

Old Columns Revisited

by Gordon Tully

Since I began writing for this magazine in October, 1985 (when it was *New England Builder*), the editors have published 82 of my columns. This month, they have graciously allowed me the opportunity to revisit my previous columns and bring them up to date where needed.

Large Overhangs — May 1993

In this article, I recommended venting between a double layer of plywood on the roof to avoid conflicts between the framing and vent chutes at rake outrigger framing. I still recommend this, but it is obviously an expensive solution. You can cut costs by using OSB or another plywood substitute for the inner layer, as long as the strapping for the outer layer is nailed directly to the rafters. The simplest solution, if you can get away with it, is to not ventilate the part of the roof that has the outrigger framing; then you can use conventional framing.

Curved Fence — January 1993

Here I described a curved fence I built. I still love the fence and get admiring comments. However, holding the curve in the fence-boards and keeping the posts vertical is harder than I anticipated. I have installed diagonal braces against the posts wherever they are hidden by plants. I drive a stake in the ground at one end, nail a 1x4 on the post, then spring the brace between the two.

As the boards age, they seem more determined than ever to straighten out. In addition to tipping the posts, they pull the nails. I will ultimately have to screw the boards onto the posts.

Lighting — October 1992

I drew a picture of a row of pendant lights over the sink counter, fitted with bare G-40 bulbs, for kitchens with high ceilings. In a recent job with a low ceiling, my electrician found some nicely shaped porcelain sockets (without the nasty exposed screws you normally find). I spaced these at 30 inches on-center, with 40-watt G-40 bulbs to avoid glare.

Residential recessed downlights are not as expensive as I had thought. Commercial ones cost over \$100 each installed, but you should be able to get acceptable residential ones in place for \$40 or so.

My House — September 1992

The double-hinged door illustrated in the article (made by cutting a normal 30-inch door vertically down the center) caused me a minor problem. When the builder cut down the door, he had to replace both halves of the center stile, which is not continuous (the rails run through). Both of the new, narrow stiles bowed, preventing the door from closing. The problem was easily fixed with plane and paint, and I don't expect it to recur. But it resulted in a callback.

Cove Light — April 1992

In a recent project, I hit on a nifty way of attaching a cove light to a wall without steel brackets or cantilevered supports buried in the wall (see Figure 1).

Bad Ideas — January 1992

I may have hit on a solution to the termite shield problem, and offer it as an experiment. On the

assumption that termites will not eat through rubber, I made a barrier out of Grace Ice and Water Shield (Figure 2). Remember that the bituminous membrane doesn't keep the termites out, it only makes them visible. So it is a good idea to keep the outer edge of the membrane visible, but you can't let sunlight hit it. Maybe trap a piece of protruding flashing between the two sticky layers?

Regarding vinyl siding, I agree with a letter from the Vinyl Siding Institute that my statement "I don't even want to think about what these buildings [with vinyl siding] will look like in 25 years" plants unsubstantiated worries in the minds of would-be consumers, and does not inform. I would omit that sentence in a rewrite.

Stairs — October 1991

I expounded a rule that you should never trap a stair between two walls, but should always leave one side open. Frank Lloyd Wright didn't like stairways; in one of his typical plans, the stair is jammed in behind the fireplace, with a wall on the opposite side. I am certain it is a handsome stair — but why? I think the answer is that one side is not a wall, but an object that serves as the center of the house. Clearly, there is much more to the problem than can be resolved with a set of simple rules: but for plaster walls, I would stick by my rule.

Half-Walls — February 1991

I received more mail from this article than from all others combined. I wish I had never mentioned the idea of balloon framing a story-and-a-half house — cantilevering the studs vertically to form the half-high wall at the second floor. It seldom works, and builders are well-advised never to try it. Use a structural ridge beam instead. The structural issues I raised in this article are superbly dealt with in the article "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Removing Collar Ties" (4/92).

