Built-ins,

A DEDICATED SPACE FOR EVERYONE

1. Coats can be hung from pegs. The cabinet sides are drilled for adjustable shelves, and they can be fitted with a closet pole.

2. Adjustable shelves offer space for items used less often. The shelves also can be used to display objects.

3. At 32 in. high, the counter is a convenient place for dropping briefcases, books, keys, and cell phones.

4. Below, a drawer and a pair of doors provide concealed storage.

5. An 18-in.-high seat makes a convenient place to change shoes. Shoe and boot storage is directly below.

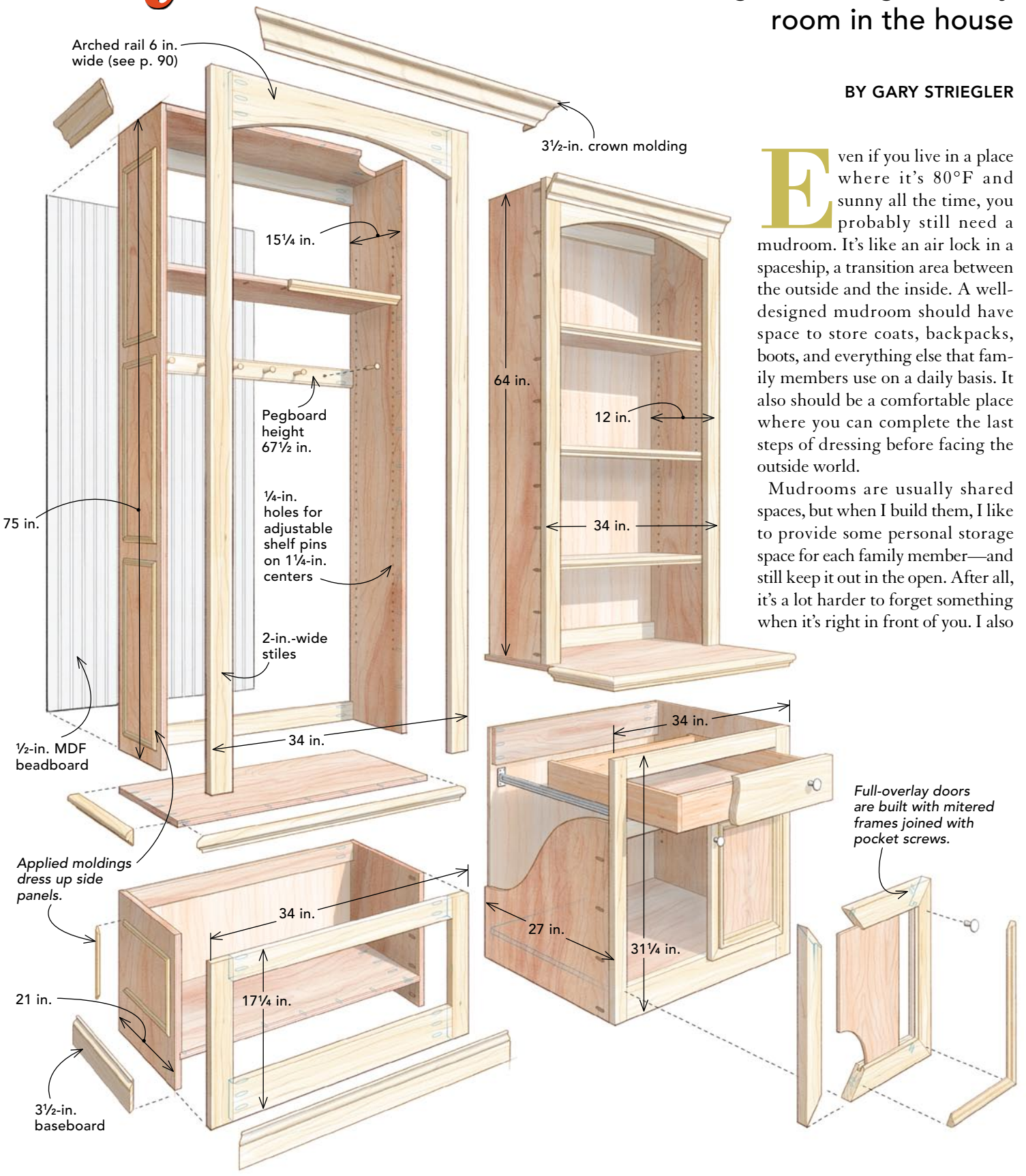
FineHomebuilding.com

See "Built-in Build Off," two methods of constructing mudroom cabinetry.

