



September 2001

# Router Tables

A router is probably the most versatile and accurate woodworking machine in your shop. To make the most of it, however, you need the right router table. This indispensable shop fixture opens up a world of possibilities for joinery, grooves, rabbets, panel raising and edge-forming operations. A router table doesn't have to be expensive or overly fancy

to get the job done. It can be as simple as a piece of plywood with a notched board for a fence. In fact, many woodworkers build their own. The reason to buy a commercial table is for the accuracy and conveniences manufacturers build into them. In this tool review, we tested nine router tables for the budget-minded woodworker — all priced under \$300.



Nine router tables compete for top honors.  
Which one is best for you?



## WHAT'S IMPORTANT

All router tables aren't created equal. We found some significant differences in several key aspects. We'll talk about those in a minute when we get to the individual table reviews. But overall, here are a few things to consider when buying a router table.

**TOP.** A router table top needs to be very flat for the most demanding work, where slight variations could change the angle of the workpiece or the depth of cut. Overall, the tables in this test scored high in flatness.

The size of top is also important. Larger tops provide more support, but for most operations, smaller tops work just fine.

**FENCE.** A good router table will have an easily adjustable fence with features such as a dust collection port, a bit guard, and an array of hold-downs, jointing shims, and stops.

We prefer fences that clamp to the edges of the table top rather than attach by bolts through slots. They're easier to remove, and there aren't any sharp edges to "catch" a workpiece.

**BASEPLATE.** Many commercial router tables have a drop-in router

baseplate that fits into a rabbeted recess in the top. Baseplates make bit-changing easier, especially if you're using a plunge router in your table. They also make it easier to mount and remove the router.

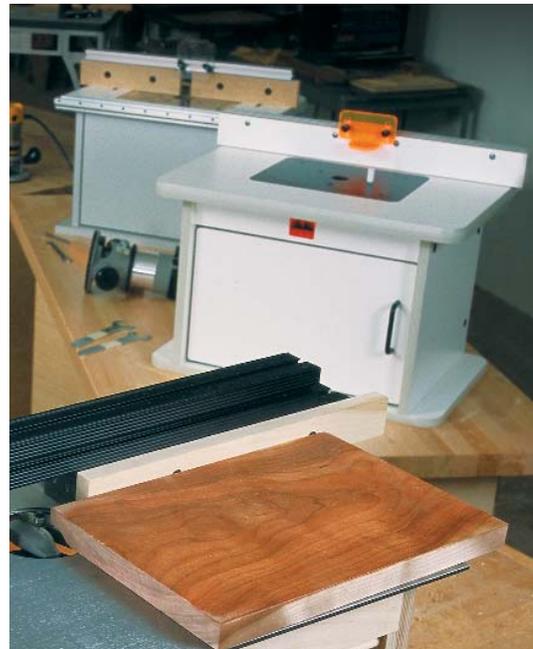
Most of the baseplates on our test models came with concentric inserts for added support close to the bit. Phenolic baseplates resist sagging better than acrylic ones, but you can't see through them.

**BENCHTOP/FLOOR-MODEL.** The word "benchtop" is a bit misleading. For safety and comfort, a benchtop table should be mounted on a stand with the *top surface* at workbench height. Benchtop tables are more portable than floor-models, but they don't have the unlimited router height clearance that full-height tables do. If you plan to use a large plunge router in your table, make sure there's enough headroom.

Some of the benchtop tables had enclosed stands. These cut the noise by a few decibels, but the enclosed space can lead to overheating problems. We suggest installing an additional dust port in the enclosed stand

to keep air circulating through it.

**FEATURES.** Many router table manufacturers offer quite an array of optional accessories that you can use to customize your table. If the models shown here don't have every feature you want, check with the manufacturer for available options.



## TWO INNOVATIONS THAT BREAK THE MOLD

Router tables have come a long way since they first started to appear in woodworking shops. With two of the models tested, we found features that definitely broke the mold.

