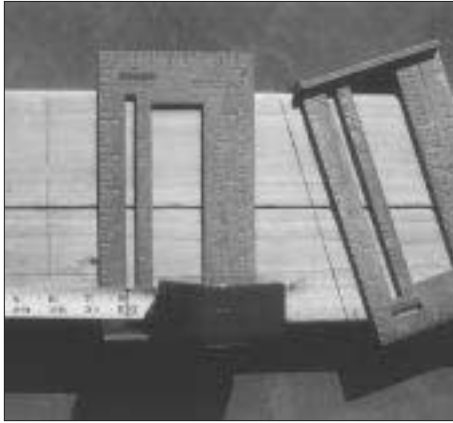


Square Deal

by Charles Wardell



The makers of the *Ultra Square* claim that it can reduce plate layout time by half. They may be right: Marking a plate for studs and joists is a breeze with this tool. Just clip your tape measure to the extended edge guide, and hook the end of the tape over the end of the plate. Then pull the tape and the square as a unit along the plate. The slots in the square are configured so that the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch on-center correction is done automatically. The square measures $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches across, so you can mark up to three adjacent studs at once. That comes in handy when laying out window openings and wall corners. The *Ultra Square* is also marked with angle settings that the manufacturer claims will reduce the number of steps needed to layout hip and valley rafters and jacks. The tool sells for \$9.95.

Contact: Applied Concepts Engineering, P.O. Box 213, Williams, OR 97544; 503/474-2818.

A Bright Idea

Computer chips are popping up everywhere these days. So it should come as no surprise that someone has computerized the lowly light bulb. *Smart Bulb* is a family of patented incandescent bulbs whose bases are fitted with microchips. They give homeowners lighting options that, in the past, would have required



expensive wiring or control devices.

The *Smart Bulb* comes in four varieties. The *Auto-Off* bulb blinks after 10 or 30 minutes, depending on the model, then shuts off (toggling the wall switch overrides this feature for two hours). The *Four Level Dimmer* eliminates the need for a rheostat. Each toggle of the light switch cycles the light intensity to the next level — bright, medium, low, and night light. The *Dimming Night Light* automatically dims to the intensity of a night light in 20 minutes. The *Signal Flasher* can be set to blink on and off so that someone can find your house at night. All four varieties are fitted with the company's "soft start" technology. When switched on, the bulb starts at low power before surging to full intensity. This extends the bulb's life by protecting the filament from the unnecessary shock of a full start.

Contact: Angelo Brothers Co., 12401 McNulty Rd., Philadelphia, PA 19154; 215/671-2000.

Rugged Foam

The high insulating value of extruded polystyrene foam board makes it popular in some areas as a nonstructural sheathing. Unfortunately, some builders complain that the stuff is easily damaged on the job site. *Amofoam-SLX* is an extruded polystyrene foam sheathing board with a plastic film laminate on

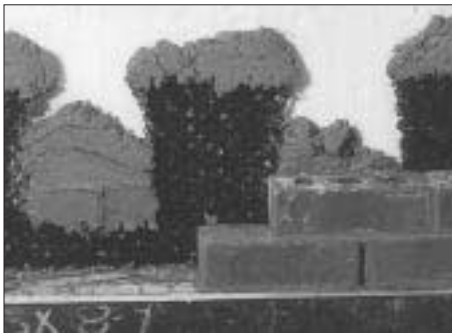


both sides. The laminate protects the faces of the board, reducing the chance of damage. The boards also have interlocking shiplap edges that reduce heat-losing gaps that would otherwise have to be taped.

The result is less air infiltration and fewer drafts than with square-edged boards. Amocofoam-SLX comes in 1/2-inch, 3/4-inch, and 1-inch thicknesses.

Contact: Amoco Foam Products Co., 375 Northridge Rd., Suite 600, Atlanta, GA 30350; 800/241-4402.

Weep Hole Saver



If you take the trouble to leave weep holes at the base of a brick veneer wall, then you might as well keep them clear. The *Mortar Net* does just that. It's an open-mesh polyethylene net designed to catch any mortar droppings that fall off the inside of a brick veneer wall during construction. The net comes in 10- and 16-inch widths, and in 5-foot lengths, and is installed without adhesives, fasteners, or special tools. The mason simply places the Mortar Net against the sheathing, then installs the brick veneer

in the normal manner. The net catches the droppings in a random pattern, suspending them well above the weep holes. Its dovetail shape prevents the mortar droppings from forming a continuous dam.

Contact: The Mortar Net USA, Ltd., 3646 Ridge Rd., Highland, IN 46322; 800/664-6638.

Slow-Dry Latex Glaze



When used skillfully, decorative painting techniques let you simulate expensive materials like marble, granite, and exotic woods at a fraction of the cost. Depending on the effect you're after, you can use a sponge to lightly dab tinted glaze over a base coat of paint in a random pattern, or you can roll on a thick coating of glaze and distress it with various tools, like feathers, rags, combs, and special brushes. Unlike paints, which look two-dimensional when dry, glazes add depth to a surface.

Since latex-based coatings start to dry after 10 minutes, most glazes are slow-drying alkyds, which leave you plenty of open time to work the glaze after application. But *Blend & Glaze* is also made in a latex version. When mixed with the company's special extender, it can be worked for 30 minutes without any problems. It mixes with all interior paints and artist pigments, may be thinned to any consistency, and won't run or sag on vertical surfaces. The company also provides a free how-to booklet for glazing techniques.

Contact: Wm. Zinsser & Co. Inc., 173 Belmont Dr., Somerset, NJ 08875; 908/469-8100. ■