

PROBLEM-SOLVING Tools & Materials

by Patrick McCombe

Our pick of products to help you
work faster, better, and more profitably

FOUNDATIONS Ideal Seal

Most building scientists agree that typical sill sealers don't do enough to prevent water and air infiltration. In fact, the foundation-to-mud-sill connection is one of the biggest energy wasters in most new homes. *Triple Guard Energy Sill Sealer* improves the water resistance and air-sealing qualities of typical sill sealer by adding a T-shaped piece of sticky adhesive membrane to the closed-cell foam. The membrane, which adheres the sill seal to the foundation, extends up the sheathing 3 1/2 inches and down the foundation 1 1/2 inches, effectively waterproofing and air-sealing that difficult area. A two-part release paper protects the adhesive while the floor is framed and sheathed. The 2x4 triple seal sells for \$19, and

the 2x6 triple seal sells for \$29. Both rolls are 25 feet long.

Protecto Wrap, 800/759-9727, www.protectowrap.com.



FOUNDATIONS Flood Damage Prevention

Flooding causes billions of dollars in property damage annually. Especially susceptible are flood-plain crawlspace foundations, which can buckle inward when subjected to the extreme pressure of floodwater. The all-stainless *Smart Vent Foundation Vent* is designed to prevent that sort of damage by equalizing the pressure. When water reaches the vent, a float-activated release opens, allowing water into the crawlspace. A thermostat-controlled louver automatically closes the vent when temperatures approach freezing. Single Smart Vents sell for about \$150, and the maker provides discounts for higher-volume purchases.

Smart Vent, 877/441-8368, www.smartvent.com.

FRAMING

Brace Yourself

Made from 1-inch square tubing, the *Plumb-Jack Adjustable Wall Brace* replaces temporary lumber bracing with reusable and adjustable steel wall bracing. When placed on 8-foot centers, the bracing can be used with walls as high as 10 feet and can withstand winds of up to 50 miles per hour. Heavy-duty turnbuckle-style adjusters can bring the waviest of walls in line quickly, even when you're working alone. They sell for \$24 each.

Vinco Manufacturing, 618/268-6244, www.vincomfg.com.



FRAMING

Graph Panels

Don't throw away your tape measure just yet, but Martco's *Grid Panel System* could give it a little more downtime. This system of plywood and OSB panels uses a grid-style set of markings with 1/2-inch increments in the field and 1/8-inch marks along the edges to make cutting and nailing faster as well as reduce missed fasteners and bad cuts. According to the manufacturer, grid-stamped panels cost about \$1 more per sheet than standard panel products. So far, the system is available only on Martco's OSB and plywood sheathing, but the company plans to license the technology to other mills in the near future.

Martco, 800/299-5174, www.martco.com.



FRAMING

Better Ledger

Detailing a ledger board to adequately prevent water infiltration is a job that's hard to get right. Rick Jewell, a builder who's repaired dozens of homes with rotten band joists resulting from poor ledger installation, has come up with the *Maine Deck Bracket*, an efficient way to make that critical connection. Mounting the I-shaped spacer directly to the home's band joist creates a standoff for the ledger and leaves the siding behind it intact. Brackets can be spaced a maximum of 8 feet on-center and can handle up to 1,000 pounds each. They work with most siding types and cost \$21 apiece, plus shipping.

Maine Deck Bracket, 207/212-0888, www.deckbracket.com.



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Big Rig

You seldom find a carpenter or tradesperson who has no complaint with his tool rig. Most complaints center on two general areas: insufficient capacity and inadequate comfort. The *Tool Chest* from Occidental Leather addresses both problems. The vest-like bag reduces strain on your lower back, and numerous pockets keep everything organized while offering greater freedom of movement than more traditional, apron-style bags. Special pockets for hard-to-locate tools and large fastener pockets make the Tool Chest ideal for carpenters and tradespeople who find themselves working on many different tasks during the workday. Prices start at \$205. Look for a comprehensive test in *Toolbox* in an upcoming issue.

Occidental Leather, 707/522-2500, www.bestbelt.com.



