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GREEN FACE-OFF
Who's right? Who's not? You decide.
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WHAT IS GREEN?
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SELLING GREEN
Should you build green to make yourself stand out?
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GREEN BUILDING SURVEY RESULTS



Twist on Tradition

Colorado builder finds a green niche with contemporary features

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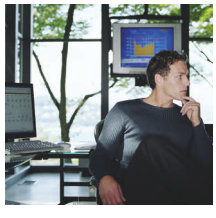
green value





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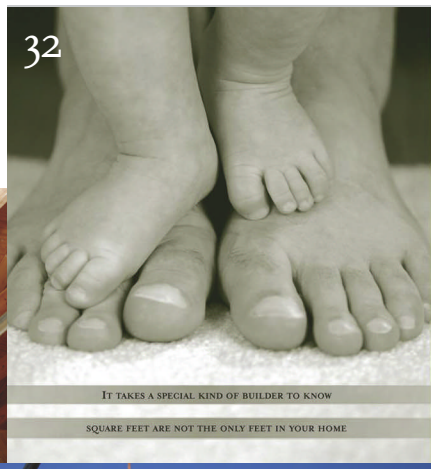







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Serious Green

Are we serious yet? Is this green movement in home building going to last? Or is it just another tease, such as the one we had in the late '70s or the early '90s?

Home builders think green is here to stay. Consider these numbers from our Green Building Survey, which we report in this month's issue:

- 67 percent of builders believe green is not a fad
- 70 percent of builders say green building is important or extremely important to their market strategy
- 80 percent of builders believe environmental goals are important or extremely important when planning new developments

Those are strong indicators that we are on a truly green footing, and maybe — just maybe — we will find broad adoption of green practices across home building. I hope so. I truly do. Adopting stringent green building practices today will have a huge impact on energy consumption, sustainability, indoor air quality and other green issues for decades.

To be honest, though, we don't have a strong consensus within the industry to adopt green practices. I disagree with the majority of builders in our survey who believe green is not a fad. Perhaps I'm too much of a cynic, but there are other numbers in our survey that cause me to doubt home building's commitment to green practices.

I know two things about builders: one, they are very conscious of the costs of construction; and two, they do not accept a cost increase unless it correlates to an increase in sales.

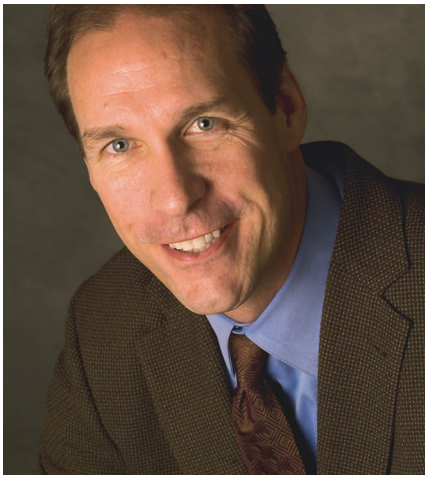
Our survey says builders don't see that happening. Nearly all builders — a pinch shy of 100 percent — say green building techniques increase the cost of a home. And 61 percent believe green techniques raise the price of a home at least six percent. However, half say green building has had no effect on sales. Add in the 18 percent who believed it only increased traffic and that means nearly 70 percent of builders see no market value from adopting green building practices.

> "Without **adopting** one standard, I'm certain my cynicism about **green building** will be proven."

No value increase at an increased cost. What builder you know thinks that's a good business model?

Not only do we have this disconnect, we have disagreement about green certification programs. As much as NAHB and the U.S. Green Building Council would like us to believe their two certification programs don't compete, the obvious truth is they do. The fact that there are two programs only creates market confusion and doubt among home buyers.

Let me offer this proof. Of builders, 87 percent agree there should be minimum standards of performance and sustainability before a builder can market a home as green — but they disagree strongly about who should set those standards. Opinion about who should set the standards is split evenly among independent, third-party programs; trade associations; and some form of government oversight. That last one is the real shocker: more than a third of builders say federal, state or local government should be setting the standards for green building.



To me, that's a call for help. We want green building standards. We want them to be consistent. And we want consumers to drive demand for green homes. To achieve that, we have to have one standard we all accept. Without adopting one standard, I'm certain my cynicism about green building will be proven.

If that happens, we will have lost a huge opportunity to improve the built environment in a manner that could affect generations of home owners. **PB**

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Benchmark Conference Agenda

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Tuesday, Sept. 25
6-8 p.m. – Welcome Cocktail Reception

Wednesday, Sept. 26
8-10 a.m. – Keynote Speaker Jason Jennings, "Thing Big, Act Small"

10-11 a.m. – J. Walker Smith, "Consumers are in Control ...And They Mean Business"

11:15 a.m.-noon – James Haughey, "Industry Update"

1:30-3 p.m. – National Housing Quality Award Panel

3:30-4:45 p.m. – Breakout Sessions:
Supply Chain
New Technology
Green Building

7:30-10 p.m. – Awards Gala

Thursday, Sept. 27
8-9:15 a.m. – Keynote Speaker Robert Kriegel, "Break It! Bringing Successful Innovation and Creativity to Your Business"

9:45-10:15 a.m. – John Rymer, "7 Things You Can Do Right Now To Improve Sales"

11 a.m.- noon – Sales Professionals Panel, moderated by John Rymer

1:15-2:30 p.m. – AVID Awards Panel, moderated by Paul Cardis

3-4 p.m. – Rick Heaston, "Make it Last: Relationship Selling"

4-5 p.m. – Builder Panel Discussion, moderated by Rick Heaston

6:30-11 p.m. – Fun Night at the winery

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>> BY **PAUL CARDIS,** *AVID RATINGS CO.*

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Flowers in the Lobby

Why maintaining your company's culture and image during tough times should stay a priority.

As the housing industry enters a second wave of suppressed sales, it worries me to see so many large home builders slashing expenditures in an attempt to achieve a particular bottom line with little regard to the impact these cuts will have on long-term customer equity.

Though it is every executive's responsibility to run an efficient operation and survive tough times, the cuts I'm seeing are gutting companies of key personnel and entire quality-assurance departments, thereby sacrificing their future ability to meet today's standards of quality and survive long-term.

It is important for a company to stick to its cultural beliefs and to resist jettisoning everything it stands for to make the bottom line. This reminds me of a story Horst Schulze, Ritz-Carlton's founding president, told me.

He recalled visiting one of the Ritz-Carlton hotels in New York just after Sept. 11 and noticing the staff had not put the traditional bouquet of fresh-cut flowers in the hotel's lobby. When Schulze asked why the flowers were missing, the hotel manager replied there were no guests in the hotel because of the attack on the World Trade Center, so he decided to forgo the flowers in an attempt to save money.

Smart decision? Not according to Schulze.

Despite how dire the economic situation looked for the hotel, Schulze was not willing to sacrifice the high level of service and amenities customers had come to expect from Ritz-Carlton. For Schulze, survival meant ensuring the standard of quality and longevity of the brand during down times. Schulze instructed the hotel manager to order the flowers and found other areas to trim in the company.

In the home building industry, high performing builders seem best prepared to follow Schulze's advice to hold true to their corporate cultures during tough times. Because of their leadership and company culture, they tend to be more adaptable to respond to market forces. This makes it easier for them to implement changes and make smart cuts that maintain resources and preserve their customer equity. Many less-advanced builders don't have the savvy to adapt and gut their resources. Their customer equity diminishes along with their brand. Today, there are reports of big builders quickly downsizing, switching to cheaper materials to get the bottom line they want and firing their QA departments.



It is important for a company to stick to its cultural beliefs and to resist jettisoning everything it stands for to make the bottom line.

I caution builders not to destroy all of the hard work that went into building their culture of quality. The housing slump won't last forever. Tomorrow's customers will expect even higher quality products and services than they do today. Those builders who maintain customer delight through these trying times will be the ones to profit the most.

During hard times, it's more important than ever to offer quality products, knowledgeable staff and support after the sale. Most builders already offer a good value, but in a suppressed economy you need to give more. In fact, everything you do to succeed during good times — a strong team spirit, a motivated staff, a corporate culture focused on customer delight, etc. — is that much more important during bad times.

Delighting customers in the current economic environment may not be easy, but it is certainly possible. How well you succeed will be a true test of your leadership skills and abilities. **PB**

Paul Cardis is CEO of AVID Ratings Co., a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home-building industry. He can be reached at paul.cardis@avidratings.com.

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>> BY **RODNEY HALL,** *THE TALON GROUP*

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Job Search 2.0

Tap technology and refine your approach to help land your next big gig.

If you're reading this month's issue, odds are good you are gainfully employed and borrowed the magazine from your office.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for many of your peers in the industry. My partners and I are fielding more calls than ever from the newly unemployed, with little indication it will let up. So, in hopes of helping more people in less time, here are some job search strategies from a search professional's perspective.

Target Companies, Not Jobs

Develop a list of highly desirable companies — the ones you've heard great things about and, truth be told, you would take a step or two backward in your career to join them.

Play 'Guess Who's Coming to Town'

If you are in a market where everyone is cutting back, odds are slim you will have much success landing a position with an established, local company. The good news is there are plenty of builders who see the current conditions as an opportunity to expand into new markets — maybe even yours. Go to the Giant 400 to identify the top 50 builders not currently in your market. Add them to your list.

Do Your Homework

Now that you've developed your list, it's time to find out who the players are in each organization — specifically those executives one to two levels above the position you are seeking. The following search engines and networking sites will get you there much quicker:

- **ZoomInfo.com:** This Web-based service collates information from multiple online documents and renders a simple profile of the person, including name, company, most recent title, e-mail, phone, etc. ZoomExec costs $99/month. However, Zoom offers a free, 30-day trial.
- **Jigsaw.com:** Jigsaw's mission is to map every business organization on the planet through an online directory of more than 6 million business cards. Using a point system for credit, members trade business cards they have for business cards they need. Each Jigsaw member brings a few pieces of the puzzle, resulting in a change to the way corporate information is gathered and maintained.
- **LinkedIn.com.** LinkedIn is an online network of more than 12 million professionals. When you join, you create a profile that summarizes your professional accomplishments. Your profile helps you find and be found by former colleagues, clients and partners. Your network consists of your connections, your connections' connections and the people they know, linking you to thousands of qualified professionals.



My partners and I are fielding more calls than ever from the newly unemployed, with little indication it will let up.

Go Direct(ory)

Lastly, don't forget online association directories. The NAHB Web site includes a list of directories geared toward various interests. For example, candidates for sales and marketing positions will find the Institute of Residential Marketing Directory useful as a networking tool.

Once you've compiled your list of target companies and identified the key executives, send each a short introductory e-mail with a short overview of your most recent positions. Your goal is to encapsulate your message in a way it can be understood in a matter of seconds. To see an example of this, be sure to see the online version of this article. **PB**

Rodney Hall is a senior partner with The Talon Group, a leading executive search firm specializing in the real-estate development and home building industries.

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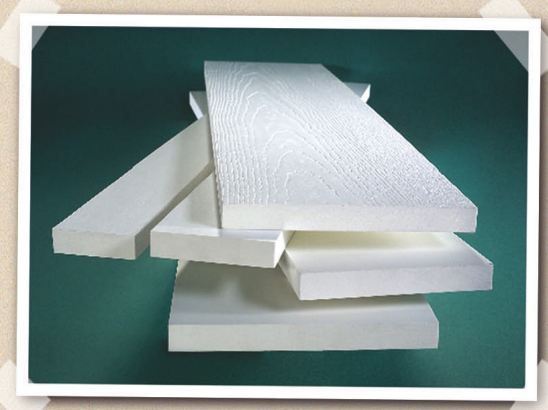

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>> BY **JOHN RYMER,** *NEW HOME KNOWLEDGE*

NEW HOME KNOWLEDGE

House-to-Sell Customers

Part one of a two-part series on closing a contract with house-to-sell customers.

What is the single biggest obstacle that prevents new home customers from purchasing a home today? Affordability? No. Sub-prime loans? Not really. The No. 1 reason customers delay their home purchase is the fear they won't be able to sell their existing home.

What are the choices for new-home sales professionals? (1) Wish your customer good luck in selling their home and encourage them to return when it sells; (2) Offer a contingency program on the purchase of the new home; (3) Work in collaboration with a "guaranteed buy" program on existing homes; or (4) Provide a well-researched road map on why now is the right time to sell the existing home.

While options 2 and 3 offer viable alternatives for house-to-sell customers, option No. 4 is the most valuable strategy in getting house-to-sell customers off the fence and under contract for your new home.

Let's look at five basic reasons why now is the right time to sell an existing home:

Reason No. 1

Job growth is very good. Tucked away among all the doom and gloom that follows the housing industry is the fact that the economy is producing about 120,000 new jobs per month. Job creation is one of the single biggest factors affecting housing demand. The time to list a home is when jobs are being created.

Reason No. 2

Mortgage rates are reasonable. While no one can predict future interest rates, a look back at historic mortgage costs shows that today's rates were below the monthly mortgage rates charged 78 percent of the time over the last 20 years.

Reason No. 3

Consumer confidence remains solid. When people feel good about their jobs and the economic outlook, they feel better about major purchases such as a home.

Today's consumer confidence rate is above 100, which means most consumers feel confident making a decision that has a long-term impact on their lifestyle.



With new home prices having fallen faster than prices of existing homes, now is the best time to sell an existing home and take advantage of today's great prices on new homes.

Reason No. 4

People are buying homes. While 2007 will not be a record year for home sales, the fact is that it will represent one of the top five years in the history of U.S. home sales.

Look beyond the headlines and understand that more homes will be sold in 2007 than, say, 2003.

Reason No. 5

When the seller's market returns, our current prices on a new home will be a thing of the past. While everyone would like to perfectly time the market so they sold at the top and bought at the bottom, it's simply not realistic. What is realistic is to expect to sell an existing home at a fair price and purchase a new home at a fair price in today's market.

With new home prices having fallen faster than prices of existing homes, now is the best time to sell an existing home and take advantage of today's great prices on new homes. You can allow the media to influence your customers' decision on when to sell their existing home, or you can stake out the leadership position as an expert in all aspects of residential real-estate and provide the road map to action. The choice is yours. **PB**

John Rymer is the founder of New Home Knowledge, which offers sales training for new home builders and real-estate professionals. He can be reached at john@newhome-knowledge.com.

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*2007 Dodge Ram 3500 Heavy Duty Chassis Cab vs. 2006 Ford and GM one-ton, pickup-based Chassis Cab models.



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- Welcome cocktail reception

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

- Keynote – Jason Jennings, "Think Big, Act Small"
- J. Walker Smith, "Consumers Are in Control"
- James Haughey, State of the Industry Review
- Frank Alexander, NHQ Panel Discussion
- Afternoon Breakout Sessions
- **2007 Benchmark Awards Gala**, featuring the 2007 NHQ Awards, AVID Awards and the 2008 Builder of the Year presentation

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

- Keynote – Robert Kriegel, "Break It! Bringing Successful Innovation and Creativity to Your Business"
- **John Rymer, "7 Things You Can Do Right Now to Improve Sales"**
- **Sales Professionals Panel**
- Avid Ratings Awards Panel Discussion
- **Rick Heaston, "Relationship Selling"**
- **Sales Professionals Panel**
- Fun Night at the Winery

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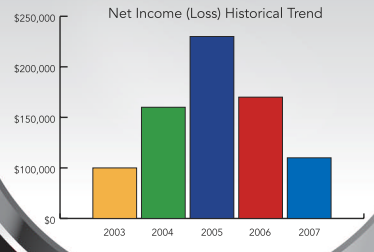

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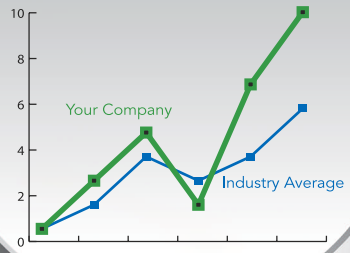

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LAKEWOOD RANCH, NEAR BRADENTON, FLA., claims title of nation's largest certified green community at 8,500 acres, promotes benefits of green with displays in its 2,400 square-foot information center showing Energy Star appliances and low-flow toilet.

SELLING GREEN

Paint it Green

Savvy marketers sell green building on energy savings and health benefits, but its subtle clout comes from some home buyers' perception of green as a mark of quality. Six home builders offer insight into how they work the green angle.

Looking for a way to sell houses in a bad market? Green building is a powerful weapon to differentiate your shiny new product from all those existing homes sporting "for sale" signs or the bland sea of sameness in competitive new-home subdivisions.

Green-built houses, neighborhoods and master-planned communities meet an emerging market head-on with a product that really is different. The best green home builders and developers find buyers — even when they're hiding — with marketing concepts that create urgency to buy out of America's fear of economic peril, health hazards and impending environmental calamity. Here's how they do it.

Why Green Is Different Today

Building a green home has been around for more than a decade, but it's only in the last few years that it found real traction in the marketplace. Why?

It might be one more example of a fundamental change in American lifestyles caused by the continuing upward spiral of energy costs. And the epidemic of asthma and allergies afflicting so many Americans might have something to do with it. Whatever the reasons, green-built houses are becoming almost as hot as hybrid cars. And green communities are attracting mainstream home buyers all across the country, not

just tree-huggers in Boulder.

Successful green builders hang their marketing efforts on energy cost savings. The payback from reduced monthly heating and air conditioning bills overtakes the higher upfront cost of building green in only a few years. Improved indoor air quality is the other attribute that virtually all green builders tout. For the thousands of families fighting allergies or asthma, it's probably the most important factor driving their decision to buy a new home. What price do you put on the health of a child? But there's more behind the recent upswing in green home building than those two lynchpin attributes: bushel baskets of marketing dollars, for one thing.

> "What you're dealing with is a **principle-based buyer:** young professionals with kids — the **kind of people** who drive Volvos." —*John Rymer*

Adam Brunning, general sales manager at Tributary — a 1,400-acre master-planned, traditional neighborhood design (TND) community in the Atlanta market — uses green building as the primary differentiator that drives sales in his community. "We require every builder — and every home — to be EarthCraft-certified," he says. "No other developer in Atlanta has made the commitment to go totally green with every home. And we sell that difference hard on our Web site and in our advertising."

EarthCraft House is the Atlanta Home Builders Association's landmark green building program, developed in conjunction with the NAHB Research Center. Based on a point system, it allows builders to qualify for certification by piling up points in categories ranging from site planning to tightness of the building envelope, from HVAC systems to water conservation. Home builder associations in neighboring cities and states are now adopting EarthCraft.

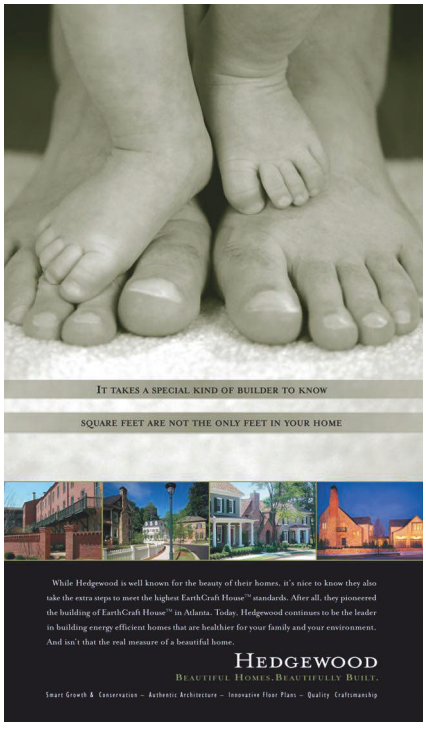
"There's a third-party endorsement aspect to this," says Hedgewood Properties' Pam Sessions, who chaired the Atlanta HBA committee that developed EarthCraft. "It's a self-certifying program, but the standards are set across the local industry. And Energy Star falls out of EarthCraft, and that's certified by the (federal) Department of Energy."

Sessions points out that EarthCraft is not a tough bar to reach. The standards were designed to allow 80 percent of production-built homes to qualify. "When you focus on installation and craftsmanship of construction techniques, it doesn't add a lot of cost," she says. "Our buyer surveys show customers believe the value added is worth the investment they make. It pays for itself over time."

