



# BUILDING ANALYSTS



"THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT WE HAD IN MIND  
WHEN WE DESIGNED POTSHELVES"

## WHAT ARE POTSHELVES?

“Potshelf” is a convenient design term used to describe a wide variety of horizontal projections on homes and other small-scale buildings to provide additional design interest. These features are commonly used to accentuate windows, entries, patios and other focal points of the exterior. Depending on the style theme of the building, these may incorporate stucco, wood, brick, tile, rock, or metal surfaces and features.

## WHY YOU MAY NOT WANT TO PUT POTS ON THESE SHELVES . . .

As projections of the building exterior, potshelves often are essentially small “roofs” or penetrations of the exterior “building envelope”, and therefore present numerous opportunities for leakage and failure if not properly conceived and carefully constructed:

- Inadequately sloped near-horizontal surfaces that do not direct water away from the building
- Insufficient protective covering or waterproof assembly
- Poorly detailed edges, corners, and integration of the potshelf elements with the weather barrier of the adjoining building wall and related window flashing
- Insufficiently sealed penetrations such as railings, exposed fasteners, and exposed supports that pierce the building envelope

Any one or combination of these potential problems may lead to damage of the potshelf and the adjoining building and its finishes and contents, often with a slow, progressive failure of the assembly.

Unfortunately, many potshelf assemblies include wood-framed voids – inaccessible box-like cavities – which, along with wall stud cavities, conceal initial leakage and provide moisture-retaining areas for growth of mold and dry-rot out of sight of the occupants until later failure of the surrounding framing or finishes and related indoor health risk. These potshelf building features also tend to require a higher level of maintenance not initially obvious to the average homeowner.

## SOLUTIONS

The real solution to these concerns is prevention through proper design and construction. Unfortunately, it may end up being proper re-design and reconstruction. In either case, sufficient attention must be given to all of the elements noted above regarding finishes, protection, details, and flashing, plus some additional specific cautions or considerations:

### STUCCO-FINISHED POTSHELVES:

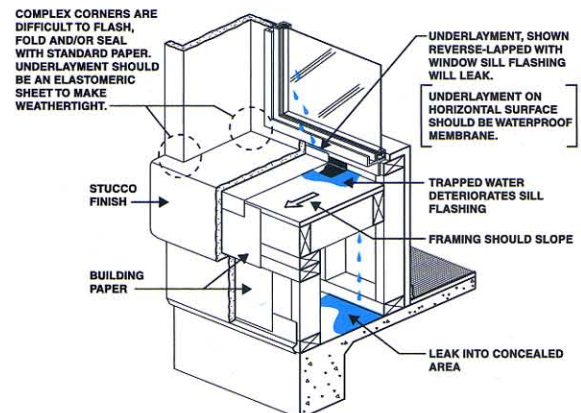
- Good surface slope for drainage
- A sloped waterproof membrane underlayment that is fully weather lapped with adjacent wall weather barriers and flashing
- Avoidance of any penetration of the potshelf surface

### EXPOSED WOOD POTSHELVES OR SUPPORTING ELEMENTS:

- Avoid hard-to-flash-and-seal wood penetration of the wall barrier
- Minimize the amount of wood-on-wood contact which facilitates dry-rot fungus growth through trapped water
- Consider pressure-treated wood for longevity where wood is exposed to the weather or close to grade
- Prime and paint all sides and ends of exposed wood members

### OTHER MATERIALS AND FINISHES:

- Other materials may require special flashing or membrane assemblies specifically suited to their use, which then must be integrated with adjacent wall weather barriers and flashing
- Appropriate drainage and protective finishes recommended for the particular material



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