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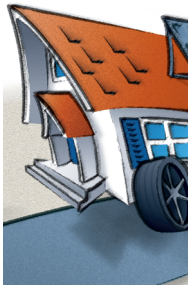





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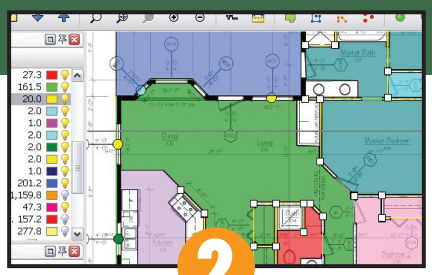

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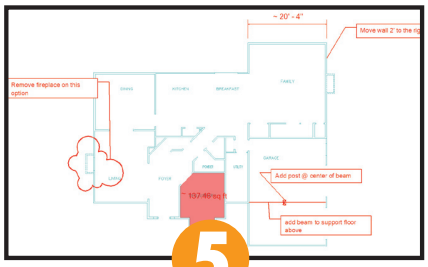

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Green Science

The science of green building is building science. Reluctance to learn green techniques is tantamount to reluctance to learn how to build.

There are immutable truths about different industries, and the most defining and strongest characteristic of the home building industry is that change occurs slowly. Getting new products to catch on can take forever. Plywood, for example, required nearly 50 years before gaining broad acceptance.

There are lots of reasons for this, but our green survey has silhouetted one element of the slow change that is important to discuss. When asked how receptive the staff was to training in green building, barely half of our builder respondents said their staffs were receptive. For production builders, it was below half. If any of us had employees who were so resistant to training in other areas of the business, our ability to improve and deliver quality homes with great customer service would be completely compromised. But in this area, in the green building arena, that affliction does not seem a concern.

Last year, when we undertook this survey, we were interested in what builders believed green is. We found they were confused, and their buyers were, too. In the end, I concluded we needed to move away from this awkward term and speak to the technical side of green. "Sustainability," I argued, carried a much more specific understanding of the goals of this movement and would reduce the cynicism and confusion in the consumer market.

I think you can make a good argument that the reluctance of builders' employees to learn green techniques is founded on the same confusion and cynicism. The use of the term "green," while clever, interferes with the green movement's very success. The word is too nebulous.

If we were to ask how receptive to training builders' staffs were on other matters, such as techniques to build better homes, I suspect the response would be significantly different. After all, what person in this industry would say, "Nope, I don't really want to learn how to do it better."

The *Professional Builder* Benchmark and AVID Leadership Conference begins Oct. 5 in Phoenix. For more information, go to www.proubuilder.com/benchmark.

Guess what? The techniques used to build green homes are a better way to build. This isn't a green thing. Or an environment thing. Or an energy thing. Or a tree-hugger thing. This is an improved technology thing.

I've been in this industry since the mid-1980s, and I can't think of a product introduction that did not deliver some improvement in building performance. It may have been better insulative value or easier installation, but both lead to better performance. And that improvement is almost without exception an improvement related to some aspect of green building.

The upshot: green isn't green. Green is building science.



Paul Deffenbaugh, *Editorial Director*
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Congress passed and the president signed the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 in July; NAHB calls it the "most important housing bill in 50 years." If you're confused about what it entails, visit www.hud.gov/news/recoveryactfaq.cfm. After all, a good chunk applies to you: first-time buyers get a $7,500 tax credit. Now all we need are buyers back in the market.

INSIDE

Green's a go for customer satisfaction [*page 15*]

Check how you manage [*page 17*]

Our greenest survey ever [*page 20*]

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[CUSTOMER SATISFACTION]

The Power of **Green**



Green design and construction can help your bottom line.

By Paul Cardis, Avid Ratings

Sales of hybrid automobiles are at record highs, and even people who can easily afford soaring gas prices are opting for hybrids to show their solidarity with the green energy movement. Rising energy costs are not only changing the way people drive, they're changing the type of homes people want to live in.

For the first time in housing history, we can honestly say that green homes built today are better than the traditional homes of yesteryear. That's because they are of superior energy efficiency, and consumers equate energy efficiency with quality — which leads to greater home buyer loyalty. This trend offers home builders an incredible opportunity to differentiate from competitors, connect with buyers on an environmental level and sell more homes.

For the **first time in housing history,** we can honestly say that green homes built today are **better than the traditional homes** of yesteryear.

It's important to note that some consumers are greener than others. "Dark Green" consumers are willing to pay a premium for energy efficient products because they have a philosophical belief that it's everyone's responsibility to help save the planet from global warming and lessen our dependency on foreign oil. Buying green has the power to make these people feel good about doing their part to solve these enormous problems. Dark Green consumers have been in the market for the last decade and, although influential, are not responsible for the green phenomenon. Rather, a growing number of "light green" consumers have entered the market for energy-efficient products, and their motivation has more to do with saving money through reduced energy costs than saving the planet.

This group, according to various experts, is responsible for the mainstream shift toward green products. This means big business for builders who can captivate light green customers. Pulte Homes has been doing it for years through Masco's Environments For Living (EFL) program; Pulte even goes so far as to guarantee that home buyers in Nevada and much of Arizona won't have heating and cooling usage exceed a certain amount. That commitment is a big attraction and resulted in award-winning customer delight.

Another builder leading the green housing charge is Avalon Central Alberta, the first net-zero energy builder in North America; the house consumes zero net power over a year! (Meet Ryan Scott, president of Avalon and creator of the net-zero home, at the *Professional Builder* Benchmark and AVID Leadership Conference. For more information, visit www.probuilder.com/benchmark.)

According to a recent poll conducted by the Global Strategy Group, 87 percent of consumers are more likely to buy products from a retailer that is committed to environmentally friendly practices. For languishing home builders, going green can do more than help save the planet, it can help save their business.

Paul Cardis is CEO of Avid Ratings, a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home building industry. You can reach him at paul.cardis@avidratings.com.

Cardis' Tips

GO GREEN
The world is getting greener everyday. Embrace the change or get left behind.

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People want to buy from companies that share a desire to solve global warming and reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.

FIND YOUR GREEN NICHE
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[MANAGEMENT]

Turn Your **Business Around**



Take a look at how you're managing, and it will help you move your company in the right direction.

By Alan Parrow, Bull Free Solutions

Most private home builders and a few public ones are struggling just to keep their doors open. With further declines or stagnation likely to continue through mid-2009, turning things around NOW is no longer an option.

Watching budgets

If your company, region or division is doing the same closed sales volume as it was in a previous year, e.g. 2002, have you gone back to analyze your budgets from that year and compared them to your current operating budgets? Clearly, if the entity was profitable then, it should be capable of being profitable today.

Reducing employee counts to levels of the most recent year with comparable sales volume and reigning in other expenses to reflect that year's business results is a good start toward restoring positive cash flow. Creditors are more likely to agree to a restructuring of debt if they can see a probability that the company can soon restore positive cash flow.

Managing morale

Of course, few things can hurt a home builder more than rumors about layoffs or discontinuation of operations in certain markets. Such rumors affect employees, prospects, trade partners and others in extremely negative ways, and they should be arrested quickly. Even if far-reaching actions must be taken to survive (and they well might), clear and forthright communications should be delivered at the earliest possible moment. When properly structured, "bad news" messages are far less harmful than leaving employees in the dark.

> When **properly structured,** 'bad news' messages are **far less harmful** than leaving employees in the dark.

Perceptions that a company is hemorrhaging money to the extent that homeowner deposits may be lost or creditors will be unable to obtain repayment of loans can become exaggerated to the point of beginning an unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecy.

Knowing the problem

Some problems may not be readily apparent, and management may lack the objectivity to properly diagnose them. Often, managers are following a strategy that was sensible during the boom times but no longer is viable given the realities of a protracted downturn. For example, some managers may equate survival with preserving margins, when in fact cash that's quickly generated is more critical to survival.

Reduced margin contracts that can proceed quickly to closing with a quick infusion of cash should be, without question, a higher priority than high-margin deals, which these days are in short supply anyway.

Among the more common reasons that management may not recognize the real problems: no longer managing by the numbers; neglecting to constantly benchmark the competition; and not thinking outside the box to foster real improvements in the company's performance. In such cases, the best strategy may be to bring in a consultant to review matters impartially and without prejudice.

Alan Parrow, Ph.D., is a former CEO of a Professional Builder *Giant 400 company. He is now president of Bull Free Solutions, a firm specializing in sales and organizational-turnaround consulting.*

Parrow's Points

MAKE THE PAINFUL TRIMS
If you need to lay off employees to stay afloat, do it. Banks will see you're doing what you can to survive.

KEEP MORALE STRONG
Communicate what's going on, even if it's bad news.

KNOW YOUR FIRM'S PROBLEM
There are many different reasons a company struggles during a downturn. Figure out your weaknesses and tackle them.

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Getting to



This year's national survey asked builders about the challenge of going green, of educating their staffs and the features they are most likely to include in a green home. Take note.

By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor



Green

It's been a year since *Professional Builder*'s inaugural green building survey. We've spent another year inundated with green guidelines for practically every industry, every corner of interest, every facet of society: green food, green clothing, green weddings, green vacations — and of course, more green building. If green building is a fad — as 33 percent of our respondents said last year — it seems its staying power will soon surpass that of the hula hoop and platform shoes.

This year's International Builders' Show devoted an entire day, Valentine's Day (Heart the Earth!), to green building and the anticipated rollout of NAHB's Green Building Standard. The association is pushing its national standard in hope of competing head-to-head with the USGBC's LEED for Homes program in terms of national recognition and use. This year regional conferences such as PCBC had a significant number of green classes, and green specialty conferences are popping up all around the country.

This year's survey goes beyond defining green. We'll analyze trends and changes from last year and focus on how builders get educated and train their staffs about green. We take a look at the challenges in building green and the kind of green fea-

There's no doubt that some adjustments must be made to build green, though how disruptive is a matter of question.

tures builders are most likely to incorporate into their homes. Though defining and refining green is a process that will go on for a while, builders are moving forward in finding out how they can provide the green construction their clients want and the market demands.

A green mountain out of a mole hill

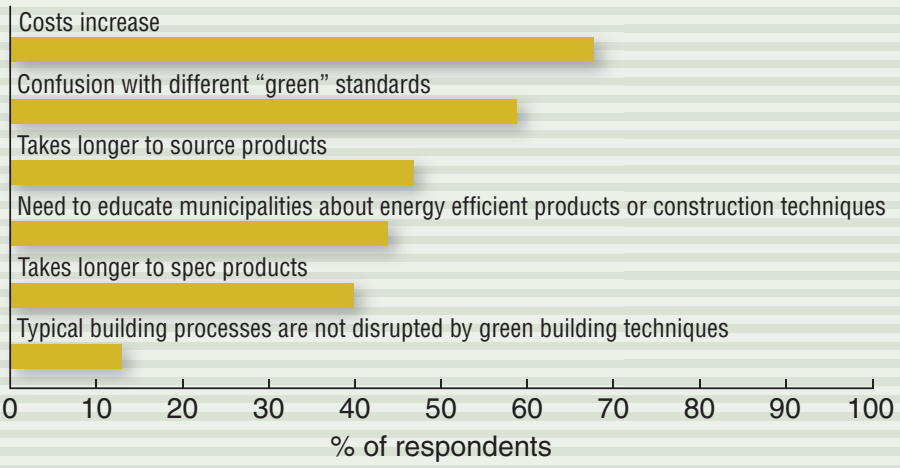
There are some builders out there who haven't gone green because of the perceived difficulty of doing so. This year we asked builders if it is harder to build green. Overall 55 percent of our respondents said yes; 45 percent said no. When asked in what way typical building processes are disrupted when implementing green building techniques, cost increases were at the top of the list, specified by 68 percent of respondents, with 59 percent citing confusion with the different green building standards such as LEED for Homes; NAHB's guidelines; and those from manufacturers, utility companies and regional and local governments. It takes longer to source products, according to 47 percent of respondents, while 44 percent said there is a need to educate municipalities about energy-efficient products or construction techniques. And 40 percent said it takes longer to spec products. A nominal 13 percent said typical builder processes are not interrupted when implementing green building techniques.

