

Perfectly Flat Planes



Q I'm looking at the Record jointer plane in your catalog and my question is, how can I be sure I get a plane with a perfectly flat sole? I don't know any local machine shops where I could have the sole machined correctly. Are Record's planes flat enough for me to use, or can you have one machined for me?

A This might sound sacrilegious, but here we go: plane soles don't have to be flat. They just have to work. Planes are named for what they're supposed to do, not for what they're supposed to be. As they arrive from the factory, most planes are quite capable of cutting flat planes on a piece of wood (after sharpening, of course), even though a careful examination might show the sole isn't perfectly flat. Conversely, it's absolutely easy to produce an out-of-flat piece of wood using a very flat-soled plane. It's the woodworker who makes woodworking happen, after all, and we encourage you to remember that excellent work is far more likely to result from the development and application of judgement, dexterity and care than from having tools milled to inhumanly low tolerances.

To be sure, there's nothing wrong with wanting your jointer plane's sole to be flat—as long as you know it isn't necessary for you to make straight, tight, flawless joints. Nor is there anything at all wrong with beautiful, precisely machined tools (as anybody who owns a Lie-Nielsen plane can attest). Striving to perfect your plane sole is as fine a way as any to pursue happiness, but it would be a shame to let something as trivial as five or ten thousandths of an inch keep you from enjoying one of the most rewarding tools in all of woodworking.