

Millennium Notebook

This summer, demolition workers in London were surprised to discover an ancient leather satchel containing fragments of parchment. Dated December, 999, the hand-scribed pages proved to be the earliest known copy of the *Journal of Light Construction*. We hope that as you face the challenges of the new millennium, you will draw inspiration from the strength and ingenuity of our artisan ancestors.

The Editors

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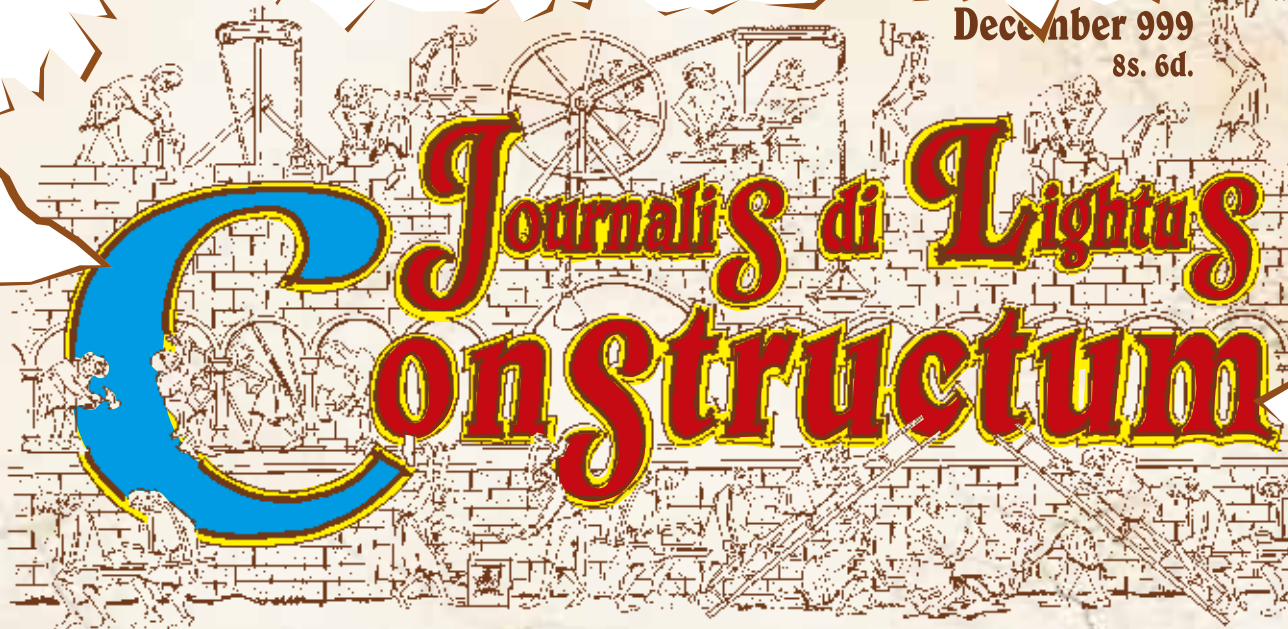


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by Sully Boggs

Recent firewood shortages in Ireland are forcing many heating contractors to look at alternative fuels. An expert in peat combustion tells you what you need to know.

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by Avery Lastpenny

A veteran builder of entry-level homes shows how recycled roof thatch and inexpensive alternatives to the traditional dirt floor can keep costs down.

Beware the Noble Client

by Theodorick of York

Landing a wealthy client can mean either high profits or big headaches for a contractor. An experienced artisan explains how to stay out of the dungeon when your client owns the county.

Tool Test: Adzes vs. Sticks

by Dunkley Crowsbie

Our tool editor compares adzes with sharp digging sticks with an eye towards durability.

Danes Introduce Inspections

In Northumbria, where Danish law has held sway since 994, builders have been gradually adjusting to the Danish Building Code (DBC). Since English authorities, intrigued by the advantages of the DBC, are considering adopting the code in areas under English rule, builders in other areas may soon need to familiarize themselves with "permits" and "inspectors."

