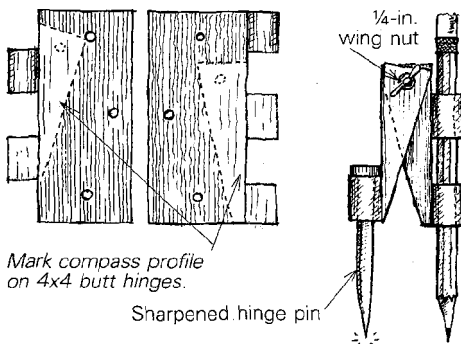


Tips and Techniques is a forum for readers to exchange the methods, tools and jigs they've devised. We'll pay for any we publish. Send details, sketches and photographs with negatives to Tips and Techniques, Fine Homebuilding, Box 355, Newtown, Conn. 06470.

Homemade scribe

The carpenter's scribes sold in lumberyards and hardware stores are so flimsy that they will self-destruct just rolling around with other tools in your nailbags. Sturdier versions are sold by mail order, but they cost about \$20. Rather than spend the cash, I made the one shown



here out of an old 4x4 butt hinge. It's accurate, nearly indestructible and easy to make.

I cut out the basic shape with a hacksaw, filed down the rough edges and drilled holes to accommodate a 1/4-in. wing-nut pivot. A sharpened hinge pin makes a good turning point. The pin and the pencil are held in place by friction. If the slots are a little loose, a squeeze in the bench vise will tighten them up in a hurry.

—John H. Sandstrom, Fort Dodge, Iowa

Drywalling at an angle

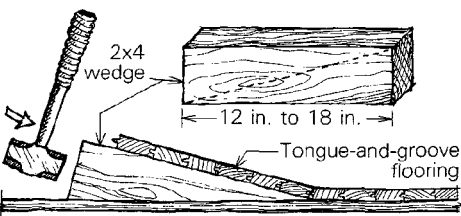
When we remodeled our house, we used a drywall trick that eliminated taping the obtuse angles formed by walls and sloped ceilings. Instead of creating a joint at this line, we scored the paper on the back and broke the gypsum so that only the face paper remained intact. We kept this hinged piece narrow, about 2 in. on either side of the break. Nailing up this sheet was a bit awkward, but it gave us flat-taped joints on either side that we were able to deal with easily.

—Steve and Becky Benton, Des Moines, Iowa

Salvaging floorboards

Trying to rescue a tongue-and-groove floor without ruining it can be tedious and time-consuming. The technique that I've developed keeps damage to a minimum, saves a lot of time and prevents frazzled nerves.

First, cut 12-in. to 18-in. 2x4s into wedges, as shown in the drawing. All wedges should be of equal length; and the wider the floorboards



are, the longer the wedges should be. Flooring has to be removed in the reverse order in which it was laid. Remove a few runs of flooring with a prybar to expose the subfloor, and position the wedges about 12 in. apart, cut side down. Beginning at one end, drive the first wedge under the floorboards about an inch. It's essential that the wedges be advanced slowly, or the flooring will split. Move the next wedge and repeat the process. This way the flooring is gradually lifted onto the wedges and pulled free from the subfloor.

When the loose flooring reaches the driving end of the wedges, remove a few strips and lay them aside for future cleanup. If a wedge hangs up on a nail, simply reposition the wedge.

—A. Eugene Walbridge, Easton, Md.

Wiring in old walls

Here are some tricks to help you use a fish tape when you're trying to run new wiring through old walls. A fish tape is a thin, spring-steel wire with a hook on one end. It's mounted on a spool, and most often used to pull wiring through sections of conduit. It can also snake through hidden wall and ceiling cavities.

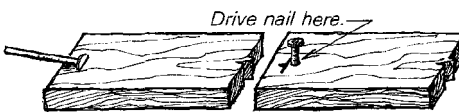
It can be hard to hit a target with a fish tape. So I catch it with a string. When you're working on a vertical run, such as an attic to a wall-mounted outlet, lower the string from above. It should be tied into a series of loops, one pushed through the other, and the string weighted with a piece of solder. The fish tape is then introduced into the lower access hole, and manipulated until its hook catches one of the loops. The same trick can work horizontally—push the weighted string along the flat run with a stick until it falls into the vertical cavity.

Another way to get a string from one place to another in an empty conduit is to tie it around a small wad of cellophane and use compressed air to blow it down the run. Then tie it to a heavier string and you're ready to haul on the tape. For a really convoluted run, where a normal fish tape won't follow the necessary path, a speedometer cable can do the job. When you are doing this kind of work, make sure you that know the location of any live boxes and unprotected wiring, like knob and tube work. And to make things easier in the event of future wiring changes, leave a piece of nylon string pulled through the runs.

