

Innovative Products

2011

by Tom O'Brien

Foolproof Skylight



Velux has redesigned its entire lineup of deck-mounted products and now promotes the collection as the *No Leak Skylight*. The company is so confident of its leak-free claims it offers a 10-year warranty — not just on the products but on installation, too. No Leak skylights provide three layers of protection against moisture intrusion: a pre-attached gasket that seals the gap between the bottom of the unit and the roof deck; an adhesive underlayment that circles the base of the frame; and a pre-engineered flashing package that features one-piece sill and saddle parts to completely seal the corners. Velux also claims that pre-installed mounting brackets and easily removable counter flashing make these skylights easier to install than their predecessors. A 21-inch-by-46-inch fixed skylight (model FS C06) costs about \$230. A manually vented model of the same size (model VS C06) goes for \$440. A flashing kit (adhesive underlayment included) costs about \$80.

Velux America, 800/888-3589, velux.com.

Seen at the Show

Remember when builder's trade shows were raucous affairs, full of hype and wildly expensive products? It's a different world out there now, thanks to the recession. Many of these events have seen their attendance plummet as more and more builders and remodelers choose to stay home and concentrate on simple survival. This has not been the case for *JLC Live*, however, as anyone who attended the Providence, R.I., show in March can attest: Throughout its three-day run, the exhibition floor was jam-packed. Attendees were able to put their hands on a wide variety of new products — many of them American-made — and in some cases speak directly to the designers. High-quality materials, labor-saving devices, and a host of products designed to prevent moisture problems and energy leaks were in abundance. As were tools, of course — lots and lots of tools. Here's just a small sample of what was on display.

Siding Helper

Tired of snapping chalk lines or using a hand-held jig to ensure consistent siding reveals? The *Gecko Gauge* is designed to ease the tedium of installing fiber-cement siding by providing support and ensuring correct placement. PacTool says its new device is adjustable for a wide range of reveals and uses a nonmarring cam-action clamp to fasten itself to the lower lip of the previous course of siding. The company cites a study by fiber-cement producer James Hardie that found that installers who used the Gecko Gauge were almost 50 percent faster than those who snapped lines to lay out siding reveals. Eight different models are available to accommodate different siding styles and reveals. The SA903, which adjusts in 1/4-inch increments and works for reveals ranging from 5 to 8 inches, costs about \$65 per pair.

PacTool International, 800/297-7487, pactool.us.





Secret Screws

Concealed fastening systems for decks continue to proliferate. The *Camo Hidden Deck Fastening System* features a two-sided jig to ensure precise screw placement and screws that easily bore through PT, cedar, composite, PVC, and hard-

wood decking without predrilling, says the manufacturer. The jig — called the *Marksman Pro* — spaces deck boards a mere $\frac{3}{16}$ inch apart while still making it possible to back screws out if a board needs to be replaced. The fasteners come in lengths of $1\frac{7}{8}$ inches (for $\frac{5}{4}$ decking) and $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches (for 2-by material). The standard coated “ProTech” screws are guaranteed against rust and corrosion for the life of the project. Stainless steel screws for extreme environments are also available. According to the maker, the cost for $1\frac{7}{8}$ -inch fasteners runs about 30 cents per square foot of decking. The Marksman Pro jig sells for \$50.

National Nail Corp., 800/968-6245, camofasteners.com.

Multi-Tool Blades

These days, multi-tools may be the hottest category in the portable power-tool market (see “Oscillating Multi-Tools,” 5/11). The key to their success isn’t so much the motor as the effectiveness of the various attachments — it’s these pieces that allow the tools to make quick work of so many challenging tasks. Imperial Blades is a small American company that bills itself as a manufacturer of high-quality replacement blades for oscillating tools at competitive prices. Highlights of its lineup include a $1\frac{1}{4}$ -inch bi-metal saw blade (\$16; near right) for cutting drywall, plastic, metal, and wood; a $2\frac{5}{8}$ -inch fine-tooth blade (\$15; center right) for making plunge cuts in wood and soft plastic; and a segmented diamond blade (\$60; far right) for cutting plaster, grout, and tile backerboard. The blades feature a universal arbor design compatible with most multi-tools; owners of Rockwell, Worx, and Fein Supercut products can order blades that are drilled to fit their particular tools. Imperial also produces a complete line of blades for reciprocating saws.

