

PVC vs. Composite Wood Trim

One builder's views on the pluses of PVC

On the coast, builders like Jim Blahut of Beach Haven, N.J., have switched to PVC trim, even for elaborate Victorian house details that must be shaped on-site. Composite wood trim materials bill themselves as engineered products, implying that the material is extra durable, but Blahut isn't buying it, not for coastal applications anyway. While the composite products may be more decay-resistant than painted pine, they are not necessarily moisture-resistant and may be prone to swelling in high humidity, particularly where the factory-primed finish has been cut or routed. According to Blahut, cut surfaces not only require more prep from his painter, but the paint fails quickly at these locations. Also, nail heads are impossible to drive flush on the dense material, as the material mushrooms

around the nail. Builders often resort to finish nails to avoid this pucker, but this voids the manufacturer's warranty. The answer, says Blahut, lies in PVC trim stock.

Blahut has been using **Azek** (AZEK Trimboards, 801 Corey St., Moosic, PA 18507; 877-275-2935; www.azek.com) for about five years. Other PVC trim products on the market now include **Koma Trim Boards** (Kömmerring USA, 3310 Stanwood Blvd., Huntsville, AL 35811; 800-330-2239; www.komatrimsboards.com) and **Nels-Tek 600** (New England Lumber Specialties, 202 Day St., West Springfield, MA 01089; 800-541-8619; www.nelstek.com). PVC-based trim can be machined, cut, and fastened like wood. Machined edges do get "hairy," but the material can be machine-sanded. Best of

all, it proves impervious to salt spray and can withstand ground contact without absorbing water and rotting — a real boon for skirt boards, water tables, and the bottom of corner boards.

PVC trim can be painted, but it is most durable if left an unpainted white. Dark colors are not recommended, as these will absorb the heat of sunlight, causing the PVC to expand more than it does already. Trim boards must be cut back at intersections to provide room for movement. Where it's critical to keep a joint tight, the material should be double-nailed and reinforced with construction adhesive. Long vertical joints at corner boards can be welded together with PVC cement, though Azek has recently begun to offer prefab corner boards in 4- and 6-in. widths.



AZEK



AZEK

All Hands on Deck

Deck building just got a little easier

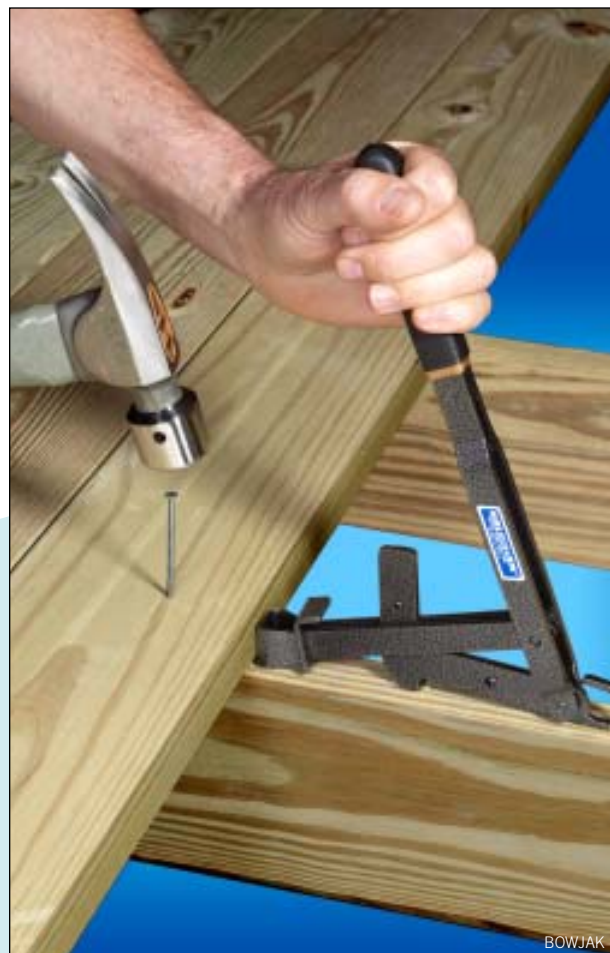
Wrestling bowed and hooked boards into line may be one of the least appealing aspects of building decks. To take some of the struggle out of this task, Vaughan & Bushnell introduced the **BowJak** (Vaughan & Bushnell, 12013 Maple Ave., Hebron, IL 60034; 815-648-2446; www.vaughanmfg.com), a pee-vee-like tool with teeth that are hammered down to bite into the joist, and a handle to leverage a stubborn board into line. It's a straightforward, rugged tool that folds up to fit fairly comfortably in a nail bag. For really stubborn bows, the BowJak can be used on an adjacent joist "upstream" from the one you are fastening, and this is how it must be used for hidden fasteners that are secured to the joist. But it may be limited in this case if the very end is severely hooked.

