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Coast2Coast Comfort Report

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The "Pain" of Not Knowing.

By Gary Hayden

A builder friend is constructing a new house. Trying my hardest with best salesman's hat on, understanding I could get several "nos" during the process of convincing him that radiant floor heating would be great for his new million dollar bay front home - he didn't bite. I even drew up detailed sketches on how the framing for the floor would be built out to support a light weight concrete system; this is where you staple the plastic pipe (PEX or PEX-AL-PEX) down on top of the sub-floor and then cover the pipe with a light weight concrete material. Then the floor covering is applied over that thermal mass. Easy to do these days with free floating flooring systems. The builder's excuse on a million dollar home - radiant floor heating is too expensive. I think the real challenge was and is "change", not "expense". He has built many houses with what he considers a "tried and true" HVAC system and always uses the same heating contractor. Much like going to a fast food restaurant, you know what you are going to get. He personally has never experienced radiant heat, at least not enough to want to make a "change". He is now in his new home, and it is a beautiful home. He installed a really cool video system so that he can see who is at the front door when he is on the 2nd and 3rd levels of the house. Nice elevator, so that when he wants, he can ride up the 4 different levels. Beautiful kitchen and master bath with the best tile and counters. The guy is truly gifted in his attention to details.

When he started developing the property, he had to clear an existing house

“It is just that my friend has never experienced the pain of not having radiant comfort, therefore he does not see the value in it, and therefore he does not have it. It's not that he can't afford it, as his added expenses of the elevator, video system and counters showed that he could have. But he is not willing to change what has worked for him for many years from his experience.”



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and then prepare the footings for the new home. Being right on a beach, he had to drive piles. You never know what you are going to get into when you drive piles. What he got into was all the piles were splitting as they went in. There was rock or something that the piles would not penetrate without destroying themselves. So he had to pull the pile driver off the job and then pay a special contractor to come in and do what is known as compaction. This was like starting over on his foundation. And he was rolling with the punches so to speak. He managed to satisfy the building inspectors that he had provided an adequate situation for his footers. And built on from there, and like I said earlier, it is a beautiful home. It was just a normal part of building for him, to pay out the extra money for the site/foundation work, but he knew how important this was to the success of the project.

So granted foundations are important and other budgets will be cut to get them right if you have a good builder. **But as everyone finds out sooner than later, the HVAC system is just as important, especially with the issue of comfort.** Foundations are taken for granted by most homeowners. Think about it, during the construction process the foundation takes 1/3 of the building schedule for some properties. It seems like nothing is really happening when one drives by the project. Then all of a sudden the structure goes up and there is this realization that things are really happening (The perception- is- reality syndrome). **So if foundations are taken for granted by the homeowner, imagine what the chances are that the best HVAC system is going to show up in the house if the builder and the homeowner are accepting any system with no special interest.** I see ½ million dollar homes selling with little concern for the existing heating and air conditioning system. I know of a home that has an oil fired boiler converted to natural gas (never a good idea) that used \$700 worth of natural gas in each of the past two Januaries. The previous owners transferred this burden to the new owners. It never came up in the house inspection that it was a problem. Once the pain of the gas bills went away from the winter season, different financial decisions are made during the summer season. The previous owners opted to buy two new \$1500 dollar bicycles during the summer instead of a new boiler. The new owners choose new decks and other home improvements and will try and make it through another winter. The biggest selling season for boiler a company is early fall when boilers are supposed to be kicking on.

Being a good "neighbor" - I have stayed mum about the new boiler decision making process. Good fences make good "neighbors" kind of deal. I have told the new owners that when they are ready I can help them. But I think they are positioned like a family on a road vacation with bad tires and a worn serpentine belt and I have told them so in the nicest, politest way that I know how. I guess we just never see busted down boilers on the side of the road.

I asked my builder friend if he managed to stay within budget (he had

long forgot about me suggesting floor heating) and he said that he did not have a budget for the house. And from his horror stories regarding getting the foundation in, he would have surely exceeded it if he had one.

Fortunately he was building this house for his own use, and I am sure that he is experienced enough to put "rock" clauses in contracts with his own clients. So it wasn't, in my opinion, whether he could have afforded radiant heating, it was that he did not feel that he could take the chance on installing it and changing what he has figured out so well in the construction process.

So what is my point here regarding radiant floor heating's afford ability and comfort? It is just that my friend has never experienced the pain of not having radiant comfort, therefore he does not see the value in it, and therefore he does not have it. It's not that he can't afford it, as his added the expenses of the elevator, video system and counters showed that he could have. But he is not willing to change what has worked for him for many years from his experience. He has a tried and true method of building.

I read recently in one of the major trade magazines that out of their top 10 literature requests, radiant floor heating is related to 8 of the top 10. Here, again, is good evidence that people are interested in radiant floor heating. Recent news from the Radiant Panel Association is that pipe sales are at an all time record growth with an increase of 38% during 2004. The benefits are numerous and can be recited by most of us. But unless you have felt the pain of not having it, then chances are you will not really want it bad enough to make a change, especially if you are a tried and true builder. So next time you are sitting in your nice cozy sun drenched car while the cold win is blowing just outside, or better yet, you are on your sun porch with triple pain windows and the sun is blazing, take that sun away and you will feel the PAIN, and believe me, the car heater and the furnace coming on will be nothing but a little "morphine". I have felt this pain, and there is nothing more comfortable than radiant floor heating and the investment to learn how to install it is minimal, compared to the cost of not having it.

By Gary Hayden

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The Pain of Not Knowing

Without experiencing the delightful sensation of heated bathroom floors and walls, one never develops the appreciation for high levels of comfort.