Fast Fascia Techniques

Tricks of the trade for installing two-by fascia by yourself

by Mike Stary

On the West Coast, installing fascia is a specialized trade. "Board hangers," as they're called in California, methodically move through a tract development, hanging the fascia on house after house. The prices for this work are well established, and board hangers quickly learn that in order to make a profit, they must work efficiently.

Over the years, I've developed a method that allows me to work by myself and hang fascia faster than two carpenters working together. Using nothing more than a 6 1/2-inch wormdrive saw and the tools in my nail pouch, I'm able to hang 2x8 fir fascia boards up to 24 feet long.

Before climbing up on the wall plates, I lean the uncut fascia stock between the rafter tails. I position the boards so that a 2- to 3-foot-long section of each board projects above the roof plane so that I can easily cut the fascia to length right from the roof.

After marking the overhang at all four corners of the building, I transfer the overhang mark to each rafter tail with a chalk line, then mark a cut line on each rafter tail and cut the tails to length.

Where I start hanging depends on the type of roof. On a simple rectangular hip roof, I usually start in the middle of one side and work counterclockwise around the house. (I always work counterclockwise because of the way my wormdrive saw tilts.) On a more complex roof, I might start with a square cut at an inside corner or where a roof section meets a wall. For gable roofs, I usually start at a corner where the gable meets the eaves and work down in a counterclockwise direction.

Bent Nail Trick

I make the first cut while the fascia board is leaning against the wall (see Figure 1). Next, I pull the board up and lay it face up, across the rafter tails and about 4 inches from their ends. To keep the board from sliding off the roof, I tack a temporary 16-penny nail into the top edge of a rafter tail, about a third of the length from one end of the board. I then move to the other end of the board, coming in two or three rafter tails from the end. I position the board where I want it and make a V mark on the top edge where it crosses the left side of the rafter. Using this as a reference, I drive a nail down through the face of the fascia, 3/4 inch to the right of the V at an angle back towards me. I stop the nail when the point sticks out 1/4 inch at the top edge of the fascia.

Pivoting around the 16-penny nail I drove earlier at the other end, I slide the board out over the end of the rafter tail and line up the V with the left edge of the rafter. The protruding nail will touch at the middle of the rafter tail. I lift the board slightly and push the nail point into the rafter tail's top edge, then drive the nail home. At this point, I move over and remove the 16-penny pivot nail that was holding the other end. I slide the fascia out and over the rafter tails, turning the fascia board so it butts against the end of the rafter tails. The angled fascia nail that was driven earlier will bend as the board rolls over the ends of the rafter tails.

I like to leave the fascia partially nailed until the entire run is hung so I can sight and straighten the entire length before nailing it off for good.

Cutting to Length in Place

If I've started hanging where the fascia butts into a wall, as in the photos in Figure 1, I'll cut that end square first but leave the other end wild. Once the fascia's tacked up, it's easy to scribe the wild end to the last rafter tail, then cut it right in place. With my saw table set at 45 degrees, I run the saw down the outside face of the fascia, watching to make sure the blade follows the scribe line (Figure 2).

Another Bent Nail Trick

Successive boards are hung in a similar manner, using a different type of bent nail trick to support the end of the fascia as it's installed. I first cut the mating miter joint of the next piece while the board is still leaning against the wall. I then drive a 16-penny nail into the top edge at the miter cut before pulling the board up. As the fascia is lifted and set in place, this nail will support the end of the fascia, while the angle of the miter on the previously hung board holds the second board snug against the end of the rafter tail.

There are a couple of tricks I use to get a tight joint. Before lifting the second fascia board into position, I tap the back side of the first piece until there is an 1/8-inch gap between it and the rafter tail (the end should not be nailed yet). When I lift the second board into place, the gap allows me to easily position the mitered end far enough behind the first piece to get a snug joint. I drive a nail into a rafter tail approximately two-thirds down the length of the second fascia board, then go back to check that the miter is correctly positioned. The 45-degree cuts should be positioned slightly past each other; otherwise, the joint will spread open as you nail it and no angled or toe-nailed fastener will be able to pull it tight. Once I'm sure the second board is slid back far enough, I drive a 16-penny fascia nail straight through the lap into the tail.

