

# Letters



## More Architects Protest Stamping Stock Plans

To the Editor:

In response to John Wagner's response in the Letters section of the December '89 issue; the laws regulating the practice of architecture are not for protecting turf, as Mr. Wagner contends, but to protect the public from naive "designers," draftsmen, builders, and, yes, a few architects, who are only out for the quick buck and who only look for the obvious problems and carelessly overlook the not so obvious. In short, the laws are there to maintain a level of quality.

I, for one, question the judgment of any architect who would illegally seal or sign someone else's drawings and thus risk one's license to practice. The letters to the editor addressed the single issue of the seal, not the quality of stock plans. The letters addressed your appalling advice to find an architect who would go against the standards of practice and seal someone else's drawings just because it can be done. I am sure you could find a doctor who would perform a brain transplant if you look long enough.

I have no idea what qualifications Mr. Wagner has, but it's obvious to me that it is not real-world experience in quality construction. Apparently, he is just another who would foolishly cut costs. I can imagine Mr. Wagner telling your readers that the codes are the definitive book on quality construction rather than being the minimum standards that they really are.

Mr. Wagner, quality construction is in the best interest of the buyer and the builder. It protects him from call-backs and it protects his reputation, which is his best advertising and job security. The only turf I want protected is the turf of quality, not the turf of the cheapest or the turf of the ignorant.

Zan L. Cartwright, AIA  
Williamsburg, VA

To the Editor:

As an architect who has revised and stamped standard (stock) house plans and refused to stamp ones I had no control over, I was embarrassed for you and the reply you allowed John Wagner to make in Letters, 12/89. He purposely went around the issue with well-phrased words. It is not a question of "turf." I will have less respect for your articles, especially on subjects I know about. It's too bad; you publish a good journal.

Jane Griswold, architect  
Andover, Mass.

*John Wagner's response in December's Letters refers repeatedly to the fact that stock plans should be modified to bring them within code compliance in the area where they are used. It goes without saying that they often are also modified on aesthetic grounds or to accommodate a*

*change of floorplan. This is legal and ethical and is exactly what Ms. Griswold does when she "revise[s] and stamp[s] standard house plans..." We agree with Mr. Cartwright that code compliance is only a minimum standard, but fail to see how higher quality is achieved under the vigilant area of an architect. How about the many professional, quality-minded contractors who read The Journal? They set their own high standards based on their own integrity and pride in their work. And how about the high standards of today's well-educated consumers? They vote with their pocketbooks for as much "quality" as they can afford. Sure, there are a few shoddy builders who value a quick buck over a quality job - and there are a few questionable architects who lose sight of customer's needs or budgets. Home buyers must be on guard against both. But to assert that every home built in the U.S. needs a unique architectural design (adding typically 6% to 10% to construction costs) is out of touch with the reality of the housing market where not only the poor, but the middle-class as well, are getting increasingly squeezed out. - The Editors*

## Two Hats Don't Fit

To the Editor:

As a long-time member of the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), I would like to respond to the letter in the September 1989 issue about conflict of interest when a person is an inspector and remodeler.

I find Timothy Chase's remarks about seeing no ethical problem with writing up a report on the physical conditions of properties and proposing repairs on the findings very disturbing. I have never believed in self-policing and have often wondered whether it is really possible for any human being (myself included) to accurately or fairly judge their own judgments and conduct. The "window" period available for home purchasers to evaluate properties and remove home inspection/survey contingencies is painfully short and it is totally impractical for home buyers to "investigate thoroughly my competitors' evaluations and quotes." A home buyer should never have to consider that an evaluation might be prejudiced toward a repair or replacement due to a potential profit incentive.

Professional disclosure in the home inspection/survey business demands a very even-handed and fair treatment of what is found. The industry often finds itself at conflict with contractors who, for instance, seem unable or unwilling to make flashing repairs but quite eager to replace entire roofs. Our daily work is replete with horror stories of contractors digging up basement slabs to install dewatering systems when corrective landscaping would have mitigated the problem of water seepage at its source.

