

Products

by Patrick McCombe

Smooth Tube

Available in diameters from 12 to 36 inches and up to 12 feet long, *Finish Free Fiber Forms* leave a smooth surface on concrete piers or columns. Unlike traditional tubular concrete forms that leave spiral lines or other surface imperfections, Finish Free's coated interior leaves a smooth surface without additional surface prep. A 2-foot-diameter tube sells for about \$10.50 per foot.

Sonoco, 800/377-2692, www.sonoco.com.



Advantech I-Joists

J.M. Huber, manufacturer of *Advantech* subfloor and sheathing panels, has added I-joists to its existing product line. Wide machine-stress-rated flanges and Advantech weather-resistant webs ensure straight floors and fast installation, according to the manufacturer. With 2½-inch-wide lumber flanges (I-64 series) — or 3½-inch-wide flanges (I-89 series) — the joists are available in 9½- to 16-inch depths. Prices are said to be comparable to those of other engineered floor systems.

J.M. Huber, 800/933-9220, www.huberwood.com.



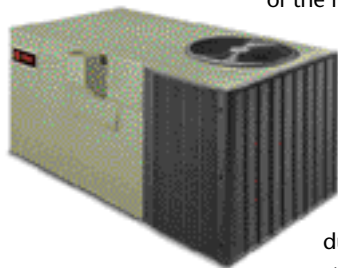
Ceiling With Style

Although suspended ceilings provide easy access to mechanical systems and can be renewed or repaired easily, they typically don't have much in the way of architectural appeal. The *Techstyle Acoustical Ceiling* from Hunter Douglas offers a bit of style along with the usual benefits of drop ceilings. According to the manufacturer, the system uses standard 15/16-inch ceiling grid, and the honeycomb panels can easily be cut to accommodate fixtures and odd angles. The ceiling is ideally suited for low-clearance application because the panels swing down instead of installing from the top. The panels are available in 2x2-foot, 2x4-foot, and 4x4-foot sizes. Installed prices run about \$4 to \$6 per square foot.

Hunter Douglas, 866/556-1235, www.hunterdouglasceilings.com.

HEAT PUMPS

Dual Heat Source. In moderate climates, heat pumps are among the most efficient ways to heat and cool a home. But during the winter in colder areas, traditional heat pumps can't extract enough heat from the air. To fill the gap, most rely on electric resistance heating for backup. Unfortunately, because electric resistance is one



of the most expensive heating methods, any cost savings realized during the rest of the year can quickly vaporize during a cold spell.

Recently though, dual-fuel heat pumps like Trane's XL 1200 have arrived on the scene. Instead of using electric resistance, these units have a gas furnace that kicks in when ambient temperatures require it, making it less expensive to run during the winter. The XL 1200 features a 12-SEER rating, electronic ignition, and an aluminized heat exchanger for corrosion resistance.

Trane, 800/438-2872, www.trane.com.

Slim and Trim. A great way to heat and cool room additions or bonus rooms without running ducts or piping is with a split heat pump like the Mr. Slim M-Series from Mitsubishi. The Mr. Slim uses ceiling- or wall-



mounted fans on the inside and outside condensing units to provide up to 30,000 Btus of heating or cooling per hour. The outdoor unit features a variable-speed compressor to efficiently match the heating or cooling load without short cycling. Up to three interior

fans can be connected to a single outside unit for effective zoning. Installation requires a 3-inch hole in the building's exterior for refrigerant lines and control wiring.

Mitsubishi Electric, 678/376-2900, www.mrslim.com.



Six Feet Under. At about 6 feet underground, the earth's temperature is relatively constant. Ground-source heat pumps take advantage of that consistent heat supply to make space heating and cooling more affordable. Water-filled tubes are buried underground, where they can extract heat even during the coldest

days of winter. In the summer, excess heat is removed from the building and dumped underground. WaterFurnace, an industry innovator, recently introduced the Rock. The split unit has two parts: an interior fan unit, plus an exterior unit with a unique boulder-shaped plastic cover, available in five colors, that hides the outdoor unit from view. According to its maker, the Rock has twice the heating efficiency of ordinary air-source heat pumps.

Water Furnace, 800/222-5667, www.waterfurnace.com.



