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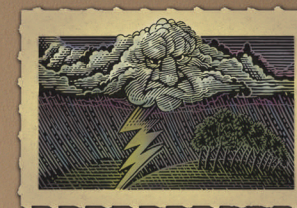
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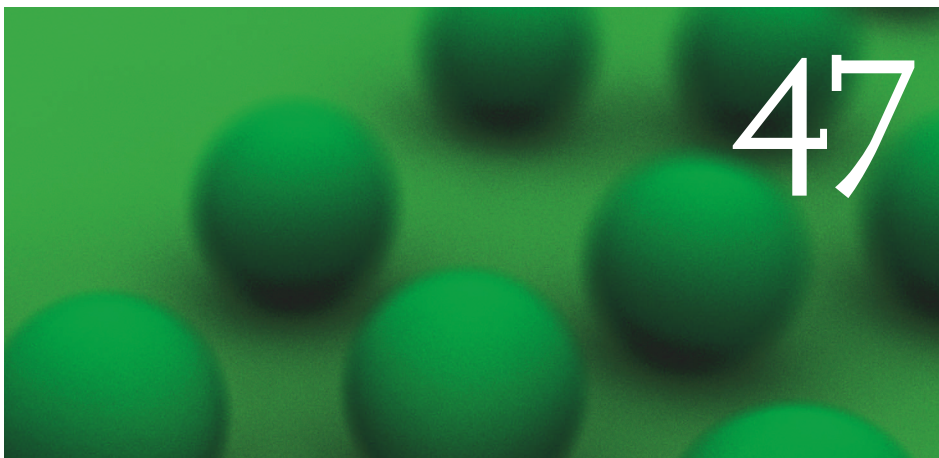


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# i**nn**ovation

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# Build More Profit per Square Foot

## Use Plywood or OSB Walls

**T**oday's building environment is about meeting customer needs and maintaining or increasing your margins on each house. APA and industry research has uncovered several reasons why builders who sheath with wood make higher profits. Among them are greater design options, smooth framing inspections and fewer expenses related to warranty work.

### IMPROVE DESIGN FLEXIBILITY



**PARTIALLY SHEATHED**



**FULLY SHEATHED**

When customers upgrade to larger or more doors and windows, are you prepared to maximize your profits on the up sale? Builders who sheath with foam (House **A**) or other nonstructural products may not be able to install such profitable upgrades without redesigning the home and resubmitting the plan to the building department.

#### HERE'S WHY:

"Fully sheathing with wood solves 95% of design and bracing issues," said Zeno Martin, a research engineer with APA's technical division. Given a limited footprint with which to work, builders using plywood or OSB walls increase their net profit per square foot through the ability to meet upgrade requests without extensive redesign or lost time. (House **B**).

Notice the 16 inch garage return walls in House **B** versus the 4 foot return walls in House **A**. Only fully sheathed homes can use this Narrow Wall Bracing Method, an inexpensive, easy-to-build bracing detail that takes advantage of wood's superior strength. This design flexibility allows a wider door in the garage and the ability to move or increase the number of windows and doors elsewhere. House **A** has much less design flexibility because foam adds no code-recognized structural value.



### MINIMIZE DRYWALL REPAIRS



Sheathing with plywood or OSB improves your net profit by reducing one of the most common callbacks: drywall repairs.

#### HERE'S WHY:

Over time, walls move. Foam sheathing has no strength to prevent the walls from racking, which leads to drywall cracks. Fully sheathed walls help prevent this problem, help the house stay square and reduce the occurrence of sticky doors and windows.

### AVOID WAVY SIDING



Wavy siding is one of the most noticeable yet easily prevented flaws in a new home. Applying lap siding over foam sheathing is not a good idea.

#### HERE'S WHY:

Irregularities in framing, and siding fasteners that miss studs, can lead to wavy siding and callbacks when nonstructural sheathing is used as a wall substrate. Plywood or OSB sheathing helps to provide a smooth, flat and solid nailbase, which imparts crisp, clean lines for all types of lap siding, including engineered wood, vinyl and cement board.

Trade publications have informally surveyed large builders who track their callback expenses. The costs associated with callbacks and repairs were estimated at roughly \$500 per home, while the annual hard costs ranged up to 2% of sales. Further analysis into callbacks, wall sheathing applications and code compliant wall bracing is available at [www.wallbracing.org](http://www.wallbracing.org).

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# Earth, wind and fire

## More On Coastal Building

Thanks for featuring my company in the July 2006 issue of *Professional Builder* in "The Complete Guild to Coastal Building." I love it when a writer interviews you and gets the facts right and your quotes right. My thanks to Marcia Jedd for a good job.

I wanted to add some input on the article on backup power systems. As this was related to coastal living needs, I thought an important issue was missed in the article. One needs to consider the outer housing around the generator. I live on the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia and put a Generac generator in my new home two and a half years ago as a natural gas backup system. My electrician was not experienced enough to realize that installing a generator with metal housing was the wrong application for a coastal environment. The salt air has just about rusted out my new generator, making its replacement within a year or so a necessity. Generac makes aluminum housing for their generators that I didn't know about and is a must for generators in coastal installations.

Also, on my recent annual maintenance check, the mechanic said that I have sand inside the carburetor that has probably infiltrated the motor, and he anticipates a failure of the engine in the next year or so (best guess on his part). We live on the beach, so blowing sand is a reality.

He said we needed to build a fence around the generator to help protect the unit against the blowing sand rather than let it free stand on the side of the house. He said we can't stop it all because the generator has to have ventilation, but the mechanic thought this would help protect it better.

Just some notes for your readers to consider while installing a power generator in a coastal environment. This insight is going to cost me \$5,000-6,000. I offer it to your readers for free.

DAVID DeBORD  
Virginia Beach, Va.

## Sprinklers are important, too

I just finished reading the letter ("Hot Debate," June 2006) from Gerald Howard with the NAHB regarding fire sprinklers. Fortunately, Mr. Howard has never been affected by fire. He references "modern home construction techniques" that in many areas include sprinklers. He references smoke alarms, which is a typical response, but if we are installing items that are mandated, wouldn't it be better to install something that actually attacks the fire instead of just informing us?

We will pray that Mr. Howard is never affected by the devastation fire can cause to our irreplaceable family heirlooms

and loved ones, especially when the majority of people injured or killed by fire are our parents or children. It is interesting how the NAHB opposes fire sprinklers, but anyone involved with the fire industry, including fire fighters, fire chiefs and fire marshalls, strongly encourage the installation of fire sprinklers. I'm sure that if anyone was truly interested in educating themselves regarding fire sprinklers, their local fire department — which by the way has nothing to gain from the promotion of fire sprinklers other than saving our lives — would be more than happy to help in any way.

DAVID STONE  
Houston

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STAFF VOL 71 NO 8

# Illegal Trades

**What would you do tomorrow** if the government arrested a third of your workforce today? Could you open the doors? Meet your contract obligations?

In some segments of the construction industry, illegal immigrants account for nearly a third of the workforce. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, 36 percent of all insulation workers and 29 percent of roofers and drywall installers are undocumented immigrants. Overall, 14 percent of all construction labor are undocumented.

I don't care where you fall on the political spectrum. If you're in housing, those numbers force a business realization that trumps politics. Without an immigrant workforce — which currently includes illegal immigrants — an industry that has for years been unable to meet capacity due to short labor supply will face revenue declines, increasing customer dissatisfaction and heightened product quality issues.

But guess what? Illegal immigration isn't the issue here. Political gamesmanship is making it the hot topic, but the real issue is the value we place on skilled labor. If the skilled workforce were valued in America at the level it used to be, we would be able to increase



rate with their skills.

Growing up, I knew carpenters who owned their homes, raised children and sent them to college. They did that on one salary. That can't be done now.

It's even worse for trades that require less skill. It's no coincidence that insulation, drywall installation and roofing are the trades that attract the most illegal immigrants. Although those trades do require skill and people who are good at them are highly skilled, they do not require the level of skill that electricians, plumbers, HVAC installation or trim carpenters do.

Now I don't have visions of a utopian,

Read our feature story on immigration on page 58, then voice your opinion at [www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues-immigration](http://www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues-immigration)

compensation, attract more career-oriented people and reduce our rapacious need to throw warm bodies at construction projects. Without the enticement of easily available jobs, would we still see streams of people trekking north and flooding our borders? I don't think so.

Politically and culturally, though, it's easier to fix the immigration problem than it is to cause Americans to view people who work with their hands as essential and valuable and, therefore, worthy of earning a living commensu-

agrarian society that raises carpenters and plumbers to an exalted status equal to basketball players. But I would dearly like to see our industry and the country begin to value skilled trades people.

They are craftsmen. And craftsmanship is a good thing. **PB**

*Paul Deffenbaugh*

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# Proactive Solutions

>> BY MARK JARASEK, SENIOR EDITOR

## One-Stop Shop

The Estridge Companies combines a design studio, sales center and headquarters in an unlikely place — a mall.

**The Estridge Companies** in mid-February unveiled a design studio and corporate headquarters in an unusual place — a mall — giving the company a new way to brand itself in the communities it serves. And if the concept works the way the firm's principals envision, the Carmel, Ind.-based custom home builder could be blazing a new path.

Estridge has taken its design studio and placed it within a retail storefront, plunking it in the middle of a high traffic, high-end-lifestyle shopping center, Clay Terrace Mall, in Carmel, Ind., just north of Indianapolis. The center even has a trendy name: HOMExperience.

Although it's primarily a design studio for new Estridge home buyers, casual mall shoppers are welcomed to peruse and purchase home decor in a sales area or even attend one of the gourmet cooking classes held on a regular basis — all subtle tactics to get the Estridge brand burned into shoppers' minds before they are in the market to buy a home. Indeed; since opening, Estridge neighborhood sales staff have made more than 40 appointments with mall shoppers — about one every three days.

Estridge also moved its corporate headquarters to an office above the retail center. A meticulously organized central command center provides solid back-up to the studio, keeping close track of the choices Estridge home buyers make for their dream homes. Across the hall from the headquarters, a special "Customer Suite" has been created for Estridge homeowners, who can use it at any time to rest their weary feet from shopping.

To top it all off, the Estridge logo is emblazoned high on the headquarters',

lest anyone miss the fact that the home builder is dedicated to planting a foot in the community.

>> BY LAURA BUTALLA, SENIOR EDITOR

## Study reveals room for growth

OWENS CORNING CONDUCTED A HOUSING SURVEY of 1,217 households to find out who intended to purchase a new home in the next 18 months and what kind of home they were interested in buying. The following charts compare the intention to buy to the actual 2005 housing market. The results show a fluctuation between what households intended to buy and what they purchased.

### % INTENDING TO BUY OR BUILD IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS

Existing site-built home	59%
New site-built home	29%
New HUD home	7%
New modular home	5%

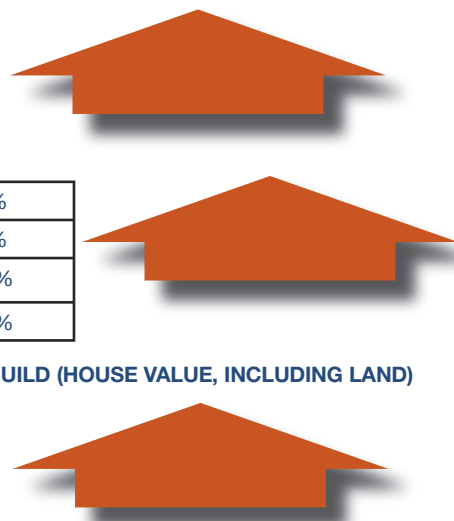
### 2005 HOUSING MARKET

7 million existing site-built homes	80%
1.6 million new site-built homes	18%
130,000 HUD homes	1.5%
40,000 modular homes	0.5%

### % OF THOSE INTENDING TO BUY OR BUILD (HOUSE VALUE, INCLUDING LAND)

Under \$100,000	23%
\$100,000-\$200,000	44%
\$201,000-\$300,000	20%
\$301,000-\$500,000	13%

Source: Owens Corning



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## LESSONS LEARNED

# Home Building's Perfect Storm

Problems are brewing over labor issues.

**We've watched a "perfect storm" brew** in the Bush/Gore election fiasco and have seen it recently with Hurricane Katrina — two unusually big messes. But could the term soon apply to home building?

Our industry faces today perhaps the strangest, most conflicting set of economic circumstances imaginable. Overall, the economy is growing at a healthy clip and, save a couple of places like my home state of Michigan, employment is up and economic indicators look good. That's countered, however, with steadily rising interest rates and investors not just fleeing the hot markets but dumping houses.

In past downturns, which used to occur every seven years or so, we knew builders could count on less expensive labor. But we skipped the last housing downturn, and this one isn't behaving properly. We may be about to see exactly the opposite thing happen: a tremendous shortage of labor supply with the accompanying increase in labor cost.

Before you cry foul, just ponder the situation for a moment. We know that both slow sales volume and falling prices will produce lower margins, and most of you are experiencing one or both. It goes without saying that labor

shortages mean higher labor prices and lower margins. Margin pressure from both ends at once? Can that really happen? If our current political climate doesn't change, it just might, and then you will have it: the home building industry's very own version of the perfect storm.

## Trouble Brews

If you live anywhere in the Southwest or in a large city, you may already know how this may come about. The clamoring for tough, strict, highly punitive immigration laws has reached a fever pitch, and our politicians are listening — and responding.

Think about it. With 100 percent of the House and one-third of the Senate up for reelection this fall, would you expect anything else? Throw in about half of the governors plus those who hold state congressional office and you have a whole lot of folks on the public dole looking for an issue they can get everyone worked up about without taking much risk. Immigration policy is that



ROBERT SUMNER/GETTY IMAGES NEWS



**There needs to be a guest worker program, and there needs to be an amnesty plan. Without both, our economy will suffer, and the one that will take the biggest hit of all is home building.**

issue.

The brutal reality of our current system is that elected officials who propose serious solutions for critical national issues such as Social Security, Medicare or energy policy are guaranteed to make a whole lot of people hysterically angry. Hysterically angry folks are great fodder for our insatiable 24/7 news channels and blogs, and they get a lot of airtime. This is not conducive to reelection. To be serious would require a politician to state exactly who is going to get hurt and how much it would cost — political suicide. Better to avoid the tough issues and either tell 'em what they want to hear or choose something very safe. Hence the resurrection of the anti-flag-burning

amendment, even though there was but one documented case of flag burning in the United States in all of 2005!

