

# Tools & Materials

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY PRODUCTS AND GEAR

## POWERFUL PIPE CUTTER

Using a saw to cut PVC pipe is easy enough, but rarely does it leave you with a clean and truly square cut, which is important for a glued fitting to be properly seated. Beyond that, saws leave a huge mess behind, meaning more time spent on cleanup. There are numerous handheld PVC cutters to choose from, which work well on PEX pipes, but most only cut up to 1¼-in. PVC pipes, and that's only if you have the superhuman strength required to squeeze the hand grips closed.

To the contrary, the DeWalt Impact Connect PVC/PEX Pipe Cutter (model DWAPVCIR) can cut through PVC pipes up to 2 in. in diameter with just one finger on the trigger. It can even slice through

**Equipped for efficiency.** Designed to connect to an impact driver as a faster alternative to handheld cutters, the DeWalt PVC/PEX pipe cutter slices through PVC with the pull of a trigger.

Schedule 80 pipe with no problem. With the 360° rotating head, not only can you cut loose pipe in-hand, but you can get into difficult areas in a wall opening, between joists, or even inside of a sink cabinet for repairing or replacing existing piping. The tool is

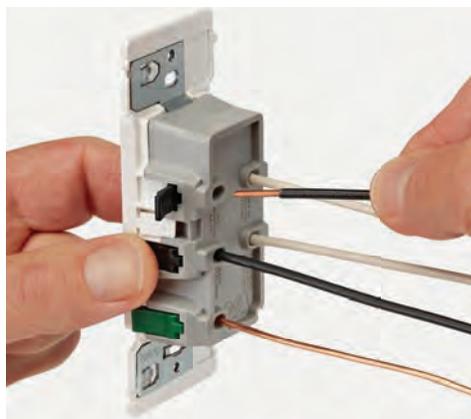


\*Drill and battery not included

designed to connect to an existing impact driver, which makes it lighter and easier to haul around in a bag than a dedicated cutter. The cutter is compatible with various brands of impact drivers and is easy to attach and remove. Also, it only costs \$100, which is less than half the price of most dedicated pro-grade cutters.

*Jim Speranza, a contractor in Rochester, N.Y.*

## Safer outlets and switches



Leviton's new Decora Edge outlets and switches have a load of new features. The color-coded, snap-and-click lever termination creates a more reliable connection than standard stab-in terminals and is faster to install because even the ground wire shares the new termination system. In addition to saving time on installation, the lack of

exposed screws on the sides of these devices greatly reduces the chance of generating a potentially dangerous short. The oversized mounting straps can span larger voids between drywall and a box, and the straps have a removable tab to accommodate smaller cover plates. The straps also feature a tongue-and-groove configuration that makes it easier

to align several devices that share a multigang box. These products are approved for 14-ga. and 12-ga. solid and stranded copper wires. Right now, devices equipped with Decora Edge termination include white 15-amp outlets and white single-pole and three-way switches. One Decora Edge outlet costs about \$2 if you buy a pack of 10.

Mark Petersen, tech editor

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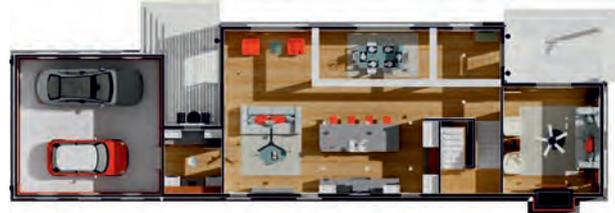
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## Less-complicated cable rail

Cable deck-railing systems deliver a sleek, modern aesthetic and do not obstruct views nearly as much as those with traditional spindles. However, homeowners



**Trouble-free tensioning.** The cables in each rail section can be tightened simultaneously using the two impact-driver-operated tensioners located inside the top rail.

and pro deck installers have often complained about the extra time the cables take to install and the daunting array of toggles, sleeves, tensioners, studs, turn-buckles, and other proprietary hardware required to install them. The new RDI Elevation Rail from Barrette Outdoor Living was designed to simplify this complicated installation.

Each rail section has two cartridges that are pre-strung like laces on a shoe. You just pull the opposing cartridges apart so that they separate enough to slide into their corresponding posts. After attaching the top rail, you tighten the cables, snap on the rail and post caps, install the mid-support baluster (for longer sections), and you're done. Each cable assembly can accommodate rail lengths of up to 6 ft. on center.

Combined, all the necessary components add up to approximately \$100 per ft., which is comparable to other cable railing systems, but it's the speedy installation that separates this system from the pack. You can buy the RDI Elevation Rail at any lumberyard that carries RDI railing.

M.P.

