Aluminum Trim FOR VINYL SIDING

For retrofit work, custom aluminum trim is more versatile than vinyl trim accessories

by Blaine Miller

When it comes to vinyl siding, the hard part is getting the trim right. Fancy vinyl accessories are okay for new work, but for retrofits, they're too expensive and don't always work. Plus, trimming old, out-of-whack openings and covering the eaves will kill your profit if you can't get a rhythm going.

When other kids my age were out shooting marbles, I was learning how to do roofing and siding work with my Dad and brothers. After working together on hundreds of jobs, we've figured out how to produce durable aluminum trim details using the fewest possible steps. The trick is getting everything on the house as uniform as possible before bending any metal. That way, you can mass-produce the bulk of the trim and install it all at once.

Working with Coil Stock

Aluminum coil stock is one of the most versatile exterior covering materials available. It comes in a variety of colors to match or complement vinyl siding colors, with either a smooth painted surface or a textured vinyl coating. The vinyl-coated stock is a little more expensive ($80 per roll vs. $55 to $60) and is not reversible, but the color options may more closely match some siding accessories. Narrower rolls are available, but we always buy the standard 24-inch by 50-foot rolls and fabricate what we need on site using a 12-foot Tapco siding and

Figure 1. To create a uniform base for the new siding, the author first cuts off window sill horns, then covers the existing siding and trim with a 3/8-inch-thick folding foam board (right). Next, a layer of housewrap is carefully cut and folded into openings and fastened with roofing nails or staples (far right).

trim brake (Tapco Products, 832 Sycamore Dr., Lansdale, PA 19446; 888/464-5805; www.tapcorental.com). We use a special holder that mounts on the rear of the brake and loads an entire roll of coil stock. The holder makes it easy to pull coil stock through and cut off whatever length is needed.

Trim wrapped in metal can look good or terrible, depending on how it is handled during fabrication and installation. Here are a few tips.

Figure 2. New 1x4 wood trim is screwed through the foam into the existing casings. Less expensive No. 2 pine is adequate because it will be covered by metal, but the lumber needs to be straight.

Keep everything clean. A metal shaving stuck in the brake can scratch the surface, and dirty tools and hands can make smudge marks that can't be cleaned off.

Handle as little as possible. The more fiddling you have to do with each piece, the greater the chances for damage. Get it made, and install it right away.

Use hand seamers. Everybody knows you need a brake to make a long bend, but some installers insist on using a block of wood and a hammer to make the smaller return bends. No wonder a lot of aluminum trim looks like someone pounded a coffee can over a board. Whenever the metal is going to be exposed, use a good set of hand seamers. We like to use seamers made by Malco (P.O. Box 537, Annandale, MN 55302; 320/274-2376; www.malcointl.com), which come in widths up to 9 inches.

Prevent buckling. One downside of coil stock is that it expands and contracts, so it can get wavy in the sun. To minimize buckling, we always create a 1-inch fold or hem on the edges of flat pieces. We also avoid putting nails through the face, nailing sparingly on the narrower sides or bottom instead.

Prepping the Openings

When we start a new siding job, I dress out the window and door openings for trim while my brothers work on the fascia and soffit. This division of labor keeps us out of each other's way, and we each do what we're best at. While we prep the house, Dad stays close behind us, keeping the mess picked up and running for odds and ends we might need. Cleaning up as we go means the job is always spotless, something customers really appreciate.

Nine times out of ten, the house we're working on will have old wooden windows with flat 1-by trim. As long as the original window frame and stops don't have to be replaced, we can trim out the openings with aluminum. Sash repairs or even vinyl replacement units can be added later. If the windows will be replaced with totally new units, then that work has to be done before we do any siding.

Squaring up. I start the job by "squaring up" the openings, using a small handsaw and a pry bar to cut off any sill returns and remove any other projections that will be hard to cover. Some people might complain that we're removing the details, but trying to duplicate moldings with tin will look more "fake" than just keeping nice clean lines.

I also nail down any loose siding that might be sticking up, and prep any electrical outlets or water or fuel lines that might be in the way. This is also the time to do any last-minute caulking and sealing of the existing siding.

Leveling the wall. We use a 3/8-inch foam-core leveling board to completely cover the existing house. There are several brands on the market, and we use whatever our siding supplier is stocking at the time. On this job, we used Polar

Industries (formerly Northeastern Foam Plastics, P.O. Box 7075, Prospect, CT 06712; 203/758-6651), which is perforated to let moisture escape and has layout lines for different roof pitches, a nice feature (see Figure 1). We float the leveling board right over any corner boards and existing window trim that are 1/2 inch or less proud of the wall. This trick makes the next steps easier, because it establishes a common surface for everything else to build on, and with vinyl siding nobody will see those minor variations anyway.

Next, we wrap the building with Tyvek, to help reduce air infiltration and to establish a good drainage plane behind the vinyl siding and trim. I carefully cut the housewrap into the window opening and secure it with a few roofing nails or staples.