Unlike flag burning, which doesn't get all that much traction, going after illegal immigrants is perfect. How easy it is to paint the great and presumed illiterate masses of illegals as undeserving interlopers of all things truly American?

According to the non-partisan Pew Research Foundation, in an April report, there are approximately 12 million illegal immigrants working in the U.S. now, 21 percent who are employed in construction. That's 2.5 million, making up 14 percent of all construction workers. It must be noted, though, that many groups further out on the right wing of the spectrum generally double these numbers. Still, it means that a lot of people and a lot of jobs, however you count.

## Our Industry

Until fairly recently, most employers generally and conveniently overlooked the fact so many of their immigrant worker "numbers don't match," but now Homeland Security is rumored to be in the process of changing the game. The talk is that the department may declare anyone without proper citizenship, a green card or a work permit to be immediately fired and reported.

"So why not?" you ask. Let's not debate fairness, legality or the fact that most research says we pull the workers toward the U.S. with the lure of steady work otherwise left unfilled; let's just talk the reality of the impact on our industry.

Last week I heard about a drywall contractor in a large market with around 800 employees. Less than 10 percent of his workers have "numbers that match." So fire them and replace them with those whose numbers are good, right? Well, he has a problem with that. "I haven't had a single Anglo apply to work for me in more than 20 years!" In short, if we start

enforcing this, he closes up shop. Period. So will many other trade contractors in the industry and apparently far more than we might imagine.

I asked a builder friend from Chicago what percent of the immigrant workers on his sites he believes are legal. He quickly stated that every one of his subcontractors signs contracts his company requires stating all workers are legal. But then he added that if you sit down



**Somewhere between 15 percent and 30 percent of our industry labor pool is illegal. If the House version of the new immigration law passes the Senate and serious enforcement followed, home building would be absolutely devastated.**

and have a beer with the contractors, you'll find out that it's not so — many of their "numbers don't match." It varies by trade, he said, but when I asked for his best estimate, he said, "about 50 percent."

## Possible Solutions

What's the real number? It varies greatly by market, but somewhere between 15 percent and 30 percent of our industry labor pool is illegal. If the House version of the new immigration law passes the Senate and serious enforcement followed, home building would be absolutely devastated — as would other industries. Ironically, illegal workers is one issue in which President Bush has a workable plan, yet it is his own party pushing hardest, for the "make 'em all felons and ship 'em back to where they came from" approach. Many Democrats are right there with the Republicans on this; after all, they want to be reelected, too.

The politicians are responding to two huge pools of ignorance. First is their own, as they are not considering the disastrous implications and costs of a blanket felon proclamation. The second is that of the public who responds just as most of us would to this survey ques-

tion: do you think illegal immigrants should be allowed to exercise all rights of an American citizen, including education, unemployment and healthcare, paid for by your tax dollars?

Short term, we can hope that Congress does what it does best: get tied up in its perennially partisan underwear and do nothing. But there does need to be a solution and a plan, and in this case, President Bush is at least pointing

us in the right direction. There needs to be a guest worker program, and there needs to be an amnesty plan. Without both, our economy will suffer, and the one that will take the biggest hit of all is home building. Shrinking demand and/or shrinking prices coupled with increasing labor costs are a formula for disaster. The perfect storm is forming, and something has to be done.

This time we'd better all get busy and start writing our Congressman because our livelihoods are at stake. Home building will inevitably recover, and the demand for housing isn't going away; but what we're talking about is a one- or two-year recovery versus a five- or seven-year recovery. We have a choice: a brief rain shower or the storm of the century.

Better pick up that pen today. **PB**

*Scott Sedam is president of TrueNorth Development, a nationwide consulting and training firm focused on quality, process improvement and organizational development. He can be reached at [scott@truen.com](mailto:scott@truen.com).*



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## KEYNOTES: TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP



### *Patrick Lencioni*

Patrick Lencioni is the founder and president of The Table Group, Inc., a specialized management-consulting firm focused on executive team-building and organizational health. He has been described by the *One-Minute Manager's* Ken Blanchard as "fast defining the next generation of business thinkers." Pat's passion for organizations and teams is reflected in his writing, speaking and consulting. He is the author of five business books, including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, which was on the New York Times best-seller list. His new book, *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars*, came out in March 2006. Pat consults to executives and speaks to world-class organizations, addressing thousands of leaders. Prior to founding his firm, Pat worked for Sybase, Oracle and Bain & Company. He also served on the National Board of Directors for the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America from 2000-2003.



### *Keith Harrell*

Known for his energetic, innovative presentations, Keith Harrell is a dynamic life coach who specializes in changing behaviors through a positive attitude. While growing up in Seattle, he aspired to become a professional basketball player. Although he never realized that dream, *The Wall Street Journal* says, "What sets him apart . . . is driving ambition and an attitude that refuses to flag." Through his company, Harrell Performance Systems and his book *Attitude is Everything: Ten Life Changing Steps to Turning Attitude into Action*, Keith specializes in helping companies achieve and maintain their goals. Harrell spent 14 years at IBM, where he was recognized as one of the top sales and training instructors. He is widely regarded as one of the country's best speakers.



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# The Times They Are A-Changin'

**Being an old rocker at heart, I thought of Bob Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changin'"**

while attending a recent Urban Land Institute conference called Developing Master-Planned Communities: Learning from the Experts. Before you decide this correlation was a result of my exercising my elbow during social hour, let me explain.

The times have changed. It's no longer a seller's market; the buyer is now squarely in the driver's seat. The old "build it and they will come" attitude is dead. The general consensus of the experts at the conference is that housing is going to be 10 percent to 15 percent off from last year's mark. In the once-sought-after markets, the decline is closer to 30-plus percent.

Everyone knew this was coming. Many were already strategizing how to manage and respond to the market shift.

During the conference, Gadi Kaufmann, managing director and CEO of Robert Charles Lesser & Co., said what I think sums up what the marching orders should be now and well into the future: success will require "nimble and insightful management teams that can move quickly and wisely as changing market conditions dictate." In moving forward, the companies striving to do more than just tread water will succeed by being

flexible, adaptable and intuitive. We must have the correct attitudes and tools to successfully adjust our approaches to the ever-changing market.

So how does a company evoke nimble and insightful management? I'd blend one part analytical thinking skills, one part adaptability and a healthy dash of creativity and self-directed fearlessness.

But, how do we know what to look for? Much like history, past behaviors — both good and bad — often repeat themselves.

To kindle the proactive behaviors and mitigate the bad, start by looking for the students in your company. They are pupils of our industry who don't fall into the rut of just doing the business. These students don't limit themselves to the confines of a job description; they tirelessly focus on improving and growing the business and teaching themselves the skills they need to be innovative.

These valuable employees are often the ones in the meet-



TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

“

**Gadi Kaufmann said what I think sums up what the marching orders should be now and well into the future: success will require “nimble and insightful management teams that can move quickly and wisely as changing market conditions dictate.”**

ing who pose ideas that may seem radical for the times. Remember: your business needs that dash of creativity to complete the recipe for success. Your employees, just like your mission, should never see themselves as finished products.

Companies must adopt the courage to be ingenious and create fresh, innovative approaches to swimming — not sinking — during this time of uncertainty. **PB**

*Bob Piper is a founding partner of The Talon Group, a leading executive search firm specializing in the real-estate development and home building industries.*



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CONSUMER TRENDS

*The key is knowing what the homebuyer wants.*

It's all about the brands.

*"I wanted a kitchen that was not only beautiful, but also fit the way my family lives. It was the unique appliance features and the quality brand names that made my kitchen different from the rest."*

While every new home doesn't always offer custom details, the need for individuality and personal expression is in — especially in the kitchen. People don't want the same commonplace that everyone else has. They want their home to stand out and show off their unique personality. They want tailored kitchen solutions that fit their lifestyle.

The secret to delivering these personal solutions without creating the headaches of custom building is having the right selection of brands. *The right brands make it easy for builders to create solutions that appeal to homebuyers — and make it easier for you to build business.*

**Delivering the right brands gives you a real advantage.** Here's an easy way to take the "mass" out of "mass marketing." Rather than choosing from a limited number of standard kitchen solutions, builders can benefit from having a larger portfolio of appliances to put in their homes. This not only allows more options to fit standard home plans — it's an easy way to satisfy the wants and needs of potential homebuyers. Maytag Builder Sales can help you answer the needs of homebuyers because we offer more diverse, quality brand names including Jenn-Air®, Maytag® and Amana®. We understand consumer trends, so we can help you anticipate the appliances homebuyers want to personalize

their homes and fit their families' needs — without compromising your budget, timeline or building plans with custom solutions.

**The right brands attract more buyers.**

A new home is a clean slate. And choosing quality brands reflects on every aspect of your project. New homebuyers are drawn to quality brands that they trust and that offer unique features to fit their lifestyles.

Your dedicated Maytag Builder Sales team makes it easy and painless for you to bring the best solutions to today's homebuyers. We offer three unique and preferred brands that provide high quality and real innovation. For higher-end homes, Jenn-Air® kitchen appliances offer the professional-style, luxury brand name these consumers expect. Maytag® appliances are known for dependability as well as for innovative features and unique configurations that make homeowners' lives easier. And Amana® appliances provide the freedom to fill your kitchens with contemporary, commonsense solutions that reflect today's younger homeowners' desire for style and individuality. Whichever you choose, you'll be sending a message that your homes are filled with quality solutions that are anything but run-of-the-mill.



Maytag® Innovation Kitchen In Stainless Steel.

**Innovative solutions differentiate you from the rest.** Maytag Builder Sales makes it easy to provide innovative solutions that make kitchens unique, make everyday tasks easier and reflect today's styles. We can suggest the right options to help sell your properties and to fit your appliance allowance.

Stainless steel appliances are all the rage. But some of your higher-end homes may require the individuality of the new high-gloss Floating Glass appliances, downdraft ventilation cooktops or professional-style appliances from the Jenn-Air® brand.

Who wouldn't love a double oven in the kitchen? But budgets and building specifications often make this option more work than it's worth. That's why Maytag offers a double-oven range that fits in the same space as an ordinary range. Other innovative solutions that match homebuyers' desire for innovation and your need for easy solutions include the new Maytag® Ice<sub>2</sub>O™ French Door refrigerator with an ice/water dispenser on the door and more fresh food capacity — and the world's first three-rack dishwasher. All fit standard openings so you can provide a custom solution without the custom headaches.

Amana® appliances allow you to add custom-look options, including cooktops, slide-in ranges, wall ovens and other traditional appliances in a variety of colors and finishes — all at prices that fit your building budget.

**For more information about the Maytag® family of brands, call the Whirlpool Inside Advantage at 800-253-3977.**

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- **Dedicated Builder Service Support Team.** Handles all of your parts and warranty needs, as well as post-sale service and support.
- **Dedicated Builder Field Team Support.** Offers the full support you need to plan and implement, including new model home programs, inventory forecasts, custom-designed packages and more.
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## CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

# Turning Home Buyers Into Partners

Relationship lessons from author Chip Bell

**Though a successful marriage might begin with burning desire and deep affection,** it becomes more of a partnership than a love fest. Just ask anyone who has been married to the same person for more than 10 years. Not only is there open communication and mutual trust, there are dual compromises and shared dreams. With everything that marriage entails, it's easy to see why "partnership" more accurately describes the relationship.

As a home builder, you don't want to marry your customers, but you do want to partner with them to ensure their satisfaction throughout what you hope will be a long relationship. Though few home builders see the value in partnering with their customers, those who do have greater customer satisfaction scores and more referral business.

There are seven key components to a successful relationship, whether it's a husband and wife or a builder and home buyer. According to Chip Bell, NRS Satisfaction I conference keynote speaker and author of "Customers as Partners: Building Relationships That Last," and "Dance Lessons: Six Steps to Great Partnerships in Business and Life," every successful relationship has the same seven components: truth, growth, dreams, grace, trust, balance and generosity.

As long as these are in place, there is little cause for your customers to divorce themselves from you.

These elements of a long and prosperous relationship relate to your business.

## Truth

A good partnership is built on mutual understanding, and that can't take place without being truthful with each other. The best way to get someone to tell you the truth is to show that you care about him or her as a person. This can be accomplished through "dramatic listening." Most home builders are pretty good when it comes to listening to customers, but few are skilled at dramatic listening, which goes beyond listening for understanding. It also includes showing through actions and words that you value what the customer is saying.

For dramatic listening to



PHOTOGRAPH: PHOTONICA



**Though few home builders see the value in partnering with their customers, those who do have greater customer satisfaction scores and more referral business.**

be effective, it must occur even after the sale is complete. Everyone in your organization needs to assume the role of dramatic listener: someone who can filter out the noise and focus intently on what the customer is saying.

Another way to encourage a truthful relationship is to beg your customers to be candid in their feedback. To incorporate truth in the partnership with your home buyers, you need to encourage candor. Implore them to be open and honest with their complaints. Ask them what you should be doing differently to win an award. If you phrase it in a way that implies you're looking for

instructional help, most customers will offer some honest advice.

### Growth

A leading cause of divorce is that the couple doesn't grow together; each person grows in a different direction. To combat this, Bell advises that businesses deliberately focus on growth in their customer relationships. This can be done by hardwiring your expertise and skills into the partnership so customers understand how your company is evolving. At the same time, make each employee a mentor who looks for opportunities to inform and teach customers.

### Dreams

At some point in a partnership, every spouse or customer wants to know what you're about and where you're going. It is critical in developing partnerships to know vision and determine if there is a match. For a home builder, vision is how you want to be perceived in the marketplace and what you want to be known for. Ideally, everyone working for your company should share these dreams. When the entire organization is aligned with these dreams, it is much easier to deliver consistency and build strong partnerships with home buyers. Employees will have clear visions of the level of service they provide. This serves the crucial purpose of conveying the future expectations of their relationship.

### Grace

Doing business with your company should be a graceful experience. You can achieve grace by making sure your organization is customer-centric, with everything designed around your partner. When an experience feels customized and personal, it's naturally more graceful. Of course, the trick is to streamline the process so that customers feel like they are getting a customized experience even though you don't have to do much work to customize

it. Look at Amazon.com. The online retailer uses software technology to record your purchases and, using that information, make recommendations for the next time you visit. Builders have this challenge every day with customers because the transaction is a series of hand-offs from sales, loans, options, production and warranty service. Although complete integration is probably not recommended, builders can make these transitions seamless and/or provide one point of contact to coordinate all the buyers' inquiries and activities.