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Tool Transport for Pros

With their undivided interiors, toolboxes and gatemouth bags require constant rummaging around and sorting through to find the tool you're after. Bucket organizers are slightly better, but they're tippy and their cavernous interiors inevitably become a catchall for fasteners, random hardware, and trash. The *Veto Pro Pac* is the first tool-carrying system that keeps your tools organized, protected, and within reach at all



times. Thirty large and 32 smaller pockets keep everything visible, and empty pockets tell you when something's missing before you need it. Instead of a single lid with latches, two separate flaps with smooth-acting zippers provide access to the bag's interior and fold out of the way when the bag is open. The luggage-like bag

includes a padded shoulder strap, leaving your hands free to open doors and carry other tools. In a *JLC* review, the XL Pro Pac (\$120) swallowed all of the tools from the tester's 22-inch plastic toolbox with room to spare.

Veto Pro Pac, 877/847-1443, www.vetopropac.com.



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Organizational Plan

Carrying and organizing a large set of plans is a constant struggle, and the inevitable coffee stains and dog-eared pages that result add little to your professional look. But keeping blueprints neat and presentable is all in a day's work with an *Easi Carrier*. The folding nylon bag, available in 24x36-inch and 30x42-inch sizes, keeps your important construction documents safe and protects your plans from job-site mishaps. It unfolds to create a hard surface for making notes and revisions, and smaller pockets keep track of things like change orders and shop drawings. Prices start at \$100.

Easi File, 800/800-5563, www.easifileusa.com.



TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Switch Hitter

Changing the contact foot on the Bostitch *N88RH-MCN-2* nailer converts the tool from a standard framing nailer to a positive-placement, metal connector nailer. Both feet are included, and they can be swapped, without tools, in a couple of seconds. The adjustable-depth framing nose-piece includes a no-mar plastic cover for exposed-fastener applications like decking. According to the maker, the 7¹/₂-pound, round-head nailer has the industry's highest power-to-weight ratio, making it easier



to drive nails into dense engineered lumber. The \$330 two-in-one nailer costs about \$70 less than a traditional single-purpose, metal connector nailer. If you already own an older N88 full-head nailer, you can purchase the positive-placement contact foot separately for \$40 (part no. MCN-KIT).

Stanley Bostitch, 800/556-6696, www.stanleybostitch.com.

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

Super Slicer



Versatile and razor sharp, an ordinary utility knife is one of the handiest tools around. Unfortunately, though, it's too big and bulky to make a comfortable pocketknife. The *Super Knife* is an anodized-aluminum utility knife that folds into a compact shape about a third the size of an ordinary utility knife. It accepts standard and heavy-duty blades, comes in five colors, and sells for about

\$25. A new, even smaller version uses mini-sized blades and sells for \$12.

RDR Tools, 480/348-0544, www.superknives.com.

DOORS & WINDOWS

No-Complaint No-Paint Window

Low maintenance, low cost, and easy installation make vinyl windows a favorite of homeowners and builders alike, but their clunky frames and styling make them less appealing to customers trying to match existing millwork or seeking a more traditional look. MW Windows' newest vinyl window uses an integral, vinyl brick molding with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch J-channel that makes it look a lot like a wood-framed window. It also features block-and-tackle balances, fully welded corners, and insulating glass with a $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch air space. The windows are available in single-hung, double-hung, and sliding styles. The list price for a 3/0 by 4/0 double-hung with screen and standard hardware is \$222.

MW Windows, 800/999-8400, www.mwwindows.com.



DOORS & WINDOWS

Screen Test



Casement windows generally have better thermal performance than other types of windows, and they have no meeting rail to obstruct the view. But for many homeowners those benefits are more than offset by the ugly metal-framed interior screens supplied by most manufacturers. Marvin's Casemaster Casement Windows feature wood-veneered screen frames that blend in better with wood-framed sash and wood trim. A removable "finishing strip" prevents paint or finishes from getting on the screen mesh. The list price for a Casemaster (rough opening 1/8 by 3/4) with a screen and standard hardware is \$340.

