

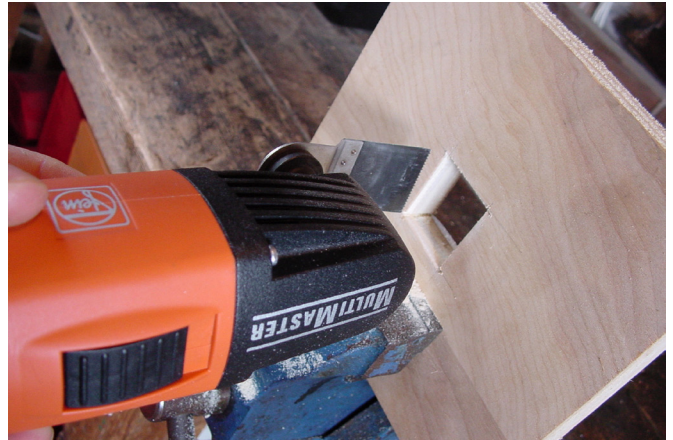
DETAIL SANDERS

A KEY TOOL FOR WOOD REFINISHING

Summer is the season you're most likely to refinish outdoor trim, door frames, window sashes and finicky woodwork of all kinds, and detail sanders are tools I've come to rely on for this kind of work. That's because they're so much better than fooling around by hand with little pieces of folded sandpaper in tight quarters. Current detail sanders have been refined to the point where they deliver pro-grade results very quickly. That said, there still are tricks you need to apply to get the best possible results.

“ Abrasives mark window glass easily and permanently, as I know from my own mistakes. ”

Regardless of the detail sander you choose, sandpaper is an issue. All power tool companies that make these machines also offer little triangular pieces of Velcro-backed sandpaper, but these are expensive and not always readily available. My solution is to buy a roll of Velcro backed sandpaper (80- and 120-grit are all I ever need), then cut the triangles to fit the sanding head. Simply unroll three or four inches of sandpaper, place the tool's Velcro-backed sanding head on top, then trim around the triangular pad with scissors. The abrasive surface on all detail sanders is small, so these triangles clog up quickly, especially when sanding off old paint or varnish. You'll constantly be putting new paper on, so economy matters. I buy rolls of



In addition to sanding, this Fein Multimaster can also cut wood and metal, plus remove tile grout. Photo credit: Steve Maxwell

Velcro-backed sandpaper at Stockroom Supply (www.stockroomsupply.com; 877-287-5017).

If you're sanding wooden window frames, be careful not to scratch the glass with the edge of the triangular detail sanding pad. Abrasives mark window glass easily and permanently, as I know from my own mistakes. Moderately smooth surfaces create the most durable finishes on exterior wood, so don't sand with anything finer than 100- or 120-grit. Also, you'll find rounding over sharp edges and corners slightly helps the new finish last longer. Sharp corners are often the place where coatings spread out more thinly during application, and this thin film layer fails soonest while causing neighbouring areas to peel prematurely. A piece of hand-held sandpaper works best for gently rounding sharp spots.

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I especially like detail sanders that include contour sanding attachments. These are small blocks of hard rubber – convex, concave, pointed and flat – that fit into a holder that bolts to the business end of the tool. Wrap sandpaper around the rubber block and you can use the tool to smoothen and strip most kinds of curved molding profiles. Just be careful not to run the variable speed tool faster than about half throttle. Any more than this and the rubber block is liable to jiggle loose from the holder in my experience.

*“ Never fixed a door before?
No worries. Give it a try and see
how most anyone can succeed. ”*

Also, don't be afraid to combine the use of a detail sander for specific parts of a job, alongside a larger random orbit sander or finishing sander for flat areas. Detail sanders only make sense in close quarters; they're unnecessarily slow on flat surfaces.

Three years ago, Bosch came out with the first 12-volt cordless detail sander, and other manufacturers have followed suit. Battery operation definitely boosts convenience, yet these tools are still powerful enough for light or medium-duty applications. These days I do most of my detail sanding with cordless models, using corded models for tougher jobs where more material needs to be removed. You'll also find that the best detail sanders are made to accept a range of other attachments for cutting and grinding. To see a range of multi-purpose



Bosch's new 12-volt cordless detail sander is convenient yet powerful. Here the tool's being used to strip varnish from a corner where a full-size sander couldn't reach.

*Photo credit:
Steve Maxwell*

models in action, check out my video at www.SteveMaxwell.ca/multi-tools-video

To be honest, I really don't know what I'd do without my detail sanders. When regular sanders are just too big to sneak in and get the job done, these little hardworking helpers always come through with an efficiency that makes refinishing a practical proposition.

Steve Maxwell, syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist, has shared his DIY tips, how-to videos and product reviews since 1988. Follow "Canada's Handiest Man" at SteveMaxwell.ca, Facebook or @Maxwells_Tips on Twitter.

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