

Letters



Inspectors: Get Professional

To the Editor:

Your February 1989 issue included an article about home inspection by William Hurrle. It was well written and very informative, but may have misled some readers to believe home inspecting is an easy business. Ten years ago a moderately informed person might blunder and bluff his way through inspections and get away with it. That is no longer possible. The home buying public is much more sophisticated and expects a knowledgeable and professional inspector.

The aspiring inspector has a duty to himself and his clients to know what he is about—technically, professionally, and ethically. A person entering this field must know the basic guidelines, the ASHI Standards of Practice and the ASHI Code of Ethics, because he will be expected to perform at or beyond those defined limits even if he is not a member of ASHI.

As the profession has matured, competition has stiffened and litigation has become more frequent. Those are but two of the negatives. The positives are that ASHI public relations efforts have accelerated market development nationwide and that educational programs are now available designed exclusively to educate the home inspector. Some of the education sources are: American Society of Home Inspectors, Inc., 3299 K Street, NW, Seventh Floor, Washington, DC 20007 (202/842-3096); Home-Tech, Inc., 5161 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20816 (800/638-8292); Instructional Technologies Institute, Inc., 145-D Grassy Plains St., Bethel, CT 06801 (800/227-1662); Property Inspector's Training Institute, Inc., 8811 Stonehaven Court, Potomac, MD 20854 (301/983-9371).

These educational programs are aimed specifically at the home inspector. Other seminars in code compliance and construction techniques are very helpful also, but lack the focus required by this profession.

The "credential" for the profession is membership in ASHI, and is likely to continue to be so. ASHI is the organization that represents the backbone of the profession and all home inspectors should seek that affiliation.

Richard C. Wolcott
Suburban House Inspectors, Inc.
Worcester, N.Y.

To the Editor:

I feel you have done your excellent publication a disservice by publishing Mr. Hurrle's article about Home Inspection in your February 1989 issue.

As President of the Great Lakes Chapter of the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), I along with every member work very diligently on building the credibility of the profession. We subscribe to a strict code of ethics as well as a standard of practice. There is an obvious conflict of interest when the supposedly impartial home inspector for a potential home buyer will also contract to do any repairs he finds. ASHI standards forbid us from doing any such repairs or referring our client to a company to do the repairs. Not only is this unethical but can eventually stereotype the profession in the same category as "used-car salesmen" (no offense intended).

Second, Mr. Hurrle should stick to an endeavor he is capable and equipped to do. If one doesn't have the proper equipment to perform a thorough inspection, how thorough can the inspection be? Instead of putting these things on his "wish list" as he has stated, he should be attending ASHI's numerous training seminars that educate inspectors in the profession of home inspections. ASHI will make a good inspector a better inspector. It will help him do his job easier and hopefully with less exposure to lawsuits.

Where Mr. Hurrle's article states that home surveys "sometimes bring you into the middle of conflicts," that should be edited to state "often times" so a home inspector should be prepared to defend his observations in court. That is another reason why ASHI is so important to the industry. Unfortunately, Mr. Hurrle won't be accepted unless he stops doing the repairs on the houses he inspects.

Lon Grossman
Technihouse Inspections, Inc.
President, ASHI Great Lakes Chapter

William Hurrle Responds:

The original assignment was to write a piece that would help a tradesperson get a feel for what it would be like to add an inspection service to his remodeling or construction business. So I will try to address the ethics of part-time inspectors in small markets.

ASHI's code forbids doing inspections and work on the same house. But what's right when such professionalism isn't realistic?

It is unethical to have a secret agenda,

to pretend to be doing a home survey while what is really going on is a sales call. We all know that the more "sell" there is in information, the less "truth." I advertise as Community Builders under the Yellow Pages' "Inspection Bureaus" heading. Clients know they are not hiring inspections-only when they phone. They want a carpenter/remodeler's savvy; not a checklist from a specialist who won't talk about materials and methods, and who won't refer them to others who can do the work or do a cost analysis of a particular problem.

I can draw a line between inspection and correction. But people often expect both from me. It may be ethically gray, but they don't feel helpless. They are inclined to trust business survivors.

Getting an inspection, a cost estimate, and someone to do the work all in one session sure gets the job done faster than separating the functions. The cost of repairs conditions the relationship, too. A few-hundred-dollar job can be handled with talk and a handshake. When the dollars mount, so does deliberation and paper.

