DRYWALL TRIM: BEYOND CORNERBEAD

NEW SPECIALTY TRIMS FOR DRYWALL MAKE BULLNOSES, COVES, AND CURVES EASY AND AFFORDABLE

BY SAL ALFANO

Metal cornerbead, L-bead, and J-bead have long been the stock in trade of drywall finishing, mostly because builders don't know what's available. When odd angles can't be avoided, they're usually handled with specialty tapes, such as *Sure Corner* or *Flex-Corner* and lots of mud. Special effects, like trimless drywall returns on doors and windows, are possible, but there's a limit to what you can do with standard accessories.

A wide variety of specialty trims, however, offer alternatives to the usual crisp, straight corners and flush edge treatments. Specialty trims make it possible to build details that are too difficult, and therefore too expensive, to produce by hand.

Tape-On Curves

Although an experienced taper can create a rounded corner, it's easier and produces more consistent results to use a product like *Softline* tape-on corner trims, manufactured by Beadex (see "Sources of Supply," at end of article). Two basic shapes are available: square corner profiles, which adapt to almost any angle, and bullnose and cove corners (Figure 1).

Most Softline trims are bedded in joint compound, just like ordinary paper tape. A layer of paper is laminated to a rigid metal profile, extending beyond the edges to form paper flanges that don't require nailing or clinching. On both cove (inside radius) and bullnose (outside radius) pieces, there is no need to build up compound behind the trim, since the paper takes all of the stress. The finish coat is applied to the flanges only — the paper covering the curved surface is left bare.

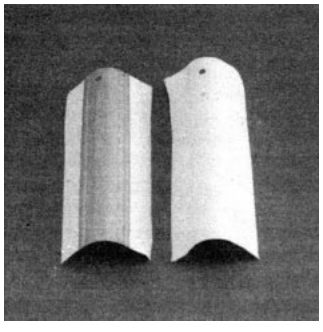

Figure 1. *Paper-on-metal trims are mudded into the joint and require no fasteners. They are especially useful in retrofits or where there is minimal backing for the drywall.*

Beadex claims several advantages for their tape-on trims over conventional cornerbead and other metal drywall accessories. Since there is no need for fasteners, tape-on trims are well suited to corners where there is little or no backing, as with wrapped columns. They also say that the paper flanges reduce cracking caused by flexing of the frame.

Tape-on trims, however, are not exempt from some of the special installation problems created by curved cornerbeads, so there are a couple of things to watch for. First, when hanging the drywall at an outside corner, any overlap will interfere with the radius of a bullnose corner trim. Hold back the edge of each sheet at the corner, leaving a notch, or "birdsmouth," on the room side (Figure 2).

Field mitering of curved pieces is a bit tricky as well. Beadex provides a paper template to use as a guide to cut the mitered profile, but you still must touch up most mitered joints with compound or caulk.

Watch also for alignment problems. You don't need special tools to install these trims, but they can help. For example, Beadex makes a roller tool that keeps square outside corner trims straight while you bed them. Without it, the flexible paper flanges can wander. Working to a line snapped along the joint will help where the tool won't, as with bullnose pieces.

Finally, while you don't need to coat the paper surface with mud, sanding it risks marring the finish surface. Instead, you should sponge the compound covering the flanges to a feather edge where it meets the paper on the radius.

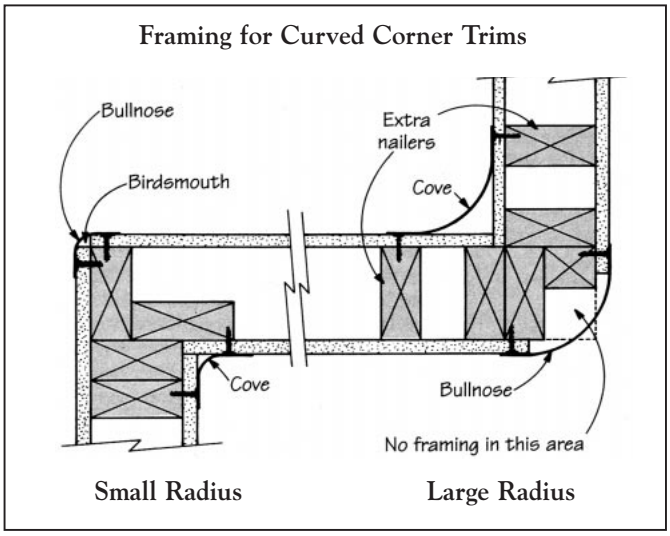

Figure 2. *Drywall that overlaps at outside corner studs will interfere with even small-radius bullnose trims. To prevent this, hang the drywall flush with the edge of the stud, creating a "birdsmouth" at the corner. Large-radius trims require additional nailers.*

