Drywall Upgrades

Build arches, wainscot, and other architectural details with scrap drywall and specialty trim

Drywallers usually try to hang as much drywall as they can, as fast as they can. After more than 20 years of fast-paced production work, though, I wanted to work smarter, not harder. Instead of worrying that anything that slowed the job down would end up costing money, I began to realize that smaller, more complicated jobs could actually be more profitable, as well as less physically demanding.

At about the same time that I was having these thoughts, drywall tools, materials, and techniques began to change. Twenty years ago, for example, my supplier carried only one type of corner bead; now, ordering corner bead can be more complicated than ordering a cup of coffee at one of those specialty shops. But that's okay, because I've made drywall upgrades using these corner beads and other types of architectural trim something of a specialty.

Arched entries, tray ceilings, wainscot, and other details differentiate my work from that of my competitors. They're also reasonably priced and use up a lot of scrap drywall that would otherwise end up in the landfill — 12 percent of new construction drywall is wasted during installation, according to some estimates.

This kind of work requires an educated customer, however. Contractors usually don't give much thought to drywall; to them, it's just a plain surface that fills in the spaces between windows and doors. And decorative drywall isn't the first thing new homeowners think of when they consider upgrading their house's finishes — probably because they don't realize that, for the same $10,000 they might spend for a new solid surface countertop, they could get all the upgrades shown in this article, with money left over.

by Myron Ferguson

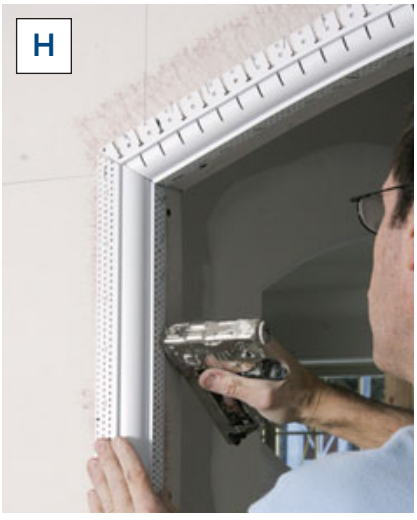
Arches

Drywall arches look elegant but don't take that long to build, since they don't require special framing or plywood. I just rough out the opening, hang the drywall so that it overlaps the opening by the necessary amount, and then cut the drywall to the shape of the arch.

When there are low ceilings and multiple entryways with different sized openings, I like to use segmented arches, since the arches can be made with the same spring line and rise. Elliptical arches can also have the same spring line, rise, and finished opening height, but some types of corner bead are difficult to bend along the tightly radiused areas of the arch.

To calculate the arch radius of a segmented arch, I use the formula $R = [x^2 + (y/2)^2]/2x$, where x = rise and y = width of opening. Then I carefully lay out the arch on each side of the wall. As I cut the drywall to the shape of the arch, I bevel the edge to accommodate the profile of the bullnose bead **(A)**. Scraps of 2x4 blocking screwed to the drywall **(B)** act as backing for the strip of drywall used to finish the arch **(C)**.

Like most of the plastic decorative drywall trim I use, this bullnose bead comes from Trim-Tex (800/874-2333, trim-tex.com), whose products are well-stocked by my local supplier. There are other companies that produce plastic, metal, and tape-on trims, including Strait-Flex (888/747-0220, straitflex.com), USG (800/873-4968, usg.com), and Pla-Cor (800/441-2724, pla-cor.com), and many big-box stores and lumberyards now offer a limited selection of bullnose and cove-style cornerbead, along



Arches continued

with standard metal corners and vinyl J and L bead profiles.

A good fit at the miters is important, so I use a jig to hold the flexible bead in position when cutting it with a miter saw **(D)**. Archway beads are usually segmented so that they can flex, but because this bullnose profile has a stepped reveal edge on either side of the bullnose, it also has a sliding two-part design. To help position the bead, I mark the location of the edge of one leg of the bead on the drywall **(E)**.

Using the spring line that I've drawn on the wall for reference, I fit the top arch beads first, fastening them in place with Trim-Tex 847 contact spray adhesive **(F)** and ½-inch Duo-Fast staples **(G)**. The vertical beads can be a little short, so I fit them last and make small adjustments with the miter for a good fit **(H)**.

