

# 5 TRIM-IT-YOURSELF TIPS

Installing your own trim, moulding and baseboard is one of the most profitable do-it-yourself home improvement ventures you can take on because it lets you save so much cash. Winter is the time we Canadians are most likely to tackle trim installation, and with the right preparation you'll enjoy creative control and personal satisfaction of the sort that money can't buy. Whatever your motivation, here are five tricks that make all the difference.

## **TRICK #1: MARK ALL CUTS WITH A KNIFE**

The sharp tip of a fresh utility knife blade makes a consistently thin, crisp, straight mark that's easy to follow accurately with a saw. Pencils don't work as well because they never stay sharp. Place a piece of

*// ...with the right preparation you'll enjoy creative control & personal satisfaction of the sort that money can't buy. //*

trim in position where you want it to go, then use the tip of the blade to make a mark. When it comes time to cut your trim, shine a strong light on the wood and sneak up to the knife mark with several shallow cuts until you're right on the waste side of the line.

## **TRICK #2: USE A MITRE SAW WITH THE RIGHT BLADE**

A mitre saw is essential for cutting trim accurately to your layout lines, but it's only as good as the blade it spins. Don't



*A mitre saw is the ideal tool for making trim and moulding easier to install. Here one end of 7 pieces of trim have been cut to an angle in preparation for marking and final cutting of the second ends.  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell*

attempt any trim installation job without a fine-toothed carbide blade at your disposal. Expect to spend \$80 to \$100 for a great blade that'll last years with regular, professional sharpenings.

## **TRICK #3: SHIM THE TRIM**

It's not unusual to have to custom-cut trim joint angles to fit out-of-square doors, windows or wall corners. And while you could do this by tweaking the saw setting one way or the other, sometimes it's easier to simply shim one end of the trim. This rotates the trim slightly relative to the saw, allowing you to tweak angles by a quarter of a degree or less. Cardboard or small wooden wedges placed against the mitre saw fence work great.

## **TRICK #4: ADJUST JOINTS WITH A BLOCK PLANE**

No matter how skilled you are with a mitre saw, sometimes a piece of trim is just a little too long for a specific space. That's better

## FIVE TRIM-IT-YOURSELF TIPS

than too short, because a few strokes with a block plane can make everything perfect. One of the best ways to slightly shorten the effective length of an almost-right mitre joint

“ Pins are roughly the same diameter as a standard sewing needle, so they leave behind marks that virtually disappear after sanding & finishing.

”

is by planing the back surface of trim, not the end. If you need to remove more than just a paper-thickness of wood, plane the joint face itself, but only with the trim fully supported on a solid surface. You want all movement to be only from the plane, with the trim steady as a rock.

### TRICK #5: SECURE TRIM WITH PINS

Twenty-three gauge pins are the latest kind of air-driven fastener, and they combine reasonable strength with an almost invisible entry hole. Pins are roughly the same diameter as a standard sewing needle, so they leave behind marks that virtually disappear after sanding and finishing. The best pinners for trim installation fire 2-inch-long pins that can hold door and window trim as well as full-size crown moulding. For strongest results, apply a little glue on hidden back surfaces of trim before installation.



A utility knife is the best tool for marking trim to length for accurate cutting.  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell



Simple trim in natural wood finishes like this are unique and achievable, even for non-professionals.  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell

Trim Carpentry Techniques by Craig Savage is my favourite book on the subject and it offers more help than I have room for here. He also has a companion DVD that shows how it's all done.

Installing trim is one of the most effective ways to make your house elegant and unique, while saving pretty good money. Doing the work yourself also lets you connect with your home in a way that only a hands-on investment can deliver.

Steve Maxwell, syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist, has shared his DIY tips, how-to videos and product reviews since 1988. Follow "Canada's Handiest Man" at [SteveMaxwell.ca](http://SteveMaxwell.ca), Facebook or @Maxwells\_Tips on Twitter.

**BOSLEY**  
**REAL ESTATE**



Bosley Real Estate Ltd., Brokerage  
ALL OVER TORONTO  
[www.bosleyrealestate.com](http://www.bosleyrealestate.com)