Letters

Slipping In an I-Beam

To the Editor:

The article "Retrofitting a Patio Door" (*Practical Engineering*, 10/02) describes methods for retrofitting headers that range from quick and risky (pray and grab the Sawzall) to slow and safe (build a temporary stud wall). Another method that can sometimes be used is nearly as quick as prayer and often as safe as a temporary wall.

Slice away about half of the top foot or so of each of the studs in the section of wall to be headed off, to provide some clearance for the new header without altering the original load path. The new header can be set tight to the bottom of the top plate, only halfway in but firmly supported on new jack studs. The old studs can be cut away completely and removed with the rest of the bearing wall. The new header can then be driven fully into place.

This works best when retrofitting a steel I-beam header and only when it can sit directly below the top plate. Steel slides across rough old top plates better than lumber, and the edge of the top flange is the ideal place to strike.

Success depends on several important details. First, pull all the toe nails joining the old studs to the top plate, and cut the sheathing free of the sliced-down studs, from the top plate down at least as far as the bottom of the new header. This way, neither the nails nor the top pieces of the old studs can remain behind and hang up the new header as it's being driven fully in. Second, thoroughly lubricate the top of the new header and the bottom of the top plate. Beeswax works well. Third, align the bottoms of the new jack studs with the bottom plate and align the tops of the new jack studs with the new header, so that the jacks don't also need to be beaten into place (and the ends likely splintered) once the header is fully installed. Fourth, drive the new header in carefully, using a heavy hammer with a hardwood block to strike only the very top of the header.

Be careful when driving in the header or you may end up with extra interior finish to repair. I've retrofitted headers up to 14 feet using this method.

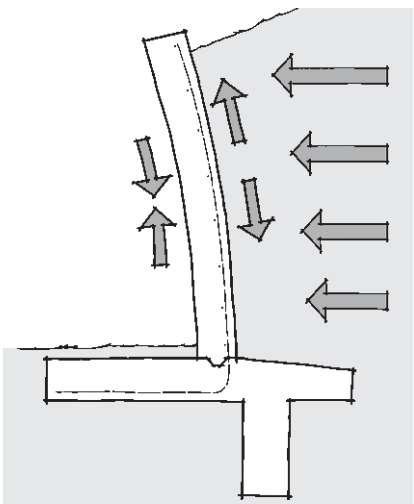
Yves Vetter, G.P.B.
Evergreen Construction and Consulting, LLC
Seattle, Wash.

Retaining Wall Rebar

To the Editor:

The 20th anniversary issue is a keeper! Great work. However, regarding the retaining wall detail on page 70, it seems to me that the face of the wall with the dirt is the compression side, not the tension side. If this is true, then the rebar should be near the opposite face.

Wayne Richard
FootHills Home Inspection
Via e-mail



Think of the retaining wall like a vertical cantilever beam. When the soil pushes against the wall, it wants to deflect the way a beam would. It stretches on the soil side and compresses on the open face.

— The Editor

JLC Information Directory

www.jlconline.com

Mailing Address:
The Journal of Light Construction
186 Allen Brook Lane
Williston, VT 05495
802/879-3335

Editorial: We welcome letters and article submissions from readers. Keep copies of all original materials. Contact us by mail at the address above, Attn: *JLC* Editorial Dept, or via e-mail at ***jlc-editorial@hanley-wood.com***.

Subscriptions: To order a new or renewal subscription, call 800/375-5981 or visit our website at ***www.jlconline.com***. For assistance with your current subscription, e-mail us at ***jlc-cs@hanley-wood.com***, call us at 800/375-5981, or write us at The Journal of Light Construction, P.O. Box 420234, Palm Coast, FL 32137. Subscription rates for qualified readers in the construction trades: $39.95/1 year, $64.95/2 years. Non-qualified readers: $59.95 per year. Sales tax required on subscriptions to DC (5.75%), GA (4%), VT (5%). Group rates available on request.

Single back issues and articles: Available for $4.95 each, plus $5.00 shipping/handling per order; call 802/879-3335, ext 143. Articles are also available for purchase online at www.jlconline.com.

Reprints: For custom reprints (quantities of 500 or more), call Carol Urban at Foster Reprints, 866/879-9144, ext. 177, curban@fostereprints.com.

