Two styles of Cornice Return

Framing this classic detail is easier than you think

BY JOHN CARROLL

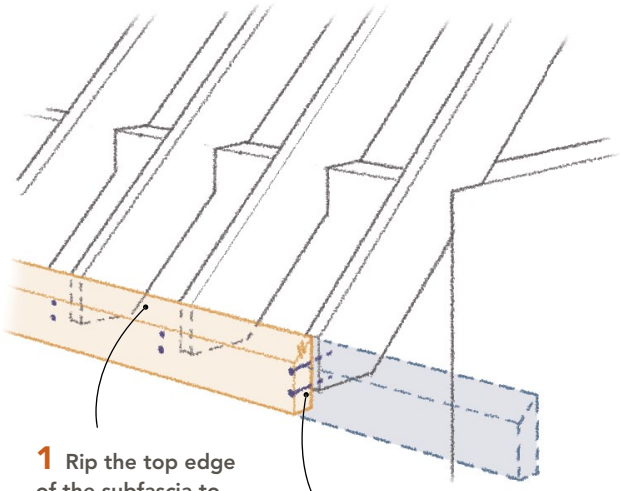
It's been said that the building of traditional cornice returns is a lost art. Also called an eave return, a cornice return is a graceful way to transition the eave and the main fascia board around the gable end of a house. This can be challenging because the returns are located outside the corner boards, which means they require additional structural support. But there are ways to ensure they are sound. Anchoring the ledger and subfascia several feet into the length of the eave is key. You will also want to make sure the ledger and subfascia extend to the end of the rake; this can be done by installing them long and cutting them in place. It's also smart to build the return before you install the barge rafter.

All of this involves more work than framing a basic rake or a pork chop return, but the results are worth it. Once you get the hang of the underlying cornice structure, you have some options for how to finish it. Here, we'll walk through two different styles. □

John Carroll is author of *The Complete Visual Guide to Building a House* (The Taunton Press, 2014).

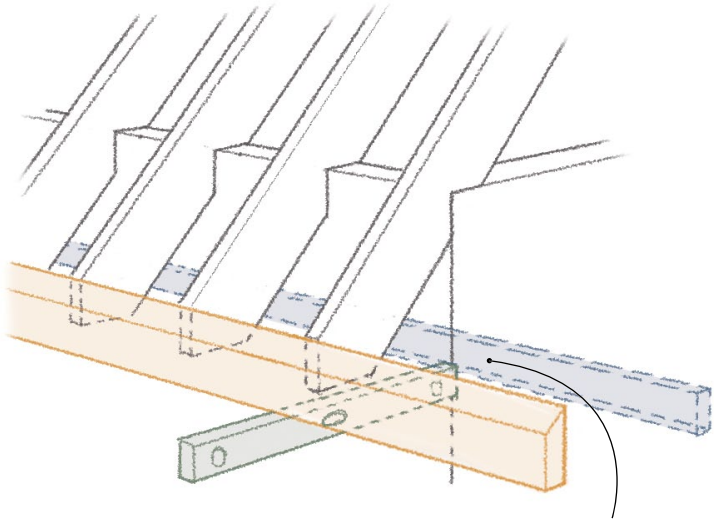
Both designs start with structural support

Whether you are framing a cornice return capped with a hip roof or a shed roof, the first step is to install the subfascia and the ledger. Run both boards long and cut in place.

