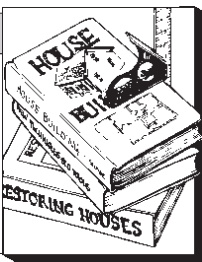


## Remodelers Handbook

**Remodelers Handbook**, by Benjamin Williams. Carlsbad, Calif: Craftsman Book Co., 1984. 412 pages. \$18.50 paperback.



by Paul Hanke

The subtitle of *Remodelers Handbook* is "A manual of professional practice for home improvement contractors," and the author makes a reasonably successful effort to touch all the bases. Despite its handy, two-page chart of space standards for residential design, however, the early chapter on planning is cursory, as is the one on repairs.

On the other hand, the chapter devoted to kitchens gives about as much design advice as you could hope to find in a book by someone who is not a professional designer. The author even includes perspective charts and step-by-step instructions for those who want to take a stab at presentation drawings.

The bathroom chapter concentrates almost solely on fixture placement, and includes a page of sample floor plans plus, again, perspective charts and instructions. Williams also notes small details, such as setting a lav at 34 to 38 inches for more comfortable use by adults (kids can use a stool). He wryly comments that "a lot of things can go wrong" during actual construction, adding that "many, if not most, will." He recommends being quick to make corrections to satisfy the client.

Representative chapters on practical construction include flooring, siding and soffits, and roofing. But in all cases, these sections were marred by poor-quality (dark and grainy) "how-to" photos that apparently were borrowed from another source.

The chapter on insulation is adequate, but Williams advises you to completely avoid sliding glass doors (to minimize heat loss), failing to note their potential for passive-solar gain on the south side. Also of concern is Williams's confidence in kraft-paper facing on batt insulation as a vapor barrier. (Poly sheet is mentioned almost in passing.) He also shows exposed foam in a heated crawl space without noting the need for a protective coating over this flammable material.

In addition, the author seems to think it is an *advantage* that condensation is "held in suspension" in blown insulation

and dissipates later by evaporation. He doesn't seem to recognize that wet insulation is *ineffective* insulation, or that modern materials and tight construction techniques can hamper effective drying out when warm weather returns.

To his credit, Williams devotes an entire chapter to ventilation and vapor barriers, in which he corrects, to some extent, the impressions he gave previously. Here he recommends using aluminum paint as a vapor barrier for retrofit work. But he also suggests oil-based paint several times, which should be near the

**Chapters on practical construction, including flooring, siding and soffits, and roofing, were marred by poor-quality 'how-to' photos. But chapters devoted to business management, estimating, cost controls, record-keeping and sales are among the best you'll find.**

bottom of the list, and he ignores the vapor-dam problem that foam sheathing and vinyl and aluminum siding can cause in cold climates.

The book closes with four chapters devoted to business management, estimating, cost controls, record-keeping and sales. These are among the best you'll find outside specialized books on the subject. Despite my criticisms, this is one of the better overviews of the remodeling field that I've had occasion to review in these pages. ■

## Add-Ons

**Add-Ons**, by Kenneth Lelen. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1984. 158 pages. \$19.95 hardcover.

*Add-Ons* is a collection of photographic studies of selected additions from around the U.S. with commentary by the author. Thirty cases illustrate ideas for sunspaces, kitchens and dining areas, bedrooms, living rooms, family rooms and exteriors.

Readers may recognize the names of Valerie Walsh (New Mexico) and Ted Montgomery (Vermont), whose works have been published elsewhere. Other designers may be new to New Englanders. Sparkling color photos are numerous, but the quality of the black-and-white shots varies greatly and detracts somewhat from the book. Floor plans generally are included that help make sense of the photos.

Some of my favorite projects are a "gazebo" breakfast room by Berkeley architect Glen Jarvis, and an ultramodern rehab in New York City by Ralph Gillis. And I especially like Leslie Armstrong's addition to her grandfather's venerable summer cottage in Martha's Vineyard. Other designs, such as the "pig with a purple eyepatch" in San Diego and Jefferson Riley's enormous dolphin mantelpiece made of cherry (with a price tag of \$2,500), seem awfully contrived. And a couple of designs are so "plain vanilla" in appearance that one wonders how they got into the book in the first place, but I suppose that is par for the course for collections of this kind. ■

## Devilish Design

**The Jersey Devil Design/Build Book**, by Michael J. Crosbie. Layton, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985. 96 pages, \$19.95 paperback.

