Letters

¿Habla Inglés?

It was surprising to see the article "¿Habla Español?" printed in your otherwise fine magazine (8/05). I found the article offensive, anti-American, and completely absurd. Last I checked, this was America, not Mexico; English is spoken here, and should be.

I have nothing against any Latino group. What I do resent is the Spanish language being crammed down our throats. Of course, it would be easier to communicate on the job site if we spoke Spanish, but it would also be easier if the crew spoke English. Why cater to the Spanish crew? Why not spend time with your crew to teach them job-site English?!

When immigrants came from Europe, they wanted to learn English and were proud to become American citizens. Those who come from Latin countries are hard-working individuals, but why should they learn English if we bend over backwards to accommodate them by learning Spanish?

Andy Podoliuk
Hicksville, N.Y.

Safety First

I read every issue from cover to cover and save them all for future reference. You have many good articles about profit, training, and keeping good men, but unfortunately safety seems to be of little concern. The lack of hard hats, work boots, and fall protection seems to be the norm. Just look at some of your covers.

At the company I work for, safety is first. Maybe if others had the same philosophy, all our workers' comp costs would drop, profits would rise, and, most important of all, everyone would go home at the end of the shift.

Steven P. Scott
Attleboro, Mass.

KEEP 'EM COMING!

Letters must be signed and include the writer's address. *JLC* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length, and clarity. Mail to *JLC,* 186 Allen Brook Lane, Williston, VT 05495; or e-mail to jlc-editorial@hanleywood.com.

Wind Hold-Downs for Rafter Tails

I loved the rafter-tail details ("Adding Timber Rafter Tails to a Stick-Framed Roof," 9/05). In the past, I've replicated simpler tails in the bungalow style. One design concern when adding tails to a framed roof is to ensure sufficient resistance to wind uplift. I've always accomplished this by sistering them to the rafter framing inside the roof as well as by using hurricane ties.

Since I assume that Rhode Island is in the new 110-mph wind zone, I wonder how this was accomplished on this project?

David Chute
IMG Contracting
Rowayton, Conn.

Builder Dave Baud of Baud Builders in Wakefield, R.I., responds: This particular house was not in the 110-mph wind zone, so the issue did not come up. I would think the knee bracket could be through-bolted to the house with a carriage bolt, the beam bolted to the knee, and the rafter tails lag-screwed or bolted to the beam. That would probably be my suggestion to the engineer doing the design, from a builder's standpoint, but the engineer would have to check it. Good luck when you do run into this situation, and please let us know the results of the engineering.

Faster Plaster Repair

Regarding the letter "Wallpaper Liner Works Well" (10/05), liner should not be considered a replacement for proper wall repair. There are two types of wallpaper liner. One, called bridging liner, is a thick nonwoven material intended for the covering of surface irregularities in some types of wood paneling and, with additional preparation, even brick and block. This is the type Mr. LeButt is referring to; however, it is not the best way to repair damaged drywall or plaster. While it will span narrow indentations, it will simply follow the contours of badly damaged surfaces but will not span cavities. In the case of cracking plaster, a product called Faster Plaster (Flexi-Wall Systems, 800/843-5394, www.flexiwall.com) is far superior. It comes in a roll with its own

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adhesive and is applied in much the same way as wallcovering; it creates a permanent installation.

The other lining material is a specialty paper called blankstock, which is used under thin decorative papers that might allow the texture of the wall surface to telegraph through. The blankstock gives these papers a soft, smooth, finished look. Blankstock is not used as a remedy for damaged walls.

Tish Iorio
Creative Endeavors
Annapolis, Md.

Building on the Beach: Is It Wise?

When I read "Replacing a Beach-House Foundation" (10/05), I was aghast. Later, I discussed the article with my fellow crew members, who had also read it. Words like "obscene" and "profligate" describe our reaction. Such an expenditure of wealth, labor, and resources for such a modest dwelling! Climatologists predict rising sea levels and heightened storm activity. What will become of all this concrete and steel when the great storm of 2009 or 2017 sweeps the cottage away?