Plastic Profiles

Other specialty trims are made of either plastic or metal. Many shapes are available in both materials, although metal trims offer a greater variety of sizes and profiles. The major differences between these products stem from the different qualities of plastic and metal.

Plastic is more flexible than metal, so it holds up well during transport, storage, and handling. And because plastic won't rust, it will never bleed through the joint compound and stain the finish.

Pla-Cor Products manufactures a line of plastic cornerbeads that includes 3/4- and 1 1/2-inch-radius bullnose trims for angles between 90 and 135 degrees, and two kinds of flexible cornerbeads for arches (Figure 3). The bullnose pieces are easy to align along a joint because they are fairly rigid, although working to a snapped line is still helpful. As with Beadex, the drywall must create a birdsmouth to avoid interference with the radius. Two-way and three-way plastic corners provide a smooth, rounded corner and eliminate the need for miters. The small seams where the straight bullnose and the molded corner pieces butt are easy to fill with joint compound or caulk.

Pla-Cor's trims can be nailed or screwed in place, but cementing them on with joint compound or glue is easier once you get used to it. If you use an adhesive like 3M-90 spray adhesive, apply it to both the joint and the plastic trim. It works like contact cement, so getting the alignment right the first time is important.

Pla-Cor makes both bullnose and square-edge arch beads. The slotted flange on one side allows the trim to follow the inside curve of an arch. For an outside curve, the flange tabs must be cut back at an angle to avoid overlap. Plastic arch beads are flexible, and because they won't kink, they are easier to use with a small radius than metal versions.

Myriad of Metal Profiles

Metal trims come in almost every conceivable size and profile. The

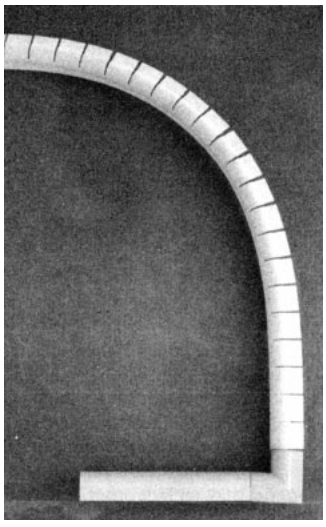

Figure 3. *Pla-Cor makes two- and three-angle corner pieces to handle common intersections. The corner pieces are fastened first and have alignment tabs to receive the ends of full-length pieces. Slotted flanges on the archbeads allow the trim to conform to curved surfaces.*

gauge of the metal grows with the size of the profile, but in most other respects, these trims look and behave like standard cornerbead.

Two product lines we looked at contain a broad inventory of stock and custom shapes. *Contours* by Construction Specialties, made primarily of "galvannealed" steel, are very similar in design and application to *Softforms*, by Pittcon Industries, which are aluminum extrusions. The Softform product line (Figure 4) is more extensive, but both companies carry the accessories most likely to be used in residential construction.

Some metal shapes are complex and require extra layout time during framing. Large-radius trims, for example, require nailers where you wouldn't normally put them, as detailed in Figure 2. Almost all metal trims are intended for use with metal studs, which come in a greater variety of widths than wood studs, but most shapes will work with wood framing as well.

Depending on the profile, miters can be quite difficult, particularly

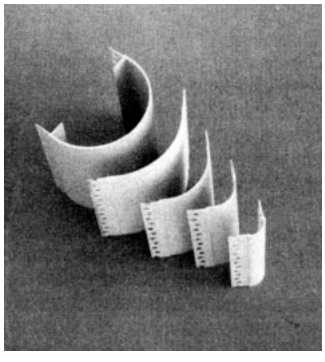

Figure 4. *Softforms trim pieces are made of extruded aluminum. All have prepunched flanges to accept mechanical fasteners.*

