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Mark Frauenfelder: Welcome to the Cool Tool Show. I'm Mark Frauenfelder, editor in chief of Cool Tools, a website of tool recommendations written by our readers. You can find us at cool-tools.org. I'm joined by my co-host, Kevin Kelly, founder of Cool Tools. Hey, Kevin!

Kevin Kelly: Hey, it's great to be here.

Mark Frauenfelder: In each episode of the Cool Tools Show, Kevin and I talk to a guest about some of his or her favorite uncommon and uncommonly good tools they think others should know about. (music ends)

Our guest today is Bob Parks. He's a freelance magazine writer who lives in Vermont. He writes for Popular Science, Runner's World, and Bloomberg Businessweek. In his spare time, he does projects with his two children and renovates his family's 1870's farm house. He can be found on the web judder.net and on Twitter [@BobParks](https://twitter.com/BobParks). Hey, Bob, how's it going?

Bob Parks: It's going great, thanks Mark!

Mark Frauenfelder: Good, yes. Great to have you on the show. All three of us know each other well from our days at Wired Magazine in the '90s.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, great to have you here again Bob. This is Kevin Kelly. So, what's judder? I'm just curious what judder is? judder.net. That's your ...

Bob Parks: Yeah, that's my personal website, my vanity site for editors to find me and hopefully sell my work to people. I picked judder ... There's another boring url that it goes to, that's www.bobparkswriter.com. But judder is the phenomenon of the raster scan going off. It's pace on a screen, so that it jumps. In the past old TV's would jump and they would judder, I just love that.

Kevin Kelly: Oh, cool, all right great. So you have some tools for us?

Bob Parks: I do. The first one is one that I don't own but I'm going to own soon. Right now I have a Makita 2711 table saw, which is an old dinosaur. I love it. But, the statistics for injuries with table saws are very high. Every carpenter and amateur who wants to be a carpenter are equally in danger of getting an injury sooner or later. For the first time SawStop has lowered the price of their table saws. These are the saws that have an electrical system that automatically stops the blade once your finger touches it. Stops it so quickly, in 5 milliseconds, that you only get a little nick on your finger.

Mark Frauenfelder: Oh yeah, is this the one that they demo with a hot dog?

Bob Parks: (laughs) That's right. Exactly.

Mark Frauenfelder: Yeah that's amazing! Does it fire some kind of an explosive charge to slam a brake into the saw or something?

Bob Parks: Exactly. There's a little brake in there that once it senses continuity with a human object through the saw blade, the little charge goes off and actually brakes the blade, sends it flying through the bottom of the saw. So it immediately goes away from the area, and you have a ruined blade, which is a lot better than a ruined hand.

Mark Frauenfelder: Absolutely. That is incredible. So how much do they cost?

Bob Parks: They used to be, the full-sized stand-up table saws for workshops that would be permanently in place, and they were over \$2,000, but just this winter the \$1,200 version came out on wheels. So, that's definitely within reach. You get a nice Makita for 5 or \$600, why not spend a little extra money? And you never have to use a guard, it makes it easier to work with wood because you don't have to constantly negotiate moving your pieces and your miters around the guard, you can just get there right into the blade.

Kevin Kelly: I encountered I think it was one of the tech shops, or somewhere, where they did have a number of these installed and I was asking, actually how useful they were, and they said that they probably had one or two times a year when, it went off, it was activated ...

Bob Parks: Yeah.

Kevin Kelly: So, that's a pretty good savings right there.

Bob Parks: Yeah. I gather there aren't that many false positives. The problem when they go off is there's an \$80 cartridge, that special shoe that stops this blade, that needs to be replaced. But again ...

Mark Frauenfelder: The best \$80 you've ever spent, really.

Bob Parks: (laughs) That's right.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, that's the minimum just to get into the hospital.

Bob Parks: Yeah.

Mark Frauenfelder: Oh yeah. That sounds great. I would love to have you write a Cool Tools review once you've had about six months with it in the shop.

Bob Parks: Oh it's a deal.

Mark Frauenfelder: All the better if you have a ... Almost ...

Kevin Kelly: Near miss.

Mark Frauenfelder: Yeah. (laughter) Could you do that for us Bob?

Bob Parks: To be serious, I'm working with my children a lot around the saw, because I want to teach them safety and also it's a very exciting tool to use to build big stuff, and so I think it's a must-have at this point.

Mark Frauenfelder: Yeah. Absolutely with kids around.

So you are also a fan of the Ellipse half-mask respirator.