Sandy Ray Chapin
Target Construction
Mountain Grove, Mo.

Decay of Wood-Plastic Composite Decking

On page 135 of your June issue, Borax ran an advertisement claiming that composite deckings can "lose more than 20 percent of their mass in a matter of months" and that they are subject to the "ravages of rot and decay" without the use of the company's product (apparently a clear sealer).

I work for a contractor whose clients request the new composite deckings from Trex, so we find this statement alarming. Can you tell me whether Borox's claim is true?

Kurt Kopfer
Gualala, Calif.

JLC *editor Don Jackson responds:* *To answer your question, we asked Borax to send us the studies supporting its claim. We also asked Trex Co. to respond (see page 24).*

From Borax, we received a series of studies on the performance of wood-plastic composites (WPCs) dating from 1997 to 2003 in which WPC samples were subjected to brown- and white-rot fungi under a number of conditions. Based on a reading of those studies, there appears to be evidence that adding a small percentage of zinc borate (ZB) to a wood-plastic formulation does indeed help prevent fungal attack of the wood component, and the resulting weight loss that the ad refers to. However, as is regrettably common with academic papers, there is no mention of which commercial brands of wood-plastic decking were sampled. In many cases the samples used in the study were not commercially available, but were specially manufactured for the research.

One of the most compelling pieces of information in these studies is that the risk of decay increases as the wood-fiber component of the WPC increases — especially in formulations where wood content is 60 percent and higher. This makes sense, because if there is enough plastic content to envelope the wood, the wood is effectively protected from rot. At some ratio above 50-50, there is not enough plastic to go around; thus decay susceptibility increases and the introduction into the mix of a fungal-fighting ingredient could be helpful.

The decking you mention, Trex, has a wood-to-plastic ratio of around 50-50. It presently comes with a 25-year (material only) warranty, and it has met the applicable code standards for termite and decay resistance. There's certainly no reason for alarm.

If you have questions about the performance of Trex (or any product), contact the manufacturer's technical department, request copies of the warranty and installation instructions, then pick the technical staff members' brains till you're satisfied. They should be happy to answer your questions and send you reports of any independent testing the product has undergone.

Mark Manning, Ph.D., manager of preservation technology, U.S. Borax, responds: *The advertisement you refer to is for the U.S. Borax product Borogard ZB, an EPA-registered preservative treatment for wood composites like OSB and, more recently, for wood-plastic composites (WPCs).*

Borogard ZB is not a clear sealer but a powdered preservative added during the manufacture of these products. It offers a safe, cost-effective means of protecting these materials from wood-destroying organisms such as decay fungi. Results from the field have shown that these products can be susceptible to decay while in service.

In an effort to evaluate the durability of these products, we commissioned Oregon State University to carry out standard laboratory decay evaluations on a wide range of commercial WPC samples. This test exposed the sample to wood decay fungi for a specified period of time (either 12 or 16 weeks) and then measured the amount of weight loss for the sample. This loss in weight is the result of wood that has been metabolized (consumed) by the decay fungi. Some of the commercial samples exhibited weight losses in excess of 20 percent. WPC samples treated with Borogard ZB showed no significant weight loss.

Maureen Murray, a spokesperson for Trex Co., responds: *There is no truth to the claim in the ad, at least regarding Trex products. Our decking is covered by a 25-year warranty against rot and insect degradation. In independent testing, Trex samples were weighed before and after exposure to the most destructive fungi that cause rot. Trex was rated as showing no decay. (A minor, insignificant weight loss was attributed to the wood fiber lost at the surface when the material was cut.)*

Trex has undergone weather-accelerated testing for up to 55 years of simulated exposure without deterioration. Trex decking has been in use in boardwalks and walkways in the wet, humid Florida Everglades, the New Jersey seashore, and other harsh environments for more than a decade with no evidence of rot or decay. The combination of independent testing and practical market experience is unique in the industry, and gives us strong confidence in the quality of our product.