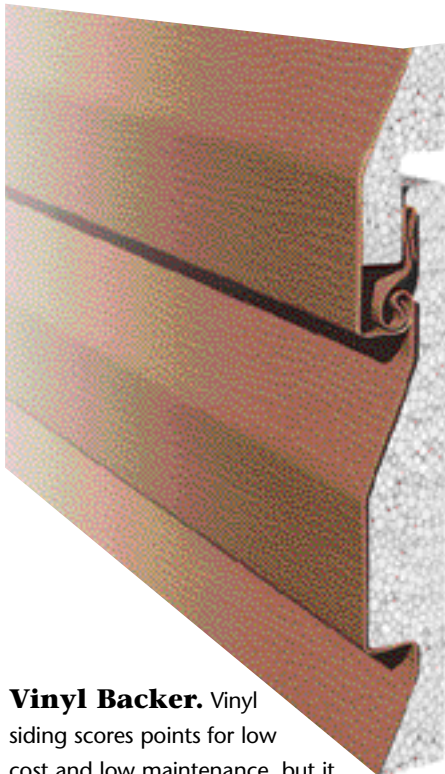
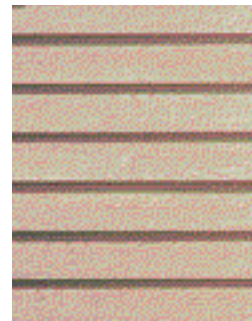
Variable-Speed Blower. Comfortmaker's new EBV Air Handler, designed for its 2- to 5-ton split heat pump systems, has a variable-speed blower for increased comfort and reduced noise. The EBV's high-efficiency motor makes it cost effective to keep the blower running all the time, which prevents temperature stratification and makes humidity control easier. For maximum versatility, the unit can be installed in upflow or horizontal configurations and includes multiple condensate drain connections.

Comfortmaker, 800/315-4370, www.comfortmaker.com.

SIDING & ACCESSORIES

Hot off the Press. Manufacturers have been using polyethylene and wood fiber to make fiber-composite decking for almost 20 years. Now Boise is using the same materials, combined under 700 pounds of pressure, to make its new lap siding. According to Boise, *HomePlate Siding* has all the attributes to make it a builder favorite. It cuts easily without clouds of dust, it's impervious to water, it's durable, and it holds paint well. The 16-foot lengths are $\frac{7}{16}$ inch thick and are available in 5-, 7-, and 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch exposures. Pricing is vague at this point, but the maker claims that the siding is less expensive than cedar and brick, on par with fiber cement, and more expensive than vinyl. As far as I can tell, there's nothing like it on the market, and initial feedback from builders seems promising. Time will tell.

Boise Building Solutions, 866/274-6758, www.boisehomeplate.com.



Vinyl Backer. Vinyl siding scores points for low cost and low maintenance, but it can break easily in cold weather, and it doesn't do much to reduce noise. The *Fullback Thermal Support System* is a collection of profile-matched, insulating panels that fit behind many popular vinyl sidings. According to the maker, the polystyrene panels improve vinyl's impact resistance, rigidity, and sound-deadening qualities. Vinyl siding that uses the insulating panels is available from several manufacturers and costs between \$85 and \$115 per square. Pricing depends on the siding thickness and profile.

Progressive Foam Technologies, 800/860-3626, www.fullbackcom.

Fiber-Cement Shingles. Shingle siding is durable and good looking, but the labor-intensive installation can be a deal breaker. Nichiha's *Sierra Premium Shakes* have the appearance of traditional cedar shingles in an 8-foot panel that installs much faster than traditional wood shingles. The fiber-cement product can be prestained in four colors (mahogany, maple, redwood, or cedar), and the deeply textured face looks very much like the real thing. According to the manufacturer, the panels can handle winds of up to 110 mph when they're blind-nailed, making them a good



choice for coastal regions and other high-wind areas. Prices vary across the country, but they should run about \$240 to \$260 per square.

Nichiha, 866/424-4421, www.n-usa.com.



Insider. Combining long-lasting fiber-cement siding with wood inside corners seems like a bad idea to me. It's unlikely that the wood will last as long as the siding, and future replacement will be tough.

Tamlyn's *Permacorner* is a vinyl inside corner that should easily last as long as the siding. Available in 10- and 18-foot lengths, Permacorner's 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch nailing fins allow easy fastening without splitting. The UV-stabilized product can be left unpainted or can be coated with a solid-body stain or paint. The manufacturer claims that the product is better than wood corners at preventing water infiltration. It costs about \$10 to \$12 for a 10-foot piece.

Tamlyn and Sons, 800/334-1676, www.tamlyn.com.

LIGHTING

Party Lantern. They don't give as much light as an electric fixture, they're more expensive, and they're harder to install, but gas lights provide a warm glow that customers love. It's a look that you simply can't get from electricity. Cunningham Gas



Products offers a whole line of post-mounted and wall-mounted gas lighting fixtures. The most recent addition to the catalog is a *Malumai Torch*. *Malumai* is Hawaiian for "party," and the dancing flames should be a welcome addition to your customer's next gathering. The cast-aluminum torch requires a 3/8-inch supply line and sells for about \$220.

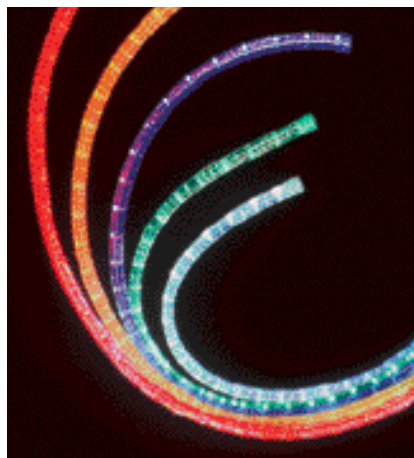
Cunningham Gas Products, 800/833-5998, www.cunninghamgas.com.