Bob Parks: Yes. I love that thing. When I'm looking for gear, I'm often checking out wood-working shops. This one is a very low-profile on the face. Right now Ellipse just sells in the US the particulate filter. So it's just for sawdust and vapors and things like that. ... I really want the particulate filter with the carbon so I can also do urethane-ing and those kinds of things all in one unit. That's sold in the UK. But for right now, you can get it on a couple of websites, this Ellipse P100 Dust Mask. Super low profile on the face, you can put your glasses or your hood over it. If you're welding you can put a welding mask over it. It doesn't feel like anything. And I also hate when I'm using a good respirator, the feeling of the straps pushing into my glasses, my safety glasses, and this one seems to have solved that ergonomic challenge. I love the feel of it on my face.

Kevin Kelly: Is there a disadvantage to having the half mask? Why aren't all the masks like this?

Bob Parks: Well, I'm not a very swarthy guy, so apparently guys with big beards, it doesn't make as good a seal on the face, because there's a lot less rubber to press against the face. And it comes in closer to the mouth. So I would assume for some people's faces and some people's facial styles, maybe that wouldn't be so good.

Kevin Kelly: Okay. So, it's shorter not above the nose, but it's ... Smaller below the nose?

Bob Parks: I'm not sure where the half comes in. The design changes are that they've figured out how to put the cartridges much closer to the face, so it doesn't hang out so far, and then it also, has much less material, so it comes in much closer to the mouth. It's basically not like a gas mask that goes over the whole face. ...

Kevin Kelly: It's more like a dust mask.

Bob Parks: It is like a dust mask, but it has that respirator quality that the neoprene presses against the skin.

Mark Frauenfelder: So it's about \$25 and then a pair of replacement filters is \$13.

Bob Parks: That's right.

Kevin Kelly: And you can use it not just for dust but also for chemical fumes. Is that right?

Bob Parks: No, the one that is sold by Highland Woodworking, now this is a shop down in the South, but I just go to their website, highlandwoodworking.com, and they've always got really good ideas. I love their blog. That's where I bought it from. And they point out that this is really a carpentry mask. It could protect you from oil vapors that are in the air, but not organic compounds, like what you'd find in a gasoline vapor or a urethane vapor.

Kevin Kelly: Okay.

Mark Frauenfelder: That looks like a good one.

Okay. So now we're getting down to the nitty gritty here. The Fernco Wax Free Toilet Seal.

Kevin Kelly: Wax free? Well, okay. Why do we want to have a wax-free toilet seal?

Bob Parks: I thought that this one was a very important part of being a human and I've replaced five toilets so far in my renovation projects in my house. In my old house I replaced two toilets, in the new house I replaced two toilets. I love the American Standard Dual Flush. It's about \$180. And each time you have to put in a new toilet, you have to fight with those wax seals. Have either of you guys ... done this?

Mark Frauenfelder: I have.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, I've replaced ... four or five toilets in our large households and I've been going with the Todo maxi things, super low flush ones. But yeah, I deal with these. There's a wax ring, it's about the size of a small frisbee maybe ...

Mark Frauenfelder: It kind of reminds me of a doughnut.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, it's a doughnut shape. It's about six or seven inches and it sits around the drain of the toilet and it forms the seal between it and the floor.

Bob Parks: Yeah. And the wax itself is meant to have a lot of give.

Kevin Kelly: Right.

Bob Parks: So that as you finally press the toilet into the floor, it crushes it into a shape that fits right around the toilet and you don't get any fumes or material coming up through the drain.

Kevin Kelly: But this is a wax-free one?

Bob Parks: Yeah. Fernco came out with this about ... Well a couple of years ago in the mid-2000's, maybe ten years ago, they started selling them. And they've started to sell like hot-cakes (laughter) to plumbing fans. So this is a neoprene adhesive that ... It's sort of a different process. Typically, it's very awkward when I've got the wax seal on the floor, I'm grabbing this incredibly heavy toilet, my knees aren't that great, so I'm swinging this thing over the hole, trying to land it in the middle of the wax ring. And sometimes ... I usually buy two or three of them, and they're usually \$4 or \$5 a piece. Because the first time I usually miss and crush the side of the wax ring, and have to start again. This is a different process. You turn the toilet over and you press this wax-free ring, the adhesive, into the toilet drain. And now you've got this long, 4-5 inch plastic throat and this adhesive piece stuck to the toilet. So it's completely stuck, you can

basically lift the whole toilet with the plastic throat. And so it's really in there good.

Mark Frauenfelder: Nice.

Bob Parks: Yeah. Then you'll turn the whole thing around and then you kind of guide it into the hole and it's got these friction-sensitive plastic fins that press it to the toilet flange. And you've got your three-inch, four-inch toilet flange, either of those work, and you press it in. And you're good to go. It even gives more stability to the toilet, if you're on one of the ceramic floors where there's a little bit of unevenness, it'll hold you in there a lot better.

Kevin Kelly: So this is a better toilet seal.

Bob Parks: It costs the same and to my mind, it's a lot more forgiving. That's one of the parts of the process that I don't look forward to, is trying to get it all to line up.