## Convenient crimping

I use a bench-mounted crimper to create custom round duct when I'm in the shop, but I dread having to crimp round duct on-site with a handheld crimper. For someone who uses handheld tools like shears throughout the day, the added action of crimping duct by hand can take a toll on your hands and wrists, both in the short term and especially over the years. Malco's TurboCrimper Impact (model C5A2) is a round-duct-installation game changer. The TurboCrimper is simple to use: Just put the tool in your impact driver (designed for drivers only, not drills), pull the trigger, and walk the tool around the perimeter of the duct. You do need to hang on tight to the material, which will try to spin and flop around. This tool is both right- and left-hand friendly, requires no setup, and doesn't take up much room in my pouch or bag. In addition to preventing carpal tunnel, the TurboCrimper is about five times faster than crimping by hand and delivers consistent, factory-grade results. It works on 30-ga. to 24-ga. duct and stove pipe, as well as spiral duct. The TurboCrimper is available online and at HVAC supply houses for under \$150.

Joey Blessing, an HVAC contractor in Faribault, Minn.



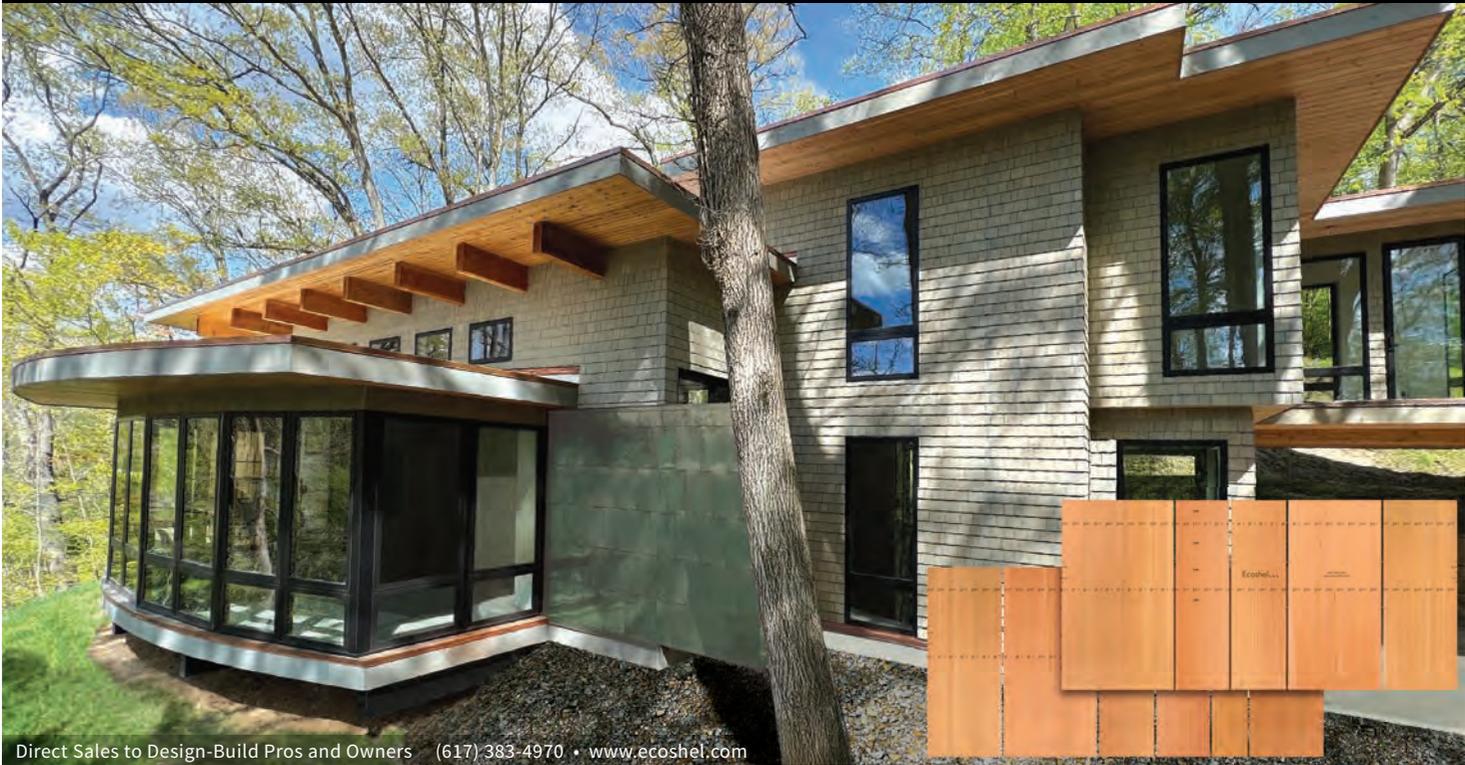
**Quick crimps.** This compact round-duct crimper requires no setup or adjustments. Just insert it into your impact driver and walk it around the perimeter of the pipe.



