



# THE JOURNAL OF LIGHT CONSTRUCTION

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JLC's

# Letters

## Architects for Hire

To the Editor:

I enjoyed David Hornstein's response to my article on bidding ("Designer Defends Competitive Bidding," *Letters*, 10/97). Since most of my new-project leads are from homeowners who do not yet have a design professional on board, I will start to employ David's philosophy and change the way I bring an architect or designer into the process. Based on David's advice, here is how I will handle it in the future:

First, I will bring in four or five architects to look at the job. Architects are unreliable enough that if I talk to four or five, I might actually get three of them to give me a proposal. I'll have those three spend maybe 20 to 30 hours each on some sketches and design schematics. I'll also have them give me a fixed bid for their subsequent design services. I'm not interested in low price, of course, but we do have a budget to consider, and I definitely want to keep those architects' pencils sharp.

After getting this initial information, I'll change the project some, based on their feedback, and then I'll have them do the same thing all over again. Eventually, I'll see which of the architects is willing to give me the best combination of low price and free consulting. Then I'll make my choice. The winner of this process then gets to put in maybe 10 or 20 more hours for free, and then I'll sign their contract and start paying them.

If I find one of the architects is willing to do this enough times, then maybe, in a few years, if a client happens to come along who seems willing to take the risk, I just might handle the project differently. What I'd do is spend some time with the client thinking about which architect is really posi-

tioned to provide the best service for the client, and I'd ask just that one architect to work on the project. I might even make sure he or she gets compensated from the beginning.

But — and this is a big caveat — since such an approach shows respect for what a good architect can bring to a project, and acknowledges that his or her time is valuable, and since it establishes a team approach that compromises just a tiny bit of my control over the whole process, I will only do it on very special occasions.

Paul Eldrenkamp  
 Byggmeister  
 Newton, Mass.

## Chimney Spillage Warning

To the Editor:

The article "Orphaned Water Heaters Prompt Lawsuit" (*Notebook*, 7/97) was on target in pointing out that venting a low-Btu appliance in a large old masonry chimney might result in expensive chimney damage. But builders need to be aware of health and life-safety effects too. A poorly vented gas appliance is likely to produce high levels of CO as well as high moisture levels, which can create not only the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning but also more subtle problems with mold, indoor air quality, and related respiratory problems.

Several years ago, a woman in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., complained to me that every fall she had such extreme respiratory distress that she and her husband had, for years, moved out of their house to a warmer climate during cold weather. We found two small gas appliances venting into a large old unlined brick flue. Venting was a misnomer, as all of the combustion products seemed to spill right back into the basement and

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house out of the draft hood at each appliance. There was just never enough heat produced to warm the chimney enough to get a real updraft.

We also found seasonal high indoor moisture levels, mold, and mildew that were worse than usual. On installing proper venting, all of these problems cleared up.

Inspectors or remodelers in northern climates who hear complaints of seasonal high moisture or respiratory distress that seem to begin in October every year should check for a nonfunctioning or blocked flue immediately.

Dan Friedman  
American Home Inspection Service  
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

### More on Vinyl Siding

To the Editor:

I could not agree more with Mike Shannahan's letter ("Vinyl Not Necessarily Final," *Letters*, 9/97). I have replaced many windowsills, brick moldings, corner boards, door sills, and the framing around windows and doors caused by the lack of a proper seal around the vinyl J-channel and/or the retention of moisture on the inside of the vinyl and the absorption of that moisture by the wood components of houses.

With all of the uproar over hardboard siding and the litigation it has inspired, I am interested to see what will happen in a few years when homeowners begin to see that damage to framing and sheathing is much greater and much more prevalent

with vinyl siding. I own a house with hardboard siding in a neighborhood of houses with hardboard siding. When I move, it will be to an older house with hardboard siding rather than to a new house with cardboard sheathing and plastic siding.

Matt McBride, Owner  
More Than a Carpenter  
Dale City, Va.

### A Good Reference Is Hard to Find

To the Editor:

After reading Kathy Price-Robinson's article "Know Who You're Hiring" (*Notebook*, 10/97), I wanted to pass on this insight concerning reference checks: After a recent round of hiring, I found that most former employers would tell me only whether the person's name was correct, the dates of employment, their wages, and the job title. The situation seems to stem from fear of a lawsuit if the person doesn't get hired in the new position.

Jay Kidwell  
Joint Council for  
Economic Opportunity  
Plattsburgh, N.Y.

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