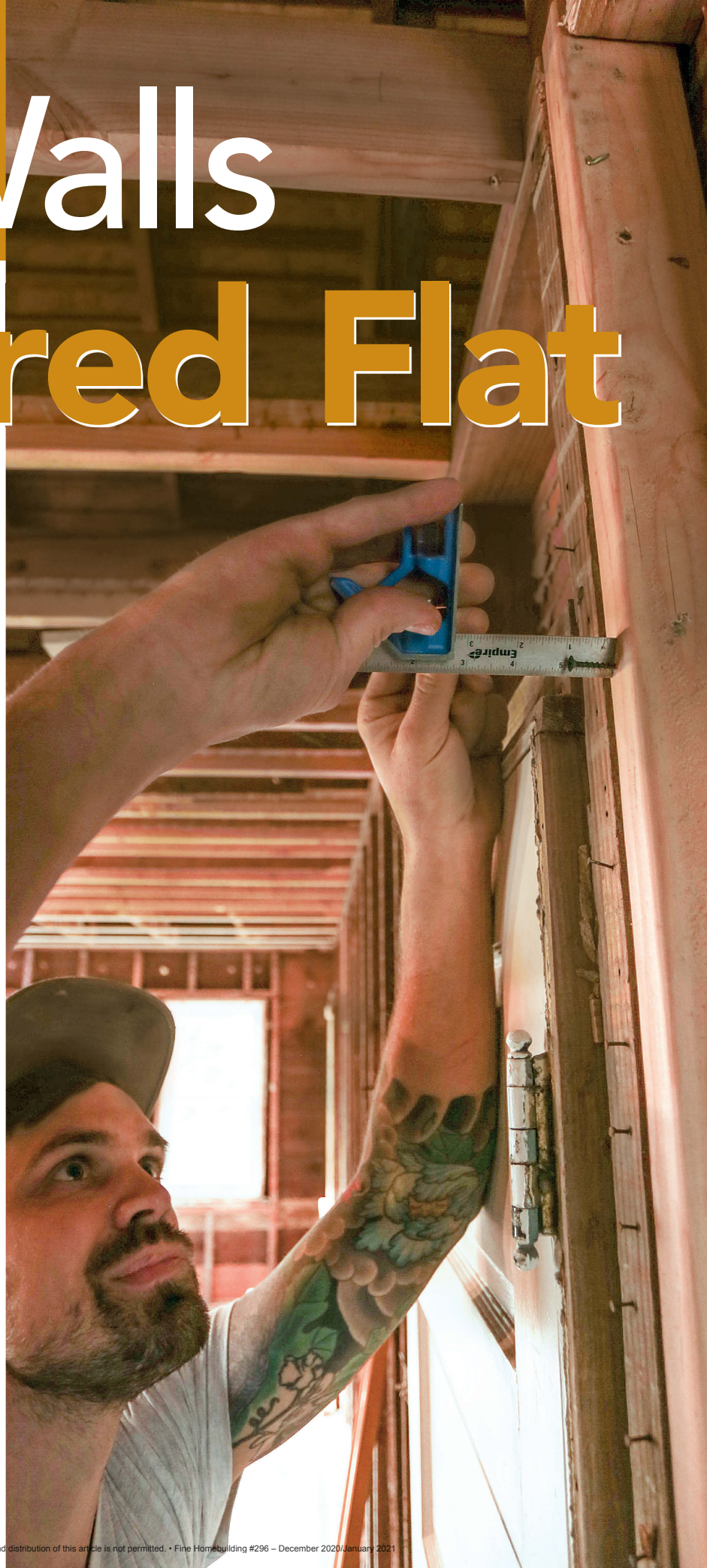
Old Walls Furred Flat

A fast, foolproof method for dealing with problematic framing or depth differences when remodeling

