

Products

by Patrick McCombe



Air Blocker

Air-sealing electrical boxes is tough to do. You can use caulking or duct seal, but flexing the wires while installing the device is likely to ruin the seal. Special work boxes with gaskets are another option, but they're expensive and I'm betting that your electrician would prefer something a little more conventional. After struggling with this problem for years, Joel Anderson, a North Dakota builder specializing in energy-efficient construction, came up with the idea of sealing plastic and metal electrical boxes with a small block of polystyrene. Dubbed the *Energy Block*, his invention insulates behind the box, too, so you don't have to worry about fitting fiberglass back there. A whole-house kit with 49 single-gang, four four-gang (they can be trimmed), and 15 ceiling boxes sells for about \$87. Individual boxes are also available.

Pine Ridge Builders, 701/320-1111, www.energyblock.com.



Shingle Style

Unlike most plastic shingle panels — which are made from polypropylene — The Foundry's *Vinyl Cedar Shingles* are composed of PVC with an acrylic color layer. This construction earns them a Class-A fire rating and provides homeowners with 16 good-looking colors to choose from. According to the manufacturer, the panels cost less per square than other plastic shingle panels and generate less waste. Since the panel molds are made using impressions from real cedar shingles, the siding has a surprisingly realistic look. It is available in sawn, hand-split, and fancy-cut versions. Prices start at about \$200 per square.

The Foundry, 800/771-4486, www.foundrybytapco.com.



Quick Frieze

Installing and painting a decorative frieze on a new home requires an abundance of time and skill not commonly available on high-production job sites. Also's *Contours Collection* promises to make trimming out the overhangs on your homes fast and painless. Made from prefinished aluminum with a polystyrene backing, the 7-inch *Contours Frieze* comes in 12- and 18-foot lengths and mounts without visible fasteners. It's available with a channel at the top to receive the soffit material, and either a brick pocket or a J-pocket at the bottom to receive your exterior cladding. The company also offers pre-formed inside and outside corners, and a matching, prefinished 6-inch *Contours Fascia* to speed installation further. Standard colors include white and sierra (light brown); custom colors are another option. The frieze sells for roughly \$4.50 to \$6.50 per foot; the fascia for about \$2.20 to \$4.50 per foot.

Also Metals, 800/231-9333, www.alscometals.com.

DECKING



Tropical Trex. When it comes to high-end homes, there are generally two types of decking to consider: exotic hardwoods and fiber composites. Each has its advantages, but a new version of Trex promises the best of both worlds, according to the manufacturer. Offered in cayenne and burnish amber, Trex *Brasilia* boasts “subtle shadings” and “natural color variations” that make the composite look like natural tropical hardwood, says Trex — but without the high maintenance. The company also claims that its product is easier to cut and fasten than many types of exotic-wood decking. The *Brasilia* hues are available throughout the Trex product line, including for rail systems and trim boards. The decking sells for about \$5.20 per square foot.

Trex, 800/289-8739, www.trex.com.

Steel with Appeal. Looking for a way to eliminate pressure-treated materials from your decks? Check out the *Steel Deck Framing System* and *Xccent Decking*. With 40/10 loading, the steel framing system can span 17½ feet with 16-inch spacing, and a little over 15 feet with 24-inch spacing. The galvanized-steel joists — which have an extra, rust-resistant top coat — banish concerns about wanes, knots, and checking. Topside, the decking is made of steel C-channels with a vinyl covering. Just make sure to do your homework before starting a project with these products, because they involve special details and connections that you need to get right. The brochure the manufacturer sent me does a pretty good job of explaining how it all goes together — except it left out all the railing details. Prices vary by region, but expect to pay from \$8 to \$12 per square foot for the decking.

Xccent, 800/933-4748, www.xccentdecking.com.



Straight-Grain Composite. For many carpenters, TimberTech — one of the first fiber composites to use a hidden fastening system — ranks among the best-looking fiber-composite offerings on the market. The product’s latest version, *Floorizon*, features what the maker calls a “VertiGrain” surface, which mimics vertical-grain wood flooring. The decking comes in cedar, gray, and redwood. Unlike many other fiber-composite decking materials, some TimberTech products can be installed on joists with 24-inch spacing (in residential applications). Prices vary by region, but generally run about \$5 per square foot.

TimberTech, 800/307-7780, www.timbertech.com.



VENTILATION



Hi-Flow. Increasingly popular in today's residential kitchens, commercial-style ranges were once reserved for restaurants with exhaust fans powerful enough to suck up a chef's hat. Unfortunately, these fans are incredibly loud, making them unappealing in a home environment. If you find yourself ordering a commercial range for that power-cooking customer, consider pairing it with the *Kitchen Ventilation System* from Fantech. This product includes a 36- or 48-inch hood liner with aluminum grease filters and dimmable halogen lights, a 400- to 1,200-cfm in-line fan, and a duct silencer that can reduce "perceived noise" by half. The remotely mounted fan's variable-speed control reduces the din even further when the owner doesn't need full power. List price for the whole system starts at about \$885.

Fantech, 800/747-1762, www.fantech.net.

Garage Ventilator. Stored solvents, gas cans, and the family minivan all contribute to a garage's poor air quality — and, since most garage spaces are under positive pressure compared with the rest of the house, these potentially toxic fumes and vapors can easily find their way inside. A new product from Tamarack Technologies, the GV-7, is a through-the-wall exhaust fan and hood designed specifically for the garage. Producing about 150 cfm, it can be controlled with a wall switch, timer, or motion detector, or it can be wired to the garage light. It sells for \$179 on the company's Web site.

Tamarack Technologies, 800/222-5932, www.tamtech.com.



