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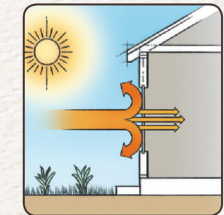


Premium Vinyl Single-Hung
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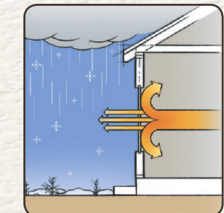


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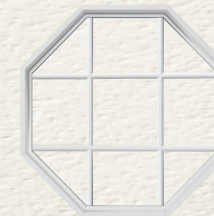
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VOLUME 10 NUMBER 9

ON THE COVER

Construction Ahead
president Austin Foster
has grown his firm because
of his ability to create
happy customers.

Photo by Robin Nelson



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Best of the Best Awards at the Remodeling Show

The judging is complete and the awards are ready to be given to the winners. Our awards ceremony will take place at the Remodeling Show in Chicago. Congratulatory letters and invitations have been sent to all winners. We're looking forward to seeing everyone at the ceremony.

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A penchant for producing satisfied customers spurs Construction Ahead to significant growth.

By Michael R. Morris

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One design/build firm found itself capitalizing on a rowhouse remodel in Washington, D.C.

By Wendy A. Jordan

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Managing Happiness

The larger a remodeling company becomes, the more difficult it is to achieve customer satisfaction, right? Dave Bryan, president of Blackdog Builders in Salem, N.H., showed me anything is possible, no matter what your company's size and volume. Bryan's \$5.5



Michael R. Morris

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million firm employs 35 people and produces 43 percent gross profit on 70 annual jobs.

They also have a 93 percent rating from past clients who would recommend them, according to customer satisfaction consultant GuildQuality. Dave's answer for how Blackdog does it?

First is hiring quality people.

"You have to be slow to hire, quick to fire," says Dave. "When we have somebody who is not a good fit for the culture, they're a toxic employee and they shouldn't be here any longer. But, we are careful when we hire. For a carpenter to come into the company, it's a three to four interview process, including me. And the only thing I talk about in my interview is culture."

Next is having strong company values.

"We took a concept from Shawmut Design and Construction in Boston, called 910," he says. "If you look at customer satisfaction as a continuum, from 1 to 10, we want 9s and 10s. We want apostles. And we'll do essentially

whatever it takes to get them."

Last is rewarding positive behavior such as the following, where this employee was publicly recognized at a company meeting and rewarded with raffle tickets to win a small prize.

"We had a client who had a tree fall on their swingset, and we weren't starting the job for two months," Dave recalls. "But the project manager heard about it, and he knew they were having a birthday party that weekend, so on Thursday night, he hopped in his truck, brought a chainsaw, and cut the tree off the jungle gym so the kids could have a place to play for the birthday party because the father was out of town on business. They never got billed, and he wasn't on the clock. He did it because he wanted the client to be a raving fan for the company. That's 910. It's a million little things like that. It isn't building the addition. It's building the addition while delivering an experience that makes them upset and disappointed when you leave." **PR**

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Maintaining Good Tradespeople

Benefits and disadvantages of employees versus subs

Whether your craftsmen are employees or trade partners, it's always a challenge to find and keep talented, reliable people.

Tom: *One of the top challenges we have today is how to maintain good craftsmen. Mostly we're going to talk about production people and today's challenges of labor, whether or not they're employees or subcon-*

tractors. Greg, I'm going to start with you. You have four employees out in field. Do you sub out other work?

Greg: Absolutely. First off, we don't use the word subcontractor. We consider them a trade partner because they're not subs to us; they're on the same plane as we are. We trade out anything that's not carpenter related, so electrical, plumbing, heating, even siding and roofing.

Tom: *Same with painting?*

Greg: Yes, and we come back and trim again and organize the flooring.

Tom: *Lucy, we learned something new this morning. We have a trade contractor agreement, and Greg even takes it a step further and calls them trade partners. Do you use subcontractors?*

Lucy: It's a very challenging term. We call them our trades and our tradespeople but interestingly enough...the legal term is subcontractor; it is not trade contractor. As often as I beat on the attorneys to try have it changed, it is a legal term that also goes back to our state laws. It's been a very challenging term to use. In-house and out of the house when we talk to each other or when we talk to the clients, we use the term trades because, just like with Greg, we feel the same way. These are our partners, they are our customers; they are what we call our "out of the house customers." We try to treat them with equality.