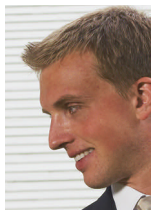
### Trust

At some point in the relationship, someone has to make a leap of faith and put his or her trust in the other party. By taking actions that benefit home buyers but are risky to you, you are showing your home buyers that you trust them. If your employees are often saying "buyers are liars," you have a serious challenge in building customer partnerships. While there are instances of buyers' lying, this cannot be the approach to regularly take and is a clear signal to work quickly to create an attitude adjustment among your staff. Remember that trust is a two-way street, but protect your company by following the procedures and guidelines of your organization.

### Balance

Every relationship involves a fair amount of give and take. It may not be 50/50 in each circumstance, but over time things balance out. To create a balanced partnership, get customers involved in ways they typically are not. Don't be afraid to bring them in to help solve problems.

Bell suggests using a system of covenants and cues to ensure that all parties feel like the partnership is balanced. Covenants are the agreements both parties make, and the cues are the alerts that things will change from what was



previously expected.

As long as both parties understand the give-and-take nature of a successful partnership and neither side tries to take advantage of the other side, the relationship will maintain a healthy balance.

The relationship will only balance if you have first created truth, trust and grace with your partner. Balance is where the partnership starts to gel and you reach a higher level. This is a great place to be, but you must clearly communicate your covenants and be sensitive for the cues for it to happen.

### Generosity

The generosity you bring to a partnership is the passion, energy, enthusiasm and excitement you have for home building and making home buyers' dreams a reality. Also, you should celebrate your partnerships in generous ways.

The average Cadillac customer spends more than \$300,000 on Cadillacs in his or her lifetime. A Cadillac dealer who understands the lifetime value of his customers isn't going to quibble over a \$100 accessory a customer wants. Similarly, builders who realize that home buyers could purchase two or three homes in their lifetime don't take customer relationships for granted. Rather, they understand the long-term benefit of being generous.

Every partnership is somewhat unique, but if you incorporate these seven elements into your customer relationships, you'll be able to increase customer satisfaction at the same time you are fostering long-term customer loyalty. **PB**

*Paul Cardis is CEO of NRS Corporation, a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home-building industry. He can be reached at [pacardis@nrscorp.com](mailto:pacardis@nrscorp.com).*



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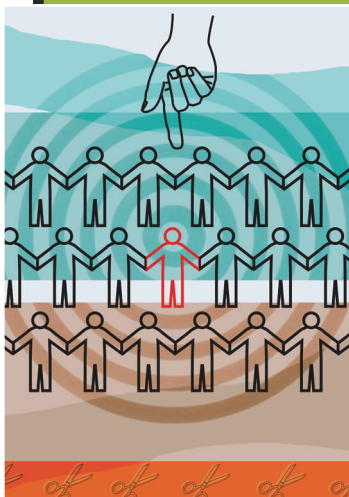
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## NEW HOME KNOWLEDGE

# Selling Your Builder

## John Rymer

Many components of a new-home purchase can be duplicated. Floor plans, elevations, home site sizes, financing, community amenities and locations can be copied by other builders. The single selling feature that is unique to a sales agent is the builder for whom they work. Do you use your builder's reputation in your sales presentation, and, if so, how do you do it?



## Jim Peavey

Georgia mid-sized builder

Annual sales: \$17 million; 24 units

**MY BUILDER HAS A REALLY STRONG REPUTATION** in the local area so I want to make sure that I discuss our company in every sales presentation. I determine when to discuss my builder's reputation by asking about any experiences the customer may have had in the past with a builder. If I get feedback that they have had some issues with a prior builder or home, I make sure to discuss the reputation of my builder right away. I know until they get comfortable with my builder they won't be ready to buy, no matter how much they like the home.

## Donna Davenport

Midwest large builder

Annual sales: \$25 million; 60 units

**I WORK FOR ONE OF THE LARGEST BUILDERS IN MY MARKET**, and we do a lot of advertising. I get a lot of people who come in with the ads and say they came to my community because of my builder's reputation. While that's great to hear, I want to understand specifically what they really know about our company. Is it just that we're big, or do they know about the differences in our construction practices and what really separates us from other builders? For example, do they understand the research we use in designing our floor plans?

## Arlene McAllen

California large builder

Annual sales: \$19 million; 55 units

**I WORK FOR A VERY LARGE BUILDER BUT AM OFTEN SURPRISED** by how many people know little or nothing about the company. If they tell me they really don't know too much about our company, I use the opportunity to begin discussing the history of our company and our financial strength, as well as our commitment to customer satisfaction. I know when I stress my builder's reputation early I can use it when we're negotiating price at the end of the process.

## Mary Ann Malloyway

Georgia mid-sized builder

Annual sales: \$19 million; 62 units

**THE FACT THAT YOU STAND BEHIND YOUR PRODUCT** and care about the satisfaction of your customer is a key selling point. If you don't believe in your builder, it will show through to your customers, and you will lose sales. If the customer doesn't know about our company, I'll use testimonials from our homeowners. Customers expect the sales person to say good things about their builder, but you can't buy an endorsement from your homeowners.



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“The quicker we sell a home, the greater the impact on our bottom line. That’s why 100 percent of these homes are *made of brick*.”

— Mike Karns, *Director of Purchasing, Winchester Homes*



“Winchester Homes has been building around the Washington, DC metro area for more than 25 years and has built and sold more than 12,000 homes. So you might think we just assume we know what our buyers want. Actually, we constantly talk to potential customers, one-on-one and in focus groups. They say three key things about brick and the way we use it.

First, they come to the table already thinking that brick makes a statement they want their homes to make. Second, our hallmark is to allow our buyers to “customize” their new home, even to the extent of changing the footprint. Here at Oak Hill Reserve, at least 90% of these are “customized.” Brick lets us do that and do it well. And finally, customers feel that for maintenance and energy efficiency reasons, they want brick.

This Oak Hill Reserve project is a community of 83 homes. And 9 months into the last section, it’s 99% sold. Good news for the bottom line. Good news for us.”

*Contact a brick manufacturer or local distributor to learn more about improving your bottom line by using brick. Or, see [www.gobrick.com/find\\_brick](http://www.gobrick.com/find_brick) for a list of BIA manufacturers and distributors.*



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Custom Publishing

**DOW FOAM IS AN AFFORDABLE GREEN PRODUCT**, says Rob Sabin of Aspen Homes in Colorado, which uses it for exterior sheathing.



## HOW I LEARNED TO . . . BUILD GREEN AFFORDABLY

# It's Not Expensive Being Green

Builders of moderately priced homes can give buyers environmentally sound features for about the same price.

**The myth that green** building is only for the super environmentally conscious is dead. Now the myth that green homes are too expensive to build is about to die as well.

Though it's emerging from the fringes, many builders still struggle with how to implement sustainable, energy-efficient, non-polluting building techniques and whether their customers are

even interested in green-built homes. And there are builders eager to make the transition yet fear they can't without pricing themselves out of the range of their core buyers.

Still, when forethought is given to site selection, construction processes, features and materials, a green home can be comparable in price to a non-green one. Homes that are energy-effi-

cient, healthy, comfortable and durable are within reach of every home builder's — and home buyer's — budget.

### **Affordable, Green-Built Home Benefits**

Saving the earth and recycling may not be concerns for home buyers on moderate incomes.

"For a lot of the folks who buy afford-

able homes, their primary concern is how inexpensively they can get into a home," says Robert Huffman, president of Huffman Homes in Austin, Texas. "That becomes a tougher sell for a green builder. A lot of the very lowest income people do not think of a home as an investment, so it's difficult to justify paying more for a green home."

The fact is if anyone is likely to benefit from owning a green home, it is affordable-home buyers. That's because a green home is well-insulated and energy-efficient, which reduces an owner's monthly heating and cooling costs. A green home uses materials that won't off-gas and pollute the indoor air, which protects the health of the home's inhabitants and cuts down on medical costs. Green homes comprise materials that are renewable and relatively impervious to moisture and the elements, resulting in a more durable home that is easy to maintain, keeping the cost of home maintenance down.

A green home will save its owners money in both the long- and short-term. And bottom line, it will be a better-built home.

"There are people who started the green building movement years ago who wish that instead of calling it green building, they called it better building, because that is what we are actually trying to do," says Armando Cobo, a custom home designer and building consultant in Albuquerque, N.M.

Cobo has designed several homes for Habitat for Humanity through the U.S. Department of Energy's Building America program, a private/public part-



**A green home is well-insulated and energy-efficient, which reduces an owner's monthly heating and cooling costs.**

nership that develops energy solutions for new and existing homes.

Although Habitat for Humanity can build green affordably because of donated or discounted labor and materials, Cobo says the Building America program was designed to make green, high-performance building a practical, cost-efficient standard for all production builders.

"The Building America program was designed to cost somewhere around one to two percent over the normal cost of a house," says Cobo. "The farther along you went into the program and the more understanding you and your subs have, it would be more cost-effective. Once you apply all the benefits of the program and the learning curve is established, it would be either a zero-cost or even cheaper than building before."

If builders market their green homes as healthier, more durable, more comfortable — and more affordable — their customers will understandably be excited about buying these homes.

### How Green Are Your Building Values?

One factor that affects cost is how deeply a builder decides to delve into green building.

"There are some programs," says Cobo,

"like the [United States Green Building Council's] LEED for Homes pilot program, that have as their target the cream of the crop of green homes." Because programs like LEED-H target builders already constructing high-level green homes, novice green builders who adopt these requirements may see costs rise significantly.

"I always temper my green building with the fact that first and foremost the homes have got to be affordable," says Huffman, who participates in Austin's Green Building Program, the first local green building program in the country.

Huffman's philosophy is to implement those green elements that make economic sense — that create a favorable balance between the monthly PITI cost [principal, interest, taxes and insurance] based on the purchase price of the home, monthly utility costs, maintenance and commuter costs (if a home is close to work or school, then less car fuel is used).

"If you incorporate better insulation or radiant barrier in the roof," says Huffman, "what we require is that it provide a payback to the homeowner, either in the form of lowered maintenance, lowered utility bills, etc."

Austin's residential green building program rates homes on a scale of one to five stars — the more green features, the more stars you earn.

"There are some tract builders that achieve one star," he says. "There are several homes, and only several, that achieve a five-star rating. That's really pretty much pulling out all the stops and doing almost everything that you can to make it a



**"Get a professional to size the air conditioning system. If you put in two tons of air conditioning instead of three, there are going to be a few dollars saved."** — Architect Peter Pfeiffer

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very green home. Those will tend to be very expensive homes, simply because they often include photovoltaic systems, super insulation or alternative wall systems, things like that.

"All of our houses obtain a minimum of three stars, and some of them four stars," says Huffman. "So we are in the top one-tenth of one percent of all houses as far as green is concerned. But it requires very selective attention to which elements we put into the house."

Christopherson Homes in Santa Rosa, Calif., is responsible for Mane's Ranch, the first green home development in Sonoma County, Calif. The homes were built in accordance with Santa Rosa's original green building guidelines, which have since become more rigorous.

Amy Christopherson Bolten is the director of community development for Christopherson Homes. Her concern is that building green not add considerably to construction costs in an area with median home prices around \$500,000.

"If something was not going to really have any impact, and it costs a lot, we would obviously not adopt that [green element]," says Christopherson Bolten. "We went line item by line item and asked ourselves, is this prohibitively expensive? No. Do we think buyers are going to appreciate this? Is the city going to care about it? If it's a yes for those things, we would probably stick it in our program. So it is a bang-for-your-buck decision."

## The Value of "Green by Design"

Many elements of green building require advance planning; this becomes even more important when you're on a tight budget.

"The most effective strategies to realize energy efficiency and therefore greater comfort and reduced energy bills are by adjusting the design to respond to the site," says Peter Pfeiffer, AIA, principle of Barley & Pfeiffer Architects in Austin.

Pfeiffer designed and engineered the much acclaimed AndersonSargent zero energy house in Frisco, Texas, that won the 2006 NAHB Research Center's Energy Value Housing Award. "People unfortunately seem to be so inclined to go with expensive options to make the house energy-efficient, where the most effective ones are the ones staring them right in the face."

Pfeiffer suggests certain design strategies to save energy and increase indoor air quality of the home without necessarily incurring more costs.

■ **Orientation of the site.** "If the lot faces west," says Pfeiffer, "you make sure you choose a plan that's got a shading front porch or some type of big overhang to minimize the exposure of those windows to the hot afternoon sun if you're in the South. Being cognizant of how your windows are shaded can cut your air conditioning bills in half."

"If you can choose the best lot, you're going to get a better [energy] rating, absolutely," says Rob Sabin, director of research and development for Aspen Homes of Colorado, the NAHB Research Center's 2006 Silver Energy Value Housing Award winner in the affordable cold climate home category. "Our goal has been to deliver a quality house for a whole subdivision. For our future subdivisions, we've worked with the developer in this process, and we've laid out the streets so that there will be a higher percentage of houses that have the correct orientation. That's not thinking six months down the line or a year



"Within Energy Star, there is a lot of gradation in terms of highly efficient or just efficient enough to meet the standard. I don't think there is any cost premium. —

*Consultant Miriam Landman*

down the line. That's laying out a whole subdivision."

■ **Install a properly sized air conditioner.** "It requires the builder get a professional to size the air conditioning system based on the loads of that particular house," says Pfeiffer. "But if you put in two tons of air conditioning instead of three, there are going to be a few dollars saved."

And homeowners will be healthier.

"When you have too big an air conditioner," Pfeiffer explains, "it cools down the air so quickly that it doesn't accurately dehumidify the air. It's still sort of sticky, so people turn the AC lower. That's how they get the humidity somewhat under control, but when you get the house too cool, it sets up conditions ... for mold and mildew to grow in the walls."

"The inside surfaces of the walls get to be so much cooler than the outside air that they reach what's called dew point," Pfeiffer explains. "Condensation starts occurring inside the walls. This can happen wherever there's heat and humidity — the South, Baltimore, New York, Chicago, St. Louis — and it doesn't take a whole lot of days [of heat and humidity] for this condition to manifest itself."

