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EIFS Interview ...

Tim Carter

Nationally syndicated newspaper columnist Tim Carter explains why he believes water-managed synthetic stucco exteriors are the only practical choice for residential and commercial construction.

Tim Carter's syndicated newspaper column, "Ask the Builder," is published weekly in 75 major newspapers throughout the U.S. Carter's Internet home page (www.askbuild.com) offers how-to information on virtually every aspect of home construction and remodeling. In April, 1998, freelance writer Ardis Berghoff conducted the following interview.

What is your professional background?

I write a column on residential construction and repairs, "Ask the Builder," that is syndicated in more than 75 newspapers nationwide. I also have an award-winning Web site (www.askbuild.com), host a weekly 2-hour radio talk show on WMOH-AM and appear regularly on WCPO-TV (ABC) and WXIX-TV in Cincinnati. I started out working for a builder back in college and was fascinated by the process, so when I graduated from college, I decided I'd do this type of work for a living. One thing led to the next, from a small-room addition to custom houses. I'm now a Master Carpenter, licensed Plumber and a Master Roof Cutter.

How did you become a columnist?

Back in 1993 I was picked as one of the top 50 remodelers in the nation by *Remodeling* magazine. I knew I had to do something with the award, and my wife suggested I write a series of columns about how homeowners can protect themselves against dishonest contractors. So I wrote six columns and took them to the *Cincinnati Inquirer*. They basically bought them on the spot. Then the *Chicago Tribune* bought them, and I knew that I had something. I'm now syndicated coast-to-coast in just about every major market.

Then I started my Web site in December 1995. It was picked last August by *WebMaster Magazine* as one of the top 50 sites in the

world. Now a freelance Internet writer from the *Los Angeles Times* had included my site in a book she's written for McGraw Hill on the top 23 successful sites in the world. This is all in addition to my radio show and television work.

Have you written about synthetic stucco systems?

Yes. I've written about them in my column and on my Web site.

Why do you like these systems? What advantages do they offer the home owner?

The two primary things I like about the synthetic systems are the solid color of the finish coat and that the finish-and-base-coats are water resistant. Because the color is solid throughout the finish coat, you don't have to worry about paint peeling. Traditional stucco systems have problems with cracking, and you don't get that with the synthetic products. Also, the design possibilities enable you to produce some really interesting looks.

What do you think of water-managed vs. barrier systems?

I scolded the developers of the barrier system because I felt that they had "slapped" the master stucco craftsmen, who for hundreds of years had developed and perfected stucco, because they decided in one fell swoop to discard and ignore all of that accumulated knowledge. Barrier systems don't employ any method to capture and divert to the exterior water that gets behind the systems. The old stucco craftsmen knew that was important. That's why they put tar paper on buildings and used extensive flashing and control joints--the types of things that deal with water that gets into a system.

Of course, the water-managed systems do handle this water. They recognize the fact that water will get behind the exterior. If you use wood framing as your primary construction system and water comes into contact with it, you'll get severe rot, structural failure, all kinds of problems. Water-managed systems, if installed correctly, will work just as well, if not better than, the old fashioned cement stucco systems.

The new water-managed EIFS is absolutely better than wood-siding and vinyl systems, which are not covered by codes requiring any type of building paper behind them. I find this shocking. All of my projects had either air and water infiltration barriers or felt paper, at the very least.

Brick veneer, which I've written extensively about on my Web site, will work as well as water-managed EIFS, but only when used with the correct flashing and products that will keep the weep holes at the base of the walls from clogging up. But so few builders are installing brick veneer correctly. Water-managed systems create spacings and actually collect water much more effectively than these other systems.

Have you had personal experience with stucco systems?

Yes. In my earlier days as a contractor, I helped install a barrier system on a house. I knew it wasn't going to work when I saw it. I warned the homeowner that I was not comfortable with the system and had him sign a release saying that there was a potential for failure and future problems by just relying on the caulk. I've had extensive experience with traditional cement stucco systems, too. I've put quite a few of those systems on new houses and on room additions that employ the old fashioned flashing and other water-management details. Every single one of those jobs over the last 15-20 years has performed with no problems, just like they're supposed to.

Have your readers or Web-site visitors come to you with questions or problems regarding these systems?

Yes, quite a few people have come to the Web site to ask me about EIFS and the class-action lawsuits. I immediately refer them to information I have on my Web site (www.askbuild.com) pertaining to these topics. Based on my experience with my Web site, however, I think that there is virtually no comprehension by the general public of the difference between barrier and water-managed systems. I think it's the job of the manufacturers to educate the public that there is a big difference between the two. People know there's trouble with EIFS houses, but they lump all systems together.

What do you think the future holds for these systems?

First of all, barrier systems are going to die, and people will turn to water-managed systems. It's a mistake for builders to continue putting up barrier systems in states that haven't outlawed those systems yet. Those companies and contractors will suffer severe financial losses because it's already a proven fact that they don't work.

It's suicidal to put on a barrier system. Trapped water and wood do not mix--it's a recipe for disaster. Many builders don't put on building paper and flashing because it takes more time and money. Saving time and money is supposedly a plus, but not always. And remember that mother nature bats last. You have no concept how powerful a driving rainstorm is. Water is heavy. When it hits that seam where the system is up against something like a window frame, one drop of water pushes another into that seam and into the system. It's powerful. That's why people with houses clad in barrier systems have big problems every time there's a rainstorm. Water-managed systems are the only ones that will prevail.

If a homeowner wants to put a stucco-look system on a house right now, what are some of the best things to do to ensure that it is done right to eliminate future problems?

Homeowners should hire a builder and a stucco contractor who can prove they have installed no fewer than five water-managed systems in the past. Homeowners also need to decide on a manufacturer that

has a top-notch, water-managed system and obtain all of the installation instructions. Read them completely, twice and then either monitor the construction yourself or hire a third party (such as an engineer or architect) to ensure that the contractor installs it exactly according to the manufacturer's instructions.

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