

Custom

Save time and money by bending PVC trim with a site-made oven

BY JOE FILANOWSKI JR.

My business partner, John Costantini, and I have been building custom homes for over 25 years, and timing has always been essential when it comes to coordinating our numerous subcontractors. About eight years ago, we were working on a job that called for exterior PVC trim with significant bends around a turret. Manufacturers can bend trim by warming it in a PVC thermoforming oven, but that would have required at least four to six weeks lead time, and we were on a tight schedule. Custom bending is also expensive; it would have cost \$2200 for the 20 ft. of trim we needed to be shaped. There are special

thermoforming blankets for trim that allow you to do the bending work on-site, but they cost over a thousand dollars—a difficult expense to justify unless you plan to use the blanket regularly. Another downside is that the largest blanket sold is only 10 ft. long and 5 in. wide. While renting might be an option, availability is limited, and rental costs are high. We devised our own technique for bending trim in order to meet our deadline, and it worked so well that now it's our go-to method.

Joe Filankowski Jr. is a co-owner of J&J Custom Builders in Milford, Conn. Photos by Aaron Fagan.

Curves

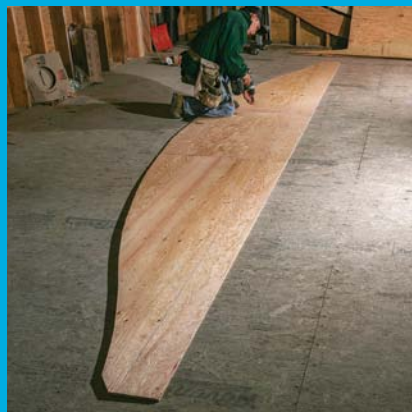
IMPROV OVEN



Our oven is simply a Master torpedo heater (155,000 Btu) aimed into lengths of 14-in.-dia. metal HVAC duct propped up on concrete blocks. Scrap stone or brick can be used to keep the duct from rolling. Inside the duct, lengths of fiber-cement siding are suspended by 24-in. wire batt supports running through the diameter at regular intervals. A piece of plywood at the opposite end of the duct confines the heat.

TEMPLATING AND PREP

An advantage of templating and bending on-site is that the contour is taken directly from where it will be installed, and if there is any unforeseen error, you can simply modify it and try again without the added time and expense such a mistake would cost by going through a manufacturer.



Storyboarding. After tracing the contour from where the trim will be installed, the plywood template is cut and then screwed to the subfloor.



Block party. Predrilled 2x4 blocks are screwed to the subfloor at regular intervals to match the curvature along the edges of the plywood template.



Molding mold. The original plywood template is removed, and plywood strips that match the height of the cove molding to be bent are fastened to the 2x4 blocking.



Plenty of room. After the surrounding area is cleared, drivers are set within reach, and 2x4 blocks loaded with screws are staged for bracing the cove once it's in place.



Load when ready. The oven is preheated for about five minutes before loading the trim. Depending on the outside temperature, it can take 30 minutes to an hour to get the trim up to a bendable temperature.

THE BIG BEND

The trim will remain at a pliable temperature for less than 30 seconds after it comes out of the oven, so it's critical to have the template staged and to have extra hands for securing the trim in place.



Learning curve. A few pokes and lifts with a stick show if the trim is noodlelike enough to bend. Of the various types of PVC trim, the more-open cellular varieties, like the Kleer pictured here, tend to bend the easiest.

Assembly line. The team sets the trim on the subfloor, pushes it tight against the form, and secures it with regularly distributed blocks.



Rest after baking. Even though the trim hardens in less than 30 seconds, it's given 10 minutes to cool thoroughly in the form before being removed for installation.