Can Improvement Plan.

Most residential can lights are huge energy wasters, especially in vaulted ceilings. Not only does the unsealed housing increase the home's heating load, but the escaping air can lead to ice damming on the roof and condensation problems indoors. If your customer has this problem, the *TCP Recessed Can Retrofit Kit* could be the answer. It seals up drafty housings, making them more energy efficient, and replaces the incandescent bulb with a fluorescent one. The kit costs about \$34.

Technical Consumer Products, 800/324-1496, www.tcpi.com.



Show Them the Ropes. You can accent cabinets, media rooms, decks, and landscaping with *Round RopeLED lighting*. The LED strands have bulbs spaced every 1.1 inches, and the 1/2-inch-diameter tubing can be cut to length at marked intervals. Colored strands, which are available in red, blue, green, yellow, and white, can be combined for special effects or visual interest. Both 110-volt AC and 12-volt DC varieties are available, as is specialty mounting hardware. Prices range from \$9 to \$42 per meter.

LEDtronics, 800/579-4875, www.ledtronics.com.



Good-Looking Lights. If your customers are looking for something with a little more class than the stamped-metal light fixtures found in every home center, you should mention the good-looking *Hand-Forged Lighting Fixtures* from Hubbardton Forge. The well-made fixtures come in sconce, hanging, and outdoor styles. Some models are available with adjustable stems (down rods) and canopies for easier installation. And they come

already assembled, unlike the home center variety. The manufacturer also makes matching kitchen and bath accessories. The Three-Light Prairie Pendant shown goes for \$525 list. Shades are sold separately (about \$65 list each).

Hubbardton Forge, 800/826-4766, www.vtforge.com.

INTERIOR MILLWORK

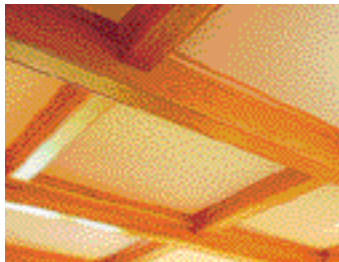


Bold Molding. If your customer is looking for interior millwork that's out of the ordinary, you might suggest *Architectural Details* from Century Architectural Specialties. According to the maker, the molded millwork is easier to install than competitors' products because higher manufacturing tolerances eliminate field trimming and sanding. And unlike other brands of urethane millwork, most orders are shipped within 48 hours. Prices vary considerably, but the maker says they're consistent with those of other manufacturers.

Century Architectural Specialties, 877/262-1999, www.architecturalspecialties.com.

Better Beam.

Coffered ceilings can be a testament to your skill, and customers love them, but the work can tie up your best carpenter for days. The *EZ*



Beam from Ferche Millwork speeds the installation of coffered ceiling and decorative beams. What makes this product notable is a lock joint milled into the beam sides and bottom. The joint holds everything stable while you fasten, and it ensures that the sides are properly aligned with the bottom. EZ beams are available in several wood species and in widths designed to slip over a 2x4 or 2x6 nailer. Standard heights go from 3 1/2 inches to 9 1/4 inches. Custom sizes are also available. A cherry EZ Beam with a 3 1/2-inch bottom and 5 1/2-inch sides sells for about \$20 per foot.

Ferche Millwork, 320/393-5700, www.ferche.com.



Beading the System. Beaded ceilings and wainscoting are the kinds of timeless details that look as good today as they did 100 years ago. However, timeless details usually translate into time-consuming details on the job site. If cutting and installing a bunch of individual boards is too much for the budget, GP's *Ply Bead Wood Panels* are a great way to install beaded ceilings and wainscoting with minimal effort. The 3/8-inch-thick southern pine plywood's 1.6-inch spacing looks very much like traditional beaded lumber, and, once painted, it's tough to tell the difference. Just make sure to include a well-placed beam or molding when you need to go more than 8 feet; otherwise, butt seams make the 4x8-foot panels look too much like plywood. Currently, my local yard in northern New England sells it for about \$28 a sheet.

Georgia Pacific, 800/284-5347, www.gpplywood.com.

Moldings That Measure Up. Value engineering and mass production have taken their toll on building materials for decades, and moldings are no exception. Although simplifying profiles and reducing dimensions have increased production and reduced costs, modern moldings just don't have the appeal of classic designs. *WindsorOne Moldings* have profiles and dimensions based on traditional pattern books and classical architecture. The thicker and more detailed profiles reproduce four distinct architectural periods: Classical, Greek Revival, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival. All the periods feature crown, base, and casing, making it easier to get a coordinated look. The company even offers a packaged display kit so you can show your clients.

Windsor Mill, 888/229-7900, www.windsorone.com.

