The Journal's pick of curious, interesting, and useful products

Super Studs

by Charles Wardell

Tall window walls often call for creative design and engineering to keep winds from flexing the wall, rattling the glass, and cracking the plaster. One answer may be *Gang Lam LVL Studs* from Louisiana-Pacific. Made from standard Douglas fir and southern pine laminated veneer lumber, Gang Lam studs come 1 1/2 inches thick, and in lengths and widths to match dimensional lumber. Like LVL beams, they're straight and true, and free of knots and other defects that weaken stud-grade material. According to L-P engineer Carlos Suarez, Gang Lams are two to four times stronger than conventional lumber. The LVL studs are about twice as costly as your garden variety 2-by, so L-P is marketing them mainly as part of an engineered framing package, rather than as direct stud replacements (see *Eight-Penny News*, 3/95). But with a modulus of elasticity of around 2 million PSI, an LVL 2x6 is twice as stiff its southern pine counterpart, so you may be able to frame that two-story foyer and not worry about flexing. L-P even makes a stiffer, 1 3/4-inch thickness just for tall walls.

Contact: Louisiana-Pacific, 2706 Highway 421 North, Wilmington, NC 28401; 800/999-9105.

Electronic Humidity Control

The *Humitrak* lets you use simple exhaust fans to protect a building against moisture damage. The Humitrak is a line of solid-state, humidistatic controllers that can control fans in bathrooms, crawlspaces, or anywhere else you might want to use ventilation to minimize excess humidity. The Humitrak resembles a thermostat, but responds to changes in humidity rather than changes in temperature. When humidity rises, the Humitrak turns the fan on; when humidity falls, it turns the fan off. It can control fans with power levels up to 1.8 amps, and can even be hooked to a humidifier/dehumidifier. A 12-minute override lets you run the fan at any humidity level. The cost is $77 to $125, depending on the model.

Contact: Tamarack Technologies Inc., 15 Kendrick Rd., P.O. Box 490, West Wareham, MA 02576; 800/222-5932.

Underfloor Sound Muffler

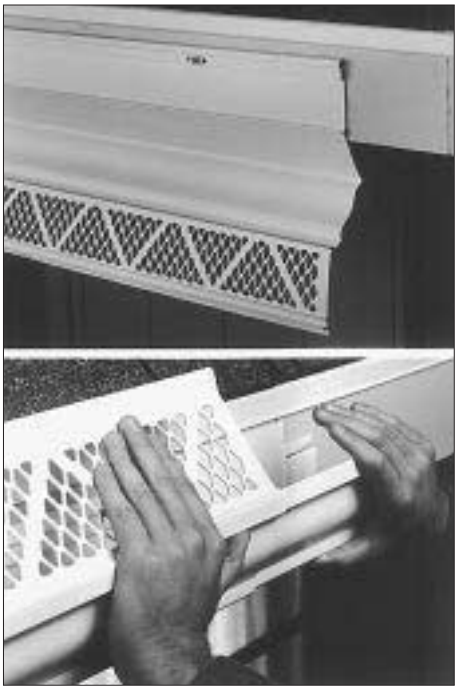
One way to decrease sound transmission through a floor-ceiling assembly is to isolate the finish flooring material from the subfloor. That's just what *Enkasonic* sound-control matting does.

Enkasonic is a three-dimensional matrix of extruded nylon filaments that's heat-bonded to a nonwoven fabric surface. The matrix, which comes in .4-inch-thick, 39-inch-wide rolls, blocks sound transmission by dissipating vibrations before they reach the ceiling below. Enkasonic can be used both in new construction and as a retrofit. The manufacturer claims Enkasonic was designed in consultation with the Ceramic Tile Institute of America specifically for use under ceramic tile, but it will also work with marble, wood, vinyl, and carpet. When used with tile, Enkasonic is sandwiched between the subflooring and a layer of backerboard to create a floating floor.

Contact: Akzo Industrial Systems Co., P.O. Box 7249, Asheville, NC 28802; 704/665-5050.

Folding Gutter

Most leaf guards are manufactured as a separate component used to cap aluminum or PVC gutters to keep out leaves and other debris. But the *Rain Master 3*'s leaf guard is an integral part of the vinyl gutter extrusion. The Rain Master is what the manufacturer calls a "flat to fold" system. The solid sides and bottom are attached to each other and to the perforated cover by means of patented plastic hinges that run the length of the gutter. Instead of mounting brackets, a series of snap anchors mounted to channels in one gutter sidewall are fastened directly to the fascia while the gutter is still unfolded. Then

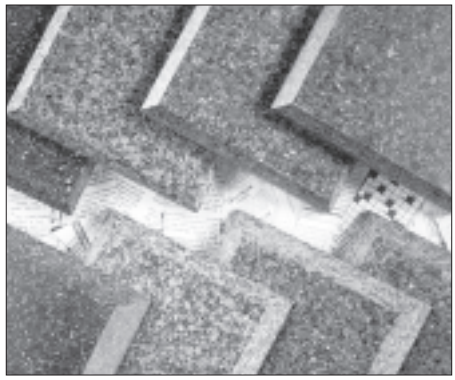


the rest of the gutter and the leaf guard are rolled up and over, and snapped into position. Couplings between gutter lengths are fitted with rubber gaskets to prevent leaks. The manufacturer claims a Rain Master gutter, which is available in white and brown, can be installed in half the time needed for a conventional gutter system.

Contact: Rain Master Division, Bemis Manufacturing, 300 Mill St., Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085; 800/558-7651.

Recycled Granite Look-Alike

A midwestern manufacturer has turned an unlikely mixture of waste newsprint and soybean flour into a material that looks like granite and handles like hardwood. *Environ Biocomposite* consists of 40% recycled newsprint and 40% soybean flour, plus 20% colorants and proprietary additives. According to the manufacturer, it's suitable for interior trim work and built-in furniture. Environ weighs less than solid surfacing material, can be glued to wood, and can be worked with standard woodworking tools and techniques. It's more than twice as hard as oak, however, so you'll need carbide tools. As with other composites, the lack of grain prevents warps and splits. Environ is water resistant but not waterproof, making it unsuitable for countertops in kitchens, baths, and other wet areas. The 3x6-foot sheets come in thicknesses of 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, and 1 inch. Colors include Emerald (a spectrum of yellow-greens and black), Sunset (cinnabar red with black), Imperial (purple with black), and Midnight (solid black). The price should fall somewhere between hardwood and solid surfacing.



Contact: Phenix Biocomposites, P.O. Box 609, Mankato, MN 56002; 800/324-8187. ■