There's no doubt that some adjustments must be made to build green, though how disruptive is a matter of discussion. But it hasn't prevented many builders from jumping on the bandwagon due to conviction or competition. The number of respondents who said they market some or all of their homes as green is 57 percent, compared with 43 percent who said they do not market their homes as green at all.

Going back to the question, "Is it harder to build green?" those who said they market all of their homes as green are less likely to think green building is harder, but surprisingly not by a huge number; 47 percent said it's harder and 53 percent said it's not. So the perceived challenge of building green has not discouraged that 47 percent from forging ahead and marketing all homes they build that way. There is a 10 percent difference in the number who said it is harder

How are typical building processes disrupted when implementing green building techniques?

Cost is at the top of several concerns builders have in doing green construction.



Source: Professional Builder, 2008

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*. In addition, Green Builder magazine invited their subscribers to participate in this year's study. Responses were collected online from June 3 through June 18, 2008. To encourage participation, *Professional Builder* donated $10 to Habitat for Humanity for each of the first 250 completed surveys. A total of 770 usable surveys were completed by the closing date.



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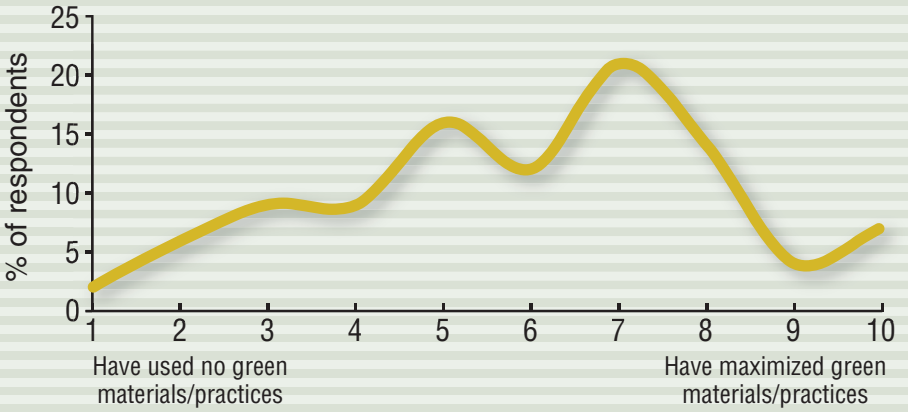
The slow sales growth in green homes could be due to the reluctance to pay more for green when home prices are going down.

How prevalent is the use of green materials and practices?

We asked respondents to rate themselves on a scale of 1= "Have used no green materials/practices," to 10 = "Have maximized use of green materials/practices." Most respondents rated themselves toward the middle.



Source: Professional Builder, 2008

when you compare respondents who only build 1-10 homes a year (51 percent) and those who build more than 10 homes (61 percent). This is in spite of the notion that in regard to cost, the more homes you build — green or not — the more likely you are to achieve economies of scale. The more green homes you build on a production scale, the less each home should cost to build.

Just how prevalent is green building among our respondents? On a scale where one means "have used no green materials/practices" and 10 means "have maximized use of green materials/practices," we asked, "How would you rate the majority of the houses built, designed or engineered by your firm?" More than half of respondents — 58 percent — rated themselves fair to midland, at 4, 5, 6 or 7. Eleven percent of all respondents said they have maximized use, giving themselves a 9 or 10. For those building 1-10 homes a year and custom-only builders, 13 percent rated themselves at 9 or 10. Those who build more than 10 homes came in at 10 percent; only 8 percent of production-only builders rated themselves at that maximum level.

Trend watch

As mentioned earlier, a key question from last year's survey was, "Is green building a fad?" Last year 67 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with that statement, saying it was not a fad; this year it was up to 70 percent. Those who build 1-10 homes a year (at 72 percent), and custom-only builders (at 70 percent) seem to disagree with this statement more than those who build more than 10 homes a year (66 percent) and production only builders (58 percent). The difference is six and 12 percent respectively.

This differs from last year's results, which had those building more than 10 homes a year and production-only builders disagreeing at a higher percentage — 71 percent and 74 percent respectively — that green is a fad versus those building 1-10 homes a year and custom-only builders at 64 percent and 65 percent respectively.

Why were larger volume and production builders less likely than smaller and custom builders to think green is fad last year? One conjecture is that production builders had less luck selling green homes this past year, and therefore believe that the fad is waning. But the slow sales growth in green homes could be due to the reluctance to pay more for green when home prices are going down.

Should there be a minimum standard of performance and sustainability before a builder can market a home as green? Both this year and last, 87 percent of those surveyed said yes. A big surprise last year was that 38 percent of those who said yes felt there should be a minimum standard set by federal, state or local government. Perhaps after giving this some consideration, this year only 29 percent said so. But those suggesting the federal government only slipped 2 percent, from 15 to 13 percent. Among those who said they market all their homes as green, only 20 percent are looking to government to set



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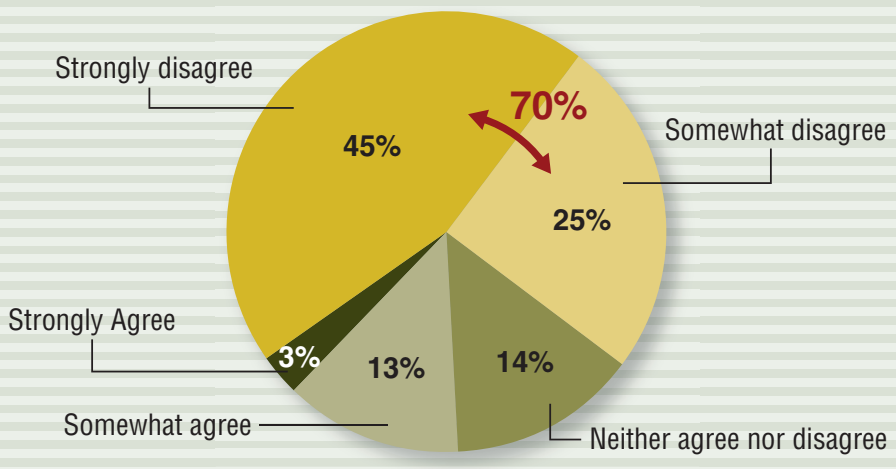
Many manufacturers are eager to label themselves or their product as green, and for good reason.

Is green building a fad?

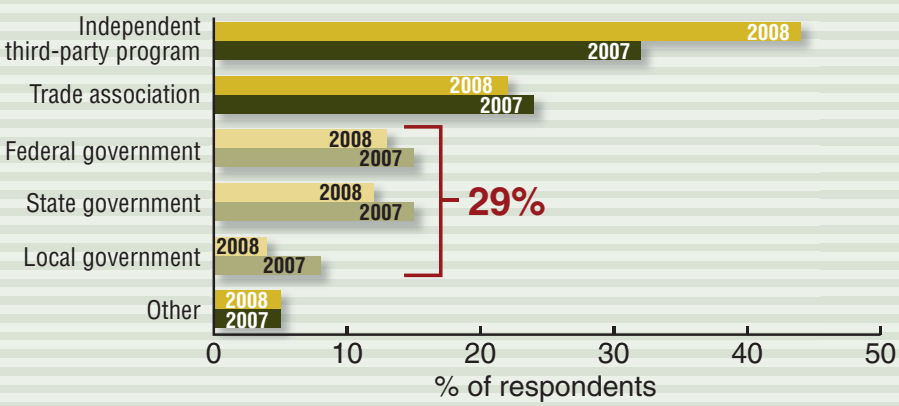
This year, 70 percent of respondents disagree that green building is a fad, compared to 67 percent last year – a solid majority affirming they believe green will be around for a while.



Source: Professional Builder, 2008

Who should determine the minimum standards of performance and sustainability in defining green?*

Surprisingly, last year 38 percent of respondents thought government should make this determination. This year it decreased to 29 percent.



*From the base of respondents who say that there should be a minimum standard of performance and sustainability in defining green.

Source: Professional Builder, 2008

those standards. This makes sense because they are actively building green homes, and the standards that the government sets will directly affect them; it's not theoretical. Those who said the standard should be set by an independent third-party program rose to 44 percent from only 32 percent last year.

Many manufacturers are eager to label themselves or their product as green, and for good reason. On the question, "How important are green features to you when selecting building products?" 86 percent of respondents said it's extremely (35 percent) or somewhat (51 percent) important, a 5 percent increase from last year. Numbers are fairly similar across the board for builders of 1-10 homes, builders of more than 10 homes and custom-only builders. However, the percentage for production-only builders for whom it is extremely or somewhat important is 73 percent, down from 87 percent last year. A good guess as to why would be that large volume builders are more concerned right now with the cost of a product. Quality is important, but quality of greenness may not be of first consideration.

We went into great detail in last year's survey comparing the ease of use, flexibility and stringency of several green certification programs. We simplified it a bit this year, comparing only easiness and reliability of some of the better known programs. The Energy Star program ranked very or somewhat easy to use by 70 percent of respondents, way ahead of the 46 percent who said utility company programs are somewhat or very easy to use. NAHB and manufacturer programs fall in the middle range, with 44 and 42 per-

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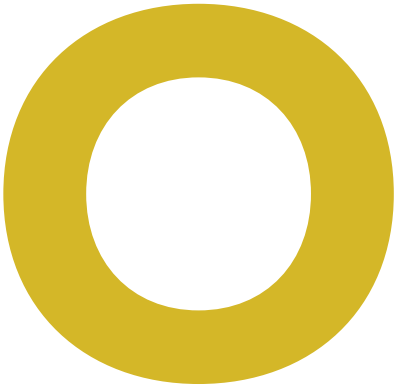
52 percent said their staff is receptive to training in green building techniques, but only 7 percent noted resistances.

cent respectively favoring their ease of use. At the bottom of the choices given were the LEED for Homes program at 23 percent and local or state building programs such as EarthCraft and Austin Energy Green Building at 24 percent.



n the issue of reliability, the results were a bit different. Energy Star remained at the top with 73 percent saying it was somewhat or very reliable. But NAHB, utility companies and LEED for Homes came in close at 50, 49 and 48 percent respectively. So LEED's program is perceived as significantly less easy to use compared with NAHB's — by a difference of 21 percent — but nearly equal to each other with regard to reliability. Manufacturer programs and local and state programs rounded out the bottom at 38 and 34 percent respectively.

Green ed

How do builders get educated about green building? We asked respondents about sources from which they receive green building information. A full 83 percent said from trade magazines and/or the media; 64 percent mention suppliers; green building associations were named by 54 percent; 46 percent said general home building associations; and 43 percent rely on trade partners.

"How receptive or resistant to training in green building techniques is your staff?" Overall, 52 percent of respondents said their staff is very receptive, and 41 percent said they are somewhat so. Only 7 percent said their staffs are somewhat or very resistant. Custom-only builders seem more receptive than production-only builders, with 56 percent of the former saying their staffs are very receptive versus 44 percent of the latter. Custom builder staffs are probably more comfortable learning new building techniques; they are more likely to consider themselves craftsmen and eager to add to their repertoire or specialization.

Most respondents — 59 percent — said in-house training is the preferred means for training staff on green building techniques. Forty three percent prefer seminars and conferences, and Webinars are the choice for 17 percent. But 23 percent said they do not train their staff on green building techniques at all.

There's a significant difference in preference for seminar and conference training between those who build 1-10 homes a year (35 percent) and those who build more than 10 homes a year (51 percent). The truth is that the cost for seminars and conferences could be a factor for those building 10 or less homes a year. There is a difference, though not as significant, in custom-only builders who send their staff to seminars and conferences (38 percent) compared to production only builders (45 percent), possibly for the same reason.

