THE JOURNAL OF LIGHT CONSTRUCTION

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

Letters

If you did a double-take when you picked this month's copy of *JLC* out of the mail, don't worry: The cover may look different, but the stories inside are still full of the same nuts-and-bolts information you've come to depend on. The fact is that after 15 years in publication, we thought it was high time we gave our pages more of a '90s look.

This isn't the first time we've made a change. I can still remember the first issue, published in June of 1982, when

the magazine was called *New England Builder*. That first issue wasn't much to look at — just 16 pages of 11x17 newsprint with black-and-white photos — but the stories inside were unlike anything I'd seen before. Back then I was still a one-man construction company, and the articles spoke my language, telling me what worked, what didn't, and why in plain English written by fellow builders who had been there and done that.

In 1988, when the name — and the cover logo — changed to the *Journal of Light Construction*, I was suspicious at first. But I soon discovered that the articles still addressed the problems I was facing — so closely, in fact, that I couldn't help but wonder whether the editors were somehow eavesdropping on my job sites and in my office.

I think you'll find the most recent changes are of the same type: The form may be different, but the content remains the same — with, I hope, a few improvements and refinements. For example, while some departments may now go by another name, the stories are still aimed squarely at solving the technical and business problems you face every day. For instance, *Eight Penny News* is now called *Notebook*, but it will continue to keep you up-to-date on the latest developments in technology, finance, and behind-the-scenes news from the construction industry. *For What It's Worth* has always kept you abreast of new materials and tools, so its new name, *Products*, makes sense. And since our long-time *Building With Style* columnist, Gordon Tully, has moved on to new horizons, we decided to retire his jersey by renaming the department *By Design*.

I believe these and the other changes — like the cleaner look, color titles, and bigger, bolder captions — will make it easier for you to find your way around in *JLC*, although initially they may have just the opposite effect. But once you've read through this issue, I think you'll agree that we're still dedicated to the traditional values of quality, honesty, and craftsmanship that have gained your respect and allegiance over the years.

Sal Alfano

Sal Alfano, Editor

Re: Water-Powered Jet Pump

To the Editor:

In your response to the question, "Should an exterior perimeter drain be connected to an interior drain and sump pit?" (*On the House*, 8/96), you provided some excellent solutions. But as an engineer with a public works agency, I must mention two problems with your suggestion to use a water-powered jet pump for houses on municipal water systems.

1. The backflow risk with this type of pump may be in violation of cross-connection control ordinances. A sudden decrease in water pressure, such as from a main break, could cause the check valve provided with these units to fail, resulting in siphoning of contaminated water from the sump into the water system.

2. During a prolonged power outage, a municipal system is capable of providing potable water from elevated tanks, which require no electricity to deliver the water to the homes. A municipality would disagree on the use of water-powered pumps as the best use of their water storage.

M. Gregory Goldbogen, P.E.
Lake County Public Works
Libertyville, Ill.

Henry Spies responds:

The recommended water-powered back-up sump pump has a built-in backflow preventer. While it is possible for any mechanical device to fail, this type of installation is much less likely to cause contamination by a cross connection than the millions of hand-held showers with hoses long enough to dangle into a tub full of dirty bathwater. Any drop in municipal water pressure normally triggers a "boil order," which is intended to prevent a significant health hazard.

Regarding water use, I certainly would not recommend a water-powered unit in an area with a water shortage. If the municipal water system is adequate to permit landscape watering, the sump pumps should put no more demand on the system than that. If sump pumps are required, simultaneous landscape watering is unlikely.

A sump pump only mitigates a symptom of poor storm water drainage. It has been my experience that if the provisions of the CABO code are followed (outside grade a minimum of 8 inches below the plate, and a minimum slope away from the foundation of 6 inches in the first 10 feet), there is seldom a problem with water in basements. One exception is if the basement floor is below the water table, which should not be allowed in the first place.

Backdraft Warning

To the Editor:

I was happy to see John Siegenthaler's article on ventilating mechanical rooms (*Focus on Energy*, 9/96). I'm concerned, though, that many contractors will feel that if they meet code, the system will work. Unfortunately, the code only specifies half of what you need. In addition to the ventilation openings specified by code, you also need some force to drive the combustion air through the holes toward the combustion appliance. It's usually assumed that the driving force is the stack effect of the appliance flue itself. Unfortunately, this is a relatively weak force, which may or may not be overwhelmed by other forces in the house, including exhaust fans and furnace fans.

A typical example is a forced-air furnace in a closet at the end of a hallway in a ranch, with supplies in all rooms and a single return in the hallway. When the furnace comes on with the bedroom doors closed, the return grille is separated from much of the supply flow, so the main body of the house, including the hallway, becomes depressurized. When a louvered door or grilles are opened to the hallway in a attempt to supply combustion air, the air flows the wrong way — out of the closet, into the return air grille. The largest opening in the closet is the furnace flue, so air is drawn down the flue, along with combustion gases.

Fortunately, house pressures can be measured in order to evaluate whether they are flowing in the right direction. By operating the furnace blower and exhaust fans in various combinations, contractors can test to determine whether it's safe to use the air inside the house as combustion air, or whether they need to connect to outside.

Ted Haskell
Oregon State Univ. Extension Service
Portland, Ore.

Take Care of Business

To the Editor:

While my first love as a builder is the nuts and bolts of a house, my appreciation for the business end of the trade increases year by year. If you had an "Old Timers" column, it might give this advice: Learn the business of construction first and be just as industrious in that as you are in the 2x4s-and-trusses end. Don't leave home without both skills.

The second piece of advice would be to charge enough and stay away from the quicksand of overly competitive environments. If there are ten roofers for every five roofs, maybe it's time to be a bankruptcy consultant or to specialize in rehabbing older sections of town (my own current work).

Jack Kriel
Springfield, Ill.

Correction

In the article "Contractor Table Saws" (12/96), we inadvertently transposed the photos of the Grizzly G1022Z and the Jet JWTS-10JF saws. Also, the saw shown under the Powermatic Artisan heading is incorrect. We apologize for the error. ■