

Build a Fireplace Mantel

In this segment of HouseCalls, Ron visited Novi, Michigan, a western suburb of Detroit, where he was asked to drop in on the Coppa family to show them how to create a beautiful handcrafted fireplace mantel. Every existing fireplace design is different. Based on what the Coppas had explained to Ron over the phone, he was able to create a working plan of the project, before he arrived.



1. Remove existing molding:

- The first step was to remove the existing molding that surrounded the fireplace using a pry bar and a wide putty knife to protect the wall.



2. Cut wood for new surround:

- Ron started by cutting out the lengths they needed from standard dimension pine lumber that they got from the home improvement center.
- For this project Ron needed two different types of saws: a power miter box for the crosscutting-- the cuts going across the grain of the wood, and a table saw for the ripping--the lengthwise cuts going along the grain of the wood.



3. Assemble surround:

- They applied wood glue to each set of the three pieces that will make up the sides and the top of the fireplace surround and then they assembled them together.
- Since this project involved a lot of nailing, Ron brought along his pneumatic nail gun and gave the family an introductory lesson in safe handling of the



gun.

4. Attach surround to fireplace:

- They used a stud finder to locate and mark the studs in the wall.
- Next they attached the three pieces of the surround to the fireplace. Ron drew a level line on the wall to put the top of the surround in place first. They held it level and nailed it into the wall studs with the nail gun.
- Next they attached the side of the surround both with nails and with several dots of construction adhesive on the side that goes up against the tile. Since you can't nail into the tile, you need to rely on this glue to hold it in place.



5. Form and attach mantle piece:

- A piece of 1 x 10 pine and a length of decorative molding are combined to form the mantel. The molding is cut at angles with the miter box and then glued and nailed to what will be the underside of the mantle piece. Ron showed us how to set the trim back from the edge of the board about an eighth of an inch along the edge to give an extra bit of detail.
- Apply construction adhesive to the top of the surround pieces, and glue and nail the mantel into place.



6. Add decorative details:

- Using plinth blocks or corner blocks, Ron creates a look that simulates the top and the bottom of a column. These are also nailed with the gun to the top and base of the surround and to the sides.
- Using the miter box, Ron angle cut decorative molding for the face of the surround. To attach the smaller molding, Ron switched to a pneumatic brad nail gun. This gun uses a very fine, almost needle-like nail that will prevent splitting.
- The final touch was to place a piece of decorative



molding between the plinth block and the surround and tack it into place with the brad nailer. These also need to be miter cut at the ends.

7. Spackle, prime and paint:

- Using an interior grade spackle and a putty knife, the Coppas helped Ron fill the nail holes and minor surface imperfections.
- They applied primer coat to the new mantle.
- They finished by applying two coats of paint.



THE RESULTS:

When Ron first arrived, the Coppa's fireplace was flat and uninteresting. With the whole Coppa family involved, this beautiful fireplace transformation took place in just two days! Now they have a place to put photos of their special friends...like Ron Hazelton!



supplies:

- A design or working plan
- Pry bars
- Wide putty knife
- Safety goggles
- Power miter box
- Table saw
- Pneumatic nail gun
- Level
- Pencil
- Stud finder
- Pneumatic brad nailer
- Disposable gloves

Materials:

- Standard dimension pine lumber (as needed for design)
- Wood adhesive
- Nails
- Wood glue
- Construction adhesive
- Decorative molding for under edge of mantle

- Plinth blocks (or corner blocks)
- Decorative molding for facing
- Brads
- Decorative trim between plinth blocks and the surround
- Interior grade spackling compound
- Primer
- Paint