How important are green features when selecting building products?

Green features don't appear to be as important to production-only builders this year as they were last year.

	2008 Survey	2008 Respondents who only build production homes	2007 Survey	2007 Respondents who only build production homes
Extremely important	35%	23%	21%	11%
Somewhat important	51%	50%	59%	75%
	86%	**73%**	**80%**	**86%**
Neither important nor unimportant	12%	25%	14%	9%
Somewhat unimportant	1%	0%	3%*	2%*
Not at all important	1%	2%	2%	2%

*Amounts rounded up to total 100 percent

Source: Professional Builder, 2008

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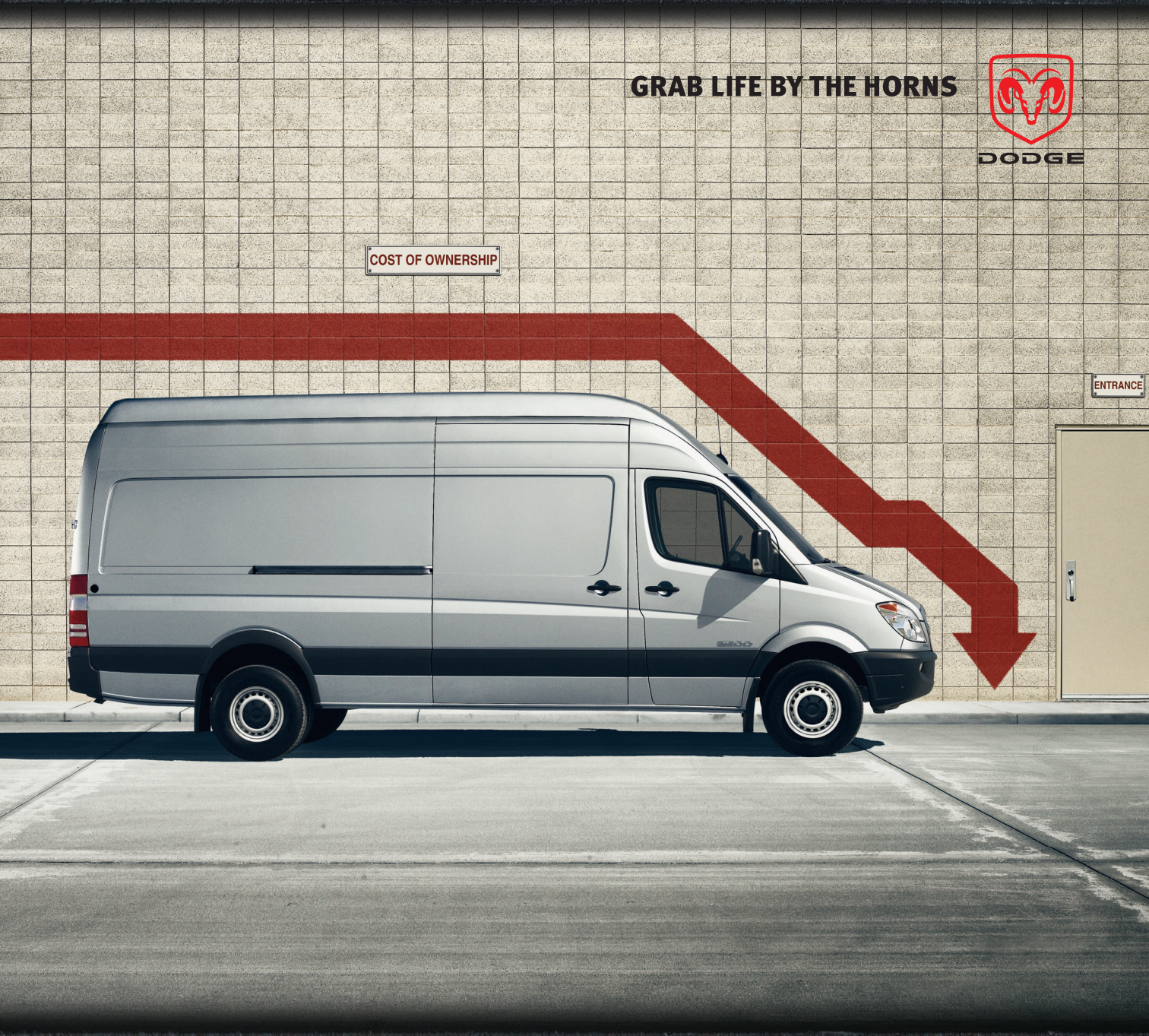

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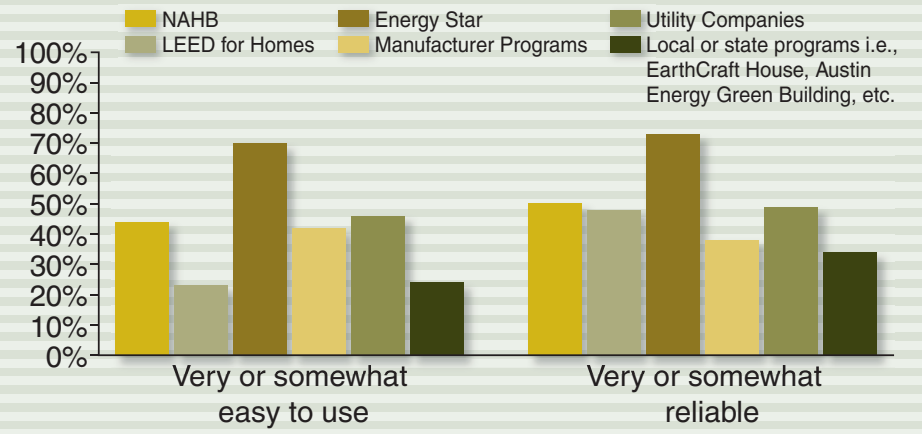
99 percent said they incorporated at least one green feature into their homes. The average number of green features is 15.

Comparing ease of use, reliability of green building programs

Respondents reported familiarity with and usage of various national green building programs. It's notable that LEED and NAHB were nearly tied with regard to reliability, but were far apart regarding perceptions about ease of use.*

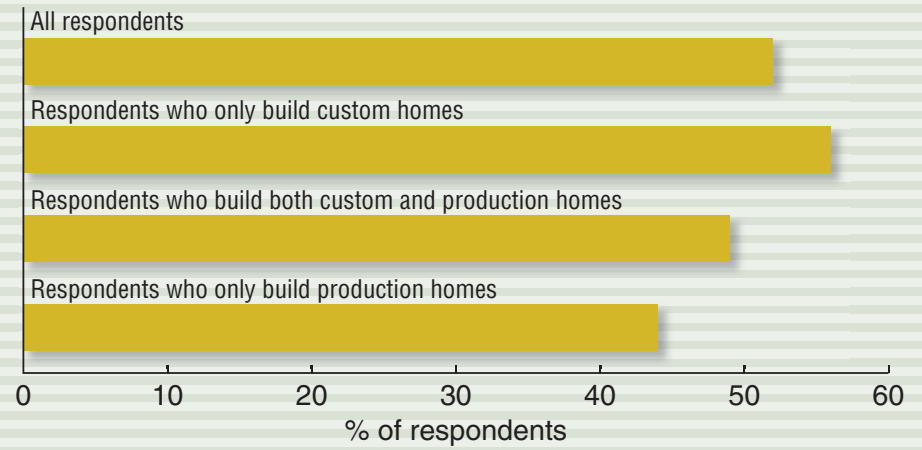


*Respondents could choose multiple answers.

Source: Professional Builder, 2008

How receptive to training in green building is your staff?

Builders' staffs who are open to learning new things should take to building green. Custom only builders are more likely to want to do so, according to our survey.



Source: Professional Builder, 2008

Green home features

We gave survey respondents a list of 21 possible green features they could incorporate into a home and asked how many had included at least one of them. A full 99 percent of respondents said they have incorporated at least one of the green features into all of the homes they built in the last 12 months. The average number of features incorporated by those who said that had incorporated at least one feature was 15.

For each of the 21 features respondents chose from, we asked approximately how many of the houses built, designed or engineered by their company in the last 12 months included that feature. Energy-efficient windows came out way ahead of the pack, with 76 percent saying they were incorporated into all the homes they built. Somewhat behind but in second place was a high-efficiency HVAC system, included in all homes built by 57 percent of respondents. Energy-efficient appliances, at 47 percent, came in third; enhanced insulation came in at 49 percent; and air-sealing packages to reduce infiltration rounded out the top five features at 49 percent.

Why were these features preferred by respondents? We can't know for sure, but what is telling is that use of some of these green features ranked fairly high among respondents who either don't market any of their homes as green or who are neutral or somewhat/strongly agree that green building is a fad. Although 76 percent of all respondents said they have used energy-efficient windows in all the homes they built, it only drops to 70 percent for respondents who don't market any of their homes as green, and to 72 percent



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for respondents who are neutral or somewhat/strongly agree that green is a fad. Even for those who are specifically targeting green features, energy-efficient windows and some of the other top five items are probably among the features that are most available, least expensive and easiest to install.

We see similar results for high-efficiency HVAC systems, with 57 percent of respondents saying that approximately all homes they built, designed or engineered in the last 12 months have this feature. But it only dips to 55 percent for respondents who tend to think green is a fad (are neutral or somewhat/strongly agree), and only goes to 49 percent

Preferred means of training staff on green building techniques

Nearly 60 percent of all respondents prefer to in-house train their staffs on green building while nearly a quarter do not provide any training on green building techniques at all.*

Preferred means of training staff	All Respondents	Respondents who build 1-10 homes	Respondents who build more than 10 homes	Respondents who only build custom homes	Respondents who only build production homes
In-house training	59%	58%	61%	60%	55%
Seminars/ conferences	43%	35%	51%	38%	45%
Webinars	17%	13%	18%	13%	14%
Other	9%	9%	8%	9%	8%
We do not provide training in green building techniques	23%	24%	22%	23%	28%

*Respondents could choose multiple answers.

Source: Professional Builder, 2008

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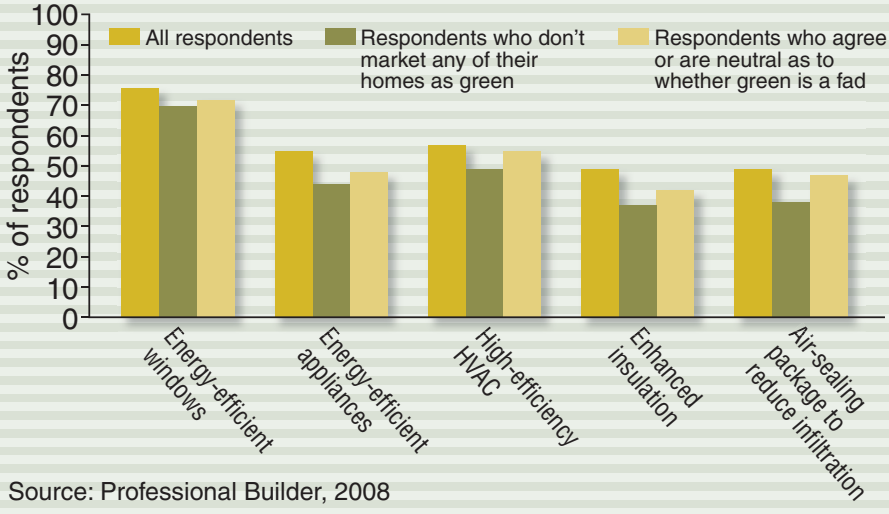
Top 5 most incorporated green features in all homes built

Some so-called green features are so popular they appear in the majority of homes whether or not these homes are marketed as green or their builders believe green is a fad.



