LETTERS

Leave Simple Design To Builders

To the Editor:

As a builder who designs for both myself and other builders, I wish to throw more fuel onto the design/build conflagration.

I have nothing but respect for architects. Indeed, I learned much of what I know from watching what they do. However, I happen to think (as do many homeowners) that architects are over-qualified for designing small and medium-sized additions, and possibly even small modestly designed houses. Any builder with common sense and an eye for design can do just fine. In fact, our most enduring classics, such as the Greek Revival Farmhouse, the New England Cape, and the Cape Cod Cottage, have typically been designed by farmers, builders, and homeowners.

Most homeowners simply aren't willing to pay several thousand dollars for an architect to do simple, straightforward design work. And let's face it, that's what most of us build. Architects further price themselves out of this market by tending to over-design small projects. Homeowners come to builders with elaborate plans drawn by architects who often project their own design imperatives onto unsuspecting clients with more modest needs. This displays a lack of fiscal responsibility on the part of the architect. In the real world, no matter how wonderful the design is, it's not worth much if it will never be built.

Architects have a well-established place in the high-end residential market. I have had the pleasure of working with many good architects. They appreciated my ability to translate their ideas into reality, and I appreciated their knowledge and ideas. However, much of what gets built does not need to be designed by an architect. This is the way it has always been, and it's not likely to change much, no matter how many states enact laws of one kind or another to regulate design.

Douglas Friesen
Owner, Boa Constructors
Duxbury, Mass.

Some Remodelers Know The Codes

To the Editor:

In response to Milton Gregory Grew, who says, "I have yet to see a remodeler who possesses a copy of the residential building codes" (Letters, 10/91), here I am!

My copy of the *Standard Building Code* (used by the City of Atlanta, where I work) sits within easy reach of my drawing board. I use it constantly. With it sits *Architectural Graphic Standards*, various NFPA documents containing span tables, *The Manual of Steel Construction*, and other reference books necessary for me to provide design/build services.

My practical training makes my drawings more accurate and more responsive to specific site conditions than those produced by some architects. My design background (ScB in engineering from Brown and MArch from Yale) helps me to infuse a degree of thought into my designs in a constant effort to uplift them from the timid "draft/build" work that is commonplace.

The world, Mr. Grew, is changing! Remodelers are changing, too. My Certified Remodeler and Certified Graduate Remodeler status (both by exam) are just further examples of my commitment to professional excellence. I cite my credentials not to boast, but as an example of the new breed of remodeler. Through NAHB, NARI, and Business Networks, I know other remodelers with similar businesses and backgrounds.

Bradley Cruickshank, CR, CGR
Cruickshank, Inc.
Atlanta, Ga.

Shoot Board Refinements

To the Editor:

Some comments on "A Shoot Board" ("Door Hanging Jigs," 12/91):

When making a shoot board, make the exposed 1/2-inch plywood wider than required for a particular saw/blade combination. Finally, run the saw through the shoot board to trim the plywood to the required width. This approach eliminates setting the fence at an exact width and, hence, allows fabrication of more than one shoot board at a time.

When undercutting finished doors, I put two strips of masking tape (approximately 6 inches long) on the door, one in the area of each spring clamp. The masking tape provides enough friction to keep the shoot board from moving while undercutting the door.

Gene K. Komatusu
General Contractor
Manhattan Beach, Calif.

Alternative Venting

To the Editor:

With all due respect to Mr. Watts ("The Down & Dirty on DWV," 11/91), the description of a bow vent shown in Figure 3a is incorrect. The layout as shown will, over a period of time, collect liquid in the area shown and render the setup useless from a venting standpoint.

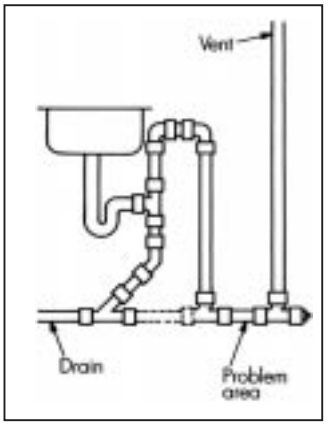
A solution is to connect the piping as per the dotted lines (see illustration below).

I enjoyed your article and look forward to additional issues.

Ron Plard
Master Plumber
RPM Plumbing and Heating
Wilton, Conn.

Lanny Watts replies:

Mr. Plard is right. Over time, condensation will collect in the lower portion of the bow vent and block it. To deal with this eventuality, a cleanout is provided. To be effective, the homeowner must be sensitive to the syphoning sounds of an unvented trap and must be willing to drain the vent or hire someone to have it done.



The alternative Mr. Polard proposes is a good one. By making the lowest portion of the vent continuous with the horizontal drain, moisture cannot collect. However, sewage can also back up. To prevent this from causing a permanent blockage, the vent in question should become a wet vent by being increased one size and given the discharge from a lesser fixture.