Tom: *Lucy, what trade is the easiest to work with?*

Lucy: It's an interesting thing. We have trades that we've worked with for 17 years. Most of them or a very large amount have been with us for many years. I think one of the biggest challenges in our industry, from what I hear from locals, competitors and friends is that plumbers seem to be ones who are the most challenging. We have been very fortunate to

have some very good plumbers, both in our new home construction as well as remodeling, but plumbers are not an easy-to-find group who are really good and stand behind their work and stay on the cutting edge.

Tom: *Greg, how is it in St. Cloud, Minn.; what's the most challenging trade contractor or trade partner you deal with?*

Greg: Definitely my drywallers. For one, it's really difficult to get them to understand that they're in a home that's being lived in and to clean up after themselves, because they probably do have the messiest job. We have used the same one for about 15 years, but he has also had people that work under him who might come in and get partially taped and have to clean up and texture. The easiest is my electrician and my plumber. My plumber's been there since day one, 21-plus years. We trained him.

Tom: *He obviously works for other people since he's a subcontractor.*

Greg: Absolutely. He has an employee base of 15 or so because he has a plumbing and heating company. I just saw him in the yellow pages one day when I needed a plumber, and we've been together since.

Tom: *Interesting. I agree with Lucy. I believe both of those are very challenging for us. Twenty-five years ago we put a plumber on staff, and he's been with us ever since. If we get slow on plumbing, fortunately he's a good craftsman. The drywallers — we're not sure who's going to show up sometimes, so it's a problem. Greg, you were talking about keeping the guys there and keeping the turnover down and maintaining a good staff so you know what level of quality you have. What's the most important benefit in keeping good carpenters and craftsmen who are on the payroll? What are the most important benefits that you see to keep carpenters and*

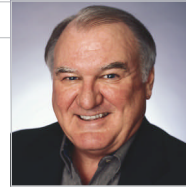


Lucy Katz

Katz Builders Inc.

Located in Austin, Texas, Katz Builders has been building custom homes and remodeling for 22 years and is heavily involved in local, state and national associations. There are five employees: three in and out of the office in terms of wearing dual hats, a field superintendent and a project manager. Being such a small office, both Lucy and Joel Katz handle sales. Anticipated volume this year should be between \$3 million and \$4 million.

Photo by Liz Garza Williams



Tom Swartz
Contributing Editor

maintain them as a good employee?

Greg: I take very good care of them. I give them a lot of vacation.

Tom: *What's a lot?*

Greg: The top guy gets 23 days, which is three weeks paid vacation, and eight holidays. That's a lot. A lot of companies don't give anything to their employees. I'm fully invested in my employees. We do quarterly bonuses.

Tom: *Based on what?*

Greg: I don't really register it on any job. If the company is doing great, I'll give them a quarterly bonus.

Tom: *Does everybody participate in that?*

Greg: Yes, you have to be with us for one year.

Tom: *Do any trade partners participate in that?*

Greg: No.

Tom: *What else do you do for employees?*

Greg: Like I said, bonuses, vacations, and treat them with respect. I give them a gas allowance every month. We have a place called "first fuel bank;" you pre-pay for gas here and they have a gas card they use to get gas every month. I let them run their jobs, and I let them be who they are.

Tom: *The interesting thing is you haven't mentioned anything about pay.*

Greg: No. Pay, I think is secondary.

Tom: *You're competitive, but that's secondary compared to what it is.*

Greg: Absolutely. I let them run their jobs. I let them do their jobs; I'm not out there ripping on them every day. I want them to be here because they're happy and enjoy it, but yet they don't have to deal with stuff after hours.

Tom: *Lucy, you just said you had some trade contractors with you for over 17 years – you had to do something right. What is the most important benefit you have to maintain good quality trade contractors?*

Lucy: Making sure we have good communication between each other.

Tom: *How do you do that? Do you supply a phone?*

Lucy: Well, back in the old days, trades didn't have fax machines so we would give them fax machines. Not too long ago, we would give them cell phones as a gift but those days are long gone. Today that's a given. Now we just want them to do e-mails; use their cell phone to do e-mail. Good communication is absolutely paramount with the trades. Making sure that our jobs are ready for them, starting with specifications. Making sure the plans are clearly identifying what they are responsible for. Checking their proposals to make sure there aren't any mistakes and they haven't forgotten something, and to get to them if they have forgotten something. But if there is a mistake there, saying "You need to recalculate this." Watching out for them. We call that partnering with our trades.