Mark Frauenfelder: Yeah, and if you're a solo handyman, like it sounds that your are ...

Bob Parks: Yeah.

Mark Frauenfelder: Then, it's great that you can stick it to the toilet and then do it.

Bob Parks: Four bucks.

Mark Frauenfelder: Four bucks. That's a good price.

Bob Parks: I am solo for that portion of it, because my daughter won't join me (laughter), anything to do with the drain part. But she loves taking the bolts off, and some of the early preparation part of replacing our toilets.

Mark Frauenfelder: So everybody order these and take your toilets off the floor and replace them right away. (laughter) Make a weekend of it.

Kevin Kelly: And by the way, if you haven't tried the total flushes, which we reviewed in the Cool Tools, and I've tried a lot of them. This is for the ultra-low flush ones. A lot of low-flush ones you have to flush more than once to really do the job, but this one really does work. It's never, in years and years of using it, it's never ever clogged.

Mark Frauenfelder: Oh.

Kevin Kelly: So it's really great.

Mark Frauenfelder: Cool. I find my American Standard does clog, but I'm willing to put up with it for the price, it was a really good value.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah that's true. This one ... The Todo's are more expensive, but in our household we sing the praises ... (laughter)

Mark Frauenfelder: So you have another one, this is a mini-water filtration system made by Sawyer.

Bob Parks: Yeah I've been using the Sawyer filter for years and just two years ago they came out with a even smaller one. This is an example of where technology and design completely recreates the market. Water filter and water filtration while you're camping, used to be a huge pain in the butt and the devices cost from \$100 to \$400. And now this little device, that is now 1.9 oz, fits right in the palm of your hand, can filter 100,000 gallons of water.

Mark Frauenfelder: What?

Bob Parks: Yes. Isn't that incredible?

Kevin Kelly: And, can you describe the process of filtering it, is it gravity, do you have to suck, is it vacuumed, or, how does it work?

Bob Parks: Right. They give you a pouch, a half-liter pouch, that you put dirty water into and then you squeeze the water through the filter into your water bottle. So, I think that the more expensive filters still have a use when you have a big group and you're cooking and you need a gallon of water really quickly. But they're still awfully heavy and expensive and this one you can use as you go, each stream you come to you can top off your water bottle, with no problem. I've found that I use PVC tubing to make my own hydration system for running, I don't have to bring water with me. If I'm going on an easy run that might last two hours with some exploring, I'll just leave the house with Sawyer and just pull from any stream. By the way, it has the 0.1 micron filter, so it's the one with the highest filtration along with the top-of-the-line models.

Kevin Kelly: So how long would it take to filter a liter of water?

Bob Parks: You ... It would take about 20 seconds, and some pushing with the dirty-water pouch. So you'd have to bring a container that would be able to hold a liter, they sell another pouch that you'd have, then you'd have to keep track of which one you use as dirty and which one you'd use as clean.

Kevin Kelly: But because it's so fast, you might not even normally filter that much at once, you might just filter a cup or something.

Bob Parks: Exactly. When I was camping with my kids last summer though, the water access on the Vermont's Long Trail, the water access was far and few between, so we did have to filter a lot of water and keep it with us, a liter or two, between places where you could get it.

Kevin Kelly: That's cool. And how about cleaning it? The filter must ... If it's such a microscopic filter, then it must clog up over time?

Bob Parks: The thing with these kind of products is they get harder to use over their lifetime. It's a \$20 filter and apparently after six months or a year of heavy use you want to just get another one. You never really get to the 100,000

gallon mark, but in terms of value it's far and above the other ones out there.

Kevin Kelly: So you don't really clean the filter, you just replace it?

Bob Parks: I think at some point you can move water through it backwards and clean it? But I'd have to check on that. One problem I've experienced, and it's more of user error, is that any filter is unsafe if it freezes, and I'm always leaving my gear at the wrong side of the doorway and having it freeze overnight and ruining the thing and then having to buy another one.

Kevin Kelly: Okay, that's interesting.

Mark Frauenfelder: It sort of cracks the filter if it freezes or something, with that material inside?

Kevin Kelly: Yeah.

Bob Parks: Yeah, I think that material has many small capillaries and areas that need to stay intact.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah. You should bring inside your sleeping bag and put it in at the bottom. (laughter)

Mark Frauenfelder: Well, Bob, this has been really interesting hearing about the stuff you use and sounds like you're having a great time there in Vermont working on you farm house. (Music begins)

Bob Parks: Yeah ... Lot of projects.

Kevin Kelly: I suspect you have probably a hundred other tools you could talk about from your remodeling chores and other adventures. Maybe we'll do this again.

Bob Parks: Oh that would be great.

Mark Frauenfelder: Yeah I'd love to. That sounds good. Thanks a lot, Bob.

Bob Parks: Oh sure, great talking with you.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, thanks a lot.

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