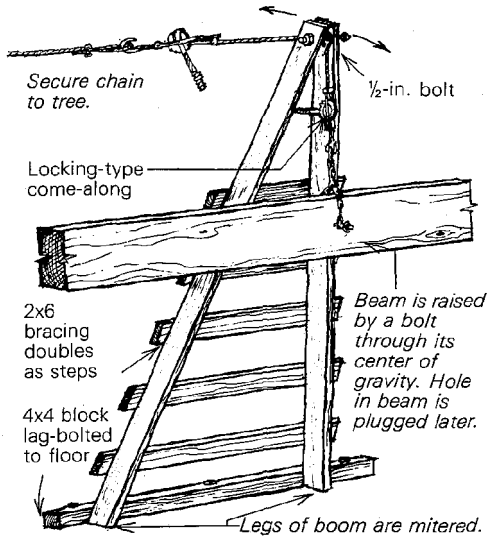


Tips and Techniques is a forum for readers to exchange the methods, tools and jigs they've devised. We'll pay for any we publish. Send details, sketches and negatives with photographs to Tips and Techniques, Fine Homebuilding, Box 355, Newtown, Conn. 06470.

Beam boom

An old-timer showed me this device for lifting heavy timbers single-handedly. I have used it to raise 22-ft. long 4-in. by 16-in. laminated beams with surprising ease. The device requires two block and tackles or ratchet come-alongs with locking devices, a boom, various lengths of chain or cable, miscellaneous hardware, and a tree or equally substantial mooring.

Construct a boom as shown in the drawing. It should be long enough to be at roughly 60° to



the floor when the beam is lifted to its finished height. Lag-bolt a heavy block (at least a 4x4) to the floor to prevent the bottom of the boom from moving and position the boom over the timber at its center point by adjusting the two come-alongs. Drill a bolt hole at the balance point in the beam, attach it to the vertical come-along, and lift away. Control over the arc of the boom and the elevation of the beam is easily adjusted with the two come-alongs, allowing precise horizontal and vertical positioning.

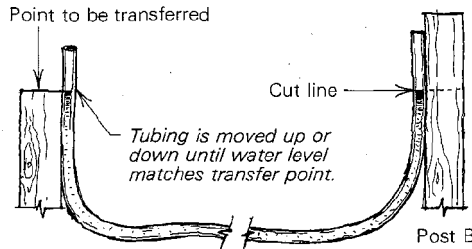
After raising a beam to the desired height, I add a second chain wrapped around the top of the boom and attach it to the tree as a safety measure; it has proved to be unnecessary, but makes me feel more secure while the beam is aligned and pegged into place.

—Robert Von Drachek, Missoula, Mont.

Homemade water level

Let's say you've just put four posts in the ground for a sun deck and now need to cut them all off at the same height. What do you do? If you have a builder's level or transit you're all set, but if you don't, this water level is a very simple and inexpensive way to solve the problem. It consists of any length of clear plastic tubing (or a hose with clear plastic extensions at the ends) and works on the principle that water seeks its own level.

First, fill the tubing with water, leaving a foot or two of air at the ends, and hold one end against the point to be transferred, as in the



drawing above. Another worker takes the other end of the tubing to the first post to be cut off (post B in the drawing).

The person at post B holds the tubing against it while the person at the other end moves the tubing up or down until the water level in the tubing matches the level of the point to be transferred. When this has been accomplished, the waterline in the tubing at post B will be the same as at the transfer point.

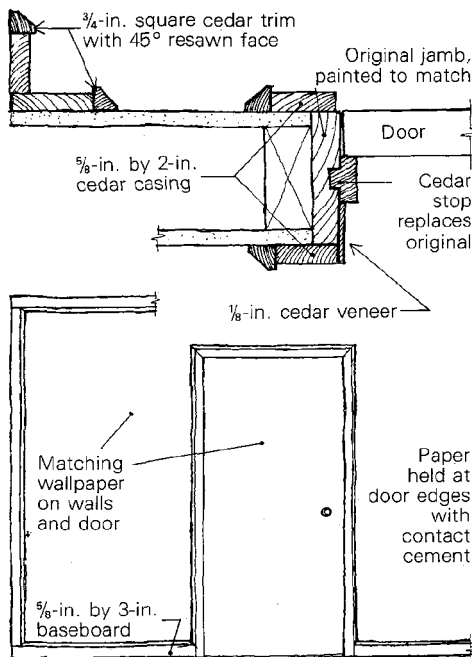
Always transfer levels from the original point to lessen accumulated error. Remove all the air bubbles from the tubing—they can affect accuracy. Remember that no part of the tubing should be higher than the ends.

