

## **SPECIFICATIONS!-- REALLY!!!!**

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Let's get serious! *No construction project can be built without specifications—period!*

It is impossible to use drawings as the only vehicle for communicating information and directions for the construction of a structure. There are elements and pieces of information that simply defy depiction, or graphic representation. There are descriptive information snippets, attributes, intangible comments, and etc. that are not visual or graphic by nature-- they are "word products".

It can be argued that one can place suitable [??] notations on the drawings that replace specifications. But come on, those notes need to be so extensive, and detailed that they are, indeed, specifications! Simply because they are located on the drawings does not take away their intent and impact. These notes are fully equivalent in intent to any Project Manual or other set of specifications.

But in addition there is an inherent risk in drawing notes as specifications. This is their extent, and coverage. For a minute imagine how many drawing sheets would be required to display all the pages in a given Project Manual. Now what material can be reduced or eliminated, in the drawing notes, that will still do the job required, but with fewer words? And, oh yes, by the way, do they retain their legal status? How "attackable" are they by any one intent on finding their faults, or twisting their direction and intent?

While the traditional language of construction is "plans and specs", there has been a continuing diminutions of the status and regard for specifications. In large measure this has come, in fairness, from two sources-- design professionals, and contractors. Surprising? Not really.

A strong underlying issue in every project is that the owner receives full measure for dollar paid. This can be easily translated into the premise that what is shown on the drawings and required in the specifications is exactly the—and the only!—solution. No comment required! The contained instructions to the contractor are "do it this way, and don't ask any questions".

But of course, with the documents resulting from a human effort, there are gaps, contradictions, and conflicts, which tend to confound the contractors. In addition are problems with indistinct instructions or depictions, and the lack of information necessary to faithfully complete the work. But even in face of this reality, all too many design professionals have engaged in an unrealistic stance akin to [if not] "We don't issue Change Orders! Just do the work as shown/depicted!"

So contractors have over the years become quite prickly about all this. Many, if not all, have become quite adept at seeking, finding, and working with the shortcomings of the project documents. Those who choose to be most unscrupulous even bid projects on the basis of "going in low, and making a handsome profit off of overpricing the necessary Change Orders, along the way". While there is some justification for added cost to incorporate and adjust the work for the changes, there is no justification for simply gouging the owner as part of gamesmanship.

But in another view, contractors do have a case for looking down their noses at specifications. Being primarily skilled, hands-on personalities, the contractors are not into word games, or written communications. This is not an attack on their intelligence or knowledge, but rather how they approach their work. Too often the contractors have been stung by specifications wording

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that was either excessive or restrictive, or which was not all that apparent to them [i.e., the "hidden" requirements].

In trying to be most diligent in achieving the desired result for their clients, many design professionals have seen fit to create an array of specifications provisions, so complex, so convoluted, and so intertwined that they have really encumbered the trade workers in the field, and the contractors' managers in the office. This is as much as a deterrent to good relations, and smooth running projects as the contractors "working" the shortcomings of the documents.

Also, it must be remembered that where disputes exist, and attorneys begin to appear, the "words" become imminently more important. Attorneys work with words, to the benefit of their client. Often this involves new interpretations, and convolution of intent to create new and threatening situations. Project drawings are not the fore' of the attorney, but words give them all sorts of "ammunition" to discredit and unravel good intentions, and what were perceived to be direct and valid provisions. A good tactic seems to be every effort to create documentation and project conditions where the attorney is a non-player.

Reality says that each faction needs to loosen up and understand that perfection is not required [read the case law], and is really not achievable. There is a grave and growing need for tolerance, one for the other, and the added effort at making the team concept both workable and the primary direction of the project. This IS NOT a competition, nor a fight for survival of the "fittest"—it is a mutual business venture, working for the benefit of a third party. Both design professional and contractor are "in the same boat", so to speak, and their common goal [!!!!] is [should or must be] the successful completion of the project, AS THE CLIENT/OWNER expects and anticipates.

In this, specifications must be written, understood, and utilized on the same basis as the drawings—in a fully complementary and supplementary manner, combined to facilitate the project work, to the benefit [and profit!] of ALL parties.\*