

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR



Scott L. Melnick

What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet. – Romeo and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2

Or would it? As a purveyor of words, I'm well aware that names help to define an item. They can clarify, or complicate. For example, in the past, relatively few people were willing to order Patagonian Toothfish, but renaming this mild-flavored fish as Chilean Sea Bass has since skyrocketed its popularity.

The world of steel has no examples as dramatic, but we've seen our fair share of name changes.

For example, when the Steel Tube Institute's membership became more international, the old TS (tubular steel) designation went by the wayside and was replaced by the compromise name HSS (Hollow Structural Sections). While the latter is undoubtedly a more complete description, for many years some designers were unaware of the change in terminology—which bred confusion.

Some changes are for technical reasons. AISC has phased out the term "anchor bolts" in favor of "anchor rods." The rationale was to prevent people from applying bolting provisions to these items.

Some differences are simply geographic, such as the East Coast reference to "soda" and the Midwest preference for "pop." Likewise, if you're on the East Coast you might refer to K-braces, while on the West Coast they're called chevrons (and there are even a few who insist on calling them Inverted Vees). Fortunately, all of these terms are descriptive and they rarely lead to any real confusion.

Other changes are evolutionary. Go back in time and AISC used to offer two major conferences—the Conference of Operating Personnel (for fabricators) and the National Engineering Conference (for designers). But in 1987 these two conferences combined to form the National Steel Construction Conference, which in 1999 evolved into the North American Steel Construction Conference (which is scheduled

for April 2-5 in Baltimore this year; to view the advance program or to register, visit www.aisc.org/nascc). The new names reflect the obvious changes to the conference. Now, however, organizers are considering another change: Since many in the industry still don't recognize the designation "NASCC" (or even the full name), some are starting to simply call it "The Steel Conference" (though others are pushing for "The Steel Show"). The conflict between "conference" and "show" demonstrates the dual nature of the event. On one hand, it offers nearly 50 technical sessions. On the other, it features an 80,000-sq.-ft exhibition with more than 200 booths. (If you have any opinions on the name, please email me at melnick@aisc.org).

Some name changes are more fundamental. Most recent is the attempt to call steel fabricators "steel specialty contractors."

As AISC's John Cross explains: "There is an old saying that perception becomes reality. Today's design and construction professionals perceive that a 'steel fabricator' is a subcontractor that provides a commodity for their projects. Following the axiom that 'you bid commodities, you integrate specialties' they routinely bid the steel package at design completion. Yet the structural framing system is one of the most customized, critical-path specialty items that can generate cost, schedule and quality benefits from early integration and involvement of a specialty contractor. Our challenge is to change the perception of our industry from that of subcontractors delivering a commodity to the reality of 'steel specialty contractors' utilizing our expertise and shop efficiencies for the benefit of the project."

Of course, some names never change—my wife, for example, is still Judy Blau.

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