*Jersey Devil*, for those who may not have heard of it, is a collection of four architect/builders who have developed a reputation for creativity and weirdness. Their work is interesting both for its strangeness (as exemplified by project names such as Snail House, Football House and Helmet House), and for the fact that, unlike most architects, the "Devils" have chosen to build what they design.

And if that combination were not enough, *Jersey Devil's* method of working is also unusual. After receiving a commission (usually residential and high budget) and doing the preliminary design work, the Devils assemble for construction, often living on site as they work. This involvement with the job, coupled with a devotion to creative design, often means the project changes as the job progresses.

There is much interaction among crew members and a lot of site detailing in a typical *Jersey Devil* job. In addition, *Jersey Devil* seems to have a fetish for using ordinary objects in unusual ways—such as clay flowerpots for lighting fixtures.

*The Jersey Devil Design/Build Book* chronicles the firm's work, beginning with excerpts from interviews with crew members as they discuss living, designing, building, materials and inspiration. Although this look at what makes *Jersey Devil* tick stays pretty much on the surface, the bulk of the book is devoted to a wonderful photographic study (in color as well as black and white) of 14 of the firm's fascinating projects.

Personally, I like *Jersey Devil's* methods, but with some exceptions I don't care all that much for their work—which is mostly a matter of individual taste. I also found myself reacting negatively to what appears to be an excessive effort to "shock" people who see their work.

But love them or hate them, *Jersey Devil* shows us what is possible when design and construction are integrated and combined with innovation, craftsmanship and sympathetic clients. The book is a must for *Jersey Devil* fans, and it certainly reminds us of what fun it can be to build. ■



*The "Hill House," an earth-sheltered home designed by the Jersey Devils.*

## Free or Cheap

**Oak Flooring Manuals:** Illustrated "how-to" manuals that cover finishing, installation, maintenance and other topics related to oak floors. Fifty cents each, from the National Oak Flooring Manufacturers' Association, 8 North Third, Sterick Building, Memphis, Tenn. 38103; 901/526-5016. Some pretty good stuff.

**Personal Computers & Your Business:** A free, 275-page handbook said to cover "everything you need to know" about buying and using a personal computer in your business. Included is a list of more than 700 software programs, a guide to the firm's computer hardware, and information on how to get assistance. Contact Digital Equipment Corp., 200 Baker Ave., CPO1-1/M94, Concord, Mass. 01742; 617/480-4180.

**Blue Book for Agents, Adjusters & Contractors:** A 128-page reference and cost guide for cleaning, repairs and reconstruction. Normally priced at \$15, it's available free of charge from any office of First General Services, a nationwide network of insurance-repair specialists. Contact First General Services, 1 Corporate Plaza, Suite 1921, 110 E. Broward Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, Fla. 33301.

**General Rope Usage:** An illustrated, 10-page pamphlet on the safe use and proper care of synthetic-fiber ropes in various applications. Covered are how to guard against overloading, how to avoid kinks when using a winch, how to check for wear, and other topics. Free from the Cordage Institute, 314 Lincoln St., Suite 568, Hingham, Mass. 02043; 617/890-2028.

**NARI Membership Services & Publica-**

**tions Directory:** A free catalogue listing "21 brochures and publications that may increase sales and provide additional service to the consumer" published by the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Also included is a list of NARI programs. Contact NARI, 1901 N. Moore St., Suite 808, Arlington, Va. 22209; 703/276-7600.

**Home Heating with Wood & Coal:** Published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society primarily for home owners, but also of use to builders as a consumer-education tool. The illustrated booklet reports on recent developments regarding pollution, efficiency, safety, and new features and designs. It also covers how to size, upgrade and maintain a woodstove.

Individual copies are \$1.55 from the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Environmental Science Department, 10 Juniper Rd., Belmont, Mass. 02178; 617/489-5170. Bulk prices are available.

**Renewable Energy & Conservation Publications:** Information on such topics as passive-solar building, indoor air pollution, municipal sewage treatment, and the use of bio-fuels to generate electricity from the "Conservation & Renewable Energy Inquiry & Referral Service," better known as CAREIRS.

The service is operated by Solar America Inc. and the Franklin Research Center under contract to the U.S. Department of Energy. Contact CAREIRS, P.O. Box 8900, Silver Spring, Md. 20907; 800/523-2929. ■

—NEB Staff