



A Framer's Handbook

by Bill Brockway



Residential Framing
by William P. Spence (Sterling Publishing Co., 1994; 212/532-7160). Softcover, 8 1/4 x 11, 288 pages. \$19.95.

Nearly every book on house construction begins with the familiar diagram of batter boards, strings, and plumb bobs defining the corners of a foundation. That same diagram is in William Spence's book, *Residential Framing*, too, but he explains the thought behind the design and the materials used better than other books I've read. It's another instance of the "beauty of simplicity" that reminds readers why they love building.

After discussing the framing details that need to be incorporated into the foundation, Spence gets down to the nitty-gritty of his subject: how to build a house frame out of wood. Most contractors will probably postpone reading the chapters on the characteristics of wood and engineered wood products, tooling up, and job-site safety, and jump right into Chapter 5, "Framing Systems." Here, Spence describes platform framing, balloon framing, post and beam, truss frames, panelized systems, and steel framing. Each discussion is accompanied by drawings illustrating the details and materials that distinguish one framing method from another.

Spence works his way up from the sill plate to the ridge beam, devoting six chapters to the various ways of

framing a roof. Every step of the way is illustrated by the kind of drawings that builders drool over — everything is straight, plumb, level, and just the right size for the job. If only it would look that way every time we built it!

The author is inclined to exceed the scope of the book's title, but the extra information is welcome. A chapter on doors and windows, for example, teaches not only rough openings, but installation and trimming out as well. The chapter on stairs describes stringer layout for straight stairs, winding stairs, landings, and fully housed stairs. A chapter each on interior and exterior trim installation show useful details on mitering and coping corner joints; and the section on siding is especially thorough.

The final chapter, on porches and decks, explains how to attach exterior joists to an existing house, how to set foundations for a porch, and how to work the roof into the overall structure.

Some framing books are reprints of old classics and are therefore often full of dated material. *Residential Framing*, on the other hand, will be an education for most contractors, mostly because we tend to stick by

what we know, and we only know the way we were taught to do it. The excellent coverage of steel framing and the explanations of the varieties of engineered lumber convinced me that the author knew his stuff. The details in this book are easy to understand and well explained. Those traits alone make it worthwhile to clear off a space on your bookshelf for this well-thought-out reference. ■

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