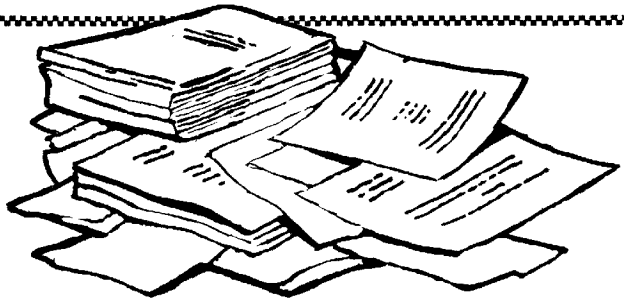


Letters



Answers Sought on Radiant Wood Floors

To the Editor:

I was intrigued by Steve Carlson's article on wood floor finishes over radiant heat systems. As applicators and installers of the Gyp-Crete line of products we face the question of floor finish choices daily with customers and professionals alike.

It is not uncommon to meet potential customers who desire nothing else but locally milled, long hardwood plank nailed over our floors. We are hard-pressed to find these acceptable for the reasons given by Carlson. Reasonable alternatives are becoming available. Gyp-Crete's Danewood clip system is a high-end product, but worth every penny due to its being triple kiln-fired, its easy installation, and its superb finish.

You will also find at least two top-quality laminated systems that state in print their applicability to radiant floors—one of these being Bruce. And, if you call Tarket's home office you will get a verbal approval from them as well—but not for their (solid) plank systems.

One other point. In the article a contractor was quoted as saying that they often run floors at 180°F to heat retrofits. As engineers and experienced installers, we hasten to share with any contractor (or homeowner) that if such water temperatures are indeed called for to meet an existing heat load, retrofit insulation of some kind is probably called for. Otherwise the structure may not be a good candidate for radiant heating. Or, at the least, it may require supplemental heat to make up the difference between required floor output and actual floor output. Trying to overcome an excessive heating load (more than 40 Btus per square foot) with radiant floor heat alone, would mean you'd have to run the floor too hot. Besides rendering the floor uncomfortable, you'd have the problems associated with excessive drying out of finish wood floor goods. The laminate manufacturers appear to agree that high floor temperatures will affect even the approved lines negatively. And I daresay that Danewood, even with its superior dimensional stability, would be subject to possible cracking.

Radiant floor heating, done correctly, is a wonderful form of space heating. It behooves the U.S. building industry to take it seriously and to come up with some additional and perhaps new responses to the questions of wood finish longevity. I guess it is all a learning process. But it's my hope that soon enough, choosing the correct wood flooring will become as much of a non-issue as, say, oxygen migration.

Thanks for a great and handy publication. Your double-cover name-

change was a stroke of genius. Well done.

Yann Kaloustian
Solartech Contractors, Inc.
East Corinth, Maine

Good Lumber Available at a Price

To the Editor:

Regarding Henry Spies's comments on poor quality lumber in the September 1988 issue of *New England Builder*: The best answer to the problem may be to order Construction Grade or Better, but perhaps you'd also like to tell the readers where to buy it!

The fact of the matter is it is not a common commercially available grade. However, there are other options open to builders who want better framing material.

Here are a few suggestions:

- 1). Insist on kiln-dried stock.
- 2). For strength and stability, douglas fir is supreme.
- 3). Some lumber mills specialize in producing high-end stock. It costs a little more but generally is worth it. Tell your lumber supplier you want better quality. Most lumber buyers know which mills produce the best lumber.
- 4). Visit several lumber yards in your trading area and ask to see their stock. It won't take long to discover what yards buy the best.
- 5). If you want better stock but don't want to pay for it—don't complain.

Robert Glasser
Barney & Carey Lumber Co.
Milton, Mass.

Tax Advice Flawed

To the Editor:

The article "Financing the Small Development" by John Brown [7/88] included financial projections showing the possible economic results to an investor. As usual you are to be commended for exploring the financial side of the building business, but unfortunately the tax aspects of the projects were seriously flawed. Not only did the projections use the wrong tax rate for calculating the investor's tax benefits, they also failed to take into account special rules that would likely prevent the investor from obtaining any current tax benefits whatsoever. These changes have dried up a major source of potential financing, and by giving builders an incorrect and overly optimistic economic model for their own projects, I'm afraid the article did a disservice.

