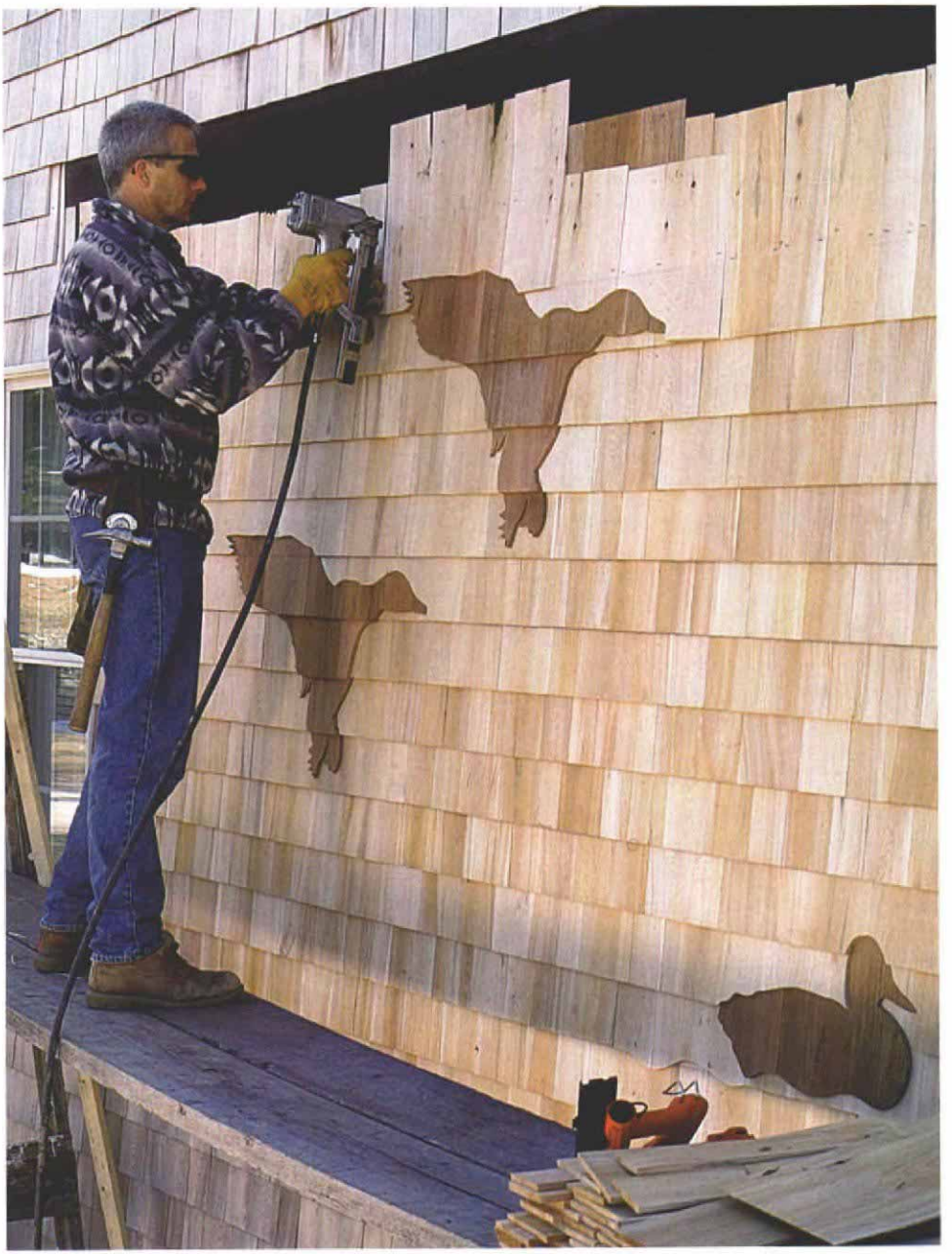
Weaving Designs Into Sidewall Shingles

Simple shapes let ordinary sidewall shingles take flight

BY MIKE GUERTIN



Nailing ducks in flight. Red-cedar shingles against a white-cedar background as well as various shingling techniques effectively outline the images of the ducks.