Hedgewood and five other EarthCraft builders were part of a recent year-long radio ad campaign that made EarthCraft a recognized household name in Atlanta.

"We've been selling houses for two years," Brunning says, "and about a year ago, we held a focus group of home owners and asked what made them buy in Tributary. John Rymer moderated it. He listed 10 attributes and asked the group to rank them. One woman held up her hand and said, 'You missed something critical. EarthCraft is not on your list!' Every member of that focus group then listed EarthCraft in their top three reasons for buying."

Rymer, a Tampa-based marketing consultant and Professional Builder columnist, has conducted focus groups on green building for nearly a decade. "Everybody always loved the idea of green," he says, "but five years ago, they weren't willing to give up much to achieve green. That's not true anymore."



ATLANTA GREEN PIONEER HEDGEWOOD PROPERTIES uses ads to tout healthy-house benefits of its EarthCraft-certified homes.

He believes large-scale green building programs like EarthCraft, combined with the urgency created by rising energy costs and indoor air-related health issues, are responsible for the new traction of green building in the market. "EarthCraft has become a brand in Atlanta, like Energy Star in other parts of the country," Rymer says. "When a builders' association gets behind such a program and then harnesses the marketing clout of major product manufacturers as sponsors, you can develop advertising budgets big enough to get identity in the market so that people will shop looking for that logo."

The amount of money it would take for an individual builder to achieve that branding impact would be excessive, Rymer reasons.

There's another benefit from large-scale advertising of programs like EarthCraft in Atlanta and others taking

THE $25,000 QUESTION

Brian Binash, director of Austin, Texas-based Wilshire Homes, has been building green homes since before the term existed, and now he's leading Greater Houston Builders Association's Green Building Initiative. The program has minimum requirements in a number of categories, including energy efficiency, indoor air quality and sustainability.

"This program will mandate houses that save an average of about 5,500 pounds of carbon dioxide a year," Binash says. "Our Wilshire product — at platinum level in Masco's Environments for Living — averages over 11,000 pounds of carbon dioxide saved each year. That's the equivalent of taking one car off the road for a year."

Binash has a clever way of marketing energy savings. Besides guaranteeing buyers' energy bills for three years, he tells them, "For every $20 a month you save on energy, at a 6 percent mortgage rate, that's the equivalent of $3,100 off the price of the house. So if we save you $200 a month in energy, that's the same as saving you $31,000 on the price of your house. Because our houses are only $6,000 more expensive than an average house of the same size, you're getting a tremendous bargain.

"What are you going to do with that extra $25,000?"

root in cities across the country. They allow communities like Tributary to draw like-minded buyers, interested in green, from across a broad geographic market. Brunning describes his buyers as Generation X families and says they come from all around Atlanta. "They are very proud of the EarthCraft green classification of their homes," he says. "That's why they came here."

"What you're dealing with is a principle-based buyer," Rymer says. "Young professionals with kids — the kind of people who drive Volvos. This is a significant, growing, but underserved niche. They are receptive to bundling all these attributes like energy efficiency and indoor air quality and sustainability under the label 'green.' They will sacrifice square footage to have a higher quality home, and for them, a brand like EarthCraft becomes almost like the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. They equate green to a broader concept of quality."

This is not just an Atlanta phenomenon. Bill Kreager, principal of the Seattle-based architectural firm Mithun, says he does nothing but sustainable projects. "We are totally focused on designing green building communities," he asserts. "We're doing a lot of four-star Built Green housing, which is the Pacific Northwest standard, and we're turning away work."

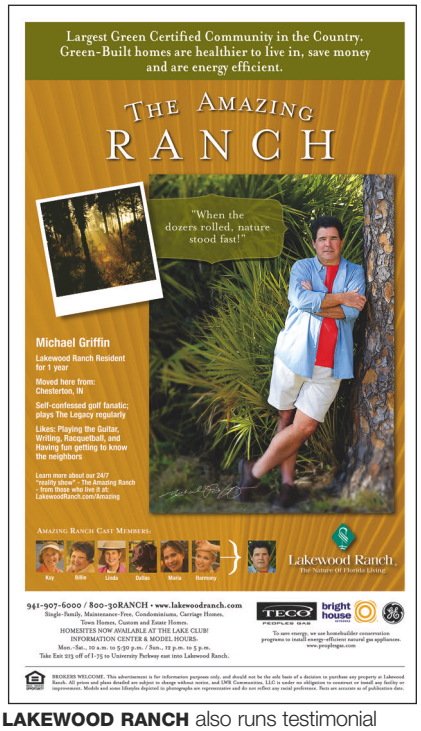
Branded Green

Kreager says builders and developers are branding themselves as green, and many master-planned communities now require four-star certification as the entry level for a home builder to be allowed in the community.

In Bradenton, Fla., Lakewood Ranch is an 8,500-acre master-planned community where every house is certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition's Green Home Standard. It has also been certified as a green community.

"We got our green certification in 2005," says Sondra Guffey, vice president of communications and marketing. "But we've really always been green." She believes it's much easier for a large community to market green than it is for an individual builder, "especially when you get beyond energy efficiency and healthy house attributes and into sustainability."

It's hard for a builder to fund a marketing budget large enough to establish



LAKEWOOD RANCH also runs testimonial ads in which residents tell why living in a certified green community is important to them (above). Lakewood Ranch's information center displays different types of home insulation to reach varying levels of energy efficiency (right).

a green identity, she says. But Lakewood Ranch has the resources to do it.

The Sales Challenge

Probably the biggest marketing challenge green builders face — especially those in the production building arena — is training a sales force to sell the complex attributes of green.

"Often, even the best sales people struggle with explaining the science of home systems performance," says Rymer. "If the discussion lasts more than three minutes, they may be out of their league."

The solution, he says, is really good displays in the model homes that sales people can use to stay on track, and collateral materials for shoppers to take with them when they leave.

"If there's a shortcoming of the EarthCraft program in Atlanta, it's prob-



ably that too few builders are giving their sales people the training they need to discuss these issues with shoppers," says Pam Sessions. But she believes it's not as hard as it may seem. "The issues and some of the technology can be complex," she admits. "But all the sales people really need to focus on are the benefits. And that has a payoff. The customers start using that benefits list for comparison shopping."

Atlanta-based Ashton Woods Homes builds across the country under Masco's Environments for Living certification program, which allows it to also meet Energy Star requirements. Vice President of Sales and Marketing Tad Serbin admits most of his sales agents don't like to talk about complex building science issues, but he trains them to use large displays in the model homes.

"In our sales offices, we have large boards with bullet points that show how the construction process; heating and cooling equipment; moisture management systems; fresh air ventilation; and pressure balancing work together," he says. "We also have a collateral piece on Environments for Living that visitors can take with them."

He leaves strategy to the salespeople, but they train constantly on the Environments for Living story. "We role play and make them go over and over it," Serbin says. "We also have that story in great detail on our Web site.



Is an ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY HOME Important to You?

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Chicagoland builder Bigelow Homes grabs headlines every year by guaranteeing green home buyers their heating bill will not exceed $400 a year. "As temperatures drop in the fall, we start advertising it," says Bigelow President Jamie Bigelow. "Energy efficiency has always been our primary point of differentiation."

But this year, Bigelow will make another point at his HomeTown Aurora development. "We now have collateral materials on our program to recharge the aquifer. We use natural runoff rather than conventional storm sewers that pollute streams and rivers. Our natural treatment trains gradually filter runoff and allow the water to seep into the aquifer."

Bigelow learned the hard way that not all residents understood the native Illinois prairie grass around retention ponds at the original HomeTown. "They thought it was weeds," he says. "But the new HomeTown will feature rain gardens, and we're going to host seminars for homeowners to tell them about all our natural environmental features."

It's something we stress as a differentiator against competitors."

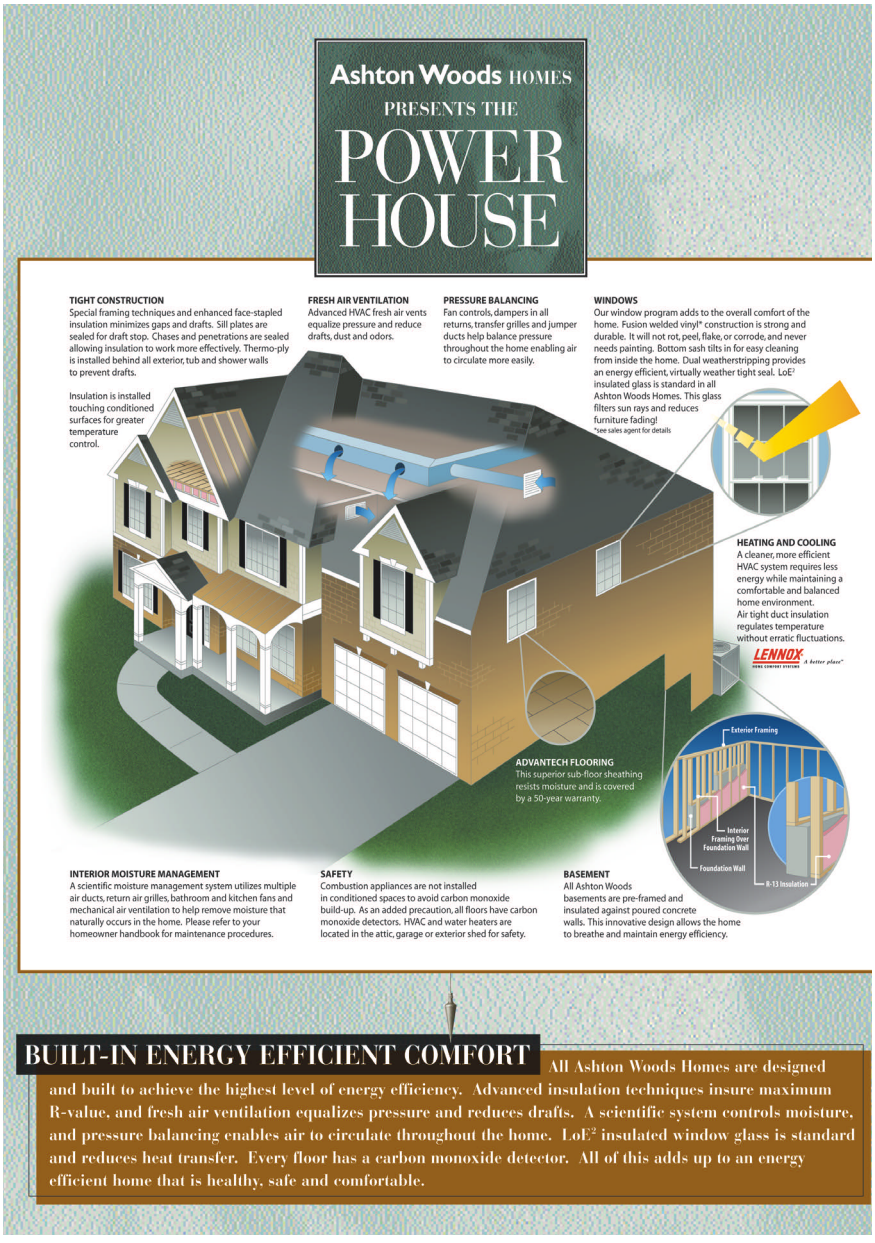
Rymer emphasizes keeping it simple. "Sell the benefits to the buyer rather than features of individual components of a system," he says. "A safe, healthy, energy-efficient home is easier to sell than a tankless water heater or foam insulation."

Ashton Woods sales rep Chris Hartley sells townhouses in Colorado Springs, Colo. He admits that when he came to The Townes at Kettle Creek from another builder in Kansas City, he'd never heard of green building or the Built Green Colorado certification program his product meets. "This is our first project in Colorado, but because we build to the Environments for Living gold level, we didn't have to do much extra to qualify for Built Green," he says.

Hartley is selling three-level townhouses of 1,900 to 2,400 square feet, base-priced from $227,000 to $276,000. The project had a grand opening in April and Hartley had 30 sales in four months. Even with all those stairs (at Colorado Springs' nearly 6,000 feet of elevation), his buyers are mostly downsizing empty-nesters. He says he gets a lot of mileage from the Environments for Living displays and collateral materials, even though home shoppers have never heard of it. "When I explain that our EFL program automatically makes us Energy Star and Built Green, they understand," Hartley says.

Green building is not the only factor in his success, Hartley says, but it's a big thing in Colorado. "They're starting to run TV commercials," he comments. Another example of those big marketing budgets at work.

Salespeople may need to be brought up to speed on green, says Satellite Beach, Fla.-based sales trainer Bill Herring, but it's not something that's beyond them. "They can learn about healthy-house technology and energy savings just like all the rest of us," he says. "Anything that creates an advantage for new homes over existing homes is really important now. The key is going to be how good they get at creating an emotional attachment to greenness when people visit the models."



ATLANTA-BASED NATIONAL BUILDING POWER ASHTON WOODS HOMES sells hard on both energy savings and healthy-house features with its "Power House" promotion of systems that bring gold-level Environments for Living certification.

Marketing materials and a Web site can do a good job of getting the green message out, Herring believes, but it's a long way from a curious interest in green building to an eager signature on a sales contract. And it takes salesmanship to cover that distance.

Bottom Line

As Pam Sessions says, "This year, there's just a mass tipping point toward green. You can't pick up a shelter magazine without seeing an article about

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Littleton, Colo., custom builder and green building pioneer John Kurowski has been building green homes since 1974 — long before any builder ever referred to himself as green. He helped found the Built Green certification program in Colorado in 1995. Few will ever be greener than Kurowski, so we listened recently as he vented his anger over the way green building is marketed across America today.

"All these names are a sore point with me," Kurowski said. "For 13 years, I've been asking NAHB to create a national brand and trademark for green building. Without that, we're going to end up with a thousand different programs at the local level, and all that will do is confuse everybody."

Kurowski said it's bad enough that LEED, Energy Star and Environments for Living muddy the water — and that's without local home builder associations thoroughly confusing not only consumers but builders as well with versions such as Built Green, EarthCraft House and Green Building Initiative. "Without a national name and trademark, the national builders can't get involved without confusing their customers," Kurowski said, "and national manufacturers can't get their sponsorships going on a national scale.

"If you look at the opportunity we have today to take a single brand to a national marketplace, we are in grave danger of missing the boat. Once locals get too much money invested in their names, they won't be able to afford to change."

It seems logical to have a single name and logo, even if the certification criteria need to be different in different regions or local markets. Maybe someone should be anointed to pick one name out of a hat at NAHB's fall board meeting.

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EARTH CRAFT HOUSE
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
™

some aspect of it. Our code standards are now creeping closer and closer to EarthCraft."

With home builders in many markets desperate to find any advantage for new homes over the glut of existing homes on the market, going green is a logical step. But keep in mind that the great successes for green building seem to come in those markets where a builder's individual corporate branding and marketing are enhanced by HBA-led certification programs with big advertising budgets underwritten by sponsoring manufacturers, and by green communities and developers that also have money to spend on marketing and advertising.

If you have to go it alone, it's still great to be seen as green. Builders of every size ought to be making speeches at HBA dinners to rally the troops behind a green flag. Going green is obviously much easier with a green building certification program active in the market. The ranks of people who want to buy green are growing fast: they don't want to buy commodity houses. **PB**

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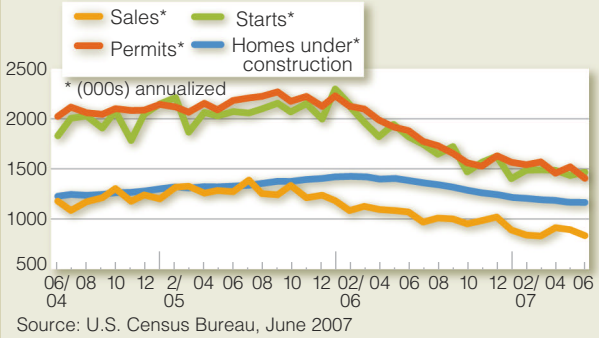
Industry Analysis

>> **BY JAMES HAUGHEY, REED CONSTRUCTION DATA**

Housing Recovery Still On Hold

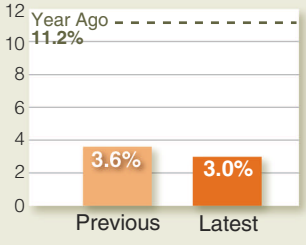
Starts steadied in the last few months but sales continued to fall under pressure from surplus inventory of homes for sale and the demise of many sub-prime mortgage lenders.

New-home construction



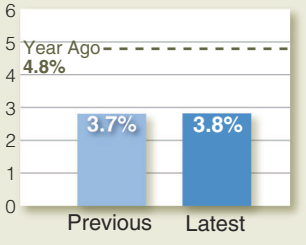
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, June 2007

Residential materials cost
(change from 12 months ago)



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, June 2007

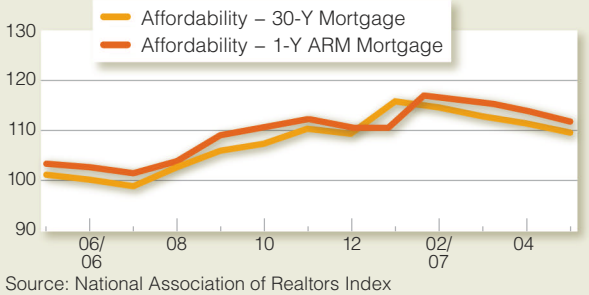
Residential contractor wage
(change from 12 months ago)



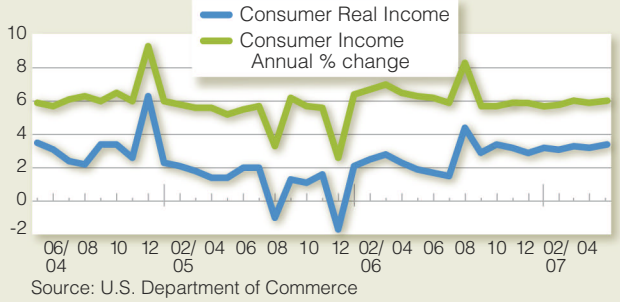
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, May 2007

			Latest	Previous	Year Ago
Total new-home inventory (month supply)	U.S. Census Bureau	June	7.8	7.4	6.4
Speculative new-home inventory	U.S. Census Bureau	June	538,000	537,000	570,000
Home price (median)	U.S. Census Bureau	June	$237,900	$241,000	$243,200
Housing market index	NAHB	July	24	28	39

Consumer buying power



Source: National Association of Realtors Index



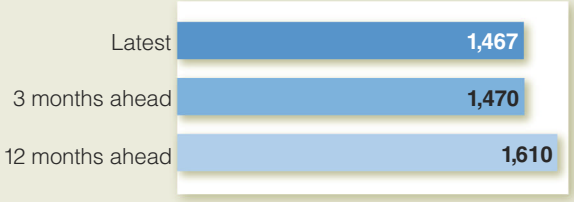
Source: U.S. Department of Commerce

			Latest	Previous	Year Ago
Employment (000s jobs per month)	U.S. Department of Labor	July	92	126	222
Household net worth growth (annual)	Federal Reserve Board	1st Q	4.3%	10.0%	12.0%
30-Y fixed mortgage rate	Freddie Mac	July	6.70	6.66	6.76
1-Y ARM	Freddie Mac	July	5.71	5.68	5.79
Consumer Confidence Index	Conference Board	July	112.6	105.3	107.0

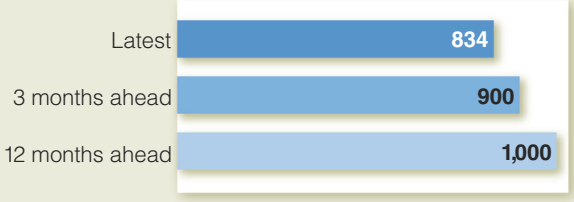
Industry Analysis

New-housing outlook

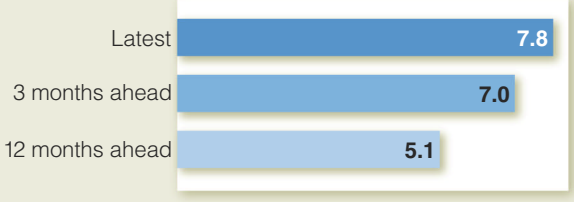
Starts (000s, annualized)



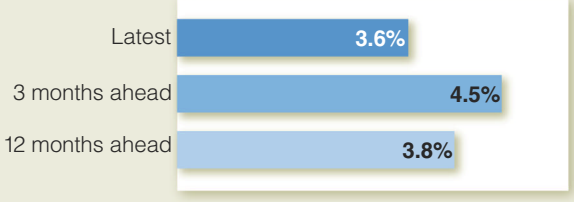
Sales (000s, annualized)



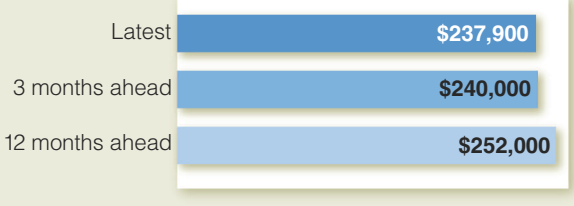
Inventory (months supply)



Residential materials cost (change from 12 months ago)



Home Price



Forecasts by Reed Construction Data

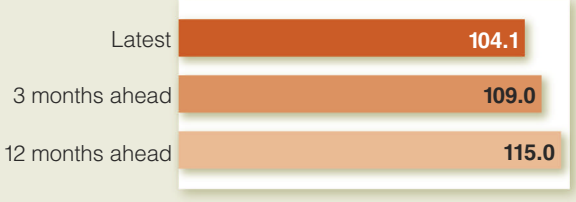
Existing-home competition

		Latest	Previous	Year Ago
Home inventory (months supply)	June	8.98	8.8	6.9
Home sales (000s annualized)	June	5,750	5,980	6,490
Home prices	June	$230,100	$222,700	$229,300

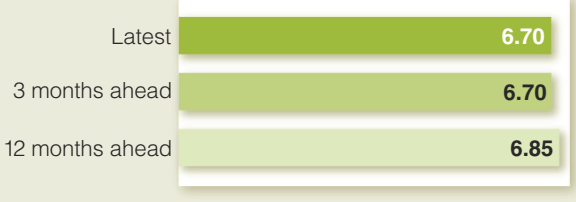
Source: National Association of Realtors

Economic outlook

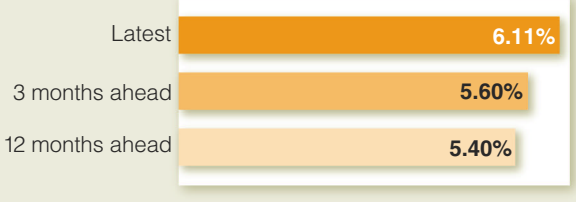
Affordability Index (fixed)



30-Y fixed-rate mortgage



Consumer income growth



Consumer confidence Index (Conference Board)

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K-1114-F-96 Windward™ 6' ProFlex whirlpool with integral four-sided flange in Biscuit.