When fitting the last board in a run on a hip roof, I lift the board into place, mark a line where it meets the outside corner of the hip rafter tail, and lay it back down on top of the rafters to make

Figure 1. *To hang a long piece of fascia by himself, the author makes the first cut from the roof as the fascia leans against the building (top left). He then lays the board across the rafter tails, finish side down. Working near one end, he drives a nail at an angle until the point protrudes 1/4 inch from the back side (top right). He moves the fascia out to the edge and drives that nail into the top of the plumb cut of the rafter tail (above left). Moving to the other end, he swings the board down into place (above right) and nails it off.*

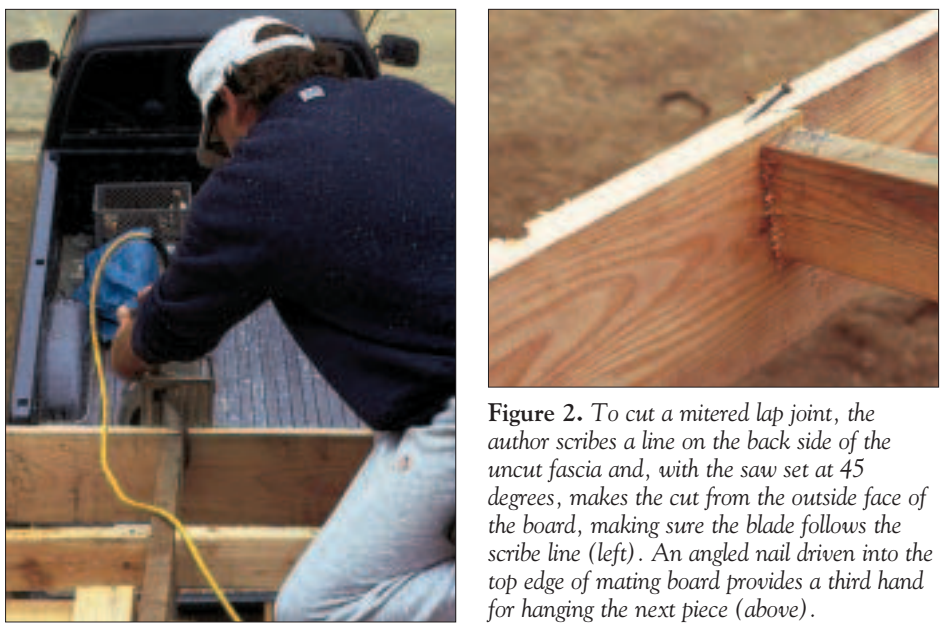

Figure 2. *To cut a mitered lap joint, the author scribes a line on the back side of the uncut fascia and, with the saw set at 45 degrees, makes the cut from the outside face of the board, making sure the blade follows the scribe line (left). An angled nail driven into the top edge of mating board provides a third hand for hanging the next piece (above).*