Ever since I saw the outline of a flying goose shingled into the siding in a photograph in "Finishing Touches" (*FHB* #65, p. 89), I wanted to do one. But clients are reluctant to let me experiment on their houses, let alone pay for it. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to experiment when I built my own house a few years ago. Through this experience and others since, I developed a system for laying out and installing shingle designs.

I used a design/weaving process to shingle a wildlife scene into the sidewall of my friend Rick Arnold's house. The techniques I used can be applied equally to any design.

Start with an appropriate design, then make a template

Weaving a successful pattern into sidewall shingles begins with a design that's a combination of the right size and the right amount of detail. Images between 8 sq. ft. and 20 sq. ft. seem to work best. Figures smaller than 8 sq. ft. won't have enough shingle courses passing through them to capture the image, and larger images like a life-size cow are lost in the field of shingles. The ducks Rick chose work well because they're a good size and they aren't too detailed. A simple design in red cedar against a white-cedar background works best (photo right). Finely de-

BUILD THE DESIGNS ON THE GROUND FIRST

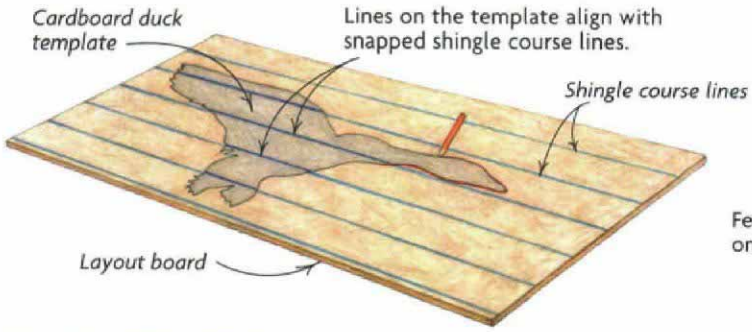




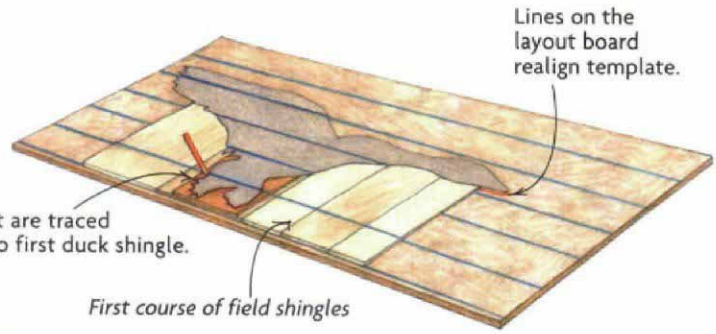
After making cardboard templates of the duck designs, the author figures out where on the wall he wants the designs to go. Then he snaps chalklines across the templates, which establish where the designs go in relation to the shingle courses. Next, he traces the outline of the templates for reference, takes them down and goes to work on sawhorses, where cutting and fitting are easier.