Marvin, 888/537-8266, www.marvin.com.

DOORS & WINDOWS

"i" Opener

By eliminating the trolley and rail from its *i-drive garage door opener*, Wayne-Dalton not only has made garage door installation easier, but has simplified life for the builder, too. The new opener mounts directly on the header above the door, leaving the ceiling unobstructed by the track and motor.

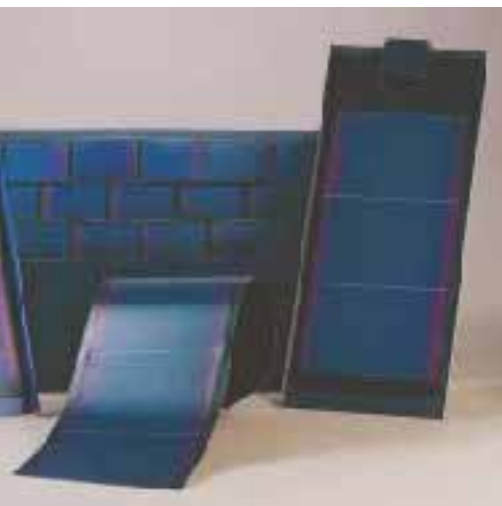


and saving builders from having to coordinate with drywallers, electricians, and installers to hang the opener and track. The i-drive also makes door operation quieter because it eliminates many of the typical moving parts and better isolates the opener from the floor above. It locks and automatically changes the transmitter security code after every cycle, which prevents unauthorized entry by code stealing. The installed price for the opener only is about \$350.

Wayne-Dalton Garage Doors, 800/827-3667, www.wayne-dalton.com.

ELECTRICAL

Self-Stick Solar



With brownouts on the West Coast and rising electricity prices everywhere, residential photovoltaic energy production is looking better all the time. Uni-Solar's collection of residential *Solar Electric Racks*, *Electric Shingles*, and *Solar Laminates* give homeowners and builders a lighter, more easily installed photovoltaic system than traditional panel arrays. The electric racks have the most traditional design and appearance, but they can be installed over uneven roofing materials like clay and cement tile. Solar electric shingles install in place of ordinary fiberglass or asphalt roofing shingles, so they add little to installation costs. Flexible solar laminates can be adhered directly to smooth surfaces like standing-seam metal roofing. According to the manufacturer, all of the products are virtually indestructible and more efficient than designs made popular in the '70s and '80s. Installed systems cost about \$8 per watt, making a typical installation about \$20,000.

Uni-Solar, 800/397-2083, www.uni-solar.com.

KITCHEN & BATH

Stone-Friendly Sink

Generally, stainless-steel sinks get (and deserve) little fanfare, but the *Blanco Module*, a high-quality, 18-gauge stainless sink with a 4-inch backsplash and integral countertop section, should make homeowners and kitchen installers very happy. The countertop section allows users to wipe splashed water and crumbs into the sink without the rim getting in the way. From the installer's point of view, eliminating the sink cutout makes working with natural stone and stock countertops much easier. A double-bowl module has a list price of \$1,690.

Blanco America, 800/451-5782, www.blancoamerica.com.



KITCHEN & BATH

Show Them You Care

Washing dishes in the tub or laundry sink gets remodeling clients cranky in a hurry, but the all-stainless *Portable Kitchenette* allows for easy food preparation and cleanup while the kitchen is temporarily out of commission. The portable unit features a pullout 16x12-inch sink and a butcher-block cutting board. A top-mounted shelf is handy for small appliances, and hooks for pots and pans are available underneath. The 28-inch-wide, 420-pound unit fits in the back of a pickup for job-site delivery, and removable drawers and casters make transport easier. You can lease it for \$3,000 per year or buy it for \$7,000. Neither price includes shipping.

Diversified Metal, 510/667-9900, www.mobilekitchenette.com.