BY TYLER GRACE

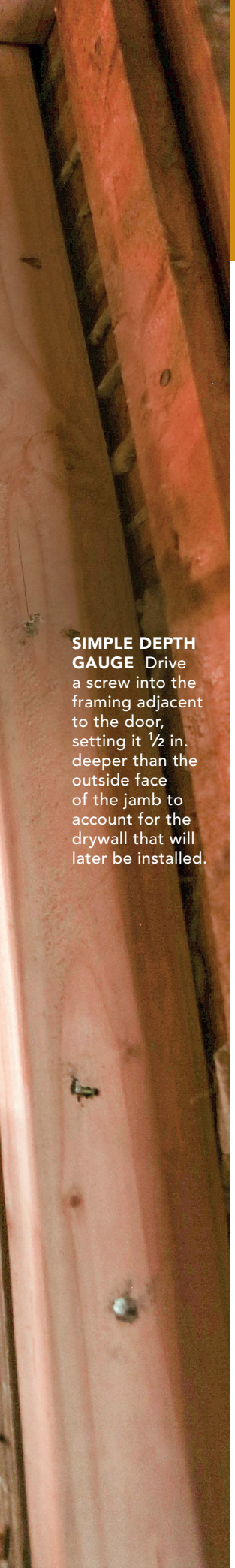


Most of the remodels my company does are in older homes with lath and plaster as the finished wall surface. Many times the scope of work is extensive, and requires us to gut those walls to add utilities or insulation, or simply to start fresh. Often the existing door and window jambs are being left in place, so we have to account for the difference in depth between the old ¾-in.- to 1-in.-thick plaster being removed and the new ½-in. drywall that will be replacing it. Since this means padding out the framing a bit, we take that opportunity to also correct any inconsistencies in the old framing.

Our method of establishing plumb and flat relies on drywall screws as depth gauges, which we like because they're easy to fine-tune with the guidance of a laser plumb line. Although it would take longer, you could do this work using a long level in place of the laser.

Of course, this method can be useful for flattening walls and ceilings in any house, regardless of whether the interior was plaster—but in my experience, if a home is old enough to have lath and plaster walls, it is typically old enough to have settled, bowed, and moved. Taking into consideration the fact that we have to pad the wall out to make up for the difference between lath and plaster and drywall, I prefer to kill two birds with one stone by sistering new studs to the existing wall studs and ensuring everything is flat. □

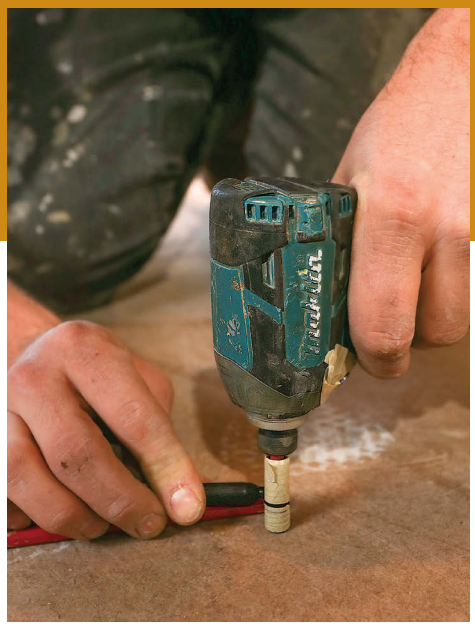
Fine Homebuilding ambassador Tyler Grace is a remodeler in Medford, N.J. Photos by Justin Fink.



SIMPLE DEPTH GAUGE Drive a screw into the framing adjacent to the door, setting it ½ in. deeper than the outside face of the jamb to account for the drywall that will later be installed.

THE JAMBS SET THE DEPTH

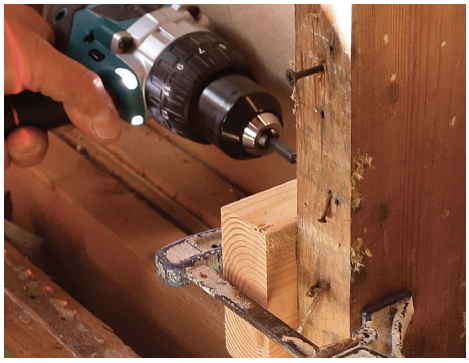
Since new drywall will be thinner than the plaster and lath it's replacing, and everything needs to flush out with the existing window and door jambs, the furring and flattening process starts at the jambs and works backward.



MAKE A MARK Place the open end of a tape-wrapped bit holder against a piece of scrapwood, hold a felt-tipped marker against it, and gently pull the trigger. As the bit holder spins, the marker creates a bold reference line. (The line's location on the holder doesn't matter.)

ORIENT THE LASER With the bit back in the holder, position the drill as if you were driving the screw while a helper sets up a plumb laser line at the other end of the wall. Adjust the laser line until it aligns with the mark.

SINK ADDITIONAL SCREWS Without moving the laser, drive another screw near both the top and bottom of that same stud, stopping when the mark on the bit holder aligns with the laser.



BLOCKS LOCK IT IN After repeating the process on the other end of the wall, set blocks alongside the studs at each screw position. Set the face of the blocks in plane with the screwheads, and use a clamp to ensure they don't drift off the mark while being fastened.

STRETCH STRINGS Next, set up a pair of taut stringlines—one between the two upper blocks, and another between the two lower blocks—to guide the placement of the new studs.

ADD NEW STUDS Working as a pair, hold a new stud along each existing stud, adjusting its position at the top and bottom until each end is a whisker shy of the stringline before tacking each end in place with a framing nail.

CHECK YOUR WORK With all the new studs tacked in place, hold a long level across the wall and check for gaps, adjusting as needed. Then remove the blocks, replace them with studs, and completely fasten each new stud in place.