



**All this and more.** Pictured here are only some of the tools and equipment the author can carry in the storage system he designed for his truck.

# Tool Storage for Pickups

This simple system could help to restore order under any camper shell

by Byron Papa

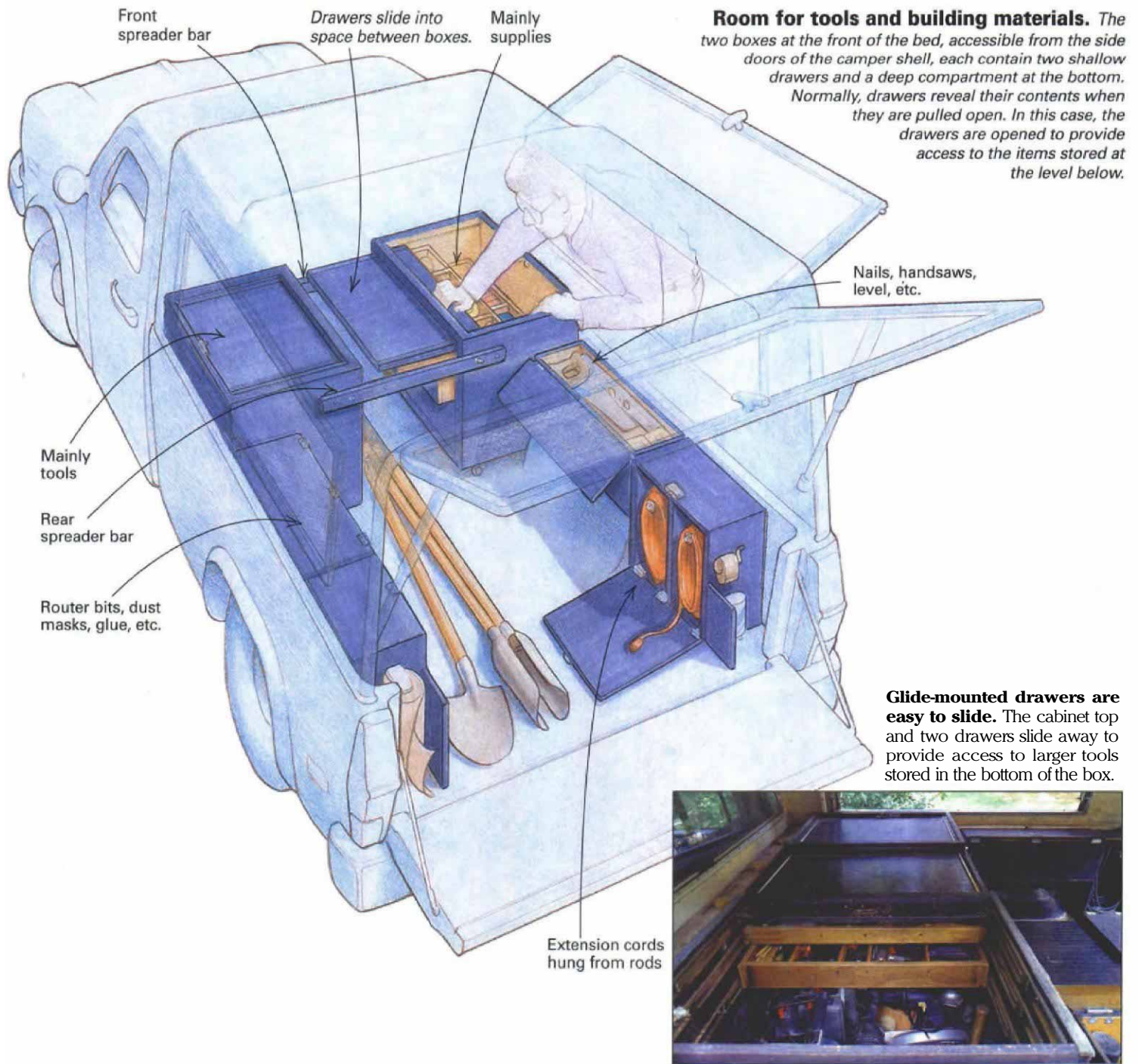
**I**n the home-building and remodeling market where I work as a small-time general contractor, competition is stiff. Bidding jobs, scheduling subcontractors and doing some of the work myself can make for long workdays. I don't have time to be crawling around in the back of my truck, looking for a tool.

To save myself from this aggravation, I built a storage system (photo above) that consists of a series of wooden drawers and boxes, accessed mostly from the side doors of the truck's camper shell (photo facing page). I've been using the system for nine years now, and I can't think of too many ways I'd like to improve it.

**Boxes and drawers**—The storage system, which cost me about \$300, centers around two large, removable toolboxes at the front of the bed, each with a set of compartmentalized drawers (drawing facing page).

Each box has two drawers and a top cover, all of which are mounted on heavy-duty drawerslides (Accuride, model 322; 310-903-0200). The bottom foot or so of each box, the last layer of storage, is a stationary bin. Standing at the side of the truck, I slide open the cover to get at the contents of the first drawer, or I move the drawer out of the way to reveal the contents of the drawer or compartment underneath. When a drawer is opened, it is "parked" in the middle space between the two boxes.

Any drawer left open on one side of the truck is automatically shut as the drawer opposite it is pushed open from the other side. When the truck is in motion, the drawers are held shut against rubber dampers with stock cupboard catches. To help the tools ride more quietly, I lined the bottom of the storage compartments and drawers with tight-weave carpet. Tools are on the driver's side, and supplies, such as caulk and glue, are on the passenger's side. Larger items, such as power tools, are in the bottom bin.



**Room for tools and building materials.** The two boxes at the front of the bed, accessible from the side doors of the camper shell, each contain two shallow drawers and a deep compartment at the bottom. Normally, drawers reveal their contents when they are pulled open. In this case, the drawers are opened to provide access to the items stored at the level below.

**Glide-mounted drawers are easy to slide.** The cabinet top and two drawers slide away to provide access to larger tools stored in the bottom of the box.

The boxes take up most of the front third or so of the truck bed, but there is space between them for carrying long lumber and other supplies. Although the two boxes are heavy when stocked, they sit on casters and can be rolled out of the truck, freeing the bed for big loads. Two oak spreader bars keep the boxes in place against the sidewalls of the bed.

**Room for tools and 4x8 material**—Four other smaller boxes with hinged lids are fixed along the bed's sidewalls. They don't protrude beyond the wheel wells, so the 4-ft. carrying capacity of the bed is preserved. The main boxes are made of 3/4-in. exterior plywood, screwed and glued together. The drawer bottoms and the four side boxes are 1/2-in. plywood. Hinges are fastened to their plywood sides with T-nuts and metal screws.

Four-ft. wide material such as plywood and drywall can be carried in the truck in at least a couple of ways. With the tailgate closed, I can angle a few

sheets down with their ends resting against the bottom of the tailgate. If I need to carry more than just a couple of sheets, I can lay them on top of the boxes with the support of a removable crossbar at the rear. To prevent the material from sliding out of the truck, I either tie the camper's rear door down over the material, or if the sheets are durable, I clamp them together with a large C-clamp.

It's hard to make a truckful of tools burglarproof, so my main strategy is not to bring attention to the storage system in the first place. Although the camper shell's ceiling is white, the boxes, painted dark blue to match the truck, and a black-rubber floor mat tend to put the truck's interior contents in the dark. □

*Byron Papa is a building and remodeling contractor in Durham/Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Photos by Reese Hamilton.*