

PRODUCTS

by Andy Engel

Lighting the Night

Designer post caps



Steve Hodes Jr. is a Web designer, but he comes from good stock: His father is a builder and remodeler. When Hodes was building his own home, he teamed up with John Cale, an artist and lighting designer (www.calestudio.com), to make custom lighted newel caps from hammered bronze. Enough people admired them that Hodes launched Moonlight Decks to manufacture and sell the caps.

The price of bronze has since spiked, and caps of this material now sell for \$235 — pricing a lot of folks out of the market. So Hodes also offers hammered-aluminum cap lights for \$85 each, in four metallic finishes (custom colors are available). Now, if the mention of aluminum has you thinking flashing, you're on the wrong track. The metal Hodes uses is nearly 1/4 inch thick, as you might expect from a man used to Kansas City's intense summer hail storms. The caps come in three sizes to fit full 6x6 posts, as well as nominal 6x6s and 4x4s. Low-voltage halogen or xenon bulbs can be used.

In the works is a solar-powered cap light, with a projected cost of \$87.50. Instead of the blue/white LEDs common to a lot of solar landscape lighting — which Hodes says can look like "a bunch of bug zappers on your deck" — yellow LEDs that shed a warm, inviting glow will be used.

All of Hodes's cap lights are made in the USA.

■ **Moonlight Decks**, 913/638-1685,
www.moonlightdecks.com

Composite Decking Looks Like Hardwood

Comes factory-kerfed for hidden fasteners



Created in two colors to resemble jatoba and mahogany decking, Fiberon's Tropic line is ready to install using its proprietary PhantomFastener hidden connector (made by Tiger Claw). Boards are smooth on both sides, and can be installed either side up. The cost at lumberyards in Connecticut is about \$4 per lineal foot for 5/4x6 planks.

■ **Tropics by Fiberon**, 704/463-7120,
www.fiberondecking.com

PRODUCTS

DockSider

Stylish for walking on, too



Designed to plank waterside structures, TimberTech's new 5/4x6 DockSider decking is a full 1 1/4 inches thick. It can span 24 inches, saving you a few joists and fasteners, as well as the trips to the waterfront to get them there. DockSider is made from a dense blend of maple wood flour and virgin polymers, says TimberTech product manager Jeffrey Burr, and is a good choice for decks as well as docks, when a firmer feel underfoot is wanted.

Available in 12-foot, 16-foot, and 20-foot lengths, DockSider works like other composite decking. TimberTech recommends screwing it down; Burr advises using 316 stainless steel screws in marine environments.

Both faces of DockSider decking are slip-resistant, one brushed and embossed, and the other what TimberTech calls "serrated." The two available colors — gray and cedar — are made with organic pigments that Burr says stay "cooler than the competition." Cost varies regionally from \$3.10 to \$3.50 per lineal foot.

■ **TimberTech**, 800/307-7780, www.timbertech.com

Who Said Joists Have to Be Wood?

Steel deck-joist system



Certainly no one at Xccent, who with partner Dietrich Metal Framing is marketing powder-coated galvanized-steel joists for decks (in three colors). Listening to Xccent's Erik Frye rattle off the advantages of steel deck framing had me wondering why it's not the standard. Says Frye, "Steel's strength-to-weight ratio is far superior to wood's, so not only can a steel joist span farther than the same depth wood joist, it's easier to place because it's lighter. Steel joists avoid the corrosion issues associated with ACQ-treated lumber joists, and can be used with any type of decking material. Xccent steel joists are straight and noncombustible."

Working with steel joists differs from working with wood, as all structural connections are made with self-tapping screws and steel brackets. Decking also affixes with self-tapping screws. Field cuts are made using a metal cutting blade in a circular saw or chop saw, and cut ends must be coated with factory-supplied spray paint. Newels can be attached with a proprietary bracket, or secured to treated-lumber blocking. ACQ-treated lumber must be separated from Xccent framing members with a bituminous membrane such as Grace Deck Protector.

Xccent will help with design, but you'll need to hire an engineer if your local inspector requires an engineer's stamp (even though the 2006 IRC covers steel framing extensively). Dealers are hard to find — there's one in the Denver area and several throughout the Midwest. Xccent will ship to individual contractors, however. Lead time for shipment from Wisconsin is two to three weeks.

Cost is around \$4.50 per square foot, higher than the price of treated lumber, but some of the difference may be made up by less expensive fasteners and by lower contractor costs, thanks to working with lighter material.

■ **Xccent**, 800/933-4748, www.xccentdecking.com ❖

Bulletproof Rail Anchors

RailLok brackets speed and strengthen rail-to-post connections



You may be familiar with DeckLok brackets, metal framing connectors used to beef up deck-to-house and newel-to-deck connections. A smaller version is now available to secure wood railings to newels. According to Jim Miller, DeckLok's vice president of operations, the RailLok started out as a miniature of the DeckLok, made only for display. But last year, a trade-show attendee asked where he could buy the miniature DeckLoks — to use on fences — and an idea was born.

Installing RailLoks looks to be a snap — shoot four 1½-inch screws through the back of the bracket into the post, drop in a horizontal 2x4, and secure it with another 1½-inch screw from below. Miller claims that in most cases, the 2x4 will break before the RailLok fails.

Available in stainless (\$10) or powder-coated steel that's rated for ACQ contact (\$8), RailLoks aren't cheap. A deck builder's liability lasts a long time, though, and Miller believes these brackets will outlast the wood they support. Custom sizes and colors can also be had.

■ **DeckLok**, 866/617-3325, www.deck-lok.com