Anywhere

Outfit a mudroom with functional storage that looks good enough for any room in the house

BY GARY STRIEGLER



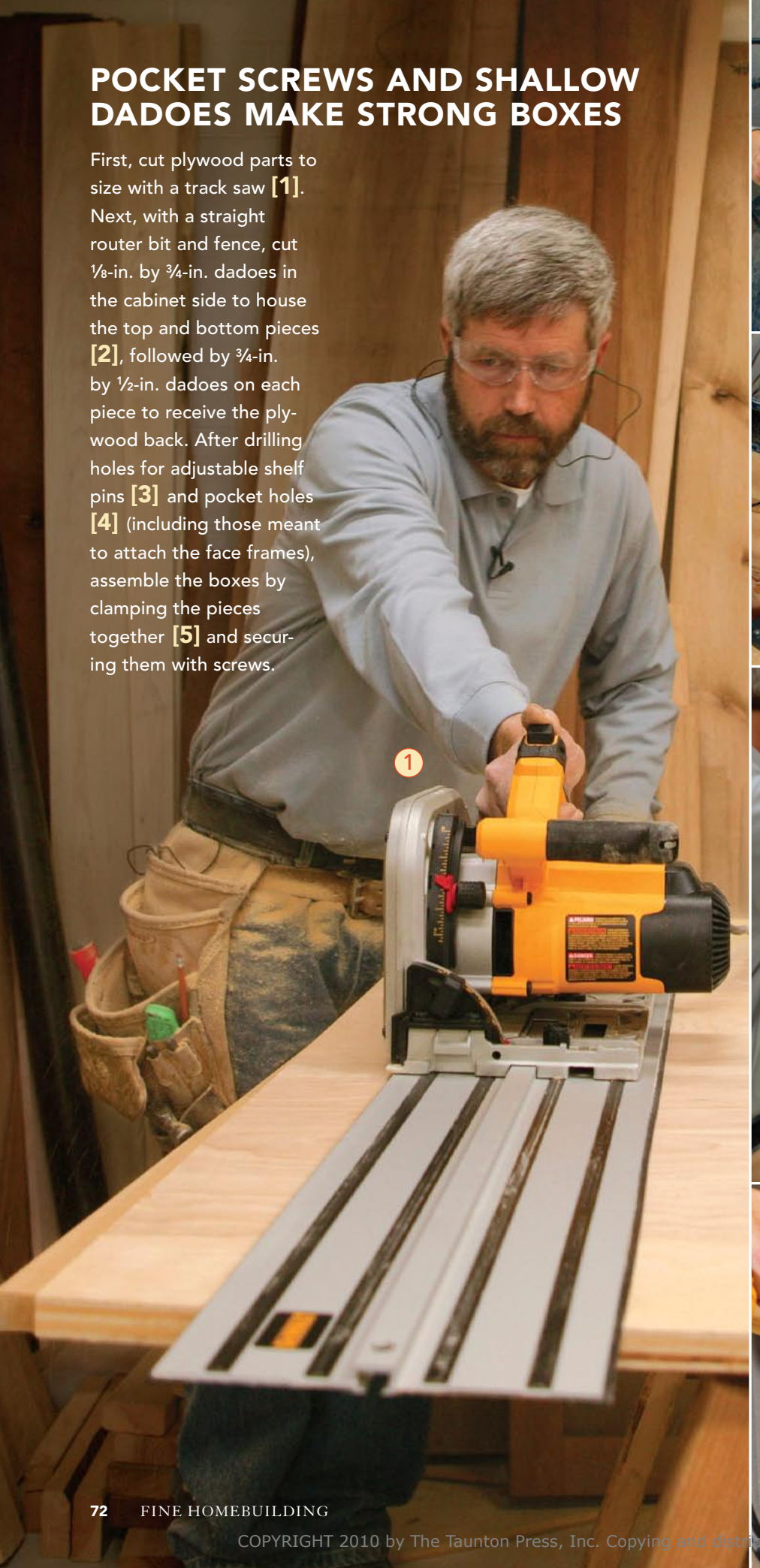
Even if you live in a place where it's 80°F and sunny all the time, you probably still need a mudroom. It's like an air lock in a spaceship, a transition area between the outside and the inside. A well-designed mudroom should have space to store coats, backpacks, boots, and everything else that family members use on a daily basis. It also should be a comfortable place where you can complete the last steps of dressing before facing the outside world.