Source: Professional Builder, 2008

for those who do not market any of their homes as green.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are some green features that have not been so widely adopted. Looking at the bottom five responses to the question, "Approximately how many of the houses built, designed or engineered by your company during the past 12 months include the following features?" 12 percent named tankless water heaters; 3 percent picked rainwater harvesting; and geothermal heating/cooling systems, photovoltaics/solar panels and gray water reuse were tied at the bottom at 2 percent each. Given the relative high cost, special installation knowledge

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required and availability/viability in certain geographic locations, some of these features just aren't frequently adapted into the homes of even the greenest builders.

Regional distinctions

Space does not permit in-depth analysis of responses by region, but it's notable, if not explainable, that despite being the region of the country where the fewest number of our respondents build, the Northeast comes out on top on several questions that might categorize them as a bit greener than usual. There are more than twice as many respondents who build in the South, but the region rarely came out on top in the "greener" category of responses.

For example, 91 percent of Northeast respondents said green building features are important when selecting building products, 6 percent more than any other region we surveyed, and 6 percent more than the overall response of 85 percent. The Midwest and South came in 84 and 85 respectively. And 79 percent of Northeast builders disagree that green building is a fad, compared with 70 percent of respondents overall, highest among the Midwest and South (tied at 68 percent) and the West at 64 percent.

The Northeast had 65 percent who said some or all of their homes are marketed as green, tied with the West, 10 percent ahead of the South and 15 percent ahead of the Midwest. The overall average as we saw above was 67 percent. And the Northeast scored 91 percent on the question, "Should there be minimum standards of performance and sustainability before a builder can market a home as green." The average overall score was 87 percent. The South scored 89 percent, the West 85 percent and the Midwest 82 percent. And it eked out slightly ahead of the West on the question of whether all homes built are marketed as green, 27 to 26 percent respectively. The South was at 24 percent, and the Midwest at 18.

Also notable: 57 percent of Northeast respondents said NAHB is an easy program to use. The Midwest is in second place 40 percent. The overall average is 44 percent. **PB**

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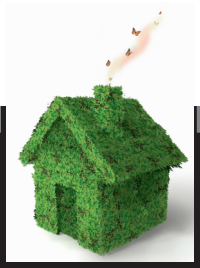

THE GREEN SCHEME OF THINGS

Key takeaways from this year's Green Building Survey:

1. YOU CAN OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES TO BUILDING GREEN. They're there, but a majority of builders are marketing themselves to fight the challenges.

2. GREEN ISN'T GOING AWAY. Though in the future, what we call it may change.

3. THE GREEN LABEL HAS CACHE. But don't get greenwashed; find out whether a product is green beyond the label.

4. ENERGY STAR IS A GOOD PLACE TO START. But watch to see how the NAHB versus LEED fray falls out.

5. WIN YOUR STAFF OVER TO GREEN BUILDING. You won't get very far if your people — trade partners in particular — aren't on board.

6. GET YOUR STAFF TRAINED. The green transition won't work if you do things the same old way.

7. EXPERIMENT WITH GREEN FEATURES. See how buyers in your market respond and how it affects your costs.

8. LOOK AT FEATURES YOU INCLUDE NOW. You may be greener than you think!

9. START SLOW. See what green features would be most effective and efficient for your market and begin adding them.

10. STAY TUNED. The housing market will continue to affect the movement. Who knows what next year's Green Building Survey will bring?

Compare this year's survey to our last. Go to probuilder.com and search for "green building survey."

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Built to Perform

*Comparison based on standard vinyl PVC material. Exposure to UV rays can be harmful. Integrity does not recommend the use of tanning beds.

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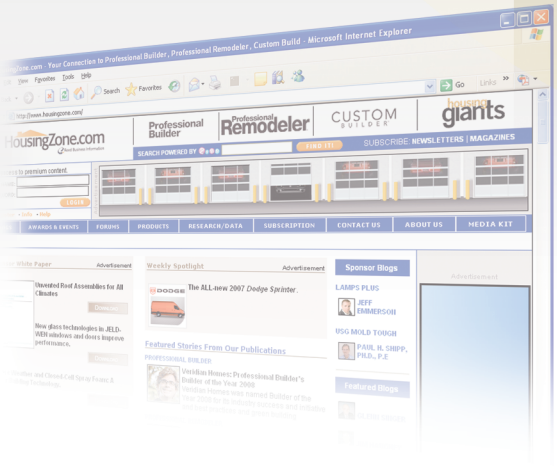

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FUN FUEL



To highlight its newly launched eco-friendly building initiative eSMART, Beazer Homes offered a branded Smart ForTwo car as an internal sales incentive this past summer. The Charleston Division won use of the Smart Car for a year. The winning effort: the division sold 75 homes during the three-day promo.

Photo: Beazer Homes

INSIDE

Stop turnover by starting training [*page 41*]

How to sell energy efficiency well [*page 43*]



Change your frame of reference.

Moment frames have long been considered the expensive option when small wall sections and open floor plans make shearwalls unworkable. Simpson Strong-Tie is going to challenge that perception with the new Strong Frame™ ordinary moment frame. Now designers can choose from 196 engineered frames, in sizes up to 16 feet wide and 19 feet tall, rather than spend hours designing their own. And since the Strong Frame is the only factory-built moment frame for wood that offers 100% field-bolted connections, it is easier and faster to install. Now there is a cost-effective moment frame solution for residential, light commercial and multi-family applications: Simpson Strong-Tie® Strong Frame.

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[SALES & MARKETING]

Are Your New Sales Agents **Prepared For Success?**



High turnover is common. Find time and resources to make every sales agent a true professional.

By John Rymer, New Home Knowledge

A consequence of the current new home sales environment is high turnover among sales professionals. Whether the turnover is voluntary or involuntary, the outcome is the same: many new sales offices today are staffed by agents who were employed elsewhere just a few weeks or months ago. The more important issue is the readiness of your newly hired sales agents to make every sale possible.

Far too many newly hired sales agents are not prepared to answer basic questions, let alone consummate a sale. Consider actual questions to sales professionals I have witnessed in the last month:

- "If I were to sign a contract today, when would you be able to complete my home?"
- "Which of the features in the model are included in the standard price of the home?"
- "Your Web site talks about a personalized Web address for customers who purchase a home to view construction updates. How does it work?"

In each case the answer was the same: "I'm new here, and I'll need to get back to you with that answer."

For an industry that is suffering from a lack of sales, we are behaving today as if the representatives to our customers need to have no more training than the clerk at the local department store!

When you have high sales agent turnover, you need to invest more time in training. Begin with mandatory five-day knowledge and sales skills requirements for sales professionals to complete prior to staffing a sales office. Don't be afraid to close a sales office for training. Break down the course work into the following areas:

- **Administration** — Working knowledge of paperwork/deposits needed to complete a sales contract.
- **Product and community features** — Teach the specifications, options and the building practices of your company.
- **Competition** — Who are your five top competitors? Visit each and make a comparison chart.
- **How the company works** — Meet members of each department with whom your new agent will be interfacing. Discuss internal communications and what is expected.
- **Basic sales skills** — Use books, online training seminars or other tools at your disposal to communicate the fundamentals of a well-structured sales presentation. With today's technology, there is no reason for new agents to wait for on-site "boot camps" to begin learning basic selling skills.

When you have **high sales agent turnover,** you need to invest **more time** in training.

Sales turnover can be painful. But there is no excuse for having uninformed and untrained sales professionals representing your company.

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

Rymer's Rules

CLOSE THE SALES OFFICE UNTIL THE NEW AGENTS ARE TRAINED
It's a small price to pay for an informed, knowledgeable sales professional.

TRAIN MORE IF YOU HAVE HIGH TURNOVER RATES
Investing in training today will pay off handsomely tomorrow.

COMBINE SALES SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED TRAINING
Knowing processes and specifications are essential for new hires. But don't delay sales skills training. Both are required for sale success.

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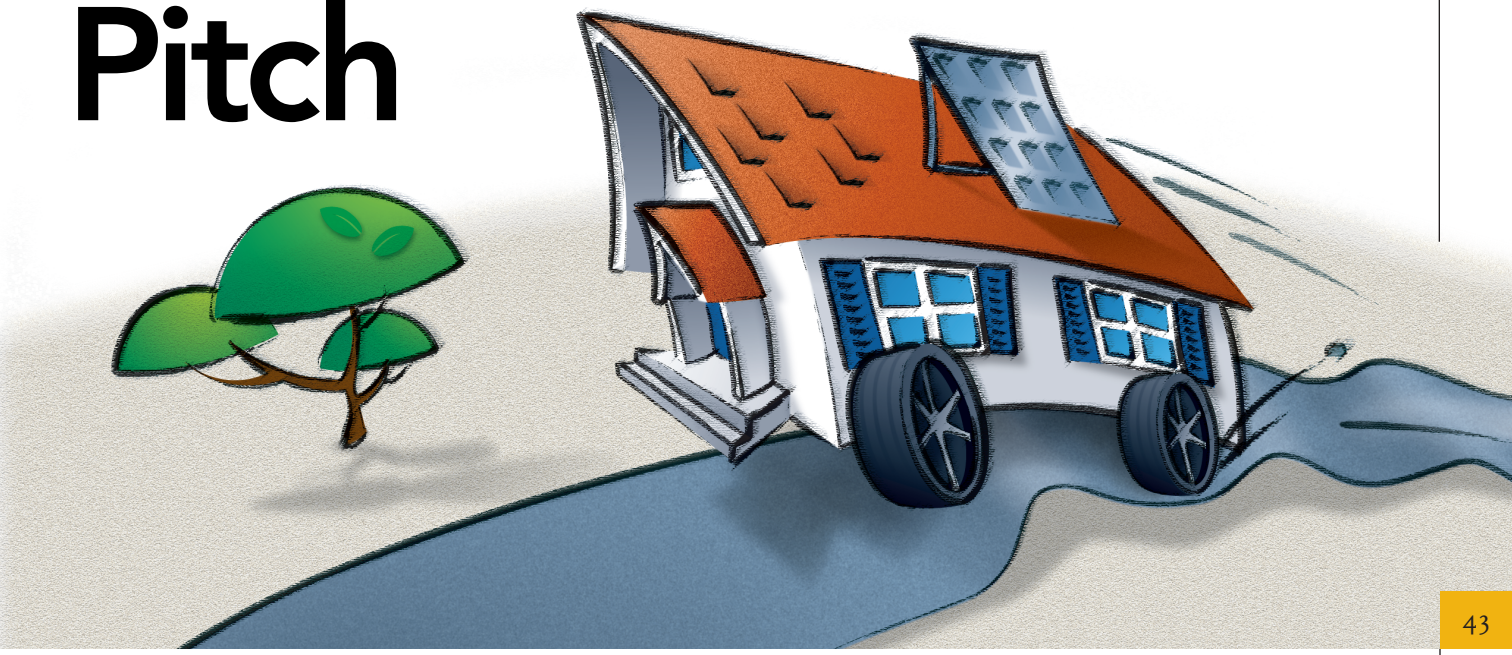
The High-Performance-Home Pitch



We sold our customers on hearth, home and the American Dream. Now eco-consciousness has forced builders and sales teams to pitch a high-performance home new to home buyers' minds.

By Nick Bajzek, Products Editor

To sell energy efficiency means much more than selling clients on energy-efficient appliances, green products or higher R-value walls. The hard part, says Tom Konrad, an analyst for AltEnergyStocks.com, is to get builders to change their sales mindset. "After all, sales teams sell what they can sell, and for a number of years builders simply couldn't build code-compliant homes fast enough. Obviously all that has changed," says Konrad.

It's up to you to catch up and learn how to sell it well.

