Not long ago new ideas were unwelcome simply because they threatened to disturb the “status quo” of living. It’s a well-known fact that people hate change. New ways of doing things were once rejected because people were intimate with their mode of living and “fear of the unknown” overrode any facts or logic. Ultimately, new ideas, if meritorious, weave their way into everyday activities, but not without a struggle.

Today, things are different. New ideas are rejected not so much from “fear of the unknown” or “disturbance of the equilibrium” as they are from risk of loss of “market share” of whatever is perceived as being threatened by new ideas or new ways of doing things.

It’s the age of turf-retention by any means, fair or unfair. Encroachment on a “turf” by something that promises to be superior to what has become the norm is looked upon as an attack by an adversary force of evil. The force must be dealt with and destroyed to preserve “turf.”

Exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS) represent a new and better way of doing what had become commonplace. Concrete, masonry, plaster, and wood siding products faced the loss of turf to the new EIFS systems when they were introduced into American marketing in the late ’60s.

Since their introduction, thousands upon thousands of buildings have been finished with the new exterior systems. At the outset, when EIFS was just another new idea contemplated to have no longevity in the marketplace, little attention was paid to the remote possibility that successful performance might someday threaten “turf.”

With two decades of eminently successful performance on all kinds of structures, the EIFS systems have displaced horrendous volumes of tilt-up concrete, poured in place concrete, masonry, brick, stucco in its conventional form, and a spectrum of other exterior finish systems. Turf has been encroached upon, and reaction has been contrived to fight and destroy the enemy by those charged with the task of protecting “turf.”

“...when EIFS was just another new idea...little attention was paid to the possibility that [EIFS] might someday threaten turf.”

The strategy for attack is obvious: Maximize the failures, minimize the successes. It’s a plan that works in politics and marketing equally well. Direct masses of information maximizing failures to those who can make decisions about whether the new system merits continuation in its historical form. Endeavor to restrict its application spectrum as the first part of the battle plan, followed, if turf is not regained, by further restrictions that render the “turf-stealer” effete.

Details of the strategy are carefully laid out. They are expressed in esoteric technical terms in such a way that the information being distributed gives the impression of logic, timeliness, and importance. Often the information obfuscates, influencing conclusions so much that an incorrect conclusion can be justified as correct based on all the data supplied by those in charge of turf retention. Even out-of-context reports can be impressive in the thinking of those who must make the ultimate decision relating to the future of a new idea that has encroached on somebody’s turf to such an extent that somebody faced a challenge threatening somebody’s future and even somebody’s existence in the marketplace.

When gypsum board panels were introduced, they were initially considered a “fad” that would soon pass into oblivion. As gypsum panels proved their reliability and performance, they encroached on “turf” of the plastering industry. Interiors of buildings were always finished with lath and plaster. The new idea represented an adversary that had to be handled.

Millions of dollars were spent on maximizing failures of wallboard, minimizing successes. “ Knock on the wall” became a well known phrase. “Cheap” was the buzzword for gypsum drywall. True in one respect, it has
become the standard for interior wall and ceiling finishes. Turf retention was defeated, and today’s drywall technology is extensive. Plaster remains an option for any building, but evaluation of many aspects of the plastering industry show that it did not prevail over drywall.

An entire new industry evolved from drywall success. The world is not worse off as a result, but far better off when viewed from job completion, fire resistance, ease of replacement where interior spaces must be changed, and a multitude of other items.

EIFS systems have also spawned an entire new industry. They are no longer “ideas” that don’t amount to anything. They have been used worldwide successfully on so many buildings they have become legion. In the United States, they have performed with excellence. What failures have occurred are minuscule compared to total usage, and certainly not any greater than failures of other exterior finish systems.

In fact, performance has been outstanding and superior to any other exterior system. Cracking is virtually nonexistent, water leaks are nonexistent, esthetics are far superior to anything else available today at an affordable price. Polystyrene is well encapsulated for the life of the building. Dry rot is no factor. Fire-resistance is excellent, and no fatalities have ever occurred from exterior insulation and finish systems either directly or indirectly.

In short, EIFS systems work. They perform well. They are well-researched, well documented for fire-resistance, durability, beauty of finish, and all the other desirable characteristics and properties of exterior finish systems. One of the most impressive recent installations is the Disney Dolphin Hotel, Disney World, Orlando, Florida. Originally designed for conventional exterior portland cement plaster, this huge hotel is clad with an EIFS system. Costs were reduced, unusual aesthetics were provided, and the project was finished on schedule. The exterior insulation reduces heating and cooling costs and creates a more comfortable interior environment.

Naturally, it represents an encroachment on somebody’s “turf” —not the plastering industry’s, since plastering contractors install the EIFS systems, but “somebody.” The counter-attacks continue and seek to influence thinking so much that wrong conclusions may be made by those who affect the use of exterior insulation and finish systems.

Probably the major objective of EIFS proponents should be to create an arena for accurate thinking—provide some means to enable decision makers to resort to what Karl Albrecht in his book, Brain Power, calls “crap detecting.” Only by thoughtful evaluation and understanding of reasons for seeking destruction of proved systems can proper decisions be reached.

If anyone feels that efforts to minimize or severely restrict exterior insulation and finish system use are altruistic, he should reflect that “altruism” is not a word in today’s marketing glossary.