Getting the ducks in a row

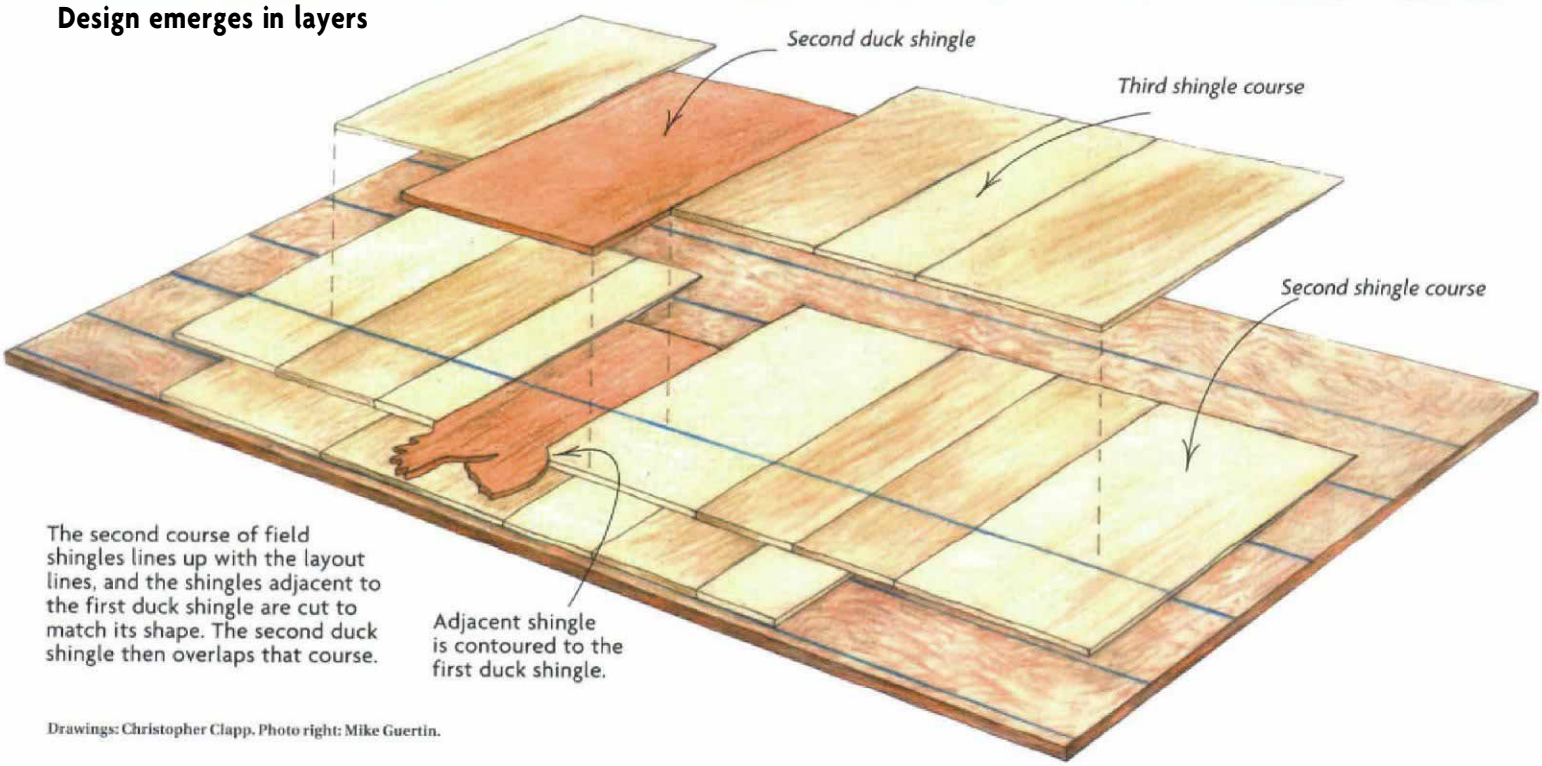
Shingle course lines snapped on the wall are transferred to a story pole and then to a layout board on sawhorses. The lines help to position the cardboard template, and the template can then be traced onto the board.



The lowest course of field shingles is spread out on the first line, and the first duck shingle from the next course goes on top. The template then lines up with the remaining visible lines, and the duck's feet are traced, cut and tacked in place.



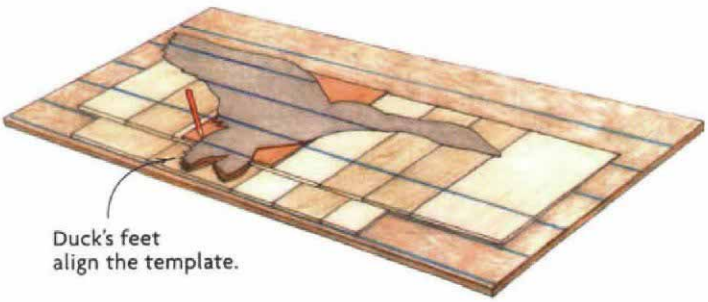
Design emerges in layers

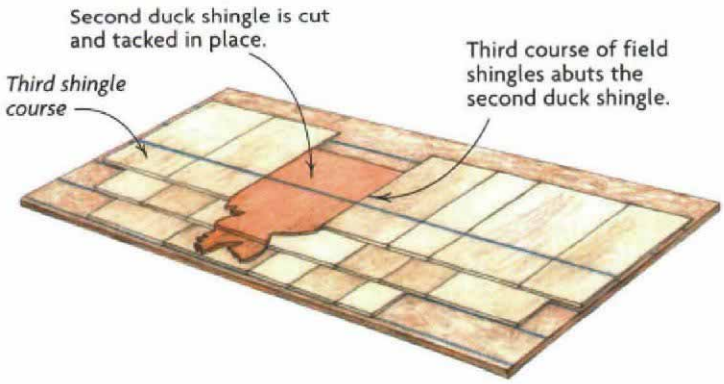


Drawings: Christopher Clapp. Photo right: Mike Guertin.