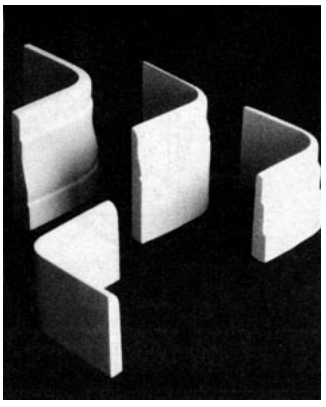

Figure 5. *Flextrim's "Round Corner Blocks" are molded in one piece from a flexible, paint-grade polymer. They simulate pine or oak grain patterns and can be made to match any molding pattern.*

with large pieces. Although you can buy some trims with miters precut at the factory, you're better off using a chop saw or radial arm saw to cut miters from templates prepared on site. A triple-chip carbide blade works well with aluminum, and an abrasive blade will cut galvanized steel. If you do this, be sure to wear eye and ear protection, and expect a couple of blades to need sharpening after each job. Dress up imperfections with fiberglass tape and joint compound, or even auto body filler.

As with all specialty trims, but especially with large profiles, you should consider how they will affect other interior detailing. If shelving must be cut to match a curved corner, for example, the cost of finish work will go up. Rounded corners also create difficulties with chair rails, wainscotting, and crown moldings. If these can't be avoided, be prepared to spend a lot of time scribing to fit the curves.

Baseboard presents problems, too. Small-radius inside and outside corners will fit on top of 5/4 base molding or corner blocks. If the finish flooring is carpet, you can omit baseboard altogether. Or you can rough-in the curve with plywood, or some other non-finish material, and roll the carpet up over it. Another option is to use flexible vinyl base throughout. For situations that require molded wood baseboard, Flex-Trim Industries makes plastic corner pieces that match 3/4- and 1 1/2-inch bullnose trims (Figure 5), and is tooling up for larger sizes.

Details

Other specialty trims speed or replace conventional techniques. Preformed arches, for example, can save a lot of time and money (Figure 6). You can install a one- or two-piece arch profile in a standard rectangular opening, without having to provide nailers at the perimeter.

Some metal trims let you accomplish in one step what would otherwise require several (Figure 7). To create a recessed baseboard, for example, you would ordinarily use L- or J-bead over drywall that has been hung several inches off the floor, and install a thin wood or plastic baseboard to cover the studs and seal the joint between the wall and the floor. You can accomplish this complete detail with a single preformed metal drywall accessory (Figure 7A). Complete metal cap pieces are available as well.

Metal Z-shaped trims create reveals at the baseboard or under wood rail caps (Figure 7B). Specialty trim "reveals" come in various shapes, including rectangular, V-grooved, and half-round, in a variety of widths and depths (Figure 7C). They create accents or transitions from one type of wall covering to another. Some of these trims can hold shallow shelves or vertical partitions, like office cubicle dividers. Others incorporate a hanging rail for framed photographs, paintings, or other display items.

Both Contours and Softforms offer preformed lighting coves (Figure

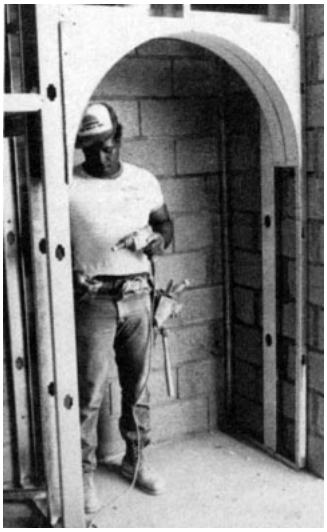

Figure 6. *Preformed arch molds greatly simplify framing requirements. The one shown above, from Curvtech, is made of 1/2-inch polyurethane and is covered with drywall paper. Square or bullnose cornerbead are already applied.*

Alternatives to Fancy Trim: A Steady Hand

Specialty trims make many details easier, but sometimes there is no substitute for a steady hand and a flexible trowel. Here's an example of an imaginative use of conventional materials and techniques developed by a drywall finisher faced with specific problems.

Smokey Lyons developed a technique — which he calls the "custom roll and tuck" — for splayed ceiling joints: the intersection of a flat ceiling or exterior wall with a run of sloped rafters. No matter how precisely the roof is framed, the joint where these planes meet is rarely straight because of the crown of the rafters and inconsistent lumber dimensions. This technique both softens the inside corner and straightens the line of the joint.

