

Editorial

NEB Renovations

There comes a time in the life of any institution to make a few changes...and when we attain that status well consider giving change its due. In the meantime, however, a fresh coat of paint and a little renovating should suffice.

By now, the astute observer probably has noticed that something's a little different with this issue. We've changed the look (and some of the names) of our regular columns, added a table of contents and a few new sections, and switched to a "trimmed and bound" format, among other things.

Many of the changes are based on your suggestions—the table of contents, for example, and the demise of our "scream-it-at-em-from-the-cover" renewal notices. (We're going with direct-mail renewal notices from now on—and we are counting on the same high level of response, dear friends.) Our switch to a slightly larger typeface, meanwhile, is dedicated to the reader who complained that he couldn't read the articles without a magnifying glass (and who suggested that we must be saving money by using the smaller print; we weren't).

Change doesn't come easy, as they say—even small changes. We spent many hours agonizing over the details, debating whether to merely sand off the rough edges and patch up the plaster, or whether to gut the whole structure, move the walls and rebuild

from top to bottom.

Always in the back of our minds were the countless letters we received from folks praising *NEB* as a wonderful rag. "We need more practical, down-to-earth rags like *NEB*," they'd say. "This is the best old rag I've ever come across. Keep up the good work, and don't change...."

We came to like that word, *rag*. And we felt a good bit of pride in knowing that, whatever our shortcomings, our belief that it takes nuts-and-bolts know-how combined with craftsmanship to build buildings right (and that trading in your tool box for a briefcase doesn't necessarily make you any more successful at it) was appreciated. Having this confirmed beyond our wildest expectations after the devastating fire of '84, when so many of you gave us the support we needed, enabled us to pick up where we'd left off and start over again.

The year and a half since have seen some remarkable changes for *NEB*—new offices, new staff, new ideas, new energies. So it is that these changes have come about. We'll continue, however, to welcome your comments, your contributions and your criticisms. Even though the face may have changed, the heart of this old rag remains the same. ■

—D.B.

Foil-Faced Foam Revisited

To the Editor:

In the November issue, a reply by Bill Lotz to a letter to the editor may be misleading.

While the addition of foil-faced foam on the exterior of a home without an interior vapor barrier will result in condensation if the dew point is reached in the cavity, it seldom would be reached in many climates because of the high insulating value of the foam.

In cold climates, condensation would be limited to periods of extreme cold. Even in the unlikely event of enough moisture accumulating to saturate wood framing, a temperature between 40 and 100 F would be required for decay fungi to grow.

Also, the moisture could not cause paint to peel on siding, because the moisture could not pass through the foil to reach the siding.

Gerry Sherwood
Middleton, Wis.

'The Money's in Site Work'

To the Editor:

While the building industry is really moving, most building codes are requiring more costly systems (septic, for example). Given the availability of financing, the "codes" are pricing most housing out of the "norm" price bracket. Given the land values today, much of the initial "cost to build" is what puts it out of reach.

I believe there is no better time to build, because most contractors and manufacturers are priced well. But the real money today is in site work.

Frank L. Balla
Solid Wall Buildings
Newport, N.H.

APA Feedback

To the Editor:

Your January issue was a big one for APA. On page six, regarding the question concerning Texture 1-11 plywood siding, I'd encourage your readers to specify the APA trademark to assure a product that is quality tested and fully backed.

Our Quality Services Division constantly monitors the production of 303 plywood siding, as it does all APA-trademarked products. Among other things, we monitor the glue-line performance, which was referred to in the answer.

When tested, the wood should fail before the glue line does. Outdoor perfor-

mance tests have demonstrated there is little hazard of delamination even in panels that have a 60-percent wood failure rate in laboratory tests.

Our test records on 303 plywood siding show approximately 2 percent of the panels rating below 60 percent. Since the product standard allows up to 10 percent failure, we are quite satisfied with the performance of APA-trademarked panels.

As the answer pointed out, many delamination claims can be avoided with proper installation and finishing.

Thanks for your continued fair treatment of APA and its products and systems. We appreciate the excellent job you're doing keeping builders informed.

Patricia B. Case
American Plywood Association
Tacoma, Wash.

Wanted: Weatherizing Supplies in Bulk

To the Editor:

Living in the cold northeastern section of Vermont and working primarily on older structures, I am constantly faced with weatherizing old doors and windows.

