Making Common Siding

Whether you're replacing wood, fiber cement, or vinyl, choose the right tools, and minimize the collateral damage

No matter where you live, the siding of your house takes a beating from sun, wind, water, and the occasional misthrown baseball. After a while, the abuse starts to show. The good news is that siding gone bad can be replaced without too much trouble. The key to extracting siding is determining how it's attached and either cutting or removing the fasteners without damaging anything else. Be aware that the weather-resistive barrier (that is, housewrap) can be damaged when old sid-

CLAPBOARD REPAIR INVOLVES TWO COURSES

A clapboard should be fastened so that the face nails are positioned above the top of the underlying board, which makes it easy to remove. In the real world, however, the nails often penetrate the top of the clapboard beneath. To remove one clapboard, pull or cut the nails holding it in place as well as the nails in the overlying course. Be sure to use a sharp knife to score through the paint along the bottom, top, and butt edges of the damaged clapboard. Remember to back up butt joints with a piece of housewrap or flashing before placing the new board.

Pop the nails. *Use a thin-bladed flat bar to pry up both the damaged clapboard and the clapboard above it, about ¼ in. at each nail position. A piece of aluminum or plastic flashing stock protects the clapboard below from being damaged during the process. Usually, when the board is tapped back down, the nail head remains proud, ready to be pulled. If it's apparent that a nail isn't moving, stop prying.*

Cut stubborn nails. *Use a multitool outfitted with a metal-cutting blade to cut nails that won't pop. To protect the clapboard and the housewrap beneath, insert a piece of coil flashing stock between the boards, then brace the tool on the wall and carefully cut the nail. Stubborn nails with small heads also may be driven through the board with a nail set.*

Conceal the repair. *Cut the new clapboard 1/16 in. shorter than the space, and prime the cut ends before inserting. Both the new clapboard and the course above it need to be nailed. To make sure the new nails grab into solid sheathing beneath and not the same old hole, insert nails into the original holes in the clapboards, but angle the nails a little upward. Caulk nail holes and butt joints as needed.*

Tool photo, facing page: Dan Thornton

Repairs

BY MIKE GUERTIN

ing is removed. During normal repairs, a piece of housewrap tape is sufficient to seal small nail holes. Cover large tears with a piece of housewrap lapped into a horizontal cut that is at or slightly above the damaged area, and then tape it in place.

Another thing to keep in mind is that damaged wood and fiber-cement siding don't always need to be replaced. Pieces with gouges, splits, and rot can sometimes be repaired in place (see "Restoring Wood With Epoxy," *FHB* #107).

Finally, while the EPA's renovation, repair, and painting rule doesn't kick in until you disturb 20 sq. ft. of exterior painted surface, it's still good practice to follow lead-safe practices when repairing siding on homes built before 1978 (see *FHB* #212, pp. 82-84).

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A surgical option

When a long clapboard has just a small amount of damage, it's possible to cut out only the bad section. Starting from a butt joint, pry out the nails in the section of the board to be removed and from the overlying clapboard about 2 ft. to each side of the damage. Bend a 1-in.- to 2-in.-wide strip of metal-coil stock to wrap and protect the bottom of the overlying clapboard at the cut site. A long strip of vinyl or aluminum beneath the damaged clapboard protects the face of the course beneath and the housewrap.

Use a handsaw for more control. *Use a modified pull saw or a fine-tooth reciprocating-saw blade mounted in a handle to make the cut. Wedges inserted above create a space for the blade. Use a Speed Square to guide the blade until the kerf is started. Before inserting a new piece of clapboard, prime the cut end.*

Modified Japanese-style saw
(about $20); blade cut with metal shears

Don't forget to repair the housewrap

Siding repairs are par for the course when cellulose or fiberglass insulation is blown into wall cavities from the exterior of old homes. Installers generally remove individual shingles or courses of lap siding and drill holes through the sheathing for access into stud bays. They usually fill the holes with tapered wood plugs but often neglect to patch the housewrap. I like to use metal or plastic flashing cards to lap into the housewrap and cover the holes. I make a horizontal cut in the wrap just above the insulation hole that is as long as the flashing card is wide. To make it easier to insert the card, I clip the top corners. Ideally, the card is tall enough to slip 2 in. to 3 in. behind the wrap and still reach a couple of inches below the hole. I tape the perimeter to the housewrap with housewrap tape or adhere the flashing with a bead of elastomeric sealant that's compatible with housewrap, such as DuPont's Residential Sealant or Sashco's Big Stretch. This is a good practice to follow when any siding damage includes torn housewrap.

