# Tips & Techniques

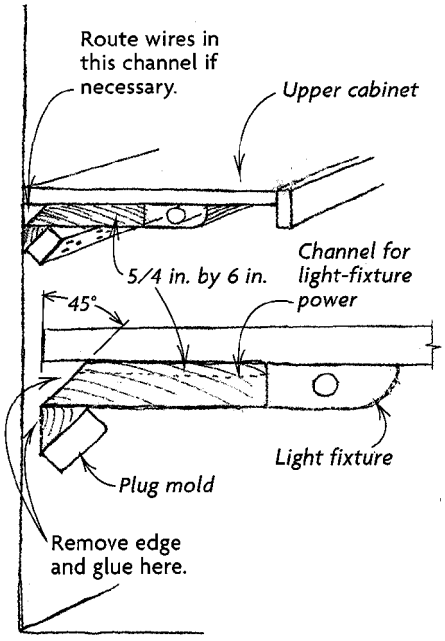
edited and illustrated by Charles Miller

*Tips & Techniques is a forum for readers to exchange information about methods, tools and jigs they've devised. We'll pay for any we publish. Send details to Tips,* Fine Homebuilding, *P. O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.*

## Angled plug mold is easier on the knuckles

Like Sarah Susanka, I prefer to use plug mold in kitchens rather than ruin the beauty of my backsplash with a series of outlets every few feet. As Sarah explains in her "Drawing Board" column *(FHB* #141, pp. 38-42), plug mold is a series of outlets ganged together in a metal housing. Tucked beneath the upper cabinets, plug mold is a lot less obtrusive than standard outlets. But mounting plug mold tight to the upper cabinets creates another problem: Your knuckles are in for a potential beating every time you unplug an appliance. I solved this problem by mounting the plug mold at a 45° angle (drawing below).

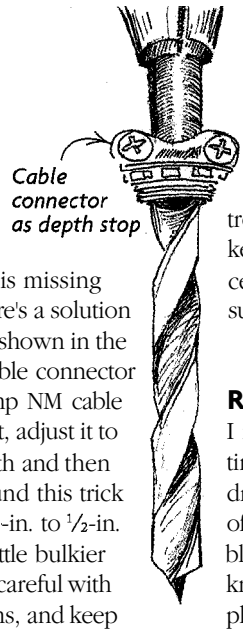
We were using 1-in, thick undercabinet light fixtures and wanted them toward the front of the cabinets. So we attached the fixtures to the edges of some 5/4-in. by 6-in.




pine mounting brackets. But before doing so, we ripped the edges off one side of the pine boards at a 45° angle, and then glued those triangular strips to the other sides of the boards. These angled surfaces became our mounting base for the plug mold, and the space behind it the wiring chase.

*—Michael Parker, Los Gatos, CA*

## Emergency drill-bit depth stop




If your favorite depth stop is missing when you need it most, here's a solution you can use in a pinch. As shown in the drawing at right, I slip a cable connector (the kind designed to clamp NM cable in a metal box) over the bit, adjust it to expose the correct bit length and then tighten the screws. I've found this trick works best on bits from 3/16-in. to 1/2-in. diameter. The clamp is a little bulkier than a real depth stop. Be careful with this setup: Stick to low rpms, and keep your fingers clear.

*—Lanny S. Anderson, Randall, MN*

## Making heavy tool belts more comfortable

In my 30 years as a carpenter, I've watched a steady evolution in tool belts. I think the leather ones were, and still are, an improvement over the old canvas nail aprons that were the mainstay for many years. Tool belts are now made of leather or nylon (often with a built-in back support) and have an assortment of bags and holsters that are slid onto the belt as needed.

There are two problems with these new belts. First, a fully loaded tool belt can be heavy, and it starts to slide down its wearer's hips. Second, the pouches and holsters have a tendency to creep out of place around the belt.

Suspenders are one solution to the problem. They transfer some of the weight to the shoulders, but the bags can still creep. And suspenders aren't the most comfortable accessory, especially during hot weather.

Another solution is simply to cinch the tool belt down tight, pinching the pouches against the user's waist so that they don't creep and slide. The problem with this solution is obvious: It hurts.

I've tried, and discarded, both methods. A better solution is to buy four inexpensive belt keepers. Belt keepers have been used for years by police officers to keep their pistol belts in place. Belt keepers are made of either leather or nylon. They are about in. wide by 5 in. long and have two snaps. After you put the tool belt on, simply slide the belt keepers behind your trouser belt and over the tool belt. I snap two in the front and two in the back, connected close to the nail pouches. The bags stay put—no more creep—and the weight is connected to my trouser belt. Much more comfortable. Belt keepers can be purchased at any police officers' supply store or at an on-line supply such as Galls (www.galls.com).

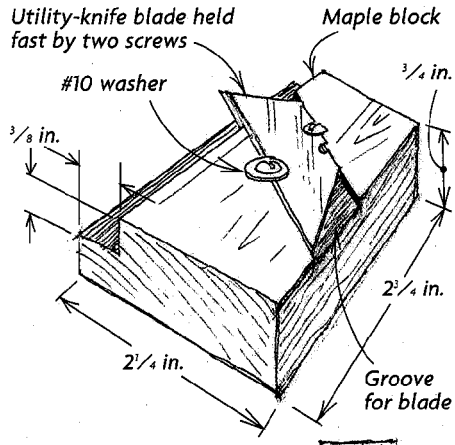
*—Vince Holmes, Wilmington, OH*

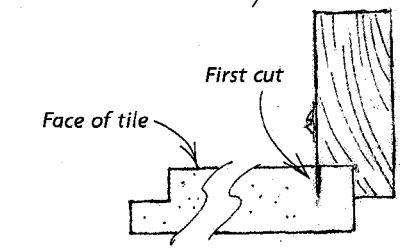
## Rabbeting ceiling tiles

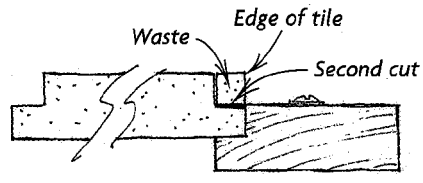
I install suspended ceilings from time to time. So I made the tool shown in the drawing below to help me rabbet the edges of the trimmed tiles. It's made of a maple block with a shallow groove for a utility-knife blade. The blade is held fast by a couple of screws.

