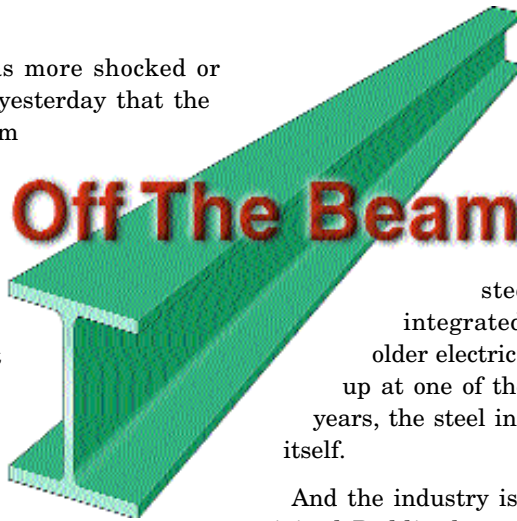


I'm not sure whether I was more shocked or bemused to read in the newspaper yesterday that the price of a single share of Amazon.com was almost equal to the combined price of a single share of all the major domestic steel mills, including Bethlehem Steel, Nucor and USX. I guess I shouldn't be too surprised, though. It's merely another manifestation of the almost daily comments I hear about how supposedly staid the steel industry is. The all-too-common refrain describes the steel design and construction industry as "mature" and "unexciting." Or—this being the Era of Clinton—it's described as "not being sexy."

Every time I hear this, though, I take it as a personal affront. Obviously, I'm not doing my job properly if readers of this magazine are unaware of the amazing and exciting changes going on in the steel design and construction industry.

Take software, for example. In addition to the myriad number of increasingly powerful design, analysis, detailing and CNC products available, work is progressing at a feverish pace to develop a single standard to facilitate the transfer of information from one program to another. This EDI standard will even further the remarkable gains in productivity already experienced by everyone in the steel industry—from engineers to detailers—through the use of computers.

Even steel itself is changing. Just when designers and fabricators are finally completely comfortable with A572, the industry is moving to a new material grade for structural shapes: A992. The material, which has the same weldability as A572 Gr. 50, has a minimum yield point of 50 ksi and a maximum of 65 ksi and a maximum



yield-to-tensile ratio of 0.85. This is the first structural material grade with both a minimum and maximum yield point. If you want to see a rapidly changing industry, pay a visit to three steel mills. Start at one of the old integrated mills, then move to one of the older electric arc furnace mills before finishing up at one of the newest mills. In just a score of years, the steel industry has completely reinvented itself.

And the industry is continuing to change. I recently visited Peddinghaus for their biennial Octoberfest, where they open their plant to visitors from around the world and showcase their latest fabrication equipment. Their latest machines punch through steel in seconds and cut through it like butter; they even have a new one for applying a precise level of camber in just minutes.

Peddinghaus is not alone, though. If you read through the pages of this magazine or walk through the exhibit hall at the North American Steel Construction Conference (scheduled for May 19-22, 1999 in beautiful Toronto), you'll see product after product with new features. Finally, building design is once more becoming bold and exciting. AISC's Engineering Awards of Excellence (see pages 40-41 for more information) regularly congratulate designers for their innovative use of steel, while the biennial I.D.E.A.S. Awards commemorate the best in aesthetic design (see pages 50-51 for more information).

So while the steel design and construction industry may not have the upscale image of Amazon.com, it actually produces a product—and an amazing one at that!

*Scott Melnick*

Editor & Publisher

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