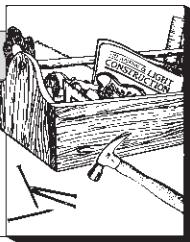


A Floor Installer's Secret

by Clayton DeKorne



Resilient floor installers have a tool in their bag of tricks that might be a lifesaver for a remodeling contractor. This tool is the Crain Super Saw — a flush-cutting circular saw designed for undercutting doors, jambs, casing, and baseboard.

To test the Super Saw, I took it on site to install a hardwood floor over an existing plank floor, and put

it in the hands of a remodeling contractor who found the Super Saw useful for solving a variety of problems on the job.

Undercutting Specialist

The Super Saw is manufactured by the Crain Cutter Company (156 So. Milpitas Blvd., Milpitas, CA 95035; 408/946-6100) — a

Figure 1. The Crain Super Saw, shown here on its side, rides on an adjustable blade housing and cuts horizontally to undercut doors, jambs, casing, and baseboard. Note the concentric indexing lines on the inside of the blade housing that are used to keep the blade parallel to the housing.



Figure 2. With the Super Saw, doors can be undercut while still hanging in place. The blade housing will adjust up to 1 1/4 inches, which is enough height to undercut a door half an inch before 3/4-inch flooring is installed.



Figure 3. Because the floor slopes away from the door opening, the author had to support the saw on a piece of plywood to undercut the door. The plywood is blocked up to match the slope of the opening, so the cut will be parallel to the floor when the door is closed.

toolmaker that specializes in tools for floor installers. The Super Saw is adapted from a conventional circular saw. Crain has added an adjustable blade housing in place of the standard blade guard and a 6 1/2-inch flush-fitting blade (see Figure 1). The saw rides on the blade housing, instead of the saw shoe, to cut horizontally at the level of a new flooring material. This cut allows the floor installer to slip new flooring underneath door jambs and casing, eliminating the need to scribe the new floor to the opening. According to the manufacturer, the Super Saw is coveted by resilient floor installers, in particular, for undercutting baseboard. This allows an installer to overcut the resilient floor covering and avoid a miscut where shoe molding won't cover the joint.

For installing a hardwood floor, I found it easy to not only undercut door jambs and casing, but also to undercut doors while they were still hanging in place (see Figure 2). The blade housing will adjust from a flush cut (zero height) to 1 1/4 inches, which is enough height to undercut a door half an inch before 3/4-inch flooring is installed. Care must be taken to keep the housing parallel to the blade when adjusting the height. This is fairly simple to do by indexing several closely spaced parallel lines that are etched on the inside of the housing.

Undercutting doors while they were hanging proved especially useful in an old house with pinless hinges. Check the floor level before undercutting a door in place, since the cut will match the slope of the floor. If the floor is sloped, you can support the saw on a piece of plywood that is blocked up to match the slope of the opening (see Figure 3). You can also work off a piece of plywood to undercut a door that is dragging over new carpet.

By any other means, undercutting pocket doors is an especially time-consuming job. With the Super Saw, however, you can hold the saw in place and slide the door open as you cut. This saves a considerable amount of time because the pocket door doesn't need to be disassembled first — a task that can sometimes involve demolishing part of the wall if the doors were built in place.

Be advised when undercutting doors in place: The undercut on a pocket door, or on the hinge side of a swing door near a threshold, will need to be finished with a handsaw. Also, on a veneered door, you may need to score the cutline on the door to keep the veneer from tearing out. In some cases, tape might help to hold the veneer down, but on oak and other splintery woods, this won't always work. On 1 1/2-inch-thick doors, you can clamp a piece of 1/4-inch



Figure 4. With a carborundum masonry blade, the Super Saw can undercut brick, block, stone walls, hearths, and chimneys. Here, an exposed brick pier is undercut to allow $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch maple flooring to slip underneath it, allowing the floor to expand and contract without opening up an unsightly gap.

hardboard to hold down the veneer. However, the fence only adjusts to a $1\frac{1}{8}$ -inch horizontal depth — not enough to add the hardboard to a $1\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick door.

The Super Saw comes with a carborundum masonry blade for undercutting brick, block, stone walls, hearths, and chimneys. This feature proved extremely useful for getting around an exposed brick pier on our floor installation (see Figure 4). Two cuts — one at the subfloor level and one at the finish floor level — are needed. The brick between the cuts is then removed with a cold chisel. This is tedious work, but worth the effort. There are few good ways to detail a masonry-to-wood joint at the floor. The best detail is to undercut the masonry and let the flooring move freely beneath it. For accomplishing this detail alone, I would recommend the Super Saw to any floor installer.

Other Uses

In the hands of remodeling contractor Stewart Jackson of Essex Junction, Vt., the Super Saw proved extremely useful for a variety of other jobs. Jackson first used the saw to trim some factory-installed jamb extensions after a window had been installed. With the Super Saw set flush to the wall surface, Jackson

was able to remove the protruding jamb extensions where the wall had bowed outward.

Jackson also used the saw to make quick work of removing subfloor. In this case, he set the blade housing on the wall, making a vertical cut flush against the wall. Without the Super Saw, Jackson would have had to make this cut with a Sawzall, which would have taken

considerably longer. His only regret was that he didn't have a carbide blade for cutting through the nail-embedded wood.

No doubt the Super Saw would prove useful to make other difficult cuts, such as cutting the bottom out of a cabinet to make way for ductwork, making the cut near the backsplash on a countertop, or any number of other flush cuts that crop up on remodeling jobs. If you had the Super Saw on hand, you would use it.

The Super Saw is currently only marketed to floor covering installers, and the demand for the Super Saw is fairly low. As a result, the price is a little high. The Super Saw, including a plastic carrying case, steel combination blade, and carborundum masonry blade, retails for about \$250. However, the flush-fitting blades are a bargain, considering they are specialty items. A combination blade costs about \$12, a masonry blade costs about \$6, and a carbide blade about \$20. ■

TOOLBITS

Specialty tool catalogs. As a professional reader of tool catalogs, I occasionally run across some gems from other trades that would interest builders and remodelers. Here are some of my favorites:

Dynamic Fastener (P.O. Drawer 16837, Raytown, MO 64133; 800/821-5448) claims to carry "everything for the builder and remodeler," with a strong bent toward the metal building trades. Among other items, they carry power shears, nibblers, metal saws, rivet tools, spud wrenches, gasketed fasteners, pole barn screws, concrete screws, epoxy anchors, flashing compounds, butyl tape, and Gatorade mix.

Forestry Suppliers (P.O. Box 8397, Jackson, MS 39284; 800/752-8460) put out a 475-page catalog geared to forest rangers and loggers that includes a tremendous

assortment of lumber crayons; hoedads and dribblers for planting trees; McLeods, mattocks, pulaskis, and brush cutters for site clearing; backpack pumps and sprayers; spuds, pickeroons, peavies, skidding tongs, and other log-handling equipment; chainsaw mills; earth augers; soil and water testing instruments; sling psychrometers; weather stations; tree-climbing ropes; two-way radios; surveying equipment; drafting supplies; sunblock; and a staggering number of insect repellents.

The Specialty Tool Company (145-D, Grassy Plain St., Bethel, CT 06801; 800/456-4605) offers a complete assortment of tools and test equipment for the home inspector including moisture meters, gas detectors, multimeters, pin-point thermometers, sound meters, borescopes, and lead test kits.

— C. D.