

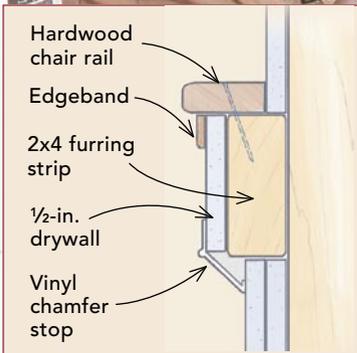
Elegant Wainscot

From Drywall Scraps



Use strips of drywall to create custom paneling that will add detail and charm to most any room

BY MYRON R. FERGUSON



Frame-and-panel construction

Stiles and rails divide the wainscot, framing recessed panels edged with vinyl bead. The wainscot can be capped with a vinyl bead or with a hardwood chair rail as shown in the inset photo (above) and drawing (left).



Drawings: Dan Thornton

Wainscot can improve the look of a room dramatically, but installing it typically demands a decent amount of money, time, and skill in trim, joinery, and finish work. If you're willing to stray from the traditional approach, however, wainscot doesn't have to be nearly so complicated.

I create wainscot by using leftover drywall (otherwise heading to the Dumpster) and decorative vinyl bead (sidebar p. 52). Often, wainscot is painted, so why not make it out of drywall? It's far less expensive than

wood, especially when a bunch of scrap is lying around a job site. Also, drywall doesn't expand and contract due to temperature and moisture changes, so it stays looking good for a long time. My process demands a certain amount of skill, but assembly is far quicker than the traditional alternative—and the finished look is just as great.

Plan the electrical layout for clean outlet installations

Bringing power through a wainscot assembly can cause problems, especially when

symmetry and clean lines are the goal. With proper planning, however, outlets can be easily integrated into a wall without looking as though the wainscot were merely built around them.

Whenever possible, I visit the job site before any electrical work is done and figure out the approximate layout of the wainscot. I tell the electrician to run wire to the general location of the boxes and to leave it looped in the wall.

When I'm installing the drywall and wainscot, I cut a hole in the wall where I want an

CREATE A LAYOUT THAT SUITS THE ROOM

Traditionally, wainscot is built to a height of 32 in. off the floor, but it doesn't have to be limited to that dimension. Ceiling height, window height, and homeowner preference all can affect the decision about wainscot height. Stile width and spacing are established once the rails are installed. Each stile's placement is determined by what looks best for a given room.



Measure, mark, and snap a level line around the room. Hold the wainscot's top rail to this line to be sure all the panels are level.



The bottom rail is wider than the top rail. The distance from the top of the bottom rail to the top of the baseboard, which will be added later, should be equal in width to the top rail. In this case, the top rail is 2½ in. wide, and the baseboard will be 3½ in. wide. I snap a line 6 in. off the floor and cut a piece of drywall 6 in. wide to get the proper proportions.



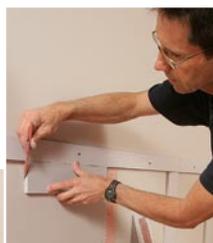
Mark stud locations. When one stud is located, use a tape measure to transfer the location of the others to the top- and bottom-rail pieces.



Drywall screws keep the rails in place. Be sure to hit each stud with 1½-in. drywall screws when securing the rails. Place one screw through the top rail and two in the bottom rail.

STILES ARE SECURED WITH SPRAY ADHESIVE

The likelihood of each stile aligning perfectly with every stud is slim, so relying on screws to secure each stile isn't practical. Spray adhesive is perfectly suited for this job. I've tried several brands and like the product made by Trim-Tex best for the sole reason that it applies adhesive in a wider, more-consistent pattern than other brands.



Dry-fit the stiles. Reposition each stile until you get a layout that you like. Make a spacer block to speed the process of marking stile locations, but don't be afraid to cheat if you have to. No one will notice if you make a panel $\frac{1}{8}$ in. smaller to get the layout to work.