The **BoWrench** (Cepco Tool Co.; 133

Philo Rd. West, Horseheads, NY 14845; 800-466-9626; www.bowrench.com) is a much larger tool that provides even greater leverage, though it's perhaps a bit more to lug around. It has three great advantages: The cam action locks the handle into place, so after yanking the board in line, you can let go and use both hands; it can be operated to push or pull a board into line; and the action is offset so it never interferes with hidden fasteners.

Speaking of hidden fasteners, there are several on the market, such as **Simpson Strong-Tie's Deck Connectors** (Simpson Strong-Tie Co., 4120 Dublin Blvd., Suite 400; Dublin, CA 94568; 925-560-9000; www.strongtie.com), and the **Dec-Klip** (Ben

Mfg. Co., 21229 Cypress Way, Lynnwood, WA 98036; 425-776-5340; www.premier1.net/~ben69/). But the ones that get the highest marks in extreme climates and for use with composite decking material, are **Eb-Ty Hidden Deck Fasteners** (Blue Heron Enterprises, PO Box 414, Califon, NJ 07830; 800-438-3289; www.ebty.com). These require a plate joiner to pre-slot the edge of the decking; then the polypropylene fastener is secured with a stainless-steel screw. The polypropylene material is UV-resistant and won't react with the new pressure-treated woods.



Foundation Flood Vents

When the flood vents open, the pressure is off

Flood vents equalize the pressure of floodwaters, allowing water to freely flow through a crawlspace area and alleviating the intense hydrostatic pressure that can cave in a foundation wall. In all coastal homes inland of the V zone, flood vents are required in an elevated solid foundation (for more information on coastal foundation code, see the feature "Piling it On," in this issue). Although flood vents look like simple crawlspace air vents, they do not typically open until the house is inundated by floodwater. Floats inside the unit open the vent door as the water rises. By code, all flood vents must be bi-directional, so that if floodwater rushes in one side, it does not fill the crawlspace and create interior hydrostatic pressure that would then blow the foundation wall out on the other side of the house.

Smart Vent, Inc., offers two basic models of flood vent that conform to all NFIP and IRC code requirements. The standard **Flood Vent** has a solid door that stays closed under normal conditions. The insulated foam core and a brush gasket around the edge help keep conditioned air inside, and are impenetrable to insects of all types. A more elaborate **Smart Vent** includes a bi-metallic coil that automatically opens metal louvers to vent the crawlspace in warm weather and then seals back up during colder seasons. If the louvers are in the closed position during a flood, the entire panel of louvers floats up to allow floodwater to pass.

Both the Flood Vent and Smart Vent models are made of corrosion-resistant stainless steel and are designed to fit in a standard 8x16-in. masonry block opening. Each vent gives 50 square inches of vent opening, which is sufficient to cover 200 square feet of foundation wall. For more information, contact Smart Vent, 20 Warrick Ave., Glassboro, NJ 08028; 888-628-4115; www.smartvent.com.



SMART VENT



FLOOD VENT

Codes in coastal flood zones require foundation openings to equalize hydrostatic pressure. Smart Vents will seal out weather and critters, but automatically open when flood waters rise.

Sun Blockers

Custom-made shutters offer form and function

A coastal home offers a retreat from, among other things, the sun. In fact, homeowners often demand not only plenty of windows to capture ocean vistas, but also the opposite — a cool refuge from the onslaught of the sun. One design solution lies in interior shutters, which allow air circulation and aren't as prone to UV fading as fabric drapes. As permanent fixtures in the home, they are an attractive up-sell that falls squarely within the domain of the remodeling contractor or builder.

Kennedy White Custom Shutters (10940 Harmony Park Dr., Bonita Springs, FL 34135; 866-949-6500; www.kennedywhite.com) offers a wide

selection of custom wood shutters that can be designed to fit almost any opening. Shutters are available in motorized or stationary models and a wide selection of hard and soft wood, colors, and finishes (including trendy crackled finishes and hand-painted designs). All shutter stiles are finger-jointed and fastened at joints with three $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch dowels. The company sells wholesale to the trade, and is set up to take custom orders and turn them around in a matter of days as its standard practice.

Similarly, **Sunburst Shutters** (3999 Ponderosa Way, Las Vegas, NV 89118; 702-870-4488; www.sunburst-shutters.com) offers a line of custom-made shutters. Its

all-wood line is made of basswood, which offers an optimum combination of durability and light weight, is available in 11 shades of white, 28 shades of wood stain, plus a spectrum of custom colors. Stiles are joined by mortise-and-tenon and dowels for maximum durability, and feature a special louver tension-control pin that holds the louvers in place at any position. A new line made of Polywood — a composite cellulose and plastic material that is impervious to UV light and moisture — reportedly won't chip, crack, warp, or yellow. And like Kennedy White, Sunburst Shutters is oriented to operating on a custom-order basis.



KENNEDY WHITE



SUNBURST SHUTTERS