

Products

by Patrick McCombe

Lift With Your Sleeves

Few things are more potentially dangerous or exhausting than moving a commercial-sized stove or side-by-side refrigerator, especially over rough terrain or up steps. When Thomas Dent was working his way through college, it was a problem he dealt with on a regular basis. Delivering appliances in Aspen proved too much for a typical appliance



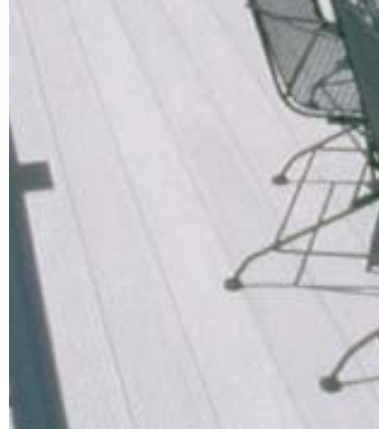
dolly, so he invented his own system. The *Shoulder Dolly* uses two harnesses and adjustable straps to move heavy objects. According to the manufacturer, the system encourages proper lifting techniques, and it leaves your arms free for balancing the load. I saw it demonstrated at the National Hardware Show, where two ordinary-sized guys carried a 60-inch projection TV (about 350 pounds) up a set of stairs. Their backs were straight, and they appeared unfazed by the heavy load. The *Shoulder Dolly* sells for \$350 plus \$18 shipping (anywhere in the lower 48).

TDI Moving Systems, 800/217-1114, www.shoulderdolly.com.

Watertight Decking

It seems like such a shame to waste the covered spaces under decks, but traditional decking doesn't provide much protection from rain and dirt. Homeland Vinyl Products now offers a waterproof decking that the manufacturer says is perfect for additional outdoor living space or protected storage below. *Gorilla Deck's* interlocking design channels water to the edge of the deck, keeping spaces underneath dry and protected. The decking works with 12-inch and 16-inch spacing, and there are no visible fasteners. It's available in five colors and sells for about \$4.00 to \$4.50 per square foot.

Homeland Vinyl Products, 800/999-6813, www.homelandvinyl.com.



Panda Plywood

Bamboo, once reserved for zoo exhibits and tiki bars, has now found its way into American homes, first as durable flooring and more recently as a sturdy and attractive plywood. Smith and Fong, manufacturer of Plyboo flooring, also makes a line of *Bamboo Plywood* for furniture, shelving, and decorative elements. According to the manufacturer, the 100% bamboo product is compatible with all industrial finishes. Standard 4x8 sheets and 30-inch by 8-foot panels both come 3/4 inch thick. Panels 16 inches wide by 6 feet long come in 1/4- and 1/2-inch thicknesses. A 3/4-inch 4x8 sheet sells for \$170.



Smith and Fong, 866/835-9859, www.plyboo.com.



Looking Grate

Compared to hot-water systems, forced-air heating systems are less expensive to install and provide an easy way to include central air conditioning. However, many homeowners complain about dust (real or imagined) that the systems blow around the house. You might

appease their concerns with a new line of registers that include an integral air filter. The two-piece *Grate Accents Register System* uses a diffuser with a filter holder and a separate grate. The grates are available in four styles, in painted and plated metal finishes, as well as wood. The grates can be swapped out easily when it comes time to redecorate.

LL Building Products, 800/755-9392, www.llbp.com.

STRUCTURAL FASTENERS

Rust Fighter. Concerns over the new ACQ (alkaline copper quaternary) pressure-treating formula corroding metal connectors at an accelerated rate has most builders wondering how to protect their clients and themselves. Until there's more conclusive information, manufacturers are suggesting connectors with heavier zinc coating to prevent corrosion. One example is the Z-MAX line from Simpson Strong-Tie. Instead of .9 ounce of zinc per square foot, the improved coating contains 1.8 ounces per square foot. The Z-MAX connectors (at right in photo) cost about 25% more than standard connectors (at left).

Simpson, 800/999-5099, www.strongtie.com.



Good Grip. If you're looking for a strong connection to concrete, you might consider the *Titen HD* from Simpson. Available in $\frac{3}{8}$ - and $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch diameters from $1\frac{3}{4}$ to 6 inches long, these heavy-duty anchors can provide over 8,000 pounds of shear strength and 12,000 pounds of tensile strength each, making them perfect for ledgers and other structural applications. You can tell the fastener's length without removing it by the code stamped on its head.

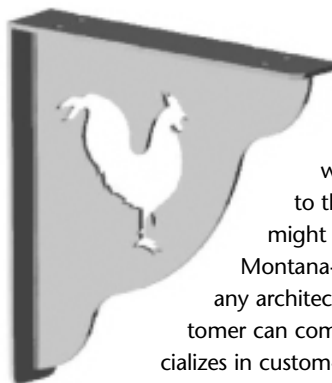
Simpson, 800/999-5099, www.simpsonanchors.com.



Sturdy Screws. Not that long ago, attaching structural components required bolts or lag screws, but several years ago GRK introduced *Self-Drilling Structural Screws*. These sturdy and innovative fasteners provide two to three times the shear strength of comparably sized lags, making them perfect for ledgers to landings. They're available in lengths from approximately 2 to 16 inches in $\frac{1}{4}$ -, $\frac{5}{16}$ -, and $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch diameters.

Yellow zinc coatings provide weather resistance, and torx-style heads resist stripping. Recently introduced stainless-steel versions are ideal for harsh coastal environments.

