

Products

by Patrick McCombe

Problem-Solving Subfloor

If you're looking for an easy way to install a finished floor over a concrete slab, you might consider the *DRIcore Subfloor System*. The 2x2-foot OSB panels have a layer of dimpled polyethylene that raises them off the slab. The resulting air space promotes drying and reduces the possibility of mold and moisture damage. The tongue-and-groove panels lock together without adhesive, and the manufacturer claims that fastening the panels to the slab is unnecessary in most cases. The manufacturer provides small "leveling squares" for shimming low spots in the existing slab. The system sells for about \$1.25 per square foot.

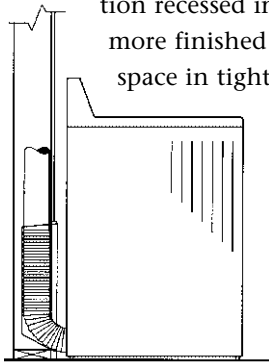
DRIcore, 866/976-6374, www.dricore.com.



Smooth Transition

Behind most clothes dryers you'll find dryer vents with distorted hose and tight bends that reduce drying efficiency and trap lint. The *Dryerbox* eliminates those problems by replacing a gauntlet of elbows and kinked hose with a smooth connection recessed into the wall. It not only increases efficiency and provides a more finished look, it also gets the dryer closer to the wall for additional space in tight laundry rooms. It's available in two sizes, the standard 4¹/₄-inch-deep model and a 3¹/₂-inch model for 2x4 framing. Just make sure to get 4-inch oval pipe if you're planning to use the smaller size. It sells for about \$20.

In-O-Vate Technologies, 888/443-7937, www.dryerbox.com.



On the Edge

A vented ridge combined with vented soffits is generally considered the best way to get hot, moist air out of an attic space, but what do you do when you don't have an overhang? The best solution I've seen is the *Vented Drip Edge* from Air Vent. According to the manufacturer, the heavy-gauge louvered drip-edge was designed with contractor input, so it performs well and it's easy to install. It's available in white, black, brown, and mill finishes and provides 9 square inches of ventilation per foot. The 10-foot lengths sell for about \$20.

Air Vent, Inc., 800/247-8368, www.airvent.com.





Sturdy Spout

Like a lot of suburban kids, we had a basketball court on the back side of the house when I was growing up. One of the neighborhood's best guards was an aluminum downspout adjacent to the hoop — it sure took a beating defending the net. To keep your customer's downspout out of similar danger, you might try *ReplaK Vinyl Gutters & Downspouts*. They have the same profile as aluminum K-style gutters, but their vinyl construction shrugs off impacts better than aluminum. In addition, it won't corrode from salt air or pollution. A complete ReplaK gutter and downspout system runs about \$1.90 per foot.

Genova, 800/521-7488, www.genovaproducts.com.

ON THE JOB

Acid-Staining a Garage Floor

Our company builds spec houses, and one of the things we do to make them appealing to buyers is to acid-stain the garage floors. When customers walk in to one of our garages, instead of plain concrete they see a floor with an attractive mottled pattern.

Acid stain is made from water, acid, and inorganic salts. It doesn't con-

tain any pigment, but if you put it on cured concrete, it colors the surface layer by reacting with the minerals in the slab.

According to manufacturers, you're not supposed to stain concrete until it has had time to cure. This means you should wait at least 28 days after the material is poured. That's not a problem for us because we pour garage

slabs early in the job, so months go by before we're ready to stain.

No matter how long you wait, it's important to keep the slab clean. You don't want it to get contaminated by things like grease, oil, drywall dust, or paint. We cover slabs with a layer of waterproof paper almost as soon as they're poured and finished. Late in the job, when it's time to stain the



Acid stain changes the color of concrete by reacting with the chemicals in the slab.

Acid stain can be applied with a brush, but you need to work fast enough to maintain a wet edge.

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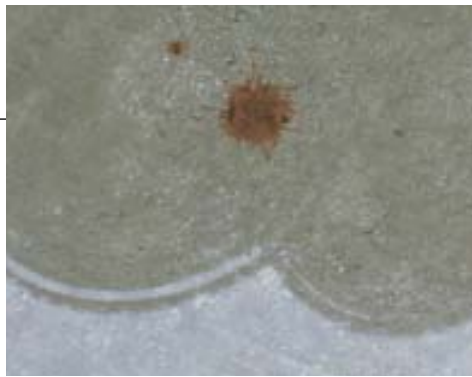
floor, we peel up the paper and wash the slab with plain water. We give it a day or two to dry, then we apply the stain.