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KOHLER Whirlpools and Baths

Feature	Benefit
Shapes and sizes to suit your needs	Allow builders to meet a variety of specifications, from standard floor plans to custom installations
Installation flexibility for any floor plan	Delivered in configuration options such as integral aprons, tile flanges and custom pump locations
Customized upgrade options	From whirlpool models to BubbleMassage™ baths, bathers can tailor their experience, from relaxing to massaging to invigorating
Coordinated design solutions	KOHLER suites elevate the bathroom design by achieving a unified look

Shown on front K-1114-LA-96 Windward 6' ProFlex whirlpool with integral apron in Biscuit.



K-1164-0 Sunward™ 6' ProFlex drop-in whirlpool in White.



K-1160-LA-0 Tercet™ ProFlex bath whirlpool with integral apron in White.



K-1337-G-0 Serif™ 5' BubbleMassage drop-in whirlpool in White.

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[3] Payload is the GVWR minus curb weight and includes weight of occupants, optional equipment and cargo, limited by weight distribution. Payload is not the Vehicle Capacity Weight as defined by FMVSS 110, which will vary according to installed optional equipment.
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What is green?

Our nationwide survey of builders reveals their opinions about what green is, its marketability and its long-term impact on the industry.



>> BY **FELICIA OLIVER,** *SENIOR EDITOR*

Everyone is jumping on the green bandwagon these days, from Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" winning an Oscar to the summer's Live Earth global warming concerts. Green, carbon footprint, sustainable design and environmentally friendly are words and concepts bandied about with ever increasing zeal and frequency. And the home building industry is far from being exempt.

California has proposed legislation attempting to establish a green building requirement in the state. Assembly Bill 1058 would require all home builders to build green by 2013. The proposed law would let home builders voluntarily build green for the first two years, followed by two years of builder feedback and possible revisions. Then the law would become mandatory.

Both NAHB and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) are lobbying for national standards based on their own guidelines. There are programs such as Building America and Energy Star (both sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy; Energy Star also partners with the Environment Protection Agency); the American Lung Association Health House; and several others from entities promoting their own green programs and guidelines on a national level — not to mention the myriad regional and local programs.

So just what does it mean to build green? The definition is in the eye of the beholder. How are builders responding to this nebulousness? Many have forged ahead with one of many current sets of green guidelines available; some are being guided by what makes sense to them, using a certain percentage of "green" materials (but again, who's defining green?), a certain degree of energy efficiency, indoor air quality, resource conservation, and sustainability, or a combination of all of the above.

But what do home builders really think about green? And how do they perceive its effect on their business? Is it flash in the pan, or will it define construction techniques in the industry for years to come? Our survey attempts to answer these multi-faceted questions. The results are enlightening, and sometimes surprising.

Getting a handle on green

You can't build green until you know what it is. In response to the question "How does your company define green," 46 percent of respondents said that a green home is one that meets criteria established by a national certification program; 41 percent think it's a matter of having a certain percentage of building materials that are green used in the home; and 29 percent said the home should meet criteria established by a local green building program (responses overlapped).

> Green (grēn) **adj.** of, relating to, or advocating ecological awareness and the preservation of natural resources

What kind of builders feel this way? Among builders in our survey who build more than 10 homes a year, 53 percent said a home should meet criteria of a national certification program versus 40 percent of those who build one to 10 homes a year. For builders who build one to 10 homes a year, 48 percent said using a specific percentage of green materials should determine whether a home is defined green versus 30 percent of those who build more than 10 homes a year.

This might indicate that larger builders feel its wise to let a nationally recognized third party define green, versus a definition based on the builder's own opinion about the greenness of a home and the materials used, thus possibly reducing the risk of over promising a green result that can't be qualified.

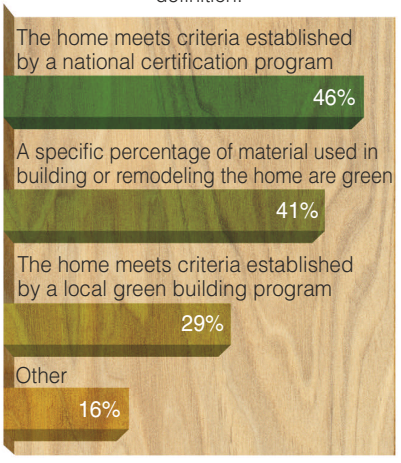
Green materials: What are they, and how much to use?

Third-party certifications allow builders to avoid the sticky wick of defining for themselves which materials are truly green as well as what percentage of green materials makes a home green. Still, many builders — 41 percent of those in our survey — think this is best the way to measure green. So what standards do these builders apply in defining a green building material?

Among several choices, energy efficient tops the list at 89 percent.

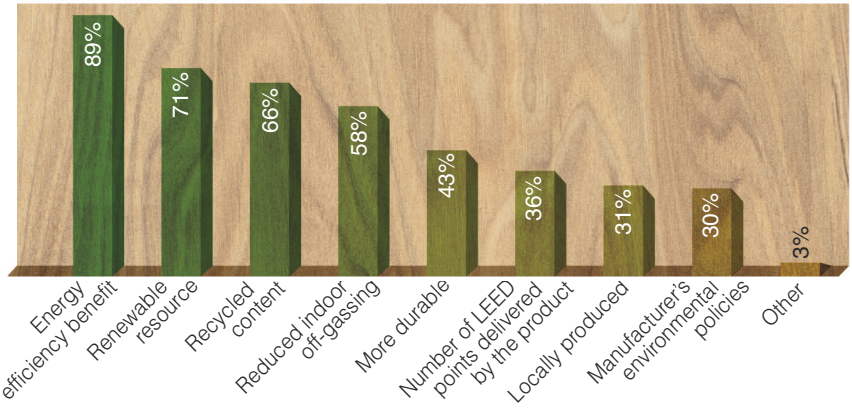
What makes a building material green?

We asked respondents who said a green home should be one that uses a certain percentage of green materials how they would define a green material. Energy efficient was the top attribute. Respondents were able to choose more than one definition.



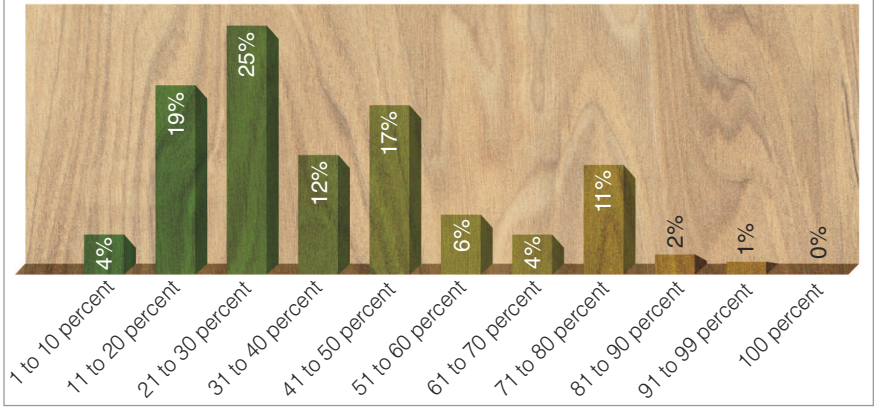
What is green?

Builders were asked how their company defines a green-built home. Respondents were allowed to give more than one response.



What percentage of green materials used makes a home green?

We asked respondents who said a green home is one that uses a certain percentage of green materials what that percentage should be.



Renewable resources came in second, and recycled content third. Further down the list were whether the product was locally produced, the manufacturer's environmental policies and the number of points awarded by the USGBC's LEED program. (LEED standards have been used in commercial, industrial and multifamily buildings but its official certification program for new homes, LEED for Homes — currently in a pilot program — will launch later this year).

Of those respondents (41 percent) who said green should be determined by the percentage of green material used in

Methodology

IN JUNE, SURVEY INVITATIONS WERE E-MAILED to a random sample of home builders, developers, contractors and modular/sectional home manufacturers who subscribe to *Professional Builder*. Survey responses were collected online from June 1 through June 19, 2007. To encourage participation, *Professional Builder* donated $10 to Habitat for Humanity for each of the first 250 completed surveys. A total of 291 useable surveys were completed by the closing date.



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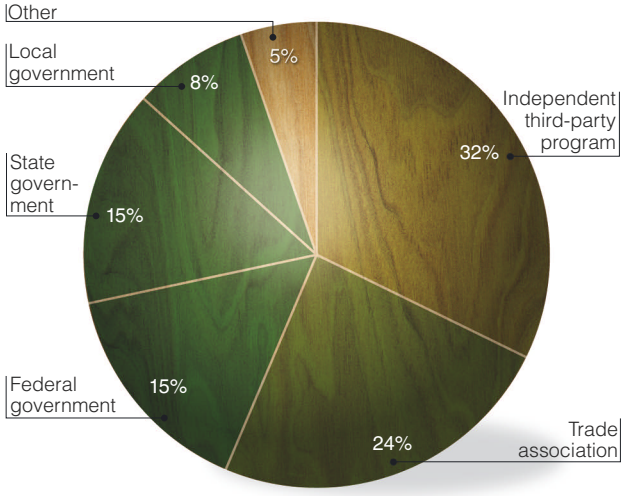
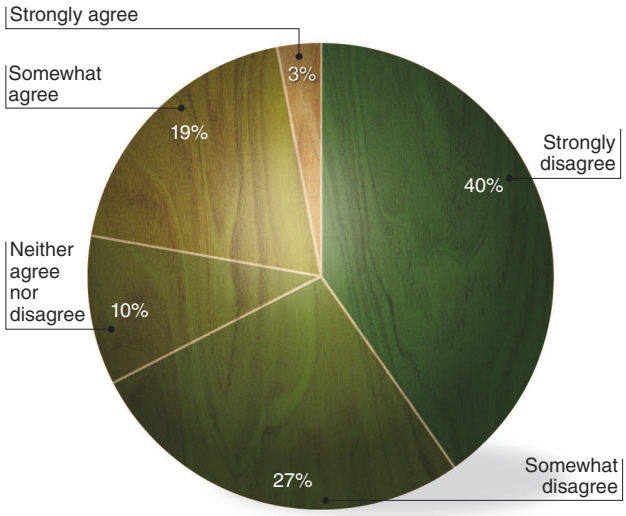
Who should define green?

Respondents were asked if there should be a minimum standard of performance and sustainability in defining green. Those who said yes were asked who should make that determination. A total of 38 percent said it should be made by either federal, state or local government.



Is green building a fad?

The green trend has had its fits and starts in the past. Builders were asked whether or not they agreed with the statement that the green building emphasis we see today is just a fad. A solid majority strongly or somewhat disagree.



the home, 44 percent think that percentage should be between 11 and 30 percent; 29 percent think it should be between 31 and 50 percent; and 24 percent think it should be above 50 percent.

Should there be some minimum standard of performance or sustainability before a builder can define and market a home as green? Yes, according to 87 percent of respondents. Nine percent weren't sure, and 5 percent said no. Interestingly, 38 percent of respondents said that either federal, state or local government should set these standards. That's not the majority — 61 percent think a trade association, an independent third party, or some other entity should have this responsibility — but it's a bit surprising that a sizeable number seem to think government intervention in this area is a good idea.

Is green building a fad?

Now we have an idea of some ways builders define green. The question is whether or not it is important enough a phenomenon to change how they build their homes. Of all the builders who answered the question, 67 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement "Green building is a fad."

There was no great difference between those who build one to 10 homes a year (64 percent) and those who build more than 10 homes a year (71 percent); nor was there a big difference between those who only build custom homes (65 percent), production homes (74 percent), or a combination of both (69 percent). Of those who don't see green building as a fad, 83 percent believe green building has had some positive effect on their sales; and 83 percent also said that green building is extremely important to their market strategy.

Among builders who build between 91 and 100 percent single family, 69 percent somewhat or strongly disagree with the idea that green building is a fad. Builders who build strictly multifamily made up only three percent of our survey respondents. Seventy five percent of them somewhat or strongly disagree that green building is a fad.

How important are environmental goals when a builder is planning a new residential development? It is extremely or somewhat important, said 81 percent of our respondents. Of those who strongly disagree that green building is a fad, 92 percent said environmental goals are somewhat or extremely important to them in planning new residential developments.

When planning a new residential development today versus five years ago, we asked to what extent if any has the importance of environmental goals changed. It is much more or at least somewhat more important today than five years ago for 86 percent.

Marketing and selling the green label

A quarter of all respondents said green building is extremely important to their market strategy, and 45 percent said it was somewhat important. Seventy two percent of those who build one to 10 homes a year felt it was extremely or somewhat important, while 66 percent of those who build more than 10 homes a year did. There's no huge difference between those who build exclusively custom homes, production homes or a mix of both — all hover around 70 percent.

"Green building has had an effect on homes sales," according to 48 percent of respondents. A quarter said it has moderately improved sales; 18 percent said it increased traffic; and 11 percent said it closed sales that might have gotten away. Three percent said it dramatically improved sales. Fifty-two percent said positioning their homes as green

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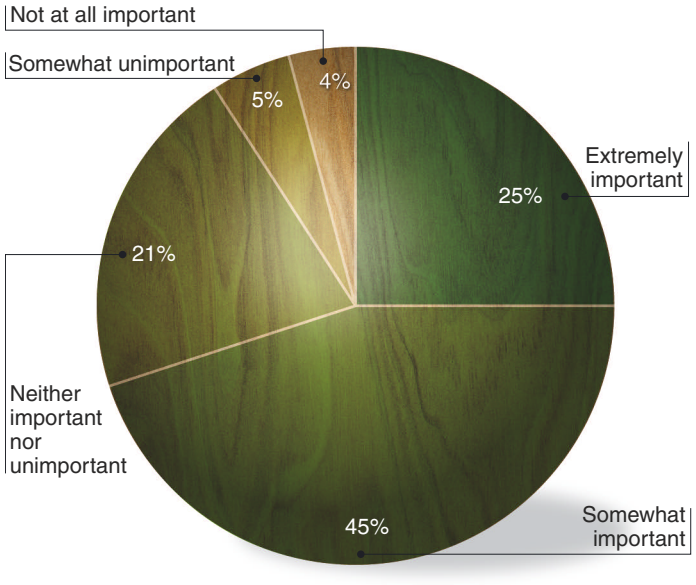
Green building's effect on home sales

In contrast to the large percentage of respondents who said green is an important part of their market strategy, a majority of respondents said green building has had no impact whatsoever on their home sales.



Green building's effect on market strategy

Builders were asked if green played an important part in how they market their homes. Seventy percent said marketing green was somewhat or extremely important for them.



has had no effect on sales at all. Contrast this with builders who said green building is extremely important to their market strategy; 40 percent said green has moderately improved sales, 32 percent said it has increased traffic, 21 percent said it has closed sales that otherwise would have been lost, and 11 percent said sales have dramatically improved. And 17 percent said it had no effect on sales whatsoever.

The perceived expense of building green and its effect on sales

A whopping 92 percent of builders believe green building increases the overall cost of a home. Of this group, the largest percentage — 38 percent — said it increases the cost by 6 to 10 percent. Forty-one percent of builders for whom green building is important (somewhat or extremely) to their market strategy that believe green building

GREEN OFFICER KEEPS BENNETT HOMES ON TRACK

Washington builder embraces green building.

Every home Bennett Homes builds is green. Most of its efforts involve processes such as erosion control, waste reduction and recycling — things that may not be as visible to buyers as, say, energy-efficient appliances but are extremely eco-friendly. The Bellevue, Wash., company was one of the first home builders to introduce the Built Green program in Washington State.

In June 2007, Bennett hired a full-time green officer to analyze its business practices and ensure the company walks the green walk. The builder recently started printing collateral materials on recycled paper and plans to replace its fleet of cars with hybrid vehicles.

Bennett Homes won the 2007 Built Green Pioneer Award from the Master Builders Association (MBA) of King and Snohomish counties for its contributions to Built Green since the program's inception in 2001. Company Chairman Todd Bennett was president of the MBA in 2003 and has been on the board of directors since the late 1990s. Bennett's involvement with national committees gave him broad exposure to green- building practices and programs.

"He felt that it was a natural fit for the general philosophies of our marketplace," says Gayl Van Natter, vice president of sales and marketing for the firm. Bennett and President Paul Glosniak convinced the MBA to adopt Built Green in its purest state, says Van Natter.

"We're building in jurisdictions where people might call themselves Built Green, and certainly there are green components, but it isn't nearly as regulated and strict as it is in King and Snohomish counties," she says. "In some of those outlying places, builders are being allowed to use [the Built Green] icon with pretty minimalistic criteria."

The company projects 225 closings in 2007 at an average price of $723,000. It builds custom and production homes in five counties, including a resort community in the Cascade Mountains east of Seattle.

