

Backfill

Roofing Under Cover

According to Colin McGhee, thatched roofs are “a bit of a novelty in the United States.” That perception won’t be diminished by the job he took on this past winter when he and his crew thatched a Maine island retreat. To stay on schedule and provide McGhee with snow- and wind-free working conditions, the contractor, Taylor-Made Builders in Northport, Maine, erected a

custom enclosure over the entire building (1). The temporary framework is covered in plastic heat-shrink film and took a 10-person crew three weeks to assemble.

The 25-square roof required 2,500 bundles of phragmites, a common marsh reed (2). Reed courses are secured under continuous 1/4-inch steel rod that’s wired to the roof at 8-inch intervals. While working, thatchers stand on “biddles” — short ladders equipped with metal hooks that catch on the rod (3). To complete the job, the temporary shelter will come down so that McGhee can step back and eyeball the lines of the ornamental ridge cap, which is similar to the one on this earlier job (4). More of McGhee’s work can be seen at thatching.com.

— Dave Holbrook