Imperial Blades, 800/743-9844, imperialblades.com.



Chameleon Caulk

According to Sashco, water-based *Exact Color* sealant can match the performance of any top-quality acrylic latex sealant: It's suitable for both exterior and interior applications; adheres tenaciously to masonry, plastic, wood, metal, and tile; and can fill joints as wide as 1/2 inch. But its biggest selling point is that it can be colored to blend in with its surroundings — or, if preferred, to provide contrast. Matching the color of a particular latex paint (or water-based solid stain) is simple, the company says: You simply inject a 30-milliliter paint sample into the caulk tube, shake it up, add the contents of an activator pack, shake again, and allow 30 minutes for the chemicals to cure. When ready to apply, the sealant is low in VOCs and cleans up with soap and water. A \$12 kit contains a 10.5-ounce cartridge, measuring syringe, activator pack, nozzle, and cap.

Sashco Sealants, 800/289-7290, sashco.com.



Easy-to-Assemble Railing

Cutting cable to length in the field can be a hassle, but Feeney's newest line of *Swageless Quick-Connect* cable hardware eliminates the need to use compression fittings or a specially designed swage crimping tool. According to the manufacturer's instructions, you snip the cable to the proper length and push it into the Quick-Connect fitting, and the one-way spring-loaded jaws lock it in place. Feeney offers a variety of fixed-end and tension-adjustment fittings, all made from 316 grade stainless steel and designed to accommodate 1/8-inch-diameter 1x19 stainless cable. Prices range from \$16 to \$41 per fitting.

Feeney, 800/888-2418, feeneyarchitectural.com.



Prefab Brick Mold

Andersen has come out with a new way of trimming out its windows and doors that promises to be both efficient and versatile. Designed to work with the A-Series, 400 Series, and 200 Series product lines, the *Andersen Exterior Trim System* consists of a concealed plastic attachment strip that holds a preassembled trim surround in place with no visible screws, nails, or sealant. For the basic profile, homeowners can choose between brick mold and two sizes of flat trim. The bottom section can be picture-framed or dressed up to resemble a sill nose, and either of two cornice styles can be applied on top. All of the packages include a full-width drip cap. Andersen says that preassembled surround kits are available for many of its windows, or builders can purchase individual components and cut them to size. The trim pieces are made from a composite material that the company calls Fibrex, which is allegedly stronger and more stable than vinyl. They're sold in 11 colors for prices starting at \$10 per linear foot.

Andersen Corp., 800/426-4261, andersenwindows.com.



Compact Table Saw

At 52 pounds, the 10-inch *Worksite Table Saw* (GTS1031) isn't exactly a featherweight, but it's designed to be easy for one person to carry and takes up less space in transport and storage than most other table saws. That's partly because of its unusual base: A steel roll cage supports the table top and makes it possible to set the saw on its side when it's not being used. According to Bosch, the cage is fitted with a "perfectly balanced" ergonomic handle that allows it to be carried easily with one hand. The 15-amp tool also features a self-squaring rip fence and a machined aluminum table top that expands to accommodate an 18-inch rip capacity. Under-table storage holds a push stick, wrenches, blade guard parts, a miter gauge, and a fence. The GTS1031 costs \$400, which includes a 24T blade. A folding table-saw stand is available separately.

Bosch Power Tools, 877/267-2499, boschtools.com.

User-Friendly Foam

Knauf is the latest insulation maker to introduce a hybrid weatherization package that combines the air-sealing qualities of foam with the affordability of fiberglass. Much like EnergyComplete — which Owens Corning introduced in 2009 (see “What’s New in Insulation?,” 4/10) — *Knauf Insulation & Sealing System* (KISS) uses a nontoxic, minimally expanding spray to fill cracks, penetrations, and seams in the building envelope. According to Knauf, the spray — called EcoSeal — is a water-based elastomeric that contains no VOCs or harmful fumes. Respirators and hazmat suits are unnecessary when working with the product, Knauf says, and other trades can continue working nearby while the spraying takes place. EcoSeal is applied with a conventional high-power airless paint sprayer and dries quickly to a tough, flexible film. Users can choose Knauf’s EcoBatt insulation or Jet Stream blowing insulation to complete the weatherization package. Installed costs run about 50 to 60 cents per square foot of insulatable space.

