Keep Siding Straight With a

A simple layout tool aligns siding with window and door trim, and helps you to finish where you started

BY LYNN HAYWARD

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DESIGN TIPS

- The siding alignment is critical at the entry and the front elevation, but less so at the back.

- Details at eye level trump those higher up.

- Make fixture blocks and horizontal bands of trim (such as water tables) divisible by the siding reveal. For instance, the width of the band could be 11 in. or equal to two courses of white-cedar shingles.

- When choosing windows that are larger or smaller than the majority, try to pick window heights (including trim) divisible by the siding reveal.

- A wall of windows or vertical siding offers a visual break between sections that won't line up.

- Isolated gables don't need to line up with anything else and can be laid out separately.

S idewall shingles and clapboards have nuances and limitations, but they share the same goals. Besides shedding water and protecting a structure, siding enhances the architectural lines of a house. Each course should run level around the building, align at inside and outside corners, and end where it began.

I like to line up the siding courses with windows and doors. As you can see in the house above, built by John Gagnon of Essex, Conn., this placement not only looks better than courses notched around openings, but it also makes the siding perform better, too. To keep siding courses consistent, my crew uses story poles laid out with marks that represent the bottom of each course. Using the window tops as a reference, I can make story poles for upper floors or for changes in elevation. As long as the pole is referenced from the same point, the course marks can be carried around the entire house to the place where they started.

Over the years, I've learned to designate a single person on the crew to make all the story poles. If many people make the poles, the chances for error skyrocket, and accountability plummets. □

Lynn Hayward has been building in the Camden, Maine, area for more than 30 years. Photos by Daniel S. Morrison.

Story Pole

WINDOW
TOP ↑
UP

BEST PRACTICES

During the closing-in stage, I use a builder's level to install the first-floor windows so that their tops are at exactly the same height; the window tops become the main reference points that we use to make story poles. Based on the window reference points, I can make story poles for the upper levels, gables, or additions.

I make story poles from 8-ft. lengths of 1x2.

I hang the pole from the top of a first-floor window, then mark the location of the bottom of the window trim on the pole.

Next, I measure the height of the space to be sided, then divide by the theoretical reveal.

• **White-cedar shingles: 5½-in. reveal**
• **Red-cedar shingles: 7-in. reveal**
• **Clapboards: 4-in. reveal**

Ideally, I like the courses to line up exactly with the window bottoms. Whenever possible, I adjust the reveals on the pole so that there's no notching over and under windows or doors. For instance, if the 15th course of white-cedar shingles ends up 2 in. above the main row of windows, I reduce the reveals to 5⅜ in. Windows, continuous bands, elevation changes, and rooflines all must be taken into account for the final layout.

Reference blocks help to keep the story straight. After setting the first-floor window tops as the main reference point, we tack small blocks to the inside and outside corners at that height. A short scrap nailed to the pole top lets us hang the pole from the blocks or from the tops of the windows.

It's like having a third hand

With a story pole tacked at each end of a long wall, nails partially driven into each course mark can be used to anchor successive chalklines. I tack a straightedge along the chalkline, arrange an armful of shingles across it, and nail them off. To keep loose shingles from blowing off on windy days, I sometimes stretch a taut string between the nails two courses above the one I'm working on.