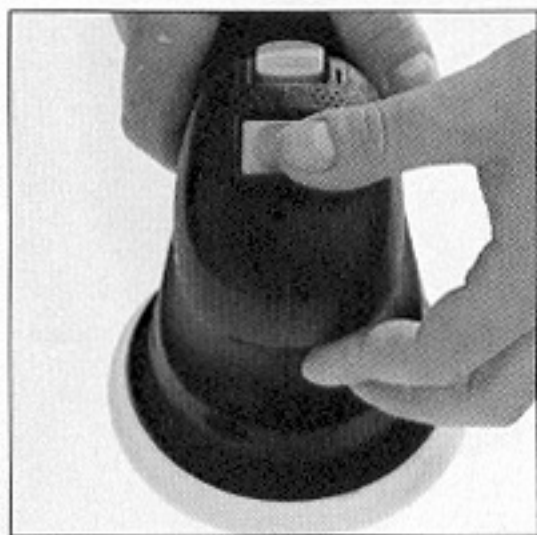


Festool RO125 FEQ

Having relied on a couple of quite usable top-name random orbit sanders over the years, picking up the Festool RO125 FEQ sander was a little like trading in my Honda Civic – which was a perfectly usable car – for a brand new Volvo sports sedan. The Festool does everything the old sander did, but it does all of it better. It also does some things the old sander could never do.

Inside the very rugged Festool “Systainer” case, you’ll find a tool that is quite large for a 5” finish sander. The RO125 looks like a cross between a barrel-grip jigsaw, a right-angle grinder and your average random-orbit sander. It weighs a hefty 4.4 lbs.

Before you can begin using the RO125, you need to connect the detachable (and thus easily replaceable) power cord, which locks in place with a quick twist. There are two bright green switches on the top of the sander. The one closer to the barrel is



THE RO125 sander has a power switch and a sanding mode switch.

the power switch; push it down and to the front and it turns the motor on and locks in the on position.

The other switch on the top of the case is where this tool starts to get fun. Move the switch to the left

and you have normal random orbit sanding. Move it to the right and the sander is in “Rotex” mode. Rotex is a combination of rotary and eccentric motion which offers very aggressive material removal. The first thing you’ll notice when you begin using the Rotex mode is that the sander requires a firm grip with two hands and careful attention to control. It’s certainly no harder to control than a belt sander, but if you’re expecting the tame qualities of a random-orbit sander, the demands can be surprising. I put a couple of gouges in some of my test pieces before I got the hang of controlling the sander in Rotex mode.

My first test project was a window perch for my cats that consisted of a white pine frame with a birch plywood shelf. With 80-grit abrasive in Rotex mode the sander evened the frame with the plywood quite quickly – too quickly, in fact, as I went through the birch veneer before I even knew what was happening.

As with any tool, be sure to try the RO125 on a test project or two to get to know its capabilities before you take it to any more expensive woods. After a couple of quick repairs, I had the piece rough sanded. I switched to finer paper and the standard mode for finish sanding. In the fine sanding mode, the RO125 is quite smooth and presents no control problems.

The heft of the tool offers all the pressure you need in normal sanding. Switching abrasive grits is a simple

