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JLC's

Letters

Charging More Than the Competition

To the Editor:

I agree with Paul Eldrenkamp about guaranteeing completion dates (*Strictly Business*, 7/00). This is just good business as well as a great selling technique. I have used it only once to separate myself from the competition and was successful in receiving a contract, even though my bid was 20% higher than that of the competition.

I would encourage everyone to use completion dates, but only on large or critical projects. One example would be a kitchen remodel, since there is normally only one kitchen in the home and the room cannot be out of service a long period of time.

Tom Wing

TJW Home Services

via e-mail

Undermount Sinks in Laminate Counters

To the Editor:

Martin Holladay consistently does a great job of thoroughly covering topics and the article "Undermount Sinks" (7/00) was no exception. I agree that undermounting sinks beneath plastic laminate counters with particleboard substrates may be foolhardy, but I've had good success doing so for the past five years.

To prevent moisture intrusion into the particleboard, I take a couple of precautions that seem to work. Once I have the sink in hand, I fit and build up the particleboard material on top of the base cabinets. I make up my own template for the sink cutout and make cuts as accurately as possible to the line. I think it's best to use curves at the "corners" of the hole, and I avoid angles that will require seams in the laminate. Using a belt sander, I dress

off the finished hole.

My first barrier to moisture is to protect the underside of the particleboard that will contact the sink. I do this by bonding the bottom edge with plastic laminate about 1 inch in from the cutout. I save laminate scraps from previous jobs for this purpose. Several pieces are fine here, and the laminate can certainly extend beyond 1 inch. I line the inside of the cutout with a band of the finish laminate. I dry fit the strip and form it with a heat gun tightly into the inside corners. Gluing up an inside ring usually takes four hands but it's doable.

I make a cradle within the sink base to support the undermount sink, as Martin describes, and finish laminating the top of the counter. After I set the sink in the cradle, I lay the countertop on for a dry run. I cut rabbeted wood strips as continuous sink clamps that screw up from beneath. Finally, I remove the countertop and lay two beads of high-grade silicone on the sink flange. After I set the top in place, I screw the wood strips and let the oozing caulk cure before trimming it off.

The first sink I undermounted this way was my own, five years ago. I periodically check the particleboard for telltale swelling and moisture stains. So far, so good. I think by laminating the bottom edge of the particleboard first, using plenty of silicone, and mechanically fastening from beneath, plastic laminate countertops are good candidates for undermount sinks.

Mike Guertin

via email

PIMA Responds

To the Editor:

The article "Shrinking Insulation Boards Plague Roofers" (*Notebook*, 7/00) is nothing more than a repetition of

the myths now circulating in the roofing industry regarding dimensional stability and polyiso roof insulation.

To quote the article: "Even critics of polyisocyanurate admit that these problems show up in only a small percentage of the polyiso insulation boards sold." In 1999, over 4.5 billion board feet of polyiso were produced and sold, mostly as roof insulation, to meet the market demand. Does this mean every polyiso insulation board was perfect? No. Is every other roof material perfect? No. Is every roof installed perfectly? I doubt it. The article gives the impression that if polyiso were 100% perfect, all roof problems would disappear.

The Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association (PIMA) disputes the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA) recommendation to use a cover board over polyiso in all roof applications. NRCA has repeatedly called the dimensional stability value for polyiso — a maximum of 4% — the "highest" of any roofing product. Yet their recommendations for "suitable" cover boards include two roof insulation products (perlite and cellular glass) that are not even evaluated for dimensional stability and one (fiberboard) that only measures change in length, not width at ambient — not elevated — temperatures. Mineral fiber roof insulation board is also listed by the NRCA as a suitable cover board despite the fact that the dimensional stability values are maximums of 5% in length and width and 7% in thickness, when tested under ASTM D 2126 — the same conditions and test method as polyiso.

There is room for improvement of overall roof system performance and PIMA is willing to participate in efforts to achieve this goal. However, as any informed professional in this industry knows, roofing is complex and requires that a large number of products be properly integrated. Every participant in the roofing market has a certain role: manufacturers must produce quality products, specifiers must be knowledgeable in all

aspects of roof systems to choose the best system for a particular project, and roof contractors must store and handle roof products properly and install the system according to the specs. Repeating misinformation about one component of a roofing system will never solve the real problem of delivering a quality roof to a building owner.

Lorraine A. Ross
Technical Director
Polyisocyanurate Insulation
Manufacturers Association
Washington, D.C.

Plumbers Won't Touch 'Em

To the Editor:

I enjoyed your article on undermount sink installations ("Undermount Sinks," 7/00). It was well written and informative. I have found that plumbers, in general, don't like to even touch them. It's always left up to the carpenter on site to install the sink bowl. Usually we'll let the plumber install the faucet, soap dispenser, instant water heater, and so on, then we'll work together on the sink. Most of the time, it takes about an hour to install and fully support an undermount sink, versus ten minutes for a drop-in. It actually takes two man-hours if you figure in the plumber's time.

John Marsoobian, Jr.
Norwood, Mass.

More Rebar Info Needed

To the Editor:

The article "Concrete Basics" (6/00) did a nice job of explaining an often misunderstood subject. I would love to see a second part dealing with reinforcing steel bars. I am continually frustrated by the large differences between what building codes and engineers specify and what typical residential concrete/foundation subcontractors are willing to provide. At our architectural firm, we have come to a compromise. We now typically specify two #4 rebars, top and bottom of a poured wall, with

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#4 rebars vertically at 4 feet on-center. Steel running horizontally in the middle of the wall seems to really increase construction complexity because it requires placing of the steel before the forms are actually up.

In a recent situation, the concrete contractor, a long-term sub of a well-established G.C., looked at foundation

plans and refused to take the job based on the minimal amount of steel. The G.C. then went to the owner. When the additional "excessive" costs were shown to the owner, the owner had to make a tough decision that he felt unqualified to make. What's wrong with this picture?

Joseph Petrarca
Richmond, Vt.

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