



THE JOURNAL OF LIGHT CONSTRUCTION

A Builderburg Group Publication

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The Journal of Light Construction (ISSN-1050-828X; USPS-001-659) is published monthly by Builderburg Partners, Ltd., 1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20005. Periodicals-Class Postage paid at Richmond, Vt., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Journal of Light Construction, 932 West Main Street, Richmond, VT 05477. Copyright 1998 by Builderburg Partners, Ltd. All rights reserved.



JLC's

Letters

Straightening Out Those Plastics

To the Editor:

Thanks for a generally great article on alternative decking materials. Unfortunately, the author uses the term "vinyl" to describe any plastic product, which is incorrect. Vinyl is a common term for PVC, or polyvinyl chloride. Most of the recycled plastic decking materials mentioned in the article are not vinyl at all. They are primarily high-density polyethylene (HDPE) from milk jugs, detergent bottles, and the like. Most of the actual vinyl (PVC) products mentioned contain little or no recycled content.

From an environmental perspective, there is a huge difference between recycled polyethylene and virgin PVC.

Nadav Malin

Environmental Building News
Brattleboro, Vt.

Foam Sheathing Too Weak

To the Editor:

In the article "Two-By Debate Continues" (*Notebook*, 6/98), the suggestion of using 2x4 studs with foam sheathing instead of plywood is structurally ludicrous. Publishing such stuff promulgates and perpetuates the mindless construction of homes which are not reasonably resistant to foreseeable winds, etc.

Robert Randall, P.E.
Mohegan Lake, N.Y.

More Joist Hanger Mistakes

To the Editor:

I was pleased to see the topic of undersized joist hangers addressed in the article "Solutions to Common Framing Problems" (6/98), by David Utterback. As an engineered lumber products representative, I constantly see conditions in the field where

improper hangers are used with both dimensional lumber and I-joists.

One additional critical misapplication is the use of flat-seated hangers with sloping I-joist rafters off of a flush ridge beam. It is imperative that a proper sloped-seat hanger be used, for three reasons: to avoid deforming the seat of the hanger, thus reducing its strength; to provide adequate bearing (1³/₄ inches min.) for the rafter; and to prevent the hanger seat from "knifing" through the I-joist bottom flange, thus reducing the strength of the I-joist rafter.

W. Grant Ricken
Technical Representative
Trus Joist MacMillan
Spokane, Wash.

Water Fight: To Pressure-Wash or Not?

To the Editor:

I am writing about the question and answer entitled "Removing Latex Paint" (*On the House*, 5/98), in which the author states that after removing paint, he cleans the surface with a 3,500-psi pressure-washer.

I have seen a number of buildings with wood siding and trim which, after pressure-washing, have had very damp wood. If the wall is "tight," the dampness can persist long enough to allow decay in the sheathing and framing, and the building can be severely damaged. Even walls that resist wind-driven rain will allow water, applied under pressure, to penetrate through the joints in the siding and trim, through some types of air infiltration barrier, and into the sheathing.

The worst case I saw involved cedar T&G siding which was sealed on all surfaces before installation. Water pen-

etrated in quantity into the sheathing, and there was little opportunity for the water to pass out through the inside (there was a vapor retarder) or through the outside (the sealer on the back of the siding retarded the vapor there, also).

Donald Baerman, AIA
North Haven, Conn.

Mike Shannahan responds:

I would have to agree that buildings have "damp wood" after pressure-washing, but I have never seen a wall so tight that the dampness from pressure-washing could "persist long enough to allow decay in the sheathing and framing." Allowing enough drying time (five to ten days in my region) between washing and painting and caulking is the key to success. Most of my exterior work is very high profile, and I wouldn't chance compromising my reputation by taking shortcuts.

Wind-driven rain will penetrate virtually all wood-sided structures, especially here in the Gulf, where hurricanes can dump 20 or 30 inches of water blasted by 150 mph winds. Someone else can do the math on pressure vs. volume ratios, but I'll state with gut certainty that controlled high-pressure-washing will not damage a house any more than a good storm as regards subsequent paint performance. I have also seen far more damage done by the poorly thought out use of moisture barriers than from pressure-washing.

The problem involving sealed tongue-and-groove boards points up what can happen in the quantum leap from architectural concept to construction reality. Although many design professionals are currently enamored of T&G sidings, they would not be my choice for exterior use in any practical application because of their inherent inability to freely shed water, particularly when installed in a horizontal or diagonal configuration. The skilled craftsmen of the past (whose ethos I try to emulate) recognized the importance of T&G as flooring, wainscoting, sheathing, or ceilings, but I've not seen much evidence of its use as siding on buildings that have stood the test of time. Board and battens, clapboards, and shakes stand out as classic exterior treat-

ments in large measure because of their ability to dry quickly and thoroughly.

High-pressure-washing is not a panacea for all paint removal projects. Attempted by an amateur, it can and often does do significant damage. Carried out by a competent and meticulous worker, it is an important part of exterior renovation work.

