

Craftsman-Style

Clean lines and balanced proportions are the key ingredients for this classic trim treatment

BY TUCKER WINDOVER

Any cook will tell you that the fewer ingredients there are, the more important each one becomes. That's especially true with Craftsman-style trim treatments. This style has its roots in England's Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized folk art and the workmanship of the individual craftsman. However, what developed in America as a residential Craftsman style was in many ways a reaction to overadorned Victorian homes built during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Gustav Stickley, who founded the periodical *The Craftsman* in 1901, became the purveyor of a style that strove to strip away excessive ornamentation and instead celebrate functionality and pleasing proportions. In the best examples of the period, the look was both simple and elegant.

That was then. Most of the time nowadays, my crew and I trim out windows and doors with off-the-shelf primed finger-jointed moldings. Sometimes, however, a client hires me to create a specific look. This requires me to shift gears and dig into my bag of tricks, which is the most enjoyable part of being a trim carpenter. Recently, I was asked to install Craftsman-style window and door casing.

Good examples spawn better designs

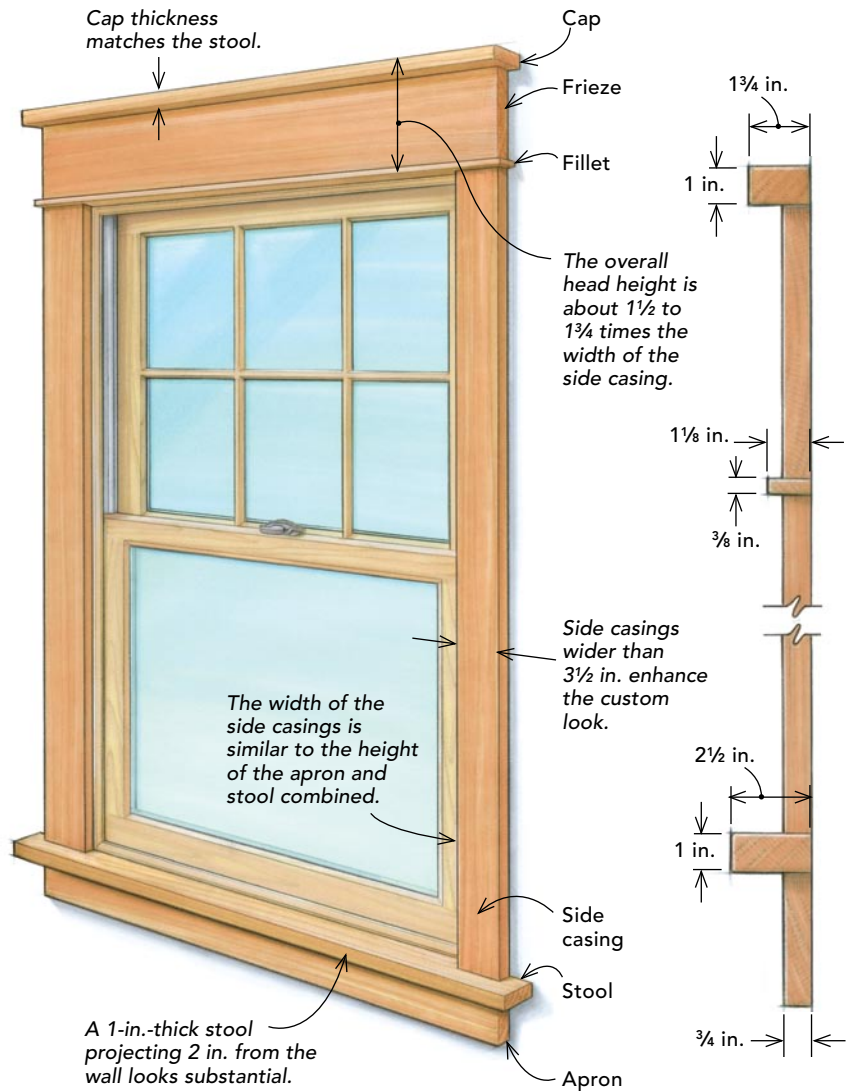
To help me settle on a design for this project, I did four different drawings of a window to try variations of Craftsman-style casing (drawings facing page). This allowed me to experiment with the size and the proportions of the elements before I did any cutting.