**MOUNTING THE ROUTER.** One of the most innovative ideas is the method that's used to mount the router to the

Veritas router table. Underneath the table is a unique clamping mechanism that lets you mount the router (or remove it from the table) in a matter of seconds (*Photo a. below*). And don't worry if you have a router with an irregular-shaped base. This quick-change clamp can be adjusted to fit any router base.

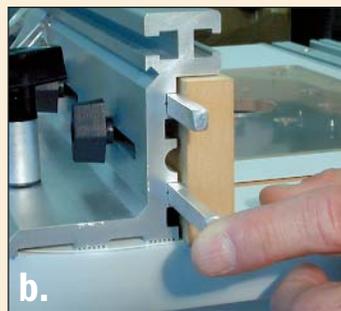
**JOINTING.** Although several of the router tables could be set up to joint the edge of a board, one model in particular had a terrific new twist. But before getting to that, here's a quick overview of jointing on a router table.

The idea is to mount a straight bit in the router and then, with the edge of the board riding against the fence, make a pass. To provide support for the workpiece *after* the material has been removed, the outfeed part of the fence has to be shimmed out a bit.

To accomplish this, the fence on the Bench Dog router table has two aluminum bars that are used to shim the fence (*Photo b.*). By placing the bars in a different pair of fence slots, you can change the amount of offset.



**a.** A unique, quick-clamp mechanism on the Veritas router table lets you mount or remove the router in seconds.



**b.** For jointing, two aluminum bars are used to shim the Bench Dog fence.

## VERITAS



Everything about this table is intelligently designed. A unique router-mounting clamp system makes it easy to mount any



router quickly and firmly without removing the baseplate. The smooth steel top tilts up for bit changing and flips over to mount the

router. Three cam-shaped table inserts drop easily into the table opening and are tightened with a spanner wrench. There isn't a miter gauge slot.

The double-decker split fences are movable and feature a micrometer-style gauge to set positions within .001". You'll need some tools to make adjustments, but Veritas has included a nifty 4-in-1 tool to help.

Options include hold-downs, a right-angle fence for cross-feed routing, a magnetic dust collection chute, a pin router attachment, and blade guards.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$269  
**Table Size:** 24" x 16"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 16"  
**Top:** Steel  
**Weight:** 40 lbs.

**Virtues:** Sturdy and accurate; unique router mount; micrometer positioner; instructional video.

**Vices:** Blade guard and dust chute not included; fence requires tools to adjust.

**Verdict:** An innovative, very user-friendly table; our unanimous choice for best in test.

## WOODHAVEN BENCHTOP



Woodhaven's design expertise and attention to detail are evident in this slick benchtop router table. Although it took



2½ hours to assemble, it was worth the time. The table is solid as a rock, with a great fence, a dead-flat table, a phenolic baseplate with snap-in insert rings, and a superior plate-leveling system.

You can have the plate pre-drilled for almost any router at no additional charge.

The fence clamps comfortably to the table top. This makes it easy to remove, and it's free of slots. Extruded fence channels accept Woodhaven's many optional accessories.

On the minus side, the top vibrates when the router is running, although not enough to affect accuracy. We also would have preferred to see a dust collection port in the enclosed base, but it's easy enough to install one yourself.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$290  
**Table Size:** 23<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 19"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 14<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"  
**Top:** Laminate on MDF  
**Weight:** 52 lbs.

**Virtues:** Excellent fit and finish; unique snap-in insert rings; slick fence system.

**Vices:** Need screwdriver to adjust fence; top vibrates; no dust port in cabinet.

**Verdict:** A solid, well-made product with all the bases covered; plenty of add-ons available.

## BENCHDOG RT100



Compact and solid, this benchtop table comes with a lot of standard bells and whistles. Some of these include a beefy T-slot/miter-gauge



extrusion, a dead-flat fence that's perfectly square, and an enclosed stand. The miter gauge slot is adjustable with set screws that take up any slop in the fit of the miter gauge's bar.

