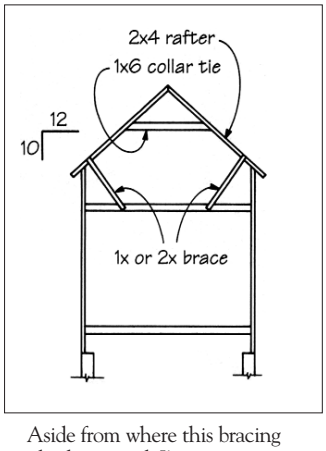
LETTERS

Chicago Balloon Framing

To the Editor:

Regarding your article on collar ties by Harris Hyman (4/92):

Chicago is where they say balloon framing got its start. I'm not sure whether this is true or not, but I have worked on a great number of attics with balloon-framed (cantilevered) kneewalls in this city. Invariably, all have been pushed outward by rafter forces over time. My theory is that when the carpenters installed the original collar ties, they nailed at the normal angle of hand and hammer and didn't try to get the nails in at 90 degrees to create the shear-pin effect needed. Over time (50 to 100 years) the rafters were able to pull away from the collar ties and the kneewalls, which are essentially 3-foot cantilever beams, bent outward, except where the framing detail illustrated below was used.



Aside from where this bracing method was used, I've never seen a kneewall over 16 inches in height that wasn't severely deformed, to the tune of about 3 inches over 40 feet.

Richard Wineberg
Earthwood Builders
Chicago, Ill.

In Defense of Profit

To the Editor:

Regarding my article, "Why I Keep My Own Books" (1/92), Chris Keep writes that it is "pure fiction" for me to suggest that "a man can make $65 an hour" in remodeling, even in the Northeast. He's right in one way: Owing to some confusion between me and my editor, the $65 an hour should actually have been $55 to $60 an hour. But he's wrong to say that "a man" (by which I think he means a carpenter, male or female) cannot be this profitable. A woman on my crew recently completed a $30,000 job that generated $79.46 per production hour, and on our follow-up questionnaire the client rated the project a seven out of seven in terms of "value for the investment." We have run smaller jobs where the return per hour was nearly $100. (We've also run some true disasters, which I will not dwell on, but at least our initial *intent* was to yield $55 to $60 an hour.)

Perhaps Chris did not understand that the dollar value per hour is not a wage or even really a burdened wage. It simply reflects the total gross profit on the job (including employee salaries) divided by the number of production hours we put into the job. It is a measure of how profitably we spent our time in a particular endeavor. An example: A $10,000 bathroom job includes $6,000 in material and subcontractor costs and 80 hours of our labor. The return per hour is $50 ($10,000 minus $6,000, or $4,000, divided by 80 hours). If labor cost (wage, benefits, insurance, FICA) is $25 per hour, then our profit and overhead is $25 per hour. Although this job would probably not be a disaster, it would in fact fall at least $400 short of our profitability goal for the job, and we would make careful note of which of our initial assumptions regarding job cost were in error.

Paul Eldrenkamp
Byggmeister Associates
Brighton, Mass.

Do the Right Thing

To the Editor:

Michael McCutcheon's contract ("Change Orders for Design/Builders," 4/92) specifies that any change required by any building inspector constitutes an automatic change order. Although he tries to minimize this sort of thing in the design phase, he goes on to relate how one customer balked at a change order for work demanded by an inspector. If Michael truly wants to "do the right thing," he should delete Article 10.2 from his contracts.

As a design/builder, Michael is presenting himself to his clients as an expert. It is his duty to know the building codes and utility regulations applicable in his area, and more importantly, how they will be interpreted by the local officials and inspectors. Most inspectors in my area are more than happy to review plans and even to visit the building where the work will take place to avoid problems during construction. This should be done as part of the design phase long before the final agreement is signed with the customer. Any changes in the work to meet code after construction begins should be minor and Michael should pick up the extra cost, not the customer.

Bob Theberge
RC Theberge General Contracting
Brunswick, Maine

Keep Hard Drive Horizontal

To the Editor:

After reading the letter from Mr. Henry B. Miner entitled "Computer Advice" in your March edition, I feel that I must pass on a bit of advice that was given to me by the manufacturer of my computer.

I wanted to stand my computer chassis (the CPU) on its side in order to gain more desk space. Just to be on the safe side, I called the customer service department and was told that the unit would function normally, but that, in time, the bearings supporting the hard drive disk would wear prematurely and then I would probably have to replace the hard drive. Unless the hard drive has been designed to operate in the vertical plane, it should be kept horizontal.

Woody Stearns
Warsaw, N.Y.

Tax Extension

To the Editor:

I enjoy your magazine very much; keep up the good work. This letter addresses your "Tax Talk Update" (Letters, 4/92).

When filing form 4868, "Extension of Time" (for filing only, not payment) no provision is made whatsoever for basing your payment on 100% of your 1990 tax liability. Any figuring on that basis could put you in a position of paying interest and penalties if you fall short of meeting the 90% requirement for the 1991 tax liability. The only basis allowed for computation on Form 4868 is the 1991 tax year's (or current year's) total liability. (See Sec. 2509 of the 1992 U.S. Master Tax Guide).

However, IRS Form 1127 allows for an "extension of time for payment," based on undue hardship (see Sec. 2537). Interest will be charged on any unpaid balance until payment is made in full.

David Kelley
Kelley Enterprises
Hinsdale, Ill.

Wood Stove Safety

To the Editor:

I'd like to offer a comment on the precaution offered in Jim Tolpin's article, "The Two-Car-Garage Shop" (3/92), concerning woodstove safety and clearances.

The article makes a statement that seems to defy common experience and intuition — namely, that a piece of wood held close to a stove can burst into flames in 22 seconds. In fact, this does happen to wood after it has been repeatedly subjected to high temperatures. This baking process, called pyrolysis, lowers the ignition point of wood, so that it can burst into flames at temperatures as low as 180°F.

According to data from the National Fire Protection Association, woodstoves account for the overwhelming majority of house fires caused by space heaters (such as electric, kerosene, and gas heaters). Hopefully, a clearer understanding of pyrolysis will engender more respect for the clearance and installation details specified for woodstoves and flues.

Joseph T. Ponessa, Ph.D.
Rutgers Cooperative Extension
New Brunswick, N.J.

European Valve Source

To the Editor:

I was interested in the article, "Innovations in Hydronic Heating" (3/92), by John Siegenthaler. We at Eastern Automatic Temperature Controls would like to inform you that we are also a source for European radiator valves. As the U.S. distributor of German MNG Products, we would be happy to send literature on our products to anyone interested.

James Green
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908/969-2992

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*, RR2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.