Installing Moulding and Trim work

By Rick Chaffey, Gen. Mgr. Moulding Warehouse Ltd.

Installing moulding is a task the average do it yourselfer can accomplish with a little planning and some basic tools. After you have decided on the style or type of trim you want to install take some time to determine the appropriate amount you will require for the job you have chosen. Most moulding today is available in standard lengths which help to more accurately determine your requirements but be prepared to have pieces left over that are too small to be used without multiple joints. Generally speaking after measuring the areas to be trimmed, add between 10% and 15% to your quantities to allow for this waste.

A power mitre saw or a mitre box with a sharp fine tooth hand saw, a tape measure, a level and a square, hammer and 1 ½" to 2" nails are all you will need for tools. It is also good to check that your mitre saw or box accurately cuts 90° and 45° before you do any cuts and make any adjustments as required. Most cuts will be basic straight or 90° and 45° mitre and bevel cuts.

Before measuring for casing, take a few minutes to first ensure that your door jambs and window build-outs are square and level. Use shims to make any corrections. Next establish a reveal around your doorjambs or window build- outs. A reveal is a space, usually 1/8" to 3/16" that is left showing on the jamb or build-out once the casing is applied. Take a pencil and make a few reference lines to provide a guideline for your casings. This is especially important at the corners because this is where your mitre cuts will start and you will want this to be accurate so that these cuts fit tightly. Using a door as an example lets assume that the height of the jamb is 80" and allowing for an 1/8" reveal the low part of the mitre cut will start at 80 1/8" and if the jamb has a 32 ½" opening then our top piece will be 32 ¾" (1/8" for each side equals ¼") at the start of one mitre to the start of the opposite mitre. You will notice that the actual measurement of the side and the top pieces will be longer because of the angle of the mitre. Your casing then can be applied along the guideline to maintain the 1/8" reveal. A pneumatic (air) nailer is ideal for fast application if you have the luxury of owning one but a normal hammer and nail set have worked just fine for many, many generations.

Once you have completed your casing installation it is time then to start your baseboard. Measure the distance between each wall or wall and doors and record the measurements on a notepad including whether the piece will have an inside or outside corner. Now before you start cutting, go back and measure again! Reading a tape upside down or recording the wrong number has resulted in many errors so catch them before you cut rather than after. While I am measuring I like to place a pencil mark on the wall where my studs are located. This makes the fastening of the base more secure and easier if I know where they are before I start nailing.

When installing baseboard you will often encounter walls that are longer than your baseboard and will require two or more pieces to be joined together. Although this is not a difficult task some points to consider will ensure a seamless appearance when completed. First when joining two pieces of moulding use a lap joint, that is, cut the two base pieces on an angle so that one piece overlaps the other. If you are using a wood moulding try to match the colour and grain if possible. Apply white glue to MDF moulding cuts and yellow glue to wood joints. After the glue has dried, sand the joint

flush and fill any gaps with a wood filler or spackling for MDF and sand again. You will have nearly an invisible joint once your finish is applied.

Finally, corners are notorious for being something other than 90° so check each one with some scrap pieces to determine if an adjustment to your angles will be required. MDF moulding is far more forgivable than wood because joints can be filled with painters caulk before painting and the finished product will appear seamless. A good mitre saw and a sharp blade is essential when using wood mouldings, if you want seamless joints, but as before, start with scrap pieces and establish the proper angle before you cut your final piece.

These are the basic steps for installing most mouldings with the exception of crown mouldings and remember measure twice and cut once.