

Conduit to the Future

To the Editor:

I am writing regarding the article "Smart Wiring: Growth but No Boom" (*Notebook*, 10/02). I almost wrote a year ago when you ran "Connecting to the Future" (3/02). Everybody is missing the obvious in trying to figure out what to install for smart wiring now and for the future, within a budget. The answer, in one word, is pipe. I am an electrical contractor in the western suburbs of Chicago. Unlike most parts of the country, it is commonplace here to see steel conduit, or EMT (electrical metallic tubing), installed in new homes instead of romex for the line voltage system in a house.

Most of us have discussed the benefits of conduit vs. romex, but the main argument that no one can argue with is its flexibility to expand in the future without fishing down walls or ceilings. The same holds true for low voltage. Run a pipe to a room from your source and, miraculously, you are set for life. You need co-ax today? In an hour or less, you have it. Need fiber tomorrow? Out with the co-ax, in with the fiber. This method has been used for years in commercial work.

We use plastic ENT (electrical non-metallic) conduit. It's a corrugated plastic pipe that comes in 1/2-inch to 1-inch diameters in 10-foot lengths or by the roll. It is also rated for line voltage. It is flexible, terminates in literally a snap into a standard box knock-out, cuts with a utility knife or pvc cutter, and leaves you with the perfect avenue to pull and repull whatever the future brings. The cost is minimal: 25¢ per foot for 1/2-inch, 40¢ for 3/4-inch.

Seth Priser
Priser Electric Inc.
St. Charles, Ill.

Rock Hard

To the Editor:

I know you love nitpicky letters from your readers. In the November 2002 *Kitchen & Bath* column, the writer refers to the hardness of quartz in Cambria countertop and tile products as being 7 on the "Mohr Hardness Scale." As a former geology student, I can assure you that it's the Mohs Hardness Scale.

Paul Zvirblis
Avalon Home Improvement
Elyria, Ohio

Thanks; you're right. The Mohs scale is named after German mineralogist Friedrich Mohs, who created it in the 1820s. It's not so much a scale as a list of ten minerals based on scratch resistance, in increasing hardness: 1) talc, 2) gypsum, 3) calcite, 4) fluorspar, 5) apatite, 6) feldspar, 7) quartz, 8) topaz, 9) corundum, 10) diamond.

— The Editor

Bad Gas No Lie

To the Editor:

In response to the letter "Bad Gas a Myth?" in your October issue: I've been around engines most of my life and have experienced bad gas from time to time. When gas goes "bad," it turns yellow and smells like turpentine. Once in this state, it can deteriorate rubber gas lines, making them soft and almost tarlike. Bad gas will also clog up carburetors.

I have had gas go bad in less than a year, and I have had gas last three years. The only explanation I can offer is evaporation. Most gas cans seal tight or almost tight, but most gas tanks on engines are vented to prevent vapor lock. The vent allows air in and gas out by evaporation. If left open, or unused, long enough, the gas can evaporate down to just a dry crust.

Aaron Dickinson
Mason, Mich.

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Letters

No-Sag Barn Doors

To the Editor:

It is with great displeasure that I find myself writing this letter on a Sunday morning, having interrupted my breakfast and leisurely read of this month's *JLC* in order to write to you.

Your sketch of the "Simple Rustic Door" (*Q&A*, 12/02) has a serious flaw: The diagonal brace should always be placed from the outside top edge to the hinge in order to transfer the load from the farthest point to the support side. I guarantee that the way you are recommending to build these doors will result in sagging from the mid-point in a very short time. When the brace is in the correct position, half the weight of the T&G paneling is transferred to the lower hinge point and the other half is hanging with the weight thrusting toward the hinge not the leading edge of the door.

Robin Berthet
Via e-mail

To the Editor:

In the 12/02 issue, a "Simple Rustic Door" is shown with diagonals for bracing. I believe the braces in the figure should be reversed for best long-term performance. In the depicted position, the braces are in tension and nothing is available to transfer the tension forces from the diagonals to the horizontal backers. By simply rotating the diagonals to extend from the top center of the doors to the bottom hinges, both diagonals will be in compression. With the diagonals in compression, after the doors sag slightly, small gaps between the diagonals and the horizontal backers will close up, and the doors will be locked against vertical movement. For best performance, make sure the diagonals are tight against the horizontal backers.

Frank Woeste, P.E.
Professor of Wood Construction &
Engineering, Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Va.

Thanks to all those who pointed out our error. See the corrected drawing below.

— The Editor

More Barn Door Ideas

To the Editor:

I would like to respond to the question about barn doors with some different suggestions. I would use 1/2-inch plywood, but I would specify either cedar plywood, pressure-treated plywood, or the ultimate: marine-grade plywood. CDX would be the minimum grade of plywood that I would consider. Sealing the edge of the plywood is an excellent idea; I would use a silicone caulk-type seal.

I would recommend the face stile and rail, but with some exceptions. To counteract any warping either in the plywood or in the rails and stiles, make sure that your growth rings are opposing on both sides. I would only use 2x4 stock, pressure treated, on the outside and 1x4 stock on the inside. On the outside, I would miter all four corners and nail through the corners. This makes for a much stronger door. Eliminate the center rails and either mount the diagonal brace or apply battens on the outside. On the inside, I would use 1x4 stock and mount diagonal bracing.

Gluing the rails and stile is unnecessary. I use galvanized ring shank nails, which hold almost as well as screws. I use Bostitch nails because

they have a hot-melt glue on the nail that activates as you fire the nail.

