

The Secret of the Scribe



How cabinetmakers make a crooked room look honest — without forcing the boxes.

THE TRUE LINE

The Secret of the Scribe

A True Line Book
Laid True · Ash's Yard

Written by Bryan Blair
A gift from Valley Tile
Northridge, California

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Written for young builders ages 8 to 18.
Free to read. Free to share with a family.

These methods are real. Tools can bite. Work with a grown-up.
Local building codes always beat a picture book.

The True Line · Six Books

Book One The Secret of Square, Level & Plumb

Book Two The Secret of the Fall

Book Three The Secret of the Waste Side

Book Four The Secret of the Scribe

Book Five The Secret of the Bed

Book Six The Secret of the Dry Room

How to Read a True Line Book

These books keep real trade secrets. Younger readers follow Ash and the pictures. Older readers use the green boxes and go outside with an adult. If you are sitting in a showroom, or in the car on the way to look at stone, the watching lists in the back will give your eyes something honest to do.

IF YOU ARE 8 TO 12

- Read the story first. Look hard at the pictures.
- Try the backyard tests with an adult.
- You do not need a job site. A hose, a board, and chalk are enough.
- New words live in the Word Chest at the back.
- If the house is being remodeled, watch one thing at a time.

IF YOU ARE 13 TO 18

- Read the green boxes. Those are working rules.
- Scale the numbers up. Bigger layouts, smaller percent error.
- Check your tools before you trust them.
- Saws, solder, drain chemicals, and live water are grown-up jobs.
- A trade is a promise: do the work true, even when no one is looking.



THE KITCHEN THAT LIED

Boxes First, Walls Second

Ash sent the kids to a woman named Lumen. She built boxes for kitchens. “Rooms lie,” she said. “Floors tilt. Walls wave. If you beat the cabinet until it matches the lie, the doors will never hang true.” The cabinetmaker’s secret is the opposite of shoving. Make the run level, plumb, and in one plane. Then cut the extra wood to the wall. That extra cut is called a scribe. The stone on top of those boxes — the slab you may have stared at in a showroom or from the back seat — only looks calm if the boxes underneath kept their word.

The High Spot Rules



Find the highest place on the floor. Draw a level line on the wall at cabinet-top height from that spot. Every base cabinet climbs to that line. Low places get shims. High places get the toe-kick trimmed. The line is the boss, not the floor. If you start at a low corner because it is convenient, the whole kitchen will lean toward the lie.

TRY THIS

On a table that rocks, put a scrap block under the low corner until a marble stays put. You just shimmed a cabinet.

FOR OLDER BUILDERS

Typical base height is about 34-1/2 inches so a 1-1/2 inch counter lands near 36 inches. Uppers are set from a second level line, not from a wavy ceiling. Start the run in the corner only after that corner box is dead true.

Don't Fight the Wall



Set the cabinet true. Measure the fattest gap to the wall. Open a compass to that gap. Walk the wall with one leg and let the pencil draw the wall's waves onto the extra strip of wood. Cut to that line. The wall stays crooked. The face stays straight. Forcing a box into a wavy wall twists the face. Doors remember that twist forever.

TRY THIS

Stand a book a little off a wavy stack of other books. Set a compass to the widest gap. Trace the bumps onto a card. Cut the card. That card is a filler strip.

FOR OLDER BUILDERS

Never rack a box to close a gap. You will twist the face frame and the doors will show it forever. Filler strips and scribe allowances exist so the box can stay square. Caulk is not a 1/2-inch filler.

The Even Shadow



The slim gap around a door is the reveal. Eyes love an even shadow more than they love a perfect wall. If one gap is fat and one is skinny, the whole kitchen looks drunk even when the boxes are strong. This is why Lumen will fuss a hinge screw after the run is locked, and will not fuss the box.

TRY THIS

Use playing cards as feeler gauges around a cupboard door. Count the cards that fit at the top, hinge, and latch. Adjust until the counts match.

FOR OLDER BUILDERS

A common reveal is about $1/8$ inch. Overlay doors hang on the face; inset doors sit inside the frame and need even more honesty. Adjust hinges, not the box, once the run is locked.

Lumen's Order of Work

Do these in order or you will chase the room all afternoon.

1. READ THE ROOM

Level the floor. Plumb the walls. Mark high spots. Find the worst corner.

2. SNAP THE LINES

One level line for base tops. One for the bottom of the uppers.