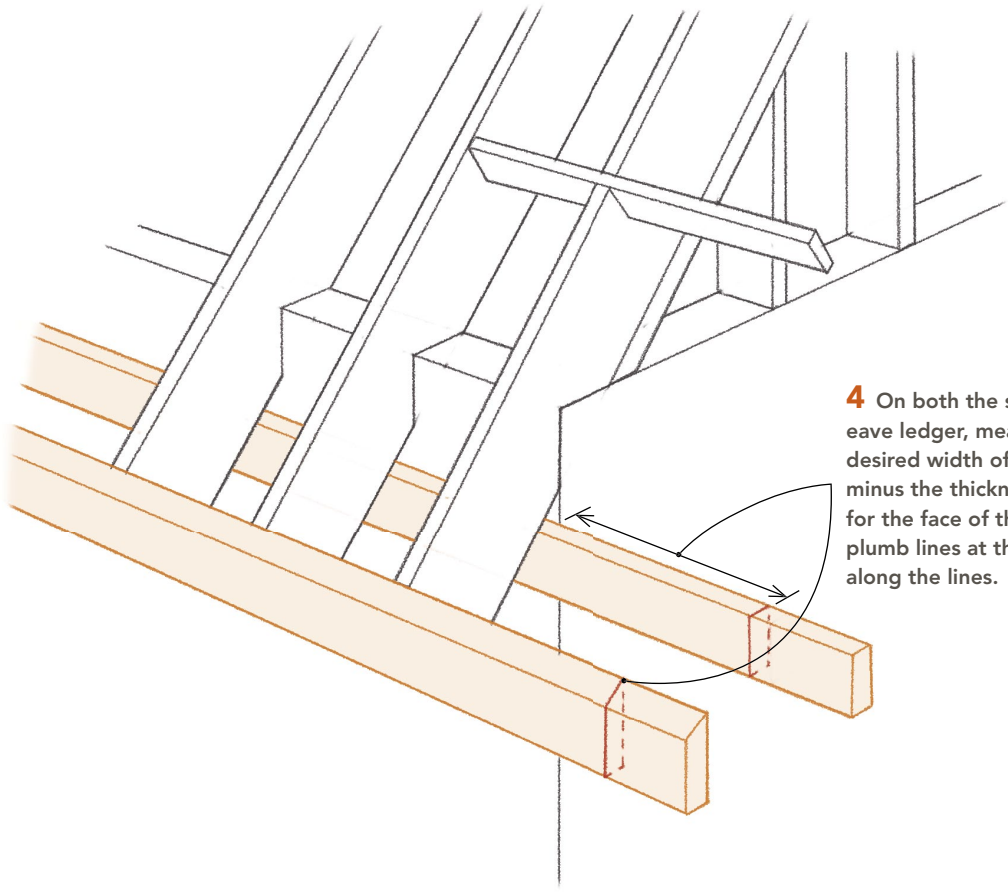


1 Rip the top edge of the subfascia to match the slope of the roof.

2 Secure the subfascia with two 12d or 16d nails at each rafter.



3 Level over from the bottom of the subfascia and mark both ends of the wall. Strike a chalkline between the marks, then nail the eave ledger along the line.

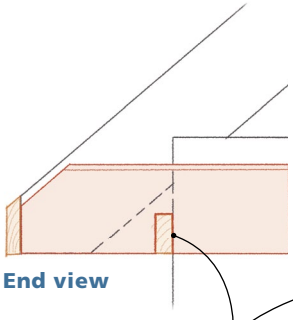


4 On both the subfascia and the eave ledger, measure and mark the desired width of the rake frame, minus the thickness of the subfascia for the face of the return. Scribe plumb lines at these points and cut along the lines.