The "In Business" column in your August 1988 issue was also commendable as a business matter but flawed from a tax perspective. Gail Hermann advises readers that

employee bonuses are not subject to employer withholding and can be reported on IRS Form 1099. What she advises is simply illegal. Almost any bonus paid to an employee will be treated as "wages," and will therefore be subject to withholding in the same manner (although perhaps at a lower rate) as regular salaries. Again, I am afraid that in an effort to give helpful business advice you have done the opposite.

Markley S. Roderick
Pennsauken, N. J.

Tensions in Growth

To the Editor:

Your issue on Land and Development was wonderful but left me hungry for more.

There are inherent tensions in growth, as so clearly delineated in your impact fee article, and also, perhaps not so clearly, in Vermont's new Act 200 Growth Legislation Bill. On one hand we have a mandate for affordable housing, and on the other we have impact fees being passed through, understandably enough, to the consumer, effectively undermining any prospects for affordable housing.

Another area that you addressed in that same vein is septic codes. The variations in septic codes from one New England state to another point out more than just variations in soil types; it shows the inherent capriciousness of the codes themselves.

Separation of black and grey water may be a cost-effective route to go in some states, but not in Vermont. The On-Site Sewage Program that operates in many of our towns requires a separate tank and field for both types of wastewater, effectively doubling the costs of any attempt to be environmentally conscientious and efficient in one's wastewater management. And so we end up with \$10,000 to \$15,000 mound systems pushing affordable housing out of the way. When one's up-front development costs are reaching \$40,000 to \$70,000 (land, access, well, power, septic) there's little hope for affordable housing even though quite a few builders have this as their ideal: To be able to build quality homes at a reasonable cost.

These tensions can be strengths or weaknesses depending on how they are balanced against each other. And that balancing is what planning should be all about. It seems to me the old planning and zoning ideas are bankrupt yet still hold sway by force of momentum and laziness. My hope is that there are new ideas on the horizon that will see the light of day in magazines such as yours.

Dennis Darrah
Vt. Assoc. of Planning
& Devel. Agencies
Montpelier, Vt.

It Looked Good On A Cocktail Napkin

To the Editor:

Late one night during a conference I was talking with a certain blower door manufacturer from Minnesota (who may wish to be unnamed). We were talking about ice dams and the usual suggestion to prevent them by extending insulation out over the sidewall, using a baffle to avoid blocking airflow through the soffit. Most publications (including your own in 5/88) suggest this approach—we do too. Well this Minnesotan said that—in his neck of the woods—insulation contractors just blow the whole area full of cellulose, no venting, no nothing, and they never have any problem with ice dams or roof deterioration.

Our theory as to why this might work is that the cellulose packs in tightly enough to prevent both warm air movement and radiant heat-loss through this area. Thus, no melting snow to create ice dams. What about roof failure from excess heat due to lack of venting? No problem, the Minnesotan said. He's seen roofs in good condition ten years after this treatment. Most "experts" would predict otherwise, I think.

Here's what I want to know. Does this technique work as well as described? Do insulation contractors in Minnesota regularly do it, and would they admit to it? If it works, why don't we recommend it as an easier alternative? Have there been roof failures from lack of venting, that he just doesn't know about? Did this sound reasonable only because it was a late at night and we'd had a few beers? Would a popular building magazine run an article on this and invite comments from the readers who have experience with this?

Al Wasco
Housing Resource Center
Cleveland, Ohio

We know of others who have done similarly with cathedral ceilings—blown them full of insulation with no vent space. They report no ice dams and no problems "as far as they know." We know of other cases where unvented cathedral ceilings have turned to worm wood. Any comments guys??? —Editor



Keep 'em coming... We welcome letters, but they must be signed and include the writer's address. The *Journal of Light Construction* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to *The Journal*, P.O. Box 5059, Burlington, VT 05402.