■ **Install air conditioning ducts carefully to minimize leaks.** "This is much more effective than worrying about buying one of these fancy energy recovery ventilators," says Pfeiffer.

■ **Build a house that needs less heating and cooling.** Again, proper orientation in terms of sun and shading — even the use of ceiling fans or whole house fans — can make this possible. "Then if

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you've got money left over to burn," says Pfeiffer, "you can look at fancier, higher-efficiency air conditioners."

Using strategies that save money upfront to pay for more expensive green features later in the process is a philosophy Pfeiffer shares with Miriam Landman, a green building consultant and writer.

"I can give several examples of products and materials that hardly cost more or don't cost more," says Landman, "but I find it even more exciting to talk about some of the items that actually create savings. Those can help offset or pay for some of the other green features that might have added cost. That can allow people, in some cases, to even have solar panels on their houses."

### Green Materials That Don't Cost More

Because of the abundance of green building products in the marketplace, most are competitively priced.

"There are a few particular brands that go above and beyond [the average], Landman says, "and those can have a cost premium, but are still not extravagant."

Energy Star rated appliances include refrigerators, dishwashers, washers, thermostats, even ceiling fans.

"Within Energy Star, there is a lot of gradation in terms of highly efficient or just efficient enough to meet the standard," says Landman. "I don't think there is any sort of cost premium."

Aspen Homes uses Dow Foam for exterior sheathing.

"This does two things for us," Sabin says. "One, it creates an exterior drainage plane, and two, it gives some insulation on the exterior of the studs, so you can get the true insulation value between the studs."



## Financial incentives for building green

**IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR**, the IRS announced a provision under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 in which builders who construct a new, energy-efficient home may qualify for a credit of up to \$2,000. To qualify, a home must be certified to provide heating and cooling energy consumption that is at least 30 to 50 percent in the case of manufactured homes and 50 percent for other homes — below that of a comparable home constructed in accordance with the standards of the 2004 Supplement to the 2003 International Energy Conservation Code. It must also have building envelope component improvements providing a level of heating and cooling energy consumption that is at least 10 percent below that of a comparable home.

Manufactured homes can also qualify for the credit by meeting Energy Star standards, with one caveat, according to the Energy Star Web site: "With the exception of the tax credit for an Energy Star qualified manufactured home, these tax credits are not directly linked to Energy Star. Therefore, a builder of an Energy Star qualified home may be eligible for a tax credit, but it is not guaranteed."

An incentive for your buyers: Fannie Mae recognizes that energy-efficient homes cost homeowners less to operate on a monthly basis than standard homes and that these homeowners can afford to spend more on their housing expenses. Fannie Mae offers Energy Efficient Mortgages that allow borrowers to qualify for a larger mortgage as a result.

Green Communities is a five-year, \$555 million initiative to build more than 8,500 environmentally healthy homes for low-income families. The initiative, sponsored by Enterprise Community Partners, provides grants, financing, tax-credit equity and technical assistance to developers who meet Green Communities Criteria for affordable housing that, among other things, promotes health and conserves energy and natural resources.

For more information go to [www.enterprisecommunity.org](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org).

Sabin says it's not significantly more expensive.

"The reality is the foam board that

"We use 100 percent **Hardie** on our exteriors — the siding, soffit, trim and everything — because it has a lower maintenance cost.

— Builder Richard Huffman

we use as the exterior sheathing has a very predictable price," says Sabin. "We use 100 percent [James] Hardie on our exteriors. OSB fluctuates drastically based on the market from one month to the next and from one season to the next. Dow Foam is more predictable. Sometimes it's more; a lot of times it's less. But you can predict your costs over a longer period of time because it doesn't fluctuate as much."

And there are products that save money in the long run. Among comparable products, "We use 100 percent

Hardie on our exteriors — not only the siding but the soffit, the trim and everything," says Huffman, "because it has a lower maintenance cost. Instead of having to paint once every three to four years, with a Hardie 100 percent acrylic/latex combination, you can extend that to 20 to 30 years."

Pfeiffer says Hardie Siding is a reasonably priced green building material that is "probably better from a building science point of view than brick, stucco and stone in climates where air conditioning is used a lot."

"It's more of a water shedding product," he says, "where stone and stucco and brick absorb water." **PB**



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\* Inside Mortgage Finance (July 28, 2005) © 2005. \*\* Inside Mortgage Finance (August 5, 2005) © 2005.

# Proactive Solutions

>> BY SARA ZAILSKAS, STAFF WRITER

## Acting Out

The actors hired to simulate family life in a Centex model home are boosting traffic — for less than the cost of an ad.

**You won't hear a family argument** save for a minor squabble between brother and sister, nor see kids' toys strewn everywhere. But home buyers visiting Centex Homes' Milestone community do get the chance to envision how their own family would look living in the 166-home neighborhood in Santa Clarita, Calif. — at least that's what the creative minds behind the strategy hope.

The home builder's LA/Central Coast division first introduced HomeLife in May with such success it repeated a day-long performance in June and July. The way it works: actors portraying a mother, father, brother and sister have a general story line they improvise throughout the day. Curious home buyers can stand by and watch or interact with the family, who in their June encore pretended to celebrate mom's birthday, complete with cake and presents.

So far, so good. The presentations have brought in 30-40 people an hour at times, and although Amanda Larson, the division's marketing director, doesn't directly attribute home sales to the event, it has affected the conversion rate, she says. Best yet: a one-day event costs less than a typical Centex ad.

"It helps [home buyers] see how they would fit into the home" even on a basic level, Larson says. Having 30 people in the home during the pseudo-birthday party, for example, shows how the home can accommodate a large family.

The division's marketing team crafted the idea a year ago while brainstorming ways to make their model homes more personal — contrary to the depersonalization sellers might aim for in re-sales.

"It's not just acting," Larson says. "It gives the home a heartbeat and makes it

an emotional experience."

As guests roam the house, Mom points out a whirlpool tub while putting on her makeup, Dad demonstrates kitchen appliances, and the kids — whether actors or visitors — sometimes find themselves playing together outside. The goal is two-fold: actors are prepared to answer questions about the home's features, too.

It's an out-of-the-box idea builders — not to mention CNN and The



**VISITORS TO CENTEX HOMES'** HomeLife in Santa Clarita, Calif., can interact with actors portraying a family or simply stand by.

Washington Post, to name a few — are noting. Builder David Hunihan of Fidelity Homes in Venice, Fla., admits his initial reaction questioned the idea but acknowledges builders tend to stay in their comfort zone.

"But more power to [Centex]. Anyone stepping out with a new idea forces you to explore new ground and think about what else could be done. I'm always impressed by any creative, cutting-edge marketing idea."

>> BY SARA ZAILSKAS, STAFF WRITER

## Taylor Woodrow Named A Top Sustainable Company

DEVELOPERS HAVE CHOICES when tackling a new community: rejuvenate an old neighborhood or start a brand new one? Taylor Woodrow focuses on taking an obsolete community and giving it new life — an approach that helped the company earn a spot on the 2006 Global 100 Most Sustainable Companies in the World list, says Mike Forsum, Taylor Woodrow's western regional president.

The list recognizes financially successful corporations whose management encourages a sustainable environment while handling environmental, labor and human rights risks. Corporate Knights, a Canadian magazine for business leaders, and Innovest researchers evaluate the 1,800-plus corporations on the MSCI World Index and compare them to their industry peers. Those deemed to be the most sustainable — the top 5 percent in their industry — make the cut. Taylor Woodrow also made last year's debut list.

"We're going into areas that are complex and complicated," Forsum says. "That's the beauty of infill; it takes a strong vision."

Although the list includes building products maker Masco and other construction-related or real-estate-related companies, Taylor Woodrow is the only builder named.

Says Toby Heaps, Corporate Knights' editor: "These companies are showing strategic foresight — not just doing good for the environment. It's about having a business plan."

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## KEYNOTES: TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP



### *Patrick Lencioni*

Patrick Lencioni is the founder and president of The Table Group, Inc., a specialized management consulting firm focused on executive team-building and organizational health. He has been described by the One-Minute Manager's Ken Blanchard as "fast defining the next generation of business thinkers." Pat's passion for organizations and teams is reflected in his writing, speaking and consulting. He is the author of five business books, including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, which was on the New York Times best-seller list. His new book, *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars*, came out in March 2006. Pat consults to executives and speaks to world-class organizations, addressing thousands of leaders. Prior to founding his firm, Pat worked for Sybase, Oracle and Bain & Company. He also served on the National Board of Directors for the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America from 2000-2003.



### *Keith Harrell*

Known for his energetic, innovative presentations, Keith Harrell is a dynamic life coach who specializes in changing behaviors through a positive attitude. While growing up in Seattle, he aspired to become a professional basketball player. Although he never realized that dream, *The Wall Street Journal* says, "What sets him apart . . . is driving ambition and an attitude that refuses to flag." Through his company, Harrell Performance Systems and his book *Attitude is Everything: Ten Life Changing Steps to Turning Attitude into Action*, Keith specializes in helping companies achieve and maintain their goals. Harrell spent 14 years at IBM, where he was recognized as one of the top sales and training instructors. He is widely regarded as one of the country's best speakers.



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>> BY **BILL LURZ**, SENIOR EDITOR

# Clean Sweep?

As Congress debates how to deal with illegal immigrants, home builders split sides, too, while the fear of losing their skilled immigrant labor sets in.

**If you're like most home builders**, you're already caught in the passionate debate over immigration reform sweeping America and as likely as anyone to rue our porous borders in an age of terrorist threats. Before you pitch a fit of indignation over the 12 million foreign nationals living illegally in the United States, give some thought to what it would be like to build — and sell — houses without them here.



PHOTOGRAPH: JUPITER IMAGES

## **No one knows exactly how much housing depends**

on illegal immigrant workers in the construction trades. Home builders are relying more every day on immigrant labor to fill the void left as a whole generation of experienced baby boomers retires from the subcontracting trade companies that actually put the industry together.

Some share of the immigrant workforce is illegal, with the highest concentration in Sun Belt states, where housing markets are strongest. If illegal immigrants are deported and if the flow of foreign construction workers into the U.S. is cut off, labor shortages will drive up costs. How much so is unknown.

Last spring, both houses of Congress passed immigration reform bills that authorize an attempt to close American borders to illegal immigration and enforce more punitive sanctions against employers who hire illegal workers. Unfortunately for

those who want swift action, the two bills are vastly different in how they deal with illegal immigrants already in the country and the need for more immigrants to keep the economy humming.

## **An Industry Divided**

Congress is as divided as the country on what to do about illegal immigrants already working in the United States. Each party caucus has a chasm, and the housing industry also has a split personality. "NAHB adopted an official position on immigration a year ago, at the 2005 fall board of directors meeting," says Jenna Hamilton, NAHB's assistant staff vice president for legislative relations. "That policy says we support comprehensive immigration reform and a new visa system because the current one is obviously broken. There's a bias built into it favoring people with higher education and those with job skills



We have too few Americans capable of this work, much less willing to do it.

— Jenna Hamilton,  
NAHB

valued by large corporations. It's slanted against people who work with their hands. The U.S. even calls them 'unskilled labor,' while builders call them 'skilled trades.' We have too few Americans capable of this work, much less willing to do it."

Hamilton says it's vital for housing to have immigration laws that reflect the reality of its urgent need for labor and a system that will allow people now working illegally to find a path to permanent legal residency.

Yet, she admits, many builders don't see it that way. "Every time we put out a policy statement, I get nasty calls and e-mails from members who don't agree with NAHB's position. It really breaks down like the split in the Republican Party. There's a wing of our membership that just doesn't want to see anyone rewarded for breaking the law."

But another wing of NAHB membership takes the attitude that housing really needs immigrants, Hamilton says. "They believe we should give them a chance to pass a background check and prove they are good people who deserve an opportunity."

Hamilton says one builder argued that if builders and their subs pay enough, they'll find Americans to fill construction trade crews. "I told him I don't know any subs who are paying minimum wage for framers and trim carpenters," she says, "and if you start paying \$100,000 to roofers, who will be able to afford the house?"

However, many builders are so passionate about their politics that they are willing to sacrifice economic self-interest. But that may not last if it jeopardizes their ability to make a living. One of the problems is that no one knows exactly what

## CONTRASTING IMMIGRATION BILLS

### SENATE

#### On Mexican border control:

- 370 miles of new triple-layer fencing
- 500 miles of vehicle barriers
- 1,000 border patrol agents this year
- 14,000 more border patrol agents by 2011 (the force currently numbers 11,300)
- Add detention facilities for apprehended illegal immigrants
- National Guard tours on the Mexican border limited to 21 days

#### On handling people who aid and abet illegal immigrants:

- Within 18 months, employers would use electronic system to verify new hires are legal
- The maximum fine for hiring illegal immigrants would increase to \$20,000 per worker
- Repeat offenders would receive jail time
- English would be established as the national language

#### On current illegal immigrants:

- Those in the country for five years would remain, continue working and eventually become permanent legal residents — after paying at least \$3,250 in fines and fees, paying back taxes and learning English
- Those in the country two to five years would go to a border entry point and file an application to return
- Those in the country less than two years would leave
- Those convicted of a felony or three misdemeanors would be deported, no matter how long they have been in the U.S.
- A guest worker program for 1.5 million farm workers, who then

become eligible to earn permanent legal residency

- The number of H1-B visas for skilled workers would increase to 115,000 a year (from current 65,000) beginning in 2007. Immigrants with advanced degrees are not subject to caps, which can rise 20 percent depending on demand.
- 200,000 new temporary guest-worker visas per year

### HOUSE

#### On Mexican border control:

- 700 miles of double-layer fencing
- Mandatory detention of all non-Mexican illegal immigrants arrested at ports of entry or land and sea border points
- Mandatory sentences for smuggling illegal immigrants
- Mandatory sentences for illegal re-entry after deportation

#### On handling people who aid and abet illegal immigrants:

- Felony for anyone to assist, encourage, direct or induce a person to attempt to enter or remain in the U.S. illegally
- Within six years, all employers would use a database to verify legality of social security numbers of all employees
- The fine for employers of illegal immigrants would rise to a maximum of \$40,000 (from current \$10,000) per violation
- Repeat offenders would receive prison terms of up to 30 years

#### On current illegal immigrants:

- Illegal residency in the United States would be a felony
- Penalties for first-time illegal entry would increase
- Driving under the influence conviction would be a deportable offense

## Weigh in on the issue.

Voice your opinion at [www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues-immigration](http://www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues-immigration)



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## WHO'S NEXT?