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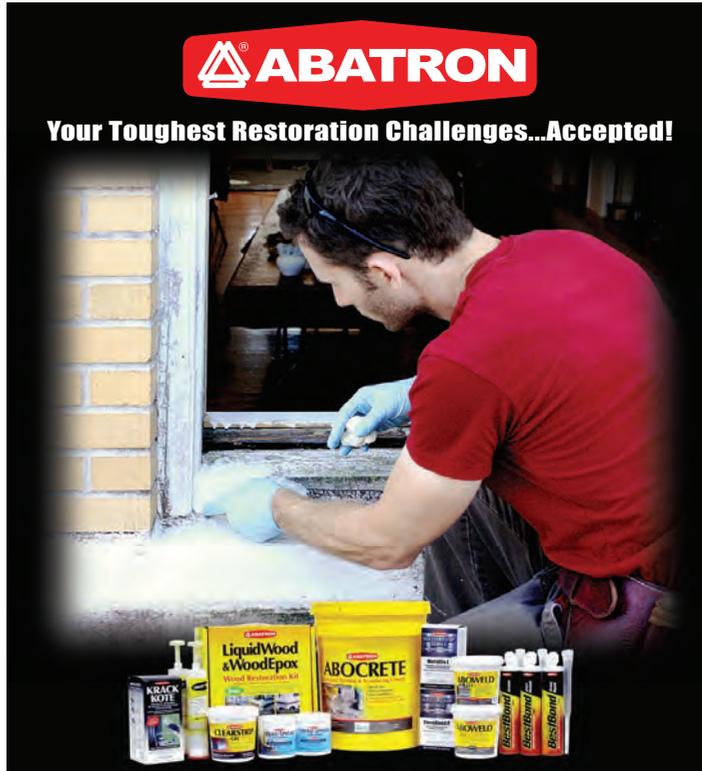
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## Effortless mud dispenser



I've slung a lot of drywall mud in my day. I started out shoveling mud onto my hawks and into my pans with a 6-in. knife. I then upgraded to banjos, then bazooka-style tapers that require a hand pump. I used that same pump to fill the various flat boxes I eventually acquired. So, when I came across the new Graco PowerFill 3.5 Pro Series, which as far as I know is the only cordless mud pump out there, I knew it was time to graduate to the next level.

This mud pump has an adjustable stabilizer that allows you to work with various-size mud buckets. The high-rise fill tube is a back saver and can be positioned right over the bucket to catch dribbles. The pump is powered by a DeWalt 20v battery and will transfer up to 55 gal. of mud on one full charge. You operate the pump by holding a button or by using the Precision Fill feature, which allows you to program the pump to repeatedly dispense a specific amount of mud. It also has a continuous pumping mode for unloading bulk mud (or for cleaning the unit). At the end of the day, you can remove just the power head and leave the stand, fill tube, and intake assembly in the mud overnight.

I spent a little over \$1500 for my Graco PowerFill 3.5, which included a battery and charger. That's a little spendy, but I typically work with other finishers, and I've noticed a savings just on time spent waiting at the bucket in the refill traffic jam. You can buy one online or at specialty tool retailers.

*Jeremy Wendstad, a drywall Contractor in Lakeville, Minn.*



**Press, fill, repeat.** When you need to fill the same tool over and over, the Precision Fill feature allows you to easily program the amount to dispense with one push of a button.

## Pipe flaring in a fraction of the time

In my 28-year career as a HVAC and refrigeration tech, I've installed a lot of copper gas and refrigeration lines that required flare fittings. Traditional flaring tools are slow; they can be fussy to use in confined spaces, and when flaring several pipes back to back, twisting those wing nuts is hard on your fingers and wrists. With the goal of working smarter, I invested in the cordless Navac BreakFree Power Flaring Tool.

Besides the fact that it only takes a fraction of the time to finish a flare, this tool's slim body

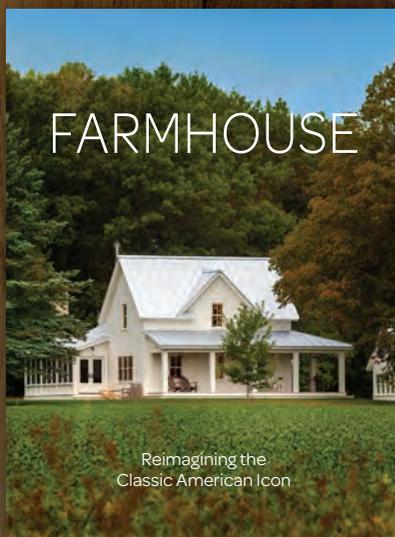
and LED light allows me to easily get into those tight spots, and since it's only 3 lb., working overhead is not a problem. Best of all, no more cramping hands. Consistency is a key feature: One of the most common reasons a flare fitting fails is that the pipe gets positioned improperly in the clamp, which is why I love that this tool has a "limit baffle" that perfectly positions the copper pipe in the tool every time. Also, the flaring is initiated with one button, which frees your other hand to fully support the pipe.

