

PRODUCTS

Posts Without the Shovel

Post bases and anchors quickly create a floating deck

by Scott Gibson

Building a deck usually starts with digging holes for concrete piers, placing concrete, and attaching a ledger solidly to the house. Oz-Post promises that you can skip all of those preliminaries when using its Oz-Deck and Oz-Post components to build code-approved supports for a floating deck — in a fraction of the time it usually takes.

Each 4x4 post is supported by a hot-dipped galvanized base that's roughly 12 inches square and held in place by a 34-inch-long post jackhammered into the ground. Base locations are laid out — with string lines, just as concrete piers would be — within 24 inches of the perimeter of the deck and no more than 6 feet apart in the field. Once the bases are in position (and local utilities have been contacted to make sure there are no underground lines in the area), they are pinned to the ground with the jackhammer-driven post. The company says the jackhammer compacts the earth beneath the base and around the post; each post is rated for a load of 1,600 lb.

Oz-Post says the system is suitable for use anywhere in the country. Because a floating deck is not connected directly to the building with a ledger, minor seasonal move-



ment has no impact on the deck and won't affect the house. And because there's no ledger, the risk of moisture damage to siding and framing is eliminated. The company says its system provides lateral as well as compressive strength.

Bases are sized for 4x4 posts only, although the company says it is likely to introduce a 6x6 base so wood posts can meet California fire codes without additional treatment. Posts can be driven with an electric-, air-, or gasoline-

powered jackhammer. Builders will also need two specialized attachments — an Oz-Hammer for the jackhammer and a spacer that fits into the top of the post.

Bases are made from 6-gauge material. Each base-and-post assembly costs \$23.

Scott Gibson is a writer in East Waterboro, Maine, who specializes in construction topics.

■ **Oz-Post**, 866/422-0751, www.oz-post.com

You may find that manufacturers of composite decking have exacting requirements for the size of the space between individual boards. Trex, for example, spec-

Spacers That Shed Water

A simple clip keeps spacing uniform



ifies a gap of 1/4 inch between adjoining boards (3/8 inch when temperatures are below 40°F). You can always cut a wood gauge block, but after you've dropped it for the eighth time in a single afternoon, it might occur to you that there should be a better way. And it looks like there is: Deck Spacers from Simpson Strong-Tie.

These elegantly simple spacers are slipped over the top of each joist to provide perfectly uniform gaps across the width of the deck. What's more, each spacer is shaped like a small roof to help it shed rain, snow, and debris. With joists protected from the worst of the weather and from the grunge that can accumulate between deck boards, deck framing should last longer.

Deck Spacers come in three colors to match standard composite colors (gray, brown, and tan) and are made from UV-resistant materials so they last as long as the deck does, the company says. A container of 500 spacers costs about \$50. — S.G.

■ **Simpson Strong-Tie**, 800/999-5099, www.strongtie.com

Fencing to Match the Deck

Rails are reinforced with steel

TimberTech is adding privacy fencing to its wood-plastic composite line. The company says FenceScape has the same advantages as composite decking: It resists splitting, warping, and rotting and isn't attractive to termites. UV-inhibiting pigments minimize the effects of the sun, according to the manufacturer.

Composite decking is too flexible for use in structural applications, but TimberTech says its fencing rails are reinforced with galvanized steel to prevent "creep." Fencing planks are available in 6-foot and 8-foot lengths and are 1/2 inch thick and either 5 1/2 inches or 3 1/2 inches wide. Composite post covers, which slip over 4x4 wood posts, are 7 feet tall. Post caps are also available.

