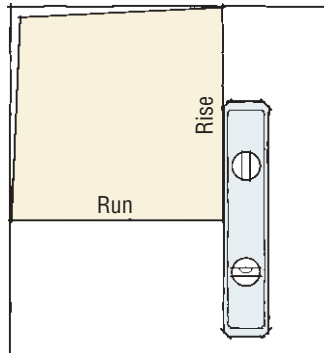


Letters

Gauge Block for Crown

To the Editor:

We use many of the same techniques that Gary Katz outlines in his excellent article on running crown molding (9/02). One thing we do a little differently is make a gauge



block that is sized to both the rise and the run of the crown molding being used, rather than just the rise, as shown in Figure 2 on page 54.

In our experience, ceilings are often not flat or level near the corners of a room. The gauge block we use references our wall line rise mark to the actual point that the crown hits on the ceiling. We use a bullet level to plumb the block and make the marks the run distance away from the corners.

Eric Wachsman
EHW Inc.
Sarasota, Fla.

Waterproofing Membranes Need Drain

To the Editor:

The excellent overview in "Waterproofing Basement Walls" by David Frane (9/02) may leave some misconceptions in the mind of the casual reader. Waterproof membranes, by definition and by design, resist hydrostatic pressure. Their use, as implied by the article's title, may waterproof the basement's walls; however, they may not waterproof the basement.

Air-gap membranes alone, as long

as they depend on the gravity drainage of water to a drain, will not waterproof a wall under hydrostatic pressure. The water will rise in the air gap and, absent a contact waterproof membrane, likely enter.

The greatest hydrostatic pressure is under the basement slab. Waterproofed walls notwithstanding, water will enter from below, unless the waterproofing is continuous under the slab.

I believe the article well describes more dependable forms of damp-proofing, including controlling free water, but not basement waterproofing in the strict sense of the word.

Kenneth Kruger, RA, PE, HI
Kruger Kruger Albenberg
Cambridge, Mass.

David Frane responds: Mr. Kruger is correct to point out that water can enter a basement from under the slab as well as through the wall. He claims that if the barrier doesn't extend below the slab, then it's not really waterproofing. That may be true in theory, but in practice, a properly installed perimeter drain will prevent water from entering through the slab. Water is not going to back up behind an air-gap membrane when it can go where gravity wants to take it, which is out through the perimeter drain. Likewise, water below the level of the footing would have to work its way up through the gravel to get to the slab.

There are situations where it's necessary to waterproof the bottom side of a slab. For example, tunnels and foundations for high-rises often extend below the water table. The usual method for waterproofing those areas is to pour the slab over some kind of bentonite or specialized sheet membrane such as Grace's Preprufe.

More on Overhead

To the Editor:

At first, I was quite interested in the concepts presented by Les Deal in "How to Charge for Overhead"

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Letters

(9/02). I especially liked his concept of fairness and the idea that marking up material prices at times can appear fishy to the homeowner. It's clear that this method works very well for him. As I thought more about it later, however, I realized that it cannot be used as a general method for all contractors.

For example, take an extreme case where all of the work is done by subcontractors. There would be no hourly labor to divide the overhead and profit among, so you would have to resort to something like charging by the day. If you assume there are 250 workdays in a year, with an overhead and profit of \$235,200 (to use his numbers), the daily rate would be \$940. If you were working on multiple jobs simultaneously, it would be confusing to know how to divvy up the \$940 among the different jobs. Due to different factors, some low-cost jobs may take relatively longer than higher-cost jobs. One way to divvy up the costs would be to weight the percentage of the \$940 day rate based on the overall cost of each job, with the general assumption that the cost of the job roughly correlates with its complexity. But then we are essentially back to percentage markups.

Or say a contractor has only one employee — his punch “crew.” Dividing \$235,200 by 2,000 hours per year gives an hourly rate of \$118 per hour for overhead. It would be hard to justify charging \$118 per hour plus actual labor for a construction task.

The point is that while charging based solely on time has its appeal, it clearly is not the one answer to all builders' billing requirements. There is more to the picture than time: The size of the job and overall cash flow are also part of the picture.

John Lawton
Lawton Enterprises
Kaleva, Mich.

Les Deal responds:

Although the article is about employers with employees, if all the work is subbed out, the process is the same. I charge for time. No matter how much of the work is done by subs, we are still remodelers selling time and talent. The money you receive should not be related to how much material is used or how much money it costs for someone else (the sub) to do the work.

When bidding, consider how much time your company will be involved in the project and multiply that number times whatever your rate is. How many jobs are in process on any one day isn't relevant.

Regarding the contractor who has only one employee: Since the punch “crew” guy has nothing to do with accomplishing the remodel, I would not carry overhead and profit on his time card. Determine how many hours you need to add to the bid for the punch-list worker and add those hours as a separate item. Since you have already figured your overhead and profit in your main bid, you have to make sure you have all job costs related to the punch crew employee included in his wages.

As to your final point, neither the size of a job nor its sales price is the determining factor in how much overhead and profit are attributed to the job. In my way of working, if a job takes me and my employees one month to do, it should yield $1/12$ of the annual overhead and profit, and I bid accordingly.

Not Inspired

To the Editor:

Congrats on 20 years, and thanks for an issue full of meaningful details. This magazine remains one of our favorites — so helpful and informative. Keep up the great work and thanks for many years of learning.

I will say, however, that it was with dismay that I found the Masonite Corp. brochure (inserted into the

anniversary issue) to be full of scantily clad women draped around doors. Such juvenile attitudes diminish us all, and most certainly do not inspire me to specify their products, ever.

Stand up for women in the design and construction professions!

Jenny Potter Scheu
Redhouse Architects
Portland, Maine

Drawing Conclusions

To the Editor,

I enjoyed the 20th-anniversary issue (10/02), particularly the “Best-Practice Construction Details” illustrations. If it's true that a picture is worth a thousand words, then your artist, Tim Healey, must be *JLC*'s all-time leading word scorer. Hats off to a great illustrator.

Carl Hagstrom
via e-mail

KEEP 'EM COMING!

Letters must be signed and include the writer's address. *The Journal of Light Construction* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail letters to *JLC*, 186 Allen Brook Ln., Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to jlc-editorial@hanley-wood.com.