

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 and sketches to Tips, Fine Homebuilding, Box 355, Newtown, Conn. 06470.

Poly paint tray

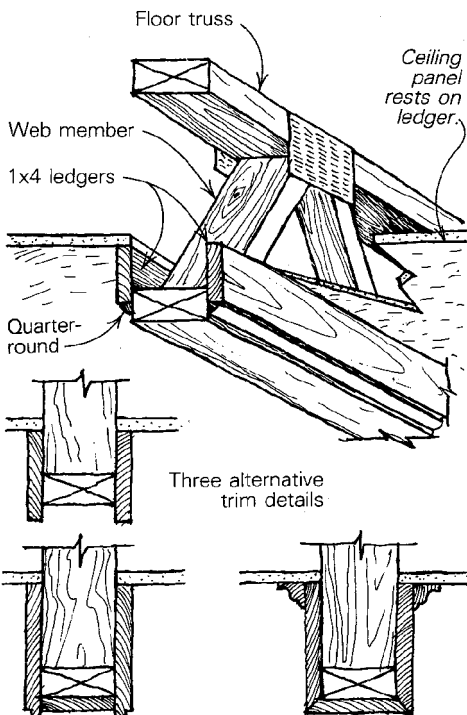
On a job where painting is done by roller before the finish floor is installed, save the expense of disposable roller-tray inserts or the hassle of cleaning the tray itself. Instead, cut a 3-ft. square piece of 6-mil polyethylene and spread it out in the middle of the room. You can pour almost half a gallon of good-quality latex paint on the plastic, and fill your roller from this central well. When you are finished for the day, cut the plastic in half and wrap it around the roller to keep the roller fresh for the next day—no need to rinse out the paint-laden roller. Use a fresh square of poly every day, or you will have flakes of dried paint marring the work.

—Rick Lazarus, Spencer, N.Y.

False beams from prefab trusses

Floor trusses have several advantages over floor joists. They span greater distances, they are more uniform and easier to work with, and they eliminate the need for all the drilling it takes to accommodate pipes, wiring and ductwork. On the other hand, trusses typically take up more room than joists. In our house, we had to use 12-in. deep floor trusses to build our basement pool-room addition. If we'd gone with floor joists, we could have used 8-in. deep members. Since we wanted an exposed-beam look in the room, our problem was somehow to recapture the extra space required by the trusses, and to avoid grafting on phony hollow beams that would give us the effect we wanted but rob us of needed headroom. Here's how we did it.

We left the bottom chord of each truss exposed, and nailed knotty pine 1x4 ledgers to the web members, as shown below. This left a ¾-in.

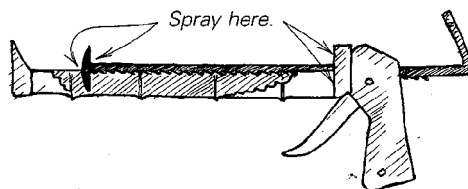


reveal, which we detailed with ½-in. quarter-round molding. We painted the trimmed-out trusses with a wash of mustard-color latex paint, which ties the colors of pine ledgers and trim and the fir trusses together, and lets the grain show a bit. Depending on the level of finish you want to achieve, the other trim details shown in the drawing give you a range of options.

The final step in this project was to lay a ceiling on top of the beams. We used random-width Armstrong ceiling panels, and simply laid them on top of the ledgers. No nails or staples were needed.—Phyllis Brubaker Pyle, Fleetwood, Pa.

Caulking-gun care

My caulking guns used to accumulate gobs of hardened caulk and mastic on the plunger, making cartridge removal very difficult. The tough



rubbery mass (silicone is the worst) was a real nuisance, and prompted the early retirement of several guns. Then I discovered the trick of spraying some silicone lubricant (WD-40 works too) on the plunger and into the back of the barrel. The lubrication lets the encrustations peel off in one piece, and makes changing tubes easy. You'll have to renew this lubricant every so often. One warning, though: If your gun has a friction-type drive mechanism, don't spray it—the lubrication will render it useless.