Tom: *I would tell you in a lot of cases that there is the possibility that they would not take that good care. You go through their specifications, so they've got to have it pretty clear.*

Lucy: We create the specification ourselves and we go back to them. We provide the plans and specifications to them and say, "Bid this accordingly." Then we will review their proposal to make sure that, if something looks out of line, we'll go back and say, "You need to check this one more time. Maybe this is correct or maybe you have missed something."

Tom: *Do you sometimes get more than one from different trade contractors?*

Lucy: Yes. We will periodically. We won't bid them against each other, but we have a pretty good sense of what's

going on in the market. If we feel someone is out of line, you bet, we will re-bid with someone else. But we're very careful about not using cheap trades and people who have not been in the industry. Before we use a new trade we will go out and view their product, look at their jobs, and check their references to make sure they can and will stand behind their work if we run into a chal-



Greg E. Theis

Greg E. Theis Remodeling

The firm is located in St. Cloud, Minn., and has been in business for 21-plus years as a full-time remodeling contractor. Theis is heavily involved in the NAHB Remodelers Council. The business has four employees in the field (one acts as project manager), one part-time in the field, Greg, who does all of the sales, and his wife, Tama, in the office. Volume of business ranges from \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million per year.

Photo by Steve Woit

lenge. We're not looking for the cheapest guy out there – that's not how we built our reputation and our business.

Tom: *Greg, do you do that? How well do you qualify a new trade contractor and where does low price come into play on that?*

Greg: It's something that I really haven't done because I have had a team together for so long. The newest person is a second electrician I took on staff who I met and who just started his business. I actually got him into our local association and starting using him. I really never qualify anybody because I haven't switched for so long.

Tom: *Lucy, I applaud that. A new dry-waller comes to mind: he just recently came in and said, "I'm looking for work and I'll*

Lucy: Clean, safe jobs. That's very important for the trades and also for the homeowners.

Tom: *Yes. Who keeps it clean?*

Lucy: We use it as a budget item. We get the trades to be responsible for cleaning up after themselves at the end of each day. We also hire a third party to come in and clean up as well.

Tom: *Greg, who cleans up after the painter, plumber, drywallers, etc?*

Greg: Pretty much they do – they are expected to do that. We have a dumpster on every site, and we have a trailer there. We still come in and make sure it's homeowner friendly when they're coming home from work at night. We'll make sure that it's safe for the home-

bedroom. In the rest of house, there is something going on in every bit of that house. My hat is off to them. We're trying to be very sensitive to them at all times. Having said that, they're gone during the day. By the time they get back in the evening there is some semblance of order so they're not completely destroyed when they walk into the home. So far so good. They're really happy!

Tom: *It's amazing what we put people through. We would have asked them to move out. We have in the past. The people say, "No, this is my home. Just give me my little cubby hole, and I'll be fine." It could be four or five months!*

Lucy: They have four or five cats also that are living with them. It's locked

We use it as a budget item. We get the trades to be responsible for cleaning up after themselves at the end of each day.

give you a bid." They give you a bid but I'm not so sure if we did due diligence. The price was OK, it was under what we were used to doing. We met them, they were nice guys, they had insurance. There were a number of things that we did, but we didn't call references and we didn't go out and see the job. I think that's more important than we gave it.

Lucy: Some of the jobs that we do are rather complex. In our market we can't turn the electricity on until the city says you can turn it on. So when they're taping and floating and putting up the sheet rock, they can't see everything over the flaws, and when you turn on the electricity and shine that light down, you go, "Oh! My God what do we have here? we have a mess on our hands." Making sure that the drywall gets done right the first time is absolutely critical.

Tom: *The benefits you mentioned, Lucy – good communication, going back to the olden days, giving them cell phones, let them pay the monthly fee I presume, and check on the proposals – is there anything else you would give the trades to keep them happy?*

owner to come home.

Tom: *It seems like on an addition, below every receptacle were the plastic things, some drywall plaster they had to cut out of the box and some ends of the wires. You'd think they would have put a box there so we wouldn't have any problem. What happens when they don't do it?*

Greg: They are told about it and they will do it the next time! I let them know this is what I expect from them. I'm not there to babysit.