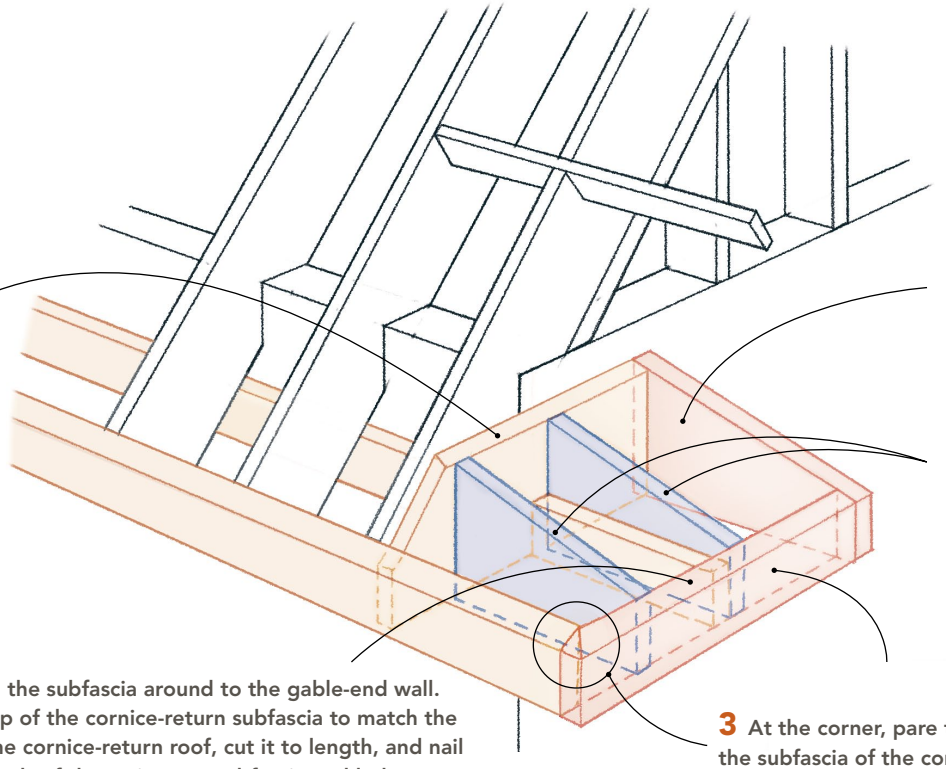
Drawings: Chuck Lockhart. Photo: John Gruen.

Shed-capped cornice return

A shed-capped return starts with both the ledger and the subfascia in place before the rafters. Installing these members level is critical to prevent headaches with trim.



End view



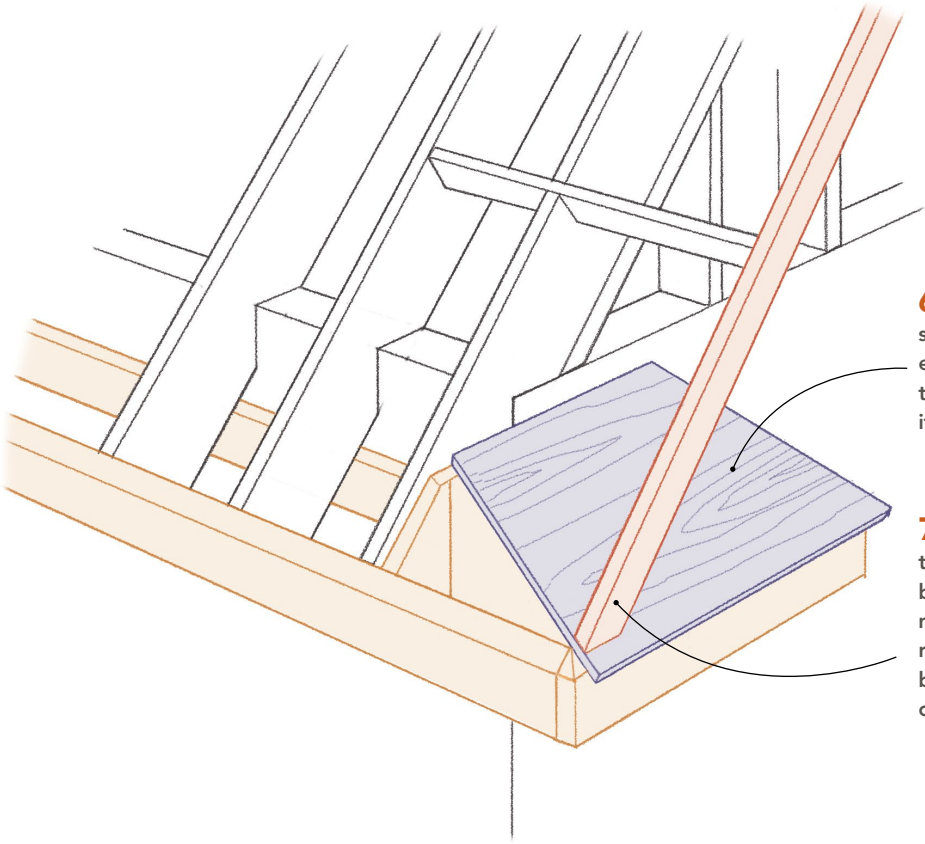
1 Notch the cornice-return ledger over the main eave ledger. Rip the top of the cornice-return ledger to match the desired pitch of the cornice-return roof. The ledger must extend from the outside end of the return over to the subfascia of the eave.

