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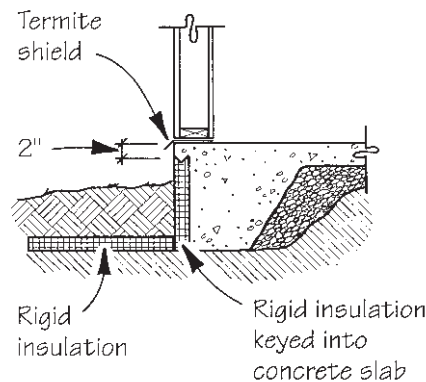
Letters

Termites and Foam

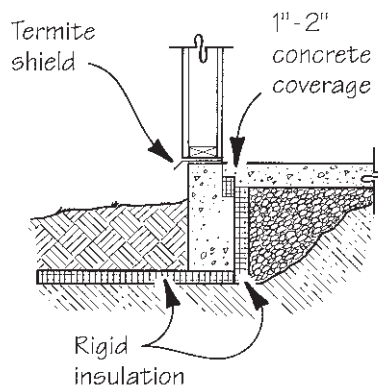
To the Editor:

In response to David Damroth's letter (12/96) about my article on frost-protected shallow foundations, here are a couple of details to consider for thwarting termites. The first detail

Exterior Insulation



Interior Insulation



(top sketch) is a bit of a thermal error in that it short-circuits the heat flow from the building, but it should still work against termites. Interior insulation (bottom sketch) may also be an answer, but again there would be some thermal short-circuiting.

There has been no research on either detail that I know off, but they look feasible.

Bill Eick
Spirit Lake, Iowa

Ice Dam Study Flawed?

To the Editor:

Ted Cushman's article on roof venting (*Focus on Energy*, 12/96) might give readers the false impression that most ice dams are caused by heat conducted through insulation to the attic (especially since the vent-area graph relates vent area to attic insulation R-value). In residential construction, the most prevalent source of heat causing ice dams is air leakage from the home to the attic (called attic bypasses). This is usually larger and much harder to calculate than conductive losses, so it makes the graph and the sidebar much less useful. If you need convincing that this is so, find a new house with ice dams, go into the attic, and note that the attic temperature is 45° to 50°F when the outside temperature is 15°F, despite code levels of attic ventilation and R-38 ceiling insulation.

The primary solution to ice dams is to seal the air leaks — recessed lights, chimney chases, pull-down stairs, plumbing stacks, duct chases, and wiring penetrations. And, of course, keep hvac equipment and ductwork out of the attic if at all possible, since 130°F air leaking is worse than 70°F air leaking.

Marc Rosenbaum, P.E.
Energysmiths
Meriden, N.H.

Ted Cushman responds: Your recommendations are good, and represent best practice for building a new home in the 1990s. The report of Tobiasson and his Corps of Engineers colleagues was based on action taken to correct severe icing problems on the roofs of large masonry buildings having a number of obvious design flaws. It would be quite a stretch to

apply the specific solutions the corps found for those buildings to a typical home of today. On the other hand, the formula developed by Tobiasson and his team may help distinguish between "best practice" and "minimum standards." Many codes prescribe a specific venting ratio as a crude form of protection against the likelihood that typical builders (or building occupants) will sometimes allow excessive heat or moisture to enter the attic by one of the many modes you mention. Although best practice would be a continuous thermal, vapor, and air-pressure boundary at the attic ceiling plane, venting might still be a good minimum requirement, particularly because it's easier for inspectors to verify without special equipment or training.

The Tobiasson formula is just another tool for a skilled designer or building diagnostician to use if he or she wants to. Applied to typical residential construction, the formula will usually show that, with good building practices, only a minimum of venting is needed to prevent ice dams in all but rare extreme weather conditions. Depending on specific conditions, however, the formula might show a designer that more venting is a good idea, if only as a precaution.

Stair Economy

To the Editor:

Regarding the story "BOCA Stair Rules Change" (*Eight - Penny News*, 12/96): One is not restricted from using a landing to turn the stair, or even better (from a space-saving perspective), using as many

HELP WANTED

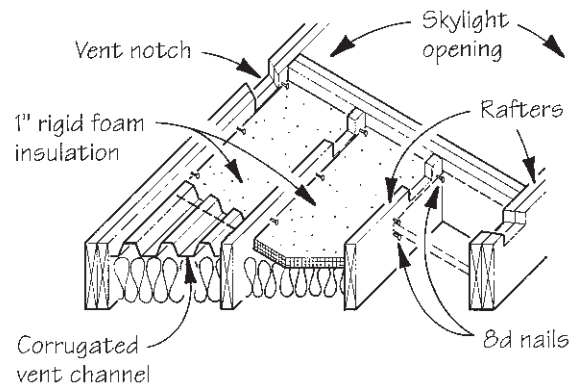
The Journal of Light Construction has a job opening for an associate editor to write and edit features and departments. Candidates should have broad experience in residential construction plus strong writing skills and an inquisitive mind. Part-time/full-time options available; relocation to our Richmond, Vt., or Lafayette, Calif., office preferred. Send resume and writing sample to JLC-EDIT, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477.

Venting Around Skylights

To the Editor:

Thank you for the article "Venting Details for Cathedral Ceilings" (12/96). Because vent notches at skylights can be blocked by fluffed-up batt insulation, we install 1-inch-thick rigid foam panels in the rafter bays above and below skylights (see illustration). We place a row of 6d or 8d galvanized nails about an inch or so down from the top edge of the rafters. We snug the foam board against these nails, then use a few more nails underneath to hold it firmly in place. Insulation can now be placed with confidence up against the rigid foam. The corrugated vent baffles come right into the channel created by the foam boards, eliminating the threat of blockage by fiberglass.

Jody Williams
Lambertville, N.J.



as four winders to make a 90-degree turn and save the area otherwise required by the intermediate landing. In fact, winders — if designed and built properly — will permit fitting something very close to the national-standard minimum step geometry (of 7-inch maximum rise and 11-inch minimum tread) into very small "affordable housing" designs.

Jake Paus
Silver Spring, Md.

Working With Realtors

To the Editor:

In response to the article "Going Belly Up: A Builder Looks Back" (9/96), I'd like to commend the author for providing thousands of dollars of valuable advice. However, the section titled "My Real Problem with Realtors" needs correction.

An exclusive listing agreement does not require that you sell all your homes with one realty company. An exclusive listing agreement should be signed separately for each spec home put on the market.

The broker is supposed to represent the Seller (Builder), since the seller is paying a commission. If the author's realtor was "routinely" committing him to special requests and unrealistic time schedules without prior consulta-

tion, he should have terminated their listing contract immediately. This is in direct violation of the N.A.R. Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

If builders do their homework, they will learn that there are many good agents out there who understand construction and understand what it means to work as a team with a builder.

Jennifer Barton
Associate Broker, Latah Realty
Partner, CJ Barton Construction
Moscow, Idaho

Keep 'em coming! Letters 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 JLC, RR 2, Box 146, Richmond, VT 05477; or e-mail to 76176.2053@compuserve.com.



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