We don't balk at letting the MD who diagnoses us also treat us. The trust is sometimes abused, but that gets around. If I can do the work, have time to do it, and if the client asks me, I don't feel it is unethical to fix a problem. The client is free to get other opinions.

Know that I've also asked ASHI for a list of publications and seminars. There is always more to learn.

Rehab Rehashed

To the Editor:

In regard to Mr. Lennon's Case In Point column in your February '89 issue, I take issue with Mr. Lennon's statement that most rehab specialists are underpaid and inexperienced. I've been a carpenter for 21 years, and have been exposed to all the trades pertinent to remodeling. I do my very best to keep our clients who are seeking low-interest loans informed on what is going to take place when work begins. I also talk with our contractors so they know what kind of workmanship we expect. Our work specs are written in a clear, concise manner, and we make every attempt to alleviate any guesswork as to what products and workmanship we expect. I also tell the contractors that we don't expect them to bid on items they cannot see, and I've never asked a contractor to eat a change order unless it was unwarranted. I've only asked that the change not be at an inflated price, but at a fair price that will keep all parties satisfied.

In closing, I would like to say it is very difficult to attract reputable contractors as it is, with all the state

regulations we have to follow, without someone like Mr. Lennon making these kinds of disparaging remarks. What he should have said is, "Contractors should judge each town having these programs on their own merit, and not lump them all together."

Dick Angelini
Rehab Specialist
Franklin, Mass.

Satisfied Customer

To the Editor:

I thought that I should let you know of my first-hand experiences with two of your regular advertisers, "The Rafter Factory, of Adamsville, R.I., and Bear Creek Lumber, of Winthrop, Wash. My current construction project, a very large, high-end addition to a residence in Greenwich, Conn., includes an 1,800-square-foot indoor poolhouse. The engineered design required the construction of eight large structural cedar trusses, of post-and-beam type construction, with applied-curved chords, all of which will be exposed when the project is completed.

Working with Cloud Bannick, from Bear Creek Lumber, I was able to purchase the required 4x4 and 4x8 STK cedar truss components at a very reasonable price. The quality of the delivered materials was very good, and on time.

Prior to contracting with the Rafter Factory for the fabrication of my trusses, I went up to Rhode Island and met with the owners, felt very good about entrusting them with the work, and went into contract with them once the bidding was completed. Their pricing was also very reasonable, although the work was to be more closely in line with cabinetry-level millwork than framing. The finished trusses were extremely well done, and again, delivered on schedule.

My letter is to let your readers know that there are still numerous suppliers and contractors available to them. Some careful research, some basic trust that people are what they say they are, until proven otherwise, and sometimes just choosing people on a "good feeling" is what you need to do to produce good results.

Allen Reyen
Stamford, Conn.

Better Tile Base

To the Editor:

I enjoyed Michael Byrne's article, "Preparing for Ceramic Tile," featured

in your November '88 issue. However, I would like to clarify a couple of statements Mr. Byrne makes.

First, he says, "All manufacturers of moisture-resistant drywall (so-called green or blue board) state that this kind of drywall should not be used as a setting bed for tiles." Not so. At Georgia-Pacific, we have developed a moisture-resistant drywall that we recommend as a setting base for nearly all types of tiles. That board is Dens-Shield, a paperless—and that's the key—gypsum product with a proprietary coating that even eliminates the need for an additional moisture barrier.

Because Dens-Shield has fiberglass facers that penetrate its water-resistant core, it won't delaminate like paper-faced gypsum products. That means when tiles are adhered, they stay put. In addition, even if the grout cracks, moisture won't affect Dens-Shield because of the coating.

Second, Dens-Shield, like the cement-based products Mr. Byrne mentioned, is an excellent substrate for thin-set installations. Test results show that although Dens-Shield weighs one-third less than those products, it performs as well as—and in some cases outperforms—cement boards.

Barbara Squires
Georgia-Pacific Corporation
Atlanta, Ga.

Government Work Good Enough

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to an article which appeared in your February 1989 issue. The article was entitled "Close Enough For Government Work," written by Michael Lennon. It is apparent that Mr. Lennon has had a bad experience with a government housing-assistance program; but the majority of problems that he illustrates in his article are just the reason that these government agencies exist in the first place.