A lot of companies make acid stain, but we use a locally manufactured product called ConSov (Varni-Lite Coatings, Hayward, Calif., 510/887-8997). It costs about \$50 per gallon and can be applied full strength or diluted 50/50 with water. If you dilute it 50/50, a gallon will cover about 400 square feet. We usually dilute it, because that lightens the color of the dark brown stain that we typically use.

There are many ways to apply stain to slabs, but we've settled on using a brush. On one of our earlier jobs, we tried using a mop, but it picked up too much acid and left visible run marks on the finished floor. The same thing happened when we tried a paint roller.

We like the effect we get by applying the stain in an overlapping figure-eight pattern. You have to be careful not to drip stain on the slab when you lift your brush from the bucket. You can brush over drips, but they will still be darker than the surrounding area.

The stain goes on clear, but once the chemicals start to react, the concrete changes color before your eyes. We usually let the stain dry overnight and then wash down the slab with plain water to remove the surface residue. Even though there's no pigment in the stain, there will be some color in the wash water. We give the slab another day to dry, then apply a clear water-based sealer. The sealer creates a surface sheen and greatly intensifies the color of the concrete. It goes on milky but dries clear. We usually apply two or three light coats, each about a day apart. It's important



The wet stain is starting to darken this area of floor, but the earlier drip — the brown spot — will probably show through.



After the stain dries, the author scrubs with plain water to remove the surface residue.

to apply thin coats; the sealer will remain milky looking if you put it on too thick. Where the homeowner drives on it, the sealer will eventually wear through, dulling, but not damaging, the color of the concrete. You can renew the color by cleaning and resealing the slab. It takes us 10 to 12 man-hours to stain and seal a 500-square-foot slab.

Calvin Wong is a site manager for TK Construction in Oakland, Calif.



The finished slab is shown here with two coats of sealer.

SPECIALTY HARDWARE

Holy Bookcase, Batman! Maybe it comes from afternoons spent watching the Caped Crusader enter the Bat Cave through a secret passage, but I think this is one of the coolest products I've ever seen. The *SpaceXDoor* looks like an ordinary bookcase, but it's actually a bifolding closet door with special hardware. Made from MDF, it can be left natural or veneered in just about any wood species. According to the manufacturer, the door can hold up to 300 pounds of books and they won't fall off when it's operated. I saw it at this year's Builders' Show. It looks well made, and the hardware looks sturdy enough for the job. It's available in widths from 48 to 76 inches in 83- and 96-inch heights. The maple-veneered version shown has a list price of \$2,300.

SpaceXDoors, 800/262-9464, www.spacexdoors.com.



Better Ledger Connection. Attaching a porch or deck ledgers to a building is one connection that you simply can't mess up. FastenMaster, maker of TrapEase deck screws and TimberLok long-length wood screws has introduced *LedgerLok*, a coated, structural screw designed exclusively for attaching deck ledgers. The new screw is self-drilling and uses a hex head with an integral washer to prevent stripping. According to the manufacturer, the 1/4-inch-diameter screws have greater shear strength than 1/2-inch lag screws, and the



proprietary coating is compatible with the more corrosive ACQ and copper azole pressure-treating formulas. A 50-count box of 3⁵/₈-inch LedgerLok screws sells for \$24; the 5-inch size sells for \$28.

FastenMaster, 800/518-3569,
www.fastenmaster.com.

Oldie but Goodie. If "period-inspired" or reproduction hardware won't work for your customer's restoration project, you can get authentic



period pieces from Ed Donaldson Hardware Restorations. The small company refurbishes antique doorknobs, sash lifts, hinges, and other common types of builder's hardware. Some of the stuff is one of a kind, but more common pieces like *Antique Rim Locks* and *Hinges* can usually be found in sufficient quantities for a small addition or restoration. The cast-iron rim lock

shown is from the mid to late 19th century and sells for \$75.

Ed Donaldson Hardware Restorations, 717/249-3624,
www.eddonaldson.com.

HVAC CONTROLS

Fresh Outlook. Adding a little fresh air to a forced-air heating system is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to prevent indoor air problems in today's tighter homes. Products like Aprilaire's *Ventilation Control System* use an electronic damper and adjustable



timer to bring fresh outside air into the return-air duct. Easier to install and less expensive than a heat-recovery ventilator, the 6-inch damper can be programmed to open from 1 to 60 minutes every 1 to 4 hours. According to the manufacturer, the controller will keep the damper

closed if temperatures are below 0°F or above 100°F or if humid outdoor air could bring interior humidity levels above 60%. Installed prices run about \$250 to \$300.

