

# Three Good Dictionaries

by Pete Young

Having a good construction dictionary in your office will come in handy when specialized terms pop up during the course of work. I collected as many as I could and paged through them to compare both content and layout. Broadly speaking, I found that while many dictionaries have had multiple editions over the years, they lack updates on recent technological and design innovations. Even the dictionaries I felt were the strongest tended to miss terms such as structural insulated panel (SIP), exterior insulating finish system (EIFS), laminated veneer lumber (LVL), or insulating concrete forms (ICF).

Here are my picks for the best construction dictionaries, in rank order:

*Means Illustrated Construction Dictionary* (\$60 from R.S. Means Company, P.O. Box 800, Kingston, MA 02364;



800/334-3509; [www.rsmeans.com](http://www.rsmeans.com)) is the most impressive of the lot. It includes more than 14,000 definitions of construction-related terms and concepts, along with a column of illustrations on each page. Finding terms is easy with alphabetized finger tabs. Each letter begins with a list of relevant abbreviations. Six appendices cover

weights and measures, drawing symbols, and a list of professional associations.

*Building Trades Dictionary* by Leonard Toenjes (\$50 from American Technical Publishers, 1155 W. 175th St., Homewood, IL 60430; 800/323-3471; [www.american-tech.org](http://www.american-tech.org)) is a solid reference that provides



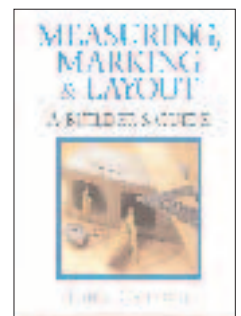
250 letter-sized pages of construction terms with a few graphic illustrations on each page. In addition, Toenjes includes a short section of contractor business terms, as well as ten appendices covering math, construction drawings, and trade organizations.

The *Construction Dictionary* (send \$40 plus \$6 shipping to Greater Phoenix Chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction, P.O. Box 6142, Phoenix, AZ 85005; 602/841-7900) contains around 17,500 definitions and abbreviations. Various appendices cover construction techniques and building materials, all in a size and format that would fit in the bottom of a toolbox. This book's one limitation is that it lacks illustrations.



## Measuring and Marking Techniques

John Carroll surveys the history of construction and collects time-proven techniques in his new book, *Measuring, Marking & Layout: A Builder's Guide* (\$35 from Taunton Press, P.O. Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470; 800/888-8286; [www.taunton.com](http://www.taunton.com)). Calling attention to simple techniques instead of expensive electronic gadgets, the book starts out with Carroll's "ten rules" that together form a primer on the underlying attitude needed to build plumb, level, and square. Separate chapters address working on foundations, floors-walls-ceilings, roofs, stairs, and masonry. The book manages to successfully explain complex layout issues with the help of very good illustrations. One weakness I spotted was the scant attention paid to calculating theoretical angles and estimating angles — useful tricks when using common modern-day tools such as slide miter saws. Nonetheless, this book is full of trade tips that would otherwise take years to pick up in the field.



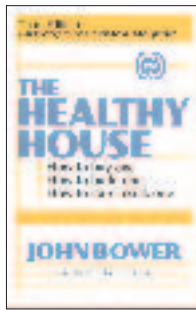
## Home Automation for Accessibility and Safety

Industry pundits have heralded the arrival of home automation for many years, yet there's a meager amount of information out there on how to incorporate automation into residential construction using readily available technology. A new 60-page guide, called *Simple Solutions: Home Automation Technology for Easy, Safe, and Accessible Living* (\$18 from the Center for Universal Design, North Carolina State University, Box 8613, Raleigh, NC 27695; 800/647-6777; [www.design.ncsu.edu/cud](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud)) focuses on straightforward solutions to safety and accessibility issues. Twelve brief chapters cover the installation of remote-controlled lighting, visible doorbells, garbage disposal safety switches, stove timer safety switches, voice controlled telephone/intercom systems, electronic keys, automatic door openers, and more. Three appendices explain power line carrier (PLC) technology, list manufacturers of automation equipment, and provide references for locating qualified installation contractors.