This tool is useful in many ways on a building site. We use it whenever we need to transfer a level point farther than the length of a carpenter's level.

—David Barker, Gardiner, Maine

Dressing up a door

The house I own came with pre-hung doors with rotary-cut skins. The doors were hung in plain mahogany frames. They weren't much to look at, and suitable only for painting. To add some visual interest I cased the door in various thicknesses of cedar trim, as shown, and continued

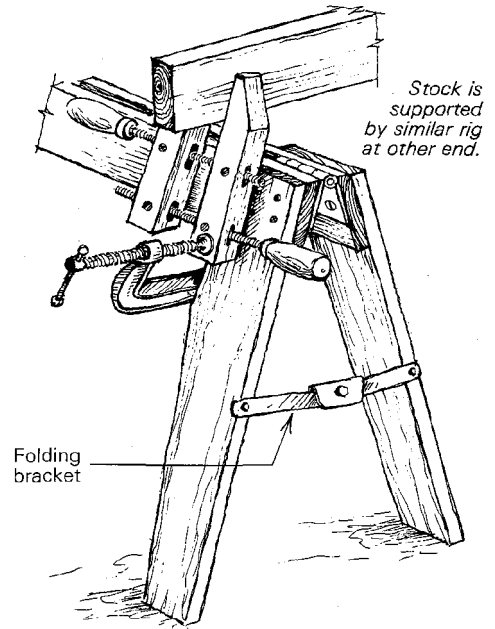


the treatment throughout the room. The 3/4-in. bevel-cut trim is slightly darker cedar for added contrast; the original jamb is painted to match. Rather than paint the door, I covered it with the same wallpaper as the adjacent walls, using contact cement to glue the edges down.

—G. Sigwardson, New Westminster, B.C.

Quick clamp support

One problem I have had in working on site is not having a workbench to hold stock for edge-planing and similar operations. I solved this by using a handscrew clamp and a C-clamp in combination, as shown in the drawing below. The C-clamp secures one foot of the handscrew clamp to the leg of the sawhorse, leaving the



other foot free for adjustment. This setup works well on conventional sawhorses and on the type described by Sam Clark (*FHB* #3, p. 9). The only alteration I'd recommend on Clark's sawhorses is to use folding card-table leg brackets rather than rope on each side of the horse to keep the legs from folding or splaying during use.

—Ben Erickson, Eutaw, Ala.

Plaster patch

The lath and plaster ceiling in our living room had been the victim of a leak in the roof for many years and was beginning to sag ominously. The previous owners had covered it with fabric-based wallpaper, followed by a textured layer, painted buff white. The fabric was evidently the only thing keeping an oval-shaped section of about 50 sq. ft. from hitting the floor. I was reluctant to replace the entire ceiling (it's a very large room) if the surrounding plaster was still in good condition, so I carefully removed the ailing plaster and inspected the edges unaffected by the leak: They were still quite sound.

Rather than replaster the entire damaged section, I decided to use 1/4-in. Sheetrock, cut to match the irregular-shaped void in the ceiling. The critical link in attaching the new ceiling was the Phillips-head Sheetrock screw, driven with a variable-speed drill. These needle-sharp screws go in without a pilot hole, and since they don't require pounding like nails, they leave the delicate lath and plaster bonds undisturbed.