Aprilaire, 800/334-6011, www.aprilaire.com.

Hot Water Management. Hydronic heating systems continue to grow in popularity, but balancing a new system can be a struggle, especially when in-floor loops are combined with other types of hydronic heating. You can make the balancing process easier with a *TruFLOW Manifold System* from Wirsbo. The solid brass manifold is adjustable for both temperature and flow and can handle up to 12 loops. The device also makes installations faster, and it looks less intimidating to tech-weary homeowners.



Wirsbo, 800/321-4739, www.wirsbo.com.



Water Heater Safety Valve. Failed water heaters cause millions of dollars in damage every year. Even though drip pans can prevent most water damage, they don't ensure the safety of your client, because the leaking water could extinguish the pilot or the burner could be heating a nearly empty tank. Installing a *WAGS Valve* (Water and Gas Safety Valve) could prevent such an accident. The device uses a water soluble disk that keeps the valve open during normal operation, but when a leak fills the drip pan to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, it dissolves, closing the water supply and gas valves. Once it's activated, a little red flag alerts the homeowner that there's a problem. The device can also be used with non-gas heaters. Installed prices should run about \$350.

Taco, 401/942-8000, www.taco-hvac.com.

Cold Call. While it makes sense to leave the heat or air conditioning turned down in most vacation homes, it can take a day or more to make the house comfortable again. If a day spent shivering isn't compatible with your customer's idea of a relaxing weekend, you could suggest the *Telephone Access Module* and *T8635L Communicating Thermostat* from Honeywell. With the two components, customers can call their thermostat and change the temperature over the phone. The slick device will also call out to three preprogrammed numbers if there's a heating failure or prolonged power interruption. According to the manufacturer, the system is easy to program, doesn't require third-party monitoring, and works with most heating and cooling equipment.



Honeywell, 800/328-5111, www.honeywell.com.

SOFFIT & FASCIA

Time-Saving Vented Trim. While perfectly functional, round aluminum and strip soffit vents aren't the best-looking exterior detail. If you or your customer is seeking an alternative, you might try the *404 Eave Vent System* from Style Solutions. Combining several preprimed trim pieces and the soffit vent in the same product results in a detail that not only looks better, but also saves a lot of installation time. Premolded outside and inside corners are available. The 6³/₁₆-inch-tall molding has a 4⁷/₁₆-inch projection and comes in 12-foot lengths. It has a list price of \$12 per foot.

Style Solutions, Inc., 800/446-3040,
www.stylesolutionsinc.com.



Wood Is Good but Sometimes Plastic Is Better. The cottage and bungalow aesthetic is increasingly popular, but the exposed overhangs and decorative details present a problem for wood millwork. If your client wants to avoid annual painting and maintenance, you might suggest *Azek Beadboard*. The tongue-and-groove synthetic lumber has a V-groove on one side and an edge-and-center bead on the other, making it perfect for reproducing period soffits, porch ceilings, and exterior wainscot. According to the manufacturer, the matte white finish holds paint well or can be left unpainted. The 1/2-inch-thick by 6-inch-wide boards are available in 18-foot lengths. The 1x6x18-foot boards sell for approximately \$29.

Azek, 866/549-6900, www.azek.com.



High Fiber. Fans of fiber-cement siding often tout its low cost, durability, and excellent paint adhesion. It's those same qualities that make fiber cement an excellent soffit material. *Vented* and *Non-Vented Soffit Panels* from James Hardie are offered in smooth and textured finishes. What's great is they're precut in 12- and 16-inch widths, and the 12-foot length means fewer seams. The 1/4-inch-thick panels are preprimed and have a 25-year transferable warranty. At a local yard (in northern Vermont), I was quoted about \$11 per piece for 20 pieces of smooth non-vented in the 12-inch width.

James Hardie, 888/542-7343,
www.jameshardie.com.

Covert Soffit Ventilation. Unlike most vented vinyl soffit that uses exposed holes or slots, Napco's *UltraSpan* uses hidden ventilation slots. The slots are tucked into the soffit's center groove, and, according to the manufacturer, the hidden location not only looks more attractive, it's also more effective at resisting wind-driven rain. The manufacturer claims that the .046-inch-thick panels are better at spanning longer distances like porch ceilings without sagging. They're



available in 14 colors at about \$75 to \$85 per square.

Napco, 800/786-2726, www.napcobuildingproducts.com.