



Letters to the Editor

Re: Proper Detailing Does Matter: The Power of Water (Solplan Review 159, July 2011)

Having been in the deck and railing industry since 1988, my company has installed many different types and styles of guardrails. Before the "leaky condo" crisis on the West Coast, many metal railings were top-mounted and unfortunately, many without attention to detail and on decks and balconies with little or no slope or sloped in the wrong direction.

We have top-mounted metal railing systems that are still performing after 20-plus years.

There are 3 main elements critical to achieving a top-mounted railing system that works:

- * the slope of the deck
- * the fasteners used to secure the rail to the deck;
- * the sealant used to seal the penetrations.

The mantra that only side-mounted guardrails will work was created primarily by the "leaky condo" crisis. Engineers decided, understandably and unilaterally, that to overcome bad construction practices and to fully protect themselves, side-mounted rails would be the only answer.

As with anything, there are pros and cons;

- * Side-mounted rails are generally more expensive;
- * The fascia is harder to maintain, i.e. cleaning and painting (see attached pictures)

They are, in many cases, busier looking and not aesthetically pleasing.

Now we have building inspectors requiring side-mounted rails and have the public believing it is a building code requirement - another incident of authority playing on the ignorance of the people. They even have many contractors, the uninformed ones, believing this. Certainly there are instances where side-mounted rails work best, but whatever happened to common sense when determining what type of system should or could be used?

Re: Green Insulation: Hemp Fibers (Solplan Review, September, 2011)

When discussing highly controversial issues, I believe in balance. Your comment that agricultural fibres lock up CO₂ during growth and will have a positive role to play in combating global



warming is certainly one of those issues. Some prefer to call it climate change.

Also, I find your comment about the association of hemp with marijuana and that the puritanical mindset in North America today is possibly restricting the development and marketing of these types of materials here, offensive. I am far from puritanical and have definite convictions in this area.

Bart Blainey
ProDeck Ltd.
Victoria, BC

Regarding detailing of guardrails: I agree that top-mounted guardrails may perform well for a long time. However, the reality is that top mounting fasteners are a vulnerable detail. Proper sloping of the deck and use of appropriate fasteners should be standard.

However, reliance on sealants to seal the penetrations is a concern, because the sealant in the top is vulnerable to atmospheric conditions - ultraviolet, and extreme temperature variations that impose stresses on materials that will lead to ultimate failure. Even 'lifetime' materials will deteriorate over time. Building envelope professionals have been insisting on the side-mounted railing fastening because they are a more

robust detail that will perform with less chance of deterioration even with a less than perfect installation or maintenance – and there is seldom perfection on the job site.

I see many designers coming up with totally inappropriate and difficult to construct designs with little thought about the detailing that may be required. When the design calls for decks and balconies, the design should take into account the necessary details that may be needed. Climate sensitivity should be a part of the design concept, and that may require special consideration for flashings, railing details, etc.

As an architect, I can appreciate the concern for aesthetics. At the same time, we may need to review our aesthetic attitudes. In wet climates, designs need to reflect the climate – and this means incorporating rain shedding details.

The Eiffel Tower was considered an eyesore when it was first erected, but today it is the symbol of Paris.

Re your comment about agricultural fibers for

insulation – science has shown that plant fibres, especially trees, but also other plants, lock up atmospheric CO₂ which is a key contributor to climate change, and we have the science showing us that human activity has been the major contributor to this. In North America, industry and political forces have been working hard to deny the fact of global climate change and its consequences, to avoid having meaningful action being taken to change course.

Thanks for your comments. Ed.

Solplan Review Back issues

A limited number of back issues are available, at a special price of \$5.75 each (plus 12% HST).

Bundle special: a random selection of back issues (minimum 22 copies) are available for only \$65.00 (plus 12% HST)

Solplan Review

Box 86627

North Vancouver, BC V7L 4L2

e-mail: solplan@shaw.ca

POWER

POWERHOUSE BUILDING SOLUTIONS INC.

2 EXCITING NEW PRODUCTS!

TYPAR 
MetroWrap™

“Commercial-Grade Building Wrap”

GRACE

Perm-A-Barrier VPS

“A Breathable Peel & Stick”

NEW RAINSCREEN PRODUCT NOW CCMC APPROVED!

Sure Cavity™ 10 mm

www.powerhousebuildingsolutions.com