—by Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design

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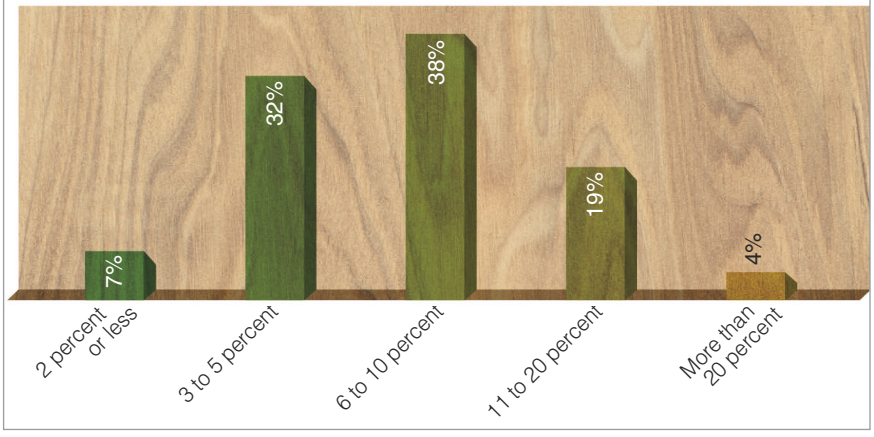
increases the cost of a home said green building only increases the cost by 3 to 5 percent; 34 percent of this particular group said the increase is between 6 to 10 percent; and 21 percent said the increase is 11 to 20 percent. No one in this group thought green building increased the cost of a home by more than 20 percent.

There is a bit of a disconnect here: More than half of builders said green building is not a fad, and 70 percent said green building is important to their marketing strategy, but 52 percent of surveyed builders said that green building has had no effect on their sales (though it was noted that this drops to 17 percent for builders who said green is extremely important to their market strategy). Furthermore, 92 percent of respondents said green building increases the overall price of the home. Only 29 percent of builders said buyers are extremely or somewhat willing to pay more for green features in their home; an almost equal number, 30 percent, said buyers are somewhat or completely unwilling to pay more for green features. It would seem that builders are hedging their bets that buyers will soon have a change of heart and be more willing to buy what they perceive as a green home and pay more for it. Otherwise, their actions don't fit their glum expectations of their buyers.

For those who said green building is extremely important to their marketing strategy, 53 percent define a green home

How does green building affect costs?

Respondents were asked whether they thought green building increased the cost of a home. Of those who thought it did, most thought the increase was between six and 10 percent.



CHANGE CAN BE GOOD

Grey Lundberg/CMI Homes Proves Change Can Be Good



Grey Lundberg, president of Grey Lundberg/CMI Homes, which has offices in Bellevue, Wash, and Cle Elum, Wash., is a recent convert to green building. Here's what inspired him and where the company's headed.

Q. What inspired you to build green? **A.** A few years ago a client of mine asked me about building a green demonstration home, and I was intrigued. I had preconceived notions that it was a trend in building that required me to build in a fashion that was both unusual and risky. What I found out was that it was building with higher energy efficiency, better indoor air quality, overall higher quality and better stewardship of our building practices — all of which, as a high quality builder, I was already engaged in at a certain degree.

Q. What plans do you have the future? **A.** Our plan is to remain at the cutting edge of technology in our custom home building and remodeling market. Our goal is to certify (with verification) every project we do at the highest level of certification.

Q. Is it important for builders to build green? **A.** Absolutely. It's not just a trend, it is the future. There are so many things that we as builders can do to improve the short-term and long-term costs to society of poorly constructed buildings. I used to be concerned about being labeled a green contractor. Now clients are seeking me out.

Q. What sets you apart from the other green builders? **A.** We have taken green building very seriously and incorporated all aspects of energy efficiency, indoor air quality and durable/sustainable construction into our high-end custom building market. I believe what starts in the luxury market trickles down to the production market.

— by Jennifer Powell, Staff Writer



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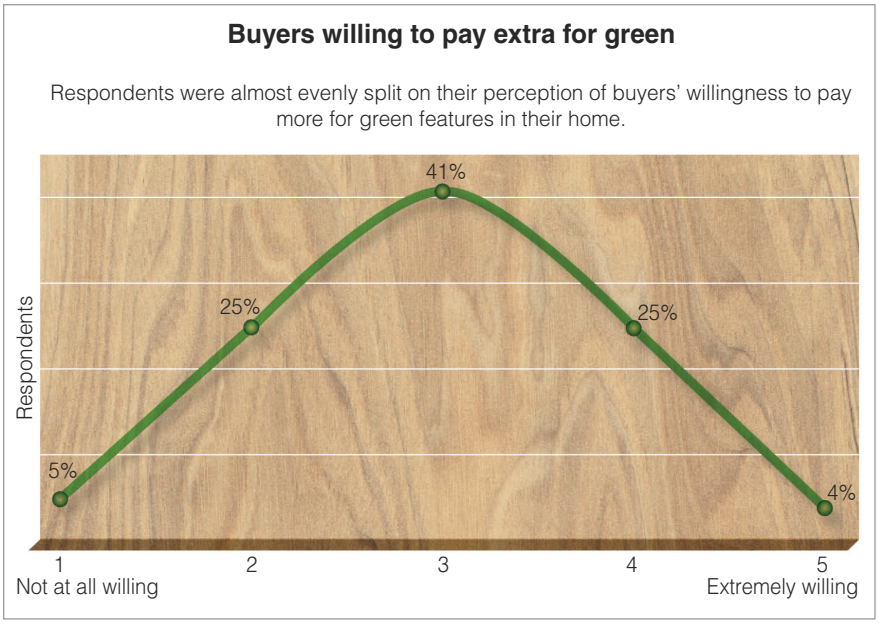

as one that meets criteria of a national certification program. No doubt these designations play heavily in their marketing strategy ("We are a LEED-certified builder, Energy Star builder, etc.") and have a certain cache. Only 40 percent say the criteria of local programs define a green home for them. Of course, depending on the program and the market, the local certifications may not be as familiar to buyers as the national ones.

The elements of green: Energy efficiency is the market driver

What value does green have for home buyers? We asked builders in our survey how important certain green features are to their customers. Builders said energy efficiency was somewhat or extremely important to 97 percent of their buyers; indoor air quality was selected by 83 percent; sustainability by 56 percent; and resource conservation by 54 percent. Energy efficiency's high ranking may reflect the fact that buyers can more easily understand and appreciate the benefits of building green when it allows them to heat and cool their homes more cost effectively. Homes that can demonstrate a measurable energy cost savings over time can be more easily sold at a higher price, with the expectation the monthly utility cost savings could exceed the additional cost of the home in the long run.

Builders who market green no doubt understand this connection: All survey respondents (100 percent) for whom green building is somewhat or extremely important to their market strategy said energy efficiency is somewhat or extremely important to their home buyers. No one in this particular group said it is a neutral or unimportant factor. The numbers were nearly similar — 98 percent — for builders who said green building was only somewhat important. But it's 91 percent — still extremely high — for builders for whom green building is a neutral factor, somewhat or not at all important to their market strategy. Even builders who don't see green as part of their market strategy recognize the importance of energy efficiency to their buyers.

The importance of indoor air quality may represent a perceived health benefit to buyers — an opportunity to avoid harmful chemicals, mold and other airborne particulates in a home that can make them and their families ill. Among those for whom green building is extremely important to their market strategy, 88 percent thought IAQ was somewhat or extremely important to their buyers. For those to whom green market strategy was somewhat important, the importance (somewhat and extremely) of IAQ was 90 percent. Among those who said green building has a positive effect on sales, 90 percent said IAQ is somewhat or extremely important to their home buyers.

CHANDLER DESIGN-BUILD'S BALANCING ACT

This small green builder forgoes double-digit home sales for green building education.

Green builder Michael Chandler, president of Chandler Design-Build in Mebane, N.C., has found a new way to dedicate his time to building quality, energy-efficient homes. Chandler only builds four homes a year, allowing him to create a profitable workplace for his employees and also serve as a speaker, mentor and teacher for other builders on green building. An integral part of that is his involvement in the Green Building Initiative, which focuses on builders who are not building to green and high-performance standards. He has 30 years of green building experience under his tool belt, and he uses it to his advantage.

"I can make enough profit on four homes to support my family, build equity in the company and have enough to give generous profit sharing to my employees while working an average of less than 38 hours per week," Chandler says.

"We only build four houses a year, and it is not enough to make a personal impact. Being part of the Green Building Initiative, I am able to influence hundreds of builders who will go out and build more houses and make a positive impact. …With the current recognition and current run-up on fuel prices, now is the time to bring green building to the mainstream."

— by Jennifer Powell, Staff Writer



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Third-party certifications for green building

When builders use a green certification program to define their homes as green, which ones are they likely to use?

Energy Star is the program used by 62 percent of builders in our survey. NAHB's green guidelines (it's not specified if builders are referring to the NAHB's Model Green Guidelines or a local program that uses the guidelines as its foundation) have been used by 32 percent, according to the survey. The USGBC's LEED certification has been used by 19 percent.

Some builders may hesitate to commit to a particular third-party green building program for fear it would be too complicated and restrictive in practical use.

We asked builders in our survey to rate the green building programs they have used in terms of ease of use and relative stringency and flexibility. Federally sponsored programs such as Building America and Energy Star were said to be somewhat or extremely easy to use by 39 percent of builders who have used them; 43 percent said these programs were somewhat or extremely stringent; and 20 percent said they were somewhat or extremely flexible.

Using the same criteria, 30 percent of builders who have used NAHB's green guidelines said there's some degree of ease of use; 33 percent said they have a degree of stringency, and 25 percent said they are in some way flexible in their requirements. Among the eight types of programs specified, LEED ranked least in terms of ease of use – only 13 percent of builders rated the program that way; 67 percent said it was somewhat or extremely stringent, and only 18 percent said it was

Popularity of various green building programs

Builders are most familiar with the green building programs offered by Energy Star, NAHB and LEED. Most had never heard of Green Globes, Environments for Living or Building America.

National Green Building Program	Have used (net)	Have used, and would use again	Never used but familiar with requirements	Heard of but not aware of requirements	Never heard of
Energy Star	62%	57%	23%	11%	4%
NAHB (Model Green Guidelines not specified)	32%	29%	36%	24%	8%
LEED (Particular LEED program not specified)	19%	16%	39%	25%	17%
Building Green	13%	11%	24%	35%	28%
American Lung Association	6%	5%	21%	36%	37%
Environments for Living	5%	3%	10%	20%	65%
Building America	5%	3%	12%	35%	48%
Green Globes	1%	.75%	9%	19%	71%
Other	37%	35%	10%	8%	48%

PREPACKAGED, GREEN GOODNESS

Michelle Kaufmann Design's message: Sustainable living can be accessible and affordable, too.

How do you keep up with sustainable design when you're at the forefront of the market? If you're Michelle Kaufmann, AIA, you hook up with museums to design homes for exhibits on sustainable living that bring together the best of the industry. Then you make sure to network with those people, trading e-mails and swapping ideas with innovators such as David Gottfried.

That networking has no doubt helped her and her Oakland, Calif.-based firm, Michelle Kaufmann Designs, to become one of the leaders in green building. MKD specializes in prepackaged modular homes, and now communities, too — all sustainable.

Green products, although important, are not entirely where it's at; the company boasts benefits of its own factory-built construction; eco-friendly finishes; and a tight building envelope, a key to successful sustainable design, she says. She refers to "inappropriate design in inappropriate areas," taking Californian-Italian courtyards and designs, for example, and placing them in cold climates.

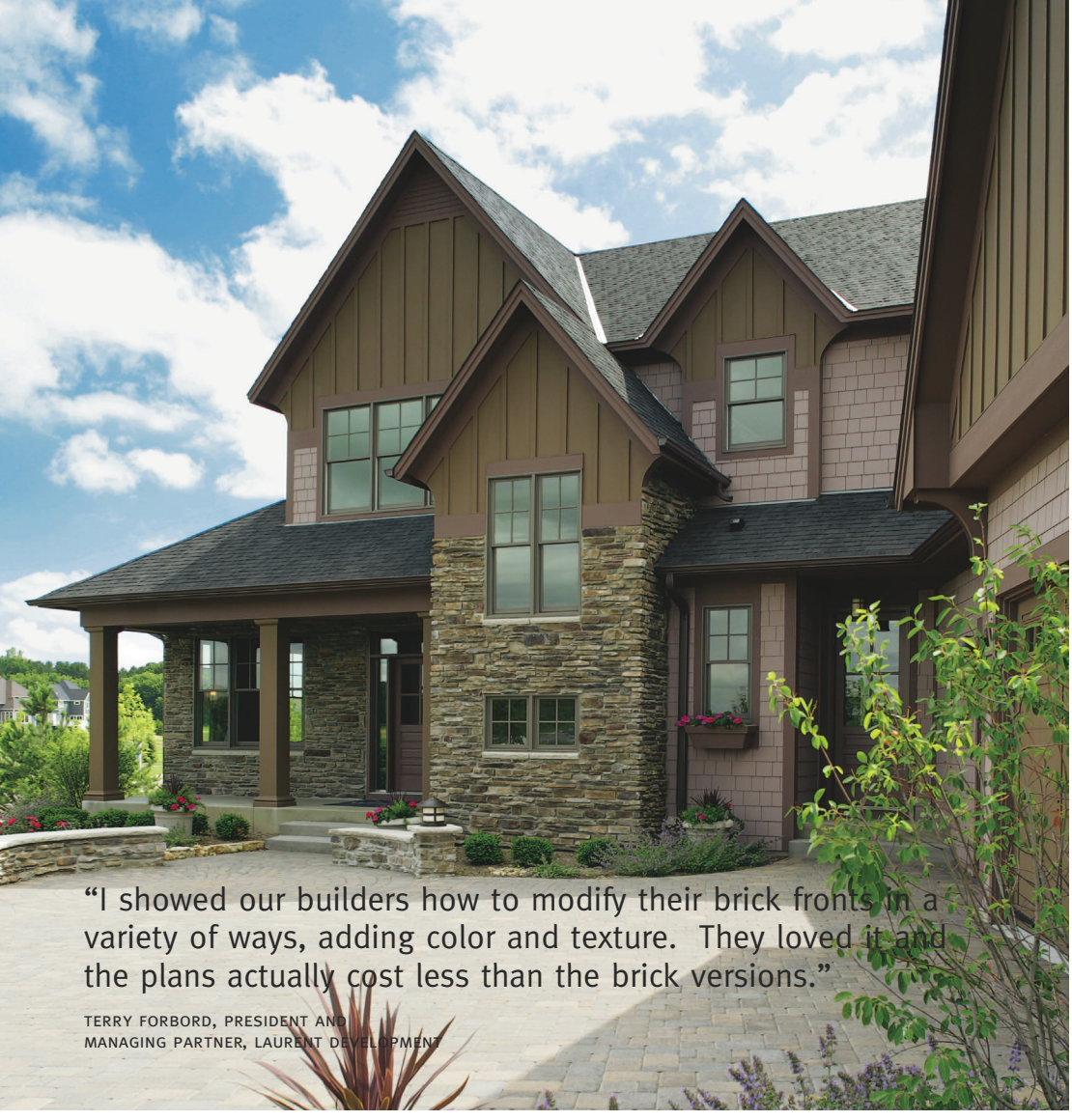
Bottom line: What's green in Chicago is not the same as what's green in Los Angeles.

Her tips for builders aiming for greener practices are simple: know your location, and don't focus on renewable materials only. "People are happiest long-term, over time, with insulation systems, mechanical systems and water choices that make sense and end up saving them money in the long run."

"The key to green design success is making it easy for people: prepackaging green solutions. What we find is that people want to go green — they want it — but it has to be cost-effective and easy. As designers and builders, the more we can make it easy by prepackaging, the more success we'll have."

Look for MKD's launch of its first green product, lighting that doubles as a vase.

—by Sara Zailskas, Staff Writer



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TERRY FORBORD, PRESIDENT AND MANAGING PARTNER, LAURENT DEVELOPMENT

Left: Dancing Waters by Laurent Development
Below: Liberty on the Lake by CPDC
Bottom: Cobblestone Lake by Tradition





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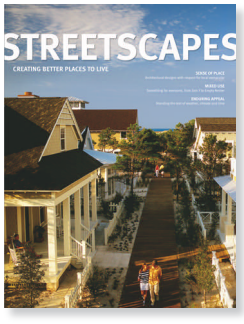

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SAGE ADVICE ON GREEN BUILDING

'Green only' home builder shares insights on building high-performance abodes.



"Don't wait on getting started with green building. You'll feel good about it, and your company will benefit," says Rick Hunter, managing partner of Sage Homebuilders when asked what would be the one thing he would relay to other home builders about green home building. He adds that builders shouldn't be intimidated by all of the requirements for building green. "It's not as bad as it looks," he says, but admits it is a little more challenging.

Hunter should know. His firm is a bona fide "green only" home builder. Based in St. Louis, Sage Homebuilders was launched in 2005 by Hunter and his partners Jason Stone and Mike Greene. They are hardly industry neophytes, however, having a combined experience of more than 30 years in home building.

Being a "green only" home builder means that every home Sage builds will meet either NAHB or LEED certification standards. The level of certification will depend upon what clients want to include in their home.

The firm is currently putting the finishing touches on its "near-zero-energy" home, which served as a showcase tour home during the NAHB's National Green Building Conference in St. Louis earlier this year. Builders attending the conference had the opportunity to visit the Sage home mid-construction to view the behind-the-scene green construction techniques and materials.

Has green-only been good for Sage Homebuilder's business? "We have more business right now than we can handle," Hunter says. "I believe that's a testament to the rapid growth of demand for green homes."

— By Mark Jarasek, Senior Editor

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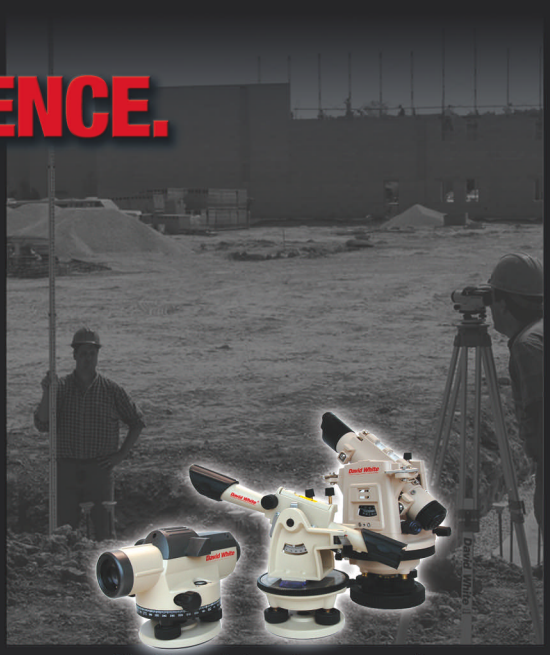

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somewhat or extremely flexible.

The perception of LEED's program seems to coincide with how the USGBC has positioned it. "There are a lot of builders out there who are just thinking about going green, and quite frankly I think LEED-H would be a fairly big leap for them," said Jay Hall, acting program manager for LEED for Homes in the July 2006 issue of *Custom Builder*, *PB's* sister publication.

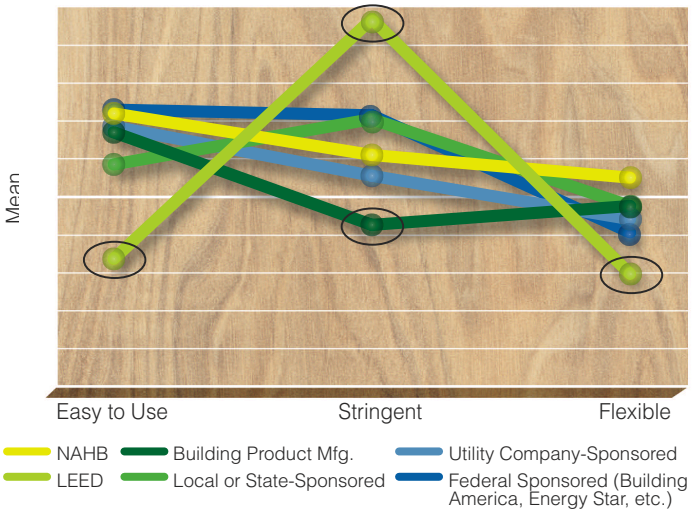
Though there are homes that have participated in the LEED for Homes pilot program and have been certified through it, it should be noted again that LEED-H will not launch officially until later this year. The perceived stringency of LEED may be based somewhat on the requirements of its other programs.

The American Lung Association Health House rates near the bottom both in terms of usage and familiarity by builders in our survey. But IAQ rated highly — second only to energy efficiency — as the element of green building in which most buyers are interested. If builders were more aware of the program and its focus on IAQ, the program might be weighted as more popular, though its rigorous requirements might still prohibit its wide use.

