

Bouquets & Suggestions

To the Editor:

As a builder and remodeler, I am finding *NEB* extremely helpful and hope you keep your focus just the way it is. I particularly appreciate learning of new trends and products through your writing staff. Their degree of experience in the building trades and the ideas are always worth reading about. It's so much more refreshing than, as you say, "press releases extolling the virtues of their product."

Also, the business info has helped me examine how I do business, and put me in a better position financially. Keep up the good work.

Jon Sairs
Calais, Vt.

To the Editor:

Your technical articles are great, but your business and legal columns are the ones I dare not miss.

I wonder if *NEB* would consider taking the 12 articles from "In Business" and "The Legal Column" and publishing them in a special year-end bonus issue. This would make a very handy reference text.

H.L. Thomas
Eutaw, Ala.

What Timing!

To the Editor:

Somehow I missed the index for your back issues. How may I obtain one?

John Terry
Fairfield, Conn.

Well, you didn't miss anything but you've come to the right place. In this

issue, after many requests and much hemming and hawing, *NEB* finally broke down and is publishing its first index to back issues. Enjoy. —Ed.

Builder Wanted

To the Editor:

My husband and I own a parcel of land in Sheffield, Mass. We would like to build a superinsulated home, but have been unable to locate an experienced builder.

Would you know of any builders in the Berkshires with experience?

Susan Butler
15 Main St.
Wethersfield, Conn. 06109

NRC, STC, IIC, etc.

To the Editor:

The increasing interest in multifamily homes has focused more attention than ever on controlling sound. Timothy Foulkes's article in the October 1986 issue is a timely and

excellent example of this increasing concern by architects and builders regarding sound. Mr. Foulkes clearly defines three distinct sound-control concerns.

In discussing sound absorption, he illustrates absorptive measures that control sound in the room where it originates. The effectiveness of a given material is measured by an NRC (Noise Reduction Coefficient) number. A good commercial ceiling tile designed for these qualities may have an NRC of .50 to .60. There are some very costly and specialized ceiling and wall panels that go to .60 to .70.

The biggest new concern over sound, however, is in multifamily residential (and light commercial) construction. In this market, the main concern is to *isolate* sound. As Foulkes's article ably illustrates, the degree of success in sound isolation of airborne sound is measured by an STC rating. The absorptive ceilings just mentioned publish STC ratings of 30 to 40. He also lists Homasote

as a "misused acoustical material" that is not a sound absorber. Homasote wall panels, however, have an NRC rating of .20 to .25, about one-half that of good commercial acoustic tile, and certainly more than standard building materials.

Mr. Foulkes's article also mentions the difficulty of overcoming impact noise (structure-borne). Homasote is a structural panel of sufficient density and resiliency that it is an effective isolator of airborne *and* impact noise. Homasote carpet board has IIC (Impact Insulation Class) values of 65 to 70, and STC value of 48, as tested in a floor-ceiling assembly. Homasote carpet board and floor decking substantially reduce impact and airborne noise levels. Homasote decorative wall panels are also sound-deadening.

Every selection of acoustic materials or methods should zero in on specific questions: Do you need absorption or isolation? And if you need to isolate, is it for airborne noise, impact noise, or both?

Guy S. Kindig
Contoocook, N.H.
New England Sales Representative
Homasote Company

In his article, Foulkes points out that sound absorption is usually not a big concern—and that normal furnishings and a carpet are usually adequate. If sound absorption within a wall cavity is desired (for its isolation effect), he prefers a material such as fiberglass insulation, which has an NRC rating of 100.

As for the IIC and STC ratings given, they are respectable, but not very meaningful unless we know what else is in the floor-ceiling assembly. —Ed.

Editorial

Think Small

The articles this month focus on small builders and remodelers. In 1986, remodeling (\$85 billion) and residential construction (\$122 billion) accounted for 5.3 percent of the GNP—up from 4 percent in 1980—making residential building and remodeling one of the largest businesses in America.

But unlike most large industries, which are growing more centralized and monopolistic, the ranks of home builders and remodelers continue to be dominated by small-volume operators. And while most products are sold more by slick marketing than by value, small builders continue to succeed largely by word of mouth.

Few individuals can start an automobile company or a computer outfit, but they can still buy a pickup and a rotary saw and, with a little luck and skill, make a living building and renovating houses. Although this may introduce a certain amount of amateurish, shoddy work, the main effect is positive—spawning a vitality, competitiveness, and diversity found in few other industries. It also tends to elevate the quality of the work, because many of the people drawn to housing truly *enjoy* building. (A

recent *Professional Builder* survey confirms this.)

But the question remains: Why hasn't the Little Guy folded up shop and caved in to Big Business—to the factory builders, the modulars, the assembly-line houses we keep hearing are just over the horizon?

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One reason is that there is still only a minor price advantage to factory building. Another is that many home buyers still value craftsmanship and personalized design and service. People might settle for McDonald's hamburgers, but they want home-cooked housing.

It is inevitable, though, that the small builder will face increasingly difficult odds and increasing competition—for labor, finance dollars, available sites, and for access to new building technologies. Even the smallest builders will have to draw on the techniques of their larger competitors—panelization, computerization, and business management skills that go beyond stuffing invoices in shoe boxes.

Many small operators come and go from the business. The ones who stay and grow will be those who find ways to marry these practical innovations with their original commitments to product and customer. Keeping those commitments paramount is in their own self-interest, because the market segment that sticks with the small builders will continue to look for quality, individualized housing.

There is a larger benefit, too—a better housing stock for all of us. It will be a sad time when all of our houses are stamped out by a cookie cutter and sold like laundry detergent.

So let 1987 be your year to get organized and to continue to turn our houses and renovations we all can be proud of. Best wishes for the new year. —S.B.