To finish the arch, I use regular drying-type joint compound **(I)**, filling in the slots in the bead with a hand tool shipped with the stepped bullnose profile **(J)**. I apply the first coat of compound with the small tool, then sand the bead lightly before applying the next two coats of thinned compound with a paint brush, again sanding lightly between coats. After priming, I fill in any gaps with latex caulk.

I used 16 feet of Trim-Tex ¾-inch radius Step A Bull arch bead and 32 feet of ¾-inch radius Step A Bull bead to build the arch shown here (K). I charge a premium price for arches, typically about $200, even though they require only about $15 of specialty bead and three hours of labor to build.

Tray Ceilings

A tray ceiling doesn't involve any complicated framing, yet the low-profile change in plane adds a lot of interest to an average-height ceiling. I start by snapping lines around the ceiling perimeter to outline the soffit area. I install 2x2 furring screwed through the drywall into the framing and fasten scrap drywall to the furring **(A)**.

This soffit can then be finished with different tray-ceiling bead profiles, depending on the style of the room. To match the milled look of the previously installed archways, for example, I used Trim-Tex's 1½-inch Step A bullnose bead, which has a ¾-inch radius and 3/16-inch-deep steps on either side of the bullnose **(B)**. This deep bead profile requires an extra layer of drywall to lower the soffit edge a total of 2½ inches.

For a more contemporary look, a good option is Trim-Tex's simple beveled tray bead, which also requires a 2½-inch-deep soffit **(C)**. With this trim, I apply adhesive caulk to the top edge before fastening the bead, then caulk the joint again before finishing the soffit. Instead of simply taping the joint around the perimeter of the room where the wall meets the soffit, I sometimes add strips of drywall here, then finish them with chamfer stop bead or some other type of L-bead.

Before fastening the bead in place with staples, I spray adhesive along the mud legs of the bead **(D)**. After

Tray Ceilings continued

the bead is installed, I give the tray a typical mud-and-tape three-coat drywall finish **(E,F)**.

Depending on the design, I typically charge between $12 to $15 per linear foot for a tray ceiling. I use roughly seven or eight 2x4s ripped into 2x2s to frame the soffit in a 14-foot by 15-foot room; about 120 square feet of scrap drywall to cover it; and five 10-foot strips of tray ceiling bead to finish it. The entire process — furring out the soffit, hanging the drywall, attaching the bead, and compounding and sanding the tray — takes about six and a half hours of labor.

In this room, I also applied a Venetian plaster finish to the ceiling, another drywall upgrade I offer **(G)**. Venetian plaster is a troweled and burnished finish that gives drywall more depth and texture; I currently charge about $12 per square foot for this type of finish.

Wainscot

Drywall wainscot can be as plain or as ornate as the budget allows — either way, it doesn't require any blocking or backing, making it a simple upgrade. Another advantage is that wainscot built with drywall and corner bead is very stable and won't move, shrink, or crack the way traditionally built wainscot can.

To begin, I snap layout lines, then screw (where there are studs) and glue (where there aren't) strips of ½-inch drywall cut to fit **(A)**. I tape the seams with fiberglass mesh tape before attaching the beads with spray adhesive and staples **(B)**.

I use different trim profiles and combinations to create different styles **(C, D)**. In this example, each wall section is framed with one panel. I did it that way because the spacing of the electrical boxes and heating ducts made it impossible to divide the walls into the evenly spaced panels you'd see with a traditional wainscot design **(E)**.

Depending on the complexity of the layout, I charge between $12 and $20 a lineal foot for wainscot. For the design in this 14-foot by 15-foot bedroom, I charged $15 per lineal foot (to account for the extra work required around an outside corner) for 58 lineal feet of wainscot, or $870. Materials included about 60 square feet of scrap drywall, about 88 lineal feet of decorative L-bead (Trim-Tex #681, used for the chair rail), 142 lineal feet of ½-inch chamfer stop bead (#9530, wrapping the inside edge of each panel), and 8 lineal feet of chamfer bead (#950, used on the outside corner), all with a total cost of about $70. It took about eight hours to build, tape, and sand the design.

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