The Future of EIFS

“The Future is not what it used to be”

By Bertrand Deau
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Any reasonable business owner in the U.S. construction sector today is faced with uncertainties due to major concerns related to the U.S. economy. Government debt, household debt and business debt have reached levels that will lead to a credit crunch. Commercial surfaces have doubled in five years and are in oversupply. Interest rates are fragile. The surge in oil prices is slashing buying power.

In spite of these concerns, however, there are signs of hope. Our country is still number one, manufacturing 25% of the goods produced with 4% of the world’s population. Our research capabilities and entrepreneurial spirit give us a fantastic rebound potential. And the number of house permits can only improve at the national level.

Since its introduction 20 years ago, the exterior insulation finish systems (EIFS) industry has become virtually a mature industry. EIFS has gained a strong recognition in the entire building community thanks to the hard work of its pioneers—manufacturers, applicators, architects, developers, specifiers, contractors and owners. Moreover, American builders have used EIFS with an ingenuity that is only just being explored in Europe, by developing the aesthetic capabilities of this product through shapes and colors that are the pride of many new buildings and homes in the U.S. EIFS has penetrated the market of facades to a point that it has become a serious challenger for the more traditional materials which now consider it as a threat.

In the business environment of the 1990s, how does our industry prepare to meet its challenges? As the Japanese say, a crisis hides an opportunity. The EIFS industry has shown its strength in the recent battle over fire issues, and such strength is going to be needed in the years to come. The situation is not going to be easier, but we know we can continue to win if we remain prudent and keep some strength in reserve. We know the fantastic advantages our product brings to the industry: competitive aesthetics, insulating performance (which is becoming a very large dividend with oil costing more than $35.00 per barrel), durability, and the most flexible means to remodel older buildings. All of these are home runs if scored tactfully and professionally.

But our visibility brings us more responsibility. We cannot let this new building concept of ours become a cheap alternative to any other exterior cladding. All the players in the construction community have to realize that bastardizing the golden goose will kill it. And it is only by giving this product the attention it deserves that we can win successfully the challenges of the ’90s: Caring about improving formulations—for instance the latest available developments of resins and additives. Caring about the details like joint treatment, parapets, grade level, etc., and implementing the use of computer assisted designs by both architects and contractors. Caring about setting standards on performances not limited to fire and impact resistance, but including water absorption and retention, vapor transmission and other fundamentals. Caring about architectural designs in harmony with the behavior of the product.

Those who don’t want to play by the rules will condemn themselves and may risk dooming the industry.

We have in our hands the trust of the building community, including building officials. We deserve it. Let us go further together.

About the Author:
Bertrand Deau is President of PAREX, Incorporated, manufacturing in the U.S. and Canada EIFS and stucco products such as System 3 (full synthetic or cementitious soft coats), Insul/Crete (hard coats) and Monocouche (one-day stuccos).