

Letters to the Editor

New England Builder welcomes letters from its readers. Letters must be signed and include the writer's address.

Permanent Wood Foundations

To the Editor:

I was interested in Henry Spies' article on wood foundations in the August issue (page 25). It seemed to be thorough and carefully done in an effort to bring people up to date on the most important revisions.

In one instance, though, I was surprised by an apparent omission. I refer to the text and detail on wood floors.

Was the author discarding the American Plywood Association's "All-Weather Wood Foundation [now the Permanent Wood Foundation (PWF)] Details for Wood Basement Floor, Plan E" (Form E4306), revised April 1984, or was he unaware of it? This system strikes me as more sound than the detail he suggested.

Elliott D. S. Adams
Sharon Springs, N.Y.

Henry Spies responds:

This is a great illustration of the point made in the article about the difficulty of keeping up on the latest revisions to the system.

I have never seen the detail you mention, and I thought we were on the list to get updates. It certainly has not been well-publicized. (Then, too, I am not sure APA is speaking to me at this point.) The technology transfer (a good current buzzword), or lack of it, on PWF seems to be one of its biggest problems.

More on Warranties

To the Editor:

Harlow G. Unger's column on warranties (November issue) was well-written, but it contained several inaccuracies.

Specifically, resale home warranties have been used by real-estate agents to help them market their listings. The offering of a warranty to a prospective buyer does nothing to diminish a real-estate agent's liability for non-disclosure to the buyer. Only a professional third-party inspection can help alleviate this liability for real-estate agents.

Also, Mr. Unger gives the impression that the only type of resale home warranty available

covers only the major systems of a house and costs about \$300. Through its offices in 90 major cities, HouseMaster of America offers resale homebuyers a warranty program that covers the roof and structure as well as the major systems for an average cost of \$150.

Kenneth T. Austin, Chairman
HouseMaster of America
Bound Brook, N.J.

Conference Clarifications

To the Editor:

A note of thanks for Paul Hanke's recent report on the "Heating Today's Buildings" conference (December issue). I would like to clarify some of the issues he raised, however.

First, there seems to be a lot of confusion in the article (and perhaps at the conference) about the installation costs of ground-coupled heat pumps. The article quotes John Duffie as saying they run \$600 to \$1,000 per ton and Carl Orio as between \$2,300 and \$2,400, but then it mentions that Orio installed a three-ton system for \$600.

I believe that John meant the costs of installing the system (labor and minor materials), as opposed to the costs of buying it, were \$600 to \$1,000 per ton, while Carl meant that the total installed cost (labor, equipment, materials and profit) was \$2,300 to \$2,400. Either he lost a lot of money on the three-ton system, or the system cost \$6,000 and New England Builder dropped the last zero.

Incidentally, a ton equals 12,000 Btu/hour, or the rate of heating per hour required to melt a ton of ice in 24 hours. The upshot of this is that a five-ton system typical of those studied by John and sold by Carl comes in at \$11,000 to \$15,000 including the general contractor's overhead and profit—or a \$5,000 to \$10,000 premium over a simple oil or gas heating system.

Regarding the mythical \$300 annual heating bill that was mentioned during the "Best Heating System" panel: When the question was addressed to me, I felt it referred to \$300 in oil, or about 30 million Btu delivered to load (40 million Btu with a system operating at 90 percent efficiency). In most of New England,

this would be about \$900 (or \$1,200 at 90-percent efficiency) of electric resistance heating.

If the electric heating bill is more than \$900, it's clear that you have \$600 (\$900 - \$300) in annual savings with which to finance the added installation costs of a gas, oil, heat-pump or whatever system. This works out to about \$6,000 in additional cost if a 10-year payback is acceptable. Many new systems can be done for this amount or less.

If the load is expected to be less than this \$900 electric bill (or \$300 oil or gas bill), the client may wish to use direct electric, but I recommend having a cheaper source available to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Wood or coal stoves and direct-vented kerosene, gas or propane heaters are all available for less than \$1,000.

