

Letters

Remodeling Opportunities Abound

There is a tsunami of backlogged remodeling need in this country, yet here we are struggling for work. Properties have been neglected for decades, our cities are (on the whole) a mess, and yet we are laying off skilled labor. This work must and will be done. We as a nation should not leave our housing and cities to future generations to fix. Young people lucky enough to buy property today are not responsible for the decades of neglect they are inheriting. We should supply them with long-term low-interest loans for upgrading their homes — 40-year notes at 2.5 percent. The bankers won't get rich, but the work will get done and the money will spread through the general economy.

A boost like that will also quickly reveal an underlying issue: the lack of skilled labor. We need a campaign to promote the trades to young people and a nationwide program to test and train young men and women. Perhaps the unions could work with the military to create a training program in uniform. Each graduate could receive a nationally recognized journeyman's license.

This work cannot be shipped overseas. It must be done, and it won't do itself. So why do we sit on our hands and watch little men destroy our economy? Let the bankers loan money in a manner that allows the work to get done. Productivity comes from those who produce.

Leland Hussey
Lynn, Mass.

Zero-Step Suggestion

Rich Kogelschatz's foundation detail for a grade-level entry is very nice, especially at the cost he quotes ("Building Zero-Step Entries," 9/09). I have a suggestion for how he might save a few dollars and improve his thermal efficiency: eliminate the rim board.

In conventional framing, the rim acts as a header to support the outer edge of the wall plate and as blocking to prevent joist roll-over. But Rich's scheme appears to bypass both of those issues. Since the exterior wall has been moved off the joists and directly onto the sill plate, no weight beyond the floor load is bearing on the joists. And when you consider that the subfloor has been glued and nailed to the joist flange, then nailed continuously to the sill plate just a few inches away, how are those joists possibly going to roll?

I'd get rid of the rim board and replace it with rigid foam for a thermal break. Run the foam down the wall 4 feet or more between the concrete and the studs. You'd definitely be a leg up in terms of finishing off the basement. If spray foam is in the budget, getting that rim out of the way allows you to completely fill the void inside the sill and beneath that short subfloor span.

Arne Waldstein
Housatonic, Mass.

Weatherization Wage Too Low?

I found the article on prevailing-wage rules (*In the News*, 9/09) to be a disservice to the professional tradespeople in the construction industry.

The author cites Davis-Bacon, which mandates a prevailing wage on federal work, but state prevailing-wage laws have become the rule of the day when it comes to weatherization work using federal stimulus funds. To this end, the challenge is to prevent the low-wage-paying (and low-quality) contractors from further destroying our industry's image and standard of living. In St. Louis, the total package (wages and benefits) for this recently "made-up" job classification is slightly over \$18 per hour. Please explain to me how this is a living wage for the average U.S. family.

John Gaal
St. Louis, Mo.

Vinyl Siding Is Green

I take exception to Alex Wilson's sidebar "Is Vinyl Siding Green?" in the article "Another Look at Vinyl Siding" (9/09). I have sold vinyl siding for more than 37 years and know first-hand how the product has evolved and is installed. It is very much a green product. The claim "little if any vinyl siding is recycled after being removed from a building" is false. I recycle old vinyl siding from our customers every week and send used accessories to second-hand material outlets in the St. Louis area.

I also disagree that fiber cement can "outlast" vinyl. Vinyl siding has improved every year and will stay on the wall as long as the existing home stands up.

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