GRK, 800/263-0463, www.grkfasteners.com.



High Style. Structural connectors, while important, aren't generally what your customer wants to show off to the neighbors. The notable exception might be the work of Creative Metal. The Montana-based shop can manage just about any architectural fabrication you or your customer can come up with. The small company specializes in custom-cut designs, produced with its CNC plasma cutter. Favorites include structural brackets with wildlife or nature scenes as part of the design.

They also make timber connectors, custom signs, and weather vanes. Custom structural brackets range in price from \$11 to \$275.

Creative Metal, 406/777-1575, www.creativemetal.biz.



CENTRAL VACUUMS & ACCESSORIES

Maintenance-Friendly Filter. Central vacuums are a great way to improve indoor quality — allergy sufferers frequently report an improvement in their symptoms after installation of a system. The *Afuera Central Vacuum System* from Electrolux uses a special HEPA-rated, pleated-fabric filter with a low-maintenance cleaning schedule — once every three years, according to the manufacturer. The system also features a self-adjusting power brush that automatically adjusts to the carpet's pile height. The unit carries a lifetime warranty on major parts and a ten-year warranty on the motor and electronics. Installed systems start at \$1,500.

Electrolux, 800/896-9756,
www.electroluxusa.com.



Clean Sweep. Central vacuum systems are great, but dragging out 30 feet of hose to sweep up a little spilled rice or some coffee grounds seems excessive. For a quick sweep, I think an automatic dustpan makes more sense. A good example is the *VacPan Automatic Dustpan* from Beam. The little door, usually mounted in the kickspace of a cabinet, is activated by a toe switch that opens the door and starts the vacuum. It seems like a great way to keep things tidy without resorting to a full-blown cleaning. It sells for \$35.

Beam, 800/369-2326, www.beamvac.com.

Quiet Down. With the power unit located in the garage or basement, central vacuums are certainly quieter than conventional vacuums, but further noise reduction can be obtained with an exhaust muffler. Most central vac manufacturers offer exhaust mufflers, and some include them on their high-end machines. Beam claims that its *Sound Off* muffler can reduce power unit noise by 50%, which makes a real difference when the unit is located close to basement rec rooms or other living spaces. It sells for about \$25.

Beam, 800/369-2326,
www.beamvac.com.



Garage Entourage. One of the great things about a central vacuum system is the wide selection of tools and accessories available — there seems to be a wand, nozzle, and hose for every job. NuTone even offers two cleaning kits for tidying up the garage and car. The *CK145* and *CK140 Garage and Car Care Kits* include bright orange crush-proof hoses, crevice tools, upholstery brushes, and a hose hook. The ultra deluxe model (CK145) also includes a 14-inch floor tool and two 18-inch wands. The suggested list price for the CK140 is \$79.95; for the CK145, it's \$131.95.

NuTone, 800/543-8687, www.nutone.com.

EXTERIOR DOORS



Door With Allure. One of the most popular and revered American architectural styles is the bungalow. People love the little houses because of their comfortable proportions and attractive architectural details. The *Bungalow Handcrafted Door Series* from Simpson not only recreates one of the style's most important architectural features, it also adds modern insulated glass and split-resistant panels, which make the doors more durable and energy efficient than the originals. Douglas fir, hemlock, and red oak are standard offerings, but other wood species are also available. Fir doors with a glass sash range in price from \$950 to \$1,200. Oak doors with a glass sash go from \$1,300 to \$1,600.

Simpson Door Company, 800/952-4057, www.simpsondoor.com.



Vinyl Frontier. Until recently, there weren't many choices in vinyl patio doors — most manufacturers limited their offerings to a couple of 5- and 6-foot sliding units. But now you can find center-hinge and French-style patio doors, as well. One example is the *Swing Patio Door* from Timeline. The all-vinyl patio door has a stainless-steel, multipoint lock that increases security and a full-height gear hinge that prevents the heavy door panels from sagging or distorting the vinyl frame.

Timeline Vinyl, 715/536-2461, www.lincolnnwindows.com.



Paint-Free Entry. Most homeowners have a love-hate relationship with wood exterior doors. They love the look but hate the maintenance. According to its manufacturer, the *Ultra Extruded Aluminum Clad Raised-Panel Door* from Kolbe and Kolbe is the solution to wood-door woes. The extruded aluminum exterior has a durable fluoropolymer finish that eliminates painting on the outside, yet the wood interior looks great and complements natural wood trim. Multipoint locking hardware and several grille styles are available. A 3/0 x 6/8, half-glass, two-panel model (4⁹/16 jambs, with double bore) has a list price of \$1,000 to \$1,500, depending on options.

Kolbe and Kolbe, 800/955-8177, www.kolbe-kolbe.com.



Rot-Free Frame. The second-growth, finger-jointed lumber used in most door jambs seems especially susceptible to rot. In shady or damp areas, it's not uncommon for a door frame to go spongy after only a year or two. One solution to rotting jambs is the *Frame Saver* from Therma-Tru. In this frame system, a plastic composite section near the bottom prevents the frame from wicking water, a common cause of premature rotting. According to the manufacturer, once it's painted, the Frame Saver is indistinguishable from all-wood jambs. The Frame Saver adds \$35 to the cost of a door (with 4⁹/16 jambs). Jambs for 2x6 walls (6⁹/16 inches) cost \$55.

Therma-Tru, 800/537-8827, www.thermatru.com.