Tom: *Lucy, what about you?*

Lucy: We also take pictures. We e-mail pictures to our trades and the lead people so they can see their guys left the job unsightly, and they need to keep the place clean. We have two types of remodel: those in which the clients are currently living and those where nobody is in the house. We have a couple right now who have chosen remodeling the entire house. We started with the master bedroom. We've done the master bedroom first for them with a bath. They have literally moved into their master

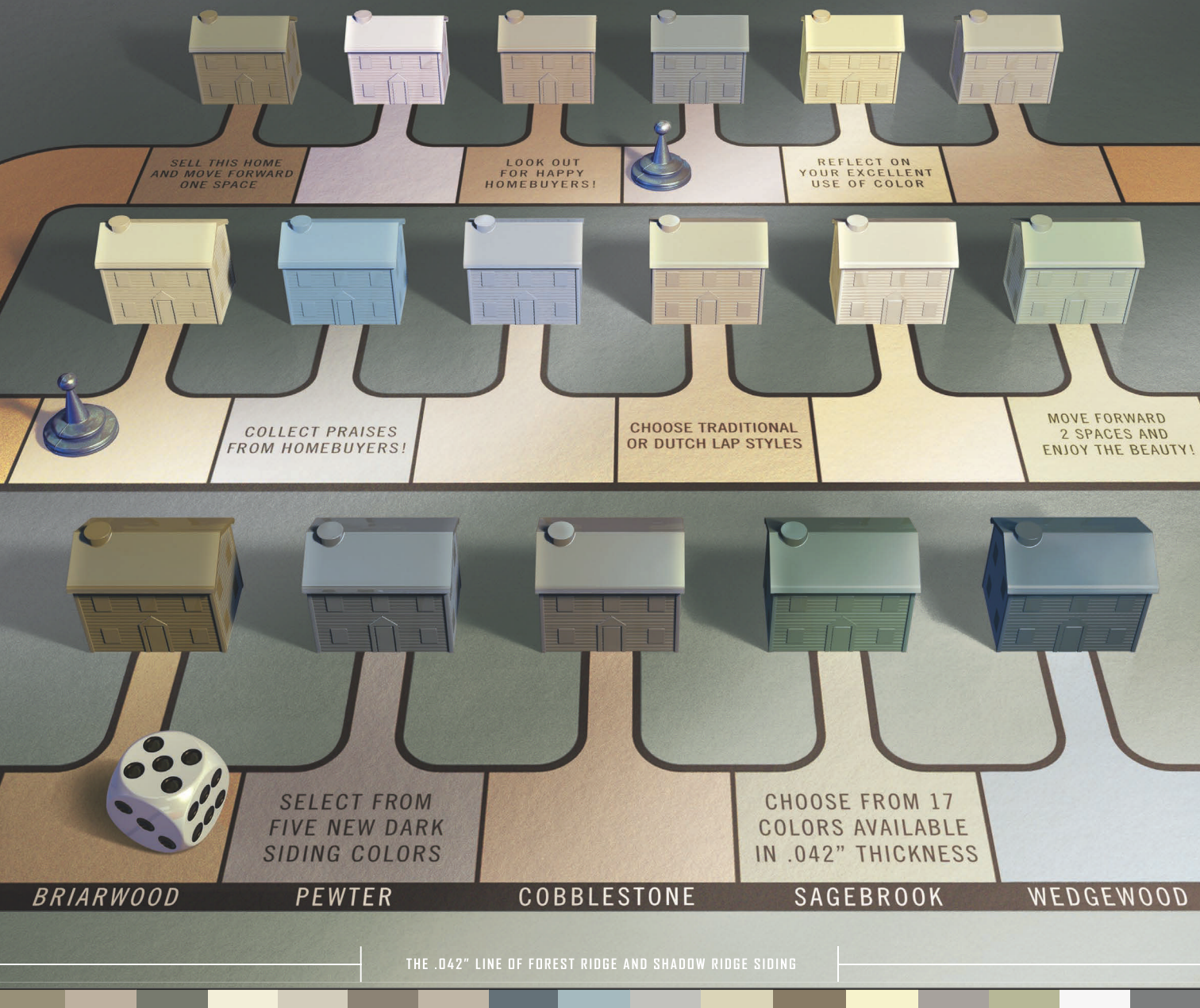
with a key so no one can go into the room. Another thing you had asked me in terms of the good communications – I think what's really critical is making sure, when we tell the trades a job is ready, that the job is really ready for them to go out. We have an online Web-based scheduling program that our trades can go to on the job which is password protected. They can go and see how the date of their schedule changes, whether it's a little bit earlier or a little bit later. They can continue to watch the job and see how it progresses.