The first step in the roll and tuck is to snap a straight line about three inches (half the width of a taping knife) from the joint. Straight lengths of strapping fastened along this line with drywall screws form the "ground," which keeps the edges straight. Do this on the lower side of the joint so gravity helps keep the knife tight to the ground.

Lyons commonly uses setting compound — in this case, Durabond 90, by USG, — for the roll and tuck. Ready mix will work, but drying time is longer and shrinkage may make an extra coat necessary. When he can't reach the full length of the joint from the scaffold, Lyons packs the mud into 4-foot sections at a time with a 6-inch knife, cleaning the excess from the upper edge.

The next step is the crucial one. The idea is to pull the mud while flexing the knife and keeping it against the ground (see photo above). The first pass roughs-in a radius and a few more pulls take out the pockmarks and uneven spots.

When the entire length of the joint is dry, Lyons removes the ground and carves away any high, sharp edges. For the second coat, he uses ready-mix and a 12-inch trowel drawn perpendicularly across the seam. After the final coat, the joint is straight and inconspicuous because of the small inside radius.

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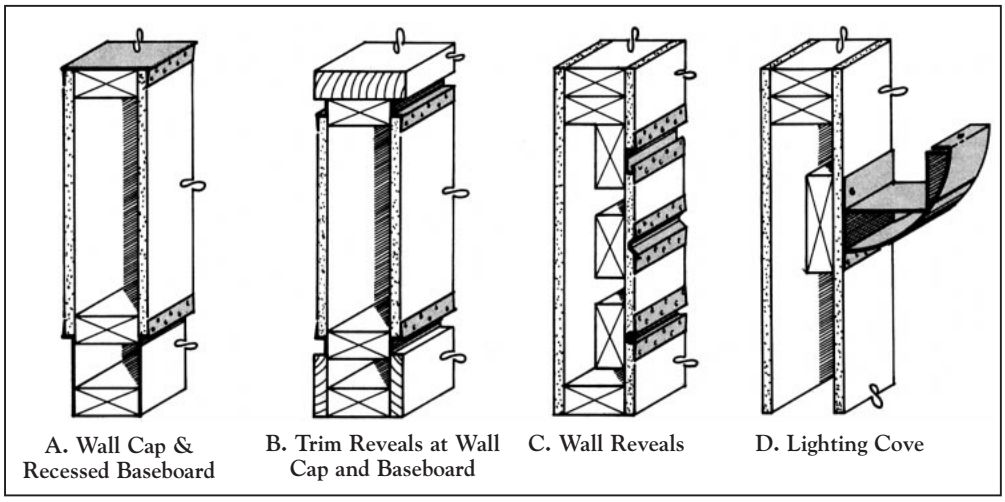

Figure 7. *It is sometimes easier to build typical details using metal trims than conventional materials.*

7D). Stock pieces can be cut and assembled in the field; custom pieces — like mitered corners — can be fabricated in the factory from shop drawings or templates.

The Bottom Line

Specialty trims are more expensive than standard accessories. But a strict price comparison is misleading because most details achieved with preformed profiles would require a lot of costly labor to produce by hand.

Conventional metal cornerbead costs about 10¢ per lineal foot or 80¢ per corner for the average 8-foot-high wall. By comparison, a 3/4-inch bullnose for the same corner is about 30¢ per lineal foot from Beadex or Pla-Cor, or about $2.40 per corner. This puts the extra cost for round, outside corners at less than $70 for a house of 2,000 square feet.

Inside corner trims are about the same price, but their net cost is greater because the paper tape they replace is cheaper than metal cornerbead and there are more inside corners. These add about $150 to $300 to the cost of the same house. This is still cheaper than rounding corners by hand (see "Alternative to Fancy Trim: A Steady Hand," previous page).

Preformed arches, on the other hand, will probably save money. A 3-foot radius Insta-Arch for a 2x4 wall costs about $75 and can be installed in minutes. You will easily spend twice that amount building the same arch by hand, including several hours of labor framing the opening and installing flexible arch bead (49¢ per lineal foot for the square-corner type from Pla-Cor).

