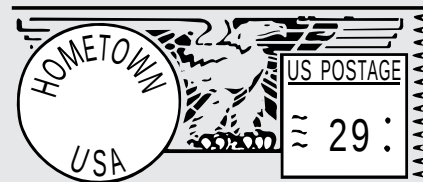


# LETTERS



## Placing Drainpipe

To the Editor:

With regard to the question "Orienting a Foundation Drain" (*On the House*, 7/94), I would like to add a couple of items: Locating the holes in the drain in the 4 o'clock/8 o'clock position is done not only to allow groundwater to rise into the drain and be quickly disposed of, but also to minimize the chance that fines filtering into the drain system from above will enter the drain and possibly block it over time. In fact, drains installed with too much slope can actually pull sand and other fines into the system.

Mr. Marsh's reminder that the stone is part of the drainage system is a point well taken. Taking a cue from the design manuals for all-weather wood foundations, many Michigan builders now install a continuous drainage bed of pea gravel covered by a vapor barrier beneath basement slabs. When used in conjunction with a permeable, readily compactible backfill such as sand or pea gravel against the foundation walls, we greatly minimize the potential for water infiltrating the basement living area.

C. P. Breidenstein  
Michigan Assoc. of Home Builders  
Lansing, Mich.

## Southern Valleys

To the Editor:

In the article "Straight Talk About Hip and Valley Rafters" (5/94), the author did a good job describing the loading conditions and presenting the case for jack rafters acting as simply supported beams with a slope.

However, a common practice in the South is for rafters to be constructed as an A-frame structure with the ridge beam acting only as a "face plate" and not transmitting vertical loads. This common scenario increases the tributary area for valley beams to include the entire loading from the jack rafters

instead of one half as in the "simply supported" scenario. Thus, the tributary area goes from a "kite" shape to a square horizontal projection encompassing the jack rafter loads from ridge to valley rafter connection. This doubles the amount of load on these beams. As a result, a contractor reading this article may undersize a valley beam based on his thinking that this is the worse case. (The hip beam tributary load remains the same "kite" shape.)

As the author pointed out, hip and valley beams should be treated like any other primary structural girder. Exercise extreme care and, when in doubt, contact a licensed engineer.

Edmund B. Semmes, P.E.  
Madison, Ala.

*Robert Randall responds:*

*Your point is correct: The valley loading diagram in Figure 1 of the article does assume a structural ridge or a supporting post at the apex. I will note with amusement that I doubt anyone will undersize any hip or valley rafters based on my article. My experience has been that mostly I am accused of gross overkill.*

*Thanks for pointing out another viewpoint. There are, I think, too many possible hip and valley scenarios to have covered them all in one article. That's why I chose to stick to a conventionally framed roof with a structural or supported ridge. I emphasize the value of your final words of advice — when in doubt, contact a licensed engineer.*

## Inspectors Disagree on Ethics

To the Editor:

I must disagree in the strongest terms to the allegation, as stated by Mr. Edward FitzGerald ("Not Business as Usual," *Letters*, 6/94), that those of us in the inspection industry who market to and through real estate agents are unethical.

Why market to the real estate agent? Quite simply, it is the only cost-effective way to get to the home buyer. And

why *not* market to the real estate agent? Home buyers depend upon the real estate professional to guide them through the process of buying the house — a process with which they have, in most cases, little experience.

Inherent in Mr. Fitzgerald's statement is the assumption that the home inspector would in some way alter the report in order to make the house appear to be in better condition than it actually is — not reporting significant defects so that the buyer is sure to buy the house. Such an assumption is absurd. What actually happens is just the opposite. The agent wants the significant defects found. To do otherwise would invite litigation, as well as a quickly diminished reputation.

Arthur Ball  
Homepro Systems of South Florida  
Miami, Fla.

## Second Growth vs. Old Growth Redwood

To the Editor:

It is admirable that you publish letters providing a forum for those who disagree with the authors of your various, usually very informative articles. However, the letter from Pamela Allsebrook of the California Redwood Assoc. (*Letters*, 7/94) does not address the issue of whether or not the material being promoted is suitable for the uses discussed in Jim Tolpin's article "Exterior Trim That Lasts" (4/94).