While I'm on the topic, I have been reminded by my friend, Arlon Nolan, that if the "Nolan" vent mentioned in the article runs horizontally before it has risen above the flood rim of its fixture, it too should be increased and washed by an appropriate fixture.

No Unprotected Bulbs In Closets

To the Editor:

I read in "Builder's Guide to Common Code Violations" (12/91) that incandescent lights are not permitted within 12 inches horizontally from the nearest edge of the storage area.

Article 410-8C of the 1990 *National Electric Code* states that incandescent fixtures with open or partially enclosed lamps and pendant fixtures or lampholders shall not be permitted. The reason is that hot filament from broken bulbs can ignite combustible material below.

Nestor N. Deshaies
Tilton, N.H.

Mr. Deshaies is right. Open or partially enclosed incandescent lights are not permitted at all in closets. However, totally enclosed incandescent fixtures may be used as long as there is a 12-inch minimum clearance to the nearest storage area.

— The Editors

Installing Cement Board Underlayment

To the Editor:

We agree with your assessment (On the House, 12/91) that bonding ceramic tile to a plywood or wood subfloor can lead to sub-par ceramic tile installations. In fact, in the *Handbook for Ceramic Tile Installation*, published by the Tile Council of America, there are no installation recommendations for installing ceramic tile over a single layer of plywood. Unfortunately, this is a common field violation of industry-accepted tiling practices.

Your answer to the question regarding attaching cement board underlayment for tile is incomplete. While nails alone may work, it is not the preferred method for the Durock ceramic tile floor system. When installing Durock as a flooring underlayment for ceramic tile, the proper installation to a plywood subfloor calls for a glue and screws or nails. First, Durock should be laminated to the plywood subfloor. Use a notched trowel to apply a latex-modified thinset mortar or Type-I tile adhesive to the subfloor. Then, fasten either 5/16-inch Durock underlayment or 1/2-inch Durock cement board to the subfloor with the proper fasteners (hot-dipped galvanized roofing nails or special

anticorrosive Durock screws) at 8 inches o.c.

The combination of gluing and fastening Durock to the subfloor thinset will ensure years of service.

Rick Stalle
Marketing Manager for Durock
U.S. Gypsum Co.
Chicago, Ill.

Thanks for the Lift

To the Editor:

Sometimes, we don't look at the mirror, don't see ourselves in its reflection, or just plain don't have a mirror. In any event, we lack the vision to see ourselves honestly or our predicament accurately. Diane Barberio's article "To the Brink & Back" gave me the mirror and the vantage to see my situation unbiased by my own declining self opinion.

So thanks, Diane, for recharging my mental batteries. Like you. I have decided to survive and thrive!

John A. Rendik
Design/Remodel
E. Northport, N.Y.

Minimum Window Clear Opening

To the Editor:

The article, "Builder's Guide to Common Code Violations" (12/91), pointed out several code violations that usually are missed when projects are designed. However, there were some errors in the article.

The first and most glaring was made in the first item, "Bedroom Window Requirements." Yes, the sill height from finish floor cannot exceed 44 inches; yes, the minimum clear opening width is 20 inches; and yes, the minimum clear opening height is 24 inches. But there is one more requirement that was not mentioned: the minimum clear opening area of 5.7 square feet. As one can see, the opening created when you use the minimum clear width times the height is less than 5.7 square feet: 20 inches x 24 inches = 480 square inches or 3.33 square feet. If you use the minimum width, the clear height needed to achieve the minimum area would need to be 3 feet 5 1/4 inches. Conversely, using the minimum height, the window's clear width needs to be 2 feet 10 1/4 inches.

In addition, the code reference for this item was mixed up; the correct UBC section number is *1204*, not 1024 as noted in the chart. (There is no section 1024 in the UBC.)

Steven G. Hall, AIA
Bassenian Lagoni Architects
Santa Ava Heights, Calif.

Engineered Lumber Pointers

To the Editor:

Congratulations on your recent article "Engineered Headers and Beams" (8/91). It is still being talked about months after its publication. People involved in the building trades need to get this type of information.

I feel it is very important to your readers that we clarify some of the points made in the article.

First, Micro-Lam LVL is generally the lowest cost option. The purchasers can get pricing information from their Trus Joist MacMillan dealer. The article also leads people to believe that Parallam beams are more often sold than Micro-Lam beams. This is not true; there is something like ten times more Micro-Lam LVL sold than Parallam.

The technical issues that might be misunderstood center mostly around LVL. The article made reference to splicing beams between supports. Splicing between supports is unnecessary with engineered products because of the availability of long lengths. Parallam and Micro-Lam LVL are commonly seen in lengths up to 60 feet. Almost all stocking dealers handle lengths up to 48 feet. If shorter pieces must be used, they should not be spliced between supports unless specifically designed as such.