"I've never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life," said Geoffrey the Blunt, a Saxon builder in Manchester, near the limits of Danish authority. Pointing to a copy of the DBC which was recently posted in the town square, he said, "These code books are impossible to decipher." He's right, of course: The DBC is written in Danish. In York, where the Danes are firmly in control, builders have learned the hard way to take the DBC seriously. "The first time I met an inspector, he walked into my site when I was finishing up daubing the interior mud," said Henry Goodwin, a York builder. "He said he wanted to look at the framing, and I thought the bloke was joking. 'Right,' I said, 'And I'd like to see the Queen's underpants.'" Says Goodwin, who was interviewed in the York dungeon, "I learned one thing for sure: Building inspectors have no sense of humor."

Environmental Law Snares Builder



Orwich builder Egbert Furrow is the first person charged under King Ethelred's recent environmental decree, the Endangered Creatures Act. Egbert was cited after it was discovered that he had clearcut 20 acres of oaks in East Anglia while preparing to build 40 single-family homes. "There's no doubt that the woods destroyed by Furrow were prime unicorn habitat," said Roger Refrew of the Creatures Protection Agency. Furrow is unrepentant. "East Anglia is lousy with bloody unicorns," he said. "They're pawing up the turnip fields and pulling apart haystacks for sport. Why, if we hunted unicorns day and night for a thousand years, we couldn't rid ourselves of the beasts." He further remarked, "I'm doing East Anglia a favor by ridding th

New Methods for Controlling Heat

Harold Smyth of Bishop's Gate has led a good life. He's lived to the ripe old age 47, making him the oldest person in Sussex. Now, nearly bedridden and deaf, he spends his days sitting on a stool by his stone hearth. His impediments have led him to develop a new way to control the temperature in his simple one-room home.

His wife, Guinevere, explained his system: "When he feels a little bit cold, he holds up one finger," she said, "and that means I should go out to the woodpile and bring in one log for the fire. When he holds up two fingers, it means I should go get two logs." Guinevere is promoting this system of temperature control, which she calls a "digital energy management system."



The "New World": Fact or Fancy? Noted explorer's discovery of new continent still unverified

Leif Ericsson has sent word from the high seas that a "lush land of immense proportions" is readily available by sailing west to Greenland, then bearing southwest.

Top real estate movers and shakers are discounting these stories as wild and imaginative tales from Vikings who've been at sea too long. "The distances Ericsson describes are much too great," says Faultrum Brift, a London land speculator. "They'd have bloody well sailed off the edge of the earth." Brift admitted that if true, the discovery could affect local land prices. "If land is as plentiful as Ericsson claims, local prices will fall."

By Design: Entry-Level Hovel

When it comes to the basic hovel, trying to fit everything into a 64-square-foot design can be a challenge. Wilfred Engelberth of Northumberland, who recently finished a 350-hovel subdivision for Lord Ludlow's peasants in Bristol, offers these pointers to first-time hovel builders:

Keep the footprint simple. History has shown that it is hard to improve on the basic 8x8-foot square (see illustration).

Include a loft. To conserve floor space, switch from the usual 80-degree ladder to a vertical ladder.

Use simple built-ins. A 4x6-foot sleeping platform can be built inexpensively. Let the hovel owner provide the straw mattress to help keep down costs.

Omit the hearth. Most hovel owners will be used to cooking outdoors.

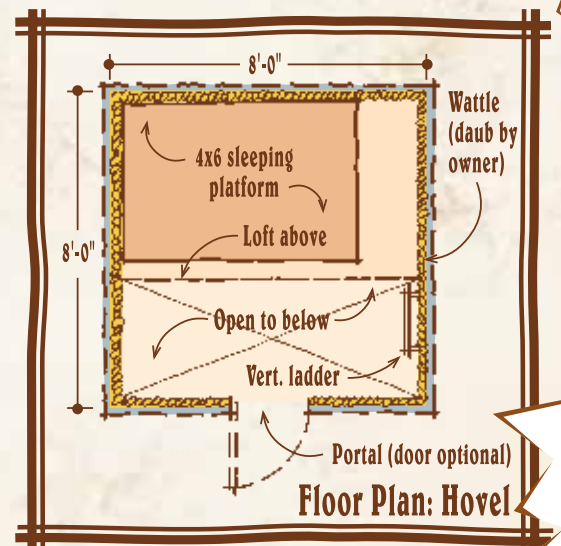
With affordability a top concern, Engelberth sells many of his hovels with the wattle installed, but no daub. "Most hovel owners are experienced daubers," says Engelberth. "If there is one thing they know, it's mud."

