



Controlled Access

Once reserved for commercial construction, mechanical access panels are finding their way into many of today's larger homes. Building a discreet and functional panel requires a surprising amount of time and effort, but Access Panel Solution's *Bauco Plus Access Panel* makes the job faster and easier. The metal-framed panel has a concealed hinge and an integral dry-wall flange that help it blend in with the surrounding wall. A gypsum door and an airtight gasket maintain the wall's fire rating and prevent air leakage. Prices start at about \$60 for an 8-inch-square panel. The largest standard size, 24 by 36 inches, sells for about \$190.

Access Panel Solutions, 877/592-0033, www.bauco.com.



Fire Tube

If you or your customers are searching for a jaw-dropping design feature, look no further than the *Cyclone Gas Fireplace*. This unique product's clear cylindrical tube houses an actual gas-fueled fire tornado. The fireplace is sold two ways: either as a customizable piece that can be integrated into other architectural elements, like a column, or as a wall-mounted unit with a decorative surround. The cyclone vents to the outside and — despite being categorized as a gas fireplace — produces only about 15,000 Btu. The wall-mounted version, with a two-tone copper or nickel surround, has a list price of \$8,000. The customizable version, without the surround, goes for about \$3,500. Makes that old lava lamp look pretty lame, huh.

Heat-N-Glo, 888/427-3973, www.heatnglo.com.



Mud Pack

I've heard that some drywall finishers make their mud spread more easily by adding a little dish soap, but the practice has always concerned me — I don't think soap residue promotes adhesion of paint and wall coverings. Try replacing that soap with *Mud-Max*, a new product that's about 60 percent acrylic glue. Adding eight ounces to a five-gallon pail of ready mix or an 18-pound bag of setting-type compound not only makes the compound spread easier — it reduces cracks caused by drying lumber and improves strength and adhesion, says the maker. Mud-Max sells for about \$25 per gallon.

Trim-Tex, 800/874-2333, www.trim-tex.com.

ENGINEERED LUMBER

Noncorrosive Sills. Using pressure-treated sill plates is good building practice and it's required by code, but many builders think the new copper azole and ACQ formulas are too corrosive. If you're worried the new formulas could compromise the connections between the sill and the anchor bolts and nails, check out Trus Joist's



TimberStrand LSL Treated Sill Plates. The company says the product's zinc-borate treatment won't corrode fasteners. Plus, because the treatment permeates the sill material, you don't have to field-treat cut ends and holes. The product is suit-

able for other uses as well, but not for burial or above-grade locations where it's likely to get wet. In addition to 2x6 and 3x6 sill material, treated TimberStrand comes in 2x4, 3x4, 4x4, and 4x6 columns and studs. All sizes are sold in 18- and 36-foot lengths.

Trus Joist, 800/338-0515, www.trusjoist.com.

Superior Stringer Stock. Anyone who has cut stair stringers from modern sawn lumber knows it's not the best material for the job. If you're unhappy with typical lumberyard 2x12s, you should definitely try engineered LSL (laminated strand lumber) or



LVL (laminated veneer lumber).

Products like *Versa-Lam LVL* from

Boise are strong, straight, and dimensionally stable. The material makes a very sturdy stringer that won't fall apart while you're cutting or installing it. Most manufacturers of engineered lumber products now have stringer design specs available at lumberyards and on the Web. I used a similar product for the stringers in my own home, and it worked great.

Boise Building Solutions, 800/232-0788, www.bc.com/ewp/.

Duct-Friendly Framing.

It's unlikely that you're going to fit 12-inch holes for mechanicals in solid-lumber joists, and that's one of the great benefits of using I-joists. GP's *Wide Open Wood I Beam Joists* come with two 11³/₄-inch round holes and an 11³/₄-by-16-inch oval hole already cut. The big holes are perfect for running ducts and plumbing. The product saves you labor and time — and it eliminates the possibility of careless installers damaging a flange with a recip saw. According to the manufacturer, Wide Open I-joists cost slightly more than I-joists of similar depth and performance without the holes.

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



Fire-Retardant MDF.

