



“For Better Buildings”

By: Francois Perreault

“ a little bit of Kerby in every building” JCP never spoke so true. And there is probably a bit of JC in every tradesman, contractors and designers. JCP ability to communicate sound building principles with everyone involved in the industry is truly amazing. His background commitment to the construction industry is well represented during his presence on site, or at the office and during his seminars. All would agree that his persistence to increase the awareness for the importance of air barrier in building was most instrumental to the performance of our building envelope of today.

Of course, having received me education on air barrier from JCP (herein after referred to as DAD) even, before we had “The Talk”, my view point maybe a little one sided, but it is with enormous appreciation that I present this summary of my DAD’s life commitment to our construction industry. (note; DAD would probably be referred to by JC as Details And Details). I was very fortunate to have DAD building science insight and education at a very young age. Being young and foolish at that time, meant, that whatever DAD told me, I believed and I never questioning any issues. Fortunately for me, what Dad said, was true, and practical, and full of good sense, and I have proceeded for the rest of my life with this education.

I’m not really sure how and where Dad intensity and commitment to the construction industry started. I wonder if it’s whether he initiated his construction experience in the plastering trade as an apprentice. Such a beautiful trade, he used to say. Or if it was, when he moved the entire family to the eastern tip of the Gaspé Peninsula and started contracting in the stucco world. Or, later on, when we all moved to Alberta and became consultants (the whole family). One thing I know for sure is that JC was very proud of his skill and the industry he had chosen.

JC understood that proper education and training were the keys for successful construction, and with the assistance from the Ministry of Education, began a training school for upcoming plasterers in the old milk barn behind the house. Not only did this training provide him with committed and competent tradesman, he promoted and extended the awareness of the trades, and contributed to the growth of the community.

Maybe it was because of his involvement in the stucco industry that brought him to start questioning methods and his thirst for knowledge of building science principles and its application. I remember that one of his first favorite book was the reprinting of the open page from the Clearing House: Questions and Answers to Construction Problems published by the Gypsum, Lime and Alabastine Association. The book is a marvel and touched many topics related to the construction of the building envelope. JC made it its own little bible to be read over and over again. The book is so worn out, from his constant reading and enjoyment. JC remained constantly proud of being a master plasterer. I loved to hear the old ways how they made and mix the Gypsum, “the rock that nobody knows” he used to said, and so important and widely used.

Somehow, JC must have found the phone number to the National Research Council, NRC, and quickly learned that there was a huge establishment ready to answer all his questions. During those days, the high cost for long distance calls definitely but a burden on his communication thirst, until he realized that the most of the staff took their coffee breaks at the same time, everyday. That when he started calling during the coffee break and left message for them to return his calls, the problem was solved. They would call back, and JC had all the opportunity at hand (and ears). Not only was he able to talk to some of the best experts in building science made available at that time, but entire library and construction related materials was available to him. The Canadian Building Digest, all the Building Research and Practices Notes, and so much more.

From there, DAD starting reading articles from Neil Hutcheon, Kirby Garden, Max Baker, so many of them. Everything was in the books, corrosion, fire, condensation, sound, rain, windows, and of course vapors and air barriers. Every spare moment that he appreciated (being a construction contractor with eight children), was spend reading over and over each chapter and article with great care.



better buildings continued from page 1

But all that reading, often only brought more questions, and I believe that is how it all started. He used to say “nobody reads anymore”.

Later on, in 1969, with thanks to the late Mr. Maurice Boyle, JC was introduced to PCL Construction and almost overnight became their unique trouble shooter for virtually all their projects. Based in Edmonton, DAD traveled all the time, and just about everywhere. There, he had to find the solution to all kinds of problematic conditions encountered on all types of construction projects. And he used to say that you must find the cause of the problem before being able to work out the solution. “Cherchez le trou” he always repeated. Apparently, his secret was to look inside, and if he found holes (trou in French) he would patch them up, and then went outside and made holes.

His construction business travels brought him in Europe and as far as China, but it did not prevent him from constantly communicating with the NRC, and it became known in PCL’s head office, that JC had a bigger phone bill than the president of the company. JC learned the importance for air-tightness from Neil Hutcheon, and saw first hand the disastrous effect that air leakage caused on many projects. Without a doubt, DAD concluded that awareness for continuous air seal had to increase, and for the benefit of us all (for better buildings) started his crusade into the Air Barrier world.

JC was convinced that the knowledge gained and published in the “building research and practices notes” were only collecting dust in the library of the NRC, and, if construction was to succeed, the knowledge had to go “on the road”. Along with Mr. Garden, and many other great presenters, JC introduced us to the beautiful world of construction seminars.

DAD participated in research projects with the CMHC, and his conviction led him to take a leave of absence from PCL and started working closer with the NRC, which included moving temporarily to Ottawa. Left us alone and mortgaged the house.

Working along side of Kirby Garden, Max Baker, with Gus Handegord and many others was like a dream come true for JC, having previously read all their articles. From there, he undertook the development of now famous seminars that we all enjoyed. He brought us simple examples, and used old stories to share his practical knowledge gained through so many projects and research. Remember the “three little pigs” seminar, and “if we built Noah’s Ark today”, the “construction details for air-tightness” presentation, and of course the “Educate or Litigate” conclusive seminar. All these seminars were presented throughout the seventies and early eighties in just about every Canadian capital city and into the USA. It was in 1983 when JC received the Alberta Achievement Award for his constant dedication and excellence in the development of the construction industry.

Once, when PCL and JC were doing well, one competitor had sent a young new manager from down east, and had said to him “you go down there, find out what they’re doing, and come back and show us”. Well, it happened, they met on the plane, sitting beside each other, and became best friends. JC has an enormous talent with people.