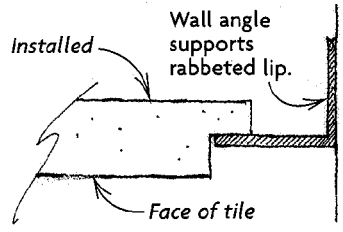
To use the tool, I first pass it along the face of the tile, just scoring it. Then I make a second pass with the cutter at full depth. Another pass along its edge, and the tile is ready to drop in place.

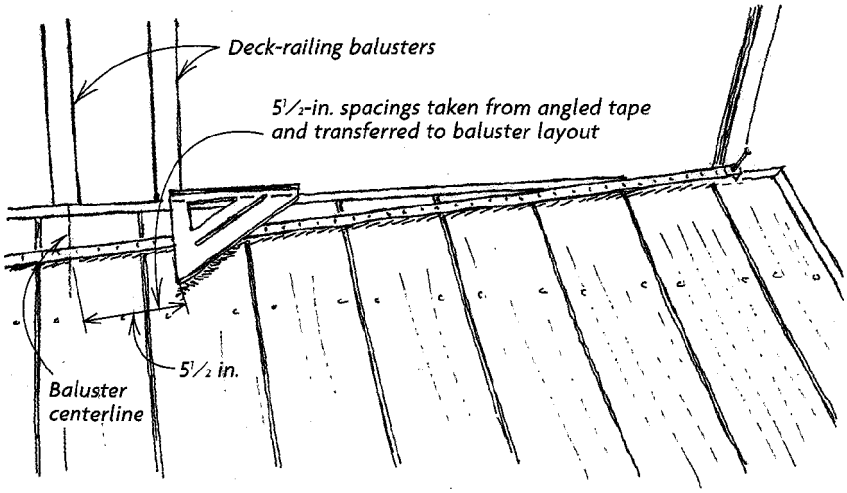
*–Jeff Bergstresser, Penn Van, NY*






## Another angle on spacing deck-railing balusters

I have struggled many a time in the past to create equal, code-approved spacing between deck balusters. The method I've come to rely on—the slant-rule technique—has taken all the frustration out of the problem.

With one baluster installed at each end of the railing, I start by measuring the distance between their centers. Next, I divide this number by the desired spacing between the centers of the balusters. Around here, the space can be no more than 4 in. With 2x2 balusters, I divide the railing length by 5½ in. That's because 5½-in. centers on 2x2 balusters results in a 4-in. space between them.

Let's say, for example, the length is 158⅜ in. I divide it by 5½, which equals about 28¾. I round up to the next highest whole number: 29. Now I multiply 5½ by 29, which equals 159½ At one end of the deck, I drive a nail into the center of the first baluster. At the other end of the deck, I place my framing square with the long blade parallel to the rim joist and the short blade aligned with center of the last baluster. With my tape hooked to the nail, I find the point on the short blade of the square where 159½ in. falls.

The tape is now at a slight angle to the rim joist, and I can measure off 5½-in. increments with my framing square and mark them on the rim joist to locate the center of each baluster (drawing above). By the way, it helps if you have a calculator that has an add-on function to speed the layout sequence.

Once I began using this method, I was surprised by how fast and effortless it is. With a little ingenuity, I think this technique could be applied to a staircase as well.

*—Mike Hoffman, Portland, OR*

## Sometimes it's good to see red

One of the handiest additions to any toolbox is a 99¢ bottle of bright-red nail polish. This tough, waterproof lacquer dries quickly, comes with its own brush and is useful for marking almost anything. I use it for tasks as diverse as identifying my tools to marking a line of red on a drill bit to provide a visual depth stop.

*—Robert A. Ritchie, Timonium, MD*

## Patching holes in textured drywall

My work includes patching holes in drywall from time to time. And if the holes are in textured walls, either orange-peel or knock-down texture, I've got to set up my commercial sprayer to re-texture the patch. Between setup and cleanup, that's a lot of work for a small job. As shown in the drawings (right), I've found a better way.

I begin a patch by applying mesh tape over the hole (1). Then I cover the mesh with all-purpose drywall compound (don't use setting-type compound) applied with a 4-in. taping knife. This process patches the hole but also clogs the crevices that create the texture (2). Once the drywall compound has dried, I sand smooth the center of the patch. Then I feather the edges of the patch with an old toothbrush dipped in warm water and a dry cloth. I work my way around the patch (3), leaving a tapered surface that makes a gradual transition to the smoothly sanded center of the patch.

To finish, I prepare a mixture of water and all-purpose compound thin enough to produce a splatter. Next I suck some of the mix into a turkey baster and practice splattering on a piece of scrap until I get the effect I'm looking for. This step is important: Trial and error is the key to making this technique work. When I've got the right consistency, I'm ready to texture the patch (4).

*—David A. Rojas, Las Vegas, NV*