These programs are set up to make necessary housing repairs affordable to low and moderate income families. I stress necessary repairs, because the majority of homes I inspect have serious, and potentially dangerous deficiencies. Some of the most common problems are badly leaking roofs, lack of adequate heating (in some instances, kerosene space heaters are the only source of heat), lack of adequate plumbing facilities, and existence of 30-amp electric service to dwellings (often accompanied by deteriorated and overloaded wiring). These are some of the "code-enforcement items" that we attempt to rectify, and that Mr. Lennon dismisses so casually. We would be doing our clients a grave disservice if we performed a cosmetic rehab on a

property and ignored faulty plumbing or wiring.

Mr. Lennon's argument about "too many cooks" is also refuted in his article. He stresses that the clients are not used to dealing with reputable contractors and their prices. The result of this is that often we are called in after a homeowner has been ripped off by a truck-and-ladder operator. The homeowner either didn't understand what was necessary to correctly address a problem, or out of lack of affordability, accepted a makeshift repair. When clients come to us, they are assured that the work will be performed by quality professionals, who have gone through an approval process just to be able to do work through our program. These contractors are subject to rigid performance specifications, as well as detailed job specifications written by a trained professional. The clients are allowed to choose cabinet styles, floor and wall coverings, fixture styles, and all other finishes, within certain parameters (usually an allowance figure). If the client wishes to exceed the cost parameter of any or all items, it is their prerogative to pay the additional cost out of pocket. The entire work write-up is reviewed thoroughly with the client prior to being sent out for bid, so the client is fully informed as to what exactly the contractors are bidding on.

Once the work has actually started, the work-in-progress is monitored closely by the rehab specialist for specification compliance. If a contractor feels that he can let his craftsmanship slide because of the client's financial status, he quickly learns otherwise. Our rehab specialists know the client is paying top dollar for the work, and they in turn, expect first-class quality in craftsmanship. The homeowner going through our program has a better chance of getting a professional job than any private individual of any better income classification contracting themselves with a private contractor.

I agree with Mr. Lennon's advice to the contractors. First of all, rehab construction is not for everyone. It's an entirely different ballgame than new construction. The contractor should gather as much information as he can concerning the program parameters, codes, and other bureaucratic stipulations prior to considering the work. If the program is structured correctly, it will protect the contractor as fully as the client. There is no reason a reputable, quality-conscious contractor cannot make an adequate profit working through a government-sponsored rehab program. Our contractors do all the time.

Jack Berger
Acting Director
Office of Housing Rehabilitation
York, Pa.

Eagle Shield Sponsors Research

To the Editor:

Avenues Communications represents Eagle Shield, Inc., in media relations, and I am writing to say how much I enjoyed the article "reflecting on radiant barriers" by Alex Wilson in the February 1989 issue of *The Journal*. But the reference to "Energy Shield, Inc." as a major contributor to the NAHB study is incorrect. The correct name of the company is "Eagle Shield, Inc."

Eagle Shield is participating with the NAHB research center in an effort to gain more research information regarding the effectiveness of radiant barriers. This NAHB study will focus on the application of radiant barriers in several different geographical areas of the country; and more importantly, it will reveal the degree of effectiveness in real-life settings—the research will be conducted in homes that are inhabited, rather than in laboratory settings.

Michael Clapier
Media Liaison
Avenues Communications
Salt Lake City, Utah

Consult Your Lawyer

To the Editor:

I was fascinated to read the article by Peter Vandertuin regarding owner labor (2/88). Perhaps intentionally, the subtitle suggests that "owners can contribute useful work if you treat them like subs." The author does not suggest that any legal documents be created in connection with this relationship, but I think he realizes the importance of a formal relationship with the owners when he suggests that the owners should be treated like subcontractors. It would seem to me that if the author has never had any type of liability claim come back to him as a result of this, he is a careful and thoughtful builder indeed, and perhaps a lucky one.

I have the privilege of assisting Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation in the training of its new construction specialists and fascinating issues like this arise all the time. I found the article extremely helpful and will certainly pass it along to my clients in every phase of construction. I would caution anyone applying these ideas on any scale to consult a local attorney and arrive at some simple understanding with the owner as to the risk assumed by the owner in this relationship and the absence of the general contractor's responsibility.

Thomas C. O'Brien
O'Brien & Barbahen Law Offices
Chicago, Ill. ■

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.