Thanks to the drill-and-screw installation, the lightweight rock went up easily; the original lath accepted the screws without a problem. I feathered the joint with quick-drying Fixall (joint compound), sanded the edge to provide a flat bonding surface, and taped the joint with stan-

dard Sheetrock tape. Matching the textured surface finish of the existing ceiling took several gallons of joint compound and some experimenting with a concrete trowel, but eventually I mastered the technique and covered the patch, overlapping the taped joint by about a foot onto the original ceiling. A coat of paint, and the patched ceiling looks as good as old.

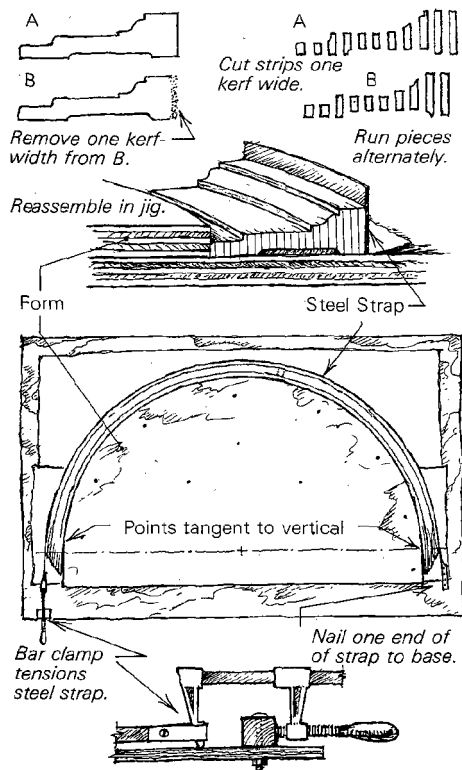
—Charles Mueller, Normal, Ill.

Forming curved trim

Trimming arched windows can be a problem, especially with complex molding patterns. This method requires two pieces of molding to form one finished piece of curved, paint-grade trim.

First, determine the distance between the inside edges of the vertical moldings (let's say 4 ft.). Cut the appropriate radius out of a sheet of plywood thicker than the trim and nail it to a plywood base. Our 4-ft. diameter arch will need a 2¾-in. trim piece a little over 7 ft. long, cut from two 8-ft. pieces (A and B in the drawing below) to allow a margin of error.

Remove material the width of the sawblade (the kerf) from the edge of piece B and then set the table-saw fence to leave a strip exactly one



kerf wide with each pass. You don't have to remove the fence again. Running the two pieces through the saw alternately makes it easier to collate the thin strips. If your molding has a hollow back, tack shims in the jig, one foot on center, to ensure proper alignment during clamping. Baste the strips with your favorite glue, place them in sequence against the curved form, and clamp the steel strap in place. I use a 26-ga. steel strap cut from an old downspout for a clamp; one end is nailed to the base, and the other has a loop large enough to anchor the end of a bar clamp. A bar clamp is better than a C-clamp for this application because the sliding

jaw allows tensioning without exhausting the reach of the threaded shaft.

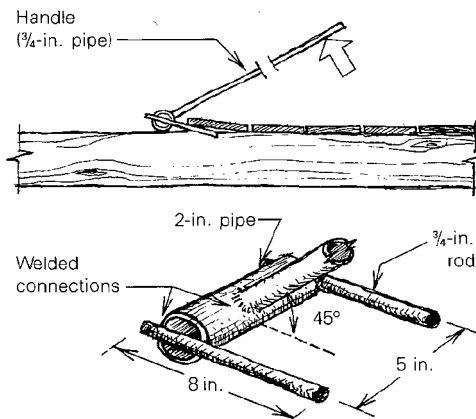
When the glue has set, scrape off the excess and sandpaper the rough edges. The junction with the vertical trim should be a 90° cut in the base of the arch at the point tangent to vertical.

—Jud Peake, Oakland, Calif.

Useful prying

One of the most versatile tools for remodeling work is an ordinary garden-variety mattock. The wide, flat blade is perfect for separating studs, rafters, joists, or anything else that is nailed together. In addition, it can be used to take up oak or pine flooring without destroying the tongues and grooves, and it can greatly speed the removal of shingles, roofing boards, plywood, bricks and a variety of other materials. Make sure you get a mattock with a blade that is fairly perpendicular to the handle; this makes it much easier to use.