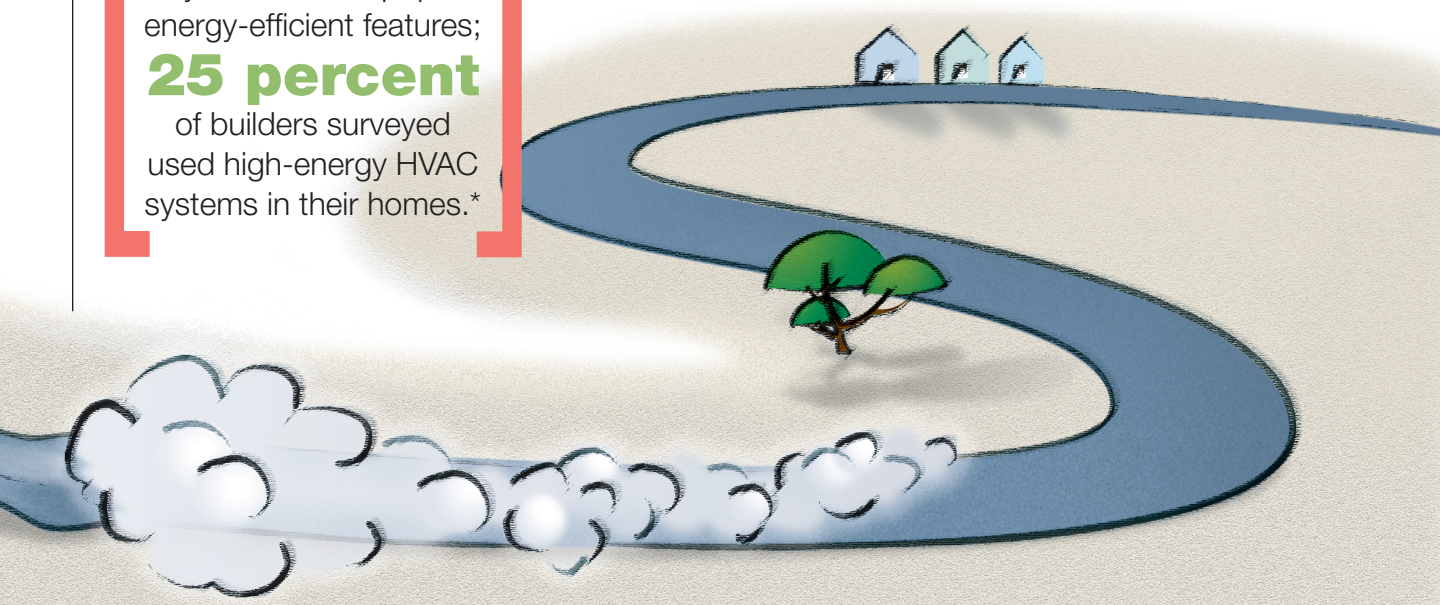
"We try to convince buyers that it's a good long-term investment to pay more for an energy-efficient home," says Georgia Newcomb, sales manager for Summit Residential in Fairfield, Conn. The problem, Newcomb says, is that builders and salespeople don't know how to get the message quite right for their target audience. Newcomb says explaining how the new appliances and methods work doesn't necessarily help you make the sale. People need to see they will save money in both the short- and long-term if they buy one of your homes.

The 3-prong approach

Newcomb's firm specializes in building Energy Star-rated homes. In a down market, one thing builders can lean on is the fact energy efficiency products and methods sell. The technique Newcomb applies is a three-pronged feature approach for the most bang for the sales buck.

There has to be value of the features — perceived or otherwise — for your homes to have a chance to sell. "It's all about the pocket book. People are terrified of the winter," says Newcomb, who points to the home's "shell" and the Energy Star

HVAC and appliances may be the most popular energy-efficient features; **25 percent** of builders surveyed used high-energy HVAC systems in their homes.*



name as the first prong. The envelope and the systems coming in and out of the home are the most obvious money-saving and energy-efficient factors to mention first to buyers.

The second prong is installing ground-source heat pumps, which Summit Residential uses in every conceivable situation it can. "The geothermal system we have is the most important piece in our sales pitch," she says, adding, "People think they can't do geothermal in the Northeast and other places. That's the part I really play up. You have to ask them how they'd feel if they didn't have to pay these crazy heat prices."

Photovoltaic solar panels is the third prong in Newcomb's strategy because of its high visibility and long history of being seen as an eco-friendly product. Newcomb points to other firms besides Summit (especially in energy-starved Western states) that are installing low-profile solar panels and solar-based HVAC units as great exterior selling points.

Getting buyers convinced these products will work to their advantage is not always an easy sell. Because the features are so new and different, the products that make up a more efficient home might not be as attractive to those unfamiliar with the benefits. Newcomb notes there will be problems of misplaced incentives and that the attitudes, awareness, perceptions and general level of knowledge of their potential consumers will be lacking with any new program. You can only sell some people on highly rated insulation, windows and doors. "Not everyone's an engineer, unfortunately," she says.

THE 3-PRONG APPROACH

- Sell the shell, or the home's exterior. This includes the insulated siding, double-paned windows and other features.
- Install renewable-resource heating/cooling systems such as geothermal heat pumps and get as far away from fossil fuels as you can.
- Incorporate solar panels into your roofs; they are perhaps the easiest systems to implement, carry the most consumer awareness and generally have the most generous manufacturer-based rebate programs.

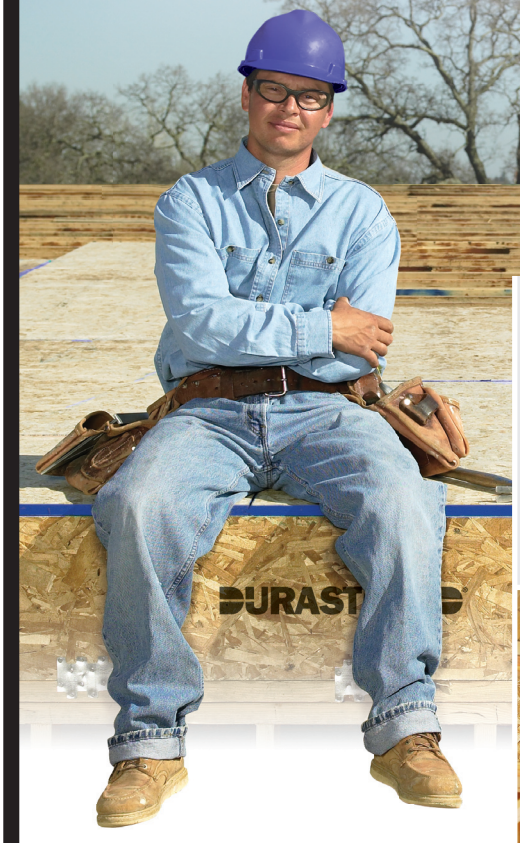
Source: Georgia Newcomb, Summit Residential

*Source: 2008 *Professional Builder* Green Building Survey

The high-performance home

Sara Lamia, who is a Master Certified Sales Professional (MCSP), is president of Building Coach and has a similar approach for a more mainstream focus. However, she isn't sold on the assumption that energy-efficient practices and products will automatically sell better. Lamia takes the idea of a "high-performance home" and breaks the sales approach down into seven pieces: a tight thermal envelope; using the sun's heat

Sustainable choices you can build on



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efficient heating and cooling system; a tight ventilation system; efficient water and wastewater management; energy-efficient appliances; and, perhaps one of the most crucial, home performance testing.

Lamia notices builders hem and haw at the last point. "Some come at us and say, 'I've built 5,000 homes. You're telling me I have to test every one of them?' and I say well, we build a lot of airplanes. I like to think that we test every one of those!"

Lamia follows this more direct approach for several reasons. "Consumer reports that ask homeowners 'Would you be willing to spend more on green?' are worthless in my opinion," she says. "The surveys don't ask people to put the extra money down. It is one thing to say they'll spend more, but when it comes down to contract time, people invariably choose the granite countertops over the energy-efficient appliances." Perhaps, Lamia says, sales teams should also play up the "pioneer" tactic: sell buyers on the idea that they will be the first to join a new wave of energy-efficient and smarter living.

> Despite generous rebate programs throughout the nation, only **2 percent** of builders surveyed reported using photovoltaic panels in their homes. Geothermal heating/cooling systems share the same percentage.*

Interestingly, Lamia likes to compare the current state of the home building industry to the auto industry. "What has made Toyota popular? It's their high-performance cars, like the Camry, not the high-end Prius. The reason people buy Toyota is because of the quality, the way they perform and the higher resale value. It's about perceived quality," says Lamia. Like a high-performance car, Lamia sees a future full of high-performance homes that can be built at all price points and floor plans.

Where Lamia and Newcomb agree wholeheartedly is the idea of third-party testing — any third-party certification — as a good thing. There may even be an unforeseen benefit such as more productivity and accuracy on the job site. "Energy Star is a good first step. ... If you can get the trades to be a part of the system I think you'll greatly improve productivity. Your trades will know that at the end of the day they're work is going to be tested. And I think it'll be great for morale and their pride to know they've done a job well," says Lamia.

Know your audience

Like Lamia, not every sales professional is sold on selling energy efficiency outright. Lyon Real Estate Broker-Associate Elizabeth Weintraub explains the benefits of energy efficiency and how those benefits directly translate into the dollars buyers will save — what might carry more weight for today's buyers. And like Newcomb, Weintraub realizes buyers don't really understand (or need to understand) the inner workings of green or energy-efficient homes. But they do realize their importance, both in cost-saving measures and eco-friendliness. "As with most new homes and innovative products, there are drawbacks those buyers appreciate hearing upfront to avoid surprises down the road," says Weintraub.

Konrad, who has published several articles on the topic, sees each buyer fitting into one of three easy price level tiers. This tactic gets the salesperson to understand each client and to figure out how to cater the energy efficient message. On the custom-built end, the superficial benefits, like solar panels on the roof and such, will resonate better with buyers. For the move-up, mid-range buyer, sales teams can dial in the health and safety benefits of the home. "People in this price range are willing to pay extra, especially if they have kids with asthma. Then you can pile on the other benefits," says Konrad. And on the lower-end of the spectrum Konrad says builders should work with banks and take a look to offer mortgages with benefits and caveats catered to a lower cost of ownership.

Energy-efficient mortgages

If buyers are looking for an energy-efficient home, says Konrad, sales teams can help them qualify for an Energy-Efficient Mortgage (EEM). With an EEM, builders and homeowners alike are encouraged to have an energy rating for their new or existing home, which will tell you and the lender how energy efficient it is. This can help drive sales by not only theorizing but proving that a more efficient home will mean lower bills. Konrad says the rating typically involves an inspection by a professional energy rater who is certified under a nationally

7 Steps to a High-Performance Home

- *Have a tight thermal envelope*
- *Use the sun's heat and home orientation to the homeowner's benefit*
- *Install efficient heating and cooling systems*
- *Keep the homes tight but well-ventilated*
- *Install effective water and wastewater management*
- *Include energy-efficient appliances*
- *Implement home-performance testing*

Source: Sara Lamia, Building Coach

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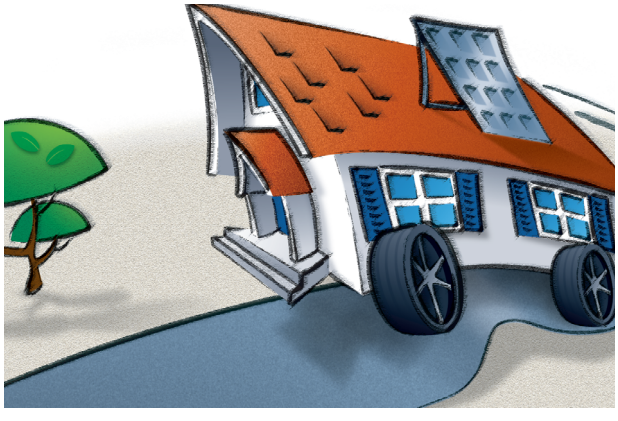
or state-accredited home energy rating system (HERS). "There are several options regarding HERS, so the type used will depend on where you live. Some states even have more than one HERS," says Konrad.