**Henry Fischer's four supers**, in handcuffs, send a chilling message to builders everywhere: Keep your own I-9s handy. Don't slip up. ICE is hard.

Giant Fischer Homes, headquartered in the Cincinnati suburb of Crestview Hills, Ky., seems an unlikely target for an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sting, but that's just what came down in mid-May, when four superintendents were arrested and charged with aiding and abetting a subcontractor who was bringing in illegal immigrants.

Fischer closed 1,150 homes last year for \$244.3 million in housing revenue and ranked No.114 in *Professional Builder's* Giant 400 unveiled last April. But Fisch-

er's stellar reputation didn't cut it.

Several months removed from the glare of image-killing TV news flashes, it now looks like Fischer may have been sucker punched. But keep your guard up.

Framing contractor Robert Pratt may have been the real target of the sting; he's under house arrest. Fischer Homes has not been indicted, but Fischer Homes' President Bob Hawksley's supers will go on trial Sept. 11. "We are supporting their defense," he says. "The only evidence against them is they were told some of the framer's people were illegal, and they didn't call us about it.

But our guys were led down the primrose path — told they were helping a

murder investigation, not an immigration sting against a trade contractor. If I put you in that circumstance, you wouldn't call anyone either."

NAHB director of legal research David Crump says there's a question about ICE's tactics. "It could be entrapment," he says. "But it's a violation of the Immigration Act of 1986 to knowingly use undocumented labor. The issue is knowledge. A builder has no liability for a sub's compliance with immigration law. The I-9 forms are the employer's responsibility. There are innuendos that ICE would like all builders — as general contractors — to be responsible for their subs. But that's not the law."



The government should recognize we need people who can work with hand tools as well as computers."

— Michael Carliner,  
NAHB

percentage of housing's labor force is undocumented, so it's impossible to gauge how much it will raise costs if illegal immigrants are removed from the equation.

### What We Do Know

The Pew Hispanic Center in Washington is hailed as the authority on the illegal immigrant population. Senior research associate, Dr. Jeffrey S. Passel, published a report in March this year estimating the total illegal population at 11.5 million to 12 million.

The total was 11.1 million a year earlier. Some 7.2 million unauthorized were in the American labor force in March 2005.

About 19 percent of unauthorized workers in March 2005 were employed in what Passel calls "construction and extractive occupations."

NAHB's Natalia Siniavskaia published a paper on immigrant workers in construction trades in December 2005, analyzing the 2004 American Community Survey (ACS) from the U.S. Census Bureau. That data showed more than 15 percent of the total American workforce was born abroad. But the percentage for construction trades was even larger, around 20 percent. (ACS does not separate residential and non-residential construction.)

The study shows that 22 percent of carpen-

ters and 32 percent of construction laborers were immigrants.

The percentage of immigrant construction labor that is undocumented is tough to figure, says NAHB economist Michael Carliner. "A key to what percentage is illegal is what share is from Mexico," he says, "because Mexicans are more likely to be illegal. I've seen data that suggests the flow of illegal immigrants peaked between 1999 and 2002 and has been somewhat lower since. But nobody knows for sure.

"The important point is, illegal immigrants working in construction are not just warm bodies," Carliner asserts. "They have significant skills that are in short supply in this country. What's surprising is how widespread dependence on immigrant labor is.

"Even in places like Chicago and Birmingham, Ala., we see immigrants dominating the job site. That's a long way from the Mexican border. The government should recognize we need people who can work with hand tools as well as computers."

As a builder, wherever your economic self-interest seems to fall on the Senate side of immigration reform, unless you like the idea of \$100,000 a year roofers. Your votes in November might influence which way this goes. **PB**

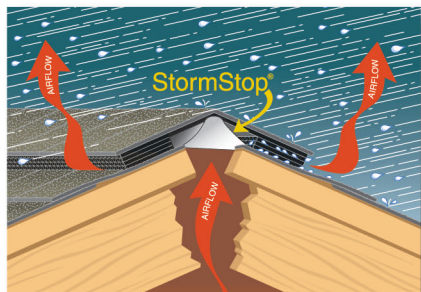
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*Mike Darvishi, Noble Construction, shows a sample of the Trimline Ridge Vent that first attracted him.*

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*"Trimline Ridge Vents are the newer, better shingle-over ridge vent. Just try it once and you'll be hooked."*

*Mike Darvishi  
Noble Construction*

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# Southern Flare on the West Coast

Barratt American Homes' Magnolia Estates meshes  
Southern Colonial with Californian influences.





**MAGNOLIA ESTATES' LARGE LOTS** "give that look from another era of neighborhood design," says Barratt American Homes' Lenette Hewitt.

**Californian homes are known for their Spanish Colonial- or Mediterranean-influenced exteriors.** Barratt American Homes, though, has brought a Southern Colonial flavor to the Southern California lifestyle with Magnolia Estates.

The neighborhood is nestled among the tree-lined streets and themed gardens of Bressi Ranch, a Lennar master planned community in Carlsbad. With the exception of Magnolia Estates, Lennar is the exclusive builder at Bressi Ranch. "We were the only guest builders," Jack Becker, president of Barratt American's San Diego division, says.

Barratt American acquired 25 20,000-square-foot estate lots within Bressi Ranch. "I attribute this to our relationship," Becker says, "but also because of our reputation for high-end, well-designed, quality-built homes."

### Opportunity

"It's the last opportunity for someone to buy a brand new home on an estate lot in Carlsbad," says Lenette Hewitt, vice president of sales and marketing for Barratt American. "There are no more estate lots planned in the Carlsbad general plan."

Barratt American, along with architects of Case Group of Solana Beach, Calif., gave the neighborhood the Southern flare of a combination of Southern Revival, Colonial Federal and Classical Revival.

Barratt American and Case created a mix of traditional exterior architecture with an open floor plan Californians are used to seeing. "When Barratt first came to us they weren't sure which exterior direction they wanted to go," Todd Brazzon, lead architect of Magnolia Estates, says. "They really thought they might do a classic California neighborhood where you have three different elevation styles for each model."

"Collectively, we made this enclave of one style that relates to each other and developed different elevations within the same vernacular," Brazzon says. "It

led to a traditional East Coast, Southern Colonial type of project."

### Mix It Up

Although the streetscape looks traditional, the floor plan fits the California lifestyle. "We wanted to be able to design this traditional product that had an East Coast, Southern feel to it yet spoke to Californians," Hewitt says. "Californians are known to be a little more casual."

The Carlisle floor plan, which is themed after "Gone with the Wind," combines an open floor plan with a traditional look.

The front exterior projects a large two-story porch. Even the in-law suite in the west wing caters to a California lifestyle

### VITAL STATS Magnolia Estates

**Location:** Bressi Ranch, Carlsbad, Calif.

**Builder:** Barratt American Homes, Carlsbad, Calif.

**Architect:** Case Group Architects, Solana Beach, Calif.

**Interior Designer:** Klang & Associates, Carlsbad, Calif.

**Developer:** Lennar Communities, Miami

**Models opened:** March 5, 2006

**Home type:** Single-family Southern Revival, Colonial Federal or Classical Revival Estates

**Sales to date:** Six out of 25

**Community size:** 13 acres

**Square footage:** 4,985 to 6,219 square feet

**Price:** \$1.7 million to 2.2 million

**Hard cost:** \$110 per square foot, excluding land

**Buyer profile:** Second- and third-time move-up buyers and executives

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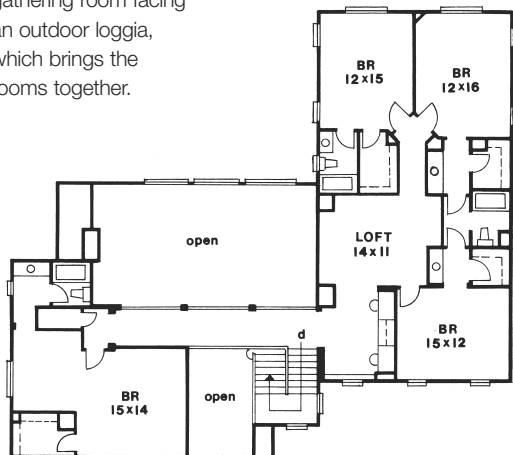


### THE CARLISLE'S FIRST FLOOR

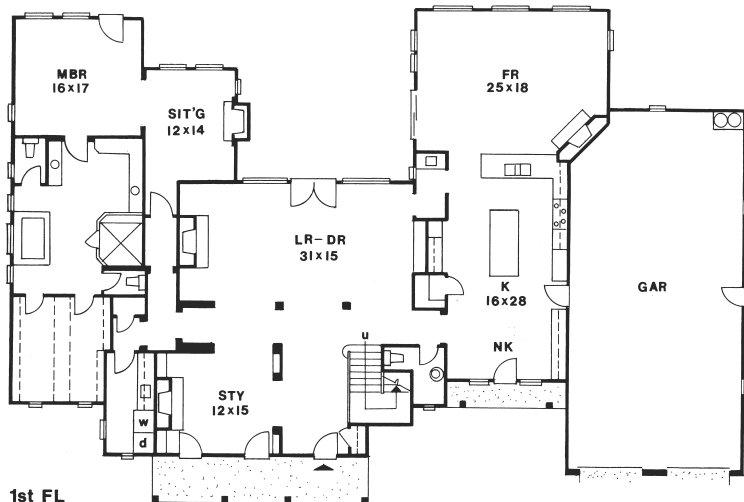
features an open floor plan, with the master bedroom, living room, dining room and gathering room facing an outdoor loggia, which brings the rooms together.



ERIC FIGGE PHOTOGRAPHY



2nd FL



1st FL

with a private porch overlooking the front yard.

To reach empty nesters, Barratt American placed the master bedroom on the first floor. "The empty nester wants to live everyday like they're in a one-story house," Hewitt says. "They can really live in the house without going up and down stairs but have that space when they need it for guests and family."

The Carlisle represents Classical Revival design, which normally features formal living spaces, such as the living room and dining room. Because Californian living is more informal, Brazzon says, "we tried to keep the formal and informal spaces separated."

The butler's pantry separates the living and dining rooms from the kitchen by offsetting the entryways. "They didn't want to be able to look through directly from the living room to the kitchen," Brazzon says.

Continuing the idea of separate spaces, the sec-

ond floor includes a children's retreat. "We have a dedicated area for a children's loft where all three bedrooms are organized around it," Brazzon says.

One bedroom has its own suite with a full bathroom and walk-in closet. The other two bedrooms share an adjoining bathroom.

### Outcome

To date, six of the 25 estates have sold, two of which are the Carlisle model. "We've sold out the first phase, and we've started second-phase construction already," says Becker.

Magnolia Estates has lived up to Barratt American's expectations. "We wanted it to be the end all for the people in Carlsbad," Hewitt says. "If you live here, you've made it." **PB**

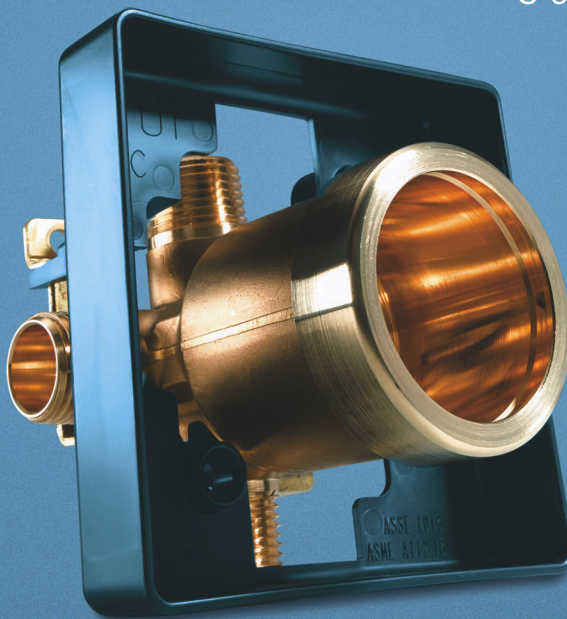


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# Market Entry Magic

Wall Homes makes its mark in a Texas move-up market by adding design flair to 17 projects in 6 months.

**Steve Wall knows** how to make a big splash. The former CEO of Texas Giant Choice Homes opened the doors to his own home building company in April 2005. You might expect him to stick to the entry-level product he mastered with Choice, but that's not the case: his goal is to dominate the move-up market by staking a claim to design leadership in that Texas segment.

With one of the world's largest private investment firms — Warburg Pincus — backing the Arlington, Texas company's venture, he punctuated his design leadership drive by opening models in 17 developments in Dallas, Ft. Worth, Houston and San Antonio in the first six months of 2006. By year-end, he expects to have 33 communities open, all showing Wall Homes' signature design flair, highlighted by brick, stone and stucco in various combinations on all four sides of the houses. He expects to close more than 400 homes this year for revenues in excess of \$75 million.

Shown here is the 2,900 square-foot Callahan II model at Bankston Meadows in Mansfield, Texas, between Dallas and Ft. Worth. Base-priced at \$247,990, the two-story home excites North Texas move-ups with what in-house architect Byron Phillips calls a "Texas ranch look" — mixing brick with the Hill Country limestone common to Austin and San Antonio but unusual amid the sea of brick in Dallas.

"My father was a bricklayer and masonry contractor," Steve Wall says, "so using masonry is something I believe in. You'll see us mix stone and brick and eventually stucco — but they have to look like they belong together. Classic Texas elevations do that, but you have to

be very careful with the combinations," he says.

"The dormers on the second story of the Callahan II model at Bankston Meadows are also unusual on a Texas elevation today, especially since they are not the 'faux dormers' sometimes used to bring light into a vaulted, first-floor space. These are true dormer windows that create niches in the second-floor bedroom of the house," Steve Wall says.