3. TRUE THE RUN

Shim, clamp, and fasten boxes to the lines and to each other.

4. THEN SCRIBE

Fillers, end panels, and toe-kicks take the wall's and floor's mistakes.

Quiet Cabinet Secrets

Same True Line habits, smaller and shinier.

FILLER STRIP

A sacrificial board between the last cabinet and the wall, sized for the fattest gap, then scribed.

SHIM THROUGH THE SCREW

Fasten into shims so the box does not crunch back to the dip in the wall.

FACE IN ONE PLANE

A long straightedge across several doors should kiss them all.

STORY POLE

Drawer banks and tall pantry shelves live on one stick so every box matches.

What Not to Do

Most ugly kitchens were rushed at the first box.

DON'T START AT A BAD CORNER

If the corner is the high, twisted place, fix the line first.

DON'T HIDE A 3/4-INCH GAP WITH CAULK

Scribe wood. Caulk is for hairlines.

DON'T HANG DOORS UNTIL THE RUN IS LOCKED

Hinges cannot save a twisted box.

DON'T IGNORE THE COUNTER

A level cabinet top is what the stone or wood counter sits on. Get that plane right.

Three Real Projects

The Rocking Table

Ages 8+

Shim a wobbly table until a marble rests. Name the high foot. That is the high-spot rule.

Card Reveals

Ages 10+

Check every gap on a kitchen door with playing cards. Write the counts. Even them if a grown-up will let you turn a hinge screw.

Scribe a Card

Ages 12+

Compass-scribe a cereal-box strip to a wavy baseboard. Cut the waste. Press it back. The wall's secret is now on the card.

What to Watch in a Kitchen

A kitchen remodel is a long play. The stone is the last act. Watch the boxes first.

THE LEVEL LINE

A pencil or laser line on the wall. Every base climbs to it.

THE SHIMS

Thin wedges under a box. They are not cheats. They are the truth of the floor.

THE COMPASS WALK

A pencil copying the wall onto extra wood. That is a scribe.

THE EVEN SHADOW

Look at door gaps before you look at the hardware.

THE COUNTER PLANE

A straightedge on the cabinet tops. The slab will tell on any dip.

THE LAST FILLER

The skinny board at the wall. If it is scribed, someone refused to twist a box.

Questions Worth Asking

Rooms lie. People do not have to.