Not only was JC’s passion very well understood and recognized in each of his seminar presentations, but it was presented with such a unique humorous side, that no one could escape without shedding a few tears of laughter. And then, there were the slides. Lots and lots of them, all kinds, all aspects and probably one for every configuration of building details, and some very nice educational slides made out of construction paper, made by the Great Kirby.

Slides, slides everywhere in the house, on the floor, covering the drawing table, at the office, and with the slide projector running, JC worked long hours and often through the night selecting and sorting out all his slides for the next day presentation.



better buildings continued from page 2

With a large cloud over his head, just like in the cartoon of the little Indian. A fabulous slide collection, gathered from multiple projects, combined with the treasures left to him by the NRC allowed him to show us images of consequences in all types of failures, so we could understand and prevent them before they happen.

“Awareness is key” was one of DAD’s favorite saying. He also promoted and convinced many builders to educate their site superintendents and field personnel into the better practices of building envelope construction. “Not only should the managers attend my seminars, but the trades and supervisor as well”. JC often commented on the need to educate all the personnel and that the information and knowledge had to be shared and introduced to everyone involved in the construction industry. He loved to work hands-on with the trades, working out problems or preventing them, the more they understood, the better was the building.

That was nearly 20 years ago, and the firmness to educate everyone in the industry for better details and performance of the building envelope construction, initiated the development of the first Canadian building envelope council, ABEC, in Alberta. JC was one of the original driving forces behind this new movement. The main goal was to develop an association where the knowledge gained by multiple and various parties could be shared to everyone through lunch seminar and special presentation, with of course, humor and good food. The building envelope council was formed to allow everyone to share their experiences and insight. This council created a forum for all the industry to benefit from each other. I remember the 10th anniversary gala in Edmonton, where JC was the honored guest, what a event it was, just about everybody was there, even the Glazing Rabbet came. Building envelope councils are now virtually in every Canadian provinces and American states.

Hours and hours, sometime all night long, reviewing architectural drawings, specifications, with project architect, consultants, friends and owners, constantly reminding them of the importance for the continuity of the air barrier, and while solving complex detail configurations into buildable details.

His practical knowledge and hands-on experience assisted him in every step of the way, always finding practical solutions for complex problems.

JC worked with manufacturers, specifications writers, inspectors and field supervisors. DAD used his great communication skill to identify sound building principles and always pursued to increase everyone understanding and comfort to all the building science principles in a simple manner. He introduced us to new products and methods learned abroad and taught us how to apply them in our construction projects, remembering us of the benefit of better air tightness, which resulted in so many other advantages and the increased durability of our buildings.

JC left PCL in the late eighties and continued to share his knowledge through seminars and joined forces with many consulting firms in the building science field. From there, he worked and helped most of us understand simple methods and introduced good advices, benefiting the entire building envelope construction and of course the industry.

In the early 1990s, JC moved from Edmonton to Vancouver, and remained an active consultant in a territory starving for better building practices and sound principles. JC worked vigorously on the design development of numerous projects and assisted many architectural firms in achieving proper construction documents and project specifications. This often resulted in cost savings and definitely, in simplified construction methods and approaches.

Like I said earlier, my point of view may be a little one sided, since I have such a high regards for his constant dedication and an enormous appreciation for the knowledge passed on to me. His experiences are a huge inheritance that assists us everyday in our task for better buildings, and since DAD always had the right phrase, I must quote him on this one “knowledge is very difficult to sell, and if you try to give it away, they will think its worthless.” So now, we are all high price consultant in the building science industry. “con insulant”.

And it sounds like I am not alone recognizing JC talent
better buildings continued on page 4

better buildings continued from page 3

“Jean-Claude Perreault has made a remarkable contribution to the construction industry as a whole, not only in Canada, but throughout North America. Claude has developed a well deserved reputation for professional expertise and integrity.”
J. Blanchfield, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

“Mr. Perreault has a unique ability to review designs and pinpoint trouble areas very quickly and has the ability to use economical means to deal with the problems.”
S.Schimdt, Schimdt Feldberg Groll Henderson

“It is essential that experience in the field, which is the real and final test, be recorded and communicated. Jean-Claude Perreault has excelled in this field.”
G. Handegord, Building Science Researcher.

“It is gratifying to have friends like you, Casey and a few others who are striving to further the struggle for more knowledge, consideration and effort to produce better buildings.”

The great Kirby, Sorcerer to the apprentice.

“There are four basic causes of building failures... Ignorance, Carelessness, Negligence and Greed, Ignorance is the only one we can do anything about”
Jean-Claude Perrault

“for better Buildings”

This article is dedicated to Michel Perreault, who passed away with his heart in Building Science.

p.s. DAD is living quietly in Edmonton and continues sketching construction details.

Thank you DAD,

Cherchez le trou !, cherchez le trou !, Napoleon used to say; Chercher la femme, for the cause of the problem.

Francois, the author of this article, the sixth child down the line, is just like his DAD. Started young, passionate for building construction, a tradesman, a contractor, manufacturer representative, field superintendent, consultant, educator, and of course

Plus, not only him, our youngest son following in their footsteps now. JC Perreault & Sons may turn out to be a legend yet. Odette must have always known.

Micheline Perreault

About the Author

Francois Perreault owns and operate BPA building Performance Analysts Ltd. In Vancouver, BC. His background has taken on a similar path as his father and brother, and faces the same challenge on a daily basis. Francois has the same humorous methods and communications skills with the workforce on site, and become a great educator in classroom or design studios. Prevention through education and awareness is a lesson learned that Francois is glad to share with everyone. Francois can be reached at fp@bpa-ltd.com