

Basic Books for Builders

by Dave Holbrook

Contractors, who depend on other trade professionals to get all or a portion of their jobs done, hate being subjected to mumbo jumbo. Of course, pride often prevents the contractor from confessing a lack of fluency in mumbo jumbo. Instead, he or she will defer to the presumed expertise of the trade professional with nods of the head and the occasional, "I see," cementing the relationship of trust and ignorance. Reasonable and intelligent questions are addressed with reasonable and intelligent replies, but in a foreign language.

The Heat of the Moment

If there were more books like *How Come? Hydronic Heating Questions We've Been Asking For More Than 100 Years (with straight answers)* (Dan Holohan, 1995, HeatingHelp.com, 63 N. Oakdale Ave., Bethpage, NY 11714; 800/853-8882; www.HeatingHelp.com; \$20), the tower of technobabble would soon topple. With a colorful mix of history,

factoids, and physics, Holohan illuminates the science of heating with hot water. He covers the evolution of modern hydronic heating in a conversational question-and-answer manner, from turn-of-the-century gravity systems (an early, safer alternative to frequently exploding steam systems) through indirect heating, diverter-tee heating, loop heating, radiant floor systems, and condensate hot-water heating. You'll gain an understanding of the basic and not-so-basic principles behind each

heating method. Remodelers can

still encounter antiquated heating apparatus in older homes. It's worth knowing that those systems may still be viable and may be adaptable to a performance-enhancing upgrade. Open the book to nearly any page and you'll learn something interesting and possibly even useful. Clear drawings and diagrams complement the text. Will you be qualified to replace your heating contractor after reading? Not likely,

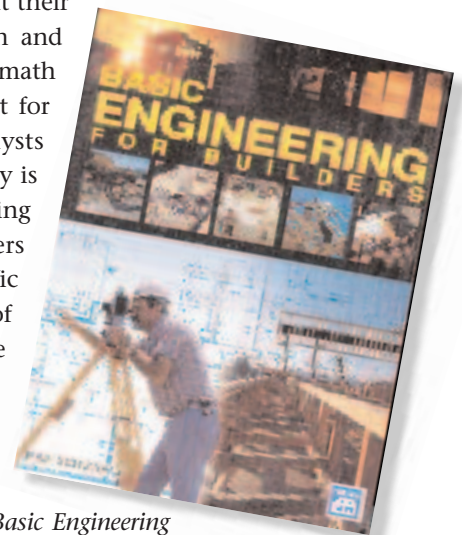
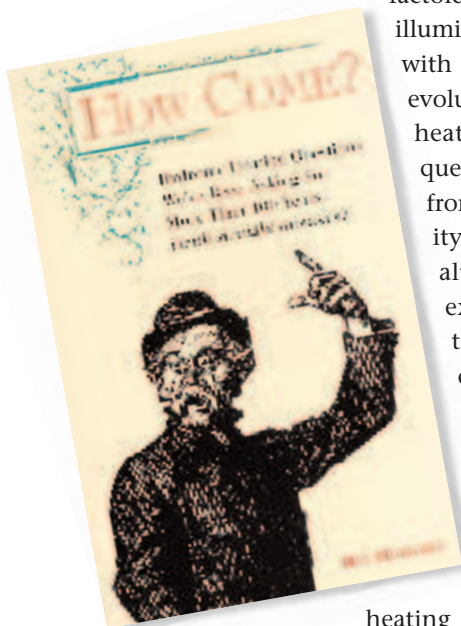
but just as when traveling abroad, you'll have a better time if you speak the language.

Who Wants to Be an Engineer?

How many builders sit their novice carpenters down and take them through the math to size a header or joist for deflection? Most analysts suggest that the industry is drifting toward becoming an army of assemblers with limited, task-specific skills. What a waste of talent. If anyone on the team shows initiative and curiosity, the best thing you can do is to feed those traits. So, you might light upon *Basic Engineering*

for Builders (Max Schwartz, 1993, Craftsman Book Company, 6058 Corte del Cedro, Carlsbad, CA 92009; 800/829-8123; www.craftsman-book.com; \$36.50), which seems to offer rudimentary engineering principles on sites small and large in the fields of surveying, concrete, wood, steel, masonry, plumbing, and hvac. Obviously, the book isn't intended as a replacement for a degree in engineering; its stated purpose is to help you build smarter, understand the requirements of blueprints and specifications, size structural members, and know when to hire a licensed engineer.

Toward that end, this book reminds me a little of a hypothetical restaurant whose menu describes complicated dishes including their ingredients and preparation, followed by the disclaimer, "We don't offer that; you need to go next door." Well, at least now you know what you're looking for, which is a start. For example, under surveying, the author tells us that an engineering surveyor "should know how to use surveying instruments and how to use mathematics to calculate distances on the ground." (You knew that, right?) Schwartz provides a list of basic trigonometric formulas and a simple diagram but doesn't take the reader through a trial example. Now you have a slightly better idea of what a surveyor is doing and what the gizmos he's using are called, and you also



know who to call, 'cause you're not ready.

Don't get me wrong; there's some good information here, such as in the chapter on concrete. Carpenters can always stand to learn a little more about the properties, utility, and performance of the gray stuff. But it's too often "information light." It's not enough to say, "Put welded wire fabric in the concrete to keep it from cracking as it cures. Use an area of temperature steel that is at least 0.2 percent of the area of the con-

crete slab." I don't get the picture. In fact, a picture would help. I'd love an engineering picture book. The section on joist and beam sizing isn't much more than an annotated span table — it helps, but it doesn't take you to a sense of mastery. This book is probably just too ambitious in scope; each chapter's topic is worthy of a more thorough "Basic" book. I'm inclined to modify the adjective *Basic* in this title with "Too."



FREE & CHEAP

Got Wood?

The Hardwood Council offers tips on designing custom crown molding on a budget, applications for lower-cost hardwood species, design techniques for hardwood floors, and more in its 28-page *Book Behind the Look*. It's free.

Contact: Hardwood Council, P.O. Box 525, Oakmont, PA 15139; 412/281-4980; www.hardwoodcouncil.com.



Play It Safe

Show you care by keeping your employees abreast of the wide world of safety on and off the job with the monthly *TopSafety* newsletter. The single-sheet letter is available in English and Spanish — split orders welcome — and comes three-hole-punched for binder storage. A subscription costs \$5.50 per year per employee, when purchased in a minimum quantity of ten. Further discounts apply to larger orders.

Contact: TopSafety, Oakstone Publishing, 6801 Cahaba Valley Rd., Birmingham, AL 35242; 800/871-9525.



Cone Heads

Applying asphalt shingles to a curved surface is bound to slow you down; a surface that curves and tapers could bring you to a dead stop. The Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association's free, two-page technical bulletin *How to Shingle a Cone Roof* offers prescriptive steps to get the job done with a minimum of waste and anguish. You can order a hard copy, or download it and other bulletins on ARMA's website.

Contact: Asphalt Roofing Manufacturers Association, 4041 Powder Mill Rd., Suite 404, Calverton, MD 20705; 800/829-3572; www.asphaltroofing.org.

Knockdown Dash & Rock 'n' Roll

These are just two of the 30 finishes depicted in the *Plaster Textures* catalog, a valuable guide in helping owners and architects express their textural stucco preferences. Color photos and application steps for all finishes are included.

Contact: WWCCA Technical Services & Information Bureau, 2286 N. State College Blvd., Fullerton, CA 92831; 714/256-1708; www.tsib.org.

