

# How Do You Make ...

## FOAM RUBBER BRICKS

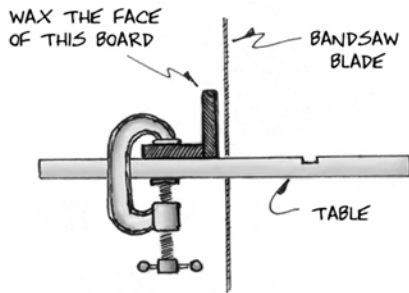
Here is a way of making 3D bricks on a wall with the sort of foam rubber that is used for sofa cushions. It is readily available at fabric stores. This foam product is generally made from *urethane* and is very different from the polystyrene products mentioned in the chapter on working with foam. It is much more bendable. It is possible to purchase vacuformed sheets of hyperrealistic bricks from suppliers, but that plastic is of a rigid type that is problematic for odd shapes. This technique can be used on irregular surfaces with no problem.

If you have a choice, be sure to select the densest foam available. It is more expensive, but it is much easier to work with. To make bricks, you should purchase foam that is 2" thick, as this is about the height dimension of a standard brick. If you are making a stone wall, or some other specific texture, you may wish to select a size that is more appropriate to that project. You will eventually be slicing the foam into pieces that are only  $\frac{1}{8}$ " or so in thickness. It is sometimes possible to find  $\frac{1}{8}$ " foam in rolls, and if so, that type will circumvent a lot of cutting.

You can get an insight into making stage brick texture by looking at real brick walls. Notice that the bricks do not stick out very far past the mortar. In fact, most of the time they hardly stick out at all. On an older structure, the edges of the brick have been softened by time and indeed the entire brick may have small pieces flaked off and other imperfections. It can be difficult to reproduce these features using rigid materials. The foam rubber is really effective, because it is so soft and pliable.

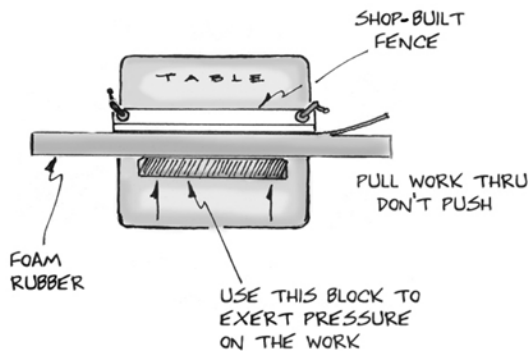
The difficult part of the process is slicing the foam into thin sections. If you do a lot of this work, you may wish to invest in special tools used by upholstery shops to cut and shape foam rubber. They use a blade that may well remind you of an electric carving knife installed on a jig saw, and indeed you can also use a turkey carver to cut foam. However, these do not have the power or industrial strength of the real thing.

You can also use a band saw to do the cutting. The band saw will not make nearly as smooth a cut, but because the bricks look better with a slightly rough texture, that is not generally a problem. You must have a rip fence on the saw in order to make this work. If your saw does not have a rip fence, you can clamp two boards at an angle to the top of the table as a shop-built version. Any type of fence will work better if you wax the face so that it becomes really smooth and creates less drag on the foam. The foam itself is very compressible and difficult to cut on the saw. There is a tendency for the material to bunch up and get drawn through the table of the band saw. Don't even think about cutting foam rubber on a table saw. That will not work.



CONNECT TWO BOARDS AT A 90-DEGREE ANGLE. CLAMP TO TABLE TO MAKE A RIP FENCE.

Some other techniques can help in cutting, considering that you want to make very thin slices of the foam. Set the band saw fence at about  $\frac{1}{8}$ " to  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the blade. This is somewhat variable. If the foam is really dense, you can get away with the thinner size. If the foam is very light, you will most likely not be able to run it that thin. You only need a very thin slice to create the texture of the brick, and thinner slices use less of the material and are easier to work with. Put some tape over the throat plate that covers the hole where the blade disappears into the table to make it smaller.