Exposed panel products are often a problem in commercial construction because of flammability issues. Fire-treated particleboard is the typical solution — but because particleboard can be covered with only laminate or wood veneer, it limits design possibilities. And therein lies the value of SierraPine's *Meditate FR2 Panel*: This MDF product machines and paints well and, unlike other MDF products, has a UL Class 1 rating. That makes it suitable for most commercial applications, even lobby areas and elevators. An identifying red stripe within the core distinguishes it from untreated MDF panels.

SierraPine, 800/676-3339, www.sierrapine.com.



For more product information, visit *ebuild*, Hanley Wood's interactive product catalog, at www.jlconline.com or www.ebuild.com

HOUSEWRAPS

Keep on Trekking. Want a rain-screen system beneath your siding without the added expense of products like Home Slicker or the hassle of strapping the walls? Check out *WeatherTrek EVD* housewrap. Dimples in the semipermeable (6.5 perms) air and water barrier keep lap and shingle siding material slightly proud of the wrap. That small air space, claims the maker, provides a drainage path for any water that's made it through the siding, reducing the likelihood of inward vapor drive. WeatherTrek has a UV-exposure rating of 120 days and sells for about 11 cents per square foot.

Valeron Strength Films, 800/825-3766, www.valeron.com.



Heavy Breathing. In rainy places like the Pacific Northwest, keeping materials dry throughout the entire construction process is virtually impossible. That means weather barriers need to allow water vapor to escape, rather than trapping it in the building envelope. *WallShield* from VaproShield has a rating of 212 perms, compared with 58 perms for Tyvek and 5 perms for Grade D building paper. That permeability makes the product — which can be left exposed for up to 120 days — ideal for wet regions, says the manufacturer. WallShield sells for \$45 per square foot. The company also makes a vapor-permeable roofing underlayment.

VaproShield, 866/731-7663, www.vaproshield.com.



Sun Screen. If you're concerned that weather or material delays could leave the housewrap on your project exposed for longer than the 120-day maximum recommended by most manufacturers, *Typar HouseWrap* may be just the product you need. According to the manufacturer, Typar has better UV resistance than most housewraps, and the company will replace it if it does become UV-damaged (labor not included) no matter how long it's been exposed to the weather. Typar also boasts superior water hold-out (165 cm) and permeability (13.7 perms). A 9-by-100-foot roll sells for about \$105.

BPA Fiberweb, 800/284-2780, www.typarhousewrap.com.



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ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT



Stylish Dimmer. It used to be that there was only one important decision regarding electrical devices: White, brown, or ivory? But today's affluent homeowners want more choices, and they generally want dimmers and switches with a little more flair. Besides better styling, *Faedra* and *Qoto* Switches have some extra features that distinguish them from ordinary toggle switches. Both models have sliding dimmers that return to the previous light level when the switch is turned back on. In addition, the *Faedra* "smart" dimmer slowly fades the lights when the fixtures are turned off, giving the occupant enough time (up to 60 seconds) to cross a room before they go out completely. Single-location *Faedra* dimmer prices start at \$44; single-location *Qoto* dimmer prices start at \$21.

Lutron, 877/258-8766, www.lutron.com.

Quick-Connect Fluorescent Fixtures. Wiring commercial fluorescent fixtures just got a whole lot easier, thanks to a recent innovation from Juno. The *ModuLight System* uses a detached, line-voltage converter and flexible cable to power fluorescent fixtures. Juno says the system reduces installation costs by 20 percent to 40 percent and provides greater flexibility for fixture placement. It also reduces energy consumption by 4 percent compared with more conventional arrangements, and eliminates 70 percent of the heat generated by typical fluorescent ballasts, the company claims.

Juno, 847/827-9880, www.modulight-juno.com.



Smooth Finish. Among the latest trends in electrical devices are wall plates with a smooth, fastener-free look — so it's welcome news that Leviton has made its screwless wall plates easier to install. Most designs use subplates with their own mounting screws, but the redesigned *Decora Snap-On Wallplates* rely on a different method. Their subplates fasten with the same screws that secure the electrical devices to the outlet boxes. This approach should save time and prevent lost fasteners. *Decora Snap-On Wallplates* fit GFCI-shaped, designer-style devices and come in one- to six-gang configurations. They're made from a tough polycarbonate plastic. Single-gang versions cost under \$4.

Leviton, 800/824-3005, www.leviton.com.



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