

The German Construction Fair

North American Construction Executives Attend CONSTRUCTA '82; Find European Technology Holding to Traditional Values

Heralded as the cutting edge of the construction future for the next 10 years, the CONSTRUCTA '82 FAIR in Hanover, Germany, last February attracted some 1,800 exhibitors of construction materials and systems which drew more than 200,000 people from around the world.

Among the visitors was a group of 18 representatives of AWCI who traveled to Germany under the auspices of CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS MAGAZINE to see the future. What they saw was perhaps not a glimpse of the future, but a strong indication of where the construction market may be headed in Europe.

At the conclusion of their visit to the huge exhibition, the manufacturers, distributors, contractors, and wall and ceiling consultants spoke about their reactions for CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS.

Included in the AWCI group were: E.H. Tasset, Inc., Cincinnati, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Tasset; Panorama Drywall Ltd., of Langley, B.C., Canada—Mr. and Mrs. Gerry Nichele; Niehaus Interiors, St. Louis—Mr. and Mrs. Bob Whittle; Dryvit Systems, West Warwick, RI—Frank Morsilli and Frank Gencarelli; Perma Glas-Mesh Corporation, Dover, OH—Guy Carpenter, Roy Fisher, Lou Settimio; U.S. Agencies, Miami Lakes, FL—Merlin Simons; Bostwick Steel Framing Company, Niles, OH—W. Hurlbert and Richard Parker; Construction Dimensions Magazine, Washington, D.C.. Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Wykoff. John Bucholtz, well-

known California construction consultant and newsletter publisher, and his wife who were traveling in Europe also joined the AWCI group for two days.

DIMENSIONS: Now that you've seen all five special exhibits and the offerings of the world construction manufacturing industry, how would you summarize the experience?

MARSILLI: I came here to see new technology, but frankly there was little I would actually characterize as new—or even a promise of breakthrough. There was more in the manner of clever innovations or variations on existing technology.

TASSET: All things considered, I think the rest of us have to go along with that assessment. You needed only to look at the high quality—and more expensive—doors and windows to see the European approach, especially as it's reflected in Germany, where the stress is on quality, permanence . . . mass, so to speak . . . rather than the more price competitive, compact approach practiced in North America.

Whittle: One new wrinkle was the tri-pod steel approach with steel embedded in the concrete so the steel hung from the bottom. This approach was discarded years ago in the U.S., but the German approach is innovative because it allows a flat slab and a longer than usual spar.

NICHELE: The technological basis here seemed traditionally European—mass theory versus the North American approach to speed and lightness.

WHITTLE: That's right. They

were displaying insulated units, supplemented by insulation between courses on outside walls. They also showed a number of approaches in solar systems.

GENCARELLI: I, too, noticed the solar displays—both passive and active—and from the standpoint of being complementary their approaches seemed valid. The North American response has seemed perhaps a bit too complete, that is doing the whole thing with solar.

The Europeans seem content to use a standard heating system and then complement it with solar. I think that approach is quite valid.

WHITTLE: The attitude toward fenestration seems more responsive, too. I didn't notice a single pane win-



Bostwick's Gris Hurlbert inspects steel work used in concrete wall assemblies.

“The attitude in Europe seems to perceive of a structure with a 100-year life at a minimum. We (North Americans) see shorter time expectancies so our feel for strength, mass and permanency differs.”

dow in the entire fair. Everything was thermal pane and one was even triple panes.

NICHELE: That touches on some of the over-engineering that I mentioned. Though the double frame window with a connecting plastic extrusion is excellent to avoid heat loss, every building must breathe. I wondered that some of the buildings and houses would perhaps be too air tight.

TASSET: . . . and there were lots of radiant heating systems. The wrinkle was that they were going after it with plastic and copper piping—to hold the weight down.

MORSILLI: The attitude in Europe seems to perceive of a structure with a 100-year life at a minimum. We see shorter time expectancies so our feel for strength, mass and permanency differs.

CARPENTER: Yes, because change is rapid for Americans and Canadians. That's reflected in our homes, cars, furnishings, etc. In Germany, location apparently is more permanent—where the family doesn't

move on the average of every 7 years—and the buildings reflect it.

MORSILLI: They engineer their walls here. In North America we use experience rules to build walls. Masonry walls may have great compressive strength, but they're somewhat of a waste. The new systems are faster, better—and more economical.

WHITTLE: Certainly, the approach here was more on quality as opposed to price. The tile, the ceramics, the windows—all were marvelously engineered . . . but too expensive for the competitive situation that we're accustomed to.

NICHELE: If our markets would support what I saw here . . . oak, carved doors, bronze doors, heat treated metals . . . we'd have them, too. But there isn't that big of a market in North America for \$800-thousand plus houses.

MORSILLI: There isn't here either. I think the European construction industry is at a crossroads. The devastation of World War II meant they'd sell

everything they made regardless of quality or price.

Now, buyers will be getting a bit choosy—and the industry will have to respond. Drywall appears to be having a tough time cracking the traditional masonry attitude here—but it'll come faster now.

WHITTLE: There might be something to learn, though. They don't trowel their finishes smoothly. Remodeling is big business in Europe



Taking a look at opening up foreign markets, Perma Glas-Mesh Corporation executives Roy Fisher (center) and Lou Settimo (right) discuss their product with German construction executive Seigfried Hanzeln.



Masonry techniques dominated CONSTRUCTA '82 and this aggregate wall section momentarily held the attention of Bob Whittle, Neihaus Interiors. St. Louis.



Exterior insulated wall systems were plentiful in Hanover and few missed a careful inspection by Dryvit's Frank Gencarelli.



Cincinnati's Ed Tasset checks out a plastic pipe solar heat collection system, featuring the pipes beneath the tile roof.

and they're stressing interiors with acrylics over existing surfaces . . . eliminating the expensive furring.

GENCARELLI: Good point. The non-smooth finish is a practical finish because it encourages people to stay away . . . keep their hands off . . . and that makes the life cycle costing more attractive.

The rougher texture look we saw here is on the way ail over North America—and I think you'll see a lot more of it.

WHITTLE: From a cost standpoint

we can't practically finish plaster smooth. I agree; that's why our markets are moving also toward a drywall with a vinyl covering to get attractive, economical smooth finishing.

TASSET: There was a considerable amount of display given to things we don't see that much any more . . . cork, foam, Styrofoam building blocks, mineral boards . . . that sort of thing.

That's why we were seeing so many—and such different kinds—of mechanical fasteners. They were all

over.

DIMENSIONS: One final question, was the trip worthwhile? Did any trends emerge for any of you?

MORSILLI: We came to see if a better mousetrap was in the offing. It wasn't—but it's obvious that the European and North American construction markets are in for change.

NICHELE: Europeans will give up something on expense, and we'll continue to build smaller and smaller houses. The average house now is running about 1,200 square feet and within a decade, I feel certain, you'll see a house with 900 to 1,000 square feet.

The average condominium or apartment is that dimension already . . . and they're serving people satisfactorily.

SETTIMIO: We came here to open up European markets. We exhibited at the fair—and the response was what we hoped for.

WHITTLE: We're more confident that we're not behind—and a few tips were worthwhile.

TASSET: All in all, it was interesting and instructive. But I don't think the North American market need worry that it's behind anyone in the world . . . based on what we saw here.