

---

# Letters



## Signs of Water Trouble

To the Editor:

As a home inspector, I enjoyed the article by Bill Eich ("Water Problems & Your Building's Health," JLC, 8/89). Water and moisture problems are one of the most common problems we find. Most times they are easy to correct. Often the problem is that the ground is not properly graded around the foundation. Any pockets of water will possibly enter the cellar. Another problem we find is the lack of weep holes in the frame of storm windows. The rain cannot drain out, and after a period of time the putty will crack and trim will start to rot.

Also, as Mr. Eich mentions, there are non-vented exhaust fans. These should always be vented through the roof if possible or through a soffit. Moisture problems combined with a lack of proper venting in the attic area will kill a roof in five years.

Bruce Williams  
Hollis, N.H.

## Framers Out of Line

To the Editor:

I found the remarks of the Fitzgerald Brothers ("Best Laid Plans—Thoughts of a Framing Crew," JLC, 7/89) to be not only unenlightened, but indicative of the stereotypical arrogance the general public attributes to building contractors.

I agree with them that installing 2-inch cripples above headers is not good building technique, but how could they have gotten 25 years building experience between them and not learned how to push a header up to the bottom of the top plate and finish the top of the rough opening with a piece of 2x toenailed to the jacks? To suggest that the architect change the ceiling height to accommodate their lack of technique is ludicrous.

With respect to their remarks about floor framing, plywood may not be dead flat out of the bundle, but once nailed, it stays dead flat, and is far more forgiving of rain. Try going back to a job where you haven't got the roof on and it has rained solid for a week if you want to see how readily OSB (oriented-strand board) yields to the elements. TJs (wooden I-beams) are great for extra long spans, but their additional cost, which is significant, hardly justifies their use otherwise.

I was appalled at the way the Fitzgeralds framed the shed dormer they described, since they knowingly transferred load to elements not intended to carry load. Their excuse that "it would have been too costly to stop and get the new material" is pretty lame. With 2x12 douglas fir costing around 85¢ per linear foot, how much

more costly could it have been compared to the half-baked job they described and the extra hassles they encountered in doing it?

Bypassing the general contractor and dealing with the owner directly, as harmless as it may seem, is a bad practice. At the least it is unprofessional, since their contract is not with the owner. Done often enough, it will bring extra costs and hard feelings.

It is tempting to go through the interview and take issue with many more of the things these particular builders do and say. Basically it boils down to their seemingly know-it-all attitude and penchant for expediency at whatever cost. Please refrain from bringing any more attention to this kind of builder. It only serves to propagate an already distorted image of builders in general.

Mark Scardiglia  
Albany, N.Y.

## Who's Educating the Educators?

To the Editor:

Regarding your "Best Laid Plans" article (JLC, 7/89), the Fitzgerald brothers may be good in the trenches, but when "educating" the architects and revising framing details, are they accepting the structural responsibility of possible load shifting and thrust?

Do they know 1200 lb from 1500 lb?

Ron Hanna, architect  
Hauppauge, N.Y.

## A "Proper" Cathedral Detail

To the Editor:

I would like to respond to a recent letter I read in your fine magazine. It had to do with the proper ventilation of "cathedral" ceilings/roof systems. In order to avoid heat build up, simply install "Proper Vent," an inexpensive polystyrene channel between the rafters. It ensures the insulation does not inhibit proper air flow. We use it, with great success.

Kevin Denton  
Harrison, N.Y.

## Rooftop Safety Tips

To Paul Hanke:

Your article entitled "Rooftop Safety" (JLC, 5/89) was excellent. For years, my company has recommended that roofers use safety lines with rope grabs while on the roof.

There are only two points I take exception with: First, your comments about ladder jacks are wrong. Rung-type ladder jacks are legal and OSHA says they must have a bearing surface

of not less than 10 inches. The most popular ladder jack sold today is rung-type made out of aluminum. There are over nine models on the market.

The second exception is the mention of "pointed metal projections." This was mentioned in OSHA for years, but will be dropped out of the Shingling Bracket section in future OSHA printings. I have researched these "pointed projections" and if you know of anyone who ever made them this way, I'd like to talk to them. We have been making them without any projections for years.

Alan D. Kline  
Lynn Ladder and Scaffolding Co.  
Lynn, Mass.

## Grout Stains

To the Editor:

In June's Kitchen & Bath column, "Grout Wars," Lynn Comeskey states that he uses an "oil-based stain" to correct shading variations in grout. Further along in the column he recommends using a "water-based stain" to re-color grout. Is this an inconsistency or am I missing something?

Another thing. We have been experiencing a reddish coating emanating from the bottom one foot in showers, requiring heavy-duty scrubbing with a muriatic acid solution during the first few months of use. Construction of these showers were typical—wood frame, "green-rock," and vinyl pans. Any suggestions? The manufacturers had none.

Vincent D'Angelo  
Nanuet, N.Y.

Lynn Comeskey Responds:

*The reference in the June column to an oil-based stain was to my first efforts at dealing with the color drift problem. I subsequently learned there are water-based grout stains and have generally been using them since. However, as each situation is different, I typically end up experimenting until I find a solution.*

*I have never seen the red discoloration you describe, so I'm not sure what the problem is. However, I would suggest being careful with the muriatic acid; you could damage the glaze and/or kill the cement in the grout. The latter could lead to the grout powdering.*

## "Spartan" May Be Inadequate

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to Richard Lind's "Contracts and Those Specific Specs" (JLC In Business, 6/89). Specifically, I question Mr. Lind's suggestion that "the plans should be as Spartan as possible, providing only information essential to the trades that will work directly with the plans." Also, I question his three reasons for

justifying "Spartan" plans.

As director of the design/production department for one of the nation's larger home builders, I feel that an adequate set of building plans, while not of the complete commercial grade bid set variety, are nonetheless fairly extensive. Yes, detailed lists (designated tasks) of the job scope for individual trades should not be included on the plans. However, much information is necessary to ensure a smooth (relatively) problem-free bidding and building process. I won't attempt to document all that should be included on an adequate set of plans (our in-house working drawing check list is five full single-spaced pages). But, I will offer a few basic guidelines.

Residential construction drawing should:

- Document all building code compliance information necessary for the building official to approve after one thorough review (building departments often have punch lists that facilitate plan review; ask your inspector for a copy);
- When combined with separate specifications, completely satisfy the needs of estimators (survey your estimators, ask them where your plans are lacking or perhaps excessive);
- Substantially answer field building questions generated by all subcontractors using the plans (again, survey your subcontractors).

By starting with the basic guidelines and expanding them to incorporate individual requirements, and by using the feedback from your building officials, estimators and subcontractors, you can generate a working drawing checklist.

With respect to Mr. Lind's reasoning for justifying "Spartan" plans, I offer the following for consideration.

Plans that are complete, according to the guidelines listed above, will not appear cluttered. They will communicate to everyone who reviews the plans (both novice and expert) that the builder is knowledgeable of all aspects of home building. And what better tool is there for explaining the construction process than a complete set of construction drawings?

Ron Lewis  
Latham, N.Y.

**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.