FenceScape was introduced in a few markets this year, mostly in the Northwest, and will be rolled out nationally in 2008. It's currently available in one color, although the company says the fencing can be painted or stained after it has weathered. TimberTech offers a

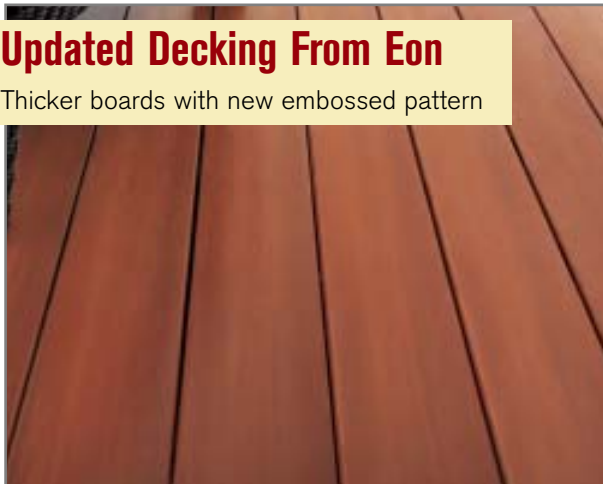


limited 25-year warranty on the project for residential installations; 10 years when used commercially. A 6-foot fence costs about \$32 per lineal foot. — S.G.

■ **FenceScape**, 888/336-2352,
www.fencescape.com

Updated Decking From Eon

Thicker boards with new embossed pattern



CPI Plastics has updated Eon decking and railing with its new Ultra line, which the company says is thicker and stronger than previous versions. The deck boards also have an embossed pattern for better traction and a more woodlike appearance — and they're co-extruded with an acrylic top coat for better scratch resistance.

Eon is 100 percent virgin polystyrene. The manufacturer says that because it contains no cellulose fibers, the decking won't support the growth of mold and mildew, and it will resist cracking, fading, splitting, and decay. CPI guarantees Ultra decking for 30 years on residential installations and 10 years when used commercially. By contrast, its Traditional line carries a 25-year residential warranty and no commercial guarantee.

Ultra decking is available in two colors — Chestnut and Sandalwood. Planks measure 1 1/2 inches thick and 5 1/2 inches wide and come in lengths of 12 feet, 16 feet, and 20 feet. They're installed with the company's Ultra Clip hidden fastener system. The decking retails for about \$3 per lineal foot.

CPI also says it is introducing new railing and cladding, as well as hangers and finishing trim. The new Eon Ultra railing is available in 6-foot sections and comes in six colors. It's designed to accept balusters from all leading manufacturers. — S.G. ❖

■ **CPI Plastics Group**, 866/342-5366,
www.eonoutdoor.com

PRODUCTS



Outdoor Kitchens Made Simple

Mix-and-match grilling centers

A gas or charcoal grill is a natural complement to a deck or patio. Some customers want something more elaborate, however, than a standard stainless steel or enameled box on wheels; they may be interested in Cal Flame's components for grills and other outdoor appliances. The pre-assembled modules can be combined in a number of ways to create a custom outdoor kitchen.

Frames — made from 20-gauge stainless steel and Hardibacker tile backerboard — come in a variety of shapes and sizes, with cutouts to accommodate grills with up to five burners, storage cabinets and doors, side burners, and refrigerators. The company also offers bases for dining tables and bars. If the homeowner wants something other than tile cladding, the backerboard can be removed.

Modules are 38 inches tall; other dimensions vary based on function. Prices range from \$560 to \$760, depending on the component. — S.G.

■ **Cal Flame**, 800/225-7727, www.calspas.com

Cable Railings The Easy Way

Fittings eliminate need for swaging



Ultra-tec has introduced cable-railing hardware that allows builders to install cable in the field without relying on factory or on-site swaging to connect the cables. Instead of having to measure all the cable runs and order exact lengths from the manufacturer, a builder can order roughly the right amount of cable, cut it on site, and use the no-swage fittings at both ends of each run.

After cutting the cable to length, the installer inserts one end into the stop end and the other end into the tensioning end, and then tightens the cable. Tensioning and stop-end fittings are available for both 1/8-inch and 3/16-inch 1x19 cable and can be used in wood or metal posts. Total range of adjustment in the tensioning hardware depends on the model and ranges from 1 inch to 2 inches. Fittings cost between \$12 and \$16 each. — S.G.

■ **The Cable Connection**, 800/851-2961, www.ultra-tec.com