After all has been said and done, there is still no universally agreed upon definition for green. It's a many splendored thing, multiply defined, and embraced as a valued target for building homes today and possibly for many years to come. **PB**

Perceptions about various green building programs

Respondents were asked about the ease of use, stringency and flexibility of various green building programs. LEED's green requirements are perceived as the most stringent of all the green programs we asked about, according to our respondents. It was also seen as the least easy to use, and the least flexible.



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>> BY **SUSAN BADY,** *SENIOR EDITOR, DESIGN*

Charting a Green Path

In addition to the NAHB Model Green Home Guidelines, LEED for Homes and about a dozen other national green-building programs, home builders can choose from about 85 regional programs. Should there be just one, or is it better to have choices?

No one would argue green isn't good, and there's concrete evidence that home builders are taking it seriously. About two-thirds of respondents to a June 2007 *Professional Builder* survey strongly or somewhat disagreed with the statement that green building is a fad. Last year, in a McGraw-Hill Construction survey, NAHB builder members predicted that 40 to 50 percent of new homes built in 2010 would be green. That might be a stretch, but it shows how much green building has affected the housing industry.

Builders are also sampling a variety of green certification programs. According to the *PB* survey, 62 percent had used Energy Star, 32 percent had used the NAHB program and 19 percent had used LEED. However, 37 percent picked the "other" category, suggesting they've used a variation on one of the brand-name national programs. Not included in the survey were local or regional programs — about 85 of them. Variety is clearly the name of the green-building game. To some that's a detriment, but others see it as an advantage.

NAHB reports that as of June 2007, 1,564 builders were involved in voluntary, HBA-driven green-building programs around the country. Of that number, 225 are involved in programs based on the NAHB Model Green Home Building Guidelines. Still in the pilot phase, the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) LEED for Homes program is expected to roll out nationally by November 2007. At press time, 375 builders were registered in the LEED-H program.

In many respects, the NAHB and USGBC programs are similar. "The categories into which they're divided are typical of green building templates that are in place around the country, though there are more prerequisites involved in the LEED rating system," says Ron Jones, owner of Sierra Custom Builders in Placitas, N.M., who served on both the LEED for Homes committee and the NAHB green building subcommittee.

"We feel very strongly that there's a huge opportunity for us to work together for the common cause," says Jay Hall, acting director of LEED-H. Yet the NAHB and the USGBC can't seem to play nice, though Hall bristles at talk of any friction between the two organizations.

But Emily English, director of the NAHB green building program, told *Professional Builder*, "The tension between our organizations stems from the fact that we've seen evidence that USGBC is trying to put their programs in front of legislators and get them mandated, and we don't want green building mandated. We especially don't want pieces of legislation to reference one program, because that really freezes innovation in place."

True to their word, the NAHB hasn't pushed for a mandate, though in cooperation with the International Code Council it developed a national green-building



program based on the guidelines. The program was approved by the NAHB Board of Directors in June 2007 and will be released in early 2008. Its purpose, according to the organization, is "to provide a template for voluntary, market-driven green building."

Jones says although USGBC, on the official level, professes LEED-H should be a voluntary program, local USGBC chapters are trying to get ordinances enacted that would require homes to be built to the LEED standard. "So [NAHB] pushes back against that because they don't want to have somebody else's version of green mandated as the only choice."

Green and Greener

Steven Winter, FAIA, principal of Steven Winter Associates in Norwalk, Conn., is an architect and building-systems consultant whose firm certifies LEED buildings and writes standards for local green certification programs. Winter's staff has been working with the NAHB standard as well and did several analyses where production homes were run through both programs. A home becomes greener as it moves up through the three tiers of the NAHB program (bronze, silver and gold), he says.

NAHB's guidelines are divided into seven "guiding principles" or sections: lot design; preparation and development; resource efficiency; energy efficiency; water efficiency; indoor environmental quality; operation, maintenance and homeowner education; and global impact. At all tiers, a minimum number of points are required for each of the seven guiding principles.

The LEED-H rating system has four levels or, as USGBC calls them, shades of green: certified, silver, gold and platinum. Points are awarded in each of eight categories: innovation and design process; location and linkage; sustainable sites; water efficiency; energy and atmosphere; materials and resources; indoor environmental quality; and awareness and education. Some categories have prerequisites. For instance, third-party testing must verify that the project meets Energy Star for Homes criteria. Projects must earn a minimum amount of points to achieve each level.

MYTH VS. REALITY

Myth: LEED-H can only be used in certain parts of the United States.

Reality: Just like the International Residential Building Code, LEED-H can be applied anywhere in the U.S., with accommodations for regional differences.

Myth: LEED-H was not developed by home builders.

Reality: The program was developed by people who represent an array of disciplines, including home building.

Myth: Huge amounts of paperwork are required to certify a LEED home.

Reality: Unlike the LEED program for commercial buildings, LEED-H requires applicants to complete only three documents.

Myth: The NAHB guidelines include too many recommended measures; they don't help the builder prioritize.

Reality: Builders are allowed to pick the measures that are most appropriate and cost-effective for their region, but they must achieve a certain amount of points in each of the seven sections.

The NAHB has admitted that its guidelines are best suited to builders who haven't yet looked into Energy Star. Winter says LEED-H picks up where NAHB gold leaves off. LEED-H, which is positioned to recognize and reward the top 25 percent of builders in the country in terms of environmental stewardship, targets builders who wish to go beyond Energy Star.

"It's interesting what's taking place at the political ends of the landscape," says Winter. "All the local programs were moving along nicely and doing what appeared to be 15,000 to 20,000 homes a year in the aggregate. But when LEED for Homes was developed, some local [HBAs] were concerned that they'd be competing for the same funding sources, although the USGBC has had discussions with many of them about doing a kind of co-branding initiative."

Generally speaking, LEED-H is more stringent. "Some builders who have been at the forefront of green, like McStain [Neighborhoods], might prefer LEED because it sets them apart from their competition," Winter says. "At the same time, the NAHB standard is good because it makes it easier for a builder to get onto the first rung of the green ladder. So I personally think the two standards should be working side by side."

Hall points out that LEED-H requires third-party verification and performance testing while the NAHB program does not. "Many [green certification] programs don't require this," he says. "It's basically the builder voluntarily participating and saying what he actually accomplished."

Builders must achieve a certain number of points in each section of the NAHB guidelines, but how they get there is up to them, says English. "They get to pick and choose from the line items whatever makes the most sense in their region and what's most cost-effective," she says. "LEED for Homes has a lot of mandatory measures that [builders] have to do no matter what part of the country they're in."

Hall maintains that the LEED-H checklist is simple and builder-friendly compared to other programs. "If you look at the NAHB guidelines, I'll say loosely that about a third of the measures in that rating system are related to building materials. That's wonderful, but it doesn't send a clear message in terms of what the builder should be focusing on. In LEED-H, we've broken it up into five [categories] and require that something be done in each of the five."

Within each category, LEED-H recommends a variety of strategies the builder can pursue. Each strategy is labeled good, better or best so that builders who are less familiar with green can focus on



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the "good" practices, while those who want to be more aggressive can go after the "better" or "best" practices.

"The perception that LEED-H has a higher level of difficulty is totally wrong," Hall says. "That [perception] relates to the commercial building program. When we designed LEED-H, we developed a documentation approach that's extremely streamlined; basically there are three forms that have to be completed and submitted."

Another difference is cost. Documentation and verification fees are established by LEED for Homes providers: local organizations with demonstrated experience and expertise in their markets. Currently, 12 LEED-H providers are contracted through the USGBC to provide services to builders. They're located in Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, the Northeast and Canada. Fees for the initial verification tasks range from $500 to $3,000 per home and depend on home size, LEED performance tier, travel time the rater requires, the number of homes being built and the builder's experience with green-building techniques.

"Our guidelines are being used by HBA programs that are doing certification locally at a much, much lower cost — something like $250," says English. Calli Schmidt, NAHB's director of environmental communications, adds that many home buyers would rather upgrade to a higher-efficiency air conditioner, extra insulation or some other "green" feature than pay a few thousand extra for the LEED-H label.

Matt Belcher, president of Belcher Homes in Kirkwood, Mo., has built houses that comply with both programs. Belcher doesn't think one makes a house greener than another, but he believes LEED-H scrutinizes the lot more closely, especially when it's an infill project.

From a builder's standpoint, Belcher says the NAHB guidelines work well "because there are different ways to get to the same thing, and you need that flexibility on a construction site because things just happen."

Green? Says Who?

In the *PB* survey, 87 percent of respondents said there should be minimum standards of performance and sustainability before a builder can market a home as green. As for who should set the standards, 32 percent of respondents said an independent, third-party program; 24 percent, a trade association; 15 percent, federal government; 15 percent, state government; and 8 percent, local government.

Those opinions reflect the fragmented approach to certifying green homes today. Many local and regional green-building programs have similar rating systems and standards. It may make sense to consolidate them into a single, national green-building program.

The proliferation of programs is one reason green home building hasn't really taken off nationwide, says Winter. "Production builders that work in 30 or 40 states can't be complying with 30 or 40 different standards," he says. "Insurers, appraisers, lenders ... none of them will get behind something that varies from city to city and state to state. What I think is going to happen long-term is that the local programs will continue to manage their implementation but may look to one of the national [programs] for the standard they adopt, just as building codes develop nationally but are implemented locally."

Still, allowing the federal government (or some other entity) to dictate green-building standards is another matter. Belcher fears that a green-building mandate would create an economic hardship for an industry that's already in a slump, and wouldn't allow for the efficient adoption of new technology.

Do consumers really care which green program their builder uses? At the moment, no, say most of the sources consulted for this article. Belcher believes as time goes on, consumers will demand that builders be held accountable to certain standards.

"Frankly, as green building moves away from being a kind of passion-driven thing into a more practical reality, there are issues that are going to have to be addressed," he says.

Winter emphasizes that there is nothing inherently wrong with the competition between NAHB and USGBC.

He just thinks the two organizations should compete in a more civilized way." **PB**

LOG ON You can read 'Homebuilders at Odds Over Green Building Programs' online at **www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues**

WHAT LEED-H AND NAHB GREEN REQUIRE

Here's what you'll need to make it to these green lists.

NAHB

A minimum number of points must be earned in each of seven "guiding principles" (sections) in order for the project to be rated bronze, silver or gold.

There are some prerequisites; for example, to receive points for passive solar design, builders must use sun-tempered design methods.

Fees are approximately $250 per home. Line items can be verified in several ways, including builder spec sheets and installer certification.

LEED-H

A minimum number of points must be earned in each of eight categories in order for the project to be rated certified, silver, gold or platinum.

There are prerequisites in a number of categories, including Energy Star certification.

Fees range from $300 to $5,000 for documentation and verification.

Third-party verification and testing is required in all cases.



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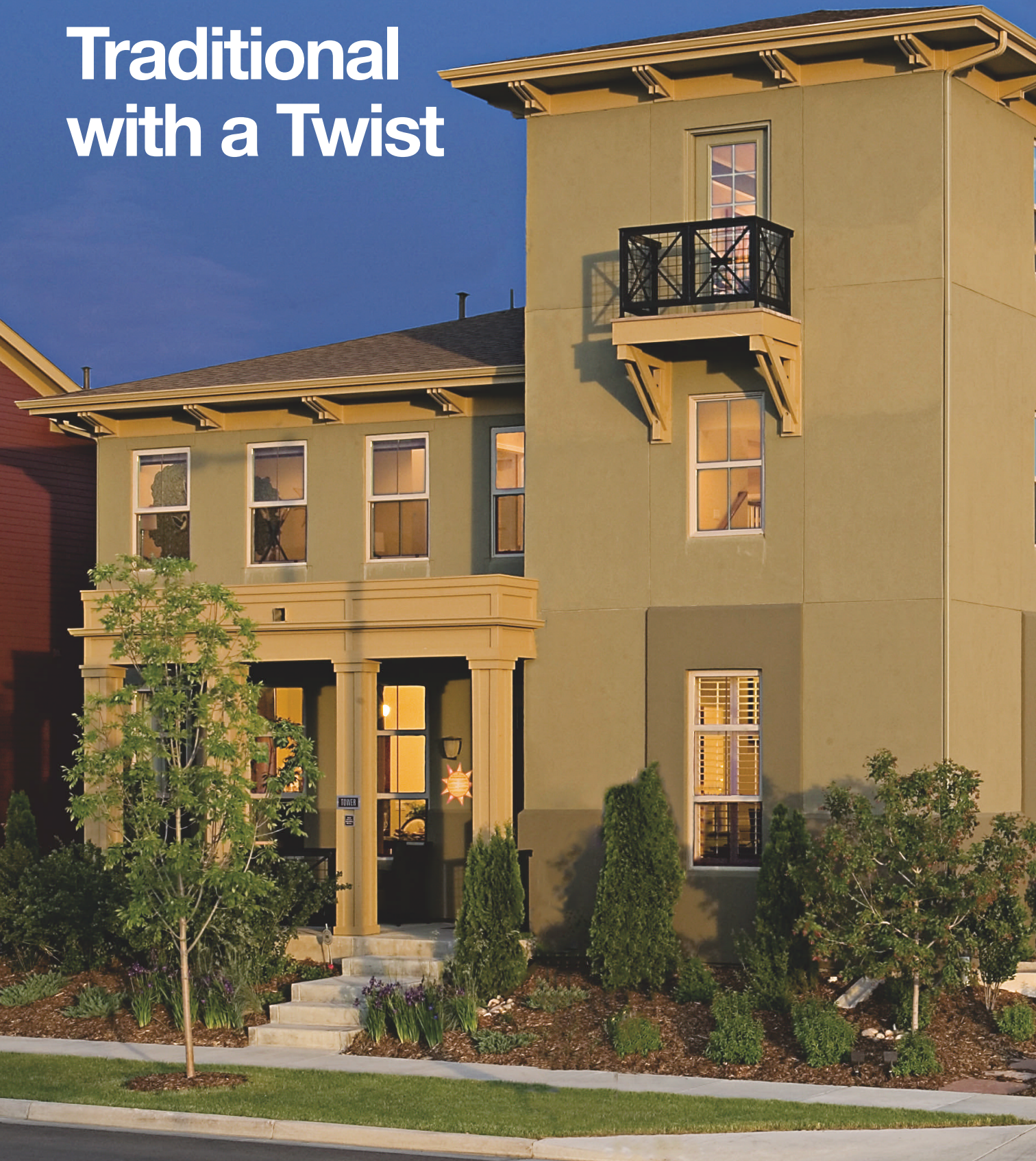
Traditional with a Twist



>> BY **FELICIA OLIVER,** *SENIOR EDITOR*



A STANDOUT OF HARVARD COMMUNITIES' Tower model is the third-floor loft with a juliette balcony that offers mountain and city views.

PHOTOGRAPHY: CREATIVE SOURCES

Harvard Communities' Tower model at Stapleton proves buyers will opt for a twist on the traditional.

Some buyers are in search of the traditional; some are in search of traditional with a twist. Perhaps you'd call it "contemporary traditionalism?" That's exactly what John Keith, president of Harvard Communities in Greenwood Village, Colo., labels it. And for his buyers, the twist hits a sweet spot.

Harvard Communities is one of several builders featured at Stapleton, Denver's 12,000-unit master-planned community redeveloped from the former Stapleton International Airport. Each builder is allotted a certain number of "filings," or grouping of lots, scattered through out the community. Harvard's homes in this community are called the Architect Collection and were inspired by homes in a neo-traditional, smaller nearby neighborhood called Prospect in Longmont, Colo.

Stapleton's developer, Forest City, has established certain design criteria for this community.

"It's what I call historicist," says Keith. "You select a certain style of homes to do as a Tudor, colonial or Craftsman style. Within that style you had to execute it well with traditional details."

Keith says the design guidelines created a lot of nice looking houses that all looked similar. Being a smaller builder in a market where a lot of the national builders compete, he was on the lookout for ways to differentiate. He and architect Kevin Yoshida of Braun + Yoshida Architects sold their idea to Forest City with an analogy.

"We showed [Forest City] slides of a traditional teapot from Crate and Barrel," Yoshida says, "and then we put it next to the (architect turned product designer) Michael Graves' teapot that's sold at Target — the pitch being that Target is proving that people will put their money down for something slightly different."

Using a little creative imagination, if you squint your eyes at look at the Tower model home from a far, you could vaguely imagine the silhouette of a teapot with the tower add-on as the spout. But the point of Keith made to Stapleton was that design innovation could be as profitable for a house as it was for house wares.

The theory seems to be panning out. The Tower floor plan has been the best selling of the elevations offered in the Harvard's Architect Collection.

VITAL STATS
Stapleton

Location: Denver
Project name: The Architect Collection at Stapleton
Model: Tower
Builder: Harvard Communities, Greenwood Village, Colo.
Architect: Braun + Yoshida Architects, Denver
Interior Designer: Lita Dirks & Co., Englewood, Colo.
Developer: Forest City Stapleton, Cleveland
Model opened: March 2006
Home type: Single-family detached
Sales to date: 15
Community size: 12,000 residential units; Architect Collection: approximately 20 homes per year
Square footage: About 3,200 square feet
Price: $650,000 – $700,000
Hard cost: $120 per square foot
Buyer profile: Young move-up families and professionals





THE TOWER MODEL'S kitchen's open floor plan has gourmet appliances and a custom-shaped, oversized island; only a standalone fireplace separates it from the family room. The net nook, above, is at the base of stairs that lead up to the tower loft space.

"That particular elevation is what we call the Tuscan look," says Keith, "yet we do certain things to it to give it a funky twist. It has some metal rail detailing on the front that is kind of modern. If you look on the inside you can see the detailing is different."

The key element of the plan and the genesis of the name is a third floor "tower." It's a flex loft space with views of the mountains and the city. The Tower includes other architectural details and interesting trim work that add interest but aren't necessarily observable from the floor plan.

"Generally speaking, builders don't think beyond the two-story house, at least in our market," says Yoshida. "The idea, at least for me, came out of visiting places like Seaside [a master-planned community in Florida] where they were really using that third story mostly for views. ... The idea wasn't to have a whole lot of program there, but just a special room or a retreat space that people might use as an office."

Opportunities

Stapleton buyers are a pretty homogenous group. Most are moving from some of the adjacent, older Denver neighborhoods because they can get more house for less money without moving to the suburbs. There's lots of open space — parks and biking and hiking trails — for an urban environment.

"It's also called Strollerville," says Keith. "You move here to be surrounded by like people who are in the same stage in their life cycle."

Greener Pastures

Harvard Communities started building green homes about three years ago. The homes are registered with Colorado Built Green, Energy Star and the Environments for Living Program, for which the model registers at the platinum level.

Photovoltaic panels for solar power are standard on all Harvard Communities homes. Other sustainable elements include high-performance framing, cellulose-blown insulation, tightly sealed duct work and Low-E argon-filled glass windows. The company also uses a very efficient forced hot air furnace with an ECN drive motor.

"It's a variable speed, 95 percent-plus furnace — the best gas-fired, hot-air furnace money can buy," Keith says. "Because the sealing of the house is super tight, air changes are low. We provide mechanical ventilation into the home as a standard feature."

