

COLUMNS • **Ron Sussman's a hammer & a nail**

Wallboard shall set you free

I believe it was Edward R. Murrow who once said, "Journalism is the first rough draft of history." Or maybe it was Keanu Reeves. I don't know. But I'm pretty sure somebody said it because journalists are always quoting it as an excuse as to why they get everything wrong. And that brings us to last month's column. Turns out there is no Thrift Savings Dogtrack, or "D" fund, logical as that would seem. But I'm sure the information about investing your retirement funds in Beanie Babies and Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes is spot on. How could it not be?

But enough about economics. This month's topic is wallboard. Since

prehistory, mankind's interior decorator gene has agonized over what to do with the interior walls of the family shelter. Documentaries such as "The Flintstones" teach us that saber-tooth tiger skins were commonly used to cover walls back in the day. Then more recently, the answer has been plaster. Plaster used to be a mixture of calcium oxide (lime), sand and animal hair. Today it's all calcium sulfate (gypsum). Freud called plaster the child's first gift, clean, white, pristine, primordial slop bleached of unpleasant associations. Keanu Reeves said, "Sturdy enough to mock the eons, yet its supple plasticity endears it to the artist, who, with a delight pre-

sumably not unlike that of the shaper of the original clay." Blah, blah, blah. Yes, plaster is fun stuff, but messy as hell, and it takes a lot of experience to smear it on a wall such that visitors will not be forced to stifle laughter.

Happily, for home repair buffs, only a very small number of homes and buildings still have plaster over lath walls. The vast majority of interior walls are made of wallboard. Wallboard, drywall and gypsum board are generic terms for this product. Sheetrock® is not. Wallboard is a sheet of gypsum, usually a half-inch thick, sandwiched between two sheets of thick paper. It's typically sold in four-by-eight-foot sheets, although other sizes are available. If you're not reading this outdoors, you can probably see some now.

The stuff is everywhere. Many people hate wallboard. These are the same people who are always complaining about how much worse things are today. They'll usually cite music as an example, saying music died in the 90s, 80s, 70s, 60s, 50s, or whatever, and spend their time rotting their brains listening only to "classic (sic) rock" stations, or, worse, "oldies" stations, pathetically reliving their probably boring youth...but, I digress.

The problem with wallboard is that it's easy to install, and therefore often installed by people who don't know what they're doing. It's not the material, but the care and attitude with which it's installed.

Wallboard is great stuff. It can easily cover hideous glued-on paneling, or ancient medusa-like wallpaper that's as tough to get off as it is to look at. But it's heavy. A standard sheet of wallboard weighs 58 pounds,