Repairs after insulating. *When insulation is installed from the exterior, the housewrap or builder's felt must be repaired.*

REPLACE OR REPAIR CEDAR SHINGLES

To repair a damaged shingle, you can remove the entire shingle or just the exposed portion. Replacing the entire shingle takes longer but is a more durable repair. Cutting away the visible part of the shingle is faster, but trickier to keep weathertight.

Mark the nails, and break out the shingle. *Each shingle is likely to be held in place by two fasteners placed about ¾ in. from each side and ¾ in. to 1½ in. above the bottom of the overlying course. Mark the likely locations with chalk. To protect the adjacent shingles, first run a knife down the shingle joint to break the paint or stain. Use a chisel or a utility knife to split the damaged shingle along the grain roughly where the fasteners should be, and pull it out in pieces. Clamping pliers help to grip and pull difficult pieces.*

Photo left, this page: courtesy of Mike Guertin.
Tool photo, facing page: Dan Thornton.

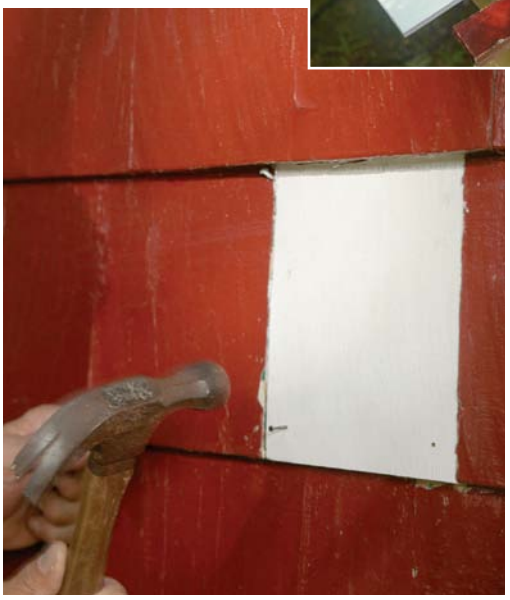
Clear the nails. *A slate ripper is a great tool for pulling concealed nails. Slide the flat blade beneath the overlapping shingle, tap it sideways so that one hook grabs a fastener, and then tap downward on the strike arm of the ripper's handle. The hook either pulls out the fastener (inset) or cuts through it.*

Slate ripper (aka shingle thief): AJC Tools ($40); Dasco Pro ($20)

Hide the new nails. *After cutting a replacement shingle, insert the new piece in place until it's ¼ in. below the course line. (The top may be trimmed a couple of inches to accommodate nails in the course above.) Drive two stainless-steel ring-shank nails just below the course line above. Then use a nail set to drive the heads flush. With a block, drive the shingle up until it's even with the course line, which also pushes the nails up under the course above.*

A replacement option

Replace only the exposed portion. Run the blade of a sharp utility knife along the butt of the overlying shingle course at a 30° to 45° upward angle until the cut is almost through the shingle. Don't cut into the shingle beneath, or the repair area may be prone to leaks. Insert a piece of aluminum flashing that's ¼ in. to ½ in. wider than the shingle, then cut a replacement shingle with the same angle at the top about ⅛ in. longer than the damaged piece. Prime all cut edges, then slide the replacement in place and tap upward until it is aligned along the butts. Stainless-steel ring-shank nails ¾ in. up from the corners secure the shingle.



CUT NAILS TO REMOVE FIBER CEMENT

Blind-nailing is the most common method of installing fiber-cement plank. Nails are usually driven into studs, about ¾ in. to 1 in. down from the top edge and concealed by ¼ in. to ½ in. of the course above. I mark the location of each nail head with a piece of painter's tape. The nails need to be cut to remove the damaged plank without harming the housewrap because it's hard to get under adjacent planks to make a repair. The ends of the planks are often caulked, so after the nails are cut, I use a sharp knife to cut the sealant and catch the piece as it drops out. Face-nailed fiber-cement planks can be removed like clapboards.

