Adjustable Panels

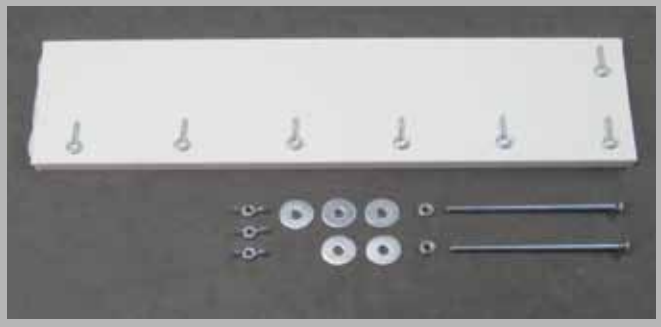
By Greg Mohr
Findlay, OH

Recently we were asked to fabricate a pair of stationary panels and an upholstered cornice with a C.O.M. linen. Although the panels were to "break" at the floor, the client was not entirely sure she would always like this look, and asked if we might later adjust them if she changed her mind. Add the "living" properties of linen, and I knew to expect a call in the future to adjust the length. There had to be a better way, and the adjustable panel board was created.

Materials and Supplies

Tools
Drill
$^1/_{16}$- and $^1/_4$-inch Drill Bits
Sharp Knife
Needle-nose Pliers
Erasable Fabric Pen
Tape Measure
Clamps

Parts for Each Panel
Fabricated Cornice
Stationary Panel Board (see Step 1)
7, Eye Hooks (sometimes called screw eyes)
2, ¼x5-inch Carriage Bolts
2, ¼-inch Nuts
5, ¼-inch Fender Washers
3, ¼-inch Wing Nuts



1. Construct the Cornice

Begin with a lined cornice, without face fabric at this point. We prefer to prewrap our cornice pieces with a black-out lining prior to assembly, then staple the cornice pieces together with 1-inch long, 18-gauge, ¼-inch crown staples. I like the clean look without any staples or gimp showing on the back. Also, cut an additional piece of wood the depth of the cornice and 2 inches wider than the dressed width of your panels. Our board is cut 1 inch less than the depth of the cornice to clear the window casing. You may use the full depth of the cornice if there are no obstructions that would prevent the board from raising and lowering. In this example, our cornice has a 5½-inch projection, and our stationary panel is going to finish at 16 inches wide. We used a 1x6-inch pine board and cut this to 4½x18 inches. This is the board that your stationary panels will hang from. Wrap this board with the same lining used on the cornice.

2. Install the Eye Hooks

Eye hooks will be installed to hang your new panel from the adjustable board. The number of eye hooks will depend on your panel size. We're using a single width with five pleats, a leading edge, and a return.

Using the erasable pen, mark the panel board to designate Front and Left or Right. Remember that the eye hooks will be mounted to the bottom of the board, reverse from how you will be looking at them during this step. Measure back 2 inches from the front of the board, which gives us a 3½-inch projection from the wall, and mark the location of the eye hooks — one for each pleat and the leading edge. Mark the last eye hook location for the return at the back of the board. Note that in this example, my drapery pin on the return will be set back 1 inch from the edge because we reduced the depth of the panel board.

Drill your pilot holes with the $^{1}/_{16}$-inch drill bit and install the screw eyes.

3. Mark the Holes for the Carriage Bolts

Turn your panel board upright, with the eye hooks hanging from the bottom, and place on the appropriate end of your cornice as shown. Clamp to keep the board in place. Note the reduced depth of the panel board in this example where we needed to clear the window casing.

4. Drill the Pilot Holes

With the panel board clamped in place, mark two holes on the top of the cornice approximately 3 inches in from both ends of the panel board, and 3 inches back from the front of the cornice. This will be the location of your carriage bolts. Double-check these same measurements underneath to ensure you will clear your eye hook. You will need at least 1 inch of clearance to allow the wing nuts to turn.

Drill a $^{1}/_{16}$-inch pilot hole from the top, down through the panel board. Remove the clamps and make a small X with your knife at each hole location to prevent the drill bit from snagging the lining. Reclamp your board in the same location and drill through both layers using the ¼-inch drill bit. Remove the clamps and panel board.

5. Installing the Carriage Bolts

Insert a carriage bolt from the top into each hole you have drilled. You may need to tap lightly with a hammer. From the bottom, insert a fender washer and nut onto each bolt and tighten firmly with your needle-nose pliers. This will keep the carriage bolt from moving when you're raising or lowering your panels.

6. Positioning the Panel Board

Install one wing nut and fender washer on the inside carriage bolt as shown (Detail A) then place your panel board onto the bolts, eye hooks pointing down and return edge to the outside. You may need to lightly tap the board to force the carriage bolts through the holes initially. The wing nut/fender washer on the inside carriage bolt will allow you to secure the board once adjusted. You would not be able to access a wing nut on the other carriage bolt once the cornice is installed. Install the remaining two fender washers and wing nuts as shown. Your adjustable panel board is now installed! Note on Detail B that the wing nuts have adequate clearance around the eye hooks.

Detail A

Detail B

Position your panel board midway on the carriage bolts and use this height to calculate your panel lengths, considering the height your cornice will be installed. This will allow roughly 2 inches up or down to adjust your panels.

This method may also be used on any board mount provided a top treatment will conceal the adjustable board. This could also be adaptable to traversing panels, using an adjustable board the full width of the cornice and a ceiling-mount rod attached to the underside of the board. Increase the number of carriage bolts to support the additional weight. Note: Any change in the height of the drapery rod will also change your cord drop.

After our installation, I showed my client and her husband how to adjust the panel length. I recently ran into her at the grocery and she was excited to tell me she had already used the adjustment feature and how thrilled she still is with her dining room treatments. One less service call for me and one more satisfied customer!