

BY EMANUEL SILVA

Durable Exterior Window Trim

When most folks hear the term window trim, they think of beautiful interior casing and sill details around a living-room window. While the interior trim is traditionally a place to showcase finish carpentry, most windows also have trim on the outside, which plays a part in defending the windows and the home against the elements. So proper execution and installation of exterior window trim is probably more important than that of the flashier interior trim and is something just about every house carpenter will be asked to do on a regular basis.

Trim material. Wood was typically used as exterior trim on houses for centuries, but wood trim demands regular care to keep it protected from exposure to the elements. In the last couple of decades, synthetic materials have taken over as a more durable choice for exterior trim, and I have switched over to these materials almost entirely. Synthetic trim materials come as flat stock or in conventional stock profiles. For the trim in the photos, I used standard PVC brickmold for the jamb and head casing. I fabricated my own sills from PVC flat stock (see “Windowsill Retrofit,” Apr/20).



Before the window goes in, the author takes accurate measurements of the height and width (1). He includes a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch gap on the sides of the window and a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch gap at the top of the window when calculating the overall size of the window trim. He begins by cutting the bottoms of the jamb casings to the angle of the sill, or about 14 degrees (2).



For longevity, the author uses synthetic trim material for his exterior window trim kits. For this window, he opted for standard brickmold in PVC. When all the pieces for the trim kit have been cut, he applies PVC cement to the first mitered corner (3) and screws the joint together from both directions (4). He repeats the process, gluing and screwing the opposite miter (5).



To attach the sill to the trim kit, the author first predrills holes on each side of the sill for the attachment screws (6). Then he applies PVC cement to both the top of the sill and the end of the jamb casing on the first side (7) and drives stainless steel screws to secure the joint (8). On the other end of the sill, he glues both surfaces and screws that joint together as well (9). Before taking the assembled trim kit to the window for installation, the author drills and partially drives Cortex screws around the perimeter of the trim (10).

Measuring and cutting. It's possible to install window trim in place one piece at a time, but it's quicker and more efficient if you preassemble the trim as a picture frame that is installed in one piece—what I call a trim kit—and the result looks much better. Before installing and flashing the window correctly in its opening (see “Retrofitting New Windows,” Apr/15), I take accurate measurements of the window width and height (1). For the inside dimensions of the trim kit, I add $\frac{3}{4}$ inch to the width of the window (for a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch gap on either side) and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to the height, which keeps the sill snug to the underside of the window and makes room on top to adjust the trim kit for level during installation. The width of the brickmold is 2 inches, so I add $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches to the width of the window to find the overall width of the trim kit. For the overall height of the trim above the sill, I add $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the window height.

I typically make the sill about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deeper than the side trim. The brickmold I used here was $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep, so for these windows I ripped my sill stock (at a $\frac{3}{12}$ slope, or 14-degree angle) to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. Armed with the measurements, I begin by cutting the bottoms

of the jamb pieces to the windowsill angle (2). The top corners of the kit are mitered, so I cut the two jamb pieces (with the angled bottoms) to the overall height measurement—the long point of the sill angle to the long point of the miter. Next, I miter both ends of the head trim, cutting that piece to the overall width of the kit (long point to long point). Finally, I cut my sill stock to that same length.

Assemble the kit. I used PVC material for these windows, so all the joints could be chemically welded together with PVC cement. To assemble the kit, I first apply PVC cement to the mating sides of one set of miters (3). I then join the corners together and drive a screw in from each direction to secure the miter joint (4). I repeat the process for the opposite mitered corner (5).

When I'm finished assembling both upper corners of the kit, I predrill holes through the bottom face of the sill (6) and apply cement to the bottom end of the jamb piece on one side, as well as to the upper face of the sill where the jamb will land (7). After mating the faces together, I drive the screws through the bottom of the sill and into the end of the jamb trim to secure that side (8). After



On site, the author caulks the back of the trim (11), then centers it on the window and levels it (12). After driving the screws (13), he makes sure the trim is flat (14). He then drives Cortex plugs to fill the screw holes (15) and flashes the trim (16).

completing the process on the opposite side (9), the kit is complete and ready to install. Before taking the kit to the window for a test fit, I predrill and insert screws along the kit's outer perimeter (10). I used the Cortex screw and plug system for these windows.

Installation. When I'm ready to install the kit, I apply a bead of caulking to the back surface of all the molding pieces in the kit (11). I press the kit into place around the window, centering it side to side. I slip a couple of spacers between the flashing over the window and the head casing to hold it in place at the proper height. After setting a level on the head jamb, I adjust it if need be (12) and sink the screws one at a time (13). I take care not to overdrive the

screws, using a level as straightedge along each length to check that it's perfectly straight, flat, and not distorted by the fasteners (14). I can back out or tighten the screws in any area that needs adjusting.

When I'm happy with how the trim fits, I tap the Cortex filler plugs into the screw holes (15). I finish the installation with a length of aluminum drip cap over the trim, and then apply self-adhering flashing tape over the vertical leg of the cap (16). The WRB folds down over the flashing and I'm ready to install the siding.

Emanuel Silva, a JLC contributing editor, owns Silva Lightning Builders in North Andover, Mass. Follow him on Instagram: @emanuel.a.silva1996.