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BPA INTERNATIONAL

JLC's

Letters

A lot has changed since the first issue of the Journal of Light Construction *was published back in 1982. To mark our anniversary, we researched back issues looking for the products and technologies that had the most sweeping affect on the lives and work of our readers. We discovered what we already knew but had forgotten: that much of what we take for granted today as standard building practice is the product of years of trial and error in the field. Given the increasing pace of change, today's tried and true methods are sure to be transformed again and again in the years to come. We hope that by looking back at the hard-won lessons of the past, today's* JLC *readers will be better prepared to meet the challenges of the future.*

Sal Alfano

Editor

Likes Vinyl Siding

To the Editor:

This is in response to Mike Shannahan's letter ("Vinyl Not Necessarily Final," 9/97). I have been installing vinyl siding since 1982, and have witnessed many technological advancements since it was introduced in the mid-1970s.

The advantages of today's vinyl siding far outweigh its disadvantages. No other siding product comes close in terms of comparative durability, low cost, and low maintenance. Vinyl doesn't have the frequent and costly maintenance of wood, the susceptibility to dents and scratches of metal, or the high cost of brick, stone, and stucco. And with the many colors, textures, styles, and accessories now available, it is easy to preserve an older home's historical perspective.

Problems caused by lack of rigidity, moisture retention, and susceptibility to weather can be virtually eliminated if the right products are used. However, as with any project, a vinyl siding exterior can only be as good as the carpenter who installed it. Professional installation by knowledgeable craftsmen is key to a quality vinyl siding job.

Mr. Shannahan also mentioned the toxicity of vinyl if it catches fire. Unfortunately, almost all substances become toxic when burned. Vinyl siding has a 25-minute minimum flame-spread rating, and its fumes dissipate outside the building and are not trapped inside. As for termites, they eat wood, not vinyl.

Finally, I'd like to address Mr. Shannahan's closing "truism." I suppose you think we shouldn't use brick, stone, or steel in buildings since God didn't make those trees, either!

Thomas A. Miner, President
Miner Brothers Construction
Mountain Home, Idaho

Benefits of Spray Insulations

To the Editor:

Thank you for your article "Controlling Moisture in Mixed Climates" (8/97). This article dramatically illustrates the futility of using fiberglass batt insulation. Most of the defenses required in systems using fiberglass batts are unnecessary if inherently airtight insulation systems

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like dense-pack cellulose, BIBS fiberglass, low-density urethane foam, or a system of 1-inch closed-cell urethane followed by fiberglass batts are used.

I notice that the wall systems in the article do not mention various difficult details like rim joists, ceiling recesses in kitchens or bathrooms, corners, partition intersections, and so forth. What happens to your vapor diffusion retarder when Mrs. Homeowner asks the electrician to put in another outlet?

Consumers are typically told that these upgraded insulation systems cost two to three times the cost of installed fiberglass batts. However, the additional cost of air barrier details, and their importance, is never discussed. As an insulation contractor I was frequently thwarted in my efforts by builders who refused to pay attention to air barrier and vapor retarder details. Then I switched to using combinations of urethane foam, low-density urethane, and dense-pack cellulose. Now I control the air movement with my insulation system. I no longer have to worry whether the builder or drywall contractor will apply caulk to the top and bottom plate.

Patrick Dundon
Dundon Insulation, Inc.
Windsor, N.Y.

MEC is Cost-Effective

To the Editor:

I am writing to correct a serious imbalance in the article "Energy Code Stirs Up Politics" (*Notebook*, 8/97). While the article displays an understanding of the *Model Energy Code's* history and content, its treatment of the code's benefits and costs is one-sided. The author quotes only sources from builder associations, such as NAHB and the Michigan Home Builders Association, that have mounted a political war against building codes in general and the *MEC* in particular.

Many builders in Michigan and elsewhere actively support the *MEC*; they know that energy efficiency is a positive aspect of home building, especially in a cold state like Michigan, and that meeting modest code requirements breaks no one's budget. These builders are ill-served by the political machinations of their associations.

The truth is that the arguments against the *MEC* are based neither on facts nor on serious analysis. They are in reality thin cover for a politically motivated, anti-regulation strategy orchestrated by NAHB, on which they will spend $750,000 this year to fight codes — money that could go into educating builders on advanced construction practices or other positive causes.

The serious, credibly documented studies of the *MEC* show that it is cost-effective, makes housing more affordable, saves energy, and avoids pollution. The report "Better Building Codes for Michigan," which we funded last year to set the record straight, shows that the *MEC* is cost-effective in Michigan, makes housing more affordable, and cuts pollution.

Another Alliance to Save Energy study, to be published this fall, amplifies the Michigan results by examining the *MEC* in 31 states that currently have weaker codes. The 1993 *MEC* proves itself cost-effective and makes housing more affordable in these states. It shows that the *MEC* can save 8 trillion Btu, $100 million, and 250,000 tons of pollution each year.

William Prindle
Alliance to Save Energy
Washington, D.C.

Michigan Energy Code Update

To the Editor:

In the article "Energy Code Stirs Up Politics" (*Notebook*, 8/97), it is noted that Michigan has overturned its adoption of the 1992 *MEC* and updated its energy code to "a compromise energy code based upon a seven-year payback period for energy improvements." While it is true that Michigan's legislature repealed the earlier adoption of the 1992 *MEC* and returned to the previous *Michigan Energy Code*, Michigan has yet to update its energy code with any further revisions. Changes have been proposed for the adoption of revisions that include a proposal submitted by the Michigan Home Builders Association. This proposal, as with all Michigan rules, is subject to hearings and a review by the Office of Regulatory Reform. Hearings to receive public opinion have not been scheduled for these rules. Everyone who desires an opportunity to make comments will be afforded time to make their views known on the proposal. Persons interested in receiving information on the hearings may do so by writing to the Department of Consumer and Industry Services, Bureau of Construction Codes, P.O. Box 30254, Lansing, MI 48909, or by calling 517/241-9347.

Henry L. Green
Bureau of Construction Codes
State of Michigan
Lansing, Mich.

On Using a Single Top Plate

To the Editor:

Robert Bouchet writes that using a double top plate is considerably stronger than a single one (*On the House*, 8/97). I could not agree more. The wall is much easier to lift off the deck because the double top plate keeps the wall more rigid. Ever try to straighten a single-plate exterior wall? You have to use so many braces that it is next to impossible to walk around in the house for further framing.

As a builder of fine custom homes, I would never take a job that called for a single top plate. The top plate is cheap insurance for structural stability and should be a national code requirement regardless of thermal conduction.

Jeff Stanley
Prestige Homes
St. Charles, Ill.

KEEP 'EM COMING! Letters 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; or e-mail to *76176.2053@compuserve.com.*