Knauf Insulation, 800/825-4434, knaufinsulation.us.



Cutting Edge Snips

Midwest Tool & Cutlery makes a variety of instruments for cutting materials like metal, vinyl, and asphalt shingles, and all of them are made in the U.S. Unlike slightly cheaper imports, the company’s *Aviation Snips* feature long-lasting drop-forged blades, a double overwound spring, and compound leverage action that increases cutting power while reducing hand strain, says the maker. The straight-cutting snips (\$15; near right) have a cut length of 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches and can cut 18-gauge sheet metal. Midwest’s *MagSnips* (\$30; far right) might also be of interest to builders, because they have replaceable steel blades. These long cutters (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cut length) can cut metal and vinyl siding, and are particularly well-suited for trimming asphalt shingles. The blades can also be sharpened. Replacement blades cost \$10.50.

Midwest Tool & Cutlery Co., 800/782-4659, midwestsnips.com.



Quick-Release Hole Saw

Lenox is not the first hole-saw manufacturer to try to alleviate the hassle of ejecting a stuck plug, but its solution might be the simplest. The *Speed Slot* hole saw has a pair of stepped slots in its side where you can insert a screwdriver and pry out the offending obstacle. And since this redesigned saw is 2 inches deep (10 percent deeper than earlier models), there’s room to pry out the plug even if you’re drilling through an exterior door panel. According to the maker, the Speed Slot also serves as a dust port, because chips and sawdust can escape and are less likely to get trapped between the plug and the saw and gum up the works. Lenox claims that this saw cuts faster than its predecessors and lasts longer — twice as long when cutting metal — due to improvements in the coating process (inside surfaces are unpainted) and tooth geometry. It comes in 52 sizes; prices range from \$11 for the $\frac{9}{16}$ -inch-diameter hole saw to \$110 for the 6-inch version. Various kit combinations are also available.

Lenox, 800/628-3030, lenoxtools.com.



Festool Innovations

If you want proof that Germany has rebounded from the recession quicker than we have, look no further than the extensive lineup of new products that Festool unveiled at *JLC Live*. Topping the list was the *CXS Compact Cordless Drill* (\$275; top). Powered by a 10.8-volt (1.3-Ah) lithium ion battery, this 2-pound wonder features a removable chuck that can be easily swapped out for a right-angle version or left off completely when working in tight spaces. (The naked end of the drill is fitted with a holder for 1/4-inch hex shank bits). Another eye-catcher was Festool's *Rotex RO90DX sander* (\$375; bottom, near right). As with the company's full-size Rotex sanders, it takes just the turn of a dial to convert this compact machine (3 1/2-inch pad diameter) from an aggressive gear-driven stock remover to a smooth random-orbit finisher. When you need to sand a corner, the round pad is easily exchanged for a triangular one. And finally, to help users organize their collection of tools, cords, hoses, and accessories, the company introduced the *Workcenter WCR 1000* (\$375; bottom, far right). It mounts on top of a Festool Dust Extractor — adjustable columns make room for stacking toolboxes — and includes such details as a pivoting storage tray, a pegboard, and an assortment of large and small hooks.

Festool, 888/337-8600, festoolusa.com.



Labor Savers

Cepco Tool Co. is best known as the inventor of the BoWrench, a device that forces deck boards into alignment. But the company also makes a bunch of other unique problem-solvers. The *QuikJack* (\$160; top) attaches to a 2x4 of any length to lever hardwood flooring into place. It can be set up to work away from or right up against a wall. Fully retracted, it measures 24 inches long and provides 12 inches of travel. The *Post-Pod* (\$90; bottom left) allows one person working alone to create an easy-to-use tripod — with scrap 2x4s serving as legs — for plumbing, setting, and bracing posts. But the company's biggest forehead-slapper might well be the *Insul-Knife* (\$35; bottom right). This nifty tool is designed to slice easily through batts of any type — mineral wool, cotton, or fiberglass — as well as rigid foam and pipe insulation, without the use of a straightedge. A sharpener (\$13) is sold separately.

Cepco Tool Co., 800/466-9626, cepcotool.com.