Larry Wall, Steve's brother and the

## VITAL STATS

### Bankston Meadows

**Location:** Mansfield, Texas  
**Developer:** Genesis Land Development, Mansfield, Texas  
**Builder:** Wall Homes, Arlington, Texas  
**Architect:** Byron Phillips, in-house  
**Interior designer:** Joanne Interiors, Dallas  
**Neighborhood size:** 173 homes on 60 acres  
**Home type:** Single-family detached  
**Square footage:** 2,176-3,741  
**Price:** \$228,990-\$270,990  
**Models opened:** April 2006  
**Sales:** 18  
**Buyer profile:** Second move-up families

**WALL HOMES AIMS TO BE DESIGN LEADER** in the Dallas/Ft. Worth move-up market by using Hill Country stone and cedar elevation on the Callahan II model. The home sells for \$247,990 at Bankston Meadows in Mansfield, Texas.

**STANDARD INTERIOR FEATURES** selected by Dallas designer Joanne McWithey include stone fireplaces and 10-foot ceilings.



BOBBIE JONES/MAJOR IMAGES

#### A SPACIOUS KITCHEN OPENS TO THE FAMILY ROOM

in the Callahan II floor plan and includes many typical upgrades as standard, including 42-inch upper cabinets, granite countertops and Whirlpool appliances. The model features Italian birch by Arrowwood Cabinetry.

sales representative at Bankston Meadows, says the upstairs bedroom appeals to children in targeted move-up families: "The kids fight over who gets that bedroom, and the reason is the niches created by those dormer windows," he says.

Steve Wall has a goal for every design touch. "People don't just want a bigger house," he says. "That may be the need, but it's up to us to provide dream fulfillment to coax them to move up. We want to build houses that are not just large but incorporate design elements and features that people associate with much more expensive homes than the ones we're selling. We're putting barrel ceilings and spiral staircases into some homes — anything we can find to add that touch of class that will spark a move-up buying decision."

In the Callahan II, Steve Wall's Midas touch on the front elevation also includes cedar shutters and an exposed cedar beam resting on two cedar columns on the front porch.

The Callahan II's appeal includes a utilitarian floor plan that maximizes useable space by carving a second story bedroom and game room into what would be an attic if the home were built as a ranch plan. The expansive first floor features a massive kitchen, open to the family room and enhanced by a 10-foot plate height and ceilings that vault to 12 feet. Arches, art niches and rounded corners add the Wall Homes' touch to interior spaces, along with finishes and detailing such as crown molds in four rooms included in the base price.

This house includes a 42-inch marble garden tub in the master bath, along with cultured marble vanities. The kitchen has 42-inch upper cabinets and granite countertops as standard. The HVAC system is 14 SEER and includes programmable digital thermostats.

Steve Wall's target for his new firm is to market homes priced between \$150,000 and \$300,000. Bankston Meadows fits into the upper tier of that range. The 173-lot community offers nine floor plans, ranging from 2,176 to 3,741 square feet priced from \$228,990 to \$270,990. In most ways, that price and product is dictated by the location and 70-foot by 120-foot lots, but he admits he was also making a statement about his new company when he opened the models in April this year.

"We're selling more houses at these prices than we would if we'd chosen a lower price range. This is the right product for that site," Steve Wall says. "But we did want to send a message to the market about the quality and style they should expect from us."

Wall Homes had sold 18 houses at Bankston by the middle of July, with the largest and most expensive plan (the 3,154 square-foot Montague II priced at \$270,990) leading the way with seven sales. The Callahan II has four sales. Wall builds the Bankston houses at an average hard cost (materials and labor only) of \$51 a square foot. Serviced lot cost averages \$45,000. **PB**



**LOG ON** To see the floor plan for the Callahan II, visit us online at [www.ProBuilder.com/plansandprojects](http://www.ProBuilder.com/plansandprojects)



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**IN HOME OFFICES,** location is key. The current trend is to put the office on the first floor, near the front entry. Using large windows allows natural light to fill the room.

**BECAUSE IT IS A WORK SPACE,** good lighting is essential. Display lights are a nice addition to the home office and can also be used to call attention to the homeowner's art — or a prize catch.

**ROLLOUT SHELVING** can be hidden behind closed doors. Roll-out shelves are popular for items such as printers, faxes and scanners.

## INSIDE &amp; OUT

# The Complete Home Office

Homeowners seek work spaces that fit within the floor plan and aesthetically blend with the house.

**Ten years ago, homeowners crammed office spaces** into the corner of bedrooms and kitchens or spread out across the seldom-used dining room table. Today, whether used for work or personal reasons, home offices are an option in the design of almost every new home. “It used to be an afterthought,” Mark Malouf, COO of Oak Brook, Ill.-based Montalbano Homes says. “We do a lot more merchandising of office spaces in our model homes. We are constantly trying to incorporate them into our home designs.”

What’s driving the trend? Integration of computers in every aspect of daily life, from family budgeting to e-mail to personal Web sites; telecommuters who want to avoid energy-sapping commutes that eat up family time; and work-at-home business owners who have dropped out of the corporate life. “We are designing more home offices that are truly used for business,” Pam Di Valerio, owner and designer at Di Valerio Interiors Kitchen and Bath Design in Santa Clarita, Calif., says.

## Placement Matters

As our lifestyles have changed, offices have become essential elements in homes. West Hartford, Conn., architect Neal Zimmerman says, “Builders need to provide for it in the same way they provide for the kitchen and bath.”

As with kitchens and baths, the office location needs to be versatile and meet the buyer’s needs. There are some basic considerations, though. For example: privacy. “It wouldn’t be a great idea to have a home office next to a kitchen because of the noise,” says Zimmerman of Neal Zimmerman & Associates AIA. “It’s not a good idea to have an office in an alcove that opens into a family space either.”

**BUILT-IN SHELVES** and cabinets can be used to store items such as books, paper and supplies.



**MANY HOME OFFICES ARE USED** by more than one person. This office's centralized work area accommodates at least two people.

So, where do you place the office? "It's good if it could be near or off a front entry," Zimmerman says, "Or, if it could have its own front entry."

"It's that question of privacy versus availability from your family," Malouf says. Montalbano Homes tends to place the room in the heart of the home or near the master bedroom.

"With dual-income families and work-at-home moms, they want that ability to still connect with the family," Malouf says. An office at the center of activity provides that opportunity but creates issues with noise and privacy.

An office near the master bedroom solves the noise issue. "We've created office options in the adjoining bedroom

## MULTI-FUNCTIONAL OFFICES

**Space doesn't always permit for a separate home office.** "Living in San Francisco, where space is a commodity, you have to pack a punch in a very small space," Mark Dutka, owner and designer of InHouse Design Studio in the San Francisco area, says. "Sometimes it has multiple uses."

The home office may be a combination of a guest or media room. "Quite often, people think of it as a multi-functional room," West Hartford, Conn., architect Neal Zimmerman says. "The room might be a home office in the day and an entertainment room in the evening."

Some people even dedicate a portion of their office to specific hobbies, such as sewing, scrapbooking or kids' activities. "It depends on what the person's needs are," Dutka says.

## 3 Keys to Home Office Design

Neal Zimmerman of Neal Zimmerman & Associates in West Hartford, Conn., says all good home offices share three things.

- ❶ **Balance** – The home and work life within the home office should be balanced.
- ❷ **Organization** – A good home office is well organized internally and in relation to the rest of the house.
- ❸ **Personal spirit** – Clients can decorate the office to their own taste that allows them to do their best work.

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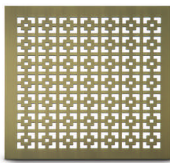




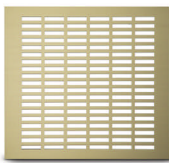
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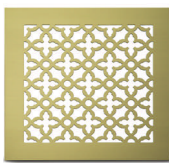
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## Plans and Projects



**PROPER LIGHTING** is essential to productive work in a home office. These examples show natural light and task lighting in a home office.



off the master bedrooms," Malouf says. "In many cases, it's just converting a second bedroom into an office/den situation we call libraries."

## Must-Have Features

Every home office must be equipped with necessities. Today, that means technology. "The home office is usually a digital communication center," Zimmerman says. Obviously, offices should have an Internet connection, whether through a phone jack or via cable/satellite. In addition, the equipment location should include proper ventilation.

"Technology is driving the furniture," Lisa Kanarek, founder of Dallas-based HomeOfficeLife.com, says. "It's driving how the furniture is designed and how it's used."

Builders now offer built-in cabinetry options during the selection process so home buyers can plan for a complete office. One of the biggest considerations is storage because home offices often lack storage space, Kanarek notes.

"There will always be a need for ample storage behind doors, including rollout shelving to hide fax machines, printers and copiers," Di Valerio says. "Also, plenty of bookshelves, file drawers and counter/work surface are a must."

"Because computers are the main staple in any home office, I always design a dual work area," Di Valerio says. "One area being for computer and keyboard, the other being a writing surface."

Builders have discovered the importance of lighting in offices. "Proper lighting, including general, task and display lighting can not be an afterthought," Di Valerio says.

Montalbano Homes adds natural light while adding a touch of design element. "We like to do the entry with glass doors," Malouf says. "We try to make it have a good feel but elegant so it still feels homey." **PB**

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>> BY JENNIFER BLOCK MARTIN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

## Decked Out

Landscape professionals offer builders advice for building better decks.

### Decks create an extension of living space

when they are thoughtfully integrated with a home's exterior. As recent as a few years ago, people weren't building as many, instead leaning toward concrete paver patios, says landscape architect Dean Hill. "Decks are back due to new materials, and now elevated outdoor areas are in."

With the outdoor room trend exploding, clients are looking to you to deftly integrate decks into their homes. We've asked masters of the outdoor domain for advice. Here is what they told us.

### Know Your Clients' Wants

First, understand what your client wants. "People are nesting and creating home sanctuaries," observes Vera Gates, a partner in the San Francisco landscape architecture studio Arterra. "Spas continue to be popular, as we hear people say, 'We're going to Hawaii for the weekend'—in their own backyard." She says her firm also finds more clients want full outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and charcoal grills.

Gates says rising real estate values warrant a need to maximize the full potential of a homeowner's property. "Clients value landscape even more so than 10 years ago."

### Communicate

Both Gates and Hill agree the key to creating a beautiful environment is communication. "Builders tend to build first and ask questions later instead of getting clarification upfront," Gates says. "The results can be difficult to correct. If you really want to save time, the builder

needs to sit down with the landscape architect at the beginning to understand the quality and intent of the project."

"By involving the architect, builder, and landscape architect, you're taking a holistic disciplinary approach to the project, and as a result, the house looks more complete," Hill says.

Site constraints like elevation changes — especially for production builders — need to be addressed at the onset. "A builder might build a house first, then look at elevation issues. How do you deal with a front door that's 6 feet off of grade?" Hill says. Landscapes and hardscapes are too often last to be dealt with, so budgeting becomes a problem. "Bring in the landscape architect early and know realistically what the end budget will be," he says.

### Choose Materials Wisely

After 15 years in residential landscape architecture, Hill doesn't have any tried-and-true time-saving construction tips for builders. He does, however, recommend working with landscape architects when specifying materials. For example, of the three choices for retaining walls — masonry, 6 by 6 timber and segmental with decorative rock — a landscape architect will know



**DOROTHY HAD IT RIGHT** — there's no place like home. Rather than fly away for peace and tranquility, homeowners are looking to build vacation-like retreats in their own backyard using ornate decks and landscaping similar to what is pictured here.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VERA GATES/ARTERRA

that the segmental takes less time and doesn't require a tradesperson.

### Go Green

Gates' clients are mindful of water conservation and green products yet still opt for wood decks. "They don't like the look and feel of green products, but I think this will change," she says. Beyond wood and composite, Hill says there are appealing new products, such as Xccent's DryDeck aluminum watertight decking and Dekstone, a stone-like reinforced-concrete paver that can be installed on a deck.

"Builders often see new products before us," Gates says. "It's a team effort. We all benefit from new materials and ways of doing things. I look at builders as craftspeople and have learned a ton from the ones I've worked with." **PB**

*Jennifer Block Martin is a San Francisco-based writer.*

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## PATH REPORT

# Streamline Your Business

Shortcuts can help you profit in a new market.

**As the white-hot housing market cools,** builders can maintain a competitive edge by improving construction quality while controlling costs.

## Factory Building

Name three things that make your customers cringe — such as mold, escalating prices and construction delays. Factory building helps all three.

You probably know that using pre-engineered roof trusses saves time compared to building trusses on site. But consider saving money by reducing discarded scrap lumber or constructing the roof more quickly so there is less chance of water-related problems. An NAHB Building Systems Council studied a 2,600-square-foot home built with trusses and prefabricated panels and found that it used 26 percent less lumber; was erected in 37 percent of the man hours of a similar, stick-built home; and created 76 percent less waste.

Fernando Pages-Ruiz, a production builder in Lincoln, Neb., used to stick-build his homes on site. But when a panel factory opened up locally, his company, Brighton Construction, switched to wall panels because of the time and cost savings.

“They are framing the walls at the factory at the same time that we are pouring the

foundation,” says Pages-Ruiz. “The moment we are done with the foundation the walls arrive, and one week later, it’s all framed up and the plumbers are in. And when you are using wall panels, one superintendent can supervise five or six crews. We have an erection crew as opposed to a framing crew, which saves us money.”

Modular construction takes these advantages to the next level. Because modular homes are built under a roof in a factory, weather delays are eliminated and time isn’t wasted as materials dry out. Because modular homes must be strong enough to transport, they also tend to be sturdier and more airtight than stick-built homes. Best of all, it only takes a few days to assemble a two-story, 2,600-square foot modular home on-site. Modular homes can be finished within a month or two as opposed to twice that long for site-built homes.

## Manage the Supply Chain

Cut costs by managing your supply chain more efficiently. In particular, work on improving purchasing and inventory management.



## MODULES BUILT IN A FACTORY

allow homes to be completed on-site in a month or two.

## A recent study from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies

reports that costs and construction cycle time for production builders in the top third of the innovation scale were 10 percent lower than for production builders in the lower third of the scale. That's enough to make the difference between a profitable year and a new career.



Imagine no 2x4s sitting out for weeks getting wet, warped or stolen. With just-in-time delivery, you get materials right when you need them, not before or after. Just-in-time delivery requires a fairly firm construction schedule, with buy-in from your subcontractors and an accurate estimate of the resources you will need and when.

The benefits include reduced job site theft, better cash flow — and increased profits — through lower inventories and not having to worry about storing materials and protecting them from the weather.

