

Blockwork Made Simple

by Charles Wardell



Ever try to get a mason to lay a few blocks on short notice? Maybe you ended up doing the job yourself, taking three times as long and getting less-than-professional results. If that's the case, then check out the *Block Laying Tab*. The people who make it claim that the Tab lets even unskilled laborers quickly build level and plumb concrete block walls.

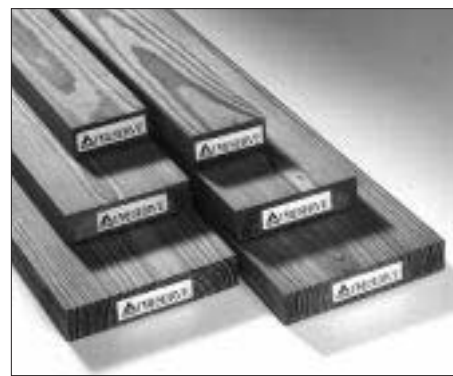
The Tab is a 20-gauge galvanized steel spacer that automatically maintains $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch vertical and horizontal joints between blocks. Although the first course must be carefully levelled, the Tabs do the work after that. Before the mud is spread for each course, the Tabs are inserted into the top of the preceding course so that each tab spans the joint between two blocks. The Tabs are held in place by two pairs of arms that grip the sides of the holes in the block. At the same time, a spacer arm fits between the blocks to ensure proper spacing. When the next course is laid over the tabs, the blocks are automatically aligned and leveled.

The Tab's arms are notched to accept reinforcing rod where needed. All Tabs remain in place when the project is finished. Although the current model only works with 8-inch-wide blocks,

the company plans to introduce Tabs for 12- and 16-inch-wide blocks. Costs are \$42 for 200 Tabs, or 21¢ each.

Contact :Bilco Brick, P.O. Box 430, Lancaster, TX 75146; 800/487-3380.

Nontoxic Treated Wood



A lot of carpenters have expressed reservations about the CCA-treated wood they cut and install on a regular basis. In particular, they worry about the long-term effects of breathing and handling the chromium and arsenic used in the treating process — chemicals the Environmental Protection Agency classifies as hazardous. For the same reason, a few homeowners I know have refused to use treated wood on their homes.

The treating industry calls these fears ungrounded, and can cite test data showing that the CCA is rendered harmless because it fixes itself to the wood cell walls soon after treatment. But whatever the reality, the perception many people have about the stuff has created a demand for a substitute.

ACQ Preserve is a new type of treated wood that contains neither arsenic nor chromium. Instead of relying on CCA, ACQ preserve is treated with alkaline, copper, and "quat," a quarternary ammonium compound. Copper is the primary fungicide (as is the case with CCA), while

quat kills any copper-tolerant fungi. The alkaline is merely a carrier. None of these materials is classified as hazardous.

ACQ Preserve includes a built-in water repellent. It's available in all lumber sizes, and in a range of species, including Southern Pine and Douglas Fir. In fact, the manufacturer, which also produces CCA-treated wood, claims that ACQ has much better penetration. It is available in densities ranging from 0.25 to 1.00 pounds per cubic foot, and can be used anywhere that CCA-treated wood can. ACQ Preserve has been approved by the American Wood Preservers' Association (the Underwriters' Lab of the treating industry), and has been accepted by the International Conference of Building Officials. (It's in the process of being tested by the other code-making organizations.) ACQ is currently being produced in North Carolina, New Jersey, Texas, Ohio, and California. Five or six more plants will be coming on line in the next six months.

Contact :Chemical Specialties, Inc., One Woodlawn Green, Suite 250, Charlotte, NC 28217; 800/421-8661.

Reversible Basement Window



The *Acrolin* is a welded-frame custom vinyl window with hardware that lets you convert it from an awning to a hopper. Designed for use in a full basement, it includes single-glazed or $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch thermopane glass. When used as an awning, two sets of stops let you open the window to 45 or 90 degrees (but not to any other settings). The hopper relies on a chain to hold the sash open at 45 degrees.

The window is available with or without a nailing fin. A removable

screen snaps in from either the outside or the inside of the frame. The window can be made to almost any size and is being marketed through local fabricators as a custom item.

Contact :Acro Extrusion Corp., 900 East 30th St., P.O. Box 9410, Wilmington, DE 19809; 800/441-3859.

Airtight Outlet Boxes



If you're an air-sealing nut, you probably worry about your electric outlets. Air escaping through exterior wall outlets can raise a home's heat loss and carry moisture into the wall cavity. In very cold climates, this moisture can condense inside the cavity, causing all sorts of mischief.

There's no easy way to seal an ordinary plastic box. People who build very tight homes have tried everything from plugging the wire penetrations with sealant, to caulking the gap between the box and the drywall, to wrapping the box in plastic during installation. A simpler solution is the *Enviroseal* airtight electrical box. Enviroseal boxes seal the polyethylene vapor barrier and the interior drywall to a flange on the face of the box. No caulking is needed. The vapor barrier is stretched across the electrical box and the flange snapped in place over it. The gasket on the flange also seals the box to the back of the drywall.

Enviroseal boxes come in single, two-gang, and octagon configurations. As you might have expected, they cost more than plain vanilla boxes. A single goes for about \$2.25, a two-gang for about \$3.35, and an octagon for about \$2.95.

Contact :R&S Enviro Products, Ltd., One Church St., Unit 10,

Keswick, Ontario L4P 3E9, Canada; 416/476-5336.

Dual-Beam Headlights



Mark Grape was tired of having his hard hat fall off his head from the weight of the front-mounted helmet light. He was also frustrated that he didn't have a hands-free light source when he wasn't wearing a helmet. His solution was to invent *Grape Light*. Designed as a work light for dark and confined areas, Grape Lights consists of two Rayovac Roughneck Flashlights (mini-flashlights that run on AA batteries) mounted to the sides of a hat or a safety helmet.

The Grape Lights kit fits on any standard safety helmet and produces a single beam of light about 10 feet in front of the helmet. The kit is designed to attach to all types of helmets, and the manufacturer claims it has been approved by OSHA. (It also notes that Pacific Gas and Electric is buying the helmet kit for its line personnel.)

The Grape Lights hat is a cloth hat with two sets of flashlight holders, one each facing forward and backward. When facing forward, the lights work just as they do when mounted on a helmet. If you need light for close work, however, you can turn the hat around backwards and put the lights in the rear holders. This keeps the visor out of your way and changes the angle of the beams so that they unite at arm's length, providing a beam of light at your fingertips. The kit and the hat each cost \$25, plus shipping and handling.

Contact :Grape Lights, P.O. Box 17846, Salem, OR 97305; 503/370-7273. ■