Stair Railings — July 1990

Building interior stair handrails to meet code is very difficult, but the code is not as bad as I indicated in this article and an earlier one. The BOCA code (the one I am most familiar with) allows a reduced design load in one- and two-family houses: The nailing must resist a lateral load of 200

Cove Light Detail

1/2" plywood glued & screwed to ledger; paint glossy white

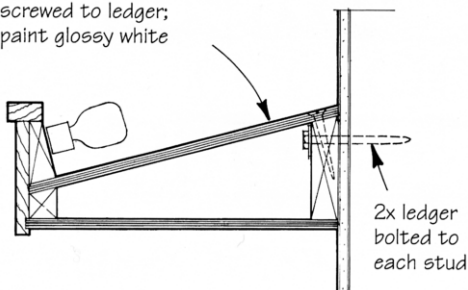


Figure 1. This cove light bracket is sturdy without relying on steel brackets or cantilevered supports.

Termite Barrier

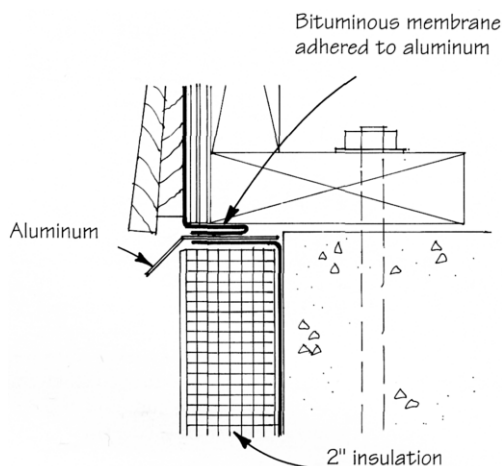


Figure 2. To foil termites entering behind foam insulation, try running two sections of bituminous membrane (Grace Ice and Water Shield, for example), as shown. Any termite tunnels will be visible on the aluminum flashing.

pounds at one point, with no minimum load per foot. The article had this at 300 pounds at one point or 100 pounds per lineal foot. Even so, few ordinary stair handrails over 5 or 6 feet long made with stock parts will meet this provision.

Flared Siding — March 1990

I showed a detail that creates a sort of bulging sweep at the bottom of a shingled wall by building up many layers of shingles. The detail I showed would be expensive in shingles, as it requires many extra courses. It works well with clapboards, however (Figure 3).

Basement Water — March 1989

I had hardly finished the article when the project in question was fitted out with a permanent sump-pump system complete with emergency generator. Water accumulates on the ledge and temporarily raises the local water level. Even though it eventually subsides, during high water the basement would flood.

A simple rule: don't build a basement which is lower than the lowest point on the site you can drain to, unless you are positive that ground water will never rise above the footings.

Sealing Siding — February 1987

I no longer have much confidence in stain, which turns out to be just thin paint. Two painters have advised me that two coats of acrylic latex over oil-based primer (where it is still available) produces the best opaque matte finish. Bleaching oil and tinted clear wood finishes such as Amteco's TWP 101 (Amteco Inc., 815 Cass Ave., St. Louis, MO 63106; 314/436-4811) and Flood's CWF (The Flood Company, P.O. Box 399, Hudson, OH 44236; 800/321-3444) seem to be good choices for transparent coatings.

I hope these addenda are helpful

Flared Siding

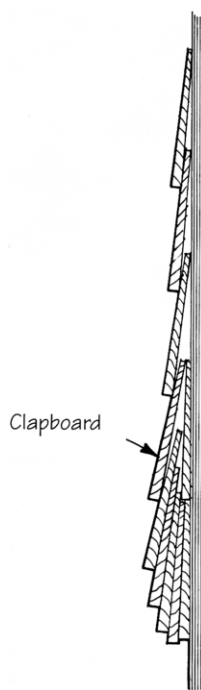


Figure 3. This traditional New England detail terminates the clapboards with a bulging sweep. With shingles, however, you'll use many more courses.

to my regular readers. I always benefit from your experience and good advice, and read all your letters even if I can't answer all of them.

Let me know if you have an idea for an article for the "Building with Style" column. Write to: *The Journal of Light Construction*, RR#2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477, Attn: BWS. ■

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