

BY RYAN STEPHENS

Avoiding Nail Blowouts

This is one that some finish carpenters already know, but I'm often surprised how many don't: The chisel-point orientation on brad and finish nails plays a big role in nail blowouts. Chisel points on brad and finish nails for pneumatic and cordless nailers are formed by grinding a slight bevel on each side of the nail strip (see photo, below). As the chisel point plunges through the wood, the shank will only bend to one side or another if it meets resistance (from a pin knot or change of grain or the like). That is, it bends in a direction towards the sides of the nail strip, as it sits in the magazine, but not to the front or back of the nailer. Brad nails (formed from 18-gauge wire) are most at risk, but it can happen with a stiffer 16- or 15-gauge nail, too.

A prime example is shooting the casing onto a door jamb, where the nail has to be within $\frac{3}{8}$ inch of the edge of the casing (any further from the edge and you won't get good purchase in the

edge of the door jamb). Any sideways bend of the nail is at risk of blowing out near the reveal or the side of the jamb.

The solution: Simply orient the gun so the nailer is always perpendicular to the edge that might blow out. That means the gun needs to be horizontal to the floor, not positioned vertically, when nailing off side casings (see photo, below). But at the head, the gun needs to be vertical. Once this change is made, the chisel orientation of the nail might bend into the wood (parallel to the casing), but not out.

Using this method, I'm able to shoot a 2-inch brad nail without mishap; I haven't had a blowout in years. Although, it's worth noting that I usually use $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch nails for wood-to-wood contact and 2-inch nails for going through the drywall.

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Photos: top left, Aleksandra DeKorne; top right, Ryan Stephens