The products available through local suppliers, such as door sweeps and weatherstripping, are available only in single-unit quantities and usually are of relatively poor design. It seems that there must be some company that manufactures good-quality weatherstripping and sells in bulk. Any suggestions?

Edward Ingraham
Ingraham Carpentry & Joinery
St. Johnsbury, Vt. 05819

We can't testify to the quality, but we have tracked down a few companies that sell weatherizing products in bulk:

Accurate Weatherstripping Co., 725 S. Fulton Ave., Mt. Vernon, N.Y. 10550; 914/668-6042.

Pemco Co., 5535 Distribution, Memphis, Tenn. 38118; 800/824-3018.

Schlegel Retroseal Corp., P. O. Box 23197, Rochester, N.Y. 14692; 716/427-7200

Letters

All of these firms will send catalogs and price lists upon request.

Finally, we doubt that this will be the last time you will need to track down suppliers of materials for old houses. We'd highly recommend that you obtain a copy of the latest edition of "The OUI Catalogue." It's available from The Old-House Journal, 69A Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217, for the ridiculously low price of \$13.95 postpaid, it lists nearly 1,500 companies that provide almost 10,000 old-house items and services. No remodeling, rehab or restoration professional should be without one. —Ed.

In Defense of Solid Fuels

To the Editor:

Who is Henri de Marne, and why does he keep saying terrible things about heating with wood and coal (January issue)?

Solid-fuel heating makes sense in many urban areas. Coal is delivered just like oil. And even with OPEC's recent price slashing, there still is a major cost advantage.

As for catalytics, the catalytic spray Mr. de Marne mentions is not a replacement for a catalytic combustor in any way, shape or form. When fitted on an appliance or added on to an existing stove, catalytics increase efficiency by 15 to 20 percent and reduce emissions by almost 80 percent.

The catalytic spray does none of that. It only reduces creosote *if it is used regularly*. The price of the spray does not justify it as an alternative to a combustor.

Steven Maviglio, Editor
Wood-N-Energy
Lanconia, N.H.

Henri de Marne responds:

What I said about wood and coal in urban areas could only sound "terrible" to an incredibly biased reader.

Wood is very expensive in urban areas and is not at all competitive with oil or natural gas. It also requires large outside storage space if it is used as the sole heating fuel, and

it is heavy and dirty. Moreover, heating with wood requires time and savvy—two elements not often found among busy, working urban and suburban dwellers. Coal also is dirty and requires time to nurture the appliance.

Perhaps Mr. Maviglio is unfamiliar with the mode of living of most metropolitan residents and thus cannot comprehend how impractical solid fuels would be for most of them. As a former contractor who has dealt with the metropolitan public for more than two decades, I know that the dirt and hassle connected with solid-fuel heating is not their bag.

I also suggest that Mr. Maviglio read my January column again. He will find that I do not say that ACS catalytic spray is a replacement for a catalytic combustor. What I do say—and maintain—is that the cost of replacing a standard stove with one equipped with a catalytic combustor is hard to justify despite the fuel savings that would be realized.

It doesn't take a calculator to figure out that a \$1,000 replacement stove that saves 15 to 20 percent on fuel is not a good deal unless you happen to burn more than five cords a year. And as any unbiased authority will attest, add-on combustors do not approach the degree of efficiency of built-in models.

I also would point out that I do in fact refer to "the regular use of...ACS" in my January column. And I maintain that at a cost of \$20 a season, ACS certainly is easier to justify than a new catalytic combustor to replace an existing stove.

Finally, I should note that I have heated exclusively with wood since 1974 and written extensively on the subject.

What's Wrong with Radiant Ceilings?

To the Editor:

William Lotz recently said that radiant ceiling heat is only good for bald men's heads (January issue). We have radiant heat in the ceiling, and this is our experience:

Completely balanced distribution. Clean and utterly silent. Never inadequate. Annual cost for 2,250 square feet averages out to \$1,100. We choose a setting and live with it because recovery from any turn-down of the thermostat is slow.

We would highly recommend it, with or without-hair!

David I. Thomas
Nantic, Conn.

Bill Lotz responds:

I am glad you're happy with a radiant system, but a gas-fired warm-air system would also be balanced, silent, etc. And think how much happier you might be paying only \$500 a year to operate it. ■