Ancient Greek and Roman temples established a proportional system that relates the horizontal entablature to the height and diameter of the columns that support it. Similar proportions can be brought to bear on Craftsman-style trim for windows and doors (top drawing, facing page). While this is a good starting point, keep in mind that modern homes generally aren't designed with classical proportions.

Lacking a ready-made template, I looked not only at Stickley's work but also at casing treatments created by the Greene brothers, who were famous for the Craftsman-style homes they designed in California during the early 1900s. What I learned is that there's no such thing



Casing



GUIDELINES FOR CRAFTSMAN DESIGN

While there are some good books on Craftsman style (see p. 64), no pattern book or carpenters' scripture provides exact measurements. Unless there's an architect involved, I design window trim myself based on my experience and a few guiding principles.

Start simple, stay simple

Use flat surfaces and square edges instead of molded profiles. Casing parts meet with basic butt joints. Subtle shadowlines are created by slight changes in thickness and overlapping elements.

Wood grain is part of the effect

For this job, I chose vertical-grain Douglas fir. When I selected the lumber, I chose boards with tight growth rings and consistent color. Oak (either rift-sawn or quartersawn) is another popular choice.

Bold, balanced proportions are critical

To get it right, I often mock up a full casing treatment to make sure all the pieces work well together. Also, to enhance a custom look, I avoid off-the-shelf dimensions where possible.

Three header variations



1. Head-piece frieze is thicker (1 in.) and overhangs the side and front by 1/4 in. There is no fillet between the head and side casings.



2. Head and side casings have the same dimensions. A simple 1-in. by 1-in. backband is mitered at the top corners.



3. A molding under the cap is added and angled at 45°. This detail also can be incorporated by beveling the edges of a thicker cap piece.



Solving problems that land on the trim carpenter's plate

Built-up compound, loose drywall, bulges in framing, and poor window installations are some reasons the window jamb and the drywall might not line up. Like it or not, these problems become the trim carpenter's headache. If the drywall surface and the jamb edges aren't made flush with each other, you'll be fighting the trim through the rest of the project, and it might never look right.

(1) Apply force if necessary. Many times, the window is not set far enough inside the rough opening. Even if the trim and siding have already been installed, I can often move the window by yanking it.

(2) Demolition works quickly. Before I start in with my hammer, I hold the side casing in place and strike a line. Then I move it an inch toward the window and score the paper with my utility knife. This provides a stopping point for the drywall paper when it peels away.

(3) Pull the drywall tight. A few screws can quickly solve the problem if the space between the drywall and the framing is a little slack.



as a one-size-fits-all casing for the Craftsman style. A room's ceiling height and its window size affect decisions about casing dimensions. Formal areas such as a front entry door traditionally call for wider casing. In closets and small rooms, bold trim can be overdone. The challenge is to let the casing add strength, mass, and mood without becoming overbearing.

Choosing and processing lumber is a big part of the job

Because this job involved stain-grade trim, I carefully selected the wood myself at the lumberyard. The vertical-grain Douglas fir I used on this job isn't a stock item at many lumberyards. The same can be said for straight-grained oak, another popular choice for Craftsman-style casing that will be stained or varnished rather than painted. When you are ordering and selecting boards, make sure that at least one edge is straight and square to register solidly against the tablesaw's rip fence. Most full-service lumber dealers will joint one or both edges of each board for a slight upcharge.

Once I'm on site, I separate the wood into piles for stools, side casings, head casings, and other parts. Especially on a big job, it's easy to waste time counting, resorting, and restacking wood that isn't properly organized from the beginning.

After completing one window from start to finish and getting the client to approve the design, I can start mass-producing parts. It makes sense to keep the tablesaw's rip fence at the same setting until all parts that need to be a given width are cut. Only then do I move on to another rip setting.

