

# Stripping Laminate

**Q.** *I need to remove old Formica from wooden sills in a house we're restoring. I've had limited success using heat guns for this task. Any recommendations?*

**A.** *Bruce Wooster responds:* I've had good luck using acetone to remove glued-on laminates. I fill a spray bottle (use glass — a plastic bottle will melt) with acetone and spray a mist along one edge of the laminate. After the acetone has soaked in for about a minute, I start to work the laminate loose with a putty knife. I continue to spray acetone into the widening gap, repeating the process until the entire piece comes off.

Using this method, a helper and I have removed 30 square feet of laminate from a kitchen countertop in about 40 minutes.

**Bruce A. Wooster** owns and operates *William R. Wooster & Sons* in *Crisfield, Md.*

## Air-Nailing Backerboard

**Q.** *Can I use a pneumatic nail gun to fasten tile backerboard to floors and walls?*

**A.** *Michael Byrne responds:* ANSI (American National Standards Institute) specifications require that a corrosion-resistant roofing nail be used when nailing tile backerboard, and that the nail penetrate the wood framing at least  $3/4$  inch. While there are no direct references to pneumatic nailing, I see no reason why pneumatic roofing nails couldn't be used, as long as the fasteners were of sufficient length. It's important that the nail head does not break the fiberglass matting material imbedded in the backerboard, so make sure to properly set both the gun's depth

adjustment and the air pressure.

Corrosion-resistant screws can also be used, providing their head diameter is large enough to resist a 125-pound pull-through force. Hi-Lo S Rock-On screws (ITW Buildex, 1349 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Itasca, IL 60143; 800/323-0720) meet this requirement.

Backerboard installed over a plywood subfloor should always be fully bedded in mortar or adhesive. In these situations, many contractors mistakenly think that the fasteners serve as clamps and that their holding power is not an issue after the mortar or adhesive "grabs." But the primary function of the setting bed is to provide a leveling bed for the backerboard; the fasteners are what holds the backerboard in place for the life of the tile installation.

For detailed guidelines on tile installation requirements, contact the Tile Council of America (P.O. Box 1787, Clemson, SC 29631; 864/646-8453) for a copy of the *Handbook for Ceramic Tile Installation*.

*A tile contractor for more than 20 years, Michael Byrne is now director of the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation in Clemson, S.C.*

## Removing Stains from Wood Siding

**Q.** *Is there any way to remove mildew and water stains on redwood and cedar siding?*

**A.** *Charlie Jourdain responds:* To remove a mild case of mildew, scrub the surface with a mild cleanser or non-ammonia detergent. Then rinse with household liquid bleach to kill the mildew spores. Finally, rinse with water.

For more severe mildew infestations, scrub the wood with a stiff bristle brush, using a solution of one cup trisodium phosphate, one cup liquid bleach, and one gallon of warm water. (Wear rubber gloves!) After scrubbing, rinse with a solution of four ounces oxalic acid crystals dissolved in one gallon of warm water in a nonmetallic container. Apply with a soft brush to one entire board or defined area at a time. After the wood has dried thoroughly, rinse with clean water. This will remove not only mildew, but also any water stains and extractive bleeding. It might reduce nail stains as well, however, but nothing short of sanding will remove nail stains entirely.

**Charlie Jourdain** is a finishes specialist at the *California Redwood Association*.

## Steep Rafter Lengths

**Q.** *When cutting steep roofs, we often have problems getting the correct rafter lengths. It seems the steeper the roof gets, the lower the rafters hit on the ridge. We have been careful to double-check diagonals and our ridge height, but our first rafter is always too short, and we have to waste time fitting a pattern before proceeding. Why do the rafters need lengthening, and is there some way to calculate for this?*

**A.** *Will Holladay responds:* The problem probably isn't one of calculating the length, but in the accuracy of your ridge height measurements. No matter how accurately you might measure the proper rise from the floor, a crown in the floor deck will boost the ridge height.

It's not uncommon for the floor height to vary  $1/2$  inch or so in the mid-

dle of a big room. While small dimensional differences like this might not be noticeable at a lower pitch, a steep roof magnifies any discrepancies. To avoid vertical measurement errors on steep roofs (8/12 and up), I always measure the rise from a string stretched across the top of the outside walls.

**Will Holladay** is author of *A Roof Cutter's Secrets*, and works as a freelance roof cutter throughout the United States.

## Signing Contracts

**Q.** *Do we have to use triplicate forms for contracts and other construction documents, or can we use laser-printed pages and just have the clients sign both copies?*

**A.** *Gary Ransone responds:* It's okay to use laser-printed pages, as long as all parties (not just the clients) sign. Here's a signing procedure that has worked for me: I sign and date the last page of the contract, then initial the

bottom of each page of the contract and any "attached" pages (subcontractor bids, sketches, or other written materials referenced in the contract). I then ask the owner do the same. This eliminates any later confusion over whether or not the owner received and agreed to all pages of the contract. You can standardize this process by including at the bottom of each page a simple box that says "Initial here," with space for the required marks. (It's not necessary to print this message; you can use an inexpensive, pre-inked rubber stamp instead.)

I always make two extra copies (printed, not photocopied) of this original contract and its attachments. I keep one copy for my files and give the owner the original and the other copy — both of which I have initialed on every page and "wet signed." The owner keeps the extra copy for his or her records, and returns the original copy to me after signing it and initialing each page. To help keep the copies

straight, I stamp the original contract at the top of page one with a red stamp that reads: "After Reviewing Please Sign This Copy and Return to Contractor."

It is better, although not essential, to have a contract for your files that has been "wet signed" by the owner, rather than a photocopy of the agreement and the owner's signature. Some contractors are more comfortable sending out an unsigned contract for the owners to sign first and return. This is perfectly fine and gives a little leeway should you wish to make last-minute revisions and issue a revised contract.

**Gary Ransone, J.D.**, is construction attorney and contractor in Soquel, Calif., and the author of *The Contractor's Legal Kit*.

**GOT A QUESTION** about a building or renovation project? Send it to On the House, JLC, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to [jlc@bginet.com](mailto:jlc@bginet.com).

