Editorial

Don't Skimp on Kitchens and Baths

This issue focuses on kitchens and baths, which are not just showcases for pretty finishes, but complex spaces that perform a variety of functions and take a lot of abuse.

How many of you have a bathroom in your own home where you have to do contortions around the sink to get into the shower? Where the tile is falling off at the lip of the tub, spawning a mildew garden? Or where the mirror lighting is so poor that you're at risk of removing an ounce of flesh when you shave in the morning?

How many of you have a kitchen where you can't find a place to set down a freshly roasted turkey when it comes out of the oven? Where the refrigerator door does not open wide enough to pull out the crisper drawer? Or where the counter or backsplash is delaminating from water draining into the joint?

Last year I toured a brand-new, $120-per-square-foot Boston condo where you couldn't open three drawers of the elegant European-style cabinets because they hit the dishwasher door. Classic!

Kitchens and baths are the most intensively used spaces in a home—and the most expensive per square foot. The kitchen is taking on an even larger role as fewer homes include dining rooms. And the role of the bathroom—with its spas and exercise areas—is growing as well.

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So it comes as no surprise that the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) estimates that a complete kitchen remodeling now costs $14,000, and an average bath remodeling costs $8,000. "The 5x7 bath is a turn-of-the-century phenomenon," says NKBA's Russell Platek. "The leisure aspect—such as hot-tub use—is getting more important, since it's the last private retreat in the home." *Professional Builder* reports that kitchens are getting bigger (a third of new kitchens, a *PB* survey says, exceed 200 square feet), and baths more numerous.

So give these spaces extra thought. Pay attention to the clearances, dimensions, and layouts needed for comfortable use *(Architectural Graphic Standards* is a good reference), and choose materials that can take the heat and moisture—and are easy to clean. (Who stays home to scrub the kitchen floor these days?) And maybe put in a little something extra: a seat in a shower or a built-in spice rack near the range. Your customers will appreciate it and send a lot of good business your way.

—SB

Letters

Dowsing Defended

To the Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed Taffy Todd's article on dowsing in your July issue. The letters by Shurcliff and Lehr that followed in the September issue sound like sour grapes to me.

I've had good success locating underground cables, water pipes, and streams with such "hogwash" methods. Obviously, the executive director of the National Water Well Association doesn't want dowsers to find water at 50 feet when drillers (who are paid by the foot) can discover water at 200 feet.

Keep up the great publication—your journal gets high marks in my classes on contracting and home construction.

Jerome Ludwig
E. Bloomfield, N.Y.

Perc Tests for Pros Only

To the Editor:

A few points of clarification regarding your recent comments on test pits for septic systems ["One Test is Worth a Thousand Expert Opinions," July, and On the House, Sept.: "What Do Test Pits Really Tell Us?"] First, there are generally three types of test that can be conducted: deep-hole (about eight feet deep) tests, percolation tests, and permeability tests. The most common testing is the use of deep-hole tests in conjunction with percolation tests.

Deep-hole tests are normally dug by backhoe to a depth of about eight feet. These tests are used to determine the soil profile (topsoil, subsoil, gravel, hardpan, clay, etc.) and depth to ledge. The test can also indicate to the educated eye the existence of mottling—a discoloration of the soil at maximum groundwater elevation. Understanding the implications of soil types, ledge elevation, and mottling is critical to the proper design and functioning of any septic system.

The percolation test hole should be dug by hand with a shovel or posthole digger. The bottom of the test hole should be at the elevation of the effective leaching area of the septic system (the bottom for a trench system, the sides for a gallery system). Also, if more than one soil type is encountered in the deep test hole, each soil-type stratum should be tested for percolation. The percolation test hole should be thoroughly presoaked up to 30 hours before testing, but does not need to be "flooded for 24 hours." The purpose of the presoaking is to allow any clays in the soil to swell, thereby filling the voids in the soil. When the test is then run, the results will be "worst-case scenario."

Finally, testing should be conducted by a professional engineer, who should issue the test report. It takes the average civil engineer at least two years of constant exposure to septic testing to be able to read deep test holes properly, detect the existence of mottling, and anticipate probable problems as indicated by deep-test-hole and percolation testing. A properly designed, properly installed septic system can last 20 years or more. The first step in the design/installation process, however, is the testing procedures. Don't trust it to anyone but an expert.

Domenic M. Schefiliti, P.E., L.S.
President
Savarese and Schefiliti, P.C.
Stamford, Conn.

Keeping Foam on Foundations

To the Editor:

I recently reread Henri de Marne's article in the March issue on "Curing the Leaky Foundation." This article provided straightforward explanations of the pitfalls of many common practices used in foundation waterproofing, and offered low-cost, practical solutions.