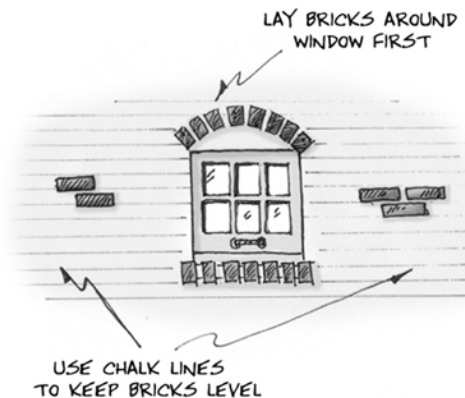


It is important to *pull* the foam through the saw, rather than to try to *push* it through. If you push on the foam it will simply bunch up and jam the saw. Pulling will help to keep that from happening. Use a piece of wood as a guide to keep the foam pressed against the fence as an assistant pulls on it. You will need to practice a few runs to get the feel of what the best feed rate is and how much pressure to use in holding the foam against the fence. Flip the blank over about halfway through, so that you get a new factory edge to work from. At some point, the piece of foam you are cutting from will become too small to work with and will bunch up around the blade no matter how careful you are. If

that leftover is reasonably thin, you may still be able to use it, so don't throw it out. This process is much artier if you have bricks of varying thickness.

When the ripping/slicing work is done you will have lots of thin strips of foam. Some of them will be very clean, and some will have a more textural appearance. This is actually a good thing, because it will make for a more varied appearance to the wall. Use a pair of scissors to cut the strips to the proper length, which for most bricks will be about 8" or so. You will need some half bricks, and perhaps some that are odd shapes around windows and such. These are all easily cut with the scissors. Consult the plans or rendering to determine how the bricks are to be applied.

Use a chalk line to strike even lines across the surface so that you have reference points to work from. If there are brick features like windows, or quoins, or some other irregularly shaped areas, lay them out first.



Apply the foam using regular white or yellow glue. The yellow will set up faster, so pick the kind that is compatible with your working speed. Of course, if the glue dries before you apply the foam, you can always just put more on. If you are working on a large flat

surface, use a roller to apply it. Use a fairly thick coat of full-strength glue. Press the foam bricks down into it so that they are firmly attached. This process can move ahead fairly quickly on a flat wall. If you have pieces of varying thickness, try to get as random a pattern as possible. There will be some pieces with torn holes, and/or extra blobs of foam on them. These are actually the ones that will make the project look really good when it is finished. You can create more of them by bending the foam and slashing it with scissors. Sometimes you can bend the pieces around a corner, but most of the time it makes more sense to use two separate sections—especially because a corner normally reveals an 8" section of one side of a brick and the 4" length of its end.



MISSHAPEN BRICKS ARE OFTEN THE BEST ONES. SPACE THEM OUT RANDOMLY.

Let the glue set up until it is really dry. Check the wall for parts that did not get stuck well, and reattach them with a small bottle of glue. You may need to use the scissors to do some last-minute trimming of parts that stick out too much.

The foam needs some kind of sealer to look good. Actually, the more sealer you glop on, the better the brick will look. Used by itself, the foam will soak up too much paint and will have an odd, spongy appearance. The sealer will cover the seams between parts of bricks and make the mortar lines look more realistic. There are several different products you can use for this process.

One is a type of scenic dope made from drywall mud and glue. Mix the two together with enough water to make it workable. Joint compound is very cheap and this material is very easy to apply. The only problem with it is that it is also somewhat brittle and tends to chip off. Also, it completely wipes out any compress-

ibility that may be gained from using foam rubber to make the original shapes. If you are fitting together various parts of a wall, the fact that the foam can be compressed as the parts fit together can be a big plus in achieving a good fit. If these factors are not an issue, the scenic dope approach will work well.

Sculpt or Coat is a brand-name product available from theatrical suppliers. It will create a heavy, latex-like coat on the surface of the foam. It is very pliable, much like the foam rubber itself. This product is very viscous, and when slathered on in large amounts will do a great job of filling joints and creating a generally rounded over, well-worn sort of appearance. It will not greatly affect the compressibility of the foam.

Elastomeric is a roofing material that is meant to be used in repairing leaky asphalt shingles. It can be found at home centers in the roofing material section. It has a thick, highly viscous nature. It is very important to select a product that is water-based. If it is flammable, it is not a water-based product. Often you may find some versions that are thicker than others, and it is generally best to use the thickest version.



USED FOR LEAKY ROOF

YOU CAN GET ROOF SEALERS IN ONE- OR FIVE-GALLON CANS. THEY ARE RELATIVELY CHEAP.

*Jaxsan* is similar to elastomeric, and it creates a rubbery coating on the brick.

These coatings are very messy, and they are difficult to remove from adjacent surfaces. You should experiment, but it is generally best to use several coats for the greatest effect. Lay the scenery out so that the pieces are abutting one another to apply the coating to ensure a uniform appearance, but separate them before the material begins to harden. It may take quite a while for that to happen.