Wood trim. Once the surfaces have been prepped and leveled, I apply new wood trim to the window and door openings (Figure 2). We usually use 1x4 pine, but it depends on the job and the finished look the customer wants. The wood all gets covered, so No. 2 is good enough, but it does need to be straight and true. To avoid rattling the window, I use galvanized screws to attach these pieces.

Bending Metal

Once the prep work is done on the entire house, I make and install the aluminum trim pieces. If the prep work was successful, I'll be able to bend most of the aluminum to the same specs, then fit the pieces to the openings by scribing and trimming to final size.

Using the brake. I start by cutting the coil stock to rough length and laying out my bends. To rip the coil stock to width, I use a utility knife to deeply score one side while the material is locked in the brake. A couple of quick bends up and down and the piece snaps off cleanly.

To make a bend, I first mark the dimensions on the coil stock, then lock the jaws of the brake down on the marks and pull up on the lower jaw of the hinged brake. It's not rocket science, but it takes some experience to avoid

Figure 3. The author begins at the sill, scribing the brake-bent metal to finish length (above), then cutting returns with tin snips (left). Trim is never nailed through the face. Instead, fasteners are driven through the flanges and tabs (below), which are planned carefully so that joints drain properly without relying on caulk.

Figure 4. The casing trim makes a clean corner where it meets and overlaps the sill (top). At the top, the casing is square cut, then overlapped by the head trim, which is mitered and hemmed (two middle photos). The final step is to install vinyl J-channel at the perimeter (bottom).

over- or under-bending. It's also important to have the brake adjusted for even tension along its length, so the stock doesn't slide as it's bent.

The brake only bends one way — up — so complicated profiles must be bent in the proper sequence, turning and flipping the stock as necessary. Some flat pieces, such as fascia covering, also need to be folded back on themselves, or "hemmed," to prevent buckling. To make a hem, I start by bending 1 inch from the edge as far as the brake will go, then pull the piece out and crimp it flat using the back of the bending handle against the top of the jaw — a feature built in to the Tapco brake. If you're using a rented brake without this feature, you can make this crimp with a wide pair of hand seamers.

Trimming a Window

Installation starts at the sill, which is the most complicated piece because it must extend completely under the window sash. I scribe (not measure) the rough pieces to final length, then make my final cuts with sharp tin snips (Figure 3, previous page). I make the final bends for returns and overlaps using a pair of hand seamers. It's important to plan the bends and tabs so that once installed, the aluminum covering acts like a flashing system to shed water without relying on caulks or sealants, which won't last long on the expanding aluminum.

If the sill trim stops short of the window sash (a mistake many installers make), water can run under the aluminum covering and rot out the sash. On this house I got lucky: I was able to loosen up the interior stop enough to slide the sill trim underneath. Other times, I might have to cut a groove in the old sill with a handsaw, or finish the edge of the sill covering with a hem. If we're reusing the window sashes, I also install new weatherstripping.

The side pieces go on next so they'll drain onto the sill, and the header trim comes last, lapping the side pieces and serving as a cap flashing for the vinyl siding (Figure 4). All of the trim is fastened through the tabs into the wall

with roofing nails; returns are fasted to the edge of the wood casing with colored trim nails. Coil trim nails are available in aluminum and stainless steel, and are painted to match the coil stock. I predrill for all nails to minimize bending and buckling, and I keep nails out of the face of the stock whenever possible. The final step before moving on is to apply a vinyl J-channel around the unit to accept the vinyl siding.

Fascia Covering

While I'm working on windows and doors, my brother Mitch is prepping the eaves for fascia and soffit, and Marty is cutting vinyl soffit and siding. When Mitch is ready to nail up the soffit, I bend the fascia covering. The house photographed for this article had open-tail rafters, so we had to install a rough pine fascia on all the overhangs. The vinyl soffit floats in an F-channel against the house and is loosely nailed to the underside of the new fascia board. The aluminum covering then floats up under the metal drip edge, or can be clipped into a vinyl trim channel if there is no drip edge.

Aluminum fascia is simpler than the window and door trim, but there are still a few tricks. With a double fascia — a 1x4 over a 1x8, for instance — the bend in the covering will keep the aluminum from buckling (Figure 5). Where the fascia is flat, however, you can minimize buckling by putting a hem on the top edge. Fascia covering should "float" over existing molding profiles, and like the vinyl siding, it should be lapped away from the line of sight. If the roof line dips and dives more than the drip edge can cover, the fascia can be installed in two pieces, keeping the bottom straight.

The same techniques we use for window and door trim and fascia coverings can be applied to other areas, such as frieze coverings and base trim, but we don't overdo it. Items like wide exterior columns almost never look good when covered with coil stock.

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Figure 5. To prevent buckling, the hemmed upper edge of the fascia trim metal is tucked under the existing drip edge, and nailed up from the bottom through the soffit (left). Similarly, the trim is allowed to "float" when covering old fascia molding (see illustration). To cover two-piece fascia, or when the roofline dips and sags, use two-piece trim nailed up from the bottom only.