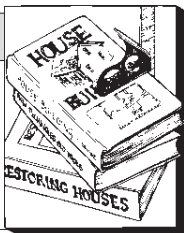


Estimating Strategies

Estimating for Home Builders by John C. Mouton
(National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB), 15th and
M Streets NW, Washington, DC 20005: 1984); 157 pages;
8 1/2x11 paperback; \$22.40, members; \$28.00, non-members.



Perhaps the scariest part of the whole housebuilding process is estimating. Unpredictable weather conditions, unforeseen cost increases, and poorly qualified bids from subs can all add to the uncertainty. The only effective strategy for reducing the risk and anxiety associated with job costing is a thorough, systematic approach to your work. The NAHB's *Estimating for Home Builders* provides the background against which you can develop a method that works for you.

Beginning with a broad overview, you'll learn how to qualify your bids with allowances, what sequence to use in estimating, and how to write a contract proposal or evaluate those you get from subs. The author examines the differences between lump-sum and unit-cost subcontracts, and how a "price" differs from a "quote." You'll learn how labor-only subcontracts can protect you from liens, and how to solicit bids in writing or over the phone. Along the way you'll pick up some good tips on staying competitive, such as not being overly optimistic in estimating labor productivity.

My only criticism is that the author's English is sometimes hard to grasp, as when he says, "In addition, normal actual costs might appear to be cost savings if the contingency cost is not needed for the work." But even if you can't follow that phraseology on the first pass, I'd still say this is one of the better books available on estimating methodology. It isn't a manual, though, so don't buy it expecting the kind of data you'd find in *R.S. Means* and similar references.

Plastering Technique Well Covered

Plastering Skills by F. Van Den Branden and Thomas Hartsell (American Technical Publishers, 1155 W. 175th Street, Homewood, IL 60430: 1984); 532 pages; paperback, \$25.96.

Plastering, it is said, is a dying art in an age of seemingly all-pervasive gypsum board. The authors of *Plastering Skills* have made a mighty contribution to preserving those skills with this comprehensive book. It is both a useful textbook for the apprentice or journeyman plasterer, and a valuable reference for those who simply admire the craft and want to learn more.

For history buffs, there is a thumb-nail description of the development of the craft, from ancient Sumer through the Renaissance to the present day. For beginners, there is basic information on hand tools like margin trowels, browning brushes, elastic knives, seven-bladed angle planes, miter rods, and banjos, as well as larger equipment

like mixers and aggregate guns. For the technology-minded, a chapter is devoted to the production, chemistry, and uses of gypsum, lime, and portland cement plasters. The latter, incidentally, was invented by English plasterer and bricklayer, Joseph Aspdin, who cooked up the first batch on his kitchen stove while searching for a mortar that would harden under water.

On the practical side, you'll learn how to proportion various products and mix them by hand, paddle, or machine; to apply the plaster over wood, metal, or gypsum lath; to determine the "suction" of your base; to handle a hawk, trowel, and darby; to use "dots" to plumb and true walls; to deal with troublesome angles; and to properly apply scratch, brown, and finish coats.

The book's chief shortcomings are its rather dry, textbook prose and a poor selection of photographs (supplemented by occasional drawings). You would have a hard time mastering the craft by following the book alone, but that's understandable since it's written to be used in connection with instruction and supervised practice. Given those limits, there isn't much you can't learn about plastering from this book.

—Paul Hanke

Free & Cheap

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SENCO Fastening Systems offers a *Safety Inspection Checklist*, which can be used wherever pneumatic tools are in operation. Categories include emergency marking and lighting, condition of equipment, personal protective equipment, and fire protection. Write to SENCO Products Inc., Attn: Jack Buchwald, 8485 Broadwell Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45244.

Signs for Safety: Seton Name Plate

Company's 1990/91 sign catalog points the way to a large selection of sign and traffic control products. It includes products such as barricades, barrels, safety fences, and OSHA warning tape; regulatory signs, tags and labels; no smoking and fire signs; and traffic control signs. For free catalog and samples write to Seton Name Plate Company, P.O. Box ZHW-1331, New Haven, CT 06505; 800/243-6624.

Collecting Dust: Delta Wood Dust

Control and Collection Systems is a booklet providing information about designing and installing central dust collection systems for small wood shops. Topics include health and safety effects of wood dust, dust capture and dust conveyance, inlet hood design, dust collector design types, air filtration, and the basic principles of dust collection and duct design. Send \$3 to Delta International Machinery Corp., 246 Alpha Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

—Susan Saunders