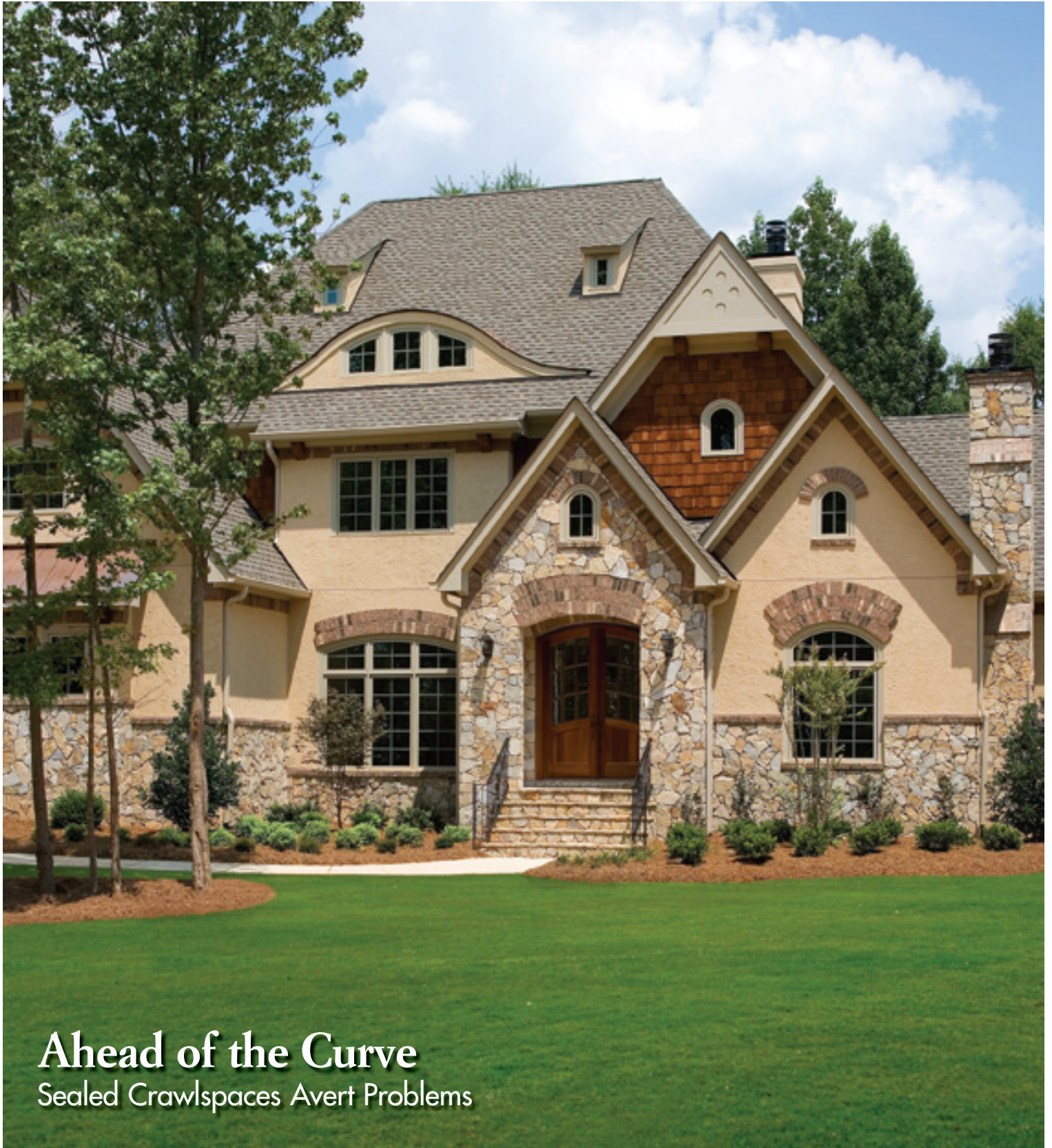

Today's
CUSTOM HOME

CHARLOTTE'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO BUILDING OR REMODELING YOUR CUSTOM HOME • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007



Ahead of the Curve
Sealed Crawlspace Avert Problems

Sealed crawlspaces like the one shown at left help prevent moisture from causing mold and mildew problems, such as those shown in the crawlspace on the right, and ultimately help to prevent them from becoming issues in your living areas.



Sealed Crawlspaces Avert Problems

By Paul Starkowicz • Photos courtesy of MoistureLoc, Inc.

Ahead of the Curve

Moisture. Mold. Mildew. They've always been around, but we tend to hear more these days about the health issues they present and the damage they can do to homes. A source has also become apparent: the crawl space.

For decades, building codes and conventional wisdom have prescribed natural ventilation that uses foundation vents to let in outside air as the primary method of moisture control in crawl spaces. Unfortunately in the southeast, the outside air is very humid, which in turn can cause moisture problems under the home.

"The ultimate goal is to keep the moisture level below 70 percent," says Jim Brettman, COO and General Manager of MoistureLoc, Inc., which specializes in residential and commercial waterproofing and drainage systems. "Spring and summer months in the Carolinas can produce humidity levels of up to 90% under the home. This can cause severe moisture problems." Moisture problems may ultimately lead to mildew and mold damage in the crawl space or living area, musty odors, buckled hardwood floors, insect infestations and high humidity throughout a home. All of those factors can lead to health problems.

In the southeast, we're currently not required by code to incorporate sealed or closed crawlspace systems in place of vented dirt crawl spaces. Advocates like Advanced Energy and the U.S. Department of Energy, among others, are pushing for change. Advanced Energy is a Raleigh-based, independent non-profit corporation founded in 1980 by the N.C. Utilities Commission to investigate and implement new technologies. "There is a need to make building codes accommodate and provide for closed crawlspace construction," claim Advanced Energy's researchers. The research group conducted a study among 12 identical owner-occupied homes with various

ventilation systems. Their findings supported that for the humid conditions of the southeast, "properly closed crawlspaces were a robust measure that produced substantially drier crawlspaces and significantly reduced occupied space conditioning energy use on an annual basis."

Provisions in the local building code are already changing, according to Brettman. "Sealed and closed crawls are an option in the code right now. The next step will likely make them a preferred option, and ultimately, the only option," he says.

Some local builders have elected to embrace these systems before they are required. "I do it 100% across the board," says Sajjan Dhaliwal of Jas-Am, Inc. "This way, the crawlspace is conditioned just like the rest of the house. There is no moisture. It stops mold from growing up through the wood that can make people sick, and alleviates excess moisture that would really damage the structure of the house." Jas-Am has built distinctive custom homes in Charlotte for the past 15 years, each personally supervised by Dhaliwal. He has hired MoistureLoc to install a Sealed Crawlspace System in every home he's built for the past year. "Our customers see value in it," he says.

So does it make sense to seal crawl spaces, especially in the southeast? "I highly recommend it," says Dhaliwal. "I never saw any reason to have a crawlspace that is not conditioned. It merely makes sense."

While those building a new home may want to include a sealed crawlspace in their plans as a matter of course, owners of existing homes with vented crawl spaces don't have to settle for the status quo. They can turn to MoistureLoc's Sealed Crawl Space Systems to "Loc Out" the dangers of moisture, mold and mildew in their home as well. ■

MoistureLoc, Inc. has specialized in sealing, waterproofing and water damage repair since 1988. MoistureLoc is a member of the Home Builders Association, Better Business Bureau and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. For more information or a free evaluation, visit www.moistureloc.com or call (704) 554-9229 or (888) 444-4167.