Although this process has

transformed the auto industry, most builders avoid just-in-time delivery because it takes more planning and they're afraid materials won't show up

in time. Builders have to be able to trust their suppliers for just-in-time delivery to work. Developing and maintaining a good relationship is key.

## Try Software Tools

Planning and coordination is best achieved with the proper construction management software tools. Don't miss the boat — or the road to higher profits — by failing to take advantage of software that can dramatically improve your building processes.

Dozens of companies sell construction management software that make scheduling, estimating, ordering, billing and management more efficient. These programs can help builders manage the construction process so they can spend more time building a high-quality home.

## Consider the Fundamentals

The underlying concept behind streamlining is whole house design, which teaches that a house is a system and that a change in one part of the system will affect other parts. The principles are drawn from the efficiencies of the industrial design and manufacturing process and can be applied to any type of construction.

Consider first how the new homeowners will live in and operate the home. Meet with the architect, HVAC installer, plumber and other contractors to consider each component and how they interact. Builders can incorporate the five basic building science concepts into every decision about the house. By looking at these components together, a builder can refine the design so all systems can be installed as efficiently as possible. This takes a little extra time at the start but ultimately will speed construction and produce a higher quality home. **PB**

*The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.*

**LOG ON** To learn the five building science concepts builders should incorporate, visit [www.ProBuilder.com/innovations](http://www.ProBuilder.com/innovations)



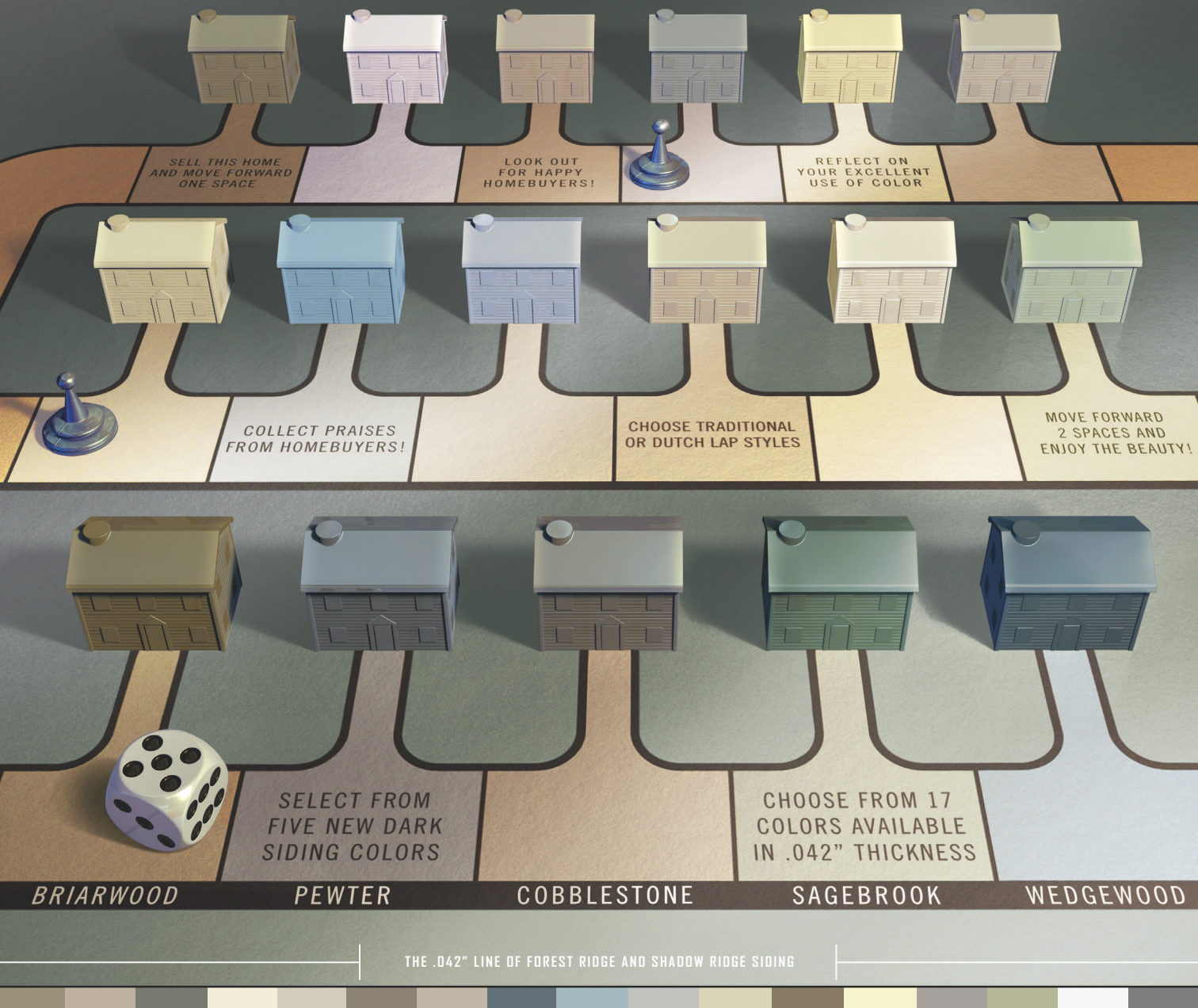
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# Pulte Homes



**Steve Burch**  
National Vice President  
of Strategic Marketing  
Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

*With contributions from  
Jim Petersen,  
Director of Research and Development*

## ▼ Pulte Homes' Pultrim by Tecton [www.tectonproducts.com](http://www.tectonproducts.com)

Developed by Pulte Homes and produced by Tecton, Pultrim is a new series of interconnecting exterior fiberglass trim parts that replace wood, aluminum and vinyl. These products are manufactured by a unique process called pultrusion, used for producing continuous lengths of reinforced plastic that can be formed into the fascia, soffit, gutter, frieze and crown moldings of a home, with a finished coating already applied. **Circle #125 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-125>**



### In My Own Words

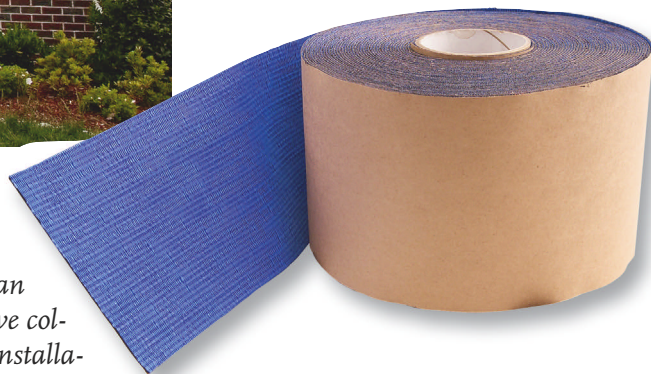
*"Pultrim is an exciting innovation in maintenance-free exterior trim for areas that use colonial/classic styles. The product can reduce installation labor and can speed the installation process. Currently available in five colors, this washable product never needs attention after installation. Cost is still an issue, but as Pultrim reaches a tipping point of acceptance, the costs should come down."*

## ▼ Dow Weathermate Straight and Flexible Flashing [www.dow.com](http://www.dow.com)

Weathermate Straight Flashing and Flexible Flashing provide a watertight seal around areas most vulnerable to water leaks: windows, doors and skylights. Featuring a cross-laminated, polymeric facer and butyl rubber adhesive, Weathermate readily adheres to most building materials and is self-sealing over nails and staples. **Circle #126 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-126>**

### In My Own Words

*"What we've got with Weathermate are five new, innovative products we're watching or experimenting with that we believe can make a big difference in the industry. Dow window sill flashing is an easy-to-install, cost-effective solution to a common home-building problem."*



>> **Pulte Homes** cont'd► **Milgard Fiberglass Windows**  
**www.milgard.com**

Milgard's fiberglass windows are produced using a process known as pultrusion. Glass rovings and mats are pulled at tremendous forces through a resin bath and a series of dies. These materials combine and catalyze, providing yielding a fiberglass that won't crack, peel, warp, split, pit or corrode and is virtually impervious to water. **Circle #127 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-127>**

**In My Own Words**

*"Pultruded fiberglass windows offer an excellent, energy-efficient, rot- and mold-resistant product that is very stable with no expansion/contraction. As with the pultruded trim, however, this solution tends to be a bit cost-prohibitive. But also like pultruded trim, as the application of pultruded fiberglass windows becomes more widespread, we expect the volume to reach a tipping point and bring the cost down."*

▲ **BrassCraft**  
**SureConnect system**  
**www.brasscraft.com**

BrassCraft SureConnect is a new and innovative system for water supply connections that will add both speed and profits to plumbing. Key to the new system is BrassCraft's pre-formed stub-out with its proprietary end form that connects in seconds. The patented lockable housing lets plumbing subs see, feel and hear the connection as it's installed to assure a leak-free connection every time.

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**In My Own Words**

*"The BrassCraft SureConnect system has the potential to increase dramatically the speed of installation and the reliability of the connection to sinks, lavs, tubs and toilets. For the builder, it is a clear bonus in terms of cycle time."*

▼ **Tankless Water Heaters by Noritz**  
**www.noritz.com**

Noritz tankless gas water heaters reduce energy costs up to 50 percent and save space because the compact design allows installation virtually anywhere, indoors or outdoors. **Circle #129 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-129>**

**In My Own Words**

*"This is an exciting innovation in instant hot water and a very efficient use of energy."*

*Tankless water heaters provide hot water instantly to any area of the house and, due to the no-tank design, provide excellent use of space, thereby providing additional design flexibility. Widely used in Japan and throughout Europe, they are still a bit cost-prohibitive for wide application among big, value-oriented production builders, but it is an emerging technology that will make its presence felt in the years to come."*





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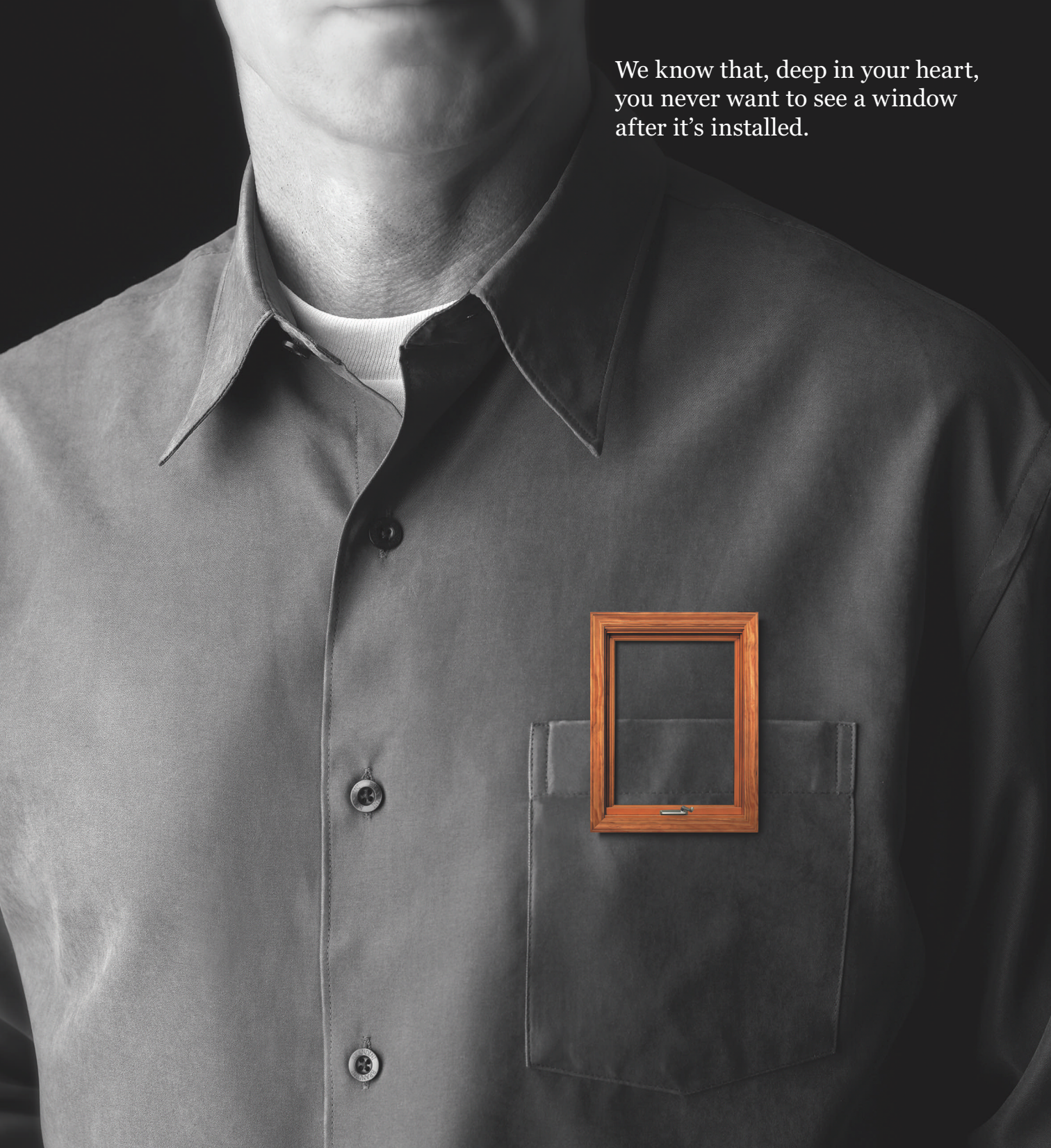
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A black and white photograph of a man's torso wearing a dark, button-down shirt. A small, square wooden window frame is placed on the left chest pocket. The frame is open, and a small latch is visible at the bottom. The background is dark.

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# Windows & Doors



## Simpson ▼

Simpson Door Company's Mastermark Dorado door features silver coming with small stained glass ovals set in a field of drawn antique-style insulated glass.

The door is available in one or two wood panels in Douglas fir, Western hemlock and American red oak. The doors are 1-3/4 inch thick with standard widths of 3 feet; 3 feet, 2 inches; 3 feet, 4 inches; and 3 feet, 6 inches. Standard heights are 6 feet, 8 inches and 7 feet. Matching sidelights are available.