The issue of connections between multiple plies of LVL was a little confusing. With our brands, the connection is generally made using nails, not both bolts and nails as shown. In some cases, bolting is required, but with the newly available 3½-inch Micro-Lam LVL sizes, and the thicker Parallam, the connections are usually easy or unnecessary.

The 3½-inch and thicker products also solve much of the cupping that was mentioned. Micro-Lam LVL has been edge sealed for over two years and is now being marketed with face seal. Both of these improvements have virtually eliminated cupping of the product, even if it has not been protected. Also, sealing improves the stability of the product "in place," before it is under roof. Obviously, the best way to control cupping is to protect the product on the job site and purchase from a dealer who does the same in his yard.

The most important thing that your readers need to know is that all LVL is not the same. Many of the LVL products have different engineering characteristics, and it is vital that each application be made according to the manufacturer's or building code specifications.

Josh Bartlett
Technical Representative
Trus Joist MacMillan
Bedford, N.H.

Improved Stair Design

To the Editor:

I was one of the people interviewed for the item, "Stair Codes Changing" (Eight-Penny News, 8/91). Given the importance of this topic to builders, a brief update is in order.

At its annual conference in September, the BOCA membership approved a significant change to the *National Building Code* to require the so-called "7-11 stair" for dwellings covered by the code. This stair has riser heights no higher than 7 inches and treads effectively 11 inches minimum in depth.

In 1990, about 85 percent of an estimated 850,000 hospital emergency room treatments were for injuries related to stairs. About one-quarter of these could have been prevented if the stairs had been built to at least the 7-11 standard.

Furthermore — and this was the basis for BOCA's adoption of the 7-11 stair for dwellings — the everyday function of stairs is drastically improved with better design and construction. This will be appreciated especially by the rapidly growing portion of our population over 65 years of age. Indeed, even if all new homes were built to the 7-11 standard, there would not be sufficient supply for the demand from elderly consumers well into the 21st century. With average stair use of nearly 20 flights per day, the improved stairs pay back with every use, many times a day.

Jake Pauls
Life Safety Specialist
Hughes Associates, Inc.
Wheaton, Md.

High-Performance Window Specs

To the Editor:

Alex Wilson's article "Window Technology Update" (12/91) contained a table on Glazing Properties with data on the Visionwall window system. Using the LBL Window 3.1 program for analyzing window performance, the Visionwall window is now rated as follows: The center-of-glass R-value is 7.5 (U-.13); the unit R-value is R-6.9 (U-.14); visible light transmittance is 49%; total solar transmittance is 20%; and ultraviolet transmittance is less than 0.5%.

Robert A. Merther
U.S. Sales Manager
Visionwall Technologies Inc.
Stow, Mass.

Through A Glass Darkly

To the Editor:

What a blow to the glass industry if tempered windows are not clear (Letters, 9/91). The glass manufacturers had better correct this situation before they worry about bigger and better insulation. What good is a high R-value if you can't enjoy the view?

Drew L. Gross
Ridgewood, N.J.

Builder-Designed Estimating Software

To the Editor:

As a custom builder and remodeling contractor for almost 30 years, I am well acquainted with the "Ballpark Estimate" problem as outlined by Alvin Simkins, of Dunnellon, Fla., and consultant Linda Case.

I was never comfortable with "guesstimates" and therefore for many years would take the time to grind out estimate after estimate for prospective customer's dreams, only to find in many cases that it was just that, a dream that they could not afford.

Finally in 1981, after searching for and failing to find a reasonably priced and accurate computerized estimating program, I engaged a programmer and developed my own estimating system. Not only can I bank out ballpark estimates from an artist's conception or a customer's dream "wish list," but I can generate detailed bids from a complete set of drawings and specifications in record time. In fact, I qualify all my propective customers by first running a ballpark estimate to see if we are both playing the same game. If my estimate and their budget are reasonably close, I will then get down to specifics. If not, then I move on to the next prospect. On average, my total ballpark estimating time per customer, exclusive of a site visit and interview, is usually no more than one to one-and-a-half hours.

Of all my "investments" over the years — vehicles, tools, office equipment, etc. — this estimating system is by far the best. I have yet to find another system that is easier, quicker, and more accurate. Three cheers for modern technology!

Dave Macdonald
Scotsman Contracting Inc.
Bedford, Mass.

Cordless Tile Saw

To the Editor:

I saw your article, "Makita's Cordless Tile Saw" (7/91), just as I was to start three tile jobs. I was impressed by your report and ordered one, which I used for all cutting since my scribe cutter was too small for 9x9 tile.

Two batteries were not enough for power cutting for a two-man operation. On the second job, I scored the tiles with the saw set to 1/32 (instead of cutting full thickness), then I snapped them as a scoring cutter would. This was much faster and decreased usage to the point where recharges were always ready.

The saw cut the full thickness so readily that scoring didn't occur to me initially, and I suspect others might also overlook that alternative.

Chester Burgess
Wappingers Falls, N.Y.

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 *JLC*, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.