KITCHEN & BATH

Power Shower

Homeowners love showers with multiple jets, but often the existing 1/2-inch plumbing system can't handle the added volume, and new, budget-killing 3/4-inch supply lines seem to be the only option. But you can be a hero with Delta's *Monitor 1800 Jetted Shower XO Series*. The multiple-jet shower valve can be fitted to 1/2-inch plumbing and can accommodate various wall materials from natural stone to fiberglass. Although the XO will never provide as much water volume or pressure as a shower valve supplied by 3/4-inch lines, its two body sprays, hand shower, and showerhead should be enough to make even the grimmest homeowner happy. Suggested list prices start at \$400 for a chrome shower-only unit; the most expensive model lists for about \$750.

Delta Faucet, 800/345-3358, www.deltafaucet.com.



ELECTRICAL

Labor-Saving Switch

Using an air-actuated switch, similar to those found on whirlpool spas, the *ISE Sinktop Switch* makes retrofitting a garbage disposal a breeze. There's no need to fish a wire up to a wall-mounted toggle switch, because the (white or chrome) push button mounts directly on the sink deck and turns the disposer on or off by means of an attached switched outlet mounted inside the sink base. It lists for \$67.

In-Sink-Erator, 800/558-5700, www.insinkerator.com.





HVAC A/C Goes Digital

By combining a digitally controlled solenoid valve with a scroll-type compressor, Samsung's *DVM System Air Conditioner* allows builders to effectively cool large, spread-out homes with a single outdoor condensing unit. The valve allows the compressor to run from 10% to 100% capacity, adjusting itself to match the immediate cooling requirements. As a result, the unit can be connected to as many as 16 individually controlled fan units without sacrificing efficiency when only one or two are running. This gives builders more design flexibility and allows homeowners more effective zoning without multiple outside units. Further adding to the system's flexibility, indoor units are available in ceiling-, wall-, floor-, and duct-mounted versions. The manufacturer says that the equipment costs about 20% more than that of conventional systems but is cheaper to operate.

Quietside Corporation, 562/463-0880, www.quietside.com.

HVAC Pipe Dreams

While a wall filled with dials, valves, and pipes might show off your heating contractor's expertise, the maze of pipes and wires might scare clients concerned about reliability and future service. To simplify the process of installing hydronic heating systems and to appease skeptical clients, Ipex has introduced the *WarmRiteRadiant Heat Control Panel*. The assembled hydronic control systems include a pipe manifold, electronic controls, and a circulator in a neat, integrated panel. The metal box makes the heating system look more like a reliable, manufactured appliance and less like the control room of the *Enterprise*. The panels start at \$2,000.

Ipex, 800/473-9808, www.warmrite.com.



HVAC Common-Sense Ventilation

Exhaust-only ventilation systems are popular with many builders because they're inexpensive and easy to install, but they can draw make-up air from questionable sources like basements, wall cavities, and garages. Providing a better home ventilation system can be relatively easy when a quality exhaust fan is paired with a *Multi-Air Filtered Fresh Air System*. The fresh air system uses a single exterior-mounted intake and a pleated-paper filter to provide clean, fresh air to four locations through three 2-inch ducts and one 3-inch duct. The 90-cfm system includes intake and exhaust grills and sells for \$426.

← **Tamarack Technologies**, 800/222-5932, www.tamtech.com.

HVAC Better Indoor Air

Although it's generally agreed that a heat-recovery ventilator (HRV) improves indoor air quality, high prices have prevented many homeowners and builders from installing them. But Broan's *GuardianPlus* whole-house filters and HRVs cost considerably less than most competing products, making fresh air more affordable than ever. The product line includes a whole-house air filter, a whole-house filter with fresh air intake, and a whole-house filter with fresh air intake and heat recovery. All three versions use the same compact plastic housing and have HEPA filters that can capture particles as small as .3 microns. At 23 inches wide, 30 inches tall, and 18 inches deep, the units can be wall mounted or suspended from ceiling chains. A wall-mounted control panel changes fan speed and alerts users when filters need servicing. According to the manufacturer, installed prices run from \$900 to \$1,400, depending on the model.

Broan, 888/336-3948, www.guardianplusairsystems.com.