01 Why is shoving a cabinet into a crooked wall a bad kind of honesty?

02 What does an even reveal tell your eye that a wavy wall cannot?

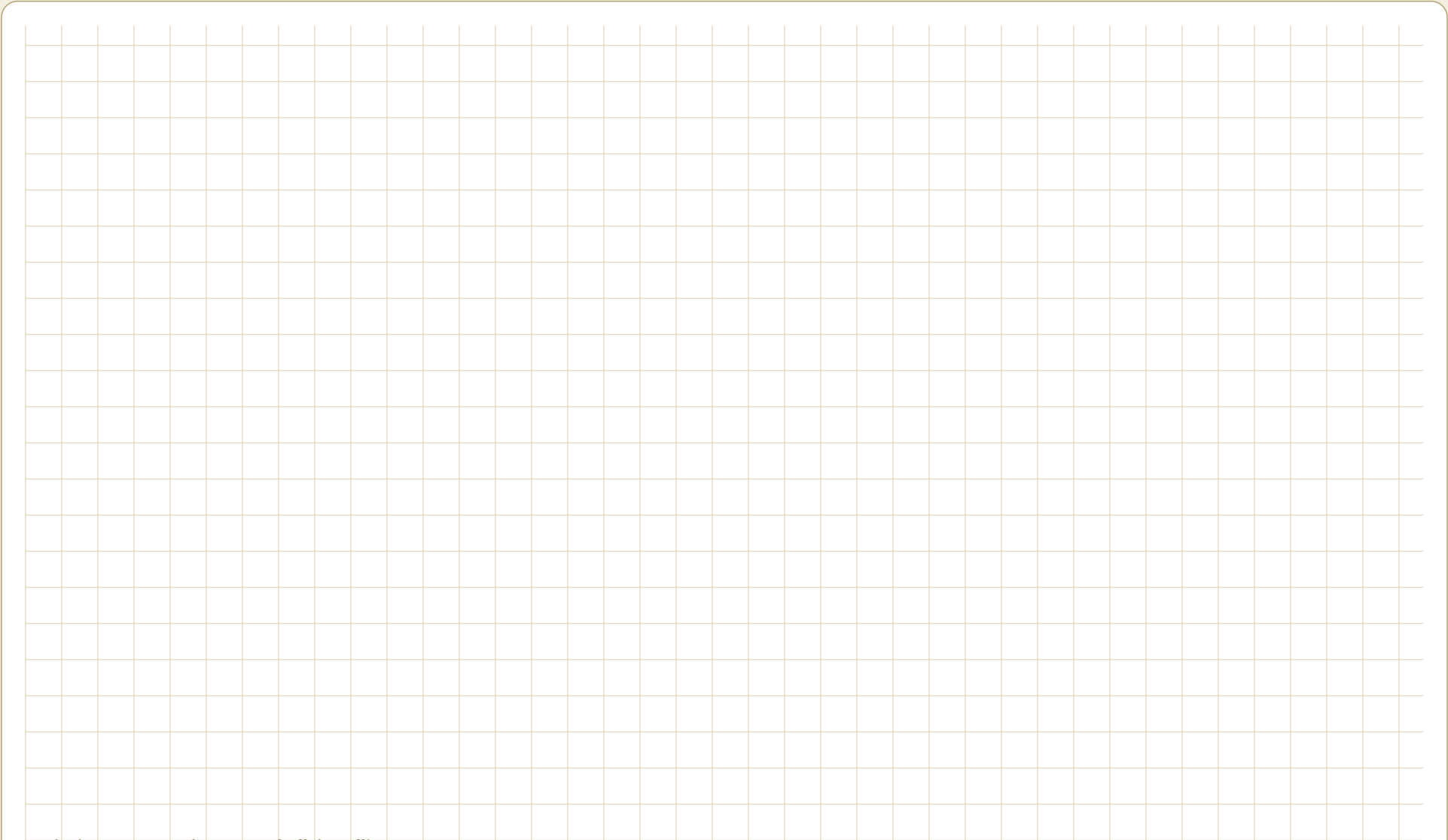
03 Why must the cabinet tops be in one plane before a stone slab lands?

04 Lumen starts with the high spot. Where else in life is it wiser to start from the hardest true point instead of the easiest corner?

05 Working well for other people is a way of keeping faith with them. What would a kitchen look like if nobody kept that faith?

Scribe the Wave

Draw a crooked wall along the right side of the grid. Draw a straight cabinet face. In the gap, sketch the wave you would copy with a compass. Shade the waste you would cut away.



Make the run true. Let the extra wood tell the wall's story.

The Word Chest

Carcass / box

The cabinet body before doors and drawers.

Face frame

The wood picture-frame on the front of many American cabinets.

Filler strip

A board that closes the gap from the last box to the wall.

Frameless

Boxes with no face frame. Doors cover almost the whole front.

Inset door

A door that sits inside the frame. Reveals must be even or everyone stares.

Overlay door

A door that sits on top of the frame.

Reveal

The even shadow-gap around a door or drawer.

Scribe

Copying a wall's or floor's shape onto extra wood, then cutting to that line.

Shim

A thin wedge that lifts or plumbs a box without twisting it.

Toe-kick

The recessed base your toes tuck under.

Upper

A wall cabinet. Hung from a level line, not from the ceiling.

Counter plane

The flat, level surface the stone or wood top must sit on.

The Builder's Promise

Craft is courage plus care. A young builder works with a grown-up until the habits are as true as the work.

- 01** Ask an adult before using saws, torches, drain chemicals, live water, or anything heavier than a backpack.
- 02** Wear closed shoes. Use eye protection for cutting or chipping.
- 03** Do not climb roofs or unfinished walls. Do not work under hanging pipe or lumber.
- 04** Wash dust off your hands. Fine dust does not belong in lungs.
- 05** Cabinets are heavier than they look. Two people lift. Nobody stands under a wall cabinet on a lift.
- 06** Saws and routers for scribe cuts are grown-up tools. A compass and a card are enough for practice.

ASH'S LAST WORD

Make the run true. Let the extra wood tell the wall's story. The doors will hang like they meant it.



THE LINE IS STILL THERE
Level. Gauge. Plumb. Straighten.

THE TRUE LINE · A GIFT FROM VALLEY TILE · AGES 8 TO 18 · PRACTICE WITH A GROWN-UP · CHECK TWICE