

Letters

Don't Cut Historic Timbers

I work for a Vermont company that specializes in restoring and preserving timber-frame structures, so after reading the table of contents blurb for Gary Morrison's article "Strengthening an Old Roof" in your December issue — which read "New LVL framing straightens and stiffens an underbuilt timber frame" — I enthusiastically turned to the article itself. But my enthusiasm turned to dismay when I saw that the author had cut the purlins and chopped out the "waste" on either side of the rafters.

In any historic timber-framed structure — and especially one dating back nearly 300 years — the joints are among its most important features. Arbitrarily cutting original framing members destroys the historic fabric that makes the buildings so special.

After sharing the article with a co-worker, he and I quickly figured out a way to straighten the roof without disturbing the original framing: by adding supplementary 2-by lumber rafters between the original timber rafters, with their upper edges below the faces of the purlins. Pairs of tapered shims could then be placed between the purlins and new rafters as needed to transfer the load. This would also cost much less than the LVL approach that was actually used.

Scott Killian
Vergennes, Vt.

Taking Exception

I believe Dennis Dixon does himself, the construction industry, *JLC*, and the magazine's subscribers and advertisers a great disservice by using derogatory slurs to label the very people who hire contractors ("Getting Paid for Preconstruction Advice," *Business*, 10/12).

Newbies? Bottom feeders?? Price-shoppers?

Sadly, Mr. Dixon did not need to do this to get a valid message across. His point about a contractor and a potential client seeing things the same way could be made (and has been, in first-class magazines like *Fine Homebuilding*) in a way that is not condescending and mean-spirited.

For Mr. Dixon to avoid a "hypocrite" label, I trust that when he goes to buy a new work truck, he does no Internet research (that would be free pre-sales advice), visits the first dealership he sees (to avoid price-shopping), asks no questions (free advice), and hands the salesperson a blank check. No haggling of course — hagglers must be like bottom-feeders. I have no guess as to how he has avoided being a "newbie" in some way at some point in his life.

Dave Bell
Anaheim, Calif.

Estimating and Design Proposal

The following excerpt was taken from comments posted on JLC's website (jlconline.com) in response to "Getting Paid for Preconstruction Advice," 10/12.

Great article. I am glad to know that I am not alone. There are professionals out there who tell the potential clients upfront that we (the professional contractors) get paid for our work, including the work we have to put into designing, estimating, and planning a project. I have a document that's similar to the author's PSA (professional services agreement). I call mine an E/D (estimating and design) Proposal. I explain our process — which is detailed on our website — to the potential clients when they first call about their project. I ask if it sounds reasonable, and if they say yes, then we book the initial meeting. There's no charge for the initial meeting, but I get a chance to explain to them in detail about our design and estimating process.

I have had huge success in selling more jobs using our E/D Proposal, and if a client is willing to go through our process then I can prepare a proper lump-sum price for the work. For a typical master-bathroom remodel, the cost to design the project is about \$2,000. The clients pay a deposit and progress payments as the design goes forward. If they decide to hire us, we discount the design fee. If they decide not to hire us, they pay the balance of the design fee and are issued a package that they are free to use at their pleasure. We rarely lose a job because of our final price, because we walk the clients through the process and they can see that the clients are more in charge of the cost of the project than the contractor is.

Thanks for the article. More contractors need to charge for the professional services they are giving away for free. — *svandyke*

KEEP 'EM COMING!

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