Our test model had a 3/8"-thick, clear acrylic baseplate with a 2" hole. Interchangeable insert rings aren't available. For different-sized openings, you'll need separate baseplates.

The split-fence adjustment knobs were cramped, but the main knobs that secure the fence to the table were accessible and comfortable.

Besides the solid construction and the full-featured fence, we were especially impressed with the clever aluminum jointing shims. These offset the outfeed fence quickly and positively for jointing.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$199  
**Table Size:** 22" x 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"  
**Top:** Laminate on MDF  
**Weight:** 35 lbs.

**Virtues:** Flat, solid and nicely made; excellent fence and miter gauge extrusions.

**Vices:** Minimal router headroom; fence knobs crowded; no dust port in cabinet.

**Verdict:** Best value in test, with all the features needed in a compact and affordable package.

## At A Glance:

**Price:** \$273  
**Table Size:** 31<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 24"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"  
**Top:** Laminate on MDF  
**Weight:** 42 lbs. (w/stand)

**Virtues:** Full-height; large table surface; sturdy base, convenient fence adjustments.

**Vices:** Featherboard hold-down only works for material up to <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" thick.

**Verdict:** A sturdy, full-featured and workman-like table that is nicely designed and easy to use.



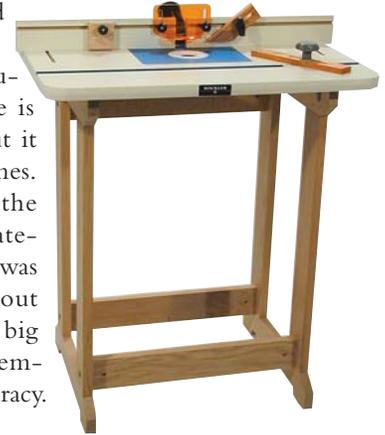
## ROCKLER

This floor-model table has a full-size top and all the important features. We tested it with a solid oak stand. A pine stand and a metal leg set are also available. The top has an aluminum miter gauge slot that accepts a standard <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" miter gauge bar. Rockler offers an optional wooden featherboard that locks in the slot with a twist of a plastic knob.

The fence — a simple, straight aluminum angle extrusion — attaches to the top with carriage bolts and large, comfortable knobs. It has two movable subfences with T-slots in the front

for a blade shield and an optional featherboard and stop block.

A drop-in aluminum baseplate is flat and rigid, but it vibrates and whines. The hole in the plastic template-guide insert ring was off-center by about <sup>1</sup>/<sub>32</sub>". This was a big drawback for template routing accuracy.



## At A Glance:

**Price:** \$220  
**Table Size:** 24" x 19<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 13"  
**Top:** Laminate on MDF  
**Weight:** 41 lbs.

**Virtues:** Solid cabinet with enclosed base that cuts noise; long fence.

**Vices:** Sharp edges and corners on top; limited router headroom.

**Verdict:** A solid, compact router table with a square, straight fence and a catalog full of options.



## EAGLE RT2000

Eagle America's entry-level table includes all the basic features you need. It also has the longest fence of the benchtop models tested.

The edges of the RT 2000's top are edge-banded with laminate, so they weren't as user-friendly as others with vinyl T-molding. Apart from a dip near the miter gauge slot, the top was flat and solid. A \$20 baseplate with four insert rings is available.

The enclosed cabinet can be fitted with an optional dust-collection pickup. You also have to drill the exit hole for your router's power cord.

The fence clamps to the sides of the table for fast removal.

The extruded aluminum fence is fitted with MDF subfences and a dust collection port. The subfences are slotted to accept Eagle's wide selection of featherboards, stops and guards. High-rise subfences are also available for panel-raising and edge-grooving operations.



## At A Glance:

**Price:** \$299  
**Table Size:** 27" x 18"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"  
**Top:** Die-Cast Aluminum  
**Weight:** 52 lbs.