While nothing new, the EEM requires some research. The cost of a home-energy rating and how it can be paid — financed in the mortgage, by the seller, by the bank or the Real Estate Agent — as well as the availability of certified energy raters, can vary from state to state and from one EEM program to another. It is, according to Konrad, potentially a great sales tool, especially for buyers who are looking for affordability. **PB**

The Energy Star program seems to be the easiest to implement out of the major accreditations out there; 31 percent of builders reported saying it was very easy to implement, with **39 percent** reporting somewhat easy. Only 1 percent said it was very difficult.*



Tankless water heaters are among the most popular choices among home buyers concerned with energy consumption. However, **36 percent** of builders surveyed reported using tankless systems some of the time, with an equal amount reporting none.*

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CREATIVE SPIN

We've seen lots of model kids' rooms, but never one with a decorative working carousel; it's no surprise a Hollywood set designer crafted it. The carousel revolves and lights up when activated by a motion sensor. The project was conceived by interior designer Doris Pearlman and Toll Brothers Project Manager Seth Ring.

Photo: Eric Lucero

INSIDE

Green homes a go [*page 53*]

Best Address: Small house, big impact [*page 58*]

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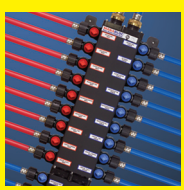


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THESE HOMES SHOWCASE SIMPLE WAYS YOU CAN BUILD GREEN.



FOR AESTHETIC REASONS as well as performance, Pinn Brothers Fine Homes chose EnergyTile solar PV modules, which mimic concrete tiles and blend into the roof. *Photo: OCR Solar & Roofing*

[GREAT GREEN]

The **Hot Seller** in Silicon Valley

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design

California's high electricity rates are spurring consumer demand for solar-powered homes at a community in San Jose, Calif. Along with other energy-saving features, solar photovoltaic (PV) roof modules are standard at Orchard Heights, built by Pinn Brothers Fine Homes.

Orchard Heights and Falcon Place, another Pinn Brothers community, are the first single-family neighborhoods in San Jose that are both solar-powered and LEED-certified. The builder is partnering with OCR Solar & Roofing of Vacaville, Calif., to install BP Solar's roof-integrated EnergyTile modules.

"EnergyTiles don't just sit on the roof — they become the roof," says Aaron Nitzkin, vice president of OCR's solar division. "It's a roofing product that just happens to generate electricity." The modules resemble concrete roof tiles and are embedded with solar technology.

"When buyers visit our models and see the installed system, they're fairly impressed," says John Moniz, project manager for San Jose-based Pinn Brothers. Since Orchard Heights opened on March 15, 2008, 29 homes have been sold. Pricing ranges from $1.1 million to $1.3 million.

Nitzkin says that builders find EnergyTiles, which have a 25-year warranty, more aesthetically pleasing than traditional panels. "You might drive by one of these homes and not even realize there's solar on the roof. It blends into the roofline so well."

Prefab-ulous **Green**

By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor



Modular is increasingly recognized as a green way to build because the factory built process saves time and energy. Linthicum, Md.-based modular builder Haven Custom Homes has taken prefab green a step further, completing its first set of EarthCraft (the Atlanta-based green building program that has become a standard in many areas of the Southeast) and Energy Star-certified custom homes in North Charleston, S.C.

Located in the community of Huntley Waters, the homes were constructed at Haven's facility in South Carolina. The Marion model, shown here, is a three-bedroom 2 1/2 bathroom home of 1,971 square feet. It features high-performance windows; tight construction and ducts; and efficient HVAC, lighting and appliances. The homes were designed by Charleston, S.C.-based Beau Clowney Design and built in conjunction with Old Man Construction, also of Charleston. The community was developed by Cobalt.

HAVEN'S MARION MODEL at Huntley Waters is green, prefabricated and attractive.
Photo: Jason Watts

Project Proves **Net-Zero is Attainable**

By Bill Lurz, Senior Editor



Perhaps the ultimate green development is an enclave of eight single-family homes now under construction in the Atlanta suburb of Roswell, Georgia. Weatherford Place is a semi-custom neighborhood where a 2,500 square-foot, two-story model has been open since October 2007 and all the homes are designed to be net-zero energy consumers. The community is pursuing LEED for Homes Platinum and LEED Neighborhood Platinum certification.

The metal-roofed model, which is already contracted for sale at $749,000, has been selling power to Georgia Power and Southern Co. for nine months. Simone du Boise, principal of Cadmus Construction, says her design/build firm mandates alternative green, sustainable power sources in all its buildings. "We are building the house next door with the energy from the model, which has a finished basement that brings air-conditioned space to 4,000 square feet. And we still have a credit with Georgia Power," she notes.

The homes use a holistic, integrated approach that include active solar photovoltaics and solar thermal to generate free hot water. It also employs many passive solar design elements and healthy-house features. "We achieved the lowest HERS (Home Efficiency Rating System) score on record, a 47," says partner Denise Donahue, "and a lot of our building science is not even considered in that rating because there's no data on it." A base HERS-rated home, built to the 2006 energy code, scores 100. Most new homes don't match that standard.

Donahue and du Boise plan to franchise their "EcoCraft Home" system to builders throughout the country.

ALL EIGHT HOMES in Weatherford Place are designed to be net-zero energy.
Photo: Cadmus Construction

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Green Builders Lives Up to Its Name

By Jennifer Powell, Staff Writer

The Alder model has a long list of energy-efficient features, including recycled lumber and recycled carpet, in every home in the Georgetown Village community. Green Builders' selling point is the Icynene spray-foam insulation. According to the company, random air leaks in insulation or gaps around fixtures and hard-to-insulate areas account for up to 40 percent of energy loss. Green Builders used the spray-foam insulation because of its ability to seal a home and create a thermal envelope. Plus, it contains no ozone-depleting substances and does not off-gas over time. An added bonus: it's affordable and works within the community, whose homes start at $190,000.



This particular model has 1,810 square feet of living space with three bedrooms and three bathrooms. There is a detached two-car garage with a studio as well. This model starts at $238,990.

THE ALDER is one of five homes in the village with Icynene spray-foam insulation.
Photo: Green Builders

ICFs Seal this Home for Energy Efficiency

By Mark Jarasek, Senior Editor, Electronic Media



THIS AIR-TIGHT HOME looks like a traditional home but reaches far beyond.
Photo: Excalibur Builders

It's the construction methods, particularly the use of insulated concrete forms (ICFs), that help make this 4,200-square foot-home in the Foxbury Hills subdivision in Slinger, Wis., a solid example of green.

Excalibur Builders' owner Dave Hamilton says ICF construction not only provides strength but also conserves trees because the structure needs significantly less lumber. In addition, a combination of ICF construction and Icynene insulation used in the home creates an extremely tight building envelope that provides significant HVAC energy savings for the home's owner.

This home also holds a green certificate from the Madison, Wis.-based Green Built Home. That green certification is achieved by earning points in the following categories: setting and land use; landscape; energy efficiency; materials; indoor air quality; plumbing and water conservation; waste reduction; recycling and disposal; builder options; and efficient use of space.

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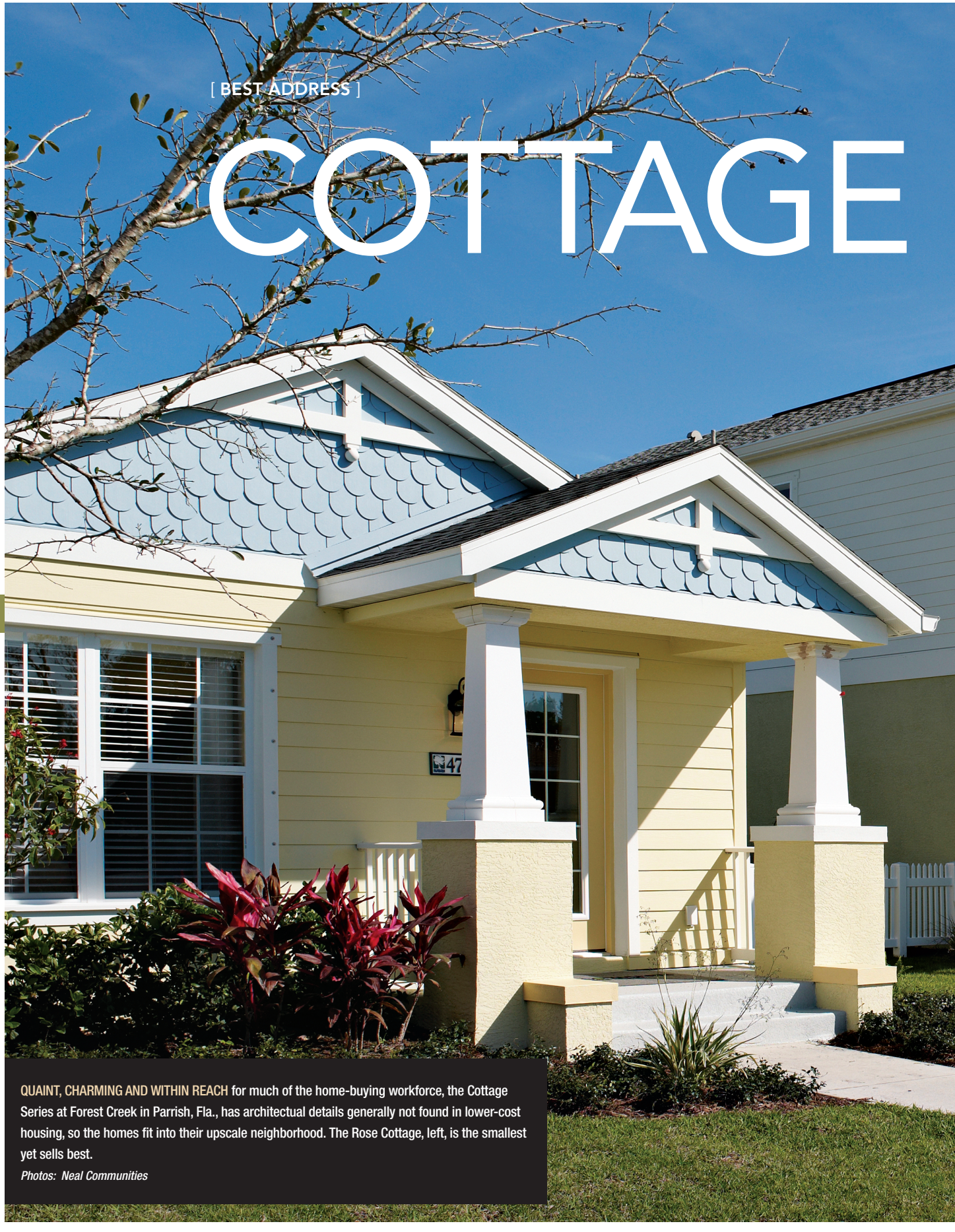
COTTAGE



QUAINT, CHARMING AND WITHIN REACH for much of the home-buying workforce, the Cottage Series at Forest Creek in Parrish, Fla., has architectual details generally not found in lower-cost housing, so the homes fit into their upscale neighborhood. The Rose Cottage, left, is the smallest yet sells best.

Photos: Neal Communities

BLISS

The Cottage Series at Forest Creek features spacious single-family homes on micro-lots – at prices that turn heads.

By Sara Zailskas, Assistant Managing Editor





In the summer of 2007, Pat Neal, president of Neal Communities, had the same problem as most builders: he had to figure out a way to deliver homes people could afford in a slumping economy, and he had to do it fast.

Also working against him, besides the housing downturn: the land he had in his Forest Creek development in Parrish, Fla., was zoned for townhomes, while his buyers wanted the American dream of a single-family home with a yard.