—William H. Brennen, Denver, Colo.

Wiring guide

If you come back to a wiring job days or weeks after installing the cables, you sometimes have trouble remembering which wire goes where. I have an installation tip that prevents this problem. I always cut the switched lines on a diagonal, and I square-cut the power leads.

—Mike Lyon, Tacoma, Wash.

Lipstick on the job

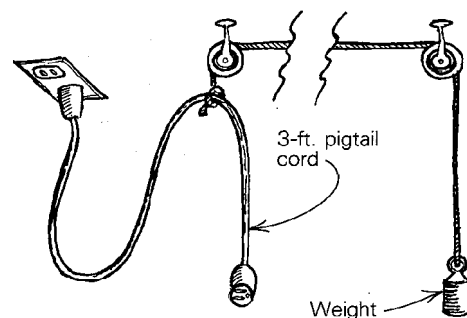
More than once I've received a look of disbelief when I've asked a helper to get the lipstick from the truck. But the stuff comes in handy in a variety of situations.

When I need to mark the end of a door latch or deadbolt strike, I rub some lipstick on the bolt, close the door and turn the bolt against the bolt to locate the proper spot to drill.

Drywall cutouts can be easily found by smearing the edges of the electrical box with the lipstick, hoisting the sheet of drywall into place, and pressing it against the outlet. Pull the drywall away from the box, and make your cut-out on the lipstick marks for a snug fit every time. This principle works for paneling and siding too. —Ernie Ale, Santa Ana Heights, Calif.

Overhead outlet

I installed an outlet directly above my workbench, and I've got a 3-ft., 12-ga. pigtail cord plugged into it. Near the female end I tied a clothesline cord that runs through two pulleys. The other end of the clothesline is tied to a

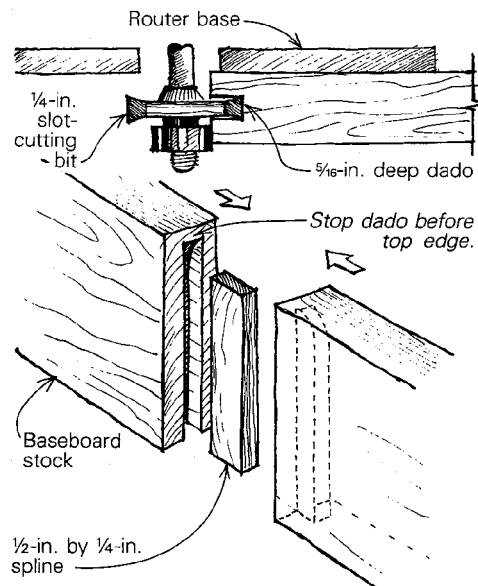


weight (drawing, above), which keeps the pigtail just within my reach—about 7 ft. above the floor—and gives me a couple of extra feet of extension cord to use when I need it. The best part of this whole arrangement is that I can work all the way around my bench without having to untangle myself from the power cords when I'm using tools like drills and routers. I also have the overhead outlet on a switch, which lets me turn off the juice easily whenever I need to change bits or blades.

—Dale Hopwood, Bakersfield, Calif.

Baseboard splice

When I need long runs of 1x baseboard, I don't splice my boards with 45° scarf joints. Instead I cut the boards square, letting the breaks fall



where they may regardless of stud layout, and I join the pieces with small splines.

I use a ¼-in. slot-cutting bit in my router to cut a 5/16-in. deep dado in the end of each board. Care has to be taken here to avoid cutting through the top edge of the baseboard stock. Then I spread glue on a ½-in. by ¼-in. spline that is slightly shorter than the length of the dado, insert it in one of the dados, and tap another board onto it. The result is a perfect, tight-fitting no-fuss joint.

With this method, you save time by not having to cut, adjust and recut the mitered joint, and you save material by not having to break the baseboards over a stud. You also avoid the inevitable splitting when you nail mitered joints together without predrilling them.

—Robert Prasch, Portland, Ore.