I rip trim elements to within $\frac{3}{16}$ in. of their final widths. Then I use a thickness planer to remove the saw marks on the edges. If the face has any chatter from the mill, I use the thickness planer to take $\frac{1}{32}$ in. off the side that faces out. I identify the more-attractive face of each piece and mark the back sides as I go. Once all the stock is separated into piles and cut to the final dimensions, I do a whole-house takeoff and cut the pieces to length. As I work my way through the cutlist, I pay attention to consistency of color and grain pattern so that I can match pieces as needed.

The milling process leaves all the edges sharp. Because sharp corners are unpleasant to brush against and don't hold finish well, I ease the edges that will be exposed in the finished installation. A block plane is a great tool for easing edges, but it's also possible to get the job done with 120-grit sandpaper.

With a simple design, the details matter more

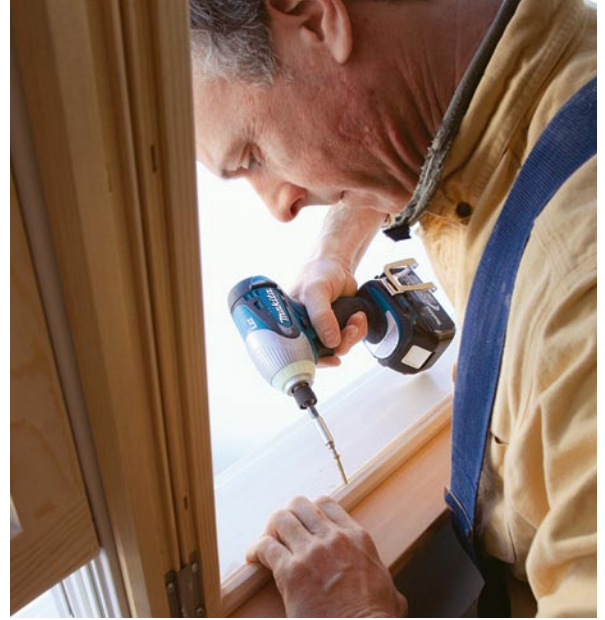
For any custom job, I take a little more time prepping the opening and the materials. For Craftsman casings, this is especially true. You can't hide any flaws in a simplified design. If the window jamb and the drywall surface don't line up perfectly, the side casing cants out. This flaw can be easily seen where the casing meets the stool or the

THE STOOL COMES FIRST

The stool visually anchors the casings that rest on its top surface. It needs to fit well against the dry-wall, be square to the window, and be attached securely. I secure the stool temporarily to establish its length.



Scribe the stool to the drywall. Hold the stool in place, and with a pencil, scribe the profile of the wall onto the stool. I use a pencil for most scribing work, but you can also use a set of scribes or a compass.



Hide the fasteners if possible. If the window molding is substantial enough, I screw the stool in place from the outside. I drive one 2-in. trim-head screw to secure the stool temporarily. Later, I add one every 8 in. for a permanent connection.



Check for square. While the stool is temporarily secured to the window jamb, check for square. The cause of any tilt should be eliminated to avoid a visible gap between the stool and the side casing.



Size the stool in place. On the first window, I leave the stool horns long. With the stool temporarily attached, I hold the side casing in place and determine the stool length. A good rule of thumb is that the stool's side projection should match its front projection.



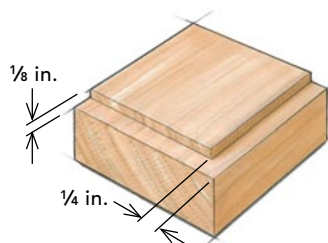
A thickness planer cleans up faces and edges

I use a thickness planer to take a light finishing pass on the show face of every piece of trim. This removes any chatter marks or other surface irregularities while also ensuring uniform thickness. I also use my planer to clean up the edges of boards after ripping them slightly wider (about $\frac{3}{16}$ in.) than their finished widths (photo left). Ganging boards together and running them through the planer gets the job done quickly and cleanly. After I run stock through the planer, I knock down the edges with a block plane and ease the edge of exposed end grain with 120-grit sandpaper.



CASINGS NEED A CONSISTENT REVEAL

Subtle details have a surprisingly dramatic impact on stain-grade trim. That's why it's important to establish a consistent reveal for the casing and to pay attention to where nails are driven.