—Norman Rabek, Burnsville, N.C.

Split-free nailing

To minimize the chance of splitting when nailing near the end of a board, make an indentation across the grain of the wood with the head of a box nail. Do this by driving the edge of the



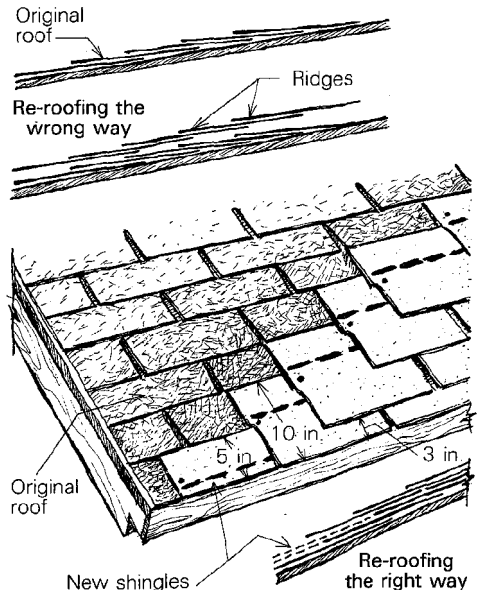
nail head into the wood. Then remove the nail and drive it just inside the mark, away from the edge of the wood. The head of the nail after it's driven usually hides the indentation.

—Steve Larson, Santa Cruz, Calif.

Asphalt-shingle re-roofing

Have you ever noticed the wavy pattern on a roof with multiple layers of asphalt or fiberglass shingles? This is due to the uneven thickness of the shingles where they overlap, and it detracts from the appearance and life of the roofing. On a new roof, the overlap doesn't cause a problem, but when a second roof is applied in the same manner as the first, the overlap creates as many as six thicknesses. This causes ridges that get larger as each new roof is applied, as shown in the drawing below.

To prevent shingle buildup on the typical 5-in. exposure roof, trim the first row of new shingles to 5 in. and the second row to 10 in., and butt them against the bottom edge of the old courses above. These will work as spacers that allow the new roof to start a different overlap pattern that misses the old bumps, with a 3-in. exposure on the first row and a normal 5-in. exposure from there on. This method lets you butt the new shingles against the bottoms



of the old. But first make sure the courses on the old roof are straight.

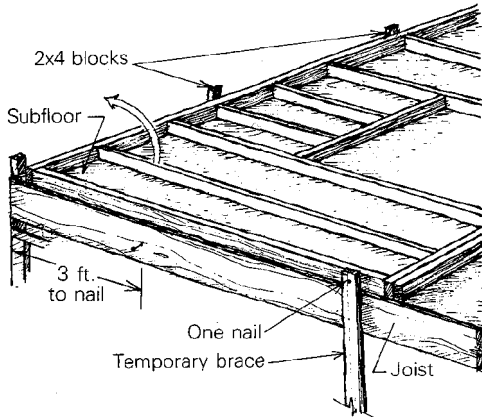
Your new roof will now lie flat, look great and last longer because the wind and water won't have any bumpy ridges to erode.

—Jack McGhie, Tucson, Ariz.

Raising walls

Raising an exterior wall on a second story can be awkward. Here are two tips to make this operation safer. Nail 12-in. 2x4s every 4 ft. to the outside edge of the platform where the wall is to be placed, leaving about 4 in. of this block sticking above the platform. When you raise the wall, the stops will prevent the bottom plate from sliding off the subfloor.

To eliminate frantic bracing after the wall has been raised, nail braces near the top of each



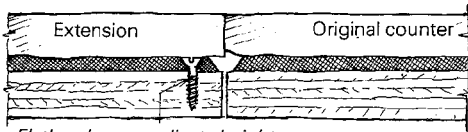
end of the wall with only one nail per brace. If the wall is on an exterior corner, drive a nail into the joist or blocking about 3 ft. from the corner, as shown in the drawing. Then when the wall is raised, the brace will swing freely and come to rest on the nail, where it can be attached quickly as a temporary support.

—Don Dunkley, Sacramento, Calif.

Matching marble

Our firm does a lot of kitchen remodeling, and recently we had to extend an existing marble countertop a few feet. Locating a similar piece of marble was hard enough, but the real test came during installation; any unevenness in the glossy surface would be quite noticeable.