Tom: *Do you ever hold retainage on the sub and do you ever back-charge them dollars for areas that had to be done by someone else?*

Lucy: We do not do retainage if they have done the work. We sign off on it and they get their money. And, we pay on a weekly basis.

Tom: *Greg didn't talk about how much he paid what he did for them beyond their pay. I wonder where pay for trade contractors enters into that.*

Lucy: We pay them weekly. They know



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they have to get their draws into us by a certain time and we will process them. If it's a hardship and they've missed the deadline, we will work with them to accommodate that. The last thing we want to do is hold their money. Remember, we're using trades who we have worked with for a long time. We have checked references; we trust they're not fly-by-night. They stand behind their work. As far as back charges are concerned, there are times when that happens, but it's very rare. We will eat it before we back charge unless we really know its negligence on their part. If it's something like stuff happens, then we really think twice before we do that.

Tom: *Greg, what is your feeling on retain-*

age and back charges? probably different there where Lucy's at in Texas; we get 40 inches of frost in the ground. These guys are looking for some revenue early in the spring, so we take care of them because it's a hardship for them to get back on their feet.

Tom: *I'm going to switch gears a little bit. I'm leading up to this team effect and how they might be the same or how they might be different. Greg, how important is it that craftsmen working for you are dressed properly? I guess I would ask if you use uniforms and do you have company logos on your uniforms?*

Greg: Absolutely. All my guys, I'd say about 90 percent of the time, wear T-shirts and polo shirts. We give them a pile of clothes every so often. One of

craftsmen look professional? Do you have logo'd uniforms that you use from the office, and do you extend that to the trade partners?

Lucy: Most of the trades in terms of how they dress are pretty professional. The framers are out in that heat. Once in a while a few of the guys may strip down to the waist but that's a very rare occasion. We do not provide them shirts. We want to make sure they're identified by their own company and their own trade. We do have written codes that we give them in terms of behavior, language, music, job cleanliness, job safety, etc., with each job as they are awarded. Even though a trade has worked for us for 10-15 years, they still get that as a standard policy with each job.

Last summer I had to ask a gentlemen who worked for my roofing contractor to change his shirt because it had some obscenities on it.

age and back charges?

Greg: Again, I have never held a retainage and also on back charges. Once in a while, we'd work things out, I would say that we would back-charge them. Once in a while we would discount a bill. Some of my tradespeople have been with me since day one, and we have a good relationship.

Tom: *That's good. I have talked to some people who do not have a team approach, and they do it by the whip. And they are not as nice as you two people, I can tell you that.*

Greg: You can only whip so long.

Lucy: That's right. It's a team, and it's a partnership.

Greg: We pay on a 30-day calendar basis. We have a payroll every two weeks in our office. Whatever is in at a certain point gets paid. Sometimes, in the spring a concrete man will ask to get paid ahead of time; and he wants the job completed before the 30-days. We'll pay him because we understand they've been starving all winter up here. It's

my guys I had to pester because he had hole-y blue jeans. I had to ask him to clean that up because it was our reputation. They all have the shirts that they wear with logos.

Tom: *It's very important, we would agree. We have the same logo uniforms for everyone who is employed here and on certain trade contractors on certain jobs. Do you have a dress code for your trade contractors?*

Greg: Yes, I do. Last summer I had to ask a gentlemen who worked for my roofing contractor to change his shirt because it had some obscenities on it. I don't care if he was 20 feet in the air. He was polite and left and got a different shirt. I probably would have went and bought him several because of that. I also watch the music and that stuff on my job site in the same way that it's family friendly.

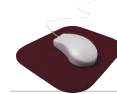
Tom: *Do you have a written guideline, falling short of an agreement, so that they know what you're expecting?*

Greg: No.

Tom: *Lucy, how important is it that the*

That would lead to the next question to follow up with this, and that is: how do you get the trade contractor to be part of your team?

