



THE JOURNAL OF LIGHT CONSTRUCTION

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JLC's

Letters

Sealed Crawlspace in Action

To the Editor:

I have been battling with a local building department over the issue of ventilation in crawlspaces (see "Crawlspace Ventilation Update," 8/99; *Letters*, 10/99, 1/00). I say it's best to seal it up and of course they say ventilate it. Two years ago, I built a family-room addition and made the 22x14-foot 3-foot-high crawlspace to serve as a storage area for outdoor items, accessible with a hinged door from outside. I used a 6-mil poly vapor barrier under the slab, and insulated the joist bays with 1-inch-thick R-board and 9-inch (R-30) fiberglass fit between the joists, and another layer of the R-board on the underside of the joists, with the joints taped. To protect the insulation against ladders and other equipment moving in and out, I installed 1/2-inch PT plywood under the R-board. The door to the crawlspace is a prehung steel unit, complete with weatherstripping, and cut down to the proper height.

The space works perfect. The homeowner is happy, and reports that regardless of the season, the space is always dry. The space gets inspected often since the building department and I are at odds, and the owner wants to make sure he is backing the right horse. The building department is stuck on the written code and won't officially "bless" the crawlspace, though I've sent them lots of supporting information. My point here is not about my problems with the building department, but to note that I have a real life case in point that sealing is better than venting.

Les Deal
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Attacking Crawlspace Mildew

To the Editor:

The letter about crawlspace mildew (*Letters*, 10/99) reminded me of a job I

did recently to solve the same problem.

Before putting down the polyethylene, I used a garden sprayer to apply a 15% solution of Tim-bor borate to the underside of the floor system. While this is supposed to kill mildew, mold, fungus, and termites, it's also very good against roaches and cave crickets.

After doing some research on the JLCD-Rom, I found the address for the manufacturer of Tu-Tuff, a cross-linked polyethylene sheeting that's not only stronger than regular poly but white, which brightens up the crawlspace. I ran it up the foundation walls and sealed it to the sills and at the overlaps using adhesive tape of the same material, for a clean, seamless look.

Bill Thibadeau
Norcross, Ga.

Cover Contradiction?

To the Editor:

The January 2000 cover shows two men installing a vinyl window. I could not help but notice that they seem to have installed the head flashing paper on top of the window incorrectly. The head flashing is supposed to overlap the top fin of the window, not lie under it, as it is being installed in the photo. There is a bead of caulk on the head flashing, which leads me to believe that it will be sandwiched between the window fin and flashing paper. On page 42, Figure 4, and page 43, Figure 6, you show the same technique. Then on page 44, you show the correct steps for flashing a vinyl window, with the head flashing going over the top fin. I feel that you have contradicted yourselves and that the photos in the issue are wrong.

Alonzo Banuelos
Bear General Contractors
via e-mail

Thanks for your letter; you have a sharp eye. What you didn't know (which we should have made clear) is that the house on the January cover was eventually clad in stucco. That means that the sheathing got completely covered with a layer of asphalt-impregnated building paper, with 6-inch laps between courses. The top nailing flange of that window, as well as the sides, would have been covered. We can't vouch for the installation, but if it was "by the book," then the stucco paper should have been tucked **under** the flashing paper at the bottom of the window.

As for the photos in Figures 4 and 6, if you read the captions you'll note that these installations were held up as models to avoid.

— The Editors

Old Mortar Better?

To the Editor:

Regarding the article "Keeping Water Out of Brick Veneer" (11/99): Hairline cracks are often more serious in terms of moisture penetration than large open cracks, as hairline cracks draw moisture in through the capillary attraction between water ions and building materials and hold it there. Large open cracks, on the other hand, allow water in but also let water drain out. I would take a 1/4-inch crack any day to a hairline fissure, all else being equal.

It is my experience after looking at hundreds of masonry walls that modern mortars are often too rich in cement and go far beyond the structural requirements of the veneer wall in question. Masonry walls should be allowed to move at both the *micro* and *macro* level. Expansion joints are not always sufficient to do this. Softer,

lime-enriched mortars would greatly reduce the damage of hairline cracking. Lime mortars are one of the primary reasons that so-called historic masonry buildings have stood as long as they have. They tend to heal themselves, as minute amounts of dissolved lime refill micro-fissures. This is a lesson we seem to have forgotten in our rush to discard the past. Stronger is not always better.

Richard O. Byrne
Architectural Conservator
Staunton, Va.

Flue Rule of Thumb

To the Editor:

Thanks for the article "Makeup Air For Combustion Equipment" (12/99). Here are a couple of additional points. First is that as a good rule of thumb the ratio of run to rise on a chimney and flue system should be no more than 20%; that is, the flue run should not exceed 20% of the chimney height. Second, the acidic condensates from condensing appliances should not drain into metal drains but should be collected and pumped outdoors or into an interior drain where they can be diluted.

J.D. Grewell
Silver Spring, Md.

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