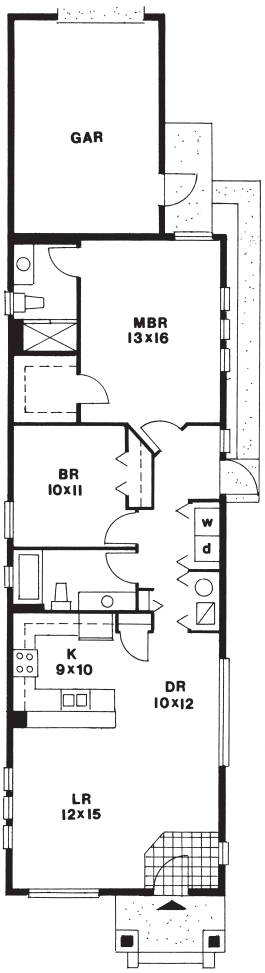
Research and consultation with longtime colleagues Jerry Messman with BSB Design, John Bews at Davis Bews Design Group and the Neal Communities team brought him to what would become the Cottage Series, three styles of single-family homes no more than 1,600 square feet with 2 or 3 bedrooms and 2 to 2½ bathrooms, all on lots 27 feet wide.

The entire process — from conceptualization to zoning approval to finished models — took about six months to boot (see the timeline on page 66 for a breakdown of how it happened).

Prices started then in the $120s and now begin at $144,900, which includes front porches with columns, rear-loaded garages, private courtyards and floor plans that respect residents' privacy. As of mid-August, 27 of 70 homes have sold.

In addition to single women and active adults, parts of the original target markets, buyers have included couples and even small families. And surprisingly, it's the Rose Cottage — the smallest, with 1,200 square feet — that's netted 13 of the sales so far. "It's very open, has lots of windows in unexpected places, larger hallways, storage — it offers everything in a small space, and everyone loves it," says Neal Communities' Marketing Director Ashley Herweg.

TO ENSURE THE HOMES looked better than affordable, Neal Communities included amenities such as stainless steel appliances (above) and added a special finish to cabinets. (Right) The Rose Cottage's kitchen is shown here.



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What really stands out in the Rose Cottage and the other cottages is how much fits in a small space; homes are 20 feet wide on 27-foot lots. But the team made sure a little house went a long way.

To keep the price low, Messman, a consulting partner with BSB, concentrated architectural details on the front elevation, adding Craftsman columns, fish scale siding and a pitched roof. The details help the cottages blend seamlessly with the rest of the Forest Creek community, which includes upscale homes.

Inside, Messman took standard features and added a twist. The master bathroom, for example, isn't larger than a typical full bathroom, but it's attached for privacy. The master bedroom has a walk-in closet so homeowners wouldn't have to sacrifice storage space because of the price they paid. He also vaulted the 8-foot ceiling throughout the home to add volume.

The Cottage Series project has its own story to tell. Check out the next few pages to find out how the team made it work.



THE ROSE COTTAGE'S living room, like the other cottages in the series, have high-fixed windows that add light to the living/dining room. A vaulted ceiling opens up the space.

Pack It In

Want to do a lot with a little space and money? Homes in the Cottage Series at Forrest Creek are 20 feet wide and sit on a 27-foot wide lot. Yet they still pack 1,200 to 1,600 square feet of the great indoors for homeowners to treasure while the prices stay low. The team behind the Cottage Series at Forrest Creek offers these tips to make a small home attractive, affordable and desirable.

Let the Light In

While one wall in the living room in the Rose Cottage has a 6-by-5-foot window, the adjoining wall features high-fixed windows that add natural light and leave homeowners room to place furniture.

Stagger the Setbacks

Only one foot separates Cottage Series homes on one side; the other side is a roomier six feet. This made it easier to design for privacy and adds variation to the home's exterior.

Make the Indoors Private

Where you place windows is crucial. The homes' large windows face the neighbors' high-fixed windows, so homeowners don't have to worry about looking in on their neighbors — or feeling watched themselves. This way, you can put another house right next to it without compromising privacy and still maximize your land.

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Reserve Outdoor Space That's Private

If you're going to have a courtyard or small yard, include a high wall, as all homes in the Cottage Series. Even if homeowners are living a few feet from next door, they'll have an outdoor nook to call their own.

Don't Forget the Front Porch

All homes in the Cottage Series offer a front porch; the Rose Cottage's is 50 square feet. Although it's a public area, it's a homeowners own social space. Plus, porches are a luxury — a simple way to add value to a lower-cost house.

Keep It Open

Open floor plans are a must. It might be a box house, but that doesn't mean residents should feel like it. Wide hallways lend a larger field, as do vaulted ceilings.

Build A Simple Structure

Think inside the box. All homes in the Cottage Series have a simple box shape, which keeps costs down. Focus more expensive details that create character on the front of the home, and use fewer architectural details on the side to save money.

Keep Curb Appeal

If it's charming and has character — key attributes the Cottage Series needed to fit into an upscale neighborhood — homeowners will be more likely to forget the smaller and less elaborate features of a lower-cost home.

Landscape It Right

Windows on the side of Cottage Series homes face a trellis, so homeowners don't have to look at their neighbors' siding. And pay attention to the streetscape and overall look of the community; if it's not pretty, it won't work as well (see sidebar at right).

Get A Good Association

To make a high-density neighborhood work — and to keep intact the charm and character — make sure to work with an association to control property. You chose the color palette for a reason; if it starts to get sloppy, your development could turn ugly. And what if neighbors store four cars on a lot and put up a shed that blocks everyone's view? Control the property, and the pleasant and affordable community will remain that way.

Plan for Proper Drainage

Municipalities often have codes about this, but if they don't or if they're weak, don't skimp on proper drainage. Get creative with it; you don't want standing water if a storm hits.



Making A Community Sell

Word on the street is that Pat Neal really knows how to sell a community. His landscaping is best described as dramatic, says Leisa Weintraub, vice president of land development and creative director; Pat Neal calls it the "30-second look" that sells. For example, if you're a Forest Creek resident, you'll see an 18-acre lake as you enter the neighborhood. That's coupled with elaborate foliage that emphasizes the natural environment, a staple for Neal Communities entrances. Streetscapes include old-fashioned lights and winding streets. Amenities abound: recreational areas and club houses are the norm.

Pat Neal meticulously chooses everything from the color palette of homes' exteriors to the type of grass. He'll make changes if necessary.

Such drama factors into the mindset of project partners. "You want to buy in that community before you even see the house," says Jerry Messman, a consulting partner with BSB Design, the firm charged with the Cottage Series concept. "Then it's the architect's responsibility to not blow the sale. ... Once you get inside, too, you can't un-sell the house. The charm and character has to be inside as well."

SUMMER LAKE represents a staple of Neal Communities: luxury amenities that sell easy.

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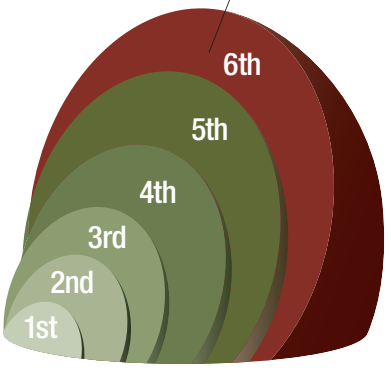

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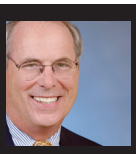
THE COMMUNITY BUY-IN



THE FOREST CREEK COMMUNITY had a price point of about $550,000 when Neal Communities announced it would build homes starting in the $120s. The county swiftly approved plans (see timeline below), but it wasn't until the models were built that some neighbors — a small but loud minority — started speaking up, concerned less expensive homes would downgrade the neighborhood.

Neal Communities took a proactive approach, says John Neal, who focuses on land development and acquisition for the builder. The team held clubhouse meetings with residents to answer questions and wrote letters to the editor to educate the community on the changes; they underscored the purpose of more affordable housing was to make sure workers had great housing, too.

They reached out to residents on the Web also by answering residents' questions on blogs — a move new to everyone on the team. "This was a new experience in community messaging," says Leisa Weintraub. "We're still getting used to it. … We decided to put our own information out there."

Says Pat Neal: "They liked we were building homes within reach. We've had a tremendous amount of support since."



Here's a timeline of the Cottage Series' creation:

8/11 2007

After determining the market wanted more affordable housing that still offers the dream of a single-family home, Pat Neal and a team visit a BSB Design home near Tampa, Fla., featuring infill single-family homes on 25-foot lots. They decide to proceed with a similar scale and form, including a front porch and rear-loaded garage. The lots the builder intends to use for what will become single-family cottages are zoned for townhouses, a plan that was scrapped when the market and buyer interests turned.

8/16

Neal Communities contracts with BSB for schematics on the Cottage Series that would feature 27-foot lots of single-family homes 20-feet-wide.

9/7

Manitee County planning director approves plans for single-family homes.

9/18

Neal Communities files for approval with Manitee County. The builder begins to plan for longer setbacks before receiving approval.

11

Neal Communities begins building models for the Cottage Series.

Swift Sale

Neal Communities typically expects local government to take 12 to 14 months to approve plans; the Cottage Series took about three. Pat Neal credits established relationships that have a lot of trust and respect (30-40 years experience with key officials helped, he says, as did having a good reputation from completing 82 projects in the county); detailed presentations to the board that showed a well-thought-out project; and a price range that matched what the county sought.





PROJECT PROFILE

Community: The Cottage Series at Forest Creek
Location: Parrish, Fla.
Model: Rose Cottage (left)
Size: 1,200 square feet
Builder: Neal Communities, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.
Architect: BSB Design

PRODUCTS USED

Appliances: GE, Hotpoint
Floors: Mohawk Carpet, tile and Conguleum vinyl
Hardware: Dexter
HVAC Equipment: Trane
Lighting: Kichler, Maxim
Paint: Sherwin-Williams
Plumbing Features: Sterling fixtures, Moen faucets
Roofing: Elk High Definition Shingles
Windows: Florida Extruders
Siding: James Hardie

12/18

County approves single-family homes with longer setbacks. "Ultimately, they liked the price level and liked the fact we were providing housing for workers," Pat Neal says.

2/23

2008

Models completed. Opening weekend garners 1,100 visitors.

8/11

27 of 70 cottages sold; 13 of them are Rose Cottages.





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Photo: Fagor America

INSIDE

The latest in high-tech HVAC [*page 71*]

Green products you should know [*page 75*]

New products: All the latest [*page 77*]

The sun shines on solar [*page 78*]

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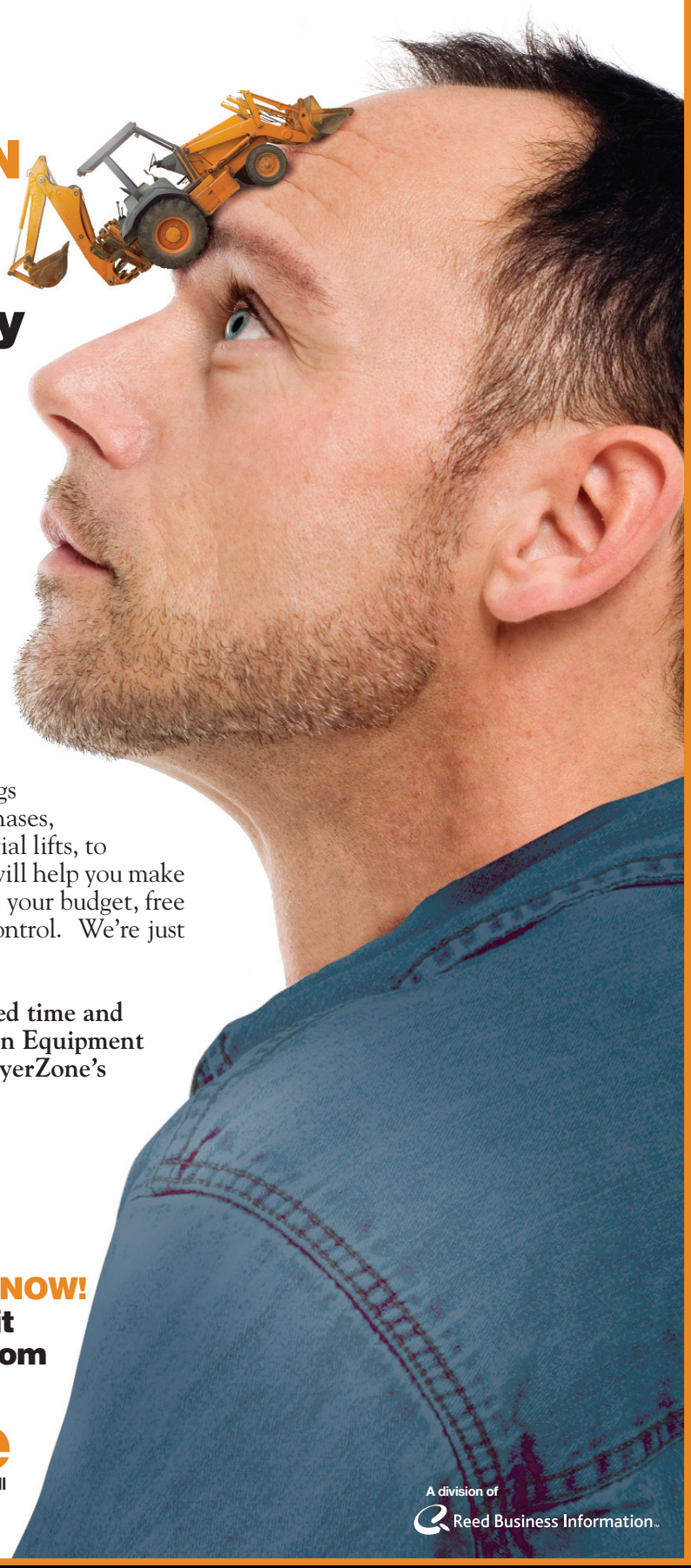

