

Wide Drywall

by Charles Wardell



If you've ever taped drywall in a home with 9-foot-high ceilings, you know what a nuisance it can be to hide the extra seam created by the 1-foot-wide filler strip. The problem isn't so much the extra taping; it's the fact that the narrow strip usually places a tapered edge next to a butt edge, which is one of the hardest seams to tape. But *Gyproc 54-inch Wide Gypsum Board* lets you finish 9-foot walls without the filler.

The only difference between this and ordinary 4x8 drywall is that it's bigger — 54 inches wide and 12 feet long (which, of course, makes it heavier). It's manufactured with the same papers and core materials used in other gypsum boards, and is hung and taped the same way. It comes in a 1/2-inch-thick standard formulation and in 5/8-inch Fireguard (Type X) variety.

Contact: Domtar Gypsum, 24 Frank Lloyd Wright Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48106; 800/366-8274.

Venting Decks and Soffits

The concept behind *Deckgrates* is simple: Take a wood deckboard, cut a series of slots every 8 inches, then use it in place of ordinary decking beneath the roof's drip line (where water

dripping from the edge of the roof hits the deck surface). By encouraging both drainage and air circulation, the slots help prevent mildew, peeling paint, ice buildup, and rot. Deckgrates are available in 8-foot lengths in the following dimensions and species: 5/4x6 pressure-treated, 5/4x6 cedar, 1x4 vertical-grain fir, and 1x4 mahogany.

The same company also makes soffit vents with a similar design. They're factory screened to keep bugs out while letting air in. They come in 12-foot lengths of 1x8, 1x10, and 1x12 pine, redwood, and cedar. They're also available in 3/8-inch x 11 1/2-inch strips of AC plywood.



Both products retail from between \$14 and \$16 per piece, on average.

Contact: Deckgrates, P.O. Box 674, Acton, MA 01720; 508/263-3376.

Green Death

Once replaced a front porch that had been undermined by carpenter ants. After removing the damaged porch frame, I noticed ants here and there in the band joist. I killed them the only way I knew how to — by using a highly toxic insect spray that left me with a headache for the rest of the afternoon.

If given the same job today, I would toss the spray in favor of *Insectigone*.



Rather than sending volatile chemicals to seek out and destroy bugs, *Insectigone* lures them to itself and dehydrates them. The manufacturer claims that the product is entirely nontoxic. The bait is a blend of FDA-approved proteins; the killer is an odorless, inert, talcum-like powder called "diatomaceous earth," which consists of the 20-million-year-old fossilized remains of marine plants and algae. Insects eat the powder or get it all over their waxy outer layer, then literally dry up and die within 48 hours. And unlike chemical sprays, the little pests can't build up a resistance to this stuff. *Insectigone* can be used both indoors and outdoors, and comes in 2.2-pound jugs or 7-ounce squeezable dusters. The dusters include a needle-nose tip for spraying the powder into tight spots.

Contact: Chemfree Environment Inc., 116 W. Service Rd., Suite 129, Champlain, NY 12919; 800/663-5858.

Composting Sink



If your clients are hard-core organic gardeners, chances are they'll like the *EcoCycle* kitchen sink. Its defining feature is a chute system beneath an opening in the wide saddle between the sink's two basins. Any garbage dropped into the chute ends up in a swing-out bucket mounted beneath the sink. When full, the bucket is eas-

ily removed and emptied onto the compost pile.

The enameled cast-iron sink measures 43 inches by 22 inches, with two 10-inch-deep basins. It's available in a wide selection of colors.

Contact: Kohler Co., Kohler, WI 53044; 414/457-4441.

Programmable Electric Heat



The new *Ultrastat* electric heat thermostat is a programmable control that can be given four different setpoints based on a room's current occupancy and lighting level. It permits a different heat level for each of the following room conditions: occupied and lighted (which typifies daytime or evening family activity); occupied and dark (when everyone is sleeping, for instance); unoccupied and lighted (as when a room is temporarily vacant); unoccupied and dark (a room that's not being used at all). The Ultrastat's passive infrared motion sensor works on a 1-hour timer. Even sleepers tend to move at least once during that time, so the sensor probably won't mistake a dark room for an empty one. The unit's light sensitivity can be set to respond to varying light levels. This makes it useful for any room in the house, from a dimly lit basement to a sunspace.

Unlike a standard thermostat, which switches the heat on and off when air temperature reaches a predetermined level, the Ultrastat turns the heaters on every 15 seconds, but varies the on time with the difference between air temperature and thermostat setpoint. The cycle is fast enough that the heating elements never cool down much in cold weather, so they retain a fairly level temperature. As a result, room temperatures deviate less than 1/2°F over an hour. The Ultrastat

sells for between \$110 and \$150.

Contact: Honeywell Residential Division, 1985 Douglas Dr. North, Golden Valley, MN 55422; 800/345-6770, ext. 716.

Shock-Absorbent Job Light



The first thing that came to mind when I saw the *Wobble Light* was a punching bag. Designed as a portable light for busy job sites, the Wobble Light has a counterweighted base (it houses a cast-iron donut) that repositions it upright when knocked over. The light is made from high-impact, waterproof plastic, weighs 38 pounds, and stands 4 feet 6 inches tall. The "polar solar" power cord stays flexible down to -49°F, and plugs into a standard 110-volt outlet. The manufacturer offers 360-degree lighting as a standard feature, but an optional reflector shield lets you have directional lighting, too. The Wobble Light includes a 500-watt, shock-resistant bulb with an advertised life of about 2,000 hours, but it will also accept a halogen bulb. The bulb and socket are mounted in a floating shock-absorbing system. A company representative claims to have tested the light's shock-absorbency by side-swiping it with a truck at 20 miles per hour. The light was unfazed.

At between \$350 and \$400, the Wobble Light seems like a luxury item, but you may want one if you're especially hard on equipment.

Contact: Wobble Light Inc., 5211 W. 65th St., Bedford Park, IL 60638; 708/496-8400. ■