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Editor's Message

Walls Panels Fill Customers' Needs— Just Not in South Florida

by Bob Becht

First time experiences with panels are not always smooth sailing!

When I was asked to write an article about wall panels I was challenged. Builders in south Florida use concrete load bearing walls and steel stud non-load bearing walls. Therefore, wall panels are not used in the marketplace I have been operating in for the last 26 years. To talk about my experience with wall panels, I have to go back to the mid-1960s in Chicago, which is where I got my start in the industry.

The first time I saw a wall panel I was a teenager working for my dad who was a residential builder in the south suburbs of Chicago. At the time he had several houses going up at once, one right next the other. To speed up the jobs he ordered wall panels and trusses. We pulled up to the jobs to check on the progress and saw that two houses were complete. His framers, however, who had never worked with wall panels before, had failed to brace the walls! I guess they thought wall panels were magic and didn't need bracing. My dad phoned his guys at home and got the walls braced that night.

With the labor conditions that we will face in the future and the pressures we will face to keep costs down so that built construction remains affordable, steel and wood wall panels have the chance to become an important part of all manufacturers' structural building component product offering.

My next experience with wall panels was from the component manufacturing side. In 1966 when I was in college, a family friend who owned a truss plant that had recently gone into the wall panel business hired me for a weekend job. I'll call the family friend Mr. X. Mr. X had a customer that had eight three-story multi-family buildings built using Mr. X's trusses and wall panels. The customer was complaining that the studs in the panels had excessive bow. Mr. X was sure that this was not the case and hired me to investigate. He dropped me off at the jobsite Saturday morning with a long level, a red crayon and a clipboard. I was instructed to check the bow on every stud, mark the "bad studs" with a red "X" and count the total studs and bad studs with hash marks on the clipboard. Mr. X defined for me what constituted a bad stud. It was an easy way for a college student with construction experience to make a few bucks, and I set off checking studs.

That evening when he arrived at the jobsite Mr. X was dismayed that I had only completed two buildings. His dismay turned to something a lot worse when he saw that most of the studs had red Xs on them and the clipboard had pages of "bad stud" hash marks. I didn't get to go back to finish the job and never did find out how the issue was resolved. But I am sure all those red Xs I put on the studs didn't help when he talked to his customer. The stud problem must have been solved because Mr. X's company stayed in the wall panel business for many years after that.

Back in those days there were no wall panel design programs so Mr. X had an ingenious system to layout wall panels. He had rolls of teletype punch paper marked with stud, door, window and top plate information and location. If you don't know

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at a glance

- Wall panel technology has come a long way since the 1960s.
- It is important for all component manufacturers to have basic knowledge of wall panels.
- WTCA offers various resources to help educate the industry about wall panels.

Editor's Message

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what teletype punch paper is, imagine an inch wide roll of paper six inches in diameter. The marks on the paper tape were one-to-one scale. The paper tape was rolled out on the fabrication table and the panel builders put the studs, door framing, etc. where the marks appeared on paper tape. The paper tapes were prepared by a group of college students. Every tape was done twice and double-checked for errors. In an era when a set of roof trusses consisted of one span of commons and two gable ends, there was a lot more room for error in wall panels. The misplacement of doors or windows, missing load bearing walls, and wrong sized panels could easily happen on the simplest house.

Even though the extent of my wall panel experience is from the 1960s, fortunately I can talk in the here and now about what WTCA is doing to promote wall panel education and technology. South Florida may not currently enjoy the presence of panels, but I'm sure you have noticed areas in which they've become prevalent. As time goes on, I encourage all manufacturers to become familiar with these resources from WTCA:

- The *Framing the American Dream*[®] (FAD) series is an old hit, and continues to be an effective marketing piece for component manufacturers when selling builders on the benefits of wall panels.
- The TTB series includes a brochure called *Considerations for Contractors Building with Wall Panels*. It repeats some of the marketing information contained in FAD and also provides step-by-step instructions and graphics to help framers with the installation.
- A new quality control program for wall panels (turn to page 20 for the low-down).
- BCSI has been around for a number of years now, and soon work will begin on an installation guide for wall panels. Look for more information about this document as the year progresses.



With the labor conditions that we will face in the future and the pressures we will face to keep costs down so that built construction remains affordable, steel and wood wall panels have the chance to become an important part of all manufacturers' structural building component product offering. WTCA will continue to work hard to provide all CMs the support they need to evolve their businesses to meet customer needs and provide the best economic structural building component solution for the job at hand.

I wish each of you the best in 2008. Happy New Year! **SBC**

SBC Magazine encourages the participation of its readers in developing content for future issues. Do you have an article idea for a future issue or a topic that you would like to see covered? Email your thoughts and ideas to editor@sbcmag.info.

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS™

THE FUTURE OF FRAMING

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