Letters

Good Ol' Fiberglass

To the Editor:

I read with great interest about the new wet cellulose insulation and the so-called great results ("Contractors' Tips for Spray-Cellulose," JLC, 8/89). Many other items are long-gone, such as cellulose with added insecticide and ureaformaldehyde (UF) foam, with its related outgassing and high shrinkage. About ten years ago, cellulose was treated with aluminum sulfate, causing high corrosion. What next?

Fiberglass, though it may not be glamorous, is still there in 78 percent of old and new construction.

Richard Hammond
Keene, N.H.

From Ireland to America

To the Editor:

Being one of your fond subscribers for some years I hope you can help me or point me in the right direction.

I have a nephew and his friend living in Ireland who have vocational woodworking experience. They want very badly to come to America to serve a carpentry apprenticeship, which is just not available to them in Ireland due to depressed economic times.

It surely would be a mutually ideal situation for both employer and employees – good reliable help at modest pay, etc.

Any help, names to contact or suggestions would be appreciated.

Gregory J. Howes
G.J. Howes Company
Groton, Mass.

Anyone interested in discussing this matter with Mr. Howes can reach him at 239 Hill Rd., RD #3, Groton, MA 01450. – The Editors

On Stamping Stock Plans

To the Editor:

In the article on stock house plans in your July 1989 issue, the author, John Wagner, says "if your state requires a stamp [engineer's or architect's], get the name of local architects who will stamp the plans." In New York State this is illegal (and I would guess in many other states as well). An architect cannot stamp drawings that he did not do himself or directly supervise, and he must maintain documentation of all preliminary and final plans, documents, computations, records and professional evaluations relating to the work for at least six years.

As the article states, "Many [architects] don't want the liability of stamping plans they did not draw." There is a very good reason for this. Even forgetting the legality, it is unethical to sign your name to something that is neither yours nor under your direct supervision and guidance.

I think it is very unprofessional for Mr. Wagner to suggest otherwise.

William J. Reese
Southampton, N.Y.

To the Editor:

We are writing to express total displeasure with an article "Stock House Plans," written by John Wagner, especially the section of the article entitled, "Getting the Plans Stamped."

This section alludes to a problem our architectural profession is constantly confronted with - the illegal affixing of a stamp or seal by an architect, structural engineer, or a professional engineer, to documents he or she has not drawn, prepared, or supervised the preparation of.

We are unaware of any state which considers this action legal in their architectural practice acts. To suggest that this is the way to get one's plans stamped and avoid the normal fees, is despicable and totally uncalled for in a publication such as The Journal of Light Construction.

We believe your management has permitted the overstepping of good judgment and an apology is in order to the various professions and, in particular, to those practitioners who exercise ethical behavior and strive to comply with the architectural acts in the state of their practice.

Richard C. Housel, AIA
Keith T. Schnepp, AIA
Springfield, Ill.

John D. Wagner Responds:

Despite some state statutes, and the efforts of many architects to discourage the practice, stock home plans can and do get stamps or "wet signatures" by architects who did not draw them. In fact, many plan services maintain staffs of architects or designers registered in many states who will upgrade plans for code compliance in the state where they will be used.

Laws vary from state to state. In some states, it is illegal for architects to stamp plans they did not draw, yet in other states, it is not. Some states don't even require a wet signature. But it is naive to assume that plans drawn by an architect not registered in your state can't be legally modified by someone else and approved for use. The same is true for stock plans.

Though neither the American Institute of Architects (AIA) nor the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) keep such statistics, it is estimated that a relatively small percentage of homes are built from plans drawn specifically for that project. The main reason is that architects typically charge anywhere from 2% to 20% of the turnkey price for a custom-designed home. That extra expense may buy a higher level of individual attention and design refinement. Yet, except in high-end custom projects, the marketplace seems unwilling to foot the bill for that added benefit. In short, many stock plans are good enough for all sorts of residential projects. The stock-home-plan industry's success reflects this.

The industry also sits on solid ground historically. Pattern books, the predecessor of modern plan books, were first popularized by Asher Benjamin, an early American architect. Many homes and buildings built from pattern books and early stock plans are now valued by communities and design professionals as "vernacular" architecture.

As for the question of ethics and legality, it's important to remember that stock plans are originally drawn by registered architects or registered designers, and are modified to code by architects or designers registered in the states where the plans will be used. In fact, few question the quality, detail, or safety of stock plans. The issue seems to boil down, then, to an old-fashioned turf battle. We think there's plenty of room on this turf for both custom design by architects and good stock design from reputable plan books.

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, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.