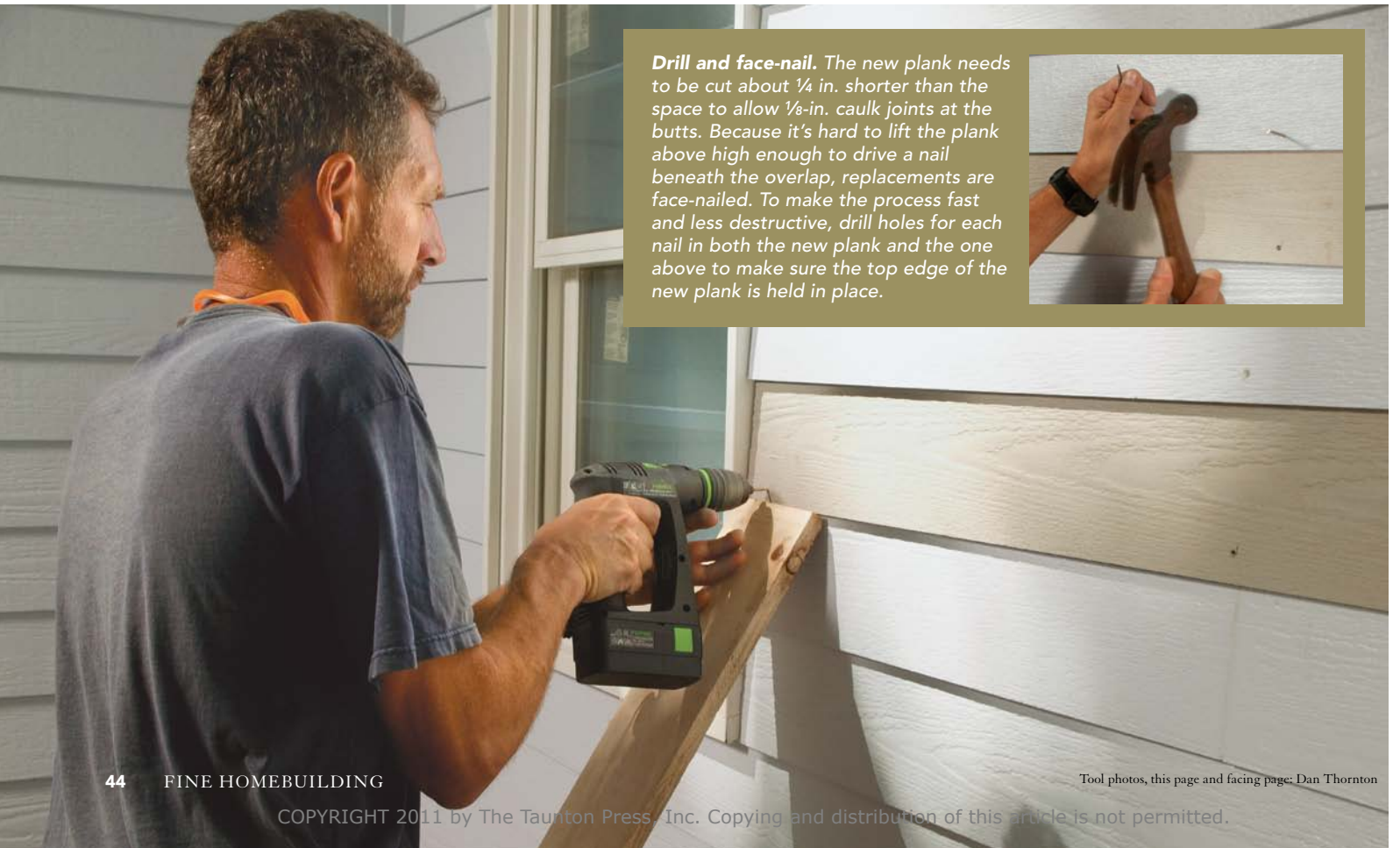
Three tools to cut blind nails

Slide a thin flat bar under the fiber-cement plank, and pry it up about ⅛ in. so that the cutter can reach the shanks. A hidden-nail cutter (left) has fairly thin, deep jaws that slip between planks. Alternatively, nails can be cut with a metal-cutting blade mounted in a reciprocating saw with an offset attachment (center) or a handsaw handle (right). Once cut, the nail shanks need to be pounded flush to the sheathing. Slip a flat bar over each cut shank, and whack the middle of the bar. Seal the nail holes with pieces of housewrap tape.

Siding nail cutters
from Malco (about $50)

