

The Domino DF 500 Q Changes the Rules of Woodworking Joinery

When it comes to joinery, you have two basic kinds. On one hand you have the traditional, strong and time-consuming joints (think dovetails). On the other hand, you have the joints that are fast to make but are frowned upon by purists (think biscuits or pocket screws).

With the release of the Festool Domino DF 500 Q system, those old rules have just been chucked into the dumpster. The Domino is a hand-held tool that cuts perfect mortises in your work. A little glue and a loose tenon (which resembles a domino) completes the joint. In my 14 years of working wood, it is the fastest, easiest and most accurate way to cut this traditional joint that I have ever used (and I've used them all).

The Domino is as swift as a biscuit joiner but makes joints as strong as you could ever want. The trick is the machine's bit and how it moves when the tool is on. The bit (which is available in 5, 6, 8 and 10mm diameters) spins at 25,500 rpm and moves left to right as it plunges into the work. A single four-second plunge creates a mortise that is perfectly sized for one of the beech Dominos, which come in five sizes at press time.

Loose-tenon joinery is nothing new, but what is different about the Domino DF 500 Q is that you can do such a traditional and strong joint with little (or no) marking on the work. And you can work anywhere on a board and at any angle. Plus, because the Domino is hand-held, you can take the tool to the work (always my preference) rather than moving large workpieces over a tiny cutter in a table saw or router table. Plus you can put a mortise in places no biscuit joiner can go, such as into the end of a 1"-wide rail.



Dominos come in five sizes: 5, 6, 8 and 10mm thicknesses and 30, 40 and 50mm lengths.



SPECIFICATIONS

Festool Domino DF 500 Q

Street price: \$700 (\$660 until May 31, 2007)

Max depth of cut: 1³/₃₂" (28mm)

Max width of cut: 1"

Fence: 0° to 90°

Performance: ●●●●●

Price range: \$\$\$\$

Festool USA: 888-337-8600 or
festoolusa.com

To make a joint, you place your two workpieces against one another and draw a single line across the joint at the location where you want the mortises to go. Set the tool to make a mortise of the desired depth and width (it's easy, just a dial and a switch). Then you line up the tool's cursor with your pencil line, turn on the tool and make a plunge cut.

You can even skip some marking chores by using the tool's built-in retractable pins. These allow you to bore mortises at a fixed distance from the ends of boards that are wider than 2¹/₂" wide without marking (we're going to post a demonstration of this on our blog at popularwoodworking.com).



The LA-DF 500 accessory snaps on the fence and allows you make mortises on the ends of thin rails.

All told, if you have ever used a biscuit joiner you will be immediately at home with the Domino. And there are many tricks to use the machine in surprising ways (again, check out our blog for details).

Are there downsides to the tool? All the controls are in metric, so get a metric ruler to guide your early efforts with the tool. And though the tool is safer than most, you do need to be more concerned about safety with this tool than with a biscuit joiner because the bit plunges deep into the work.

Some people will be put off by the price (\$700), but the tool is well made and is actually less expensive than many mortise-and-tenon systems that use a router plus a jig (or a table saw plus a mortiser) for the joint.

After just a few weeks of use, I was completely sold on the tool. Now there is no excuse not to use a mortise-and-tenon joint.

— Christopher Schwarz

For more information, circle #114 on Free Information Card.