

Ticksticking

by Sam Clark

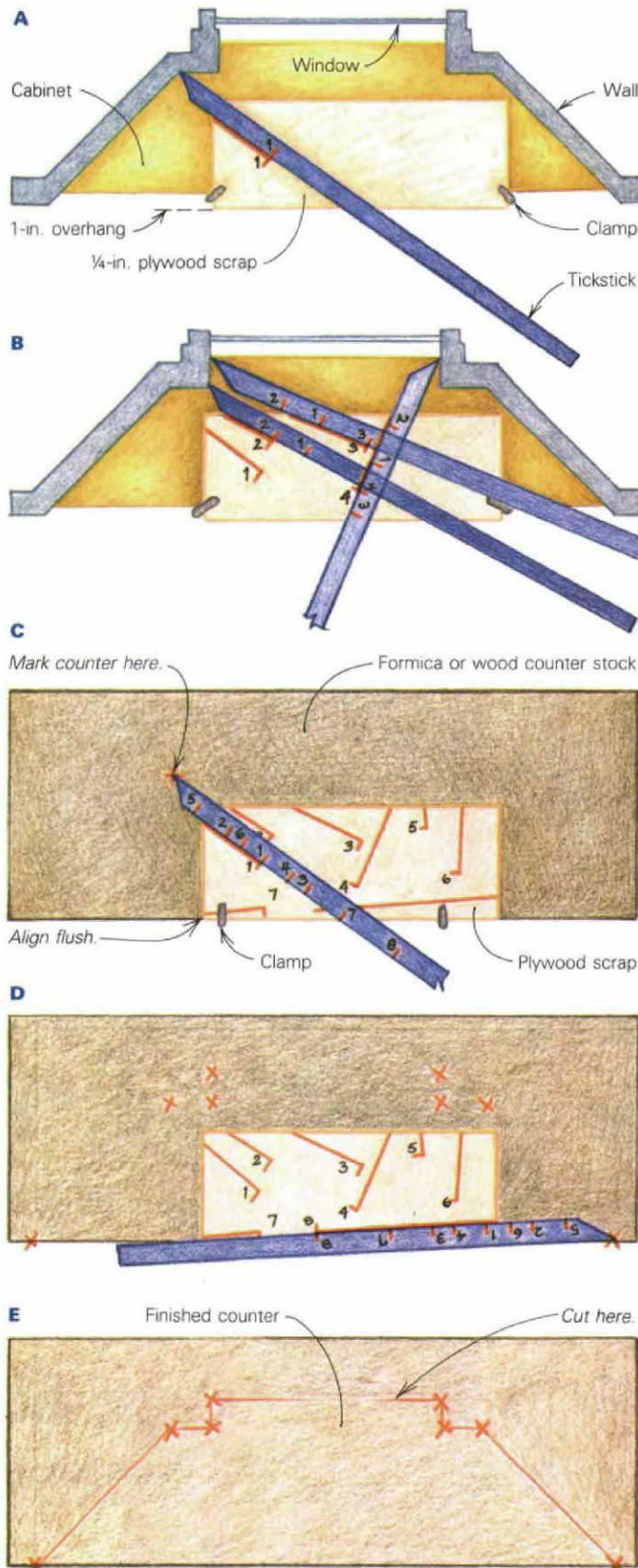
Fitting a large panel—such as a section of plywood subfloor or countertop—into an irregular space isn't easy. It can be done by making a paper pattern, by laying out some sort of grid on which to plot points, or by cutting the piece oversize and then laboriously trimming away the excess. Often a better method is ticksticking, a nautical carpentry technique I learned from fellow builder Henry Stone, who discovered it in an old yachting magazine.

Ticksticking can be used to reproduce any flat shape quickly and accurately. It's good theater, too. You make some apparently nonsensical hieroglyphs on a scrap of plywood and a stick, and some equally arcane scratches on the stock to be cut. Then you saw out a shape without the intervention of ruler, bevel, level or mathematics. Your audience—which surely will have gathered by now, and which will have been making unkind comments at your expense—falls silent. Then there's applause, as the piece goes in the first time with no trimming, all 20 facets perfect.

The applause is entirely undeserved, however, because the method couldn't be simpler. Suppose you want to cut a countertop to fit against a wall that takes several jogs to form a niche at a window opening. No moldings will conceal the joints; the fit must be exact. Take a scrap of any thin sheet material; ¼-in. plywood is ideal. It's best if this scrap is at least one-third as big as the area to be measured. Secure it to the cabinet in the plane the counter will occupy. The scrap can be positioned anywhere on this plane, at any angle, but it is convenient to align one or more edges with the eventual location of the counter. In this case, the front edge of the scrap overhangs the cabinet 1 in. because the counter will eventually do the same.

Make a tickstick—just a thin stick or a piece of lath about 4 ft. long, with a point at one end. Lay the point on one of the critical lo-

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ocations, say the left rear corner. Let the body of the tickstick fall anywhere on the scrap; it doesn't matter where. Hold the stick firmly,

Mark the stick and scrap at first point.

and with a sharp pencil draw a line on the scrap along the left edge of the stick. Without moving the stick, make a hash mark across the line you just drew and on the stick (A), at the same point along the line. It doesn't matter where along the line you choose, as long as the two hash marks meet. Label both hash marks #1.

Mark the other critical points.

Now reposition the tickstick, say with the point at the left corner of the window bay. Again mark along the left edge, make two more hash marks, and number them #2. In like fashion, mark and number all critical points along the perimeter (B). For a curve, approximate by fixing many points along the arc.

Align the scrap and stick at #1; mark counter.

You'll end up with a stick with numbered hash marks, and a scrap with lines crossed by numbered hash marks. Now remove the scrap from the cabinet, and clamp it on the countertop to be cut (C). This can be done near the cabinet, or in your shop. To mark the tickstick, the scrap was centered in the space to be fitted with its front edge projecting 1 in. for the countertop overhang. To transfer these points onto countertop stock that is cut to rough length, just center the plywood right and left, with its front edge flush with the front edge of the stock. Now put the tickstick to the right of line #1, with hash mark #1 on the line touching hash mark #1 on the stick. Mark the counter right under the point of the stick. Do the same at line #2 and all the other lines (D). Connect all these points, along with the one that marks the counter's length on its front edge (E), and cut along the resulting line. Install the piece. Turn to the audience. Bow. □

Align and mark other counter points.

Connect the dots.