Yes, spray adhesive is strong enough. Apply two coats of adhesive on the back of each stile and on the wall. Let the adhesive set up for a few seconds before pressing the stile firmly in place. Cover each joint with self-adhesive mesh tape.

SPECIALTY BEAD ADDS STYLE AND DURABILITY

The vinyl bead I use for wainscot is secured with a combination of $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. divergent staples and spray adhesive. Vinyl bead is a great product for this project because I can easily sand or scrape excess compound off it without causing any damage; it also takes paint well.



Keep it looking straight. In one corner of the room, mark the position of the chair rail, in this case a decorative L bead, on the top rail. Make a corresponding mark in the room's opposite corner, and snap a line between the points. Hold the chair rail to this line as you glue and staple it to the top rail. Do the same for each panel's top chamfer stop.

Vinyl chamfer stop frames each panel. Secure the panel's top piece first; then plumb the vertical pieces with a torpedo level before attaching them. Finally, install the panel's bottom piece, and fill in any missing staples. They should be spaced about every 12 in.



Decorative L bead

CHOOSE BEAD CAREFULLY

Designed for single or double layers of $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. or $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. drywall, Trim-Tex vinyl decorative bead comes in 8-ft. or 10-ft. lengths and a variety of different styles. I use decorative L bead as chair rail because its offset design covers the top edge of the top rail. The chair-rail bead is not an option here because it's designed to be used only on flat surfaces. Chamfer stop creates a clean, panelized look. Like all vinyl bead, it can be cut on a power miter saw using a plywood blade with the teeth reversed to cut the vinyl cleanly.

Chair rail

Chamfer stop

Trim-Tex
www.trim-tex.com
Cost: \$2 to \$5 per piece

outlet, reach in, and pull the looped wire through. I typically place electrical boxes in one of two places, either in the exact center of a panel or in the center of one of the stiles. I use an old-work box for either installation (see the article “Problem-Solving Electrical Boxes” in *FHB* #186, and online at FineHomebuilding.com).

Another option is to position all the outlets horizontally in the baseboard. This layout requires you to install taller baseboard, but it makes for an easier wainscot installation because the electrical boxes don't interfere with the layout.

Consider door and window transitions carefully

Nowhere is quality craftsmanship more evident than where wainscot meets a door or window opening. Done well, the transitions look seamless and well planned. Every room is different, though, so perfecting these details can take some creative thinking.

When possible, which isn't often, I let the wainscot butt directly into the door and window casing while allowing the window stool to overlap the wainscot. Most likely, the wainscot stands proud of the molding, though. In these situations, I butt the wainscot to a pilaster at a door opening, or I build out the casing (drawing right) to accommodate the aforementioned butt joint. □

Myron R. Ferguson (www.thatdrywallguy.com) is a drywall contractor in Galway, N.Y. Photos by Rob Yagid, except where noted.

www.finehomebuilding.com

A CAREFUL MUD JOB CREATES A CLEAN FINISH

I've used several different types of joint compound when making wainscot. Each type performs fine, but depending on time constraints, you need to choose a specific product. Setting-type compound sets up the quickest, and when used for the first coat, it allows you to apply the second coat the same day. Otherwise, wait at least 24 hours between coats of compound.



The first coat isn't pretty. Apply a liberal amount of joint compound to bring the rails and stiles flush to the bead. Smooth the compound as you go, and let it dry.



The second and finish coats fill in the remaining low spots. Apply the second and final coats in the same manner as the first, being sure to fill in any low spots on either the rails or the stiles. Sand any high spots or blemishes that you've created between each coat with 150-grit sandpaper, and remove excess compound that ended up on the bead material. Now you're ready to paint.

Make casing thicker to accommodate wainscot

Wainscot shouldn't stand proud where it meets window and door casings. You can build out the thickness of casings with a combination of molding and flat stock. (See “Adding Detail With Built-Up Molding” in *FHB* #172, and online at FineHomebuilding.com.)