Bath Business in Decline

Alfred Spickett's plumbing showroom has been at the same location for over 600 years. Looking wistfully out over the main street of Bath, a small village on the banks of the Avon River, Spickett laments the precipitous plunge his business has seen recently. "Ever since the Romans left in 410," says Spickett, "the bath business hasn't been the same." He further states, "It's hard to find anyone at all who's interested in indoor plumbing."

Faux Mud

Shell-Waste Corp. has just brought to market a new artificial daub they call "mortar." Made from ground shells and sand, it is being touted as appropriate for both stucco and stone-laying. Burton Worsley, an engineer at Shell-Waste, said, "Admittedly, it's a factory-made product. But from a distance, it looks like real mud."



Architects' Fancies

Throughout the month of January, a dozen homes in Greenwich will be open to the public as part of the London Architects Guild's "parade of homes," intended to showcase bold new concepts in design. One entry, the AI Fresco house, has walls of lattice and a silk roof. "The idea here is to reduce the separation between the outdoor environment and the indoor environment," said architect Froggly Barnsworth. "The house, unfortunately, is difficult to show at the moment, because the interior is filled with wind-driven snow."



Entry Doors Now Standard Equipment

The recent spate of bear attacks in Jutland has greatly increased customer demand for improved security. High-end home builders are reporting that doors, once considered a luxury option, are becoming standard on new homes. Johan Burgess, a builder in Essex, says, "No one wants an open portal anymore. Everyone asks, 'How much would it cost to include a door?'"

Owners of homes with doors report an unexpected benefit: lower energy costs. "I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't experienced it in my own home, but it's true," reports Frederick Upton of South Warwick. "As soon as I installed a front door, my firewood costs dropped 20%." Research is now underway at Oxford to see if such anecdotal reports of energy savings can be confirmed.

K&B: "Kitchen Boulders" Here To Stay

When Alfred Bogsworth makes soup, he always cuts up his carrots, turnips, and parsley on the dirt floor, just like all of his neighbours. Until last December, that is, when Bogsworth managed to roll a huge stone into the middle of his kitchen floor.

The flat-topped "kitchen boulder" is about a yard high. "The best thing about it," explained Bogsworth, who now owns Kitchen King in Cornwall, "is the convenience of chopping your grub while standing up. It really helps the lower back." Bogsworth's customers also claim that they find fewer pebbles in the soup. Bogsworth has tried to promote sandstone, with limited success. "In the high-end homes," he says, "all they want is granite."

Wrought Spike Won't Rot

Two London blacksmiths have begun promoting an alternative to the wood tenon. Officially called the "iron tenon," but known among artisans as a "spike," the new fastener is little more than a stick of wrought iron with one pointed end and one blunt, slightly flattened end. These ironmongers have proved in public demonstration that a carpenter wielding a stone-headed mallet can drive these "iron tenons" into timber mortise-joints without first drilling a hole. Driven flush with the surface of the timber, it is claimed that the metal tenons will hold the joint even tighter and stronger than the wood itself.

While it is generally known that iron resists rot and decay more robustly than wood, there is little agreement over the strength of the new spikes. Thus far, no one has been able to withdraw a spike once it has been properly driven, but skeptics argue that this is due primarily to the lack of a proper tool for extraction. Also, there is some discussion over the value of spikes that are driven only part way or that are bent through clumsy use of the somewhat unwieldy stone-headed mallet. Tests are currently underway at Cambridge's College of Alchemy, but ideological differences among the staff as well as an inherent bias against iron nails is likely to delay results for several centuries.

On The Hovel

Outbuilding Solves Air Quality Woes?

Q: I recently finished building a 10x10-foot two-story hut with three stalls for cattle downstairs and a sleeping loft upstairs. The owners are now claiming the house has indoor air quality problems. Could the green thatch I used be the problem?

A: Recent studies at the Cambridge Building Science Laboratory have determined that most indoor air quality complaints are caused by common household cows, which produce far more methane than previously believed. The lab is now advocating that cattle be housed in a separate outbuilding, rather than the hovel.

Kitchen vs. Bath: What's the Difference?

Q: As a small residential contractor, I usually work on simple hovels in the rural countryside. Recently, however, I landed my first downtown job — a new five-room house — and the owners keep talking about the "kitchen" and the "bathroom" as if they were separate rooms. What's the difference?

A: Both "kitchen" and "bathroom" are used to describe rooms in which the bourgeoisie performs functions that most of us do outdoors. That's where the similarities end.