

## Deck Builder's Hammer

**Titanium 12-Ounce Framing Hammer**  
**Stiletto Titanium Tools**  
**800.987.1849**  
**stiletto.com**  
**List price: \$105**

by Mark Clement



Do deck builders really need axe-handle hammers? After all, we're not framing walls, where a curved handle would enable us to swing around the end of the plate more efficiently. And even if we were, chances are good that we'd be using a nail gun instead of a hammer. But it turns out that even for a deck builder, Stiletto's 12-ounce, 18-inch framer's hammer is pretty handy.

### Axe-like Claw

I wanted to try an axe-handle hammer in the first place because I was having trouble slamming my straight-handled hammer into my toolbelt's hammer loop, which is located on my right hip behind my tool pouch. It occurred to me that an axe-handle could work as a sort of hook, making it easier to snag the loop.

That turned out to be true, though it normally wouldn't be enough reason for me to drop a ton of money on a new hammer. But this hammer also has a claw with a very gradual "fetch" to it. I rarely pull nails with my hammer; instead, I split, pry, and pierce with it, mostly during demolition. The Stiletto head is more hatchet than claw, perfect for the way I use a hammer.

As a bonus, the hickory handle fits my hand so well it almost makes me want to go back to hand-nailing.

### Lightweight but Powerful

The 18-inch handle is a little long, but I don't mind; the lightweight titanium head more than makes up for it. Stiletto claims that a hammer with a 12-ounce titanium head has the same driving force as a 21-ounce steel hammer, with less shock. I don't know if that's true, but without question this hammer feels lighter in the loop, where my hammer hangs most of the day—and where it does the most damage to my body. The lighter hammer is also easier to swing, yet I can still crush nails with it and plunge the claw where it needs to go.

The Titanium costs about \$50 more than the stainless steel version—no small amount of money for a carpenter—but (in my view) it pays for itself the first day. And if you're looking for a bigger—or smaller—hammer, versions with longer and shorter handles (straight or curved) are available, with 10-ounce, 14-ounce, and 16-ounce heads.

*Contributing editor Mark Clement is a deck builder and writer in Ambler, Pa.*

## Smart-Bit Deck Screw Depth Setter

**SmartBit Depth Setter**  
**Starborn Industries**  
**800.596.7747**  
**starbornindustries.com**  
**Web price: \$21**

by Andrew Wormer

For maximum holding power—and as a demonstration of good craftsmanship—face fasteners should be driven so that their heads are flush with the surface of the board. This isn't as easy as it sounds, though, especially when you're driving deck screws into wet pressure-treated decking, or stainless steel trim-head screws into cellular-PVC trim. It

takes a little finesse to make sure the screws don't sink too deeply, and that takes time.

Starborn's Smart-Bit Depth Setter is a nifty little drill accessory that allows you to set a consistent screw depth. I used it to drive different-sized Phillips-head and square-drive screws into treated southern yellow pine, red cedar, and even some

## TOOL KIT | Smart-Bit Screw Depth Setter

very-low-density PVC trim, and found that it worked as advertised.

It's adjustable, which allows you to set the screw depth; and it seems robustly-

built, with metal rather than plastic parts. The tool also has a free-spinning stop collar with a rubber O-ring to prevent the depth setter from marring the surface of

the board around the screw. I suspect that the O-ring will be one of the first wear-points, but replacement stop collars are available from Starborn.

When you have a screw gun set up with a Smart-Bit Depth Setter, you will probably want another gun on hand in case you need to back a screw out. The tool is not recommended for use with impact drivers—because the impact motion tends to loosen the locking nut, according to the Starborn representative I spoke with. It seemed to work fine in my impact driver, but I didn't drive very many screws with it.

The \$21 tool will probably shave a second or two per screw off your installation time, so even if it lasts for only a few decks, that's money in your pocket—along with a better-looking deck for your customers. ❖

*Andrew Wormer is the editor of PDB.*



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