Metal trims are the most expensive. List price for a 3/4-inch bullnose is $1.17 per lineal foot; for a cove, $1.31. This is over ten times the cost of ordinary cornerbead. Even at these prices, however, metal trims can save money if they replace other materials or reduce labor. The recessed baseboard profile in Figure 7A, for example, costs $2.48 per lineal foot, but once it's installed, the detail is finished. Measured against the cost of materials and labor usually required to complete this detail, metal trim is competitive. ■

Sal Alfano is an associate editor at The Journal of Light Construction.

Sources Of Supply

Arizona Metal Processing Services
P.O. Box 729
220 Camino Dr.
Goodyear, AZ 85338
602/932-3330
Metal drywall trims, including square and bullnose cornerbead, arch beads, and 3-way corner caps.

Beadex
833 Houser Way North
Renton, WA 98055
206/228-6600
Cement-on paper-on-metal cornerbeads.

C.O.C. Industries
Clinch-On Products Division
5201 Program Ave.
Mounds View, MN 55112
800/523-4642
Cornerbead installation tool, steel bullnose trims with two- and three-way corner caps, L-, J-, and U-Bead.

C/S Group
Construction Specialties
P.O. Box 380
Muncy, PA 17756
800/233-8493
"Contours" line of steel trims, including curved profiles, lighting coves, barrel vaults, and column covers.

Curvtech
Outwater Plastics
4 Passaic St.
Wood Ridge, NJ 07075
800/631-8375
Two- and four-piece preformed plastic arches.

Domtar Gypsum
P.O. Box 543
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
313/930-4700
Wallboard and joint compound.

Flannery
1391 Paxton St.
Pacoima, CA 91331
818/899-5557
PVC and steel trims, including curved cornerbead, radius baseboard corners, arch bead, and preformed arches.

Flex-Trim
P.O. Box 4227
Rancho Cucamonga, CA 91730
800/356-9060
Flexible plastic inside and outside cornerblocks, flexible molded trim.

Goldblatt Tool Co.
P.O. Box 2929
Kansas City, KS 66110
913/621-3010
"Flex-corner" metal-reinforced joint tape, tools for cement, drywall, brick, tile, masonry, and carpet; and drywall repair patch kits.

Gold Bond Bldg. Products
2001 Rexford Rd.
Charlotte, NC 28211
704/365-7300
Gypsum wallboard, joint compound, "Multi-flex" metal-reinforced joint tape.

Hyde Tools
54 Eastford Rd.
Southbridge, MA 01550
617/764-4344
Metal-reinforced joint tape, drywall tools.

Insta-Arch Corp.
17 Hamden Park Dr.
Hamden, CT 06517
203/288-2724
Prefabricated fiberglass arches.

Marshalltown Trowel Co.
P.O. Box 738
Marshalltown, IA 50158
515/753-0127
Hand trowels, drywall tools, pouches and aprons.

Phillips Manufacturing Co.
4601 South 76th St.
Omaha, NE 68127
800/822-5055
Metal cornerbead, utility angles, metal studs, and resilient channel.

Pittcon Industries
6409 Rhode Island Ave.
Riverdale, MD 20737
800/637-7638
"Softforms" extruded aluminum trims, including curves, lighting coves, barrel vaults, and column covers.

Pla-Cor Products
10207 Buena Vista Ave.
Suite D
Santee, CA 92071
619/562-2139
ABS trims, including curved cornerbeads, arch beads, and two- and three-way corner pieces.

Stockton Wire
1106 W. Isabel St.
Burbank, CA 91506
203/245-5193
Plastic-on-metal drywall arch bead, plaster accessories.

3M Corporation DIY Division
3M Center Bldg. 223-4S-01
St. Paul, MN 55144
612/737-4901
3M-90 spray-on, high-strength contact adhesive.

Trim-Tex
3700 W. Pratt Ave.
Lincolnwood, IL 60645
800/874-2333
Rigid vinyl cornerbead, extended L-bead, arch bead.

U.S. Gypsum
101 So. Wacker Dr.
Chicago, IL 60606
800/552-9785
"Sheetrock" gypsum wallboard, joint compound, "Durabond" setting compound, metal accessories.

Vinyl Corp.
8255 Northwest 70th St.
Miami, FL 33166
800/648-4695
Vinyl drywall and stucco products.

Wall Tool & Tape Corp.
118-01 101st Ave.
Richmond Hill, NY 11419
718/441-3190
"Sure-Corner" metal-reinforced joint tape.