All About Wood

by Paul Hanke

Wood Reference Handbook
(1991, Canadian Wood Council; 800/531-3122). 559 pages. Cloth-bound, 7x10. $75.

The Canadian Wood Council has done a fine job of producing a comprehensive treatise on wood products and uses. *Wood Reference Handbook* covers a broad range of topics with clarity and excellent graphics. The first five sections describe everything from lumber grades and sizes to fire safety and installation of particular wood products, including dimension lumber, glulams, trusses, PSL/LVL beams, prefab I-joists, sheetgoods, and more. Section 6 pulls all the preceding material together into a discussion of complete structural systems.

One unexpected pleasure in this technical publication is the splendid color photos that open each section. These imaginative, real-life examples admirably illustrate the beauty and versatility of wood construction. By the time I was halfway through the book, I felt like going out and hugging a tree.

But I also began to wonder whether the generic information in the early chapters would be useful to many readers. There is very little guidance for practical application of the materials discussed. For instance, the phenomenon of double shear is very well illustrated, but the *Handbook* says nothing about how to design for this condition. And the excellent section on bending fails to mention deflection limits and gives no advice on how to properly size a joist or rafter.

My opinion improved, however, when I read the last four chapters, which deal with interior and exterior products, wood protection and finishing, and fire safety. The section on structural systems is hard to fault as an overview of virtually every type of wood-frame construction. And after a thin chapter on finishes, the final chapter on fire safety again offered an excellent overview of the rationale behind codes, assembly ratings, and the like.

Wood Reference Handbook is a good (albeit expensive) general reference for practicing professionals, and should be considered by professors and technical librarians for inclusion among their next purchases.

Tired Tome

Audel Carpenters and Builders Library
by John E. Ball, revised and updated by John Leeke (1991, Macmillan Publishing; 800/323-7445). Hardcover, 6x8½. Four volumes, $16.95 each.

I can remember seeing Audel's guidebooks twenty years ago in libraries and bookstores. I never borrowed or bought any of them, and now, having read one cover-to-cover and carefully perused the other three, I'm glad I didn't. Together the four volumes of Audel's *Carpenters and Builders Library* cover the gamut of carpentry, from tool selection to CAD systems, and I had hoped that reading them would be akin to having an old-timer by my side. Instead, I found that the 1,300-page tome didn't measure up to other, less comprehensive references.

I found the information in the *Library* dated and lacking in depth. For example, retractable tapes are completely absent from the section on measuring, which mentions only folding rules. I have also seen better discussions of framing, and I know of one small illustration in another book that describes how to use rafter tables on a framing square much more simply and clearly than Audel's lengthy and arcane passages.

Another correctable shortcoming is a glaring lack of cross-referencing between chapters and volumes. The section in Volume 1 on "Practical Drawing," for instance, focuses heavily on a detailed description of how to use a CAD system (better learned from your software's tutorial or manual), without a hint that more information is presented in a later volume.

Finally, the "modernized" chapters on insulation and solar heat are very weak. The solar chapter, for example, gives a thin overview of active and passive systems (Sunset's book is better), but gives no rules-of-thumb for design and no references for further study. In my view you'd be far better off with a collection of other titles on particular subjects than this Audel series. ■

Paul Hanke is an architectural designer, writer, teacher, and occasional builder in Warren, Vt.