2 Extend the subfascia around to the gable-end wall. Rip the top of the cornice-return subfascia to match the pitch of the cornice-return roof, cut it to length, and nail it to the ends of the main-eave subfascia and ledger.

3 At the corner, pare the bevel of the subfascia of the cornice return to make it even with the bevel of the subfascia of the main eave.

4 Cut two or three return rafters at an angle that matches the desired pitch of the cornice-return roof.

5 The outside piece has to be 3 in. longer than the other pieces to allow it to overlap both the cornice-return ledger and the cornice-return subfascia.



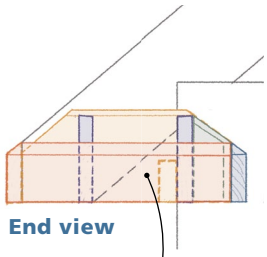
6 Cut and install the sheathing so that it doesn't extend past the plane of the main roof deck, and nail it to the rafters.

7 After making the top plumb cut on the barge rafter, mark a level cut for the bottom. Set your saw to a bevel that matches the pitch of the cornice-return roof, and cut along the line. Nail the barge rafter to the ridge, lookouts, and cornice-return roof.

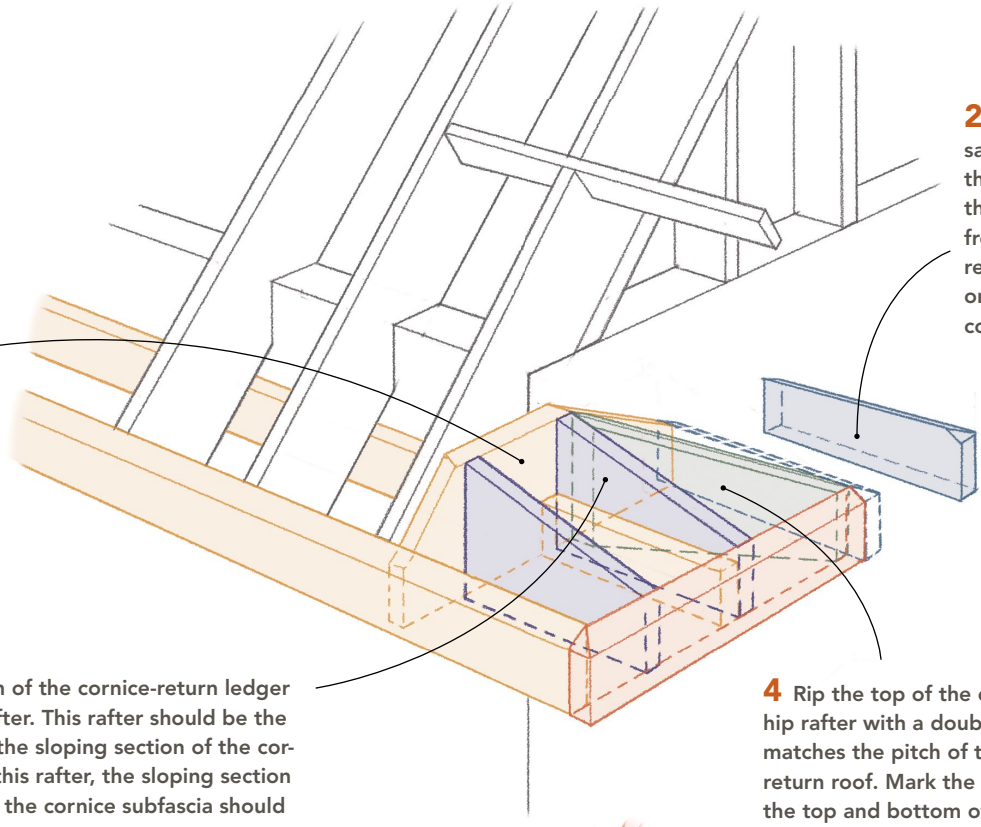
Photos: left, John Gruen; right, Justin Fink

Hip-capped cornice return

The sequence of building a hip-capped return is similar to the shed cap, but the hip on the outside end requires a change to the cornice-return ledger and subfascia, as well as a hip rafter.