**Circle #131 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-131>.**



## Andersen Windows & Doors ▲

Andersen's 400 series Frenchwood double-hinged patio doors feature Low-E4 tempered glass, which the company says reduces water spotting up to 99 percent and reduces energy bills by 25 percent. The doors have a three-way locking system and can open inward for small balconies, decks and patios. They measure 5 feet, 11 1/4-inches by 6 feet, 7 1/2-inches and are made of rich oak, maple or pine. Hardware options include a choice of seven styles and 10 finishes.

**Circle #132 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-132>.**

## Weather Shield Windows & Doors ▲

Weather Shield's Collections doors, which were featured as prototypes at IBS, have hide-away roll screens in a French sliding door, hinged patio door or entrance door configurations for high-end homes. Builders can choose from American fir, Spanish cedar, alder and mahogany for interior doors. The company recently made a partnership with Stone River Bronze, which provides customized, handcrafted hardware in silver-colored bronze or antique oil-rubbed finishes. Rustic-looking wire-brushed textures are also available.

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## Milgard ▼

Milgard's fiberglass entry doors, from parent firm Masco, feature the company's SuncoatMax Low-E glass that reduces solar heat gain by 60 percent over single-coated glass and blocks 95 percent of UV light. The doors accept paint and stain and are available unfinished or pre-finished. There are 12 glass designs to choose from, including the Stellar (shown), Onyx and El Dorado. The fiberglass line also features double-hung windows.

**Circle #133 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-133>.**



## Marvin Windows and Doors

Marvin hardwood entry doors have hand-carved appliques, embossing and engraving fully customizable for logos, family crests and other details. The doors are made with mahogany, cedar, white oak, walnut or cherry. A reverse-grain, face-glued manufacturing technique is used on the stiles and rails, which are joined using a blind mortise-and-tenon system. Seven styles are available: artistic, classic, traditional, craftsman, old world, luminary and rustic.

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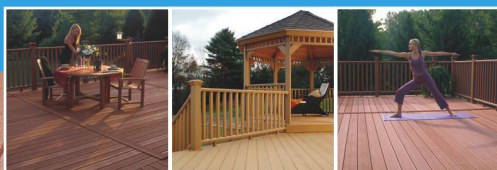
## Peachtree

Peachtree's 500 and 700 (shown) series doors are made from extruded aluminum and are designed for hinged and sliding patio doors. The hinged doors are made in a 1 3/4-inch standard panel or a premium 2-1/4-inch panel in traditional or French styles. All have multi-point locking systems and four adjustable hinges. Hinged doors can also have raised panels, and sliding doors have dual tandem rollers and security foot bolts. Seven colors are available: white, black, brass, brushed chrome, nickel, antique or oil-rubbed brass.

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# Decorative Products

## Wassmer Studios

Wassmer Studios' handcrafted ornamental pieces are made with non-combustible hardened plaster available in cornice and panel mouldings, ceiling centers, corbels, niches and mantels. All installations are applied by adhesives and permanently installed with three to four fasteners along the bottom edge and two or three along the top. Each piece can be primed and painted.

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## Laurey

Laurey Cabinet Hardware introduced several new lines of cabinet hardware, including the Alhambra; classical Greek-inspired Mykonos; Waverly; Churchill, which features a leather/metal casting; and Monte Carlo pulls and knobs. All lines are made with a series of new finishes, including two-tone gold, oil rubbed bronze, Venetian bronze and weathered antique bronze. The lines also feature matching hinges.

Circle #137 or go to <http://pb.ims.ca/5145-137>.



## Atlas Homeware

Atlas Homeware's coordinating appliance pulls dress-up kitchen appliances and cabinet knobs with the retro-style Primitive line and modern-inspired Optimism line. There are six lines for builders to choose from in 18-inch or 20-inch sizes, including the Zanzibar (shown). The pulls and knobs are available in burnished bronze, polished chrome, sleek black or brushed nickel. Atlas' lines are available at retailers such as The Great Indoors and The Expo Design Center.

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## Fypon

Fypon's one-piece fireplace mantel surround is made of low-maintenance urethane that accepts paint and finish. It stands 50 inches by 55 inches and has a 37 3/16-inch by 37 3/16-inch fireplace opening that works with most factory-made fireplaces. The piece installs with a urethane millwork adhesive and requires little hammer-and-nail work for most wall surfaces. The company says it installs in about an hour and measures a 6 1/2 inches at the top for bric-a-brac.

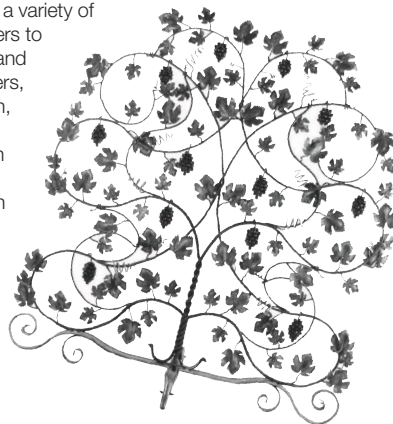
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## King Architectural Metals

King Architectural Metals has a variety of decorative products for builders to choose from, including door and gate hardware, gates, balusters, panels and other wrought iron, aluminum or steel forgings. Balusters are available in satin black, copper patina, matte black finish and pewter vein in hundreds of designs at 9/16-inch thick with matching S and C scrolls. The company features 1,600 designs in all and can cast custom projects.

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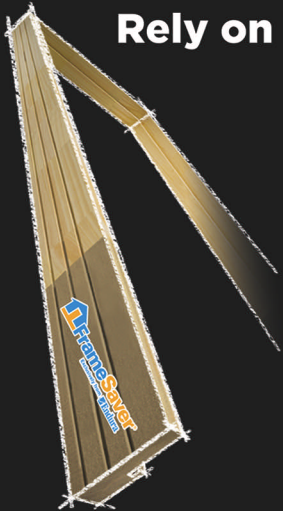
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## Tuesday, September 26

12:00 – 5:00  
HOUSING TOUR - MOUNTAIN EDGE COMMUNITY

12:00 – 5:00  
GOLF OUTING - REFLECTION BAY GOLF COURSE

6:00 – 8:00  
WELCOME COCKTAIL RECEPTION

## Wednesday, September 27

8:00 – 9:30  
KEYNOTE ON LEADERSHIP – PATRICK LENCIONI



Patrick Lencioni is the founder and president of The Table Group Inc., a specialized management-consulting firm focused on executive team-building and organizational health. He has been described by the One-Minute Manager's Ken Blanchard as "fast defining the next generation of business thinkers." Pat's passion for organizations and teams is reflected in his writing, speaking and consulting. He is the author of five business books, including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, which was on the New York

Times Best Sellers list. His new book, *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars*, came out in March 2006. Pat consults executives and speaks to world class organizations, addressing thousands of leaders. Prior to founding his firm, Pat worked for Sybase, Oracle and Bain & Company. He also served on the National Board of Directors for the Make-A-Wish Foundation of America from 2000-2003.

9:45 – 11:00  
REAL-ESTATE MARKET UPDATE – JOHN BURNS,  
PRESIDENT, JOHN BURNS REAL ESTATE CONSULTING  
GIANTS magazine columnist John Burns provides unique insight to the real-estate market. He will share the trends, opportunities and threats facing home builders in an increasingly difficult market.

11:00 – 11:45  
BUILDING MATERIAL MARKET UPDATE –  
BARRY RUTENBERG, PRESIDENT,  
BARRY RUTENBERG AND ASSOCIATES  
Barry Rutenberg has been a leading voice in understanding the impact building material issues have on builders. He will share his timely information on regulations, tariffs and other events affecting product supply.

## DETAILS

1:15 – 1:45  
LEADERSHIP – LARRY WEBB,  
CEO, JOHN LAING HOMES  
Establishing a culture of leadership in a company requires inspired direction and a strong plan. Hear from a recognized industry leader on successful methods for developing true leaders in your organization.

1:45 – 2:15  
STRATEGIC PLANNING – MARK HODGES,  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, CORPORATE OPERATIONS,  
HOVNANIAN ENTERPRISES  
Leadership translated into action only comes from strategic planning. The future of Hovnanian Enterprises has been mapped by a clear plan. Learn about the methodology for strategic planning executed by one of the largest, most aggressive builders in the country.

2:15 – 2:45  
HUMAN RESOURCES – MARK UPTON,  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT – WESTERN REGION,  
TECHNICAL OLYMPIC USA  
The engine at the center of any successful home building company is fueled by quality employees. Technical Olympic's focus on supporting quality people with best practices points to the clear connection between recruitment/retention and superior operations.

3:00 – 5:00  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS –  
LEADERSHIP, STRATEGIC PLANNING,  
HUMAN RESOURCES

6:00 – 10:00  
NHQ AWARD DINNER

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## Details: The Foundation of Success

In a year of change, home builders face new pressures from all sides. Ensuring they execute the details of their businesses is essential to growth and prosperity. To help you succeed, the Professional Builder 2006 Benchmark Conference focuses on the specifics of operating a quality home building company.

Our keynote speakers will address the essential success elements of leadership and team-building, providing the framework for executing the details. Then our nationally recognized builders will delve into six areas that are essential to develop for your company's future success: Leadership, Strategic Planning, Human Resources, Trade Relations, Performance Management and Construction Quality

## Thursday, September, 28

8:00 – 9:30  
KEYNOTE ON PERFORMANCE – KEITH HARRELL



Known for his energetic, innovative presentations, Keith Harrell is a dynamic life coach who specializes in changing behaviors through a positive attitude. While growing up in Seattle, he aspired to become a professional basketball player. Although he never realized that dream, The Wall Street Journal says, "What sets him apart from less successful speakers is driving ambition and an attitude that refuses to flag." Through his company, Harrell Performance Systems, and his book, *Attitude is Everything: Ten Life Changing Steps to Turning Attitude into Action*, Keith specializes in helping companies achieve and maintain their goals. Harrell spent 14 years at IBM, where he was recognized as one of the top sales and training instructors. He is widely regarded as one of the country's best speakers.

9:45 – 11:45  
LEGENDARY SERVICE AT THE RITZ  
The Ritz-Carlton has earned a worldwide reputation for delivering customer services that set a standard for every business owner to emulate. How do they do it? Get the inside story on their methods to identify, hire, train and motivate employees to meet the demands of the most demanding customers.

11:45 – 1:15  
NRS SATISFACTION 1 AWARD LUNCH



## DETAILS

1:15 – 1:45  
TRADE RELATIONS – BRYAN BINNEY,  
VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS, SHEA HOMES  
Developing partners to support the future of your business is essential to mitigate the risk of home building. Trade partner relations mean sharing in each other's success. Executing that requires careful communication, attention to details and long-term commitments.

1:45 – 2:15  
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – BILL SAINT,  
CFO & DIRECTOR, SIMONINI BUILDERS  
Every good company wants to improve performance. Establishing a foundation for performance management is essential. 2006 Builder of the Year Simonini Builders has created in-house methods that give the tools to its employees to meet enormous expectations from demanding clients.

2:15 – 2:45  
CONSTRUCTION QUALITY – CHARLIE SCOTT,  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, THE ESTRIDGE COMPANIES  
Known for its superior customer service, The Estridge Companies starts the process through a program of superior construction quality. Learn the techniques this dynamic company uses to control, communicate and execute the craft of building every day.

3:00 – 5:00  
BREAKOUT SESSIONS –  
TRADE RELATIONS, PERFORMANCE  
MANAGEMENT, CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

6:30 – 10:00  
NETWORKING OUTING –  
NINE FINE IRISHMEN PUB

## Friday, September 29

9:00 – 12:00  
TEAM-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES  
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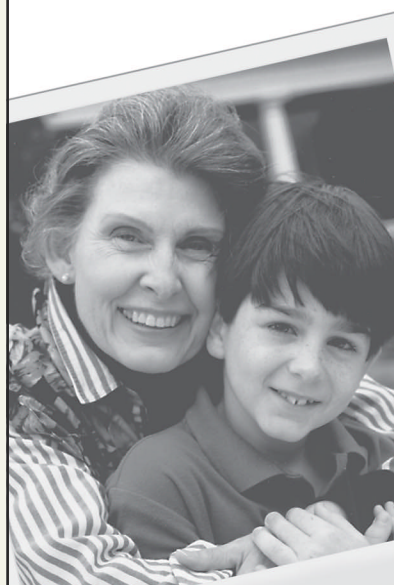
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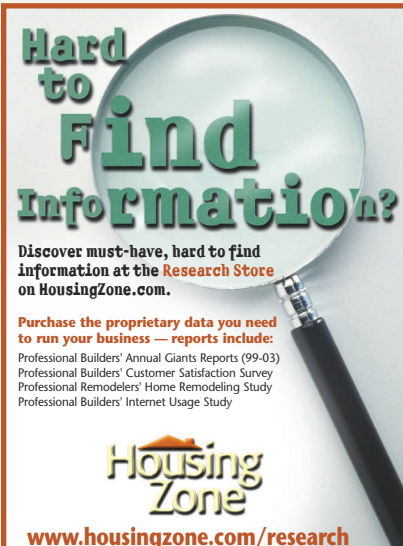
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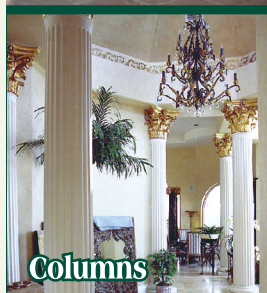
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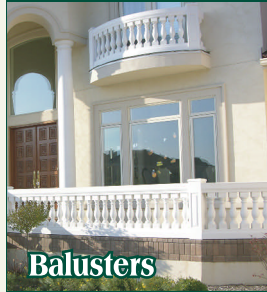
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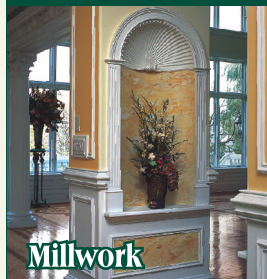
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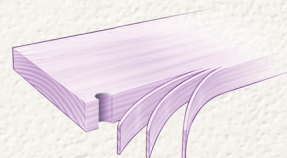
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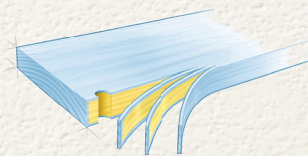


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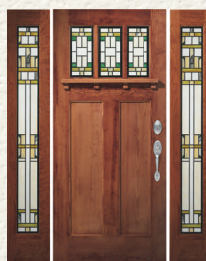
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