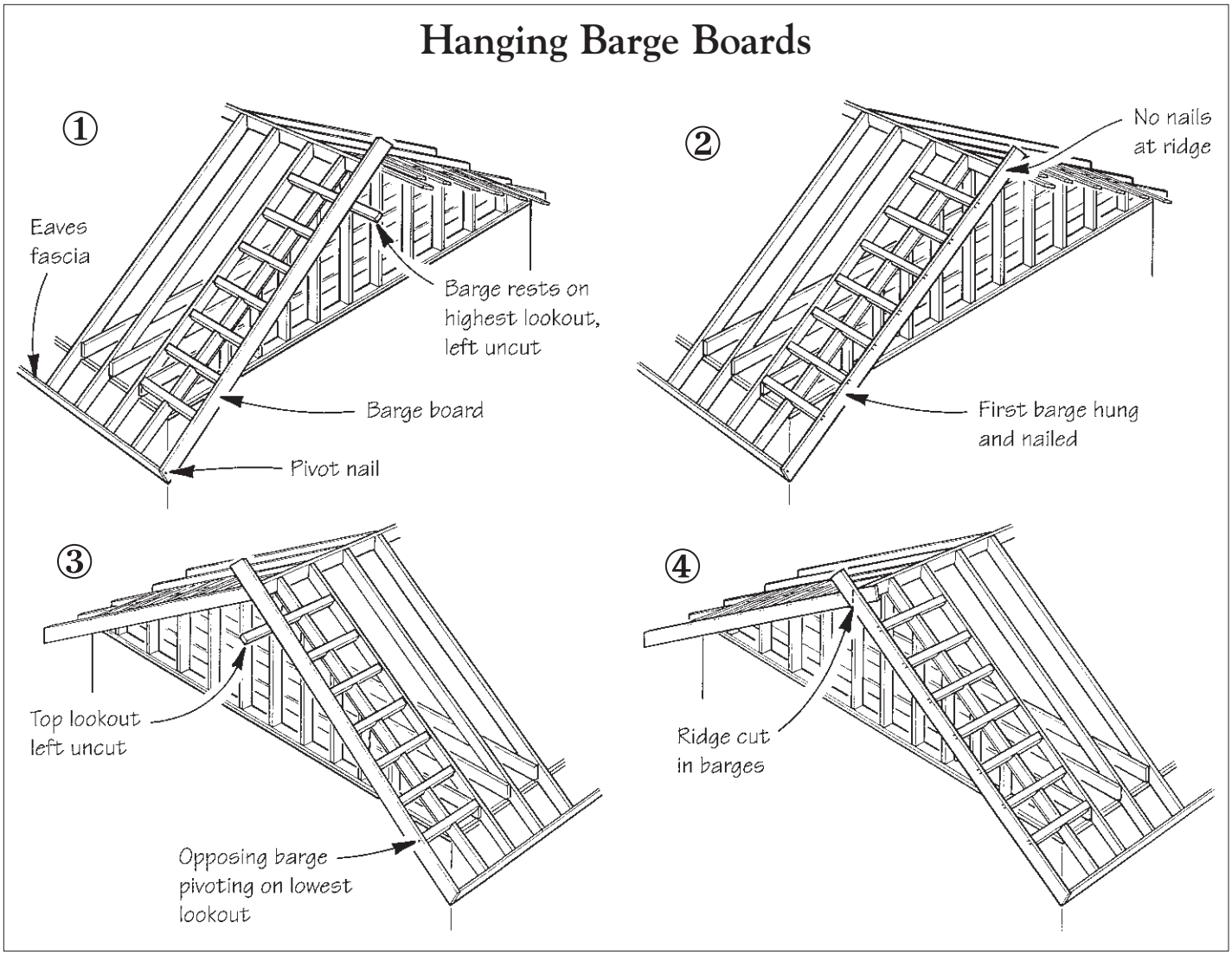

Figure 3. *The author first cuts the lookouts to length, except for the top one. He cuts the miter at the bottom of the barge board and supports it with one nail into the eaves fascia, resting the top end on the uncut lookout. He then moves to the ridge, cuts the lookout to length, and nails the barge to the lookout, but not to the ridge. He installs the opposing barge in the same way, letting it run long at the bottom.*

the compound angle cut. For gable roofs, the last board in a run is left running wild.

Hanging Barge Boards

On gable-style roofs, the gable fascia (called "barge boards" in my area) are fastened to lookouts that cantilever over a framed rake wall (Figure 3). I install these lookouts long, then cut them to length in place. I first snap a line between the overhanging ridge board and the wild end of the eaves fascia to mark the position. I scribe a line on the back side of the eaves fascia and, with the saw table held on the outside face of the fascia, watch the blade follow the scribe line. After cutting the eaves fascia, I start at the low end of the roof and cut all the lookouts except the highest one next to the ridge. I cut the 45-degree miter on the eaves end of the barge board then pull it up, and start a nail at the top of the miter.

Next, with the top end of the barge board resting on the uncut lookout by the ridge, I drop the board over the edge and drive the started nail into the joint at the eaves fascia. Moving to the upper end of the barge, I hold the barge with my left hand and cut the lookout to length. I lower the barge into place and nail it off as I work my way to the lower end, making sure that I don't drive any nails into the ridge block. I then cut off the top of the barge about 1 inch past the ridge block, to provide a temporary resting point for the upper end of the opposing barge.

I repeat the process on the other side of the gable, again leaving the highest lookout uncut. With the upper end of the barge resting on the uncut lookout, I nail the barge with one 16-penny nail into the lowest lookout, letting the lower end extend beyond the eaves. Moving up to the uncut lookout, I lift the barge and cut the lookout to length, then carefully set the barge on the tip of the previously hung barge. I position myself above the ridge, lift the barge, and lower it until its top edge is flush with the top edge of the lookouts. Then, lifting the barge back up 1/8 inch, I make a vertical plumb cut. As I make this cut, the blade scribes a cut line on the barge board beneath (I hold the barge 1/8 inch high to compensate for the material removed by the saw kerf). Holding the cut barge up and away, I cut the other barge, following the scribed line. ■

Mike Stary, of Leucadia, Calif., operates Stary Construction, a company that specializes in installing fascia and roof sheathing. Photos by Brent Emery.