We got a precise fit by using a flathead screw under each corner of the new piece. The



screws were easily adjusted to the right elevation, and they kept the heavy marble from sinking into the slowly curing mastic.

—Max Durney, Petaluma, Calif.

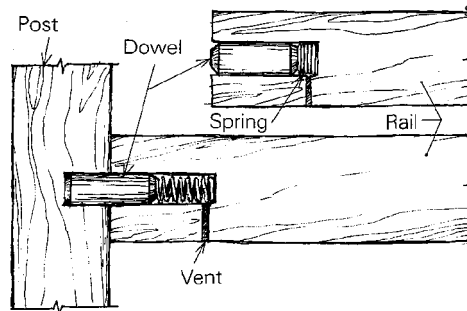
Cold hands, warm nails

Cold-weather construction generally means a choice between warm fingers and dexterity. In stead of making frequent trips to the site's trash burner to warm your hands, keep a pail of nails warming on the fire. Your nail-fingering hand can be thinly gloved, or not gloved at all, with the nails keeping your fingers warm. This works best when you are using a lot of nails in a short time, but a leather pouch full of warm nails retains its heat longer than you might think.

—Albert Treadwell, Sandy Hook, Conn.

Spring-loaded dowels

I came up with this simple way to dowel a rail in place between two fixed posts. Drill and dowel one end of the rail as you normally would. On the other end, drill the hole deeper and insert a spring before the dowel. Make the



depth of the hole equal to the length of the dowel plus the length of the compressed spring.

Once it's aligned with the hole in the post, the spring-loaded dowel will push its way home. I butter the dowel with hide glue before inserting it in the rail. I also drill a small vent hole in the bottom of the rail to prevent suction problems. Beveling the ends of the dowel allows the parts to go together easily.

—Thomas Ehlers, Austin, Tex.

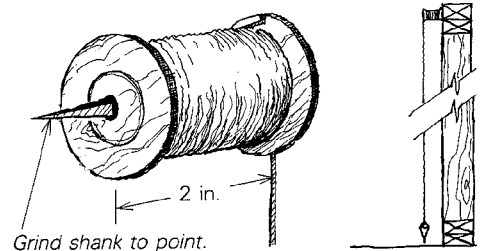
Non-clogging sawblades

Have you ever tried cutting through a composition-shingle roof, only to find that your reciprocating sawblade has become totally fouled with tar and refuses to cut? It's frustrating to stop every 6 in. or so to unclog the teeth. I solved this problem by switching to a plaster-cutting blade. Its symmetrical teeth are non-clogging, and they cut in either direction. Since they catch more often on the forward stroke, invest in the sturdiest bimetal blades. In my experience, Lenox blades (American Saw Mfg. Co. Box 504, East Longmeadow, Mass. 01028) have proven to be the best—they don't snap off, and can be straightened out if they bend.

—William H. Brennen, Denver, Colo.

A better plumb bob

I keep my plumb-bob string wound around a spool exactly 2 in. long. I drive a screw into one end of the spool, cut its head off and grind the shank to a long, diamond-shaped point. Since I



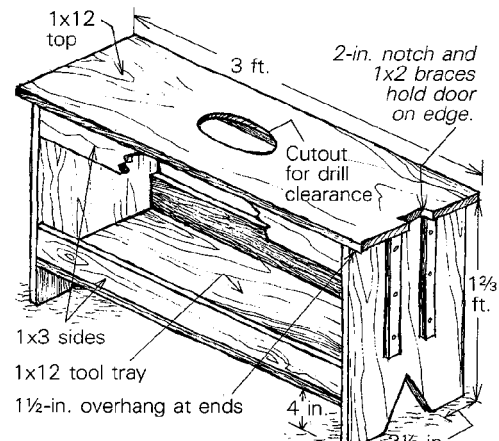
usually work by myself, I can drive the point into the top plate of the wall and dangle the plumb bob off the end of the spool. When the bob hangs 2 in. out from the bottom plate, I know the wall is plumb.

—Earl Roberts, Washington, D.C.

Lightweight workbench

I got the idea for the workbench shown below from a couple of old West Virginia carpenters. I've been using this design for years now, and the benches are unbeatable for holding work that's being drilled, cut or nailed. Whenever I do drywall work, I lay two benches on their sides and cover them with planks and plywood to make a low scaffold. It's just the right height for working on an 8-ft. ceiling.

I've found these dimensions to be right for me, but of course they could easily be altered to



suit the individual. The material for each bench costs less than \$10. Nail them together with 8d cement-coated nails, and you're ready to work.

—Howard Goldblatt, McLean, Va.