



A Fast, Foolproof Method for

With plywood strips and hot-melt glue, you can make a template that guarantees a perfect fit

BY CHRIS GREEN

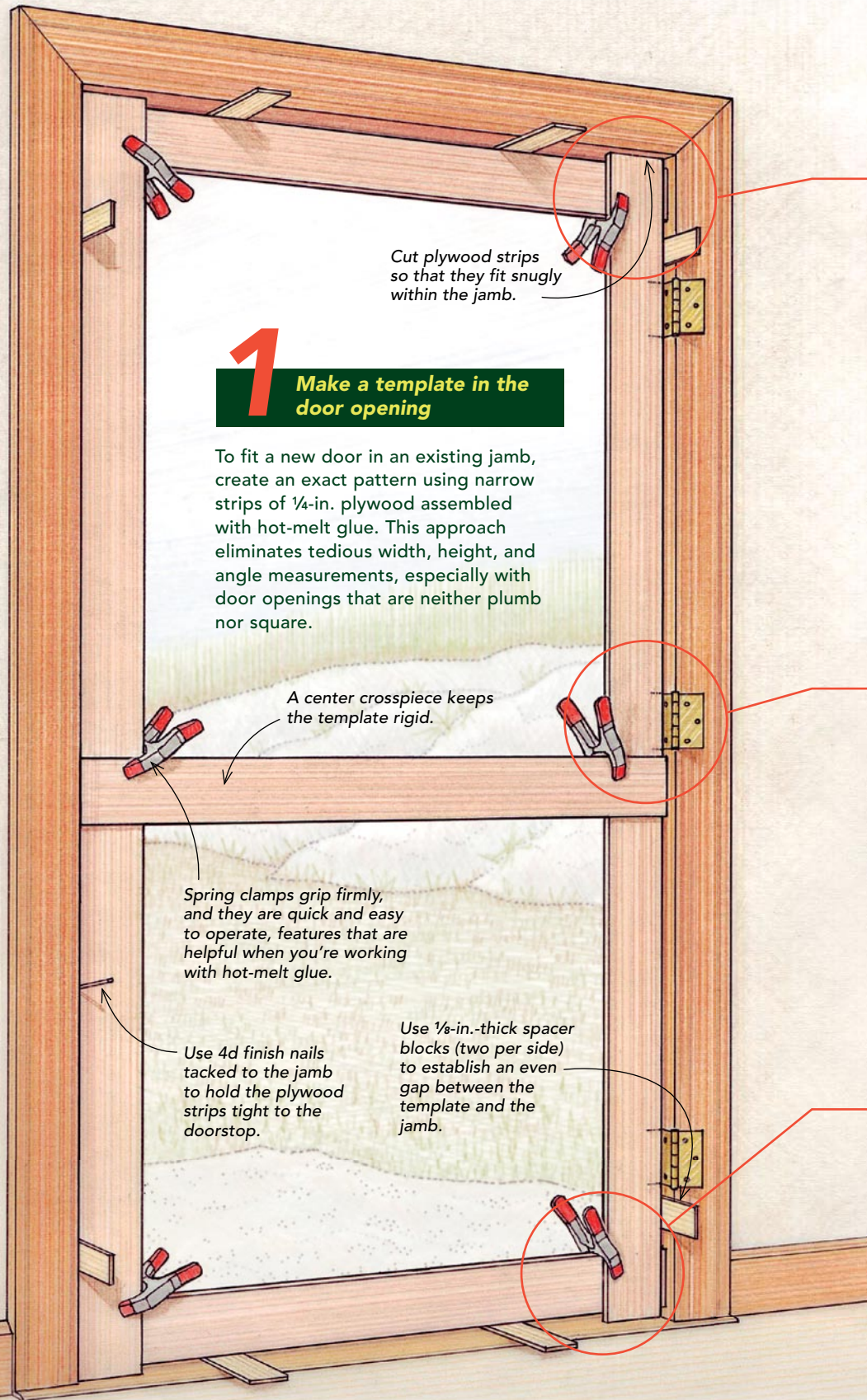
Cutting a door to fit an existing jamb can be challenging for a professional and downright intimidating for a novice. A door requires a glove-like fit to provide years of trouble-free operation and to keep out noise and cold air while keeping in heat. The gap between the edge of the door and the jamb can't be too small or too large; it should be a precise $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

When I started out as a carpenter, I learned to transfer measurements from the door opening to the door using a framing square, a long level, and a measuring tape. Although this technique works, it has limitations. If the door jamb on the hinge side is bowed or if the opening is out of square, you can end up making several trips from the door opening to the sawhorses, carrying the door, re-marking, and recutting. If you measure, mark, and cut correctly each time, you'll eventually get the door to fit.

A better way is to make a template that provides an exact pattern in which to cut the door so that you get the ideal fit the first time. This technique isn't limited to

full-size doors, either. You can use it on cabinet doors, countertops, closet shelving, and even oddly shaped stair treads. □

Chris Green is a carpenter and cabinet-maker in New Milford, Conn. Photos by Rob Yagid.



1 Make a template in the door opening

To fit a new door in an existing jamb, create an exact pattern using narrow strips of $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. plywood assembled with hot-melt glue. This approach eliminates tedious width, height, and angle measurements, especially with door openings that are neither plumb nor square.

Cut plywood strips so that they fit snugly within the jamb.

A center crosspiece keeps the template rigid.

Spring clamps grip firmly, and they are quick and easy to operate, features that are helpful when you're working with hot-melt glue.

Use 4d finish nails tacked to the jamb to hold the plywood strips tight to the doorstop.

Use $\frac{1}{8}$ -in.-thick spacer blocks (two per side) to establish an even gap between the template and the jamb.

Fitting Doors



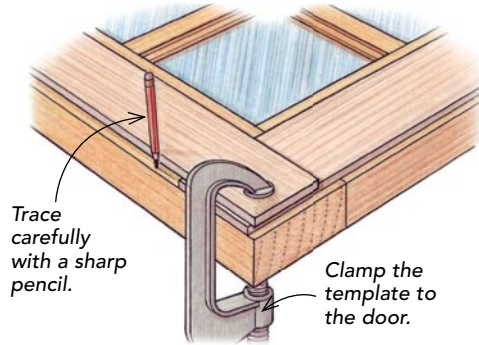
Modify the template for a bowed jamb. If the jamb is not straight, use a compass to scribe the jamb's irregularities onto the template. Shave the template to the scribed line with a block plane, and complete the assembly. The same technique can be used to fit doors to warped or worn thresholds.



The template doubles as a story pole. Using a combination square and a utility knife, transfer each hinge location precisely to the template.



Secure the template with hot-melt glue. Pull apart each overlapping strip, apply the glue, and replace the clamp. In a minute or two, you can remove the template and place it on the door.



2 Trace the template, and cut the door



Center the template on the back of the door, making sure its interior side is face up. Clamp the template down securely, and trace its outline. When preparing to cut the door, I use a gauge block (top inset photo), made especially for my saw, to position a straight-edge the correct distance from the traced line. Clamped to the door, the straight-edge guides my saw for a precise cut. Be sure to cut a 2° bevel on the door's latch side (bottom inset photo), and clean up the edges with a block plane or a sanding block.



3 Hang the door on the first try

Set the bottom of the door on a stack of tapered shims. You can adjust the door's height by pushing the shims together or by pulling them apart until the hinge leaves are aligned.

