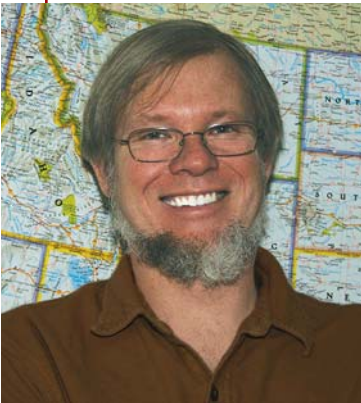


# Teaching Moments



Read a couple of pages further into this magazine, and you'll find a letter from a reader taking me to task. What did I do this time? I ran a photo on last issue's cover of a carpenter using a miter saw while not wearing safety glasses. The author of that letter is quite correct — the carpenter should have been wearing safety glasses. Thank you, Mr. Erwin, for pointing that out.

Three carpenters I've known have suffered serious eye injuries. Two of the injuries were from nails sent flying, back in the day when nails were driven with hammers. One of those two guys recovered his sight; the other lost an eye. The third fellow lost an eye to a bungee cord. The message there is to put on your safety glasses the minute you start work. My oldest friend, a carpenter, had what I thought was a good perspective. He said, "Scars are honorable, but losing an eye? That's a handicap."

I've known and worked with Brent Benner, the carpenter in the cover photo, for years. Ironically, he's darn near religious about wearing safety glasses, as evidenced by the photos further on in that issue. I should have noticed that he wasn't wearing his glasses both when I took that photo and when I approved it as a cover.

That said, I still might have run it had I noticed. Working at a magazine such as this, I have a dual mission. Sometimes, those missions conflict. First, I'm a journalist. Journalists report reality. On the job site, reality is never exactly as the suits who write safety regulations say it should be.

As a journalist, I've talked with hundreds, perhaps

thousands, of carpenters. When carpenters talk, it's rarely long before they're telling war stories and comparing scars. I was a carpenter once, too, and I join in. Often, we laugh about our traumas with a bravado whose purpose seems to be to prepare us mentally for our next visit to the ER.

On the other hand, I'm also an educator. Outside the trades, that sort of bravado is viewed as idiotic. The suits who write safety regulations do so with good reason. I know this, and I work with authors to ensure that articles show not only useful — but also reasonably safe — techniques.

The question is how far in which direction should a trade magazine lean? I photographed Brent for that cover article on a sunny day in May. As can happen on such days at the end of a dark and cold New England winter, I forgot sunscreen and burned red as a steamed Maine lobster. Should the magazine warn you about skin cancer? More than one carpenter I know has had a bout with melanoma, and it's a real risk for deck builders.

In the end, I think you're all adults. I'm not going to show wildly unsafe techniques in this magazine, but neither will I pull a good photo just because it shows the reality of a carpenter who isn't wearing safety glasses. On the other hand, when that happens, I encourage you to do as Mr. Erwin did and make it a teaching moment. ❖

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Engel".

Andy Engel  
Editor