Trace, cut and install second duck layer

Because the traced line on the layout board is covered by shingles, the template lines up with the duck's feet. The outline is then traced onto the second duck shingle.



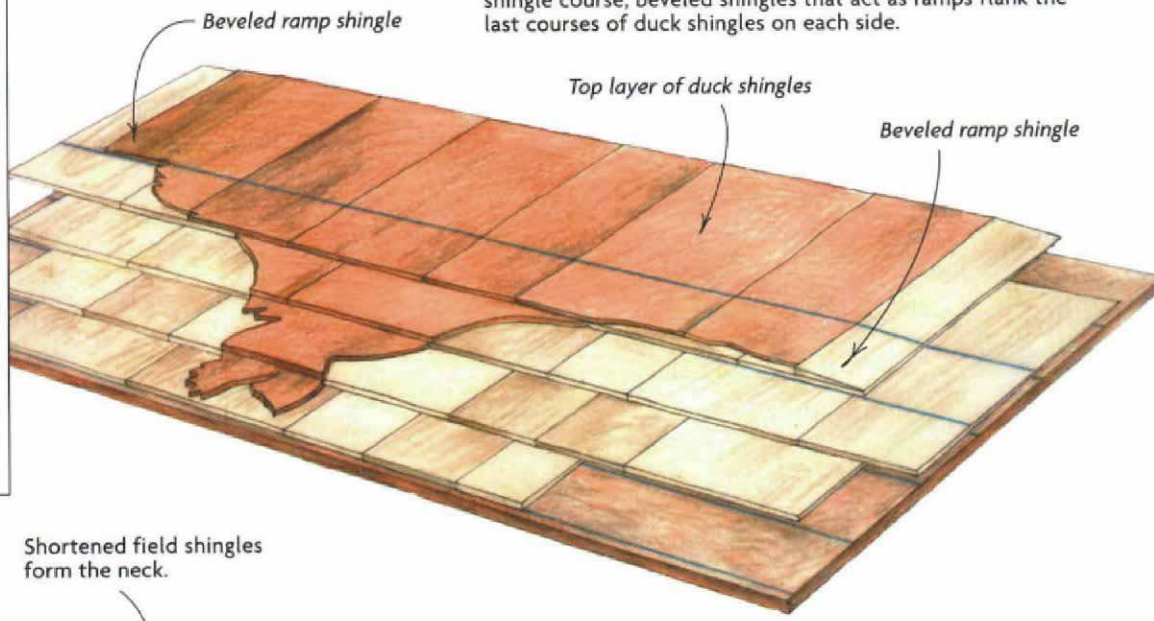


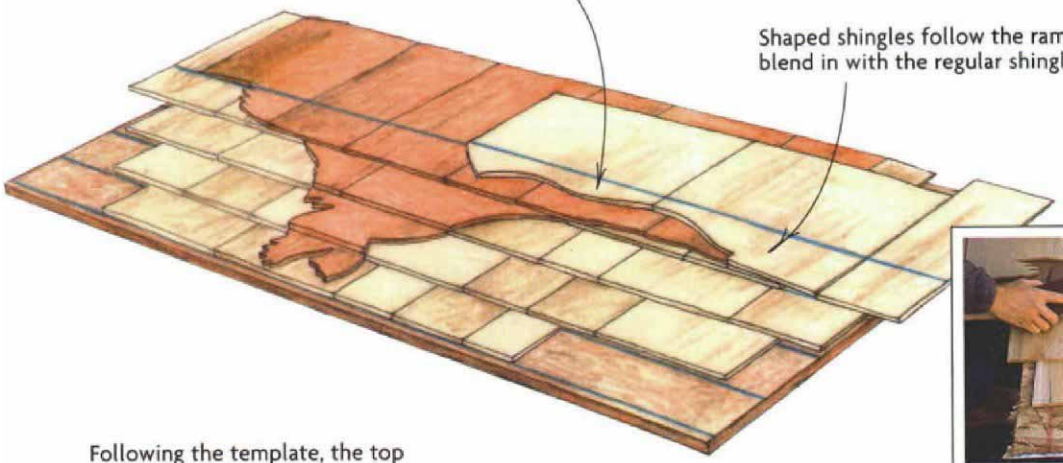
Ramps smooth the transition into the wall