Fit and Trim. Squeezing a bath or ventilation fan into a 2x6 joist cavity can be challenging, but Panasonic's Whisperfit line has a 5 1/2-inch-deep housing that's perfect for the job. The newest model, the *Whisperfit-Lite*, includes a pair of compact fluorescent bulbs for lighting, so you don't have to install an additional overhead fixture. The fan delivers up to 110 cfm, depending on size; you can use it with either a 3- or 4-inch duct. Sound levels range from .7 sone to 2.0 sones. A 50-cfm model sells for about \$120 on the Web.

Panasonic, 866/292-7292, www.panasonic.com.

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VENTILATION

Fire-Rated Fan. You can't go installing just any ventilation fan in a fire-rated ceiling, because air and heat leaking through the housing or ductwork could contribute to flame spread. Ventilation fans like Air King's *Fire Rated Series* have dampers actuated by a fusible link that closes in the presence of fire. Models range from 50 to 130 cfm, with sound ratings of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 sones. Prices run between \$100 and \$220.

Air King, 877/304-3785, www.airkinglimited.com.



Cool Breeze. As central air conditioning has grown in popularity, whole-house fans have dwindled. That's not surprising: First-generation fans leaked astonishing amounts of cold air during heating season and made about as much noise as a helicopter. Newer models, however, like the *Whisper Aire* from Air Vent, can complement or even replace central air during much of the cooling season in all but the hottest climates — quietly. Powered by two small fans that produce up to 2,200 cfm, the *Whisper Aire* can reduce the temperature in a 2,000-square-foot home by 15 degrees in 15 minutes, says the maker. The small cabinet fits within 16-inch framing; a motorized damper insulated to R-25 prevents air leakage when the unit's not in use. The five-speed motor draws from 3 to 4 amps and is controlled by a hand-held remote with a four-setting timer (30 minutes and one, two, and four hours). The fan costs about \$650.

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

Stealth Ventilation. Some customers want the action of a bath fan without the appearance of one. Show these folks the *Decorative Fan/Light* from Broan, which masquerades as a conventional ceiling light while circulating air through cleverly concealed vents. The fixture is offered in five corrosion-resistant finishes and in 70- and 80-cfm models, with a sound rating that ranges from 2.5 to 3.5 sones. It accepts two 60-watt bulbs. The suggested list price for the 754SN (satin nickel) model is \$158; the 757PT (pewter) model goes for \$222.

Broan, 800/558-1711, www.broan.com.



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EXTERIOR DOORS

Weatherproof Wood. If your customer insists on a real wood door despite extreme weather exposure or inadequate overhangs, you might suggest a Simpson *Performance Series* unit. These doors, which are available in several wood species, “virtually eliminate” rotting, splitting, and swelling of the bottom rail and lower stiles, says the manufacturer. They contain $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch insulating glass and feature a five-year warranty. Prices vary by region, but the fir model shown should sell for between \$400 and \$500 per panel (without the frame).

Simpson Door Co., 800/952-4057, www.simpsondoor.com.



Split Personality. Although it looks fairly convincing stained, I’ve often thought that the imitation wood grain on fiberglass doors looks a little too simulated when painted. This can be frustrating for homeowners who want doors with a stained-millwork interior and a painted exterior — a common scenario. To address the problem, Peachtree has added a new option to its *Newport Line* of fiberglass doors: a wood-grained interior with a smooth exterior. Available in six standard colors in 6'-8" and 8'-0" heights, the door comes in most common styles, including full- and half-glass models with plain or decorative glass. The smooth-exterior option adds about \$10 to the door’s price. The model shown — without transom or sidelight; with $\frac{49}{16}$ -inch jambs and adjustable sill — sells for \$350.

Peachtree Doors and Windows, 800/732-2499, www.peachtreedoor.com.

Arts & Crafts. One of the defining details of a Craftsman-style house is a sturdy and handsome hardwood door. But who says it has to be *real* wood? For the folks who want period architecture without heavy-duty maintenance, there’s IWP’s *Aurora Craftsman Collection*. Sold in three architecturally correct Arts & Crafts styles, the fiberglass doors and sidelights come with either oak or mahogany graining. The manufacturer offers seven prestained finishes and numerous factory-applied paint colors — an added bonus that eliminates the perils of job-site finishing. The door shown costs about \$4,000.

Jeld-Wen IWP, 800/535-3936, www.jeld-wen.com.



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Two-Faced. Window and patio-door manufacturer Hurd has added entrance doors to its product repertoire. The most interesting model is the *Taylorwood*, which combines a steel exterior with a wood-veneered interior available in more than a dozen species. The door comes in 6'-8", 7'-0", and 8'-0" heights and can be ordered with jamb cladding to match the company's aluminum-clad windows. The company also offers all-steel and fiberglass units and 12- and 14-inch sidelights; all can be prefinished at the factory. Prehung wood-veneer units (without sidelights or transom) range in price from about \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Hurd Millwork Co., 800/223-4873, www.hurd.com.



Agrarian Charm. Finding a fiberglass door with rustic character is harder than you might imagine, but the *Classic Craft Rustic Collection* fits its moniker quite nicely. Originally offered in only 8'-0" heights, the line has expanded to include 6'-8" offerings in several styles. All the doors feature simple contours reminiscent of Mediterranean architecture; unlike wood, says the maker, the fiberglass construction is ideally suited to the Southwestern U.S., where these styles are especially popular. An unfinished 3'-0" x 6'-8" prehung unit (without sidelights or transom) has an average list price of \$535.

Therma-Tru, 800/537-8827, www.thermatru.com.



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