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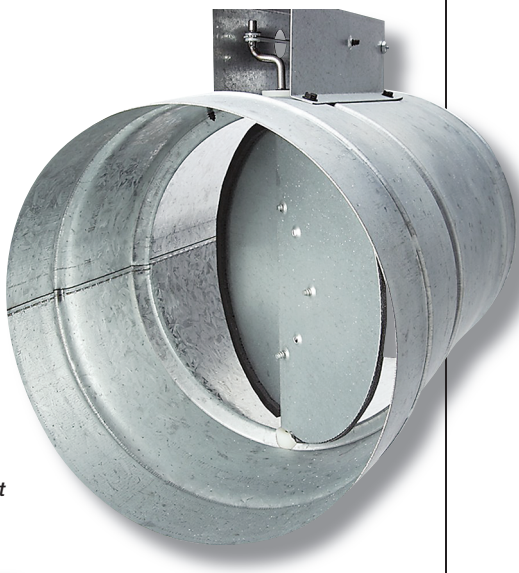

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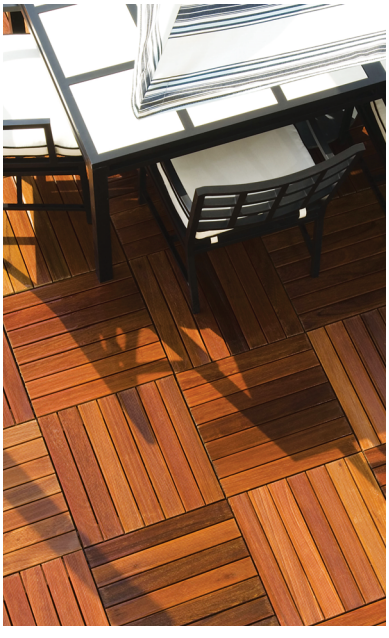

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[SOLAR UPDATE]

The **Sun Shines** on Solar

By Nick Bajzek, Products Editor



Has solar power finally reached the tipping point?

After some four decades of existence, solar power may finally become an accepted, economically viable alternative to grid power sources. The United States is the world's fourth-largest solar power market after Germany, Japan and Spain. The U.S. saw nearly 150 megawatts of solar capacity hit the grid in 2007, up some 45 percent from the previous years. A total of 750 megawatts were produced, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association, a U.S. trade group.

However, solar panels bolted to residential and commercial roofs to convert the sun's energy into electricity are still far too pricey to compete with fossil fuels such as coal or nuclear energy without generous subsidies on the local, state and even Federal level. But that might change very soon, thanks to innovations from solar power companies small and large.

Tom Werner, CEO of SunPower Corp., the largest solar power company by sales in the U.S., predicts "grid parity," or an equalization between solar and fossil fuel electricity, will happen in about five years. A bold claim, no doubt; but with high energy prices and an overstretched national power grid, his prediction may come to fruition.

Sharp Solar Energy Solutions: The latest to come from Sharp's solar business is the OnEnergy System, which uses a simplified, flexible mounting system to speed up installation and improve aesthetics. The company allows builders to configure each system online. Sharp says the racking system is compatible with virtually all types of roofing materials.

BP Solar: The Home Solutions Program helps builders to integrate the company's Energy Tile solar panels into their communities. The company sends a representative to give an assessment of your homes. These assessments factor in roof type, pitch, shape and orientation, as well as offer an analysis of potential shading throughout the year. Every system includes an inverter to convert generated power from DC to AC electricity.

GE: The energy company recently teamed up with roofing giant GAF to market, and ultimately, develop new solar modules for new and retrofit construction. GE currently offers the builder-centric, pre-packaged Brilliance line. These systems feature solar modules integrated into customizable arrays. The systems ship with all the components necessary for a complete installation, including the mounting kits and a wireless power meter to monitor the system's performance. These are available with or without an Uninterruptible Power Supply.

PV Solar Planet: Using United Solar Ovonic's UNI-SOLAR thin-film solar laminate material, the Sunseeker 68/136 Building-Integrated Solar Electric Generator by PV Solar Planet is a lightweight and flexible roofing material. It integrates onto PV Solar Planet's Sunseeker standing-seam metal roofing panels. The film is extremely durable and maintains a greater efficiency rating than rigid photovoltaic cells. **PB**

NO MORE BOXY SOLAR PANELS! These lay-flat roof panels from BP and Sharp (inset) make it easier on roofers to install and can be paired with a solar water heating system for added eco-benefits. *Photos: OCR Solar Roofing*

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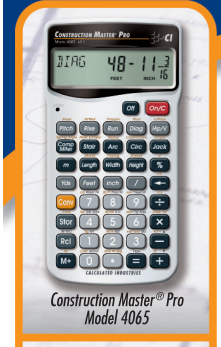



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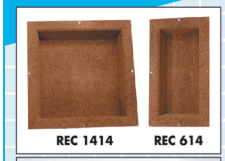



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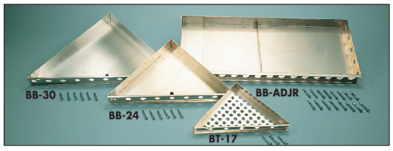

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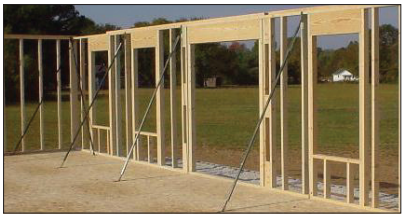

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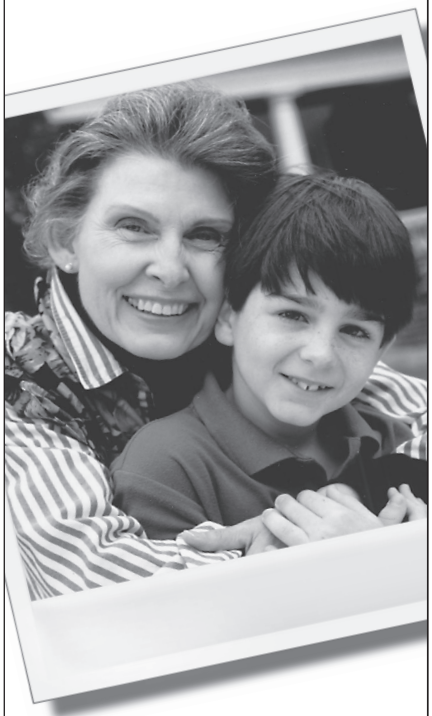

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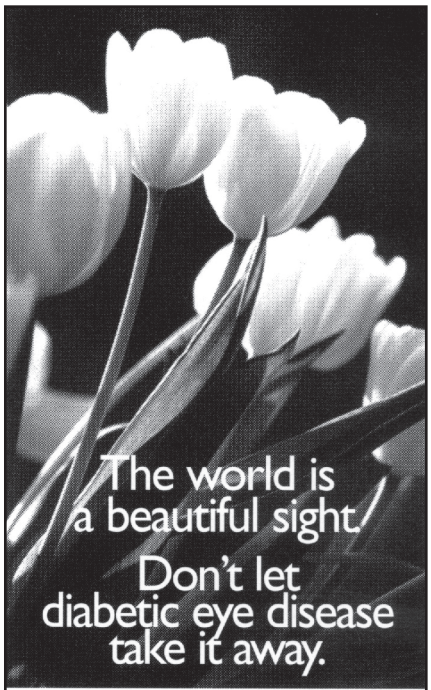

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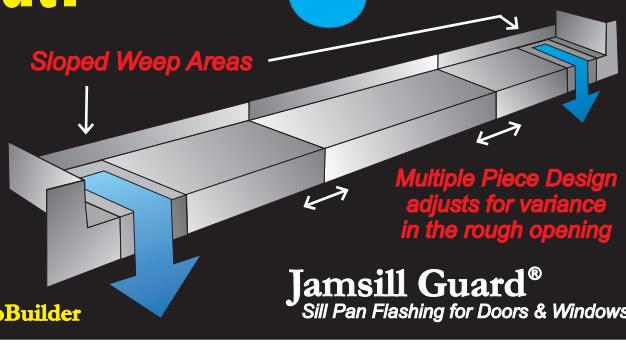

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numbercrunch



Think about it

40 The Los Angeles Times reports that 40 employees are left at Barratt American, down from 140. The company is surviving the downturn by doing reconstruction work in fire-damaged parts of San Diego and creating a custom homes division.

$100B ForeclosureRadar.com reports that banks and lenders have foreclosed on $100 billion worth of California homes over the last two years.

$1 You can get a small fry from McDonald's for $1, rent a movie from the Redbox for $1, and now buy a house for $1. In Detroit, a house located a couple blocks from Detroit



City Airport is on the market for $1, reports the Detroit News. The house might sell for $1, but it will cost the bank $10,000 in commission fees, closing costs and taxes.

$200 million The **New York City Housing Authority** gets a bill every year for $200 million from the city, which covers everything from water to trash pickup to police services. The agency manages **343 public housing complexes** that are home to 406,000 low-income and moderate-income residents.

$2.6 trillion The FDIC reports that America has $2.6 trillion of uninsured deposits. Deposits in institutions equal **$6.9 trillion,** but only $4.2 trillion of that is insured. If your account is under $100,000 insurance limit, **the FDIC's got your back.** But if your deposits are over $100,000, wake up!

49% According to **a poll by Harris Interactive and Move,** 49 percent of adults consider green features such as solar panels and energy saving appliances to be **more important than luxury amenities.**



21% The construction industry is connected to **half of all greenhouse gas emissions in the country,** according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Residential buildings make up **21 percent of national energy consumption.** Wow, they sure eat up a lot of energy (hint, hint).



10,529 The Miami Herald performed an **eight-month study on Florida's mortgage lending industry** and learned a few shocking surprises: the news outlet found that from 2000 to 2007, at least 10,529 people with criminal records were approved to work in the mortgage profession. Also noted: more than half who had committed **fraud, bank robbery, racketeering and extortion** cleared background checks.

1 California **sets trends in every industry,** from fashion to housing. It's currently the first state to adopt a **statewide green building code.** Will it become a trend too? The California Building Standards Commission will implement it in phases over three years; the first phase will begin July 1.

What happens in *Vegas* stays with you *forever.*



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