The fair approach for contractors who also wear home inspector/survey-

or hats would seem to be to refrain from working on or profiting from buildings they have inspected/surveyed.

Michael Lennon  
Home Pro Systems  
McLean, VA

## "High-Posted" Cape

To the Editor:

I'm not sure I understand exactly what a "High-Posted Maine Cape" is (referred to in On the House, 12/89), and/or why a 4x4 set square to the rafters is of any concern to proper ventilation techniques.

To begin with, despite their cosmetic appeal in New England, gable-end vents are of no help when it comes to ventilation. Except in very rare wind configurations they tend to "stall out" and form very localized air circulation patterns.

A ridge vent is only going to have free air from the space in between rafter tails (assuming no other infiltration). So it is entirely appropriate to have available ventilation only between rafters at the ridge.

Perhaps this will require a custom-made ridge vent, which is no big deal to fabricate.

Keep in mind that the balance of a system between the soffit vents and the ridge vent is of more concern than the total volume of air. A slow system which is moving as designed is much better than a large system that is stalled-out due to design error.

Bruce Austin  
Pelham, Mass.

## Computers Are No Cure-All

To the Editor:

Morris Carey's answer to Nancy O. (JLC State-of-the-Art Contractor, 10/89) is less than satisfactory considering her question. Nancy states that her company had receipts of \$1.8 million last year, yet it was the worst year (I assume profit-wise) in the company's history. Mr. Carey chose to attack her choice of computers instead of offering help that would be more helpful.

It is very likely that no matter what computer or software Nancy buys and uses she will not have greater profits in her company. She is probably doing one or both of two things: either underbidding her jobs or not adequately containing costs once the job is underway. These problems would need to be addressed no matter what computer system Nancy has. I have found that computers offer no panacea to management problems. Nancy would be better off hiring an accountant who could set up a method to bid jobs and keep better track of costs. Once she is comfortable with this system she could look to computerize.

Secondly, the fact that Nancy has three Macs in her office and no IBM-

compatible computers should be no hindrance. We should do a little over \$1.8 million this year with six contractors and laborers and the rest subcontracted. We keep control of costs and bid jobs with an adequate profit margin with the use of only one Mac. We find that the Mac provides accounting support, word processing, drawing, and estimating with no problems. In addition, the Mac is easier for someone with no computer experience to become productive. With an MS/DOS-based computer the memorization of codes and commands is intimidating to someone with no computer experience. A busy contractor who has too many things to do without spending a month learning how his new tool works.

Eric Russell, manager  
Bartlow Construction Co.  
Everett, Wash.

Morris Carey Responds:

I agree completely that a computer is not the solitary solution to our business problems. But, not everyone has the same level of need from the computer to the businesses.

Choice is more available with IBM than it is with Macintosh. That doesn't mean that Macintosh isn't any good. Apple makes super computers. The simple fact of the matter is that there are many more business software choices with IBM than there are for Apple products.

I don't think it's fair for either you or me to try to make that choice for Nancy. She needs to know her options, because only she knows her financial and energy limitations.

It is not fair to say that Nancy's business will not improve with the proper implementation of computers. I purchased and implemented a \$60 calendar program in my business last year that dramatically reduced my cost-of-sale labor by 33%. Unfortunately, it is not available for the Macintosh.

If Nancy is underbidding her jobs - and such could be the case - there is a rainbow of estimating and job costing programs which make light work of those tasks - 98% of which are only available for IBM machines.

I am using the same accounting, database management, and word processing software that I purchased in 1982, and it looks like it will suffice for several more years as well. The nice thing about IBM is that the software that operated on their first machines still operates on the current bigger and better ones. When Apple went from Apple to Apple II to Macintosh, software interface was lost, and everyone had to start from scratch.

Yes, I am a staunch IBM clone user. ■

**Keep 'em coming...** We welcome letters, but they 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 *The Journal*, RR2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.