The Journal's pick of curious, interesting and useful products.

New Beams on the Block

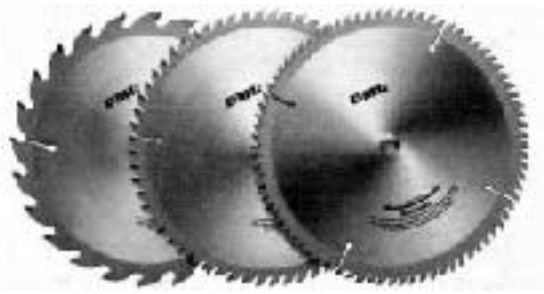
by Clayton DeKorne

Given the fluctuating price, availability, and quality of full-sized solid sawn timber these days, Weyerhaeuser Series 1650 glulams may be an answer for one-piece headers and beams. These glulam headers have no camber and are sized to fit into conventional 4- and 6-inch framing. They are stress rated for bending at 1,650 psi. Comparably sized glulams, LVL, and parallel-strand lumber cost significantly more and are rated for commercial use at a minimum of 2,800 psi which is more than is needed for most residential applications. A 3 1/2 x 7 1/2-inch Series 1650 glulam reportedly has the same structural capacity as a 4x10 #1 Douglas-fir beam. The reduction in size alone may make these glulams cost effective. In addition, the manufacturer guarantees 100% usable lumber and cut-to-order lengths, so there's little waste. For more information, contact Weyerhaeuser, Tacoma, WA 98477; 800/424-3401.

Insulating Drainage Panels

Thermadry is an exterior foundation insulating panel with drainage channels carved in the face. The channels are covered with a filtration fabric to keep the channels from filling up with soil. Standard 2x8-foot panels are available in 1 1/2-inch (R-6.9) and 2 1/4 -inch (R-10.6) sizes. The panels have tongue-and-groove edges for installation. The tongue edges have a flap on the filtration fabric to lap over the joint. Two compressive strengths, 1,250 and 1,750 psf, are available in each size. For more information, contact The Dow Chemical Co., Customer Information Center, P.O. Box 1206, Midland, MI 48674; 800/258-2436.

New Carbide Blades



There's a new carbide, Dyanite, that "is fast becoming the industry standard" for long wearing carbide blades. And there are a couple of new Teflon coated blades, Black and Decker's Piranha Deck Blade and Freud's Series 98 Blades, that promise smoother cuts and reduced pitch build-up.

Dyanite is a proprietary substance belonging to DML; it is available on their Golden Eagle saw blades. These blades reportedly stay sharp two to five times longer than standard C-4 grade carbide blades. DML is unwilling to divulge the blade's secret formula, but it does seem to live up to these manufacturer claims. With a sample combination blade I cut through enough pressure-treated lumber and DCS plywood to dull any ordinary blade. And it's still sharp enough to make finish cross-cuts in hardwood plywood. Golden Eagle saw blades are available in a variety of tooth configurations and grinds in 8- to 16-inch diameters. For more information, contact DML, Inc., 1350 S. 15th St., Louisville, KY 40201-1861; 800/233-7297.

The Piranha Deck Blade is an 18-

tooth carbide circular saw blade marketed primarily for cutting pressure-treated, green, and wet wood. The Teflon coating does seem to help reduce the bind of wet fibers and treating chemicals that can gum up the blade. And the high-hook tooth makes for an aggressive blade that cuts smoother than most 24-tooth blades. The blade's deep shouldered tooth also seems effective for clearing the kerf when cutting these woods. But it performs well on other woods, too. For more information, contact Black and Decker, 10 North Park Drive, Box 798, Hunt Valley, MD 21030; 301/527-7055.

Freud produces larger diameter blades that have a Teflon coating to resist pitch build-up and an improved carbide similar to Dyanite. This carbide is identified with the acronym HOOK; this name has nothing to do with the tooth configuration or grind. HOOK carbide is reportedly made with a finer carbide dust than regular C-4 carbide, so the end product is denser. In addition, the mixture is formulated to resist acids in wood, which contributes to its long life. The 80-tooth, 10-inch blade makes a very good table saw blade. It cuts smoother than most other blades I have used and stands up to hardwood ply for an exceptionally long time. For more information, contact Freud, 218 Feld Avenue, High Point, NC 27264; 800/334-4107.

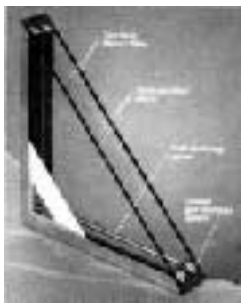
Structural Laminate

Wilsonart recently introduced Formed Structural Laminate, a pre-formed surfacing material with a phenolic resin core. No substrate is necessary. And it is incredibly strong. (I tried to destroy a 3/8-inch sample with a 20-ounce hammer and failed.) This material has been popular in Europe for a number of years. In this country it is taking off in the commercial market for such uses as toilet partitions, retail counters, and fast food seating. But it may also have a place in residential work for countertops and cabinet cases. It is available in 1/8-, 1/4-, 3/8-, and 1/2-inch sheets with both faces finished. For more information, contact Ralph Wilson Plastics Co., P.O. Box 6110, Temple, TX 76503-6110; 817/778-2711.

Motion Sensing Light Switch

Most motion detectors are part of an exterior light fixture or a larger security system. If you want to control a standard light fixture, the SL-6107 Reflex Switch can do the trick. The interior motion-sensing wall switch can be manually switched on and off or it can be set to "auto" to turn on the light when someone enters a room. The switch also has a "security" setting that will flash the lights on and off when someone enters the room and a "random" mode with a built-in timer that randomly turns lights on and off after dusk. This switch can be used for incandescent lights up to 500 watts. It carries a one-year warranty and sells for about $25. For more information contact Heath-Zenith, Reflex Division, Hilltop Road, St. Joseph, MI 49085.

Super Window



Super windows with R-values between 6 and 15 have been lurking on the horizon for years and all of the big window manufacturers claim to have a prototype undergoing testing at some level. Hurd is the first company to put such a window on the market: the Insol-8, and R-8 quad-pane window. It has two panes of "Heat Mirror" low-e film suspended between two panes of clear glass. This configuration yields R-8 at the central portion of the window. The three spaces between each pane are filled with an undisclosed gas mixture. Between the two films is an innovative, non-conductive edge spacer that should help reduce thermal losses and condensation at the window's edges. For more information, contact Hurd Millwork Co., 575 S. Whelen Ave., Medford, WI 54451; 715/748-2011. ■