As Mr. Tolpin stated, old growth cedar and redwood are excellent materials for exterior trim. What he did not say, but what I have learned over 25 years in the construction business, including the last eight as a home inspector, is that the second growth redwood now on the market is not nearly as durable as the old growth lumber we were used to in the past. This is particularly true of the second growth material coming from the managed "tree farms" of the larger lumber companies, where planting and care of the forests is focused on maximum growth. A

representative of a West Coast lumber producer once showed me a board cut from second growth harvest where the growth rings were at least 1/2 inch wide. This material — even clear heart, properly cured — will have nowhere near the durability of the old, close-grained material from the “old days.”

Ms. Allsebrook states that redwood is the most protected commercial wood species in the U.S., as it should be. The redwood that her association promotes is truly a beautiful and versatile building material. However, contractors and homeowners should be made aware that there are differences between old growth and second growth redwood and the second growth material may indeed not be suitable for some uses where traditionally it was preferred.

Neil Macneale III  
Palo Alto, Calif.

## Choosing Wide Pine Lumber

To the Editor:

I just got through reading the article “Laying Wide Pine Floors” (7/94). I would like to commend the author — the installation information is excellent. I would, however, like to expand a bit on the information on choosing lumber. Buying the best lumber for the situation is obviously important to the success of the installation. While many people wish to use locally sawn wood, local availability is probably a more important factor. The author uses eastern white pine, presumably because he has a good source for that wood in Vermont. In other parts of the country, other species are more available. A quality lumber dealer is your best ally in this, or any other, project.

The author correctly emphasizes moisture content. Users of eastern white pine have an advantage, in that eastern pine mills often dry their stock down to a moisture content of 8% or so — well below the standards required by the grade rules. For western or southern pine in the common grades, “dry” simply means 19% moisture content or below. These boards have more drying to do. Not allowing the boards to acclimate by stacking

and stickering can lead to shrinkage disasters.

Moisture content is one advantage of using the select grades of lumber. Here, the rules call for 15% maximum moisture content — WWPFA rules further stipulate that 85% of the pieces be 12% or below. In other words, with select lumber, the wood should arrive on the job close to the moisture content it will achieve in use.

As for choice of species, the pines are usually divided into hard (or yellow) pines and soft (or white) pines. Eastern white, Idaho white, and sugar pine are the white pines. These tend to be smoother and softer, both in texture and appearance, than the hard pines. In situations of heavy wear, the hard pines — ponderosa, lodgepole, red (or Norway), and the southern pines — may be a better choice.

On a minor technical note, the author states that pine is inherently more prone to shrinkage and swelling than hardwoods. Actually, that is not true — in general, softwoods have a much lower shrinkage potential than hardwoods. In fact, eastern white pine is among the most dimensionally stable domestic woods, being nearly as stable as redwood and western red cedar.

Chris Donnelly  
Northford, Conn.

## Roof Ventilation Query

To the Editor:

Regarding the article “A Simple Custom Entry” (6/94): We would recommend ventilation for all enclosed areas exposed to the sun. Is the lack of ventilation in the porch roof an oversight or did the author have a reason for omitting it?

Kevin M. Kelly  
Jay-K Independent Lumber Corp.  
New Hartford, N.Y.

Charles Wardell responds:

Roof ventilation has three purposes: 1) to protect roof shingles from overheating, 2) to provide an escape route for any water vapor that gets into the roof before that vapor has a chance to condense, and 3) to reduce the chance of ice dams by venting any heat that gets into the roof

system in the winter before it can melt snow that has accumulated on the roof.

None of these factors was a consideration here. Since an exterior entryway isn't connected to the conditioned space, there's no chance that heat or water vapor from inside the house will get into the roof system where it might condense. And since the shingles are installed over an uninsulated roof deck, overheating isn't a danger. In fact, entries such as this are quite common where I live. They're never vented and I've never seen this lack of ventilation cause any problems.

## Filter Fabric a Must

To the Editor:

Concerning the drawing “Foundation Drainage for Wet Sites” (*On the House*, 6/94): Perimeter drains must have protection from silt. There may be some locations where the soil makeup is less likely to silt in, but “better to be safe than sorry” — especially if the basement is finished or carpeted. The fabric should wrap completely around the stone of the perimeter foundation drain. Young masters are being bred from your publication — guide them!

Jody Williams  
Building Choices  
Lambertville, N.J.

## Address Correction

The correct address for the national Small Flows Clearing House, mentioned in the article “Constructed Wetlands: Alternative Septic System” (*Eight-Penny News*, 4/94), is P.O. Box 6064, Morgantown, WV 26506; 800/624-8301.

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.