Joinery *tolerances* and scribing allowances

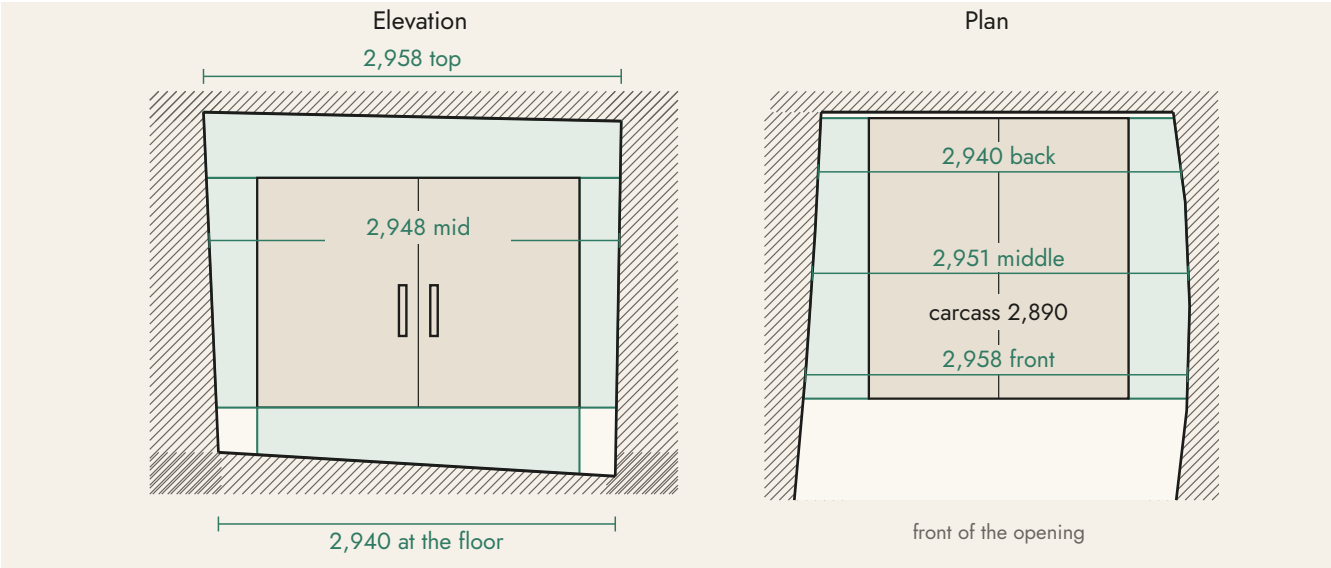
What a building may be out by, how scribing takes it up, and how to survey.

AT A GLANCE

Element	Limit in LABC Warranty Technical Manual v11 (2022)	What to allow on the drawing (our note)
Wall, flatness	±3 mm, 2 m straight edge with equal offsets.	Plan scribe margins. Never assume a flat wall.
Wall, plumb	8 mm for a wall up to 3 m high. Above 3 m: 8 mm per storey and 12 mm in all.	A 2.4 m unit against a wall at the limit has up to 6.4 mm of lean to scribe off (8 × 2.4 ÷ 3.0); two walls leaning out, 12.8 mm.
Corners and openings	Corners ±10 mm in 500 mm. Reveals plumb ±3 mm (±5 mm over 1.5 m). Sills and heads level to 3 mm (5 mm over 1.5 m).	Measure both diagonals, and every opening at three points.
Floors and ceilings	Flat ±5 mm over 2 m. Level to 3 mm per metre up to 6 m, and 20 mm over longer runs.	A 3 m run can stand on a floor up to 9 mm out of level (3 × 3): adjustable feet, scribed kick and top strip.
Skirting to floor	Gap not over 5 mm at completion; it can grow as the floor dries.	Scribe skirting and plinths to the floor.
Door to frame (not fire doors)	Gap at head and jamb 4 mm. Face distortion 5 mm in height, 3 mm in width.	Without prejudice to fire resistance, says the manual. Do not apply to fire doorsets.
Fitted furniture	Aligned vertically, horizontally and in plan; gaps consistent; no step at worktop joins. No figure given.	Write your own alignment and gap tolerance.

These are the limits a new-home warranty scheme treats as acceptable, not design tolerances and not a standard. Our notes and arithmetic are in the third column. A contract or a designer may require tighter figures, and later editions of the manual may differ.

A UNIT IN AN OUT-OF-TRUE ALCOVE



Example dimensions in mm; deviations exaggerated. Scribe margin 25 to 34 each side.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

SURVEY AND VERIFICATION

Dimensions to be verified on site by [party] before shop drawings. The survey to record, for each opening or run, the width at [three] heights, the height at [three] positions, the plumb of each wall, floor and ceiling levels to a single datum, and the position of services. Survey drawing [number] to be signed off by [designer] before production.

SCRIBING AND ALLOWANCES

Joinery against walls, floors and ceilings to be scribed. Scribe margin of [25] mm at each end of each run, shown on the drawings and confirmed by survey. Walls, floors and ceilings are assumed to be within [3] mm of flat on a 2 m straight edge and [8] mm of plumb in [3] m. Where the survey shows more, [the main contractor is to correct it / a variation is to be raised] before production.

PLINTH, DATUM AND FLOOR

Plinths on [adjustable feet], range [ ] mm, set from a single level datum at [ ] mm above finished floor level, and scribed to the floor. Floor finish to be in place [before / after] fitting.

GAPS AND ALIGNMENT

Shadow gaps [ ] mm, even to [ ] mm, as drawing [number]. Door and drawer margins [ ] mm and consistent; doors and drawers aligned vertically, horizontally and in plan. [Fire doorsets to be fitted to the certified installation instructions; the leaf is not to be scribed or planed.]

TERMS USED

Scribe

To shape the edge of a panel or board so it follows an uneven wall, floor or ceiling; a scribe strip is a deliberately oversized piece cut to fit.

Shadow gap

A deliberate recessed gap, usually 6-12 mm, at a junction such as skirting to wall, that hides the irregularities of the wall and reads as a clean dark line.

Plinth

The recessed base under a run of cabinets or a wardrobe, which gives toe space and lets the floor be scribed against it.

Datum

The single reference level or line that all heights on a drawing and a survey are measured from.

Plumb

Truly vertical. A wall out of plumb leans.

Straight edge

A long rigid rule, commonly 2 m, laid on a surface to measure how far it departs from flat.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- LABC Warranty Technical Manual Version 11, Section 20 Tolerances (pp. 448 to 456; (c) MD Insurance Services Limited 2023): 20.1.3 walls, 20.1.5 floors and ceilings, 20.1.6 frames, 20.1.7 skirtings and fitted furniture. Read 5 Nov 2026.
- LABC Warranty Technical Manual Version 10, Section 1 Tolerances: walls and ceilings. Read 5 Nov 2026.
- Architectural Woodwork Standards, 1st edition (2009), Section 10 Casework: 1.2.9, 1.2.20.1.4, 1.5.1, 1.5.2. US practice.
- BS 8000-5:1990 Workmanship on building sites. Carpentry, joinery and general fixings: BSI listing only; not read.
- BS 5606:1990 Guide to accuracy in building: BSI listing: withdrawn 23 Feb 2022; not read.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/joinery-tolerances-and-scribing. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.