are flat and mirror polished. Flattening and polishing the backs of plane and chisel blades is always necessary to achieve sharpness. Depending on the condition of the blade, this may take some time, but you need to do it only once.

After some light work with the fine diamond I'll gently remove the burr with my Norton waterstone then again work the cutting face till I have another fine burr. Switching from diamond stones, I'll start work on my 8000 Norton waterstone. The 8000 stone is kept flat with my coarse diamond stone. After spritzing the 8000 stone with water, I polish the cutting edge of the blade with ten strokes and turn the blade over. Remember the burr? I push the blade back very lightly over the stone and observe a tiny black line following the blade, like a spider web. That is the burr. My aim is to gently polish it away not break it off

I do five or six strokes on the back then turn the blade over and repeat the polishing process, counting to myself. Eight on the front, ten on the back until the stone is almost dry. I clean the blade and check it. The blade will be extremely sharp and capable of producing see through shavings and polished wood. That is where I want it. I clean and cover the stones after each use.

Normally the entire process is more meditation than work for me. I love to sharpen tools. It brings joy to me to have a tool reach its full potential.

I've found that if I am relaxed yet focused I do my best work. My stance while sharpening is much the same as for sawing and planing. I use as much of the length of the stone as possible. If you do free hand sharpening notice your breath as you work. When I taught hand sharpening, I noticed people got so intent they literally forget to breathe. Holding your breath is the enemy of relaxed work or play! Have fun; relax and enjoy your tools and life.

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