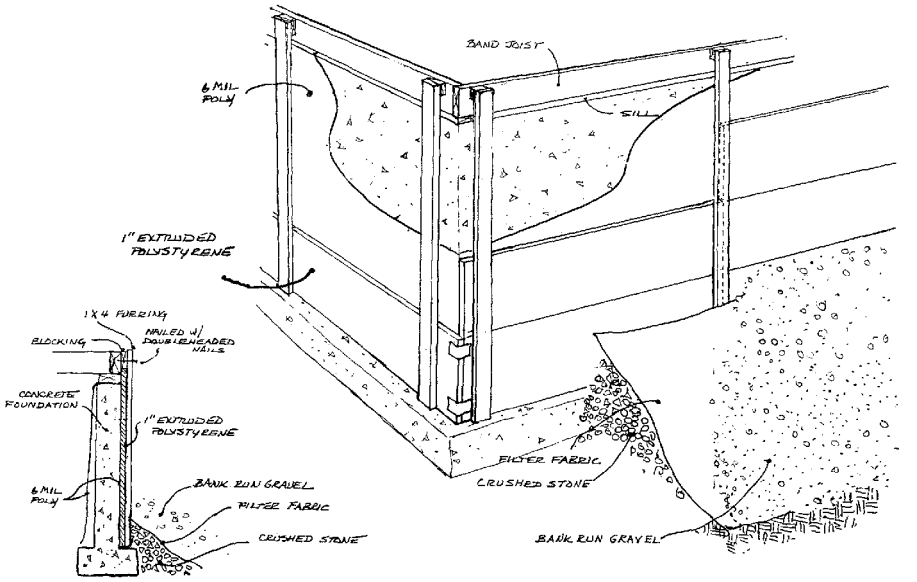
One question I did have after going through the article was how he would recommend attaching the one-inch extruded polystyrene to the six-mil poly. My concern is the compatibility of the adhesive with the poly, to ensure against deterioration.

Marc Simon
Azimuth Building Services
Ipswich, Mass.

Henri de Marne responds:

There is no reason to use adhesive at all Between the foam insulation and the poly. For foundations less than eight feet high, I recommend nailing the extruded polystyrene to the sill or band joist at the top (with the sheets set vertically) and securing the bottom with a layer of crushed stone, which extends about six inches above the top of the footing. Cover the stone with filter fabric, and backfill with bank-run gravel or coarse sand. A variation on this approach is to tack the foam in place using masonry nails and large, metal "roofing disks."

Another approach I use will work on any-depth foundation. In this method,



The backfill holds the foam in place in this technique and its variations. Adhesive is unnecessary, says de Marne.

lengths of 1x4 furring are set vertically around the foundation eight feet on center. They are held off the foundation by one-inch-thick blocks at the top, and are left to dangle at the bottom. Sheets of extruded polystyrene are then slid behind the furring and lined up so that the vertical seams in the insulation fall behind the furring. Once the bottommost layer of insulation is installed, the crushed stone at the footing is used to hold the insulation and furring in place.

Successive layers of foam insulation are slid into place and held tight with granular backfill. The corner joints of foam insulation are strengthened with duct tape. The uppermost layer usually is delayed until the siding goes up, so the insulation does not get mangled fry work crews. It can be nailed into the band joist.

In termite-free areas, the furring is cut off just below the finished grade. Otherwise it is pulled out as the backfill goes in. The gap that forms between the topmost layer of rigid foam and the next lower band is foamed with canned urethane. This system goes together quickly and works well.

Ad Clarification

To the Editor:

Misinformation was given in the ad placed by Branch River Foam Plastics, Inc., in your August and September issues. It was stated incorrectly that our R-Control panels have been issued a CABO National Evaluation Report Number 373. At this time, R-Control panels are being evaluated by CABO as an alternative building method. A report number has not been issued. Branch River regrets this error.

George H. Elmes
President
Branch River Foam Plastics Inc.
Smithfield, R.I.

Keep 'em coming.... We welcome letters, but they must be signed and include the writer's address. *New England Builder* reserves the right to edit for grammar, length and clarity. Mail letters to *NEB*, P.O. Box 5059, Burlington, Vt. 05402.

Call for Papers

The American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Airconditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) is seeking papers for "IAQ/87: Practical Control of Indoor Air Problems," a conference to be held May 20-22 in Washington, D.C. A limited number of residential studies will be accepted. The deadline for abstracts (300 words or less) is Dec. 1. For more information, call ASHRAE at its Atlanta, Ga., headquarters: 404/636-8400. ■