To avoid cracking overlapping shingles, the author used the most flexible shingles he could find for the top shingle. Alternatively, he could have soaked them in water and microwaved them to make them more flexible.

Successive layers of duck shingles stack up like the first two. Because the duck's top contour is cut into the next regular shingle course, beveled shingles that act as ramps flank the last courses of duck shingles on each side.





Following the template, the top line of the duck is cut out of the next layer of field shingles. For this design, a shortened layer of field shingles drops down to form the neck, and the next course of field shingles creates the top of the wings.



The author created the uppermost edge of the duck's head and wings by tracing the outline onto the bottom edge of field-course shingles. Removing the waste from these overlapping shingles highlights the dropped red-cedar shingles immediately beneath them. After the author tacked the overlapping shingles to the board, they were ready to weave into the sidewall of the house.

Photos this page: Mike Guertin



A strong silhouette makes a pleasing image. **Images between 8 sq. ft. and 20 sq. ft. such as this duck work best for shingle designs. Red-cedar duck shingles overlap the white-cedar courses below to create the duck in relief.**

tailed images such as antlers are nearly impossible; if the image makes a pleasing silhouette, it's probably a good candidate.

During the layout and shingling process, I traced the images of the three ducks many times, so to maintain consistency, I made cardboard templates. I started with sketches and enlarged them on an overhead projector. Then I projected the images onto cardboard, adjusted them to size, traced their outlines and cut them out.

Before tracing the outlines of the three ducks onto the shingles, I needed to know where on the sidewall of the house the ducks would land in relation to the shingle-course layout. I arranged the templates on the sidewall of the house and tacked them up (photo to left, p. 93).

With the templates in place, I snapped chalklines on the house's sidewall at the bottom of each shingle course. This step left chalklines on the wall and across the templates. Before removing the cardboard templates, I traced the ducks' outlines on the wall for future reference. Finally, I made story poles that were long enough to include reference marks representing two shingle-course lines above and below each of the patterns. Now that I had gotten reference marks on the story poles and the templates, I could transfer the reference marks to a piece of oriented strand board (OSB), which I laid across my sawhorses. Working on a horizontal surface facilitated the layout and fabrication of the decorative shingles (drawings p. 93, facing page).

Getting those ducks flying on the wall

After fabricating the decorative shingles on my makeshift workbench, it was time to move the shingles to the sidewall of Rick's house. Because the shingles were tacked to the OSB, it was easy to remove them in the opposite order in which they were installed. These shingles must remain in order; so number them, letter them, or devise your own system. We lettered the rows A, B, C, etc., from bottom to top; individual shingles of each lettered row were numbered 1, 2, 3, etc., across.

We set up some adjustable staging so that we could work at a comfortable height and also stocked the area with extra shingles to complete the job. We applied a row of field shingles just below the lowest traced image on the sidewall of the house. To create a reference for the rest of the shingles in the design, we traced the lowest part of each design onto that course with the template. After doing that, as long as we aligned the rest of the shingles in the design with each other and with the horizontal course lines on the house, they fell into place.

The new shingles eventually tied into the existing shingles. Because the shingles came in a variety of widths, it was easy to choose combinations of shingles that tied in nicely, providing tight joints with no narrow shingles. To help line up the horizontal courses while tying in, we used a wooden straightedge along the chalkline. It was just tacked in place so that we could easily remove it to slip shingles behind. □

Mike Guertin is a builder, a construction consultant and a contributing editor to *Fine Homebuilding* from East Greenwich, RI. Photos by Roe A. Osborn, except where noted.