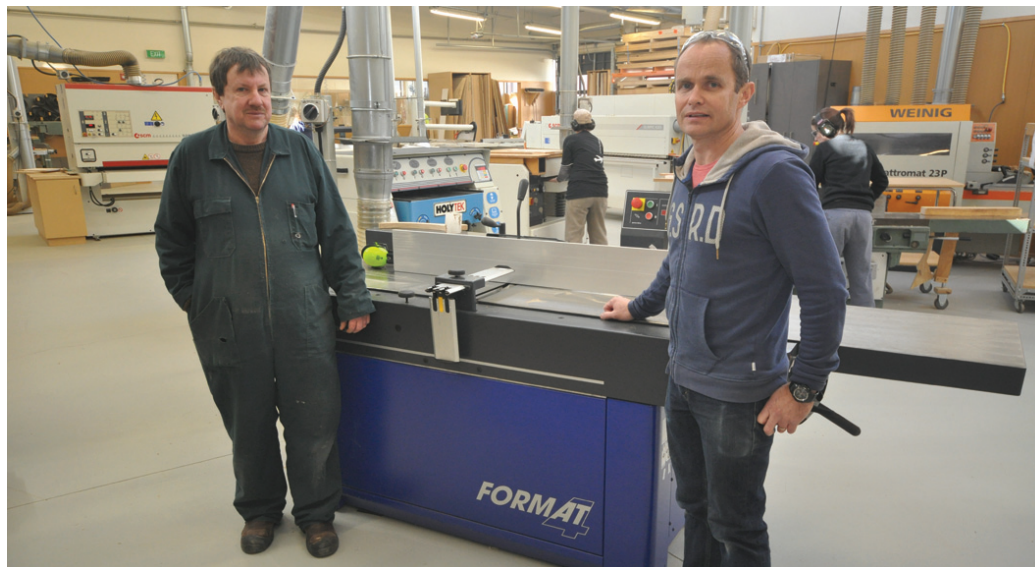


Build quality, features, price ... and safety

As one of NZ's pre-eminent training institutions, Invercargill's Southern Institute of Technology (SIT) is known for the quality of its teaching, its close ties to industry, and its modern workshop. Courses on offer include an 'Introduction to Joinery', Trade academy courses for local schools, and night classes. At the core of the programme are the block courses for apprentices, and as part of the new BCITO structure SIT provide block courses for all BCITO joinery apprentices in the South Island.



The Format 4 Plan 51L ticked all the boxes for SIT tutors Lee Park and Philip Johnstone.

Tutors Philip Johnstone and Lee Park are responsible for the joinery shop, and preparing students for industry. This means SIT need to have an up-to-date, reliable and safe suite of machinery. As part of their ongoing machinery assessments they've recently replaced an older Planer-Thickener with the latest Format-4 Plan 51 Surface Planer from Austrian woodworking specialists Felder Group.

"There are several things we need to consider when replacing machinery" explains Lee. "Build quality, features and price are all important of course, and in this case the Format-4 is more than suited to our needs. But equally important to us here is safety – especially given the nature of who is in our workshop. The other important factor is support. When things go wrong we need our machines up and running again quickly."

The Plan 51L is certainly packed with features. New to Format-4's range, the feeding planer table alone offers 1,650 mm of supporting surface, with total table length around 3 metres, perfect for larger workpieces. It's also the first Format-4 planer that offers a tilttable planing table for concave and convex joint finishing. The space saving design of the planing fence makes it possible to position the planer directly against the workshop wall. At SIT there's

limited space, and against the wall isn't an option, so helpfully the Comfort guard minimises the machines's footprint while maximising safety. "With students moving all over the workshop then a traditional tunnel guard can really get in the way" says Lee. "The unused section of the Comfort guard folds neatly out of the way – giving freedom of movement when using or moving around the machine."

Just as important for teaching is the machine's accuracy. The Power Drive electrical height adjustment is standard on a Plan 51L. "Knowing they're getting an accurate measurement gives students a lot of confidence" says Lee. "Our older machine had a wind-up height adjustment, so having the digital rise and fall working to within .1 of a mm is a big improvement." Another useful feature is Felder Group's renowned 'Silent-POWER' cutterblock – offering super-quiet operation combined with the fine finish offered by a spiral-block. "Having the machine running while talking to students is a big advantage," says Lee. "We've had the decibel meters in here and the machine is really quiet. Unfortunately, when you turn our extraction on the noise jumps up 20 decibels!" Another benefit of a spiral block is the long-lasting 4-sided knives, and the ability to turn individual knives that might get are damaged.

Sometimes its small features that can make a real difference to a machine's usage. In this case it's the fence adjustment. "It's so smooth and easy" Lee explains. "You can operate it effectively with just one hand, whereas our previous machine needed quite a bit of muscle. With the Plan 51L even the smallest students can get a good accurate result, regardless of their strength."

As you would expect at an educational institution, issues around health and safety come up again and again. Philip and Lee have to be the gatekeepers to safety at SIT's workshop and it's a role they have to take very seriously. Safety considerations have also influenced SIT's latest joinery-shop machine: a Felder FB

bandsaw. It's still on the way from Austria but Lee is already looking forward to having it available. "We need a machine with an electric brake" he says. "Having the blade brought quickly to a controlled stop certainly improves safety. But it also means a faster turnaround between students – no more queues at the bandsaw."

There's no doubting the quality of experience the students are getting at the Southern Institute of Technology. With small class sizes, excellent tuition and a clear focus on having the best machinery for the job, the future for our industry looks to be in good hands.



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