JLC* Bookstore:** Visit our bookstore online at ***www.jlcbooks.com. You can order from our secure website, call us at 800/859-3669, or order by mail to Hanley-Wood Bookstore, P.O. Box 5000, Forrester Center, WV 25438.

JLC* LIVE:** For information about attending the *JLC* LIVE conference or expo, contact us online at ***www.jlclive.com or call 800/261-7769; for exhibitor or sponsor information, call Tami Svarfvar at 802/479-9526 (ext. 184). To request a press pass, call Kevin Spaulding at 802/879-3335 (ext. 133).

JLC*-Update:** Subscribe to our monthly e-mail newsletter for residential and light commercial contractors. It's free to *JLC* readers, and each issue contains industry news and the latest tips on materials, techniques, tools, and technology. Subscribe online at ***www.jlc-update.com/subscribe.

Letters

Icing on the Cake

To the Editor:

I loved your 20th anniversary issue, but must point out the safety flaws on your cover. OSHA would not be happy to see workers without proper scaffolding and harnesses, but probably the most flagrant violation is raising a lit candle! I would also suggest a slump test on the icing. Thanks for another great issue; keep them coming.

D.E. Bernstein
Via e-mail

No Need for Expensive Heating

To the Editor:

As an hvac contractor, I think Alex Wilson's assessment of radiant floor heating (*Focus on Energy*, 10/02) is right on target. It is easy to understand the appeal of radiant heating in drafty older homes, but careful attention to the building envelope gets rid of uncomfortable drafts, making a ducted system much more practical.

In my area of the country, ground source heat pumps have become fashionable in many upscale homes, but the concept has the same flaw as radiant heating — it's quite expensive, and the return on investment is not there.

Maurice W. Pickett
Pickett Heating and Cooling
Campbellsville, Ky.

Higher Fly Ash Content in West

To the Editor:

Regarding the question on concrete fly ash content (*Q&A*, 10/02), the fly ash supplied from the East Coast has different properties (including higher sulfur content) than that found on the West Coast, which perhaps makes high-fly-ash-content concrete impractical for East Coast contractors. However, I can assure you that I have seen a number of projects with 50% fly ash content in the last two years I have been in Berkeley — from small floor slabs to a seven-story seismic retrofit on the University of California Berkeley campus, where the predictable structural strength of the concrete was crucial.

The arguments for fly ash include reducing waste, reducing carbon dioxide production, reducing production cost, and reducing water content in the mix. The chief disadvantage, which means that for the moment it is more likely to be requested by "green" clients, is the fact that cure time to structural strength is 56 days (rather than the conventional 28). In addition, high-fly-ash-concrete does not finish in the same way as conventional concrete and requires practice for a satisfactory finish.

Dana Buntrock
Assistant Professor, Architecture
University of Calif., Berkeley

Proper Flange Height

To the Editor:

The caption for the "Built-Up Flange" drawing in the "Kitchen & Bath Rough-In" section of the October issue (*Best-Practice Construction Details*, page 142) says to "ensure that the flange isn't recessed too far below the finished floor." The *Uniform Plumbing Code* clearly states that the flange will rest upon and be affixed to the finished floor. This is why, if you turn a toilet upside down, you see a void around the horn, to allow for the flange to sit 1/4 inch above the finished floor.

Ron Guglielmone
Draingo Plumbing
Redwood City, Calif.

Nice Laser, Lousy Manual

To the Editor:

Thank you for Gary Katz's thorough and thoughtful article on this most valuable tool in today's technology bag ("Visible-Beam Rotary Lasers," 5/02). Based on your specific recommendation, I purchased the LeveLite SLR-01 Pro Pack laser and accessories. I think that the manufacturer blew it horribly in one area. The manuals are, at best, grossly inadequate. I have no objection to fussing around with a new tool or piece of power equipment, but the two manuals included were not worth the paper they were printed on.