The BreakFree comes with the five most common-size flare dies ranging from 1/4 in. to 3/4 in. The battery indication light lets me know when it's getting low, so I don't get stuck in the middle of a flare, and Navac says one battery will produce up to 100 flares per charge. So far, I've shared this tool on two occasions, and both of those techs ordered their own the same day. You can buy the BreakFree tool online or at HVAC supply houses for \$380. Check out the video that shows how it works at [navacglobal.com](http://navacglobal.com).



*Jason Crow, an HVAC and refrigeration specialist in Lonsdale, Minn.*

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## A clip for all drivers

Work on fire safety and security equipment, and those huge LED display stadium scoreboards. I do mostly service work, so when I show up to a job, I don't always know where the problem is or which tools I'll need until I take a look and find out exactly what I'm dealing with. Tracking down the problem often requires a lot of walking, and I prefer to bring as few tools as necessary. But I always bring along my driver and various bits on these initial inspections in case I need to remove a panel to get at the problem, or if by chance the fix is as simple as a twist of a nut or turn of a screw. When I first



came across the Nohlster tool clip, designed to replace the factory belt clip on most major brands of drills and drivers, I knew it was exactly what I needed. It features a more secure clipping mechanism and a spot to hold four 1/4-in. hex-shank bits and drivers.

The Nohlster was easy to attach to my Milwaukee driver and didn't diminish the functionality of the tool in any way. It did arm me with more bits to bring to my work area, which has reduced trips up and down ladders and saved me from wasting time fishing around in my pouch for the proper bit. The bits fit tightly into the bit holder and don't



**Bits at the ready.** In addition to its sturdy spring clamp that reduces the chance of accidents, the tool clip has a spot to hold four bits, resulting in fewer wasted trips.

fall out if the tool gets bumped or snagged. The locking clip releases with the press of a lever, which is intuitive to use and helps keep my driver from falling from wherever I hook it. I like knowing that I won't accidentally knock the clip loose and damage my driver or a customer's property. In my opinion, all drills and drivers should come with these clips. You can buy one at [nohlster.com](http://nohlster.com) for \$25.

Colton Nolan, a limited energy technician from Montrose, Minn.

## Balanced brad nailer

I've been a trim carpenter for over 40 years and now use cordless nailers for most of my work. I've tried a bunch of different brands, but my 18-ga. Grex nailer is the one I use most for trim. I like it so much that I recently treated myself to the new Grex cordless 2-in. 21-ga. brad nailer (model GCH850). Before buying this 21-ga. model, my 18-ga. nailer was the smallest I owned. If I needed something smaller, I'd use my 23-ga. pinner. I thought that this tool would come in handy only in very specific cases, but I have been using it more than twice as much as I thought I would. It made me wonder why I didn't get one sooner.

At the time I bought this nailer, it was the only cordless 21-ga. brad nailer on the

market. Grex makes the best-balanced, most compact, and lightest cordless nailers that I've come across. They have a similar size, balance, and weight as pneumatic brad nailers. The reason for this is that, like Paslode products, they use a fuel source to generate the force instead of relying on a large, heavy battery. And, unlike other fuel-powered products, Grex cordless guns do not have a fan, so they only need two AAA batteries to create the ignition spark, which also requires less space. Even the rechargeable AAA batteries I use seem to last forever. Grex fuel cells don't have a shelf life and use a propane that is nearly odorless.

I'm very picky when it comes to trim-nailer tips, which is another reason I love Grex nailers. Grex tips are made of a



**Fan and odor-free.** The low-odor fuel used by these brad nailers doesn't require a fan to disperse exhaust fumes; all that's needed are two AAA batteries to ignite the fuel.

softer material than most other nailers I've used, which means less sliding around on the trim when pushing the tip in. Also, I find the Grex four-sided tips work much better when firing nails on the sharp edges of trim contours than the one- to three-sided tips that other brands feature.

Each fuel cell should deliver around 1300 shots. But don't short yourself when buying extras because you usually have to order them online. The Grex brad nailer costs about \$300—find out more at [grexusa.com](http://grexusa.com).

Mark Schmidt, a master trim carpenter in Farmington, Minn.