They hold extremely well. You generally will break the nail before you succeed in pulling it out.

John F. Wilder Jr.
Rosemount, Minn.

Use Cedar

To the Editor:

Mr. Frane's response to "Building Barn Doors" offered several solutions; I offer one more suggestion: Use T&G cedar instead of spruce. The doors would be significantly lighter, reducing weight-related racking and hinge problems. Moreover, cedar is naturally weather resistant.

Robert Naser
Dedham, Mass.

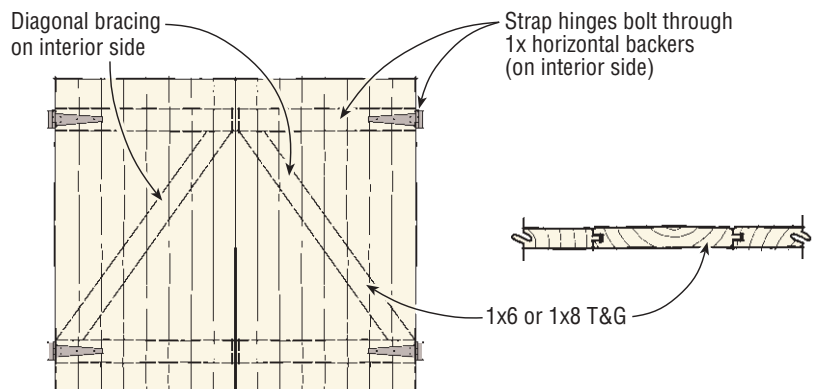
Better Hinge Support

To the Editor:

When I was growing up, we were told to always slope the diagonal bracing on "Simple Rustic Doors" toward the hinged side of the door. The idea is to transfer the load where it needs to go. Makes sense to me. It's amazing, though, just how often you see it done the way you had it illustrated. You might also want to extend the horizontal backers to the edge of the door so that you catch the first two screws in the strap hinge.

David Grellier, Architect
Atelier Northwest, Inc.
Bremerton, Wash.

Outswinging Rustic Door



Letters

Common Language

To the Editor:

I read Ms. Story's advice about English being a valid job requirement (*Legal Adviser*, 12/02). Her closing remarks about hiring a diverse workforce with reasonable job requirements is pure lawyerese. It is this type of thinking that creates substandard workforces and promotes cultural cliques that divide rather than unite workforces.

When our forefathers arrived here, they brought their cultures with them, along with their language and skills as tradesmen, and went to work building America. One thing they did though was learn to speak a common language: English. Why should we expect any less of our newly arrived immigrants?

The people who work for me understand from the get-go that I would not put them in jeopardy by pairing them with a non-English-speaking person. I value my workers too much to take a chance that someone might not understand a command and suffer tragic consequences. If some court has a problem with that thinking, then it's time to talk to our legislators. I don't consider myself discriminatory, but one of my requirements is that all my workers can communicate with one another and comprehend what's being said.

Ted Newman, Jr.

Lakes Region Remodeling Company
Center Tufonboro, N.H.

Can't Cope?

To the Editor:

As a fifth-generation nail pounder (finish type), I almost had a seizure reading the article "Finish Carpentry, Production Style" (11/02), which shows a tradesman cutting two 45-degree miters for an inside corner! Has he ever heard the term "cope"?

Craig Brown

Via e-mail

Good catch. The photo captions should have made clear that the author is using MDF trim, which doesn't cope easily.

— The Editor

Wanted: Good Customers

To the Editor:

I operate a small general contracting company located in Seattle. Our projects range in size from \$1,000 to \$750,000 and beyond. In the past couple of years, I have become increasingly frustrated with the stories in the press about bad contractors and people who've been taken by unethical contractors. It seems to be a dominant consumer advocate theme on television and in the newspaper, but there are few stories about the satisfied customers we service (the majority of clients in the industry), as those stories don't offer the same sensationalism.

And where are the stories about bad remodel clients? We've been fortunate that the remodeling business has been good to us in the last several years. However, we still get set back by customers who don't return phone calls for days, if at all. These delays in responding to our requests for information make it hard to make progress on a project and schedule our jobs efficiently. Some customers want us to meet with them immediately, but they think our time is not worth anything.

Recently, I had a pair of customers who were firm about wanting their project to be done on time and on budget (a reasonable request, as far as we're concerned). Yet when it was completed on time and *under* budget, they had major complaints about the final bill! It feels like a contractor can't win with certain clients. And there are customers who still haven't paid us 60 to 90 days after their job has been successfully completed. In what other industry could customers get away with not paying on time after their project is complete and

they are enjoying the fruits of one's labor and products? In another recent case, we submitted an invoice for \$20,000, and the client gave us \$10,000!

We approach our business as a two-way street — just like a job interview. We try to get a sense of customers' priorities and whether they will be good and reasonable clients, just as they are interviewing us to make sure we are the right fit for them. Fortunately, most of our customers are pleasant to work with, and some have even given us more payment on draw request than we ask for. So why am I complaining? Because a smaller contractor can be paralyzed by a few clients who do not pay on time. It's unfortunate that the future of my business is in the hands of a few bad clients. Thank you for allowing me to share the other side of the contractor-client story.

Tom Fine

Fine Construction Inc.
Seattle, Wash.

KEEP 'EM COMING!

Letters must be signed and include the writer's address. The Journal of Light Construction reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to JLC, 186 Allen Brook Ln., Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to jlc-editorial@hanley-wood.com.