Measure to the top of the block. A reveal block, rabbeted as shown in the drawing, tells me where the top of the side casing needs to be.



Move obstructions if necessary. I use a scrap of side casing to ensure that switch boxes and outlets aren't in the way. The box shown here is just far enough away that I don't need to call the electrician.

Make these nails disappear. While holding the reveal block in place, secure the bottom of the casing from the underside of the stool. This eliminates two visible nail holes and helps to keep the joint tight.

head. Also, if the window is even a fraction out of square at the corners, the butt joints where casing pieces meet show visible gaps.

Most window manufacturers have their own details for frame and sash, so the connections have to be worked out on a case-by-case basis. On this job, the Andersen Windows moldings (photo top right, p. 63) were thick enough behind the stool to allow trim-head screws to be driven from the back side of the window frame to secure the stool to the jamb. To lock this key piece in place, I nail it to the side casings (photo far left) and glue the top edge of the apron to the stool.

I use a rabbeted reveal block to mark the distance from the edge of the window jamb where the casing will land. This layout tool ensures a uniform reveal all around the window. On this job, the jamb stock was thick enough to allow a 1/4-in. reveal, which creates a pleasing shadowline. You can mark reveal offsets on the jambs with a utility knife or a sharp pencil. I often eliminate this step and simply measure up to the top of the block.

I am careful about where I put fasteners. As a habit, I like to maintain consistent distances between nails (16 in. is typical) and to keep the nails in horizontally or vertically aligned pairs on the casing. One goes into the jamb; the other goes into the rough framing. Even if the nail holes are filled with expertly matched putty, a random nailing pattern is a visual distraction that's not acceptable on a stain-grade job.

I used 2-in.-long, 15-ga. finish nails to install this trim. Thinner 18-ga. nails are too liable to bend if they encounter wood grain that leans toward the face of a board. You don't want to have to pull errant nails on a stain-grade project. I adjust my nail gun to set nails just over 1/8 in. below the surface. Any shallower, and the wood putty might not stay in place.

Many times, especially during production-oriented work, the final walk-through can get short shrift. On a custom job, however, I make a point of doing a thorough walk-through. One unfixed mistake can unnecessarily sour a client's perception of the whole job. □

Tucker Windover is a finish carpenter in Arlington, Mass. Photos by John Ross, except where noted.

CRAFTSMAN STYLE AS A WAY OF LIFE

Craftsman style reaches far beyond trim details. As the books here amply illustrate and explain, this style extends to home design, architectural details, furniture, and even a philosophy that advocates simplified living.

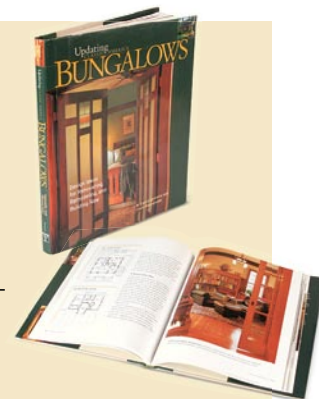
Craftsman Homes and More
Craftsman Homes
by Gustav Stickley,
Lyons Press edition,
2002

American Bungalow Style
by Robert Winter
and Alexander
Vertikoff, Simon &
Schuster, 1996

Greene and Greene: Masterworks
by Bruce Smith and
Alexander Vertikoff,
Chronicle Books,
1998

Greene & Greene
by Edward R.
Bosley, Phaidon
Press, 2000

Updating Classic American Bungalows
by M. Caren Con-
nally and Louis Was-
serman, The Taun-
ton Press, 2002



FRIEZE AND APRON ALIGN WITH SIDE CASINGS

Pencil lines on the wall extend the side-casing layout, enabling me to size and position the frieze board and apron correctly. The frieze is part of a three-piece header that I assemble on the bench.



Add a thin fillet and a fat cap. Once the frieze is cut to length, I can nail the fillet along its bottom edge and the cap along the top. The thickness of the cap matches that of the stool.



Keep the apron clean. Just as when I'm installing the side casings and the header assembly, I nail the apron carefully. Nails are best driven in pairs. I align pairs of nails vertically on the apron and header, horizontally on side casings.