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JLC's

Letters

Fiber-Cement Details

To the Editor:

I was delighted to see the article "On Site With Fiber-Cement Siding" (1/98), because I will be doing an installation soon. I am particularly interested in corners. The article explains inside corners, but there is nothing about outside corners. In the photographs on the front cover and on page 28 the outside corners are not finished and nothing is said about it. I have asked my supplier and other contractors and they all give me the same answer: Install 1-by primed trim for the outside corner before installing the siding, butt the siding against the trim, and caulk. But what if I want a wraparound look? This may seem obvious, but the article points out that fiber-cement is brittle and the edges break easily when cut at an angle. I have also thought of using aluminum siding type corner pieces. Some help would be very much appreciated.

Guy Groulx

Center Town Home Repair
 Fort Worth, Texas

David Frane responds:

The standard way to do outside corners is to butt siding to a wooden cornerboard. Fiber-cement manufacturers are currently developing 3/4-inch trim boards, so someday you'll be able to trim entire houses with fiber-cement.

Be careful about using aluminum trim pieces to get that wraparound look. Raw aluminum will corrode when placed in contact with alkaline materials like cement. Check with the manufacturer before you use nonstandard details, because they might void your warranty.

Let me clear up a misunderstanding about miters. Builders in Texas told me their crews had a tough time doing out-

side miters in fiber-cement. But I later visited a site in Massachusetts where the carpenters had done beautiful outside miters in Hardi-Panel. The difference was that the crews I observed in Texas were doing fast production work, and cutting trim with circular saws and speed squares. The crew in Massachusetts worked on high-end custom homes and was using better equipment. So it is possible, with care, to do outside miters in fiber-cement. But remember, you can't pull the joints together by nailing into the "end grain" like you do with wood siding.

Finally, the picture you refer to is of a detail that's often used in Texas and Arkansas. The siding is run to the outside corner, then corner boards are nailed over it. It sounds crazy, but in some areas carpenters have been doing it this way for a long time. In Arkansas, I saw a 150-year old building with casings and corner boards nailed over the siding, and a two-year-old house with the same detail.

Precutting Frames Saves Time

To the Editor:

I recently received your book *Advanced Framing*. I have two suggestions.

On page 76, Will Holladay explains his method for cutting the ridge cut. I'd like to recommend using a beam saw set at the proper angle. I've been doing this for years and find it extremely fast and accurate.

I'd also recommend an article on pre-cutting houses. I've been doing this for almost every piece of lumber on each house. I believe in moving as little as

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possible. When I start cutting I don't stop until the cutting's done. Of course, this requires you do your homework ahead of time, but the time saved (not to mention the wear and tear on your body) is worth it. With precutting there is no wasted material, because you cut from longest to shortest, and all materials are accounted for. Also, you are mentally prepped for framing after having figured and precut a house.

Another trick I use in conjunction with precutting is to strategically stack my precut components for easy access when they're needed. For example, I'll stack the floor joists at the end of the house so I can roll them easily when it's time. Also, I'll stack precut wall components (headers, sills, trimmers, etc.) on pallets that can be forklifted to the right floor (I own a Champ HL350). If a forklift is unavailable, then stack the parts as close to the floor as possible, or in the middle of a slab after all the walls are snapped.

Mark Brantley
Newton, Texas

Trimable Undercabinet Light Strip

To the Editor:

I just read Michael De Luca's article "Lighting the Kitchen" (*Kitchen & Bath*, 12/97). I wonder if the author can give me any more information on the undercounter lights he mentions — the ones with the lamps spaced 2 inches on-center and that can be trimmed to fit. Thanks.

Angela Candela
Morley Builders
Lawrence, Kan.

Michael De Luca responds:

The light fixture I referred to is called ClikStrip and is manufactured by Ardee, P.O. Box 370375, Miami, FL 33137; 305/531-7978.

Relaminating Not Worth It

To the Editor:

In the January '98 *On the House* column, a reader asked whether laminating over existing plastic laminate is

acceptable, and what the best procedure is. I have to disagree with Mr. Pitcher's response on several points. He states that it's always best to remove the existing laminate and get down to the substrate. This is not always true. Remove the existing laminate and what you'll end up with is anyone's guess. More often than not, you can expect particleboard that has swelled or plywood that has delaminated due to moisture absorption. It is usually not a pretty picture.

Mr. Pitcher also states there is no good way to remove existing plastic laminate. He recommends a torch and a putty knife. This method may work, but in addition to being dangerous (from noxious fumes and the associated fire hazards), it's much more labor intensive than it has to be.

With a spray bottle filled with lacquer thinner and a stiff putty knife, you can remove existing plastic laminate easier than you would ever believe possible. Simply lift up a corner of the laminate with a putty knife and with the nozzle of the spray bottle in the "stream" position, spray the lacquer thinner between the substrate and the laminate. With this process of lifting and spraying the old adhesive will be dissolved, allowing you to peel away the existing laminate quite easily.

A 4x8 sheet of 3/4-inch particleboard will only cost you about \$10. It's simply not worth it to relaminate an existing counter top. Do yourself a favor — toss the old top and make a new one.

Dan Pasqualucci
Irmadan Enterprises
Miami, Fla.

Likes Clip-Head Nailers

To the Editor:

I just finished reading "New Clip-Head Nailers" (*Toolbox*, 1/98) — excellent article. I like the cliphead nailers and am looking at the Hitachi unit. I had an old Paslode (too heavy) and now have a Senco 325 (okay). After reading your article, I think I'll pass on the two guns you tested because nei-

ther one could sink a nail in LVLs. If I have to finish off nailing with my hammer, I'd just as soon handnail it and avoid the bending associated with hammering on air gun nails.