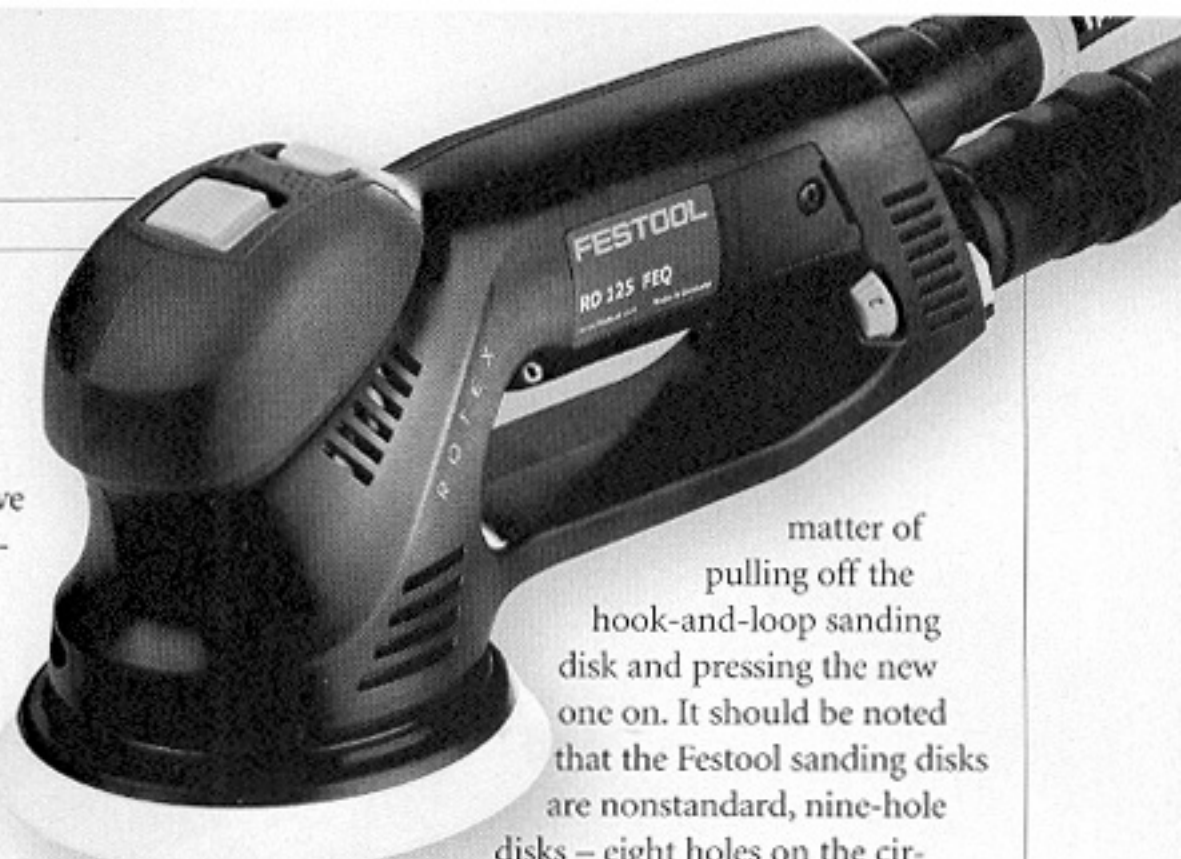
matter of pulling off the hook-and-loop sanding disk and pressing the new one on. It should be noted that the Festool sanding disks are nonstandard, nine-hole disks – eight holes on the circumference and one in the middle.

According to the Festool literature, the tool actually sends air out through that middle hole to help move the dust to the other eight holes for extraction. I can’t really tell you how much air is pushed out through that middle hole, but I can tell you that hooked up to my central dust collection system, the extraction was very effective. I had almost no visible dust remaining on my cat perch when I was done sanding.

Next I tested the Rotex mode on the underside of the edge-glued shelf of a red oak fireplace mantel. With 80-grit abrasive, it quickly removed excess glue and flattened the joint. There will be times now that my belt sander stays on the shelf, because the RO125 can handle a lot of the rough sanding normally done with a belt.



A SPINDLE LOCK allows sanding pads to be changed quickly and easily.



THE TOOLBOX

The final feature I wanted to test was the tool-less pad change. The mantel has over 20' of concave profile that needed some serious sanding, and I wanted to try the softest pad and some medium abrasive for the initial sanding of this profile. Switching the pad was remarkably easy. There is a spindle lock button on the back of the tool. Push that button, turn the pad until the lock engages, then turn less than a full

rotation and the pad comes off. With the lock still engaged, thread the pad on and tighten it by hand in a couple seconds. If you've ever changed pads on other sanders, you know this is a significant improvement.

The Festool RO125 FEQ might be heftier than some other sanders and take a little more work to control at times, but it's as close to the perfect finish sander as I've ever used. It performed every finish sanding task

I tried without a fuss and was able to do many tasks I would have previously used other sanders for. The tool feels like it's built to last a lifetime. It's a bit expensive at around \$325, but in the long run the investment will pay off with many years of quick and effective sanding.

— *Dave Eames-Harlan is a freelance writer and woodworker who really loves tools. He lives in Moscow, Idaho.*