End view

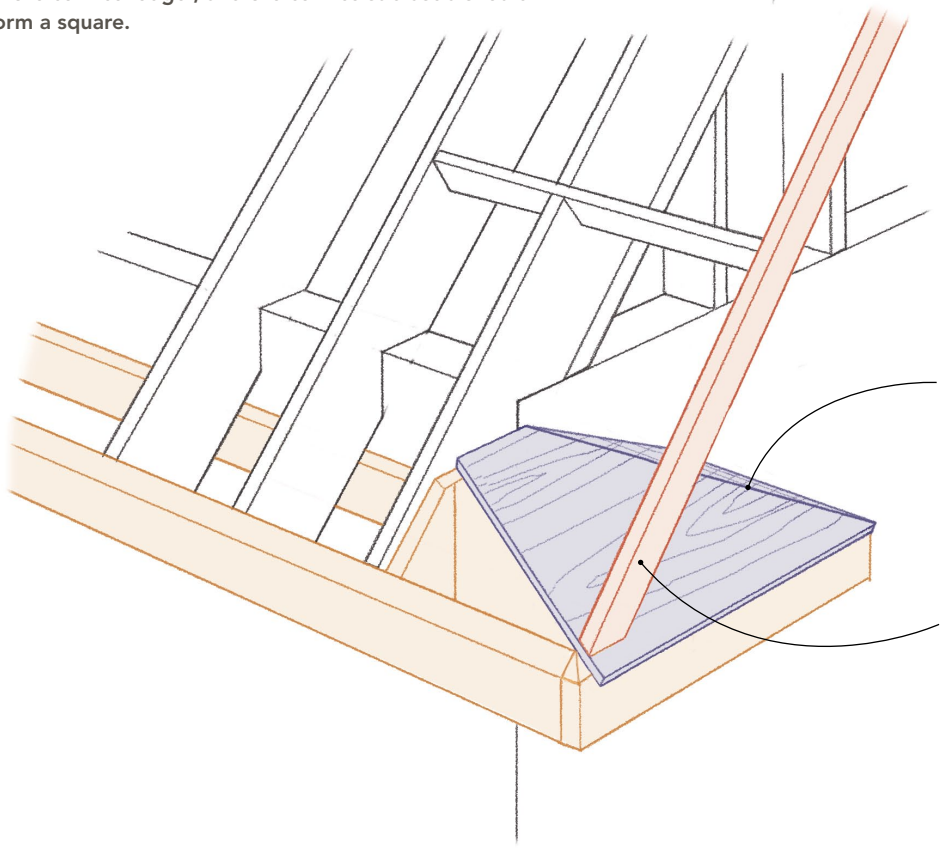


1 Lay out and cut the cornice-return ledger just like a shed-capped return, but with the outside end cut at the same slope as the common rafters in the cornice return.

2 Rip a piece the same size and with the same bevel as the subfascia on the front of the cornice return, and install on the end of the cornice return.

3 Where the level section of the cornice-return ledger ends, install a common rafter. This rafter should be the same length and pitch as the sloping section of the cornice ledger. In plan view, this rafter, the sloping section of the cornice ledger, and the cornice subfascia should form a square.

4 Rip the top of the cornice-return hip rafter with a double bevel that matches the pitch of the cornice-return roof. Mark the plumb cuts at the top and bottom of the hip, then set your saw to a 45° angle. Cut a double bevel at both ends of the hip.



5 Cut the hip sheathing to be in plane with the main roof deck and nail it to the rafters.

6 Install the barge rafter using the same method used for the shed cap.