A TOUCH OF FRENCH TO A NEW ENGLAND HOUSE

After viewing a number of stucco alternatives, the owner and architect selected an EIF shell for their unique residential design on the strength of durability and ease of cleaning.

While it took only six months to erect the shell, the owners of a new home in Westport, Massachusetts, spent nearly two and a half years studying various designs and construction materials before permitting their architect to draw the final plans.

Designed and built by Sakonnet Group of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, the two-story, steel-framed house is what company officials call “a New England version of a French country home.”

According to project architect Allen Berry, the closed shell was built without load-bearing interior walls, enabling the owners, guided by the contracting supervisor, who is also an architect, and an interior designer, to decide on final floor plans well into the construction phase.

The hybrid design incorporates 22-inch deep wood-frame, open-webbed ceiling and floor joists throughout which afforded maximum flexibility when locating interior partitions and accompanying electrical, plumbing and heating systems, said Berry.

The house is deliberately over-designed mechanically, he said, with eight heat pumps plus a radiant heating system and a dehumidifier, all housed in two rooms in the attic.

The 1,200-square-foot south wing contains a heated 10-by-40 foot lap pool and exercise room. Six German French doors face east and west. Heating ducts in front of each door run under bluestone which covers the deck. The pool’s floor is a radiant heat slab. A Dry-o-tron combination dehumidifier and heat exchanger, mounted in the ceiling, draws the room’s excess moisture out of the air and sends it into the pool, while returning the moisture’s heat into the air. The room’s temperature remains in the upper 70s.

His client’s wife has “life-threatening allergies,” said Berry, requiring that the pool area remain mold and moisture free. “We first considered covering the interior walls with ceramic tiles but found that mold and mildew caused by the room’s high humidity would lodge in the grout,” he said.

After drawing up detailed specifications for the owners and thoroughly researching all other options, including stucco, Berry said that he agreed with

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More than 1700 square feet of Senergy’s mildew-resistant SENERFLEX™ wall system was applied over mechanically-fastened cement board in the pool enclosure. The etched round window at the end of the room depicts two geese flying, a familiar New England scene.
the owners and the job superintendent to go with low-cost exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS), which the group concluded would be as durable as and easier to clean than other materials.

“We had worked with synthetic wall systems before but never on the inside wall where its insulating qualities are less of a factor,” he explained. “Detailing was important, and we wanted a good, factory-backed warranty.” Choosing the EIFS supplier, said Berry, rested with the plastering contractor.

Norman Boucher of B & B Plaster, Inc., whose Fairhaven, Massachusetts, company had blueboarded and skim-coated the interior walls of the main house months earlier, was called back to install the EIFS on the pool enclosure’s 1,700 feet of interior wall surface. He had worked with some exterior insulating wall assemblies before; and after reviewing others, Boucher said the owners preferred Senergy’s thin coat color selection and 20 to 30 year life expectancy. Boucher also found the company’s sales and technical staff, headquartered in Cranston, Rhode Island, easy to work with, adding, “They helped eliminate the need for control joints by detailing the fiberglass reinforcing mesh and the base coat around the recessed door frames located every eight feet.”

Instead of installing commonly-used gypsum sheathing, Boucher mechanically fastened 3-by-5-foot, 1/2-inch Durock cement boards into the wall studs. His five-man crew then applied the base and finish coats in just two days.

The owners selected a beige colored coating which, Boucher says, provides a rustic looking texture blending nicely with the wood ceilings, solid mahogany doors and the stone deck.

“Had we used stucco, it would have taken longer to apply and been more expensive,” Boucher said. “We would have had to put up two coats of plaster over wire lath and a finish mating and would have lost valuable time waiting for each coat to set. The cement absorbs moisture and a painted surface would have required considerably more upkeep. While not 100 percent waterproof, EIFS’s acrylic finish coat is water repellent and contains mildew resistance inhibitors.”