Other green features include recycling lumber waste and the use of engineered wood products;

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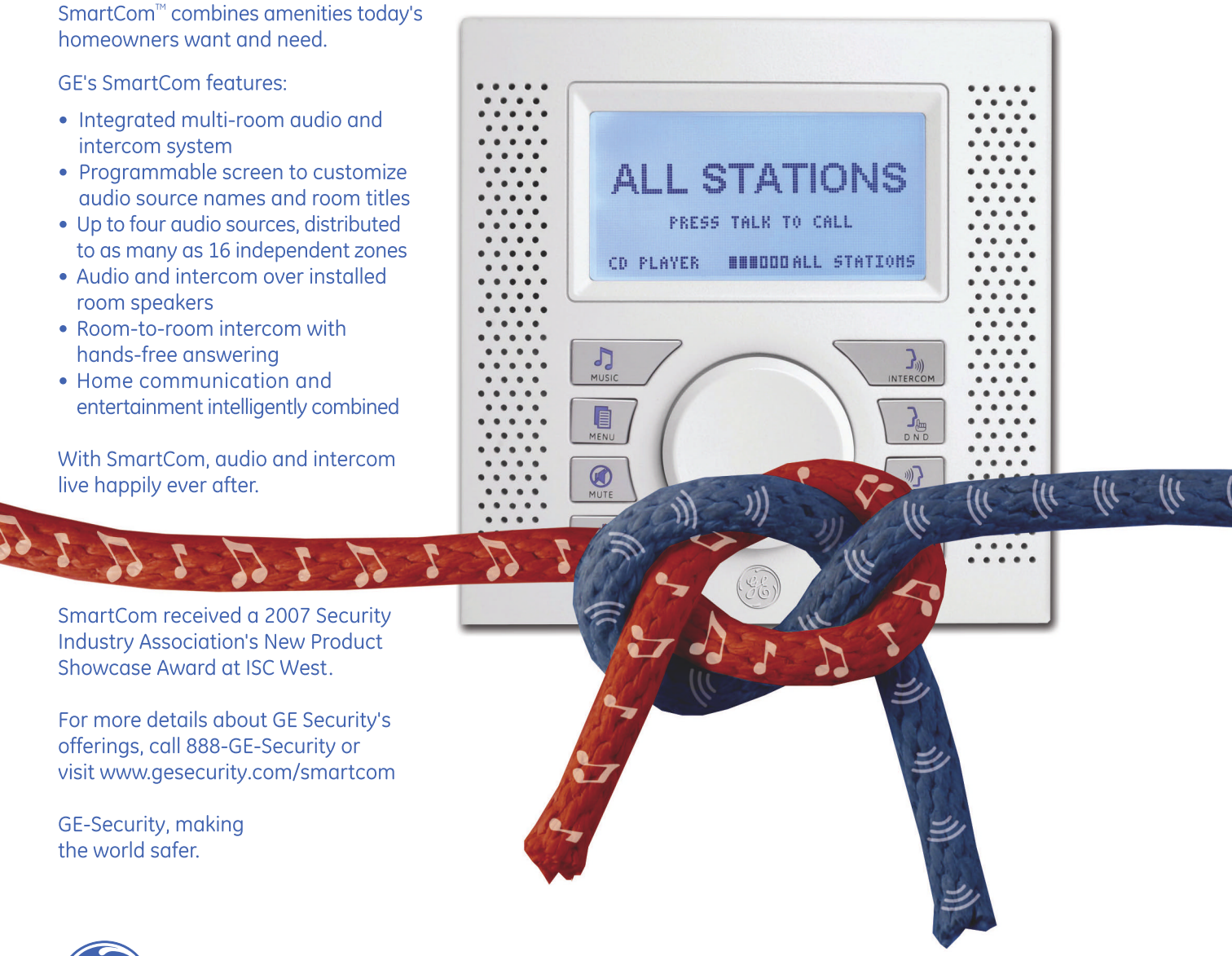

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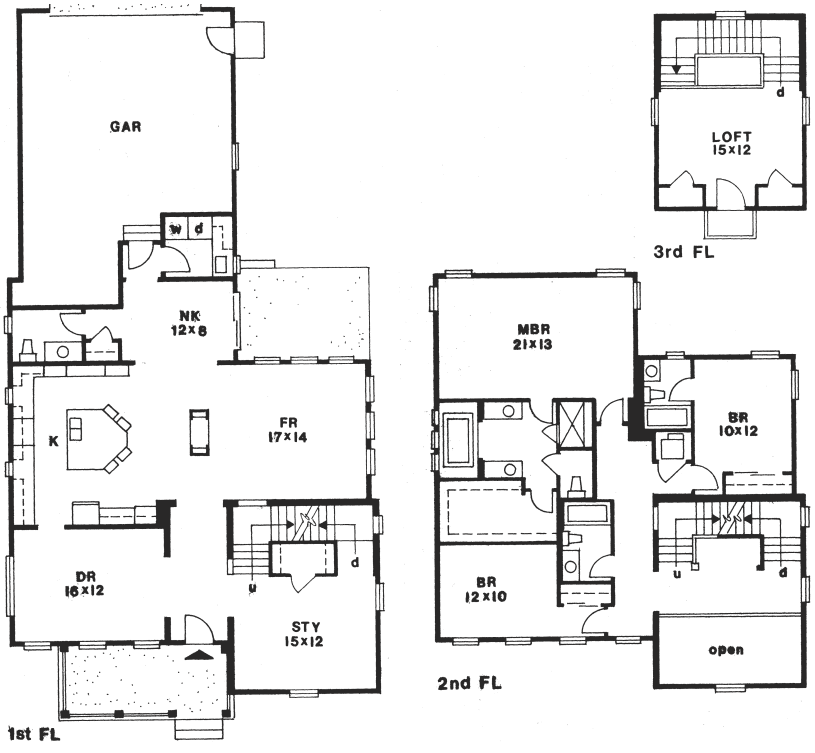
THE 3,127-SQUARE-FOOT-HOME features unique detailing and custom trim throughout, as seen on the ceiling of the master suite, right. Also included in the suite are a large walk-in closet, master bathroom, above, and sitting area.



OSB sheathing; VOC paints and solvents; sealed combustion appliances to prevent back drafting; moisture management to prevent mold; and minimal water landscaping with a rain-sensored irrigation system.

Challenges

Getting Stapleton to loosen the design constraints was fairly easy. Another challenge, which turned out to be minor, was getting the public to accept the design.

"When people drive up, they expect to see a certain thing," says Keith. "When they drive up to our houses, certain people ask, 'What are they?' and certain people say, 'Wow.' It just depends."

Then there was the green challenge.

"We feel these homes are about the most energy-efficient production homes being built in Colorado," says Keith. "You do all these surveys that say everyone wants a green home. But the first question people ask is, 'How thick is the granite?' They don't care so much about the fact our ductwork leaks 3 percent when the ductwork in an average Denver home leaks 40 percent. These are snooze-type items to a lot of people.

But others get turned on; Keith has noticed a change in the last six months. People are becoming more focused on such issues. And he's working hard to promote green value at his models. He holds a "wine and cheese high-performance home forum" with all his buyers.

"We walk though a house that is in the construction process, where the drywall is not up," says Keith, "and we can show them all the things we do behind the walls to make their house as efficient as possible.

It's an opportunity for future neighbors to meet each other. And people say, 'I can't believe you even think about how you frame the house

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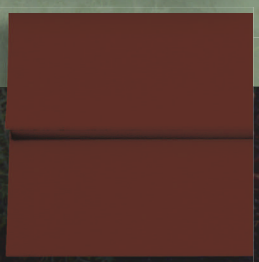



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A TWO-STORY, OPEN STUDY/LIBRARY attracts buyers. Another plus: Harvard Communities' homes' affiliations with Colorado Built Green, Energy Star and the Environments for Living Programs.

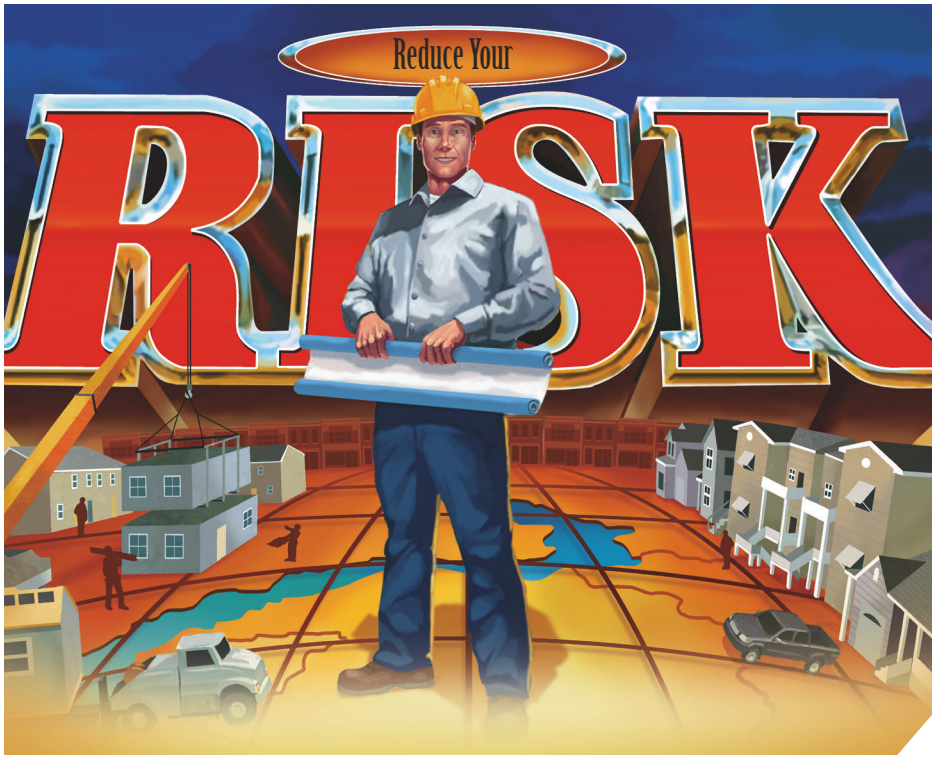
to allow insulation to go into that corner, or how you seal up this detail or that detail.'"

Outcome

Keith says he sells about 40 houses a year, and about 30 percent of sales are the Tower model. He says that figure is a bit deceptive because of regulations on what homes can be built at Stapleton.

"I can't put any house on any lot," he says. "They pre-plot it, so you can only do so many of them because they want to insure that the streetscape is varied and diverse. It's actually one of our more popular plans. We wish we could build it more." **PB**

LOG ON To read **'Greenwood Village's Colorado's Harvard Communities' sales climb for the Tower model at Stapleton'** online, visit **www.ProBuilder.com/plansandprojects**



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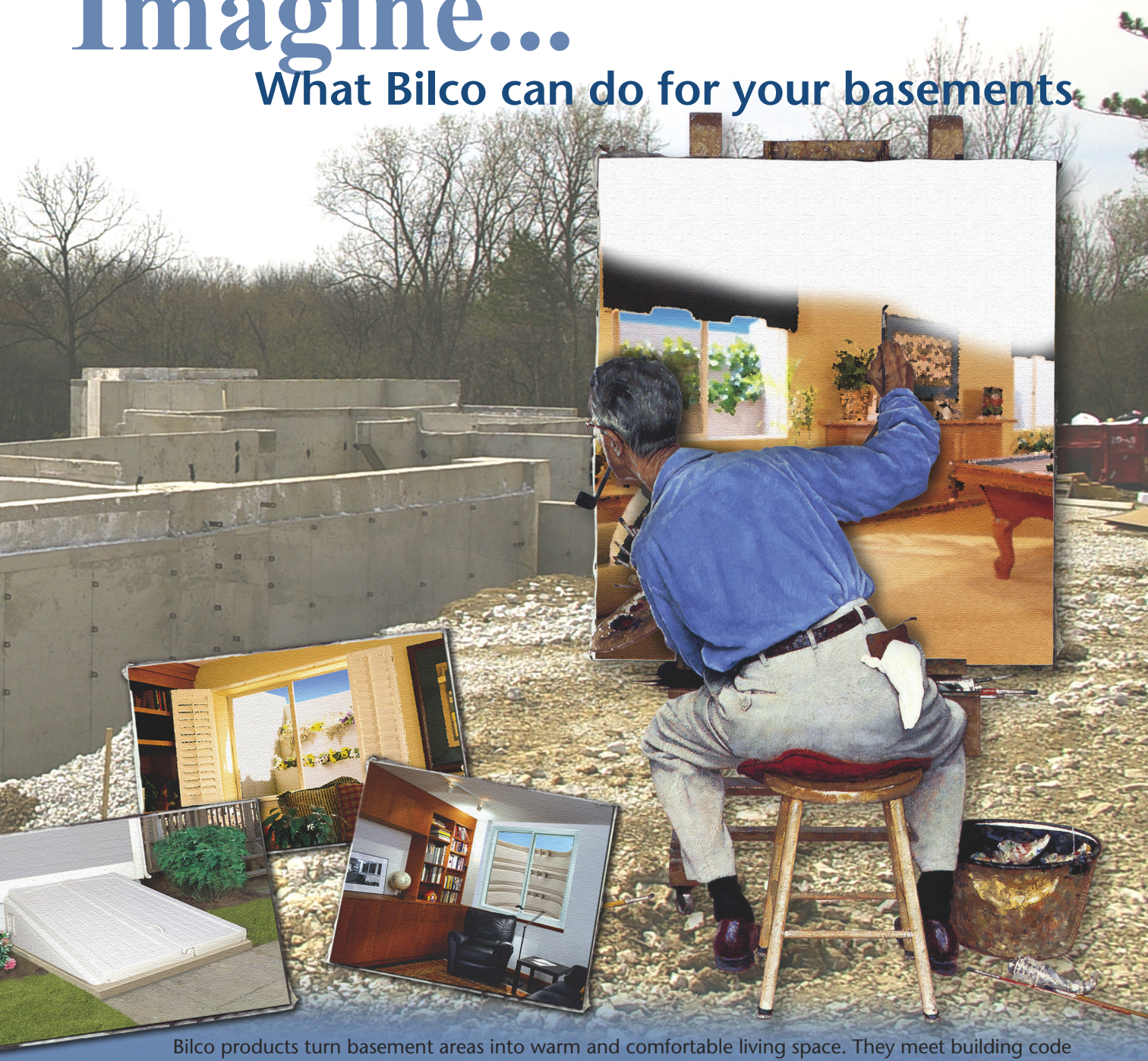

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Product News

>> **BY NICK BAJZEK, STAFF WRITER**

Sharp Lookin' Solar

The ungainly and inefficient solar roof cells of the past are just that. Solar power is now poised to take off some of the burden placed on our nation's power grid, as Sharp's roof modules show.



According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, houses account for 17 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. An easy place for home builders to start incorporating green building practices is as simple as applying roof tiles. Sharp's ND-62RU1 62-watt solar roof modules are one small and cost-effective step the industry can take into the green movement.

"Many builders have been reluctant to get into solar power. It's a tough market," says Jesse Quay, senior design consultant for Sun Light & Power in Berkeley, Calif. "In the next five, maybe 10 years, instead of putting panels on top of the roof, the panels will be the roof," says Quay.

Solar energy has been fighting an uphill battle of acceptance since the first solar battery was invented in 1883. In 1954, researchers Gerald Pearson, Calvin Fuller and Daryl Chapin designed a silicon solar cell capable of 6 percent energy conversion efficiency with direct sunlight. The team later created an



THE SHARP SOLAR MODULES lie flat on the rooftop, interlocking with most standard roof tiles via a specially designed mounting system for a smoother look.

array of several strips of razorblade-size silicon and placed them in direct sunlight, allowing the silicon to absorb electrons beaming from the sun. These electrons were then converted into an electrical current, thus creating the first solar panel. In principle, Sharp's latest roof panels aren't all that different.

Solar roof modules began popping up quite often in residential construction and remodeling during the oil crisis in the 1970s. President Jimmy Carter famously put a solar rig on the roof of the White House during his administration. However, the early solar units were problematic at best; the technology came with high installation costs, had efficiency problems and weren't the prettiest to look at. Another major factor working against the industry was simply quality of work.

"It was a new technology, and many builders and remodelers were putting up solar collectors without having much experience in the field. Ultimately many systems failed and that gave solar a black eye," says Quay.

And it wasn't long after Carter's term that President Ronald Reagan moved into the White House and, in an equally famous publicity stunt, removed the solar collectors from the roof.

Fast forward 20 years: oil prices are up again and the energy crisis has reached critical levels. Solar power is now poised to take off some of the burden placed on our nation's power grid.

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Growing climate change worries and historically high oil prices have forced the current administration to reconsider its stance on alternatives like solar polar. Earlier this year, the White House proposed $148 million for solar energy development, up almost 80 percent from what it invested in 2006.



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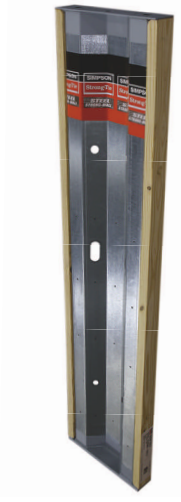

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main difference definitely is its design," says Arthur Rudin, director of engineering at Sharp. The solar modules lay flat on the rooftop, interlocking with most standard roof tiles for a smoother look.

"We worked closely with our engineering team, our colleagues in Japan, builders here in the West Coast as well as with roofing manufacturers," says Rudin. "We couldn't design the product without the input from manufacturers. We consulted them to come up with a size that is compatible with most roof systems out there."

At 59 by 15.6 by 1.3 inches, one solar module replaces roughly five standard tiles. Each module features an anti-reflective coating that increases the absorption of light under low-light conditions, expanding operation earlier and later into the day than other modules.

Maximum power output for a standard installation on a 2,500- to 3,000-square foot house is roughly 300 volts with a maximum power current of 7 amps, producing the 62 watts in the product's namesake. And the modules, Sharp says, are quick and easy to install; screwed directly onto the existing roof battens, there's no need for more framing materials nor to screw more holes in the roof. Like concrete tiles, they can be replaced individually without removing surrounding roofing material.

They are designed to deflect water through channels and are resistant to moisture, impact and high winds in addition to carrying a 25-year limited warranty on their power output. Rudin points out, "In a typical home with a typical installation, the solar panels can reduce the home's total power consumption 1/3 to ½. That's big."

We may be past the tipping point when it comes to solar technology, Quay notes. "Forty-two states have incentive programs for net metering, where the utility allows homes to feed back into the grid," he says. Simply put, if more and more homes are powered by solar, they could, in turn, feed power back to the nation's starving energy grid, allowing home owners to sell the power they generate back to utility companies at wholesale prices. Says Quay: "It's free market capitalism at its best." **PB**

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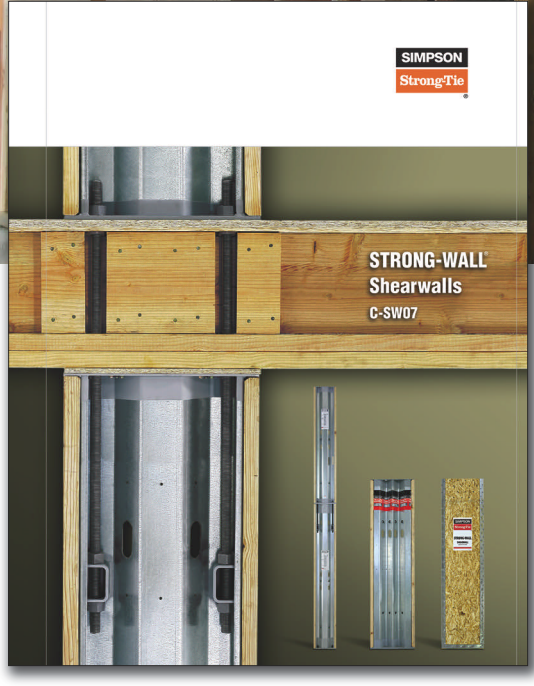

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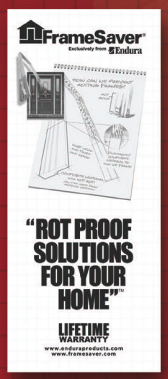

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>> BY **SUSAN CONBERE,** *FOR PATH PARTNERS*



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PATH REPORT

Code Change Clears A Few Hurdles

International Residential Code adoption on SIPs could save builders time.

Structural insulated panels (SIPs) have always been easy to assemble into strong, energy-efficient walls. Now, planning and permitting are streamlined, too.

The International Code Council voted to adopt SIPs into the International Residential Code (IRC) in May. Prescriptive specifications and installation details will be included in the 2007 supplement. The upshot: builders using SIP building envelopes in residential projects will no longer be required to conduct additional engineering to show equivalency to the IRC.

The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing; the Structural Insulated Panel Association; APA – The Engineered Wood Association; and SIP industry partners developed the prescriptive approach, which requires no guesswork by the builder. The approach explains what SIPs are and exactly how they're used: "spans, connections, what kind of screws, the nitty gritty details defined," says Dana Bres, a research engineer with PATH.

"Different manufacturers have different ways of doing things and slightly different products," says Chris Schwind

of SIPA. "By getting the test data from all the manufacturers, we came up with a minimum standard that they all meet. Now it doesn't matter if one manufacturer does things a little differently from another."