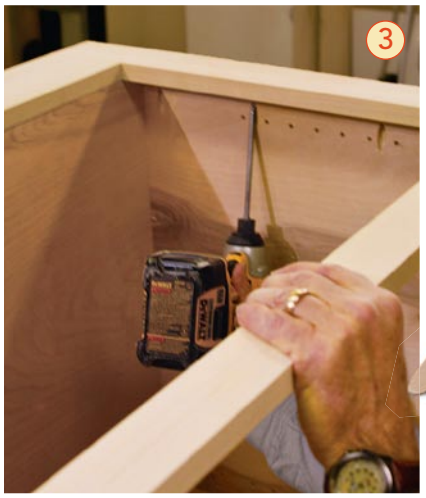
Mudrooms are usually shared spaces, but when I build them, I like to provide some personal storage space for each family member—and still keep it out in the open. After all, it's a lot harder to forget something when it's right in front of you. I also

Drawings: John Hartman

POCKET SCREWS AND SHALLOW DADOES MAKE STRONG BOXES

First, cut plywood parts to size with a track saw **[1]**. Next, with a straight router bit and fence, cut ⅛-in. by ¾-in. dadoes in the cabinet side to house the top and bottom pieces **[2]**, followed by ¾-in. by ½-in. dadoes on each piece to receive the plywood back. After drilling holes for adjustable shelf pins **[3]** and pocket holes **[4]** (including those meant to attach the face frames), assemble the boxes by clamping the pieces together **[5]** and securing them with screws.





think it's important to have some concealed storage for things such as umbrellas that you don't need every day. When shelving is part of my storage design, I make it adjustable. There is no telling what you'll need to store down the road. Finally, I want every mudroom to have some counter space for things like cell phones, keys, and books.

Built in the shop, on site

When I build a cabinet on site, I use the same basic methods that I would use in a shop. I build the cabinet boxes, attach face frames, then screw the boxes to the wall and to each other. To do this, I employ a few special tools to create a mini-shop. My track saw lets me cut sheet goods in a fairly tight space, and because the saw moves instead of the plywood, it's a one-man job. When cutting sheet goods with a tablesaw, I need a total of 20 ft. of space. With a track saw, I need about 10 ft. The only drawback is that I have to measure and mark each piece when I'm making multiple cuts.

When I'm building cabinet boxes, accuracy and strength are important. Kreg Tool Company's Foreman makes fast work of drilling the pocket holes I use for joining cases and face frames (inset photo, facing page). Unlike the company's pocket-screw jig, this machine is self-contained and drills pilot holes with a lever-actuated indexing mechanism. The screws give me a strong joint without a lot of nail holes on the sides of the cabinet, and they pull the joints tight without clamps. Pocket-screw joints are more efficient than biscuit joints because you machine only one of the two pieces being joined. There are no problems with alignment and there's no clamp time. As soon as the screw is driven, I can move to the next step.

My miter saw sits in a homemade stand that has wide outfeed surfaces and a built-in clamp to hold my work if I need to use the stand as a secondary workbench. Most important, it has an adjustable-stop system so that I can make accurate repetitive cuts of face-frame and door parts.

Most cabinet shops are set up around a large tablesaw and a heavy-duty planer. Because all my lumber is surfaced before it comes to the job site, I need only a portable planer to remove sawkerfs from the edges of the lumber after it is ripped. (Always remember to rip pieces about ⅛ in. wider than you need so that the edges can be cleaned up.) A small tablesaw will do everything that I need done on the job site as long as I pair it with a good outfeed table that doubles as my main workbench.

Installing square boxes in an unsquare world

The installation process marries the measured geometry of the boxes to the often irregular condition of the room. If you are setting upper

INSTALL FROM THE GROUND UP

Base cabinets are installed first and should be shimmed level. Marking the location of framing in the wall makes it easier to screw cabinets to the studs. Any hollows in the wall should be shimmed out to prevent distortion of the cabinet backs when the screws are tightened [1]. The first upper cabinet is placed on the base. Note that the base counter is attached to the upper cabinet first so that the exposed joint is as tight as possible. Trim screws join the two cabinets to each other and to the framing [2]. Whenever possible, locate screws behind face frames or other less visible spots. Clamps provide a third hand to keep the joint tight between two cabinets while driving in screws [3]. After the boxes have been assembled, the crown molding, baseboard, and other trim can be installed [4].

and lower cabinets separated by a backsplash, it's almost always easier to set the uppers first. However, in this mudroom, the uppers sit on base cabinets that must be installed first. I always start base-cabinet installation by checking the floor for level. I prefer to set cabinets at the highest corner and then shim everything else up to that point. If I can't start at the highest point, I carry the high point around the room and shim the first cabinet up to it. If the finished floor hasn't been installed, I add shims so that there are no problems when installing appliances after the floor is down.

It's also a good idea to check walls for plumb and to use a straightedge to check for humps. Bows or dips across the face of the wall will wreck a nice straight line of upper cabinets, so the cabinets may have to be shimmed out to keep the front edge straight.

When I cut the backs of cabinets for wiring or electrical boxes, I work from the side that will give the cleanest cut on the visible side. I also make allowances for out-of-plumb walls and factor in the amount of face-frame hangs beyond the sides of the plywood box. Remember, too, that a pilot hole is a great idea if you're screwing face frames together. □

Gary Striegler is a custom builder in Fayetteville, Ark. Photos by Charles Bickford.