

SPECIFICATIONS, FUNDAMENTALLY

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The most dismaying and damning aspect of specifications is the lack of fundamental understanding, and proper utilization of them in practice.

It is a shameful commentary that at the 2006 convention of the AIA, in one group when asked who read specifications 5% of the hands were raised. Now this could be attributed to the fact that AIA attendees are upper echelon principals, designers, marketers, or others in the phases of practice away from mainstream documentation and construction [and not the grunts in document production and the field]. Of course, a specification writer would be a rare participant in this venue, as would a designer at the CSI convention!

Specifications seem to be much like the building codes, "baffling, frustrating and a dull business" in the eyes of all too many architects, and engineers, too.

Perhaps not to excuse this situation but to explain it, it is widely held that English is not the most popular topic in high school or college classes. Using words is often conflicted and difficult, and then too, what you write is lasting, and can come back to or at you strongly and often. Whereas the spoken word is heard for a moment and then lost. Here is where so many are "misquoted" when their words are remembered differently by various parties—but can never really be firmly re-established [unlike the written word, in full black and white!]

All too many professional schools in large part are direct contributors to this malaise. Their penchant to teach limited areas of professional practice—design for example—at the shameful exclusion of a full range of at least introductory level instruction about the whole of practice, leaves specifications as an untold story. This produces graduates who do not know what specifications are, what they look like, how they are formulated and written, nor how they are utilized in actual practice on real projects.

Any one who has taught in such programs knows well the difficulty in establishing any type of real-world practice instruction. Either time and/or budget do not permit it; it can be an elective [avoided by most who don't understand what the intent and content are]; and at the surging disdain of the other more theoretical faculty. Many programs proclaim that "it is not their job to train students for practice"—what????]

Construction personnel are so heaped with technical and administrative work that they dismiss specifications as avoidable necessary evils, fully lacking the rudimentary understanding in that the specifications are direct communications from the owner via the design professionals. And the information in them is crucial to the work required, and in the best interest of all contractual parties.

Oddly enough, the one group that both understands and uses specifications is attorneys. In any legal proceeding, the first document reached for are the specifications. Being word oriented, the attorneys look immediately to the unavoidable written word, where every-- and that means EVERY-- nuance or glitch can be challenged, twisted or interpreted. Suddenly the drawings are all but irrelevant and the "specs" become the battle ground. Attorneys for the most part are confounded by drawings, having no training in their reading or development. But give them "words", and they shine!

Herein is an obvious, deeply challenging direction for the CSI--

NO !, it's a clanging gong, or a clarion call!

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Although with a rather stellar background in information location, specifications writing procedures, and associated programs, there is a crying need for CSI to come out strongly with a program of fundamental discussion of specifications from the layperson level, throughout academia, up to and throughout all design and construction personnel and organizations. This is not necessarily to give legitimacy to specifications, but rather to provide "Dick and Jane" information that shows the basic premise of project specifications-- their concept, their composition, their use and their massive contribution to communication and legal status needed by projects.

CSI with its basic charge, its direction and dedicated path cannot ignore this situation any longer. Although the trigger came from outside and may even be deemed meager, it is nonetheless all too obvious that the linkage between contract drawings and contract specifications is at high risk simply due to lack of information, and rudimentary instruction.

CSI needs, NOW, a series of efforts for the student professionals up to and including all associated organizations, and even the general public that explains, fully, clearly and unequivocally what specifications are; how they are developed; what they contain; how they function; and how they are fully co-equal partners with the drawings in all construction projects [this might even extend to people buildings new homes].

**Neither the drawings,
nor the specs,
alone,
can produce projects:**

**it is *the inseparable, coordinated combination*
that does produce projects.**