

# Custom Curves

## A simple oven to heat PVC trim for on-site bending saves time and money

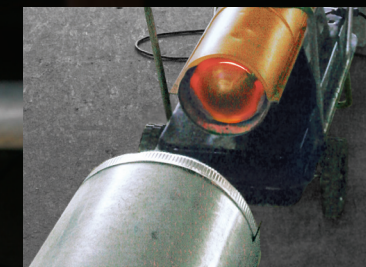
BY JOE FILANOWSKI JR.

**M**y business partner John Costatini and I have been building custom homes for over 25 years, and timing has always been essential when it comes to coordinating our numerous subcontractors. About 8 years ago, we were working on a job that called for exterior PVC trim with significant bends around a turret. Manufacturers can bend trim by warming it in a PVC thermoforming oven, but that would have required at least four to six weeks lead time, and we were on a tight schedule. Custom bending is also expensive; it would have cost \$2200 for the 20 ft. of trim we needed to be shaped. There are special ther-

moforming blankets for trim that allow you to do the bending work on-site, but they over a thousand dollars—a difficult expense to justify unless you plan to use the blanket regularly. Another downside is that the largest blanket available is 10 ft. long and 5 in. wide. While renting might be an option, availability is limited, and rental costs are high. We came to devise our own method for bending trim in order to meet our deadline, and it got the job done well without a major investment.

Joe Filankowski Jr. is a co-owner of J&J Custom Builders in Milford, Conn. Photos by Aaron Fagan.

## IMPROV OVEN



Our oven is simply a Master torpedo heater (155,000 Btu) aimed into lengths of 14-in.-dia. metal HVAC duct propped up on concrete blocks. Scrap stone or brick can be used to brace the duct from rolling. Inside the duct, lengths of fiber-cement siding are suspended by 24-in.-wire batt supports running through the diameter at regular intervals. A piece of plywood at the opposite end of the duct confines the heat to the duct.



# TEMPLATING AND PREP

An advantage of templating and bending on site is that the contour is taken directly from where it will be installed, and if there is any unforeseen error, you can simple modify it and try again without the added time and expense such a mistake would cost by going through a manufacturer.



**Storyboarding.** After tracing the contour from where the trim will be installed, the plywood template is cut and then secured to the subfloor for further templating.



**Block party.** Predrilled 2x4 blocks are secured to the subfloor at regular intervals to match the curvature along the edges of the plywood template.



**Crown heights.** The original plywood template is taken away, and plywood strips that match the height of the crown are installed against the 2x4 blocking.



**Plenty of room.** After the surrounding area is cleared, drivers are set within reach, and 2x blocks loaded with screws are staged for bracing the crown once it's in place.



**Load when ready.** The oven is preheated for about five minutes before loading the trim. Depending on the outside temperature, it can take 30 minutes to an hour to get the trim up to a bendable temperature.



# THE BIG BEND

The trim will remain at a pliable temperature for less than 30 seconds after it comes out of the oven, so it's critical to have the template staged and to have extra hands for securing the trim in place.



**Learning curve.** A few pokes and lifts with a stick are enough to see if the trim is noodlelike enough to bend. Of the various types of PVC trim, the more-open cellular varieties, like the Kleer pictured here, tend to bend the easiest.

**Assembly line.** The team sets the trim on the subfloor, pushes it tight against the form, and secures it with regularly distributed blocks.



**Rest after baking.** Even though the trim hardens in less than 30 seconds, it's given 10 minutes to cool thoroughly in the form before being removed for installation.