**Virtues:** Sturdy; good plate-leveling system; versatile fence; safety switch.

**Vices:** Ribbed table surface isn't user-friendly; insert rings don't sit flush. Accuracy could be better.

**Verdict:** A solid, feature-packed table that can serve as a benchtop or floor model.



## CRAFTSMAN 26464

This latest router table from Craftsman is a full-featured benchtop model. We tested it with an optional steel floor stand. The cast aluminum top is coated with a clear anti-friction finish to prevent marring. A drop-in baseplate, drilled to fit all 1997 and later Craftsman routers, comes with three plastic insert rings. For other routers, you'll need the optional universal baseplate.

The three-piece aluminum fence is easy to adjust and has T-tracks for mounting a large, plastic featherboard, which comes standard with the floor-

model version. Reversing the out-feed fence offsets it <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" for jointing operations.

The heavy-duty, clear, plastic bit guard enhances dust collection and keeps hands away from the bit. It can be flipped out of the way for miter-gauge operations and taller workpieces.

This table comes with a standard two-outlet safety switch, so you can turn on the router and a shop vacuum simultaneously.



## WOODSTOCK REBEL



The Rebel is a lightweight aluminum benchtop router table with a sturdy, bolt-together, cast aluminum stand.

The table is flat, the split fences are square to it, and the lock-down knobs can be accessed easily. But it's tedious to adjust both fence sections each time we changed the position of the fence. So we'd



suggest a one-piece subfence to solve this problem.

We had to drill the holes in the aluminum baseplate to mount our router, but Woodstock offers custom-drilled plates for an extra charge. We had to remove about  $\frac{1}{32}$ " from the plastic insert ring's flange so it would sit flush with the table.

The overarm blade guard doubles for dust pick-up. But it isn't very effective for either purpose when the fences are close to the bit. It also requires a 3"-dia. flexible hose and clamp to connect to the opening.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$188  
**Table Size:** 24" x 18"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 17"  
**Top:** Cast Aluminum  
**Weight:** 35 lbs.

**Virtues:** Rock-solid yet lightweight; flat table surface; rigid aluminum baseplate.

**Vices:** Separate fences tedious to adjust, blade guard not always usable.

**Verdict:** A solid and accurately machined table, without many frills or accessories.

## JESADA



This is Jesada's only router table for under \$300. It's a floor-model table with a full-size top, a simple extruded aluminum fence, and a sturdy drop-in baseplate that must be drilled to accommodate your router. The baseplate comes standard with two nested insert rings, but the outer ring stands about .010" proud of the plate surface.



The leg set included consists of two rather flimsy sheet-metal leg units that require a plywood shelf and rails for stability. Once braced, the table is quite rigid.

You'll need to rout slots in the table top to attach the fence. This isn't difficult, but you'll need a  $\frac{3}{8}$ " straight bit and edge guide (no instructions or dimensions included).

We had mixed feelings about the cam-lock levers that held the fence in place. They hold securely enough, but their sharp edges and corners make them uncomfortable to operate.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$240  
**Table Size:** 31 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 24"  
**Under Table Clearance:** 22 $\frac{11}{16}$ "  
**Top:** Laminate on MDF  
**Weight:** 46 lbs.

**Virtues:** Large, floor-model table with a straight fence.

**Vices:** Top has no slots; legs must be braced; no provision for split fence.

**Verdict:** A full-size, no-frills router table with a large top. But few accessories are available.

## PORTER-CABLE 698



This small benchtop table has some good features — easy assembly and a remote router switch. But overall, we were disappointed with its design and operation.

The cast aluminum top is pre-drilled to accept all Porter-Cable routers, but there isn't enough clearance underneath for their 3 $\frac{1}{4}$  HP plunge

routers unless you mount the table on a stand or cutout table.

The flat table top came equipped with a miter gauge, but the sharp grooves are intrusive. Also, the steel insert ring sits about .025" below the table surface, so your work tends to catch on the edge of the opening.

The two-piece fence design means you have to adjust each fence independently every time. The fences were straight but weren't square to the table. And the blade guard on the right fence casting was awkward to use and remove.