So builders now have two resources: "The manufacturer of the panels provides technical assistance; the building code provides prescriptive guidelines. The combination of the two allows builders to get it right," says Bres.

SIPA and the NAHB Research Center surveyed about 900 builders in April and found that roughly half the builders surveyed were familiar with SIPs but haven't used them. Schwind predicts the code change will attract more builders.

"Having it in the building code is just one more barrier builders don't have to face when choosing this product."

It also makes it easier to get to yes with code officials and homeowners, says Bres. However, the immediate effect of the code change will vary depending on location, says Curt Stendel, a SIP builder in Minnesota.

Over the long haul, Stendel predicts its making getting building inspectors' approval easier, but many municipalities are still working under the 2000 version of the IRC.

So if your municipality is still working with an outdated code, be sure to bring the 2007 code (available at www.sips.org) to your building inspectors' attention.

"Lack of education by the industry is the biggest barrier," says Stendel. "It's one-on-one education of inspectors that makes the most difference."

Why Choose SIPs?

SIP building has increased significantly with the rising popularity of green building. According to SIPA, total SIP production increased 6.1 percent in 2006, which followed a 12.1 percent increase in production in 2005.

"SIPs dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes to frame a building," says Schwind. "You are working with large prefab sections, you have fewer joints to seal, you can place panels as big as 8 by 24 feet by using a boom track or a forklift, and it will reduce the man hours to dry in a home."



GOOD PLANNING AND TEAMWORK speed SIP construction and provide for a strong, durable, energy-efficient home.

The learning curve is also relatively short.

"It takes less skilled labor to put up SIPs to frame a house than wood framing: two to three homes are probably all that's needed to train a crew," says Schwind. "Crews can also work faster because walls are perfectly straight. It's a continuous nailing surface to attach drywall, so it's easier and faster."

Labor savings depend on the size and experience of the crew and also on jobsite conditions. And you'll have to pay for a crane to lift the panels. But if you're setting panels that are already insulated, you don't have to spend time framing walls or dealing with warped lumber, which saves time and money.

SIPs also produce a lot less waste. Made in a factory to specification, they're delivered to the site pre-cut and ready to install. This means there's hardly any job site waste unless someone got the shop drawings wrong. And because the panels go up so quickly and are so big, there's less job site theft. Who's going to walk off with 8-foot by 24-foot panels?

With the extra insulation and the tight fit, SIPs also save considerable energy. "SIPs give you the ability to control air infiltration better since there isn't as much air going in and out," says Schwind. He notes that because SIPs create a tighter building, ASHRAE standards require you use mechanical ventilation with them to ensure proper indoor air quality.

For builders seeking LEED or Energy Star certification, SIPs are a real bonus, and not only for their insulation and air sealing benefits.

"You can pick up one extra LEED point if the sheathing of your SIPs has an FSC stamp," says Stendel. (The Forest Stewardship Council stamp certifies that the wood was sustainability harvested.)

With the recent code change, Energy Star also agreed to waive blower door



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SIPS ARE PERFECT FOR VERTICAL EXPANSION, as this third-story wall and roof installation in Minneapolis shows.

testing with SIP homes. Inspectors now only have to do a visual inspection, saving the cost of the blower door test.

"For Energy Star builders, this is $300 to $500 they don't have to spend proving something they already know. This frees up the money for better windows, doors and appliances," says Bres.

Given all the pluses of SIPs, why, exactly, have builders been slow to adopt them?

Terry Dieken, owner of Extreme Panels in Minnesota and a SIP manufacturer for 14 years, says humans are just creatures of habit. Although SIPs have been around for 40 years, they're still new to a lot of builders.

Next on the Horizon

The prescriptive method is for SIP walls only. SIPA and its industry partners will be working to design standards for connecting SIP roofs to insulating concrete form (ICF) walls and to SIP walls next. **PB**

Susan Conbere writes about better building practices on behalf of the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH). PATH is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For more information about PATH, visit www.pathnet.org.

LOG ON Read 'Code Change Lowers Hurdles for SIPs, Green Building' online at **www.ProBuilder.com/innovation**

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Tarpon Coast Builders



Mike Romig
Venice, Fla.



Weaver Precast

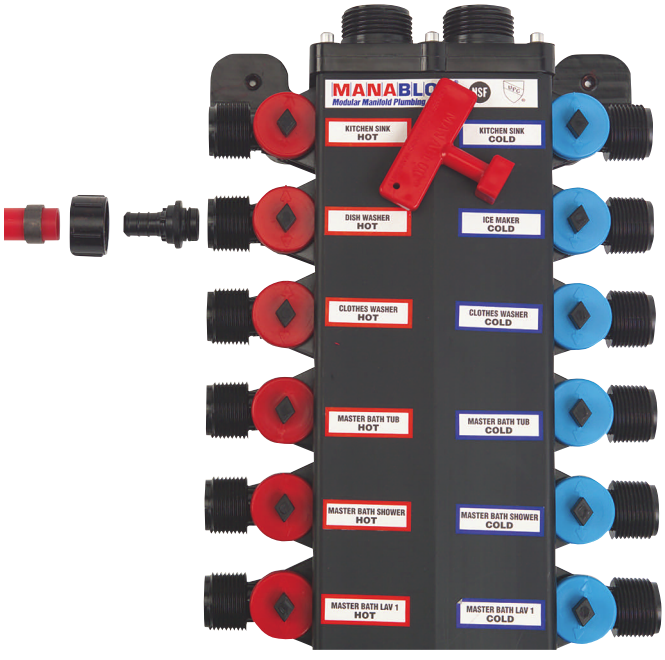
The Epic Wall System from Superior Walls/Weaver Precast is manufactured with a reinforced low-water-to-cement concrete. The walls are certified R-15, and the company claims the walls significantly reduce moisture and mildew buildup. Standard heights are 8 feet; 9 feet, 4 inches; 10 feet; and 12 feet. Window and door dimensions are custom-designed to fit specs. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-125***

In My Own Words

"This wall system provides the strength and security our buyers expect from our SafeHomes while facilitating our accelerated schedules. The walls are poured in a controlled environment using 5,000 psi concrete and have been large-projectile tested to 235 mph. They form the base of our disaster-resistant homes and are waterproof because of the density of the concrete. Our buyers appreciate knowing they will be protected from wind-borne debris and not get water leakage with resulting mold during severe weather."

Vanguard Piping Systems

Available in both polyalloy and brass, crimp adapters from Vanguard Piping Systems accommodate crimp connections at the Manabloc plumbing system as well as the fixture. Easily adaptable for either ½- or ⅜-inch tubing, the company says specific sizes need not be indicated when ordering. No special wrench is required, says Vanguard — a finger-tight installation is all it takes. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-126***



In My Own Words

"The Manabloc system accomplishes many of our plumbing related goals in the SafeHouse, including reduction of maintenance, long-term durability, energy conservation and reduction of pressure variation when multiple valves are activated concurrently."

>> Tarpon Coast Builders cont'd



BioBased Insulation

Following the Open Cell 501 polyurethane spray foam, the 1701 water-blown, closed-cell insulation from BioBased uses soy products in place of petroleum derivatives. The product uses about two acres of soybeans to insulate a typical 2,500 square-foot house. The insulation adheres to nearly any surface and will not shrink, settle or disintegrate. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-127***

In My Own Words

"This soy-based insulation provides superior insulating properties for our SafeHomes while supporting our green building techniques. It is a healthy alternative to traditional insulation materials and provides an added benefit of strengthening the roof structure. It also allows us to seal the entire building envelope, thereby eliminating much of the potential uplift and water penetration of vented soffits occurring during hurricanes."



Storm Busters

The 16mm corrugated polypropylene panels form the backbone of Storm Busters' Hurricane Shutters. Rated for coastal areas and sporting TAS (201-203) and ASTM (E 1996) missile impact ratings, the shutters allow 70 percent of light to come in and, according to the company, will not warp or deform. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-128***

In My Own Words

"The Storm Busters products are significantly lighter than aluminum; allow light into the home; will not rot or incur insect damage; and don't have sharp edges. They are easy to mount using the track system, so homeowners are more apt to use them."

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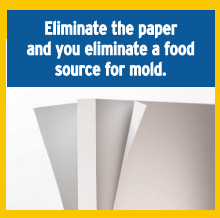

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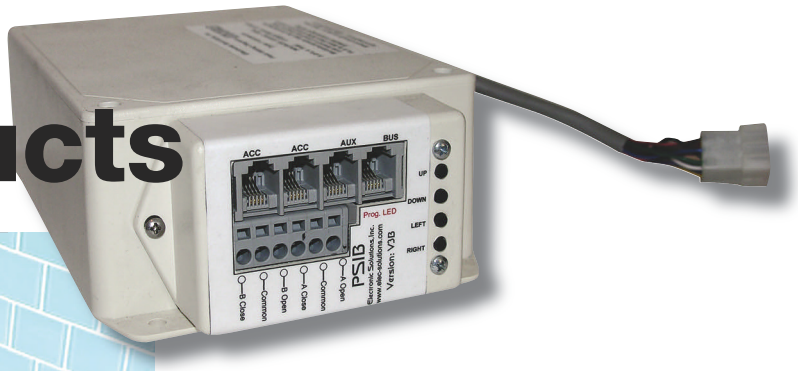
>> BY **NICK BAJZEK,** *BUILDINGPRODUCTS@REEDBUSINESS.COM*

ProBuilder Product Report: **New Products**





Pegasus/Blanco

Made in single and double non-metallic configurations, the latest offering from Pegasus maximizes kitchen space with the oversized granite kitchen sink. The sinks are made in several colors and come with two cutting boards (mahogany and glass), a colander and a bowl. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-130***

Auton

Combining RF, infrared and low-voltage remote signals without the need for reconfiguration, is the Multifunction Controller from Auton. It features a remote control equipped with two preset buttons that can be used to program the television's position into memory. An RS232 option enables users to control their PCs through the flat-panel television screen. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-129***



Schlage

Bringing piece of mind, the Schlage King Cobra 2 (KC-2) deadbolts and Access Control Management System uses a programmable iButton, rather than keys. That means, according to the company, there's no need to replace or re-key deadbolts. The ANSI/BHMA Grade 2 deadbolts provide first-rate security and low susceptibility to kick-in, drilling and wrench attacks. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-131***



Clopay

Expanding on its Gallery Collection line of garage doors, Clopay's new offerings include three-layer sandwich construction options. The doors are available in two thicknesses, 1 ⅜ and 2 inches, with a thermal break to improve energy efficiency. The doors have long and short grooved panels constructed from heavy 24-gauge wood grain textured steel. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-132***

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>> BY **NICK BAJZEK,** *BUILDINGPRODUCTS@REEDBUSINESS.COM*

ProBuilder Product Report: **HVAC**

Construction Solutions

With fire safety in mind, the DBX1000-M metal dryer box from Construction Solutions minimizes fire hazards by providing a recessed area in the wall for the dryer vent hose, thereby reducing the possibility of kinks in the hose, which largely contribute to fires caused by lint build-up. It also allows the gas line connection to be made within the cavity, and the box can be rotated in any direction to accommodate both upward or downward venting. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-133***



Honeywell

Meeting the American Lung Association's Healthy House guidelines, the Honeywell F300 Whole-House Electronic Air Cleaner removes up to a reported 98 percent of airborne particles passing through the system. Installed directly inline with the home's HVAC ductwork, the unit gives particles an electrical charge and collects them like a magnet. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-134***





York

It's all about giving home owners options, and York's Hybrid Comfort System does just that. An electric heat pump provides warmth during mild winter weather, while a gas furnace provides supplemental heat during colder days. The company says the system can contribute to big savings on utility bills and that the units may also help homeowners qualify for utility and tax incentives. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-135***



Coleman

The Comforteer TCGD series of air conditioners with MicroChannel coil technology from Coleman are made in eight 13+ SEER models. The smallest unit measures 24 inches high by 23½ inches wide by 23½ deep and weighs 96 pounds. The units use R-22 refrigerant and feature a standard limited warranty (five years on parts and five years on the compressor). ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-136***

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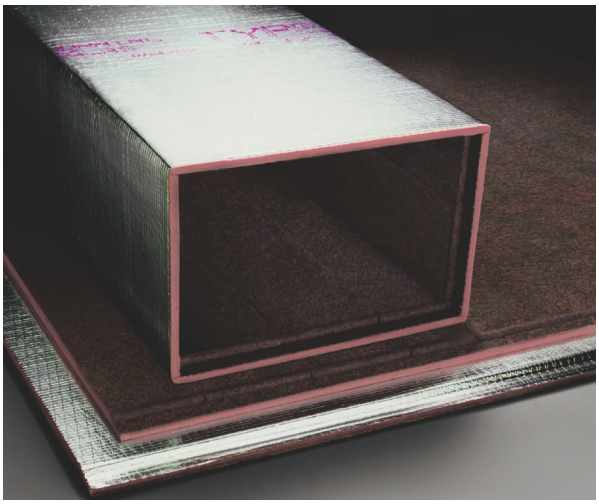

Owens Corning

Nothing is worse than noisy ductwork in the middle of the night. Owens Corning's QuietR ducts offer, according to the company, 75 percent more energy efficiency than plain sheet metal ducts. Air leaks are reduced eightfold, resulting in less sound transmission through the house and, most importantly for some, the pops and creaks found in normal sheet metal ducts are greatly reduced. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-137***



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Myson

Myson's T6 IVC Center-Connection Radiator is a dual panel, double convector radiator that offers the advantages of a 2-inch central connection as well as the standard four-corner connection to save installers time. The T6 IVC replaces baseboard up to 29 feet and delivers up to 16,036 BTUs per hour. It carries a five-year warranty. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-139***



Rinnai

Recently certified by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), the C98 series (also known as the 3237 series) from Rinnai is now available in both indoor and external versions. The R98i-ASME and R98e-ASME are for residential use where ASME certification is required. The units have 9.8 gallon-per-minute output at a 35-degree temperature rise. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-140***

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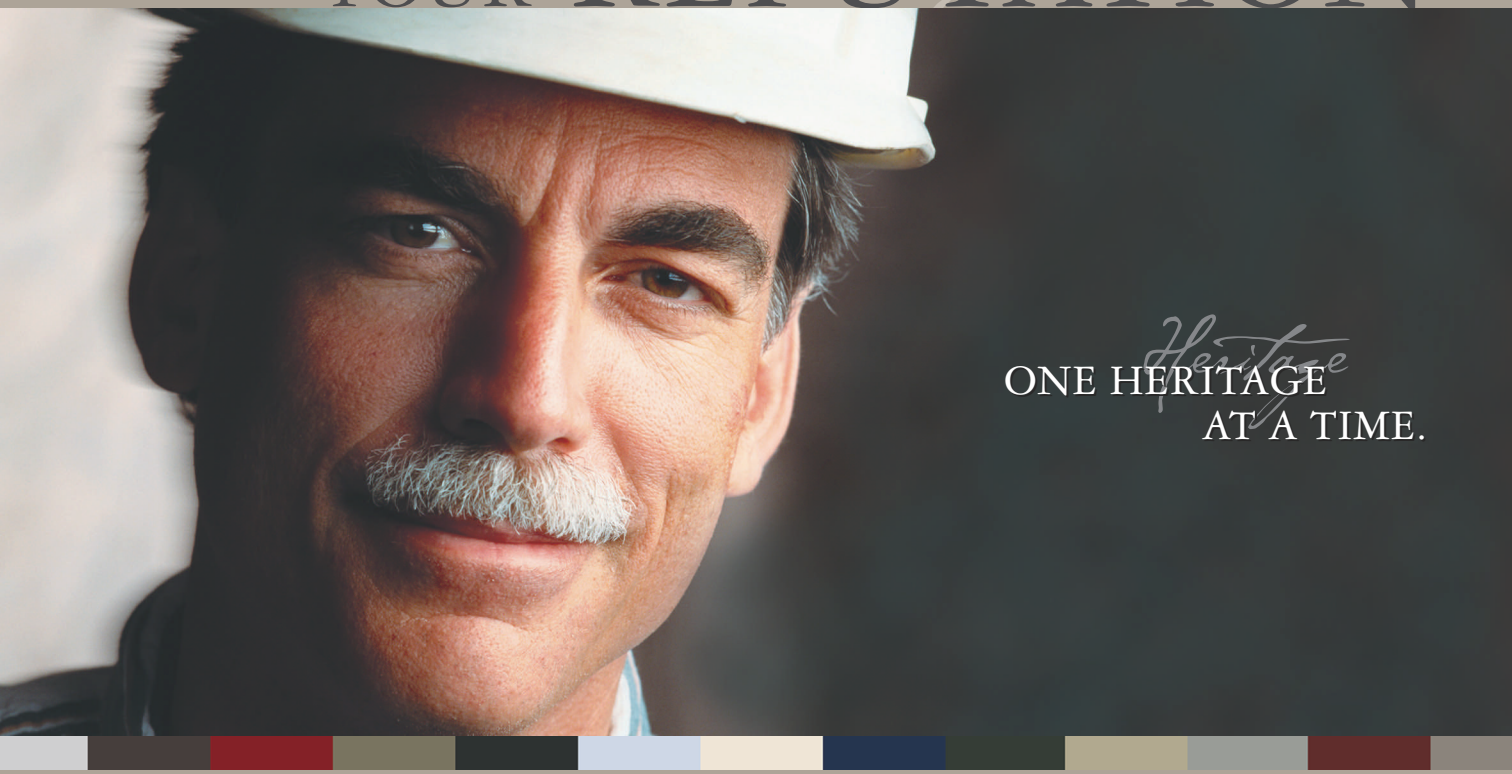

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>> BY **NICK BAJZEK,** *BUILDINGPRODUCTS@REEDBUSINESS.COM*

ProBuilder Product Report: Green Products



NuTech

Following the trend toward Compact Fluorescent Lighting, NuTech's Composite Recessed CFL Downlight model is designed for new construction. The unit's small profile means it only needs 4.25 inches of space to fit in restricted spaces or angled ceilings. It can house one or two CFL sockets or dual or triple-tube lamps. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-142***



Broan

Meeting ASHRAE Standard 62, the ultra-quiet SmartSense system by Broan automatically coordinates the operation of ventilation fans in the home, running them intermittently throughout the day when necessary. A master control switch controls up to 10 fans. The kit includes two Ultra Silent fans (one 110 CFM fan, one 80 CFM fan) and two SmartSense controls. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-141***





Grand Hall

Bringing standard tank and tankless water-heating technology together is the Eternal Hybrid water heater from Grand Hall. According to the company, the unit works on the principle of counter flow, with cold water entering from the bottom of the tank and a top-mounted turbo burner that forces heat downward. According to the company, it achieves an 86 percent thermal efficiency. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-143***

Avonite Surfaces

Containing 40 percent pre-consumer recycled waste materials, the Crater and Summer lines from Avonite Surfaces are SCS-certified as a sustainable surfacing product. The Crater features a black base with yellow, grey, red and brown accents. The Summer has a green hue with large flecks of black, grey and clear. ***For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5336-144***

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2007 BENCHMARK CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

- Housing Tour – Greater Atlanta
- Welcome cocktail reception

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

- Keynote – Jason Jennings, "Think Big, Act Small"
- J. Walker Smith, "Consumers Are in Control"
- James Haughey, State of the Industry Review
- Frank Alexander, NHQ Panel Discussion
- Afternoon Breakout Sessions
- **2007 Benchmark Awards Gala**, featuring the 2007 NHQ Awards, AVID Awards and the 2008 Builder of the Year presentation

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

- Keynote – Robert Kriegel, "Break It! Bringing Successful Innovation and Creativity to Your Business"
- **John Rymer, "7 Things You Can Do Right Now to Improve Sales"**
- **Sales Professionals Panel**
- Avid Ratings Awards Panel Discussion
- **Rick Heaston, "Relationship Selling"**
- **Sales Professionals Panel**
- Fun Night at the Winery

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

- Complimentary Golf Round at the Chateau Elan Chateau course (LIMITED AVAILABILITY)