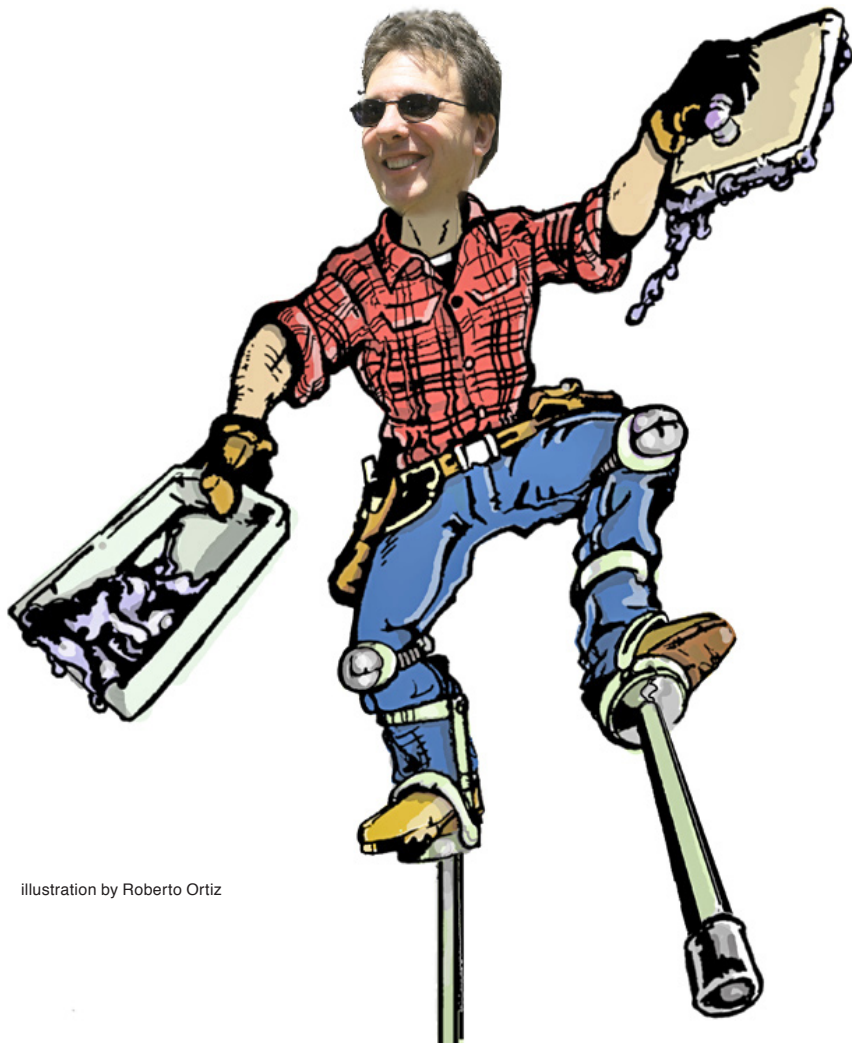


illustration by Roberto Ortiz

see WALLBOARD next page

WALLBOARD from previous page

and all 58 pounds bear down on a narrow band across your fingers as you carry it. So get a buddy to help.

To cut it, all you have to do is score the facing paper with a utility knife and break it across the line. If you have children, they'll be playing kung-fu ninja with the scraps, making a remarkable mess, so get them out of the room so you can play a little kung-fu ninja with the better scraps yourself.

Wallboard can be installed with nails or screws. Screws are better. Nail heads will ultimately pop through the wall making unsightly dimples. Screws won't. Screws hold better, and they install more quickly because to install them you use a drywall screw gun. The screws themselves are self-taping and quite sharp, and they have trumpet-shaped heads so they go right into the drywall slightly below the surface, to the proper depth which is set on the screw gun.

To cover the seams and screw heads, you need joint compound, paper tape

or mesh, and taping knives. Taping knives are spatula-like tools used to smooth the joint compound. Covering the screw heads is easy, just smear some joint compound over the screw and wipe it down with the taping knife. Joint compound shrinks when it dries. 24 hours after you apply it, you will need to lightly sand or sponge and then give it a second coat and perhaps a third coat the day after that. The harder part is the joints. First, put down a layer of joint compound, then embed paper or mesh drywall tape along the seam, then a thin layer of joint compound over the tape. Make it smooth with the knife. The point is to avoid as much sanding as possible when it dries.

For inside corners, do one side of the corner one day, let it dry, and then do the other side of the corner the next. For outside corners, you'll need a wallboard corner bead, which is a perforated metal strip bent into a

V-shape that covers the corner and is then covered with joint compound.

Second and third coats are applied with wider and wider taping knives until the wall surface is perfectly smooth. Wait at least 24 hours between coats for the joint compound to dry. Then the occasional imperfection can be sanded, or sponged off. Sponging is a little slower, but it avoids the clouds of dust sanding generates.

You say you just put your fist through the wall over your inability to meet your production requirements? No problem! Just cut a square around the hole such that the vertical sides of the square run down the middle of the nearest studs so you'll have something to screw to, then cut a piece of wallboard to exactly fit inside the square hole. Screw or nail it into the studs, and tape and joint the seams. Then get back to work and get some cases out. I think it was Neil Patrick Harris who said, "Work shall set you free." Or maybe that was Keanu Reeves. **TM**

food

Here's a recipe of Susan Hayash's mother. She's gluten intolerant, which means she can't have anything made with wheat, rye, oats or barley. As a big baker, she's had to find recipes that work for her that don't use flour or other wheat based products. The following is a great gluten-free peanut butter cookie recipe.

Flourless peanut butter cookies

1 cup Peanut Butter (smooth or chunky)

1 cup sugar

1 egg

1 tsp baking soda

Mix ingredients. Roll into balls & dip into sugar. Squish with fork making a cross.

Use a lightly greased pan or parchment paper.

Bake at 350 degrees for 8 to 10 min or until golden brown. Do not overbake!