Lucy: People call us because we have an excellent reputation. They know we treat them fairly, we pay them fairly and we are respectful of them. It's a team effort. We are a company that has built a reputation where we are respected in the community, both by the people who use our services as well as the trades who work with us. So, it's not the challenge. But in the beginning it was. It was a matter of good communication, paying on time, not retaining their money and just not messing with them – having the best people that our dollars and our client's dollars could pay for the services they provided and treating them fairly and respectfully. That's what all of us want. **PR**

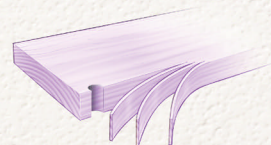


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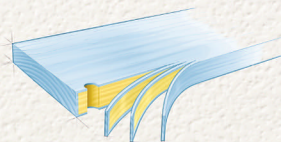


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Doug Dwyer
Contributing Editor



The Power of Meetings

So what's the big deal with meetings anyway? You meet with your subcontractor/carpenter to start a new project. Depending on the size of your company, you also meet

with your office manager, sales people, production manager and possibly your staff accountant, marketing manager or even your general manager.

You and I have meetings all the time, both informal and formal. When we are in business with little experience, meetings tend to be more informal and reactive to what's going on in your business. The goal as we grow in business is to be more proactive and to set up formal meetings with agendas and a strategy to reduce the need for the reactive, and often, less productive meetings.

How often should you have a meeting? It depends on the intended purpose. At our company, we have daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual meetings.

With our daily meeting, we cover critical numbers, reinforce our culture, report on what good is happening and address challenges. Typically it is a 10 minute standing meeting. Not all companies need a daily meeting, but they are highly effective and create a great team atmosphere.

Weekly meetings should be a minimum standard for all companies to reinforce company direction and goals, tracking and accountability for projects and sales being moved forward, proactively build your company culture and for training to keep your team growing. It is critical to have planned and structured meetings if you are going to free yourself from the business and produce the best results.

If done well, you will greatly increase the effectiveness of your team.

Monthly meetings are designed to review results compared to budget. We adopted the open-book management style early on sharing financial numbers of the company, and it has proven highly effective. These meetings are also utilized for training and group problem solving.

Quarterly meetings are highly effective for planning and brainstorming about the company's future needs. I recommend a minimum of once a year, taking half a day (or more) to do team building exercises. If facilitated correctly, this can give your team insight on how to better work together. An additional benefit is that it sends a message to your team that you care about them and that you're not just all business. Look at hiring an outside facilitator from a local college, consultant or perhaps someone at a club or church you belong to that would volunteer to help with a team building exercise.

The annual meeting's primary purpose is to plan for the New Year, i.e., the business plan and budgeting.

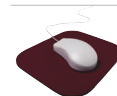
These descriptions are not meant to be an exhaustive list of how, why and when to have proactive, formally planned meetings, but they are more than enough for a good start. The point is to develop a structure, define a frequency and be consistent so that your

team has something to depend on. It's not about having meetings, it's about producing the greatest results with the resources you have.

I can remember many years ago when I had mainly reactive meetings versus planned, proactive meetings. (In reactive meetings, what you get is a lot of duplicated effort, waste and a culture of chaos.) One example: I would have the same conversation with two or three people at different times and would think I was doing well. At times it was better than not having meetings at all, but it is much more effective and efficient to meet at the same time. It creates synergy, group genius (several minds are better than one), builds a team, cuts down on follow-up meetings and saves everyone time.

With more frequent meetings and a proper structure, you can predict and identify problems quickly so they can be solved earlier and with much less expense. The problem could be a misunderstanding; a system that's not working or is needed; or that someone is thinking about quitting. There is more to the power of meetings than first meets the eye. If you haven't started, then get started. Or, if you are already having these types of meetings, ask yourself how can you take them to the next level. **PR**

Doug Dwyer is president and chief stewarding officer of DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen by Worldwide, one of the nation's largest remodeling franchises. He can be reached at doug.dwyer@dwyergrgroup.com.



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Good as Gold



A penchant for producing satisfied customers spurs Construction Ahead to significant growth

By Michael R. Morris
Editor in Chief

Four years ago, Austin Foster's Atlanta, design/build firm, Construction Ahead, was averaging about \$400,000 per year in installed sales volume. Last year, following steadily increasing annual sales, the firm's volume reached a hefty \$1.7 million.

Although a number of factors contributed to this rise in business, Foster places the majority of the credit on his company's ability to satisfy customers. In fact, 92 percent of his business in 2