



Grasdakke • Thatchers

Some of the most common cons in the Thatching Industry

Many clients, architects and engineers cannot identify common cons in the industry. Some of the most common are as follows:

1. The measurement of poles. A typical pole size is given as 100-125mm x 3.6m. 100 designates the *minimum* diameter on the *thin* end of the pole and 125 designates the *maximum* diameter on the *thick* end of the pole. The thick end diameter of the pole varies, but an accepted norm is that the pole tapers by 5% per meter. Many roofs are built with undersized poles and the responsible person is unaware as they are led to believe a pole is measured on the thick end. Keep in mind the minimum pole diameter that may be used for thatch structures is 100-125mm, as per SANS 10407.
2. Thatch layer thickness. Many Thatchers will lay an eaves layer that is 200mm thick, then taper the layer to the ridge where the thickness ends up as little as 75mm. It is not obvious once the roof is complete as all that changes is a slight change of angle on the thatch surface. Gable ended roofs are more difficult to cheat as the taper then becomes obvious. On completion of the thatching the thatch layer thickness should be checked randomly over the entire roof surface. SANS 10407 specifies a minimum layer of 175mm.
3. Bolted structural connections. Structures are built and on inspection it seems that the main stress connections are bolted, however on closer inspection it is sometimes found the connection is actually a 150mm wire nail fitted with a washer and nut. The fraud connection is very often not seen from ground level but seen only on closer inspection.
4. Rafter spacing. SANS 10407 dictates a maximum centre to centre spacing of 900mm. Many roofs are built where this maximum is exceeded.
5. Lath spacing. The spacing of laths is determined by the average length of grass used. SANS 10407 tables the maximum lath spacing for a given grass length. Closer spacing than tabled is acceptable. The more often a bundle is stitched to the structure the more durable the thatch layer.
6. Stitching. Only tarred sisal twine or stainless steel wire is to be used with a maximum spacing of 100mm.
7. Roof slope. The minimum *general* roof slope is to be a minimum of 45 degrees. The reason for this is that any valley or hip is always approximately 10 degrees flatter than the general roof slope giving the minimum roof slope of 35 degrees allowed. The general roof slope impacts dramatically on the slope area of the roof. A major saving can be made by the thatcher by building the roof a few degrees flatter than specified.
8. Free standing roofs. These roofs are supported by columns. The footings of these columns affect the overall stability of the roof and adequate footings, preferable specified by an engineer, be installed. Many columns are planted in the ground too shallow and without the necessary concrete footing the size of which is determined by the roof load and soil conditions. Concrete footings should not encase the bottom of the pole as this will accelerate rotting by not allowing drainage.
9. Bad design. Never allow overlapping thatch surfaces. The drainage water falling from the higher roof onto a lower thatch surface accelerates rotting on the lower surface as the penetration of water into the layer is deeper and takes longer to dry. In general the

drainage of water from thatch roofs is an important factor in the design of thatch roofs as all drainage areas such as valleys will degrade faster than general roof slopes.

10. Thatch roofs with ceilings. Many thatchers will not install a ceiling or “sprei” layer in thatch roofs fitted with ceilings. This results in an under surface with the fines of the thatch bundles exposed which in the advent of a fire will accelerate burning. Ceiling grass should always be installed irrespective of normal ceilings being fitted.