### At A Glance:

**Price:** \$149  
**Table Size:** 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
**Under Table Clearance:** 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ "  
**Top:** Cast Aluminum  
**Weight:** 26 lbs.

**Virtues:** Light and portable; easy to assemble; has remote router switch.

**Vices:** Fence not square to table; blade guard and dual fences awkward.

**Verdict:** The least-expensive and least-impressive table tested.



# Final Recommendations

Most of our test models excelled in some areas and fell short in others. That's why we suggest you base your final decision on the features that are most important to you.

The first thing to consider is the router you plan to use in your table. If your only router is a 3 HP plunge router, you may find that it won't fit comfortably in a short benchtop table such as the Bench Dog or the Eagle. The Porter Cable table accepts only Porter Cable routers. If you want to be able to stow your router table under a bench or toss it in the truck, choose a benchtop model.

Accuracy, ease-of-use and optional accessories are also important. With only minor exceptions (noted in the individual write-ups), all the tables were accurate enough for normal routing chores. We liked the drop-in baseplates of the Woodhaven, Bench Dog, Eagle, Jesada, and Rockler tables. We also preferred the easy-to-remove fences of the Woodhaven, Eagle, and Veritas models. The Bench Dog had the most comfortable fence knobs.

Because these are entry-level tables, it pays to look ahead to other accessories you might want to add later. It's hard to beat Veritas' extensive line of nifty add-ons; although Eagle, Woodhaven and Bench Dog also offer plenty of options.

## TOP PICKS

The Veritas table earned our *Editor's Choice* award because of its innovative features: the solid-steel tilting top, the unique router clamp, the clever insert rings, and the slick fence system. Though it didn't have a drop-in base-

plate, the router clamp is more convenient and sturdier. One thing missing on the standard Veritas model was a dust chute, but they offer a great one with a magnetic base that can be used on other machines, too.

Close behind the Veritas were the Woodhaven and Bench Dog tables, with their enclosed stands and wide range of optional fence accessories. The Woodhaven scored slightly higher because of its more ample headroom, snap-in ring system and unbroken table surface. The Bench Dog won our *Top Value* award because of its excellent performance at a very reasonable price.

## GOOD TABLES THAT FELL SHORT

The Rockler, Eagle America, and Craftsman tables also earned respectable ratings. Of the three, the Craftsman had the most standard features, including the only dual-outlet switch in the test. But the Eagle America and Rockler tables offer more optional accessories.

We liked Rockler's larger table, open stand and sturdy aluminum baseplate. The Craftsman's ribbed aluminum table surface wasn't as user-friendly as a laminate-surfaced top.

## ROUNDING OUT OUR LIST

The Woodstock Rebel and the Porter Cable table both lost points for their independently adjustable fences.

The Jesada model we tested had the virtue of being a floor model, but it didn't offer as many features as our top picks. The uneven baseplate was also a drawback.

**VERITAS ROUTER TABLE SYSTEM**



**BENCH DOG PRO TOP PORTABLE RT100**



## HOW TO CONTACT THE MANUFACTURERS

**Veritas** .....800-871-8158  
[www.LeeValley.com](http://www.LeeValley.com)

**Woodhaven** .....800-344-6657  
[www.Woodhaven.com](http://www.Woodhaven.com)

**Bench Dog** .....800-786-8902  
[www.BenchDog.com](http://www.BenchDog.com)

**Rockler** .....800-279-4441  
[www.Rockler.com](http://www.Rockler.com)

**Eagle America** .....800-872-2511  
[www.Eagle-America.com](http://www.Eagle-America.com)

**Craftsman** .....800-349-4358  
[www.Sears.com](http://www.Sears.com)

**Woodstock Int.** ..... 800-840-8420  
[www.WoodstockInternational.com](http://www.WoodstockInternational.com)

**Jesada** .....800-531-5559  
[www.Jesada.com](http://www.Jesada.com)

**Porter Cable** .....800-487-8665  
[www.PorterCable.com](http://www.PorterCable.com)