

Deconstructing Deconstruction

I consider *Modern Steel Construction* to be one of the best I receive. It presents extremely useful information to me as a practicing structural engineer and I read it thoroughly.

I have been in the business for almost 40 years. During that time I have seen many changes; the introduction of calculators, computers, several new codes (which appear to be sold by the pound) and now as the June issue of *MSC* touts, "Sustainable Construction."

However, I must have missed something because my Webster defines sustainable as "keeping in existence, keeping up, maintain or prolong." For the past 40 years, I have been designing structures which sustain themselves. If they didn't, I would have lost my license a long time ago. I also missed something about the benefit of growing grass and trees on roofs which few can see. If people object to the usual black or silver color of roofs, why not paint them green or even put little yellow spots on them to remind those coming into O'Hare of dandelions which do a wonderful job of sustaining themselves throughout the metropolitan area.

Seriously, in an age where everyone is cutting budgets, and more and more I see the results of less and less building maintenance, how do we justify the added costs of construction and maintenance to support these roof gardens?

But the real temperature riser in the June issue was the article titled "Design for Deconstruction." I think the premise of this article is so irrational in terms of the duty of the structural engineer that it is inappropriate for *MSC* magazine, where there are other subjects that would be of greater value to practitioners.

Structural engineers (good ones) expend an inordinate amount of time figuring out today's codes, etc., and then design a practical and economical structure, as easy to construct as possible within the requirements of the architect's design. In today's economic reality, building ownership changes regularly and building uses change from that for which it was originally designed.

The suggestion that consideration be given during the initial design of a

structure to the inclusion of shafts which might make deconstruction easier but with a corresponding loss of floor area (and possible income), and the detailing and arrangement of structural members for possible deconstruction of the building at a future date, is just ludicrous. Your article on the Lillis Business Complex (also in June 2004) makes my point. How could the "tree" column assembly which is a strong visual feature of this building be considered for use in a future building? And if this still cannot be reused, then it must be taken down and separated from that steel which possibly can be reused. The problems and costs are endless.

Since almost all steel removed from a demolition site will be recycled, and some of it will require (gasp) a torch to get it out, why not just let it go at that? Instead of an article on how a building structure should be considered as made up of "Tinkertoys," why not give us a tribute to the inventor of the acetylene torch? Keep up the good work.

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