I spoke with the distributor for LeveLite, who says that they only import the instrument and did not design it. My specific question to them was regarding the remote control for the unit. There was no manual for it, and they told me that none exists. I spoke with an engineer in their service center, and he agreed with my observations. I had been attempting to use the unit to set a foundation layout and level batter boards and could not get the instrument to turn on with the remote control. I went through the usual stuff of testing the batteries and dancing around with the remote to see if I could get it to go on, but no dice. Why? Because the remote will only turn the unit off. What were they thinking? I walk 50 feet to set something up, level and plumb using the features I need, then turn the damn thing off. Now I need to walk back to the instrument to turn it on to set another element at the same height on the other side of a window? I don't get this at all.

Manuals should be a piece of any tool review. Most people don't read them, but when something goes wrong, it's nice to be able to figure it out without calling California on my dime.

Tom Walsh
Hull, Mass.

Gary Katz responds: I'm sorry I failed to mention this in the review. I figured out on my own that the remote wouldn't turn on the tool and probably

wasted as much time learning that as you did. But I was so excited that the remote control was also the detector (a milestone in engineering achievement), that I clean forgot. I still believe the SLR is a winner, even though the instructions are ridiculous.

Another Top Tool

To the Editor:

It was good to see Craig Savage contributing to the 20th anniversary issue of *JLC*. I enjoyed his articles over the years. I also jumped on the high-tech bandwagon early and am always looking for new products to simplify my business.

I would have to add to his list of the "Top Five Office Tools" (*State-of-the-Art Contractor*, 10/02) to make it a Top Six. I've had a Palm Pilot for the past five years and now could not function without it. The basic Palm is ideal for keeping my calendar, entire phone directory, and daily to-do list. Recently, I came across the first software for the Palm I have actually found useful — Punchlist, by Strata Systems. It allows me to take notes about the job while I am on the site. I can keep track of materials to order, subcontractors to schedule, notes for the clients, and so forth — any of the functions necessary to keep a project flowing efficiently.

Back at the office, when I sync the Palm, Punchlist will create the appropriate faxes and e-mails from my notes. It will then either automatically, or as I select, send that information to the appropriate suppliers, subcontractors, clients, etc.

I take an inordinate amount of notes while on job sites and driving between. Miscellaneous notes in a notebook, or on scraps of paper or 2x4 cutoffs, are now eliminated. Everything is organized and ready to send on the Palm.

I have looked at lots of software for my Palm over the years; this is really the first one I have purchased that is sensible, logical, and does exactly what it advertises.

Congratulations to *JLC*; keep up the good work.

Joe Stilwell
Via e-mail

New Seismic Anchors

To the Editor:

Regarding the hold-down details on page 113 of the October 2002 edition of *JLC*: The Fas-Tie, while new in 1993, has been phased out. We would recommend the STHD strap tie, a recent addition to our line, or the HPAHD22 embedded strap anchor for this type of installation. We have also developed several new styles of hold-downs, including the PHD Pre-Deflected Holdown, the HDQ8 Holdown, and the HDC Concentric Holdown. Please note that the HD and HDA Holdowns shown are still available and are good choices in many situations.

Tom McClain
Simpson Strong-Tie
Dublin, Calif.

Don't Forget Fireblocking

To the Editor:

As a building inspector, I was disappointed to see that you didn't show a fire-stopping provision in the illustration "Framing a Tray Ceiling Below a Floor" (10/02, page 148). Your detail shows a common mistake that allows smoke and fire to penetrate the floor system. To correct the condition, the drywall should have been run all the way up the wall or a wider ledger should have been used (to close off the top of the stud cavity).

Joseph Booth
New Hartford, N.Y.

Objectifying the Irrevocably Subjective

To the Editor:

The article "How to Charge for Overhead" (9/02) and the ensuing letters responding to that article constitute a pointless effort to objectify one irrevocably subjective question: What's a fair price? This whole debate seems fueled by a phenomenon peculiar to our industry, which is that fear of charging too much consistently prevails over fear of charging too little.

A fair price for a project is, in fact, any price the client pays with a smile and a sigh of relief that the job was done and was done well, and that the contractor receives with the knowledge that costs were covered and enough is left over to have made it all worthwhile. For the exact same job, depending on circumstances surrounding the job, this "fair price" could be $1,000, or $10,000, or almost anything else.

Paul Eldrenkamp
Byggmeister Inc.
Newton, Mass.

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.