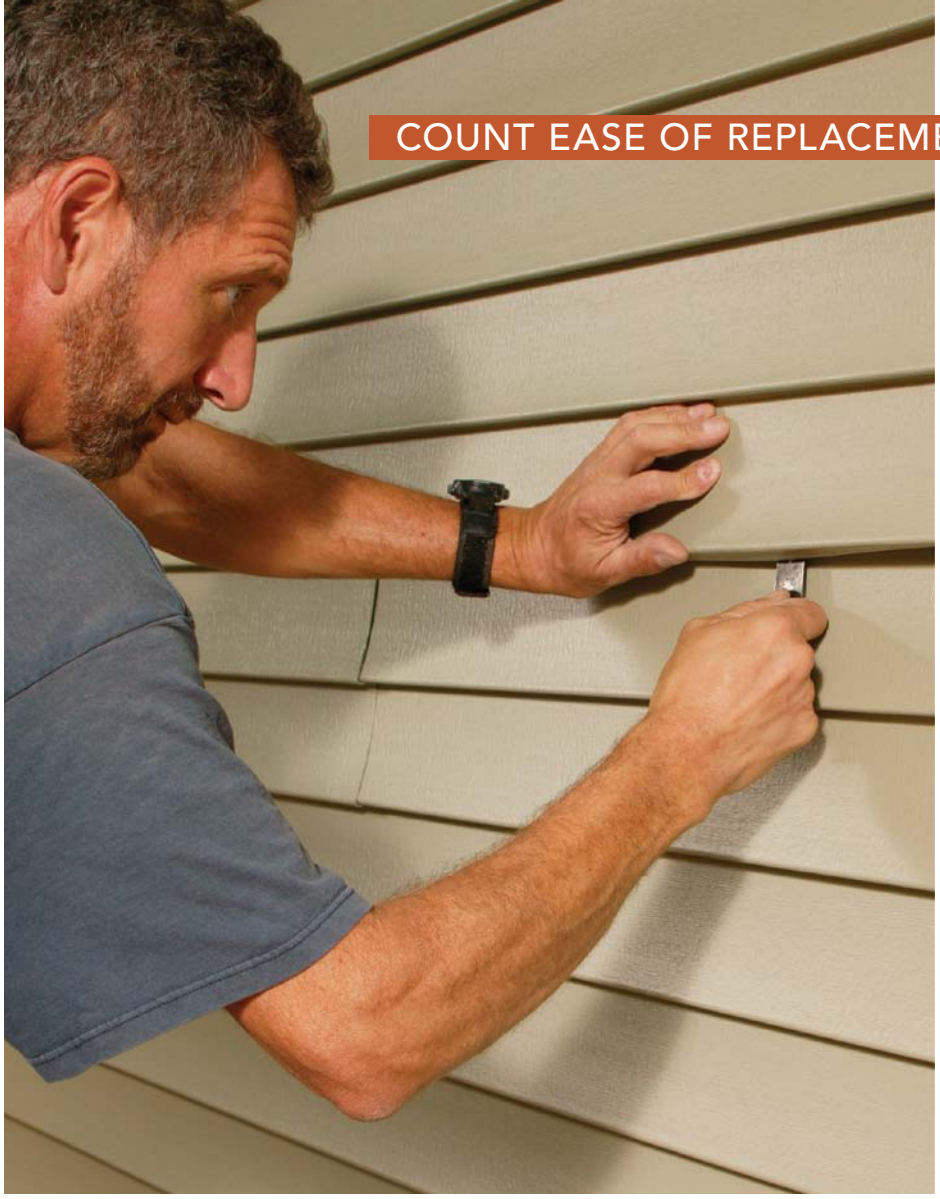
Flush Cut Adapter (FCA-007)
from Paws Off Tools ($40)

Sawblade handle
from Milwaukee and others ($10)



Drill and face-nail. *The new plank needs to be cut about ¼ in. shorter than the space to allow ⅛-in. caulk joints at the butts. Because it's hard to lift the plank above high enough to drive a nail beneath the overlap, replacements are face-nailed. To make the process fast and less destructive, drill holes for each nail in both the new plank and the one above to make sure the top edge of the new plank is held in place.*

Tool photos, this page and facing page: Dan Thornton



COUNT EASE OF REPLACEMENT AS ONE OF VINYL'S BENEFITS

Each vinyl panel is nailed along the top, and its bottom edge is interlocked with the top of the panel below. Use the same tool to disengage the damaged panel and to reassemble the replacement. Once the panel's nailing strip is exposed, I pull the nails, remove the panel, and insert the new piece.

Vinyl-siding removal tool from Malco or Wiss ($6)

First, unzip the panel above. *Using a hook at the end of the removal tool, pull down and out while sliding the tool sideways. Once the bottom is unlocked, the rest of the panel can be pulled up and out of the way with a length of housewrap tape. Pry out the nails holding the damaged panel, disengage the bottom edge with the removal tool, and remove the panel.*

An overlay option

Vinyl also can be patched temporarily with an overlay that covers the damage. From a long-enough piece, cut the hem off the top and the upturned edge of the butt lock. The patch slips beneath the butt-lock joint above, and the bottom overlaps the joint below. Drill and snap two pop rivets into the butt lock at the bottom to hold the piece in place.

Trim the tab and install the new panel. *If the replacement needs to be trimmed to length, make relief cuts at the top hem and butt lock to match a factory-cut end. Then slip the lap end beneath the adjacent panel and snap the butt lock into the hem below. Hammer two nails into the center to keep the panel from shifting side to side, then drive additional nails 16 in. to 24 in. apart. Nail heads should be set 1⁄16 in. to 1⁄32 in. proud to allow the panel to expand and contract. After the replacement is nailed, use the same unlocking tool to engage the butt lock by pulling down on the tool and pressing the panels together while sliding along the joint.*