

DECK SUCCESS

by Ken Evans, cabinetmaker

No matter how you design your deck, it'll never live up to its full potential unless you also do some routing. Standard 2x4s, 2x6s and 4x4s perform well structurally, but they sure leave a lot to be desired as far as looks go. Factory-milled edges are particularly mundane, and this is where detailing with a few large router bits can trigger huge gains. For the same money you'll spend on screws for an average sized deck, you can buy several specific router bits that'll turn an ordinary deck project into an extraordinary success.

If you can afford only one bit to supercharge your deck building efforts, the $\frac{3}{4}$ " radius roundover is it. Versatility is the reason why. Two passes of this bit ~ one on each side of standard $1\frac{1}{2}$ " thick decking -- creates a true semicircular bullnose profile. This is ideal where full-sized lumber overhangs the edges of decks and steps. It looks much nicer than square-edged lumber, and wears more durably, too. You'll also find this same $\frac{3}{4}$ " roundover useful for all kinds of outdoor woodworking projects as well as larger pieces of furniture and built-ins. A few minutes with a random orbit sander removes any small ridges that might be present where the two router passes came together. If you're using $5/4$ for your deck surface (it measures 1"-thick), then a $\frac{1}{2}$ " radius roundover is the tool you want. Got a lot of $5/4$ lumber to profile? Consider a 1" diameter, bearing-equipped bullnose bit used in a portable router table. This bit creates that prized, semicircular profile in just one pass.

The $2\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, 45° chamfer bit is another great deck tool. It's big, but perfectly proportioned for the large dimensions of deck construction. It lets you create classy, angled edges on all kinds of vertical supports, railing structures and veranda posts. Just don't be misled by the bit's size. Even though it's big, it works perfectly in all large and mid-sized routers, even down to $2\frac{1}{4}$ horsepower. You'll achieve best results if you start and stop your chamfers several inches from the ends of the parts you're routing.

One place where typical deck designs usually flop is the location where horizontal railings meet vertical posts. Metal connections or toenailed joints look bad enough to taint an otherwise outstanding deck, but a large flush trimming bit offers one way around this challenge. Models with a bearing on the shaft make it easy to quickly create large, deep mortises to accept the ends of rails. Create a plywood template of the mortise size you want, clamp it to your post, then plunge the spinning router bit into the wood and let the bearing follow the inside edge of your template.

Not many deck builders have discovered the value of routed details, and rarity is one reason why these enhancements are so valuable. Another is good looks. You simply can't beat the stunning appearance of a deck that's discernibly richer thanks to its classy, routed details.



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