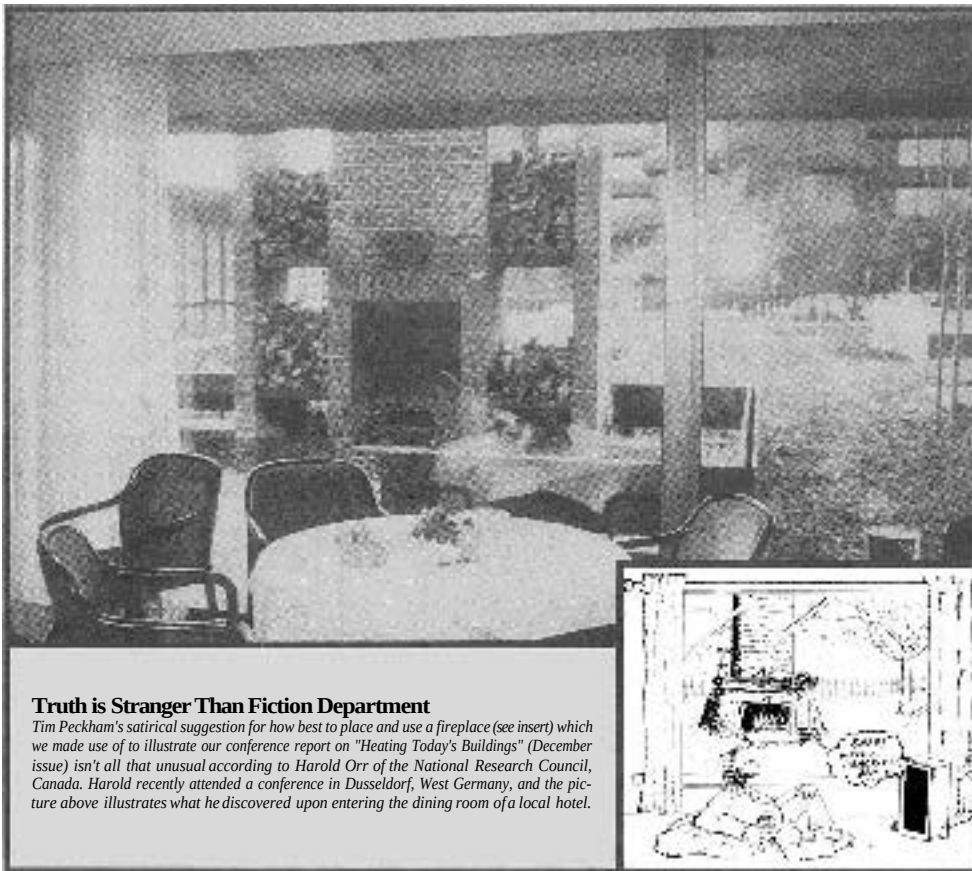
Another approach is to use the \$6,000 to insulate even further and bring the electric bill down to \$300 (or \$100 in the case of oil), at which point the house can be heated with the lights, coffee pots and personal computers, getting double duty from the electricity.

Finally, one of the highlights of this conference—the product exhibit—deserved more mention. I had spent more than eight months pulling teeth trying to convince major manufacturers to see the significance of exhibiting or speaking at a conference in New England dealing with quality, efficient heating systems.

That mostly the smaller, more innovative firms participated tells you a little about how seriously the larger manufacturers value your readers as present or future customers. The small innovative firms (Yukon, Glowcore, Energy Kinetics, Thermastor, Monitor, Trolatemp, Elpan, etc.) are trying to meet the needs of your readers and deserve your support. The big ones (Carrier, York, Lennox, Hydrotherm, etc.) could care less.

Once again I thank Paul for his constructive comments and encourage readers to participate in the Quality Building Council's "Advanced Residential Construction Conference" March 14 and 15 in Hartford, Conn.

Drew A. Gillett, P.E.
Bedford, N.H.



Truth is Stranger Than Fiction Department

Tim Peckham's satirical suggestion for how best to place and use a fireplace (see insert) which we made use of to illustrate our conference report on "Heating Today's Buildings" (December issue) isn't all that unusual according to Harold Orr of the National Research Council, Canada. Harold recently attended a conference in Dusseldorf, West Germany, and the picture above illustrates what he discovered upon entering the dining room of a local hotel.