Roof Management

Roof/Top/Topics

In This Issue…Why Use A Consultant? – Part 1

Why use a roof consultant?

A better question might be why use a consultant instead of using a roofing contractor, architect or manufacturer's rep to give you advice on how to handle your roofing problems? This is a legitimate question and one that we get quite a bit from those organizations using contractors, reps and architects to give them advice on their roofs! We have hesitated in the past to discuss this in these newsletters because our intent has always been to have them be purely informational in nature and not allow them to be viewed as a marketing tool for our particular company. However, smart organizations do recognize that they shouldn't try to handle roofing problems without expert advice and they need to turn somewhere. Therefore, we want to layout in the next few issues some of the tradeoffs involved and why using a consultant is preferable to other sources of advice. Some of the examples we include here do apply to our company, but we think that our examples are representative of many companies in our profession. This first part will focus on the advantages of using a consultant instead of an architect for roofing advice.

Perhaps the best reason to use a roof consultant instead of any other means of getting advice on your roofing problems can be summed up in one word: Experience. In just the last two years the author of this newsletter has been on more than 330 roofs that he had never seen before, in addition to the dozens and dozens of roofs that he sees regularly for his clients. Not only that, but in the majority of the cases the roofs that were looked at had problems present. A good roofing consultant will see more roofs and roof problems in a few months than the typical architectural firm may see in a decade or more. He will see problems (and solutions) that many other designers don't even know exist, simply because he was exposed to much more than they are. While it is true that architectural firms may have some experience with roof design, most of their focus is usually in the context of new construction. Installing a new roof on an existing building is often not nearly as straightforward. There are nuances that a professional consultant will notice that others will miss. Being tuned in to these nuances can result in an installed roof at a lower cost, a better job or both. More importantly, understanding the nuances will help avoid making design choices that can actually build problems into the installation. Here is a classic example:

On the right side of this rubber roof the parapet wall has been covered with a synthetic stucco product that is been widely used in the construction industry called EIFS. At least in the northern half of our country most exterior wall systems that look like stucco are actually EIFS. Sometimes the EIFS is wrapped over the top of the wall as you see here. This detail is "approved" by many EIFS manufacturers. What you see in this picture is that as the EIFS has weathered. The protective surface has begun to flake off. This allows water into the building. This wall leaks! In spite of what the EIFS manufacturers claim EIFS is not nearly as good at repelling water when it is used on a horizontal surface has when it is used on a vertical wall surface. The other problem this detail creates is that when it is time to replace the rubber roof the termination point for the rubber is too close to the roof elevation.

It will be expensive to repair this problem because the best way of dealing with it is to encapsulate the wall with rubber and then install a metal coping, which is what should have been done in the first place. But because the EIFS coping slopes upwards to a point in the middle it will be much more difficult to get a metal coping to fit correctly. The EIFS has numerous small undulations that are not visible from the ground, which will cause the metal coping, when installed, to twist slightly creating a condition called oil-canning. This will be visible from the ground and it will be unsightly. This design choice has created a very expensive problem for this owner and it has occurred simply because the architect doesn't have sufficient experience with roofing. This is a typical example of where a consultant's experience would have saved the owner a lot of money. It is not unique.

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