## Building Healthy Homes

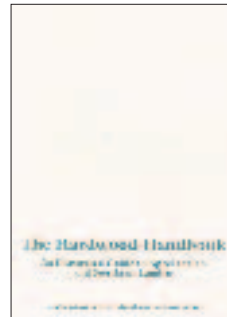
The completely revised and expanded 650-page third edition of John Bower's *The Healthy House* (\$24 from the Healthy House Institute, 430 N. Sewell Rd., Bloomington, IN 47408; 812/332-5073; www.hhinst.com) covers health issues related to residential living space in five main sections comprising 26 chapters, three appendices, and a helpful index. Parts one and two cover fundamental concepts, such as air quality and tight construction, as well as basic systems, including ventilation, heating and cooling, and air filtration. Part three compares and contrasts available strategies and building materials on a component-by-component basis. The last two sections provide case examples as well as resources for information and manufacturers.



Throughout, Bower points the way to building homes that provide the healthiest living environment possible. A companion volume called *The Healthy House Answer Book* (\$9) answers 133 common questions pertaining to healthy indoor living space.

## Appalachian Hardwoods

*The Hardwood Handbook: An Illustrated Guide to Appalachian and Southern Lumber* (\$25 from Southern Lumber Manufacturers Association, 671 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297; 404/361-1445; www.slma.org) is a handy compilation of information concerning hardwood species that grow in the eastern portion of the country. Based on information



from the USDA's *Wood Handbook: Wood as an Engineering Material*, the guide's tables present the relative working properties (machining, resistance to splitting in nailing, nail-holding, and gluing) and physical properties (specific gravity, shipping weight, shrinkage, elasticity, and hardness) of 27 wood species. The guide also presents color pictures showing what the milled

lumber from each species looks like, accompanied by narrative descriptions of their growing ranges, availability, notable qualities, and predominant uses.

## FREE & CHEAP

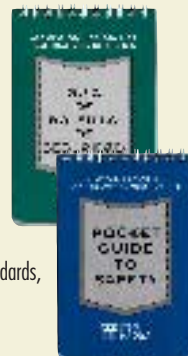
### Trench Safety

The *OSHA Excavation Standard Handbook* (\$2 from J.J. Keller & Associates, P.O. Box 368, Neenah, WI 54957; 800/327-6868; www.ijkeller.com) is a 20-page trench safety primer. The book clarifies under what conditions (soil type and trench depth) OSHA mandates protective measures and also examines issues such as support systems, sloping and benching, timber shoring, and hydraulic shoring.



### Pocket Guides

Although geared mostly towards commercial roofing, the National Roofing Contractors Association's *Pocket Guide to Safety* provides lots of useful information on basic roofing safety issues. Available in both English and Spanish, (\$7 from NRCA, P.O. Box 809261, Chicago, IL 60680; 800/323-9545; www.roofonline.org), the 100 4x6-inch spiral-bound pages cover protective gear and procedures for all types of roofing, with additional sections on OSHA standards, weather hazards, and emergency first aid.



Thomas Glover's 500-page *Pocket Reference* (Sequoia Publishing, P.O. Box 620820, Dept. 101, Littleton, CO 80162; 303/972-4167) is packed with bits of handy information, including 45 pages tailored to carpentry and construction, 15 pages on different types of glue, and 65 pages of conversion tables. Other useful sections cover hardware specs, plumbing, and math. And if you're curious about that rock formation on the site, just turn to the geology section. Throw this book in your glove compartment. My bet is you'll find yourself reaching for it for reasons you can't even think of right now.



## Production Financing for Small Builders

Compiled by the mortgage finance committee and staff at the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), *Financing for Small Builders and Developers* (\$17.50 from Home Builder Press, 1201 15th St, NW, Washington, DC 20005; 800/223-2665; www.builderbooks.com) presents up-to-date information on acquisition, development, and construction loans. This 70-page book covers strategies for obtaining financing from traditional sources, such as banks and thrifts, as well as from government programs and alternative sources, such as mortgage bankers, pension funds, real estate investment trusts, finance companies, and Fannie Mae.



## Fixing Old Wood Windows

Assuming you have a reason to repair old, single-pane windows instead of replacing them with insulated glass windows, Terence Meany's *Working Windows: A Guide to the Repair & Restoration of Wood Windows* (\$15 from Lyons Press, 123 West 18th St., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10011; 800/836-0510) could come in handy. Meany, who calls himself Mr. Window, has some neat tricks up his sleeve — like drilling access holes in jambs to replace the ropes on disengaged sash weights.