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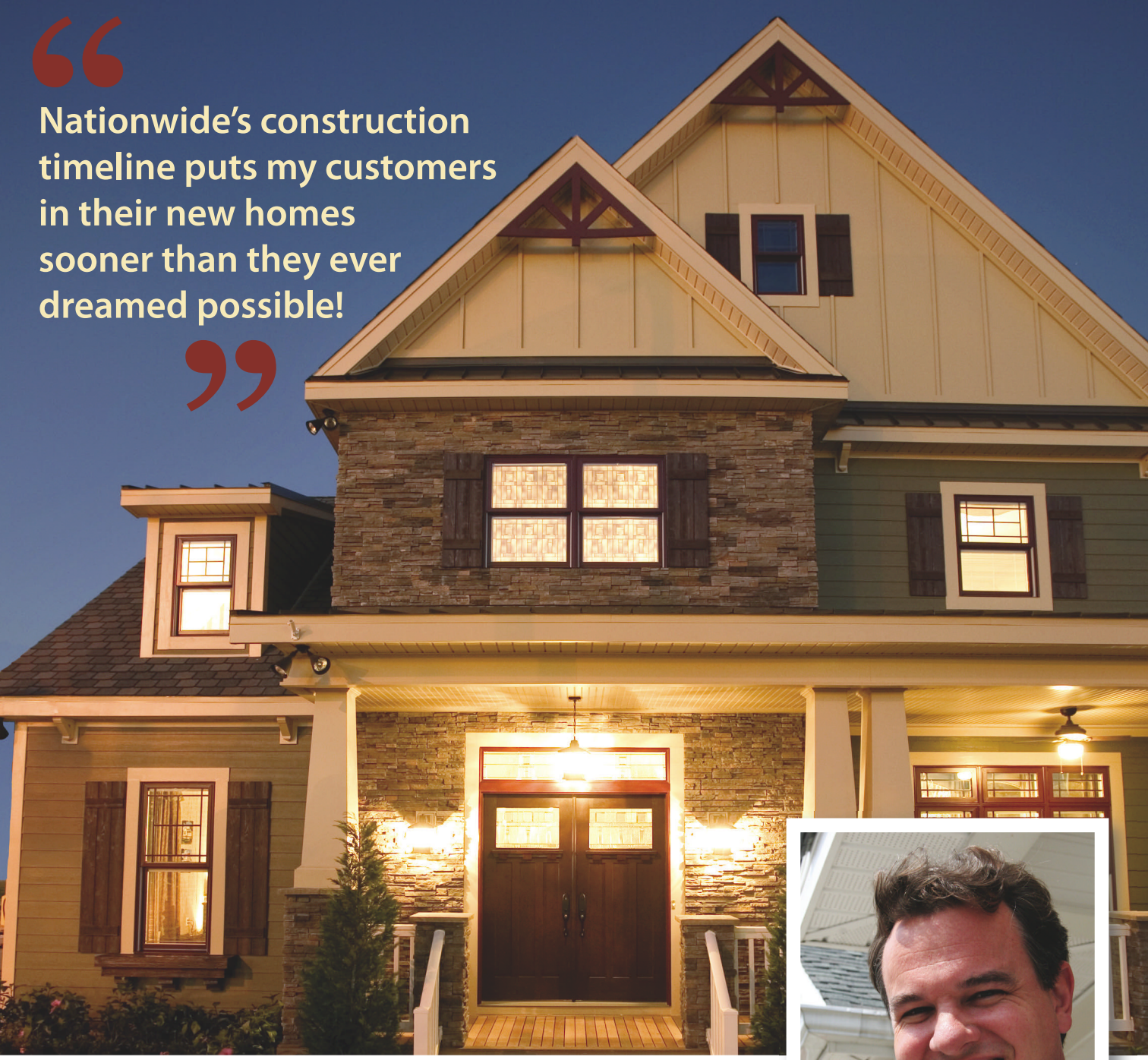

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– David Bauer, Gurnee Enterprises, Inc. of Ft. Pierce, FL

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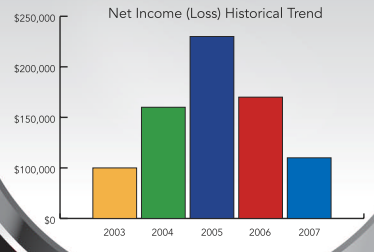
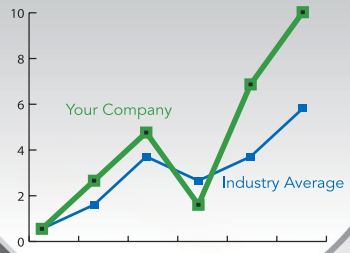


Financial Benchmarking

Revenue, expenses and margins compared to a peer group you define



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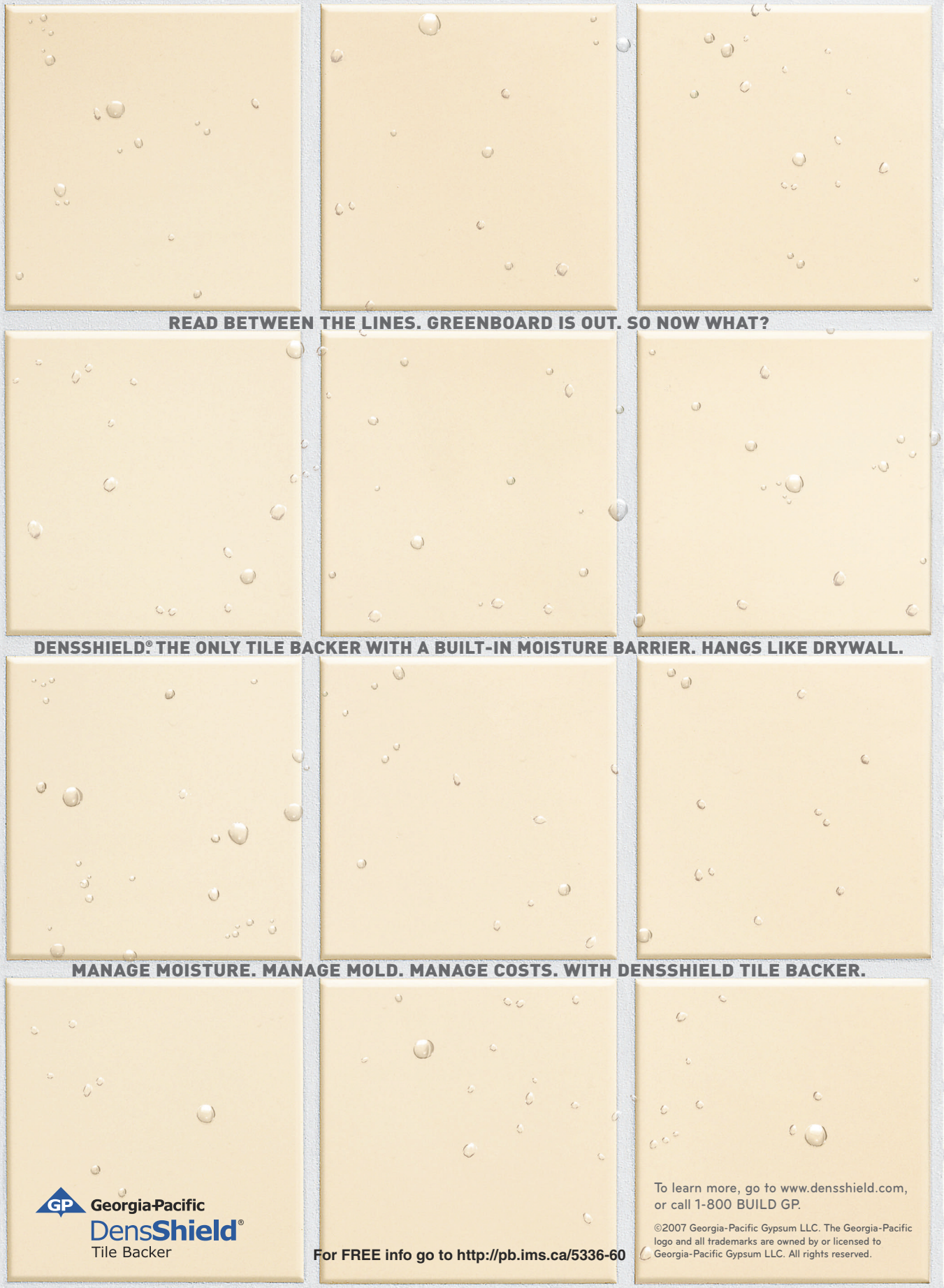

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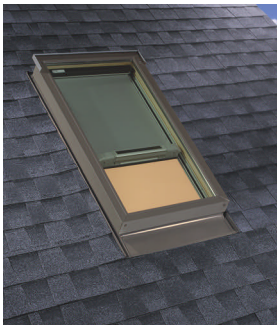

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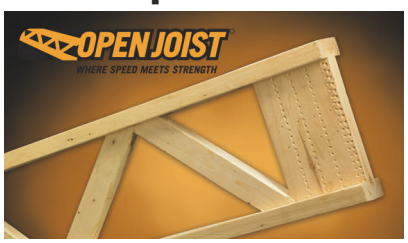

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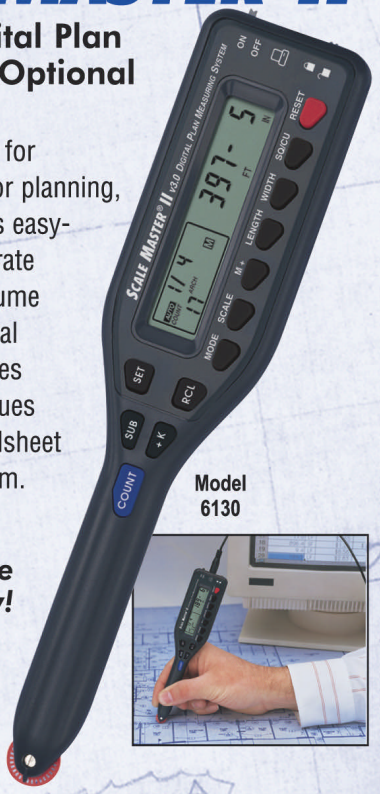

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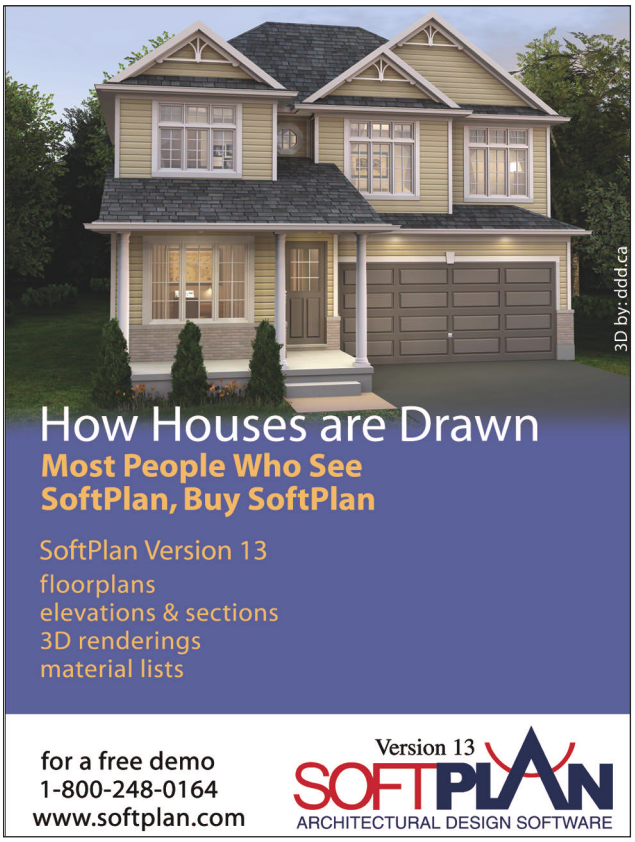

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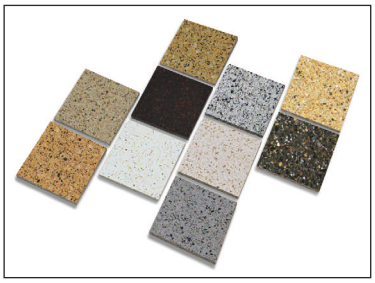

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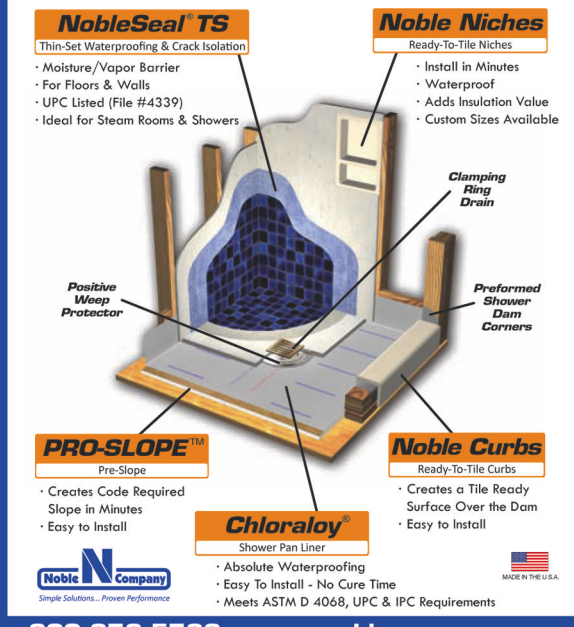

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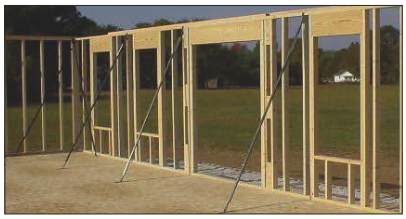

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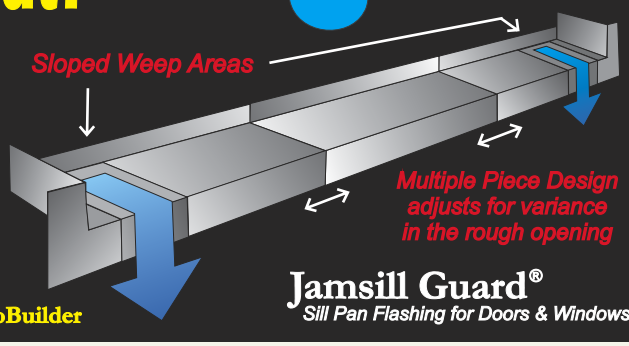

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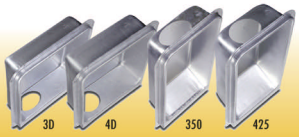

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Financing the Downturn

8 steps you can take to protect yourself.

>> BY **CHUCK SHINN,** *THE SHINN GROUP OF COMPANIES*

Industry experts believed the housing cycle downturn was going to be a short-lived, mild 10 percent adjustment with a soft landing. It has been anything but a soft landing, and the economists keep adjusting their forecasts and extending their predictions of when the industry is going to hit bottom.

Throughout the first half of 2008, the housing industry will continue to weaken in activity and home prices will continue to drop. Banks will put a lot of pressure on builders to require stronger financial statements and adhere to the loan covenants. Builders that are not financially sound will have a hard time surviving, which will increase builder bankruptcies.

What actions should you take to survive?

1. **Get your financial house in order.** Try to reduce the amount of debt your company is carrying. If you have operating lines of credit, don't extend them to the limit and leave them there. Banks prefer you operate at a balance of about 50 percent.

2. **Don't hide from your banker.** Talk to your banker before you get into trouble. Put a realistic business plan together based on the current market conditions to present to the bank. Renegotiate your loans before they get into trouble. Work to reduce your debt, extend maturity and include interest carried.

3. **Diversify your financial institutions.** Banks have different lending practices, which can change depending on how they feel about real-estate lending and how exposed they might be to our industry. You might want to have a mix of national and local banks. They tend to operate differently and will possibly give you some maneuvering room.

4. **Get rid of your spec inventory homes.** Liquidate your spec inventory homes and turn them into cash. Too many builders are still holding on to homes that have had an anniversary. They were built during a different economic time.

5. **Get rid of your land if possible.** Renegotiate your land contract or walk from your earnest money. If you are on a take-down schedule, renegotiate the take-down rate to match the current sales rate or don't exercise the future take downs. Put an investment group together to walk you through the process. You might have to discount the land and it might cost you some future profits, but you can get out of the land debt and the negative cash flow.

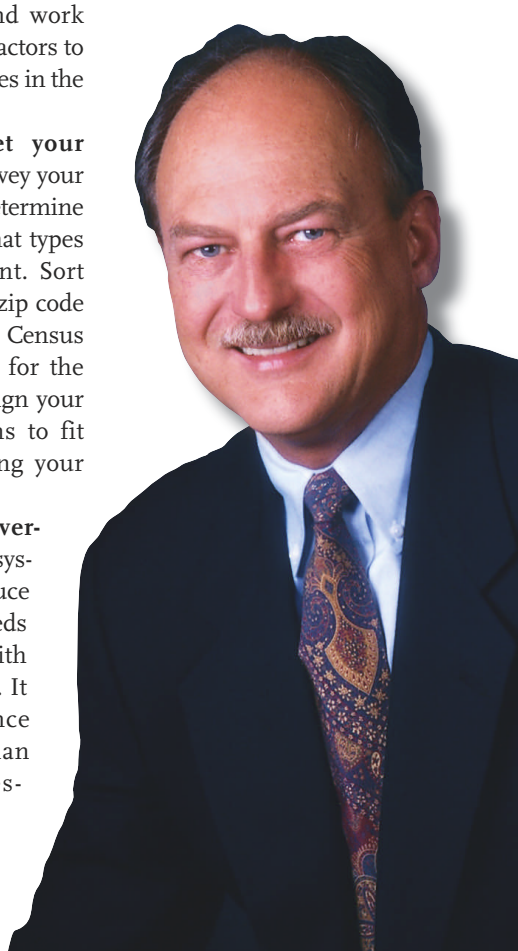
6. **Work on your direct construction costs.** Strip your added standard features. Determine what your sales price needs to be to get velocity back in your communities and work backward to what you can afford for direct construction costs. Value engineer the product and work with your trade contractors to eliminate inefficiencies in the construction process.

7. **Target-market your product offering.** Survey your customer traffic to determine who they are and what types of housing they want. Sort your traffic cards by zip code and research the U.S. Census Bureau information for the main zip codes. Design your product and systems to fit the customers buying your homes.

8. **Trim your overhead.** Improve your systems so you can reduce your overhead. It needs to stay in balance with your volume of sales. It is better to do it once and do it deeper than you think is necessary. **PB**

Since 1975, Chuck Shinn Jr., a consultant and industry educator with a doctorate in business management, has improved the management skills of home builders to increase their profits, quality and customer satisfaction. He can be reached at cshinn@shinnconsulting.com.

LOG ON To read **'How homebuilders can survive the housing cycle downturn'** on our Web site, **www.ProBuilder.com/emergingissues**



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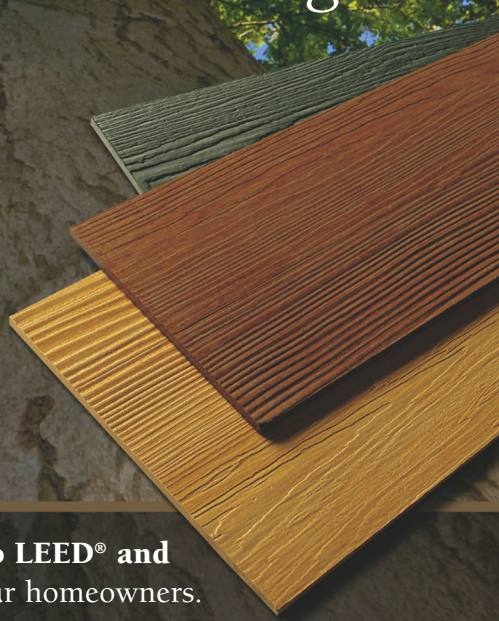

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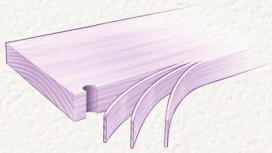

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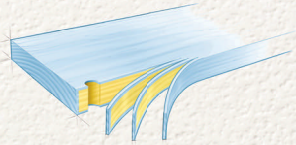

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