Another very worthwhile tool is a homemade rig built from two pieces of pipe and two pieces



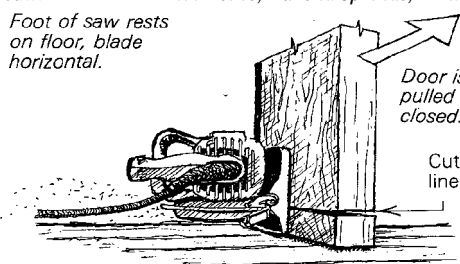
of steel rod, as shown. This tool is excellent for removing roofing and siding boards without cracking them. Simply straddle the rafter, stud or joist and lift. The boards just pop up.

—Norman Rabek, Burnsville, N.C.

Trimming pocket doors

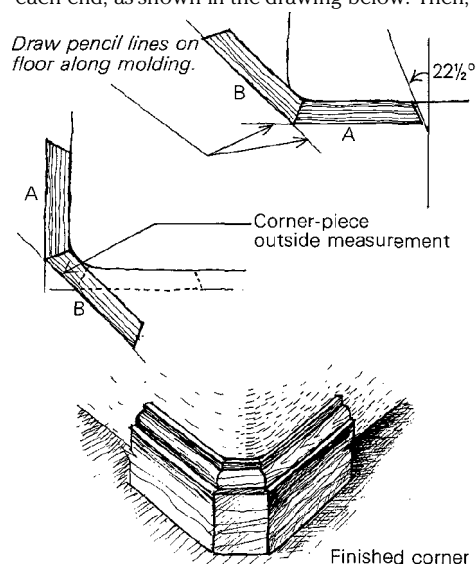
If you have to trim more than 1 in. from a pocket door (to clear a carpet for example), do it in place. First, mark your cut with a knife and place your circular saw on the floor, blade low and horizontal, as shown in the drawing below. My large saw clears the floor by 1½ in. and my little one by 1¼ in., which allows plenty of room for the carpet. Position the saw with its foot flush with the face of the door and open the blade guard. Turn on the saw and, holding it firmly, have someone slowly close the door. This will cut most of the door bottom; the last bit can be trimmed with a Sawzall, a jigsaw or a key-hole saw.

—W. Peine, Eureka Springs, Ark.



Trimming round corners

The following procedure allows you to install baseboard or crown molding where the plaster or stucco corners are radiused, without leaving an ugly gap behind the heel of the miter. Begin by cutting two pieces of base molding about 4 in. long with an angle of 22½° (one-half of 45°) on each end, as shown in the drawing below. Then,



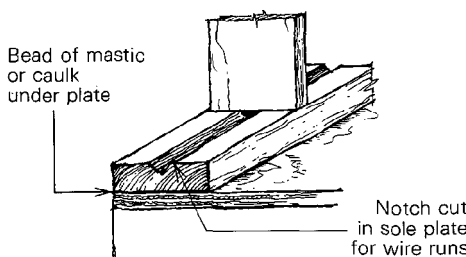
holding piece A flat against the wall and piece B against the round corner, move both pieces until a tight corner fit is formed. Mark this junction with a pencil line on the floor. Next put piece A flat against the other wall and move piece B along the pencil line until again a tight corner is formed. Now scribe another pencil line along the front of piece A. Where the lines cross is the given measure of the small corner molding piece, which is also angled at 22½°. The long pieces can also be accurately measured from the intersecting lines.

—Harts Matzinger, Laguna Beach, Calif.

Energy-saving sole plates

The usual method of wiring a stud-wall house is to drill holes in the center of the studs and string the wire around the perimeter of the building. When the insulation is installed later, the insulation adjacent to the wiring is compressed, lowering its effectiveness.

A more efficient and less cumbersome wiring scheme, which I learned from Larry Medinger of Ashland, Ore., is shown in the drawing below. A



V-groove is cut in the sole plate before the wall is assembled. This groove makes an easy run for the wiring and is out of the way. A bead of mastic or caulk under the plate will cut down on air infiltration, a well-known energy bandit.

—David Bainbridge, Berkeley, Calif.