A gun needs to be able to take a fall and operate jam-free, and anything else is a bonus. Presently we use a Duofast, two Hitachi NR83s, a Senco 60, a Stanley Bostitch, and a Senco 325, of which the Hitachi guns stand out.

Tommy Guerrant
Matoaca, Va.

Brick Veneer Details

To the Editor:

Your article "Getting Started With Brick Veneer" was excellent (11/97). I do have a problem with the fact that the brick veneer extends below grade, but confess that we don't deal much in the Chicago area with concrete block foundations. Our cast-in-place concrete foundation walls always extend above grade so that we avoid having the masonry below grade. Having been involved with many leaky basements, it seems that most problems come from the fact that finished grade is either above the top of the foundation wall or does not slope away from the building.

In the detail shown on page 43, there could have been another flashing behind and under the lowest three brick courses, turning down over the damp-proofing or waterproofing membrane for 4 to 6 inches. This would have eliminated the potential leak source.

The article should also have commented on the need to provide end dams on flashings above openings to prevent water from running off the ends of the flashing down into the wall. It also could have commented on the need to lap and seal joints in continuous flashings. Both of these items are frequent sources of water infiltration.

Stuart Jacobson
Stuart K. Jacobson & Assoc.
Northbrook, Ill.

Steve Thomas responds:

Here in Central Ohio, where we routinely use both block and poured founda-

tions, it is not at all uncommon for brick, stone, or stucco to extend 6 inches or so below finished grade. Obviously, positive drainage away from the house is important. The flashing technique you recommend would work well, and could be used where excessive moisture might be expected in the soil around the house.

Your observations about end dams and proper lapping and sealing of flashing are both correct. I consider any time and money spent on properly flashing and sealing a building well spent. You just about can't "overflash." To be effective, the flashing must extend past the face of the brick (to be trimmed off after the mortar sets) and an adequate number of free-draining weeps installed.

Brick Veneer Resources

To the Editor:

The article "Getting Started With Brick Veneer" (11/97) by Steve Thomas was well-written and informative. I wish the builders, masonry contractors, and building officials in the Atlanta area would read it! We have a local office of the Brick Institute of America in Atlanta and still weep hole and flashing details are almost totally ignored here.

I would like to see you address the flashing of vertical brick sidewalls at the roof line. Most contractors here install the roof and flashing first and then the mason installs the brick on top of the shingles and buries the flashing behind the brick. This leaves no way for the water to get out from behind the brick because there is no flashing or weep holes to let it out.

Wm. F. Scharfnorth
Alpha-Tech Home Inspections
Atlanta, Ga.

Steve Thomas responds:

Your comment that masons are mounting brick atop shingles leaves me queasy: I'm almost afraid to ask for more detail. I advise you to visit your local BIA office and get the proper instructions and diagrams for flashing where brick (or stone) and shingles meet. Distribute these details to local architects for incorpora-

tion into their drawings.

Water is the principal enemy to the longevity of any structure. As difficult as it may be to coordinate the roofing and masonry trades, this is one area where total understanding — and water integrity — must be achieved.

Wanted: Contractors With Integrity

To the Editor:

Mr. Eldrenkamp's blanket advocacy of negotiated pricing for construction projects coupled with his often ingenuous responses to those who beg to differ puts him on a mighty high horse ("Farewell to Competitive Bidding," 7/97; Letters, 12/97, 2/98).

As an architect for 18 years, I have been involved with every conceivable type of project delivery method and construction contract, and they can all succeed and fail miserably. I have worked with incompetent and unscrupulous contractors and those who have contributed greatly to the success of a project. The small handful of contractors that I hold in high regard possess a high level of knowledge, ability, and personal integrity. How well they worked with me and my clients to produce quality, on budget, final projects has never related to when they joined the project team or whether they did or did not competitively bid to get the job.

According to a May 27, 1993 article by Griffen Miller in the New York Times, "The number of consumer complaints about home contractors are among the highest of all businesses. These grievances include the exceeding of estimates, performing substandard work, and leaving jobs incomplete."

Contrary to Mr. Eldrenkamp's dim view of the professional architect's responsibilities, one of my big jobs is to "protect the owner from wily, unscrupulous contractors." If I could retire my policeman's badge in this regard, I certainly would. But until I find that contractors with both the knowledge and the integrity that my clients deserve start turning up with regularity, I will

continue providing these "protective services" for my clients.

Dennis Michael Findley, AIA
Mclean, Va.

Paul Eldrenkamp responds:

I don't have a dim view of an architect's responsibilities. As I said in my original article, I have a profound respect for what a good architect can bring to a project. I would not do much more than a bathroom remodel without one. I have worked with several architects for whom I have a very high regard. If the client does not yet have an architect (and most of my clients have not hired a design professional when they ask us on board), after some thought and conversation regarding the client's needs, I recommend one of these architects.

Mr. Findley, for his part, knows a few contractors he respects. But his clients nonetheless continue to need his "protective services." His clients are obviously not hiring the contractors Mr. Findley likes. I believe that Mr. Findley would be providing his clients better service if, on their behalf, he brought one of his favored contractors into the job early on, and worked with that contractor to lock in schedule, budget, and quality standards at the design stage, when there is the most leverage for those efforts.

I apologize if I come across as high and mighty. I believe I have some valid points to make about how architects and contractors can better work together to improve the collective service we offer our clients, and I am trying to communicate those ideas as clearly as I can. Despite Mr. Findley's experience, there are many very good contractors in the marketplace: I know because I have to compete against them all the time. Architects who insist on competitive bids may stand the least chance of working with them, and they are possibly cheating their clients as a result.

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, 932 West Main St., Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to 76176.2053@compuserve.com.

