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Builder

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hanley wood

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BIG SCORE: Birch plywood, scored at intervals, simulates the look of authentic tongue-and-groove beadboard in a kitchen by Structures Building Co.



SWEAT THE SMALL TUFF

Sometimes the littlest design details yield the biggest payoff.

THE MOOD IN THE HOME BUILDING INDUSTRY is officially glum. Buyers are playing a waiting game, and inventory isn't moving. Except in the case of that builder around the corner whose homes are being snapped up faster than free NFL tickets on Craig's List. What gives? A side-by-side comparison shows him selling the same square footage with the same amenities at the same price point you are. He paid the same for land and water taps, and he uses comparable subs. And yet his houses have a certain allure that buyers can't get enough of. He must have invested a fortune on *something* that's making them bite.

Then again, maybe he didn't. Sometimes the tiniest design details—extras that cost pennies on the dollar, or simply require a little sweat equity and nothing more—can make a big difference in the way a house lives. BUILDER consulted a handful of industry veterans targeting middle-income buyers (folks accustomed to balancing price with cachet) and asked for their most cost-effective design secrets.

MATTHEW SCOTT

BY JENNY SULLIVAN



FIT AND TRIM: Clever trim carpentry unifies various design elements in a master bath by Structures Building Co. Basic 1-foot-by-4-foot boards, topped with strips of bed molding, create the illusion of paneled wainscot, but the lower portion of the wall is painted dry-wall, not wood.

TRICKED OUT TRIM

If you've written off handsome millwork as a luxury reserved for pricier houses, you may be cheating yourself out of a sale. Take it from Steve Kendrick, owner of Structures Building Co. in Mount Pleasant, S.C., where paneled wainscoting is as much a part of the local flavor as roadside barbecue. To save on costs while honoring tradition, Kendrick has created a pared down version of the real thing that looks great. He uses 1-foot-by-4-foot strips to add dimension to plain walls, but the expanses between those stiles and rails are drywall, not plywood.

"We paint that part of the drywall with the same oil-based gloss paint as the wood trim, so it looks like wood paneling," says Kendrick, who builds roughly a dozen houses each year, half of them on spec. "It doesn't matter whether the chair rail begins 2 feet or 6 feet up from the floor; we're still using virtually the same amount of trim." As a finish, the horizontal rail is topped off with a strip of poplar bed molding. Other times,

Kendrick mixes things up and simulates a beadboard look by scoring a sheet of birch plywood with a router and then painting it with the same gloss paint—at a third of the cost of real tongue-and-groove beadboard.

Structures has also won points with buyers by wrapping its bathroom mirrors to look like built-ins. "Instead of just slapping up a plate-glass mirror and leaving the edges raw, we'll wrap it in the same trim, sill, and apron material we use on the windows. This creates an inset so you can mount lighting on top of the mirror," says Kendrick. "This is something we do a lot in powder rooms, which get a lot of foot traffic from guests, not to mention visitors touring our spec homes. In the low-country cottage style, it's a detail people like."

STUFF THE ENVELOPE

You've maxed out every inch of the floor plan, but have you considered how to take advantage of unused volume space? If you really want to push the building envelope,

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think about it in 3-D. Consider tucking an intimate reading nook into the dead space under the stairs, putting built-in shelving at the end of a hallway, or carving a functional loft into the attic roof structure. The latter is something that can be done with traditional framing and a standard truss package, "at a fraction of what it would cost to bump the house up another full story," says Ed Binkley, national design director for the architecture firm BSB Design.

Closets and laundry rooms are additional sweet spots that often get overlooked, Binkley says. "If you have 10-foot ceilings in your house, but you only need a 7-foot ceiling in the closet, that's 3 extra feet of volume space that often go unused." In a kid's room, that's prime real estate for a secret hideaway with a ladder going up to it. In a master suite, it could serve as a bonus storage area for seasonal clothing.

Thinking in sections has become standard practice for builders working in areas where land is scarce and small footprints require a more vertical mentality. SummerHill Homes, which builds on small lots in and around Silicon Valley in California, reassesses the potential of every nook and cranny and how those spaces might be exploited to serve home buyer needs. "People need space to store their holiday ornaments, photo collections, and suitcases," says Tad Holland, vice president of marketing for the Palo Alto, Calif.-based builder. "In smaller homes this is a big challenge. If we have a 20-by-20-foot garage with an up-slope in the front, we'll leave that space open for storage instead of covering it with [drywall]. It might cost an



TUCK ME IN: A sleeping "nest" off the home office in Ed Binkley's own Florida residence makes clever use of what would otherwise be an unused cavity in the framing.

TRIM THE BUDGET

How much does Structures Building Co. save with its cost-savvy trim tactics? Here's a breakdown for a 14-foot-by-14-foot room with 6-foot case opening (base and shoe molding assumed to be equal):

Ply-Bead Wainscoting vs. Traditional Beaded Tongue & Groove

Beaded Plywood

Item	Quantity	Unit Measurement	\$/Unit	Total
7/16" OSB nailer	7	each	\$7.37	\$51.59
Subfloor/Paneling adhesive	2	each	\$3.25	\$6.50
3/8" x 4' x 8' beaded plywood (cabinet grade)	5	each	\$30.82	\$154.10
2-piece poplar chair rail cap	55	linear foot	\$2.37	\$130.35
Trim labor	175	square foot	\$3.50	\$612.50
Paint (turnkey)	175	square foot	\$1.50	\$262.50
				Total \$1,217.54

Traditional Tongue-and-Groove Beaded 1x4

Item	Quantity	Unit Measurement	\$/Unit	Total
7/16" OSB nailer	7	each	\$7.37	\$51.59
Electrical-adjustable extension boxes	7	each	\$2.15	\$15.05
1'x4' T/G beaded pine	770	linear foot	\$.81	\$623.70
2-piece poplar chair rail cap	55	linear foot	\$2.37	\$130.35
Trim labor	175	square foot	\$5.00	\$875.00
Paint (turnkey)	175	square foot	\$1.50	\$262.50
				Total \$1,958.19

Stile and Rail Wainscoting

Stiles & Rails Over Drywall

Item	Quantity	Unit Measurement	\$/Unit	Total
Drywall	175	each	\$.81	\$141.75
Subfloor/Paneling adhesive	3	each	\$3.25	\$9.75
1'x4' poplar stiles	186	each	\$1.09	\$202.74
Panel molding	352	linear foot	\$.60	\$211.20
1'x6' poplar	55	linear foot	\$1.41	\$77.55
2-piece poplar cap	55	linear foot	\$2.37	\$130.35
Trim labor	175	square foot	\$4.50	\$787.50
Electrical-adjustable extension boxes	7	each	\$2.15	\$15.05
Paint (turnkey)	175	square foot	\$2.00	\$350.00
				Total \$1,925.89

Stiles & Rails Over Plywood

Item	Quantity	Unit Measurement	\$/Unit	Total
1/2" x 4' x 8' birch plywood	7	each	\$60.29	\$422.03
1x4 poplar stiles	186	each	\$1.09	\$202.74
Panel molding	352	linear foot	\$.60	\$211.20
1x6 poplar	55	linear foot	\$1.41	\$77.55
2-piece poplar cap	55	linear foot	\$2.37	\$130.35
Trim labor	175	square foot	\$6.00	\$1050.00
Electrical-adjustable extension boxes	7	each	\$2.15	\$15.05
Paint (turnkey)	175	square foot	\$2.00	\$350.00
				Total \$2,458.92

SOURCE: R.P. NEWTON, ESTIMATOR, STRUCTURES BUILDING CO.