
Letters



Who Owns Historic House Plans?

To the Editor:

Here's a question about John Leeke's article "Historic House Plans" (Restoration Primer, 7/89). Does the homeowner have the legal right to grant permission for his house to be drawn, or does consent lie with the original architect (or his estate), or someone else? I'm sure many historic homeowners would be flattered and more than willing to allow you or me to measure and duplicate their homes (once they are convinced we aren't burglars). I'm interested in where the legal lines are drawn, however.

I am moved by the work of several architects — Frank Lloyd Wright in particular. My impression is that the F.L. Wright Foundation claims copyrights to all of his work (design, writing, and building plans.)

I realize that Mr. Leeke was talking about buildings that would have no such problems, but what about structures by known architects? The ethical issues of reproducing or "modernizing" a historic plan is another question which I will leave to someone else to raise.

Daniel W. Starck
Starck Studios
Carbondale, Ill.

In March 1989, the United States joined the Berne Convention, a multinational copyright treaty which includes copyright protection for works of architecture. Current copyright law protects "exceptional" buildings, but not strip malls and tract housing. Probably most older "vernacular" buildings would not be protected. Designs by known architects, however, would be protected until the copyright expires - usually 50 years.
—The Editors

Fake FRT Stamps?

To the Editor:

FRT plywood has been troubling everyone associated with building in

the Washington, D.C., metro area. Here, it seems, some treatment methods are not considered the problem that others are. This has prompted some very innovative field activity on job sites.

It seems that some of the builders or their superintendents have had their own stamps made up to indicate that the plywood within their houses is the "acceptable" type.

One building inspector confiscated such a stamp in Fairfax County, Virginia.

As professional home inspectors/surveyors, we have found it difficult to find the stamps that are supposed to be on the plywood so when we find something showing prominently near an access hatch, we are a little suspicious.

The problem extends into the resale market as well. Home buyers want to know if their particular roof contains the defective product and, if so, how much it will cost to repair it. Real estate agents are anxious about the matter and home inspectors/surveyors have difficulty coming up with anything definitive.

Michael Lennon
Home Pro Systems
McLean, Va.

Software Reviews Not Purchased

To the Editor:

On behalf of the Software Review Task Force of National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), please let me respond to Dennis Kolva's letter (JLC Letters, 8/89) regarding NAHB's software certification.

Mr. Kolva asserts that the fee that NAHB charges seems "to be too much like a purchased recommendation." This may be his opinion, but I can assure him and the rest of the building industry that this is not the case. Since I do all the testing of submitted products myself, I can hardly agree that the recommendation is "purchased."

Yes, NAHB does charge a fee to recover its costs incurred performing the review of building industry software products. The Software Review Program is not a profit generating venture. In fact, the intent of the Software Review Program is to have an effect on industry specific software, regardless of whether or not the software programs go through the review process. We know of several programs that, while they have not been submitted for review, exhibit most, if not all, of the features which are standard to the approved products.

The Software Review Program exists to help NAHB members select software. Most of the builders I speak to are very pleased to be given a list and information on products from companies that have distinguished themselves as being committed to NAHB and the building industry.

Susan Forrester
NAHB
Washington, D.C.

How Big Is the Senior Market?

To the Editor:

The article "Retrofitting Houses for Seniors" (JLC, 10/89), was of much interest to me as remodeling contractor. For the past two years we have been examining the viability of an emphasis on the barrier-free remodeling market. So far, I'm skeptical but still studying.

In the article, the author reports correctly that 75% of the elderly will stay in their own homes the remainder of their lives. This leads me to the paradox: Who will buy a single-family barrier-free home remodeled for the elderly if most elderly stay in their own homes and the rest move into retirement communities? Perceived resale value is almost always a criteria for our remodeling customers, even if the resale is intended to be done posthumously.

I would also like to know then, of the "estimated \$36 to \$72 billion geriatric retrofit market" (talk about ball-

park estimates!), how much of that is going to the single-family residential remodeling contractor? Isn't that market primarily comprised of nursing homes, retirement communities, and their suppliers? Of the segment that does pertain to residential retrofits, how much of it includes the already established "home elevator" market?

Our firm, like others I'm sure, is eager to focus on our area's need for barrier-free residential remodeling. But when the demand for such services is limited or doubtful, isn't it wisest from a business sense to keep making money the way you've been making money?

Jay Ustruck
Aztec Construction
St. Louis, Mo.

Although industry estimates don't say what portion of senior retrofit dollars are spent on single-family residential, as opposed to retirement communities and nursing homes, logic tells us if 75% of the elderly stay home, then home is where the remodeling is to be done.

On whether remodeling a home for an elderly occupant will adversely affect its marketability and resale value, George Genung of the NAHB's Council on Seniors Housing says it might. But, he points out that the more adaptable the remodeling is — for instance, by installing cabinets or counters that can be raised or lowered easily — the larger the market will be for that particular house.

—The Editors



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.