Laying Closed Valley Shingles

To the Editor:

Regarding the article "Flashing a Leakproof Valley" (3/98), I congratulate the author on the use of membrane protection and the way he installs the overlying aluminum valley. He is right: Many builders nail the sides of the valley, and it soon begins to buckle. The worst result is not that it is unsightly, but that eventually, metal fatigue will set in and cracks will develop, resulting in leaks.

The right way to install metal valley flashing is, indeed, to nail it at the top and clip it along its edges, as the illustration shows, to allow for movement. It is also best to lay it in pieces no longer than 6 to 8 feet to minimize overall movement.

I have a problem, however, with the way the author installs closed cut valleys. His method does not follow the specific instructions of the Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association. ARMA specifies that the overlying shingles should be kept 2 inches short of the centerline of the valley, that the top inch of each underlying shingle be cut back at a 45-degree angle to direct the water back into the valley, and that each shingle end be embedded in a 3-inch-wide bed of asphalt roofing cement.

I have investigated roof leaks that were directly attributable to failure to follow these specifications. Water crept under the shingles for several feet and got into the living area. Making the necessary corrections solved the problem. The author may be lucky so far, perhaps because of the redundant protections he builds in (eaves membrane under the flashing).

Most professional roofers generally stay away from woven or closed cut

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valleys because valley shingles get much more wear than the rest of the shingles — they get water from both roofs. They prefer to use heavy-gauge metal because it can withstand the rush of water. The most experienced roofers will also make an inverted “V” in the center of the valley to help direct the water down without having it wash onto the other roof plane.

Henri de Marne
Waitsfield, Vt.

Glulams: Versatile & Competitive

To the Editor:

I was surprised to read the misinformation about glue-laminated beams in the article “Engineered Lumber Update” (3/98). While the piece does, generally speaking, make a positive statement about glulams, it unfortunately also perpetuates the perception that glulams are a specialty product not intended for everyday use.

Willamette Industries manufactures a wide variety of glulams for residential construction, including ridge beams, floor beams, and headers. These stock products are often lighter in weight than the alternatives, and usually are as easy or easier to install. A number of companies, including Simpson Strong-Tie, manufacture engineered connectors for use in their installation.

Generally speaking, glulams compete directly with such products as laminated veneer lumber, parallel strand lumber, and solid sawn timbers. Glulams hold significant advantages for many applications. For example, with a glulam the contractor gains the benefit of single-piece installation, avoiding the need to bolt together two or more pieces of LVL to carry a particular load. And pound for pound, a glulam constructed of kiln-dried Douglas fir or Southern pine will stand up to any load as well as or better than any piece of parallel strand lumber. From the standpoints of durability, storage, versatility, ease-of-use, and cost, a glu-

lam is often the best alternative for a variety of applications.

James J. Enright, Sales Manager
Engineered Wood Products
Willamette Industries
Albany, Ore.

Safety Game

To the Editor:

In response to the letters titled “Readers Speak Out on Safety,” (6/98), I too have often wondered why construction literature often shows photographs of framers not wearing safety equipment and engaging in hazardous practices like walking the plates. However, I don’t share these readers’ point of view. I build in the Denver area, a pathetically paranoid “safety” zone. Yes, I am in compliance: We build our truss assemblies on the ground, erect safety rails to within 1/16 inch of the code, use a harness on even a 5/12 roof, and even wear eye protection. And, oh yes, I have a dark brown face and a bright white scalp to prove I wear my hardhat.

I learned carpentry from the Mennonites of northwest Florida, tradesmen for centuries. As a young man, I fell in love with this brutal business, for all of its satisfactions and dangers. I still love it, but I can see how the big political bosses are tapping our pockets playing this “safety” game.

The reason that you still see pictures of framers “in violation” — for not wearing safety glasses or whatever — is that there are still areas of this country where the framers are free to decide for themselves whether or not to wear them. It is almost impossible to wear any kind of glasses in Florida in the

summer without clearing the lens of sweat 5,000 times a day.

You give me one day off without pay for not wearing safety glasses and I’ll be pounding nails on another crew by lunch time.

Joe Guerra
Hammerhead Builders
Lakewood, Colo.

Slope or Pitch? Take Your Pick

To The Editor:

In response to the letter from Professor Grant Newman (6/98): In the field, “pitch” and “slope” are synonymous, with pitch being the more common term. *The Dictionary Of Architecture and Construction*, published by McGraw-Hill, is commonly accepted as the authority on architectural terminology by general and professional users and in many courts of law. Under the definition of “slope,” it says “see pitch.” For “pitch,” it reads “the slope of a roof, usually expressed as a ratio of vertical rise to horizontal run, or in inches of rise per foot of run.” Craftsman Book Company’s *Rough Carpentry*, first published in 1976, states “The pitch of a roof is generally expressed as the number of inches of vertical rise in 12 inches of horizontal run.” To give Professor Newman his due, however, this same reference goes on to state: “In terms of proportion, pitch is the ratio of the rise of the rafter to the width of the building.”

Larry T. French
Christiansted, Virgin Islands

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