

## Construction Detail Help

by Paul Hanke

*Graphic Guide to Frame Construction* by Rob Thallon  
(Taunton Press, 1991; 800/888-8286) 220 pages.  
Spiral-bound softcover. \$29.95.



In the past, I have reviewed books on generic structural details, most notably Dost and Botsai's *Detailing for Performance* (see

Builder's Library, 5/91), and Ching's *Building Construction Illustrated* (see Builder's Library, 12/91). Now there's an outstanding new contender for a slot on your bookshelf among the detailing reference manuals: *Graphic Guide to Frame Construction*, by Oregon architect and builder Rob Thallon.

Despite the existence of the earlier books, the author says he couldn't find a comprehensive detail reference book, so he decided to write one. And within his self-set limits he did a fine job. As a reference on wood framing and enclosure details, *Graphic Guide* is hard to beat. It's very well organized and clearly written, and the illustrations (mostly sections and isometric drawings) are sharp, well annotated, and drawn at a 1- or 1½-inch scale, so they can be easily transferred to working drawings. And Thallon's treatment is extensive, often showing several different ways of doing a job.

Each chapter begins with an overview of the subject at hand, followed by an axonometric view of the complete system under consideration. Numerous labels in the drawings reference the page and illustration where particular elements are treated in greater detail. This and the book's format — spiral-bound so it opens flat — make it easy and pleasant to use.

You'll find pages of specific construction details, from footings to parapet venting of flat roofs, and virtually everything in-between. Among the many topics covered are retaining walls, plywood I-beams, and porches and decks, as well as instructions for folding moisture barriers at rough openings, flashing details, and housing stringers for stairs. Again, each series of drawings is cross-referenced to related illustrations or text so you get the big picture.

As you may have gathered, I found this book hard to fault. There are, however, some unfortunate omissions. For example, there is no material on interior finish work. And there are no specific details on seismic or hurricane construction. Instead, the author recommends you consult local codes, a convention he uses elsewhere as well. Also missing is information on siting and mechanical-electrical equipment, both of which you can find in Ching's book.

There are also some discrepancies among related illustrations, charts, and text. And occasionally the author doesn't provide enough background information to back up his statements. For example, Thallon says that poly sheets "may" deteriorate rapidly when in contact with concrete. Do they or don't they, and under what conditions? How can we prevent this from happening, and should we be worried about all the plastic we have installed under slabs?

In a few cases, the information Thallon provides is insufficient, as when he tells us to fasten a metal cap to the *sides* of a block wall to prevent moisture penetration from the top, but doesn't tell us how to do it. At other times, he isn't completely up to speed on the latest technology. The radiant slab detail, for example, shows polybutylene pipe without mentioning alternative materials, such as Wirsbo's pePEX — cross-linked polyethylene with a built-in oxygen barrier (see "The Oxygen-Diffusion Debate," 3/86).

Finally, most of the charts for sizing headers, rafters, and joists are too abbreviated to be really useful, and actual design conditions could vary widely from the author's stated assumptions.

But this is just nitpicking. These small issues detract little from the overall excellence and usefulness of this book. Personally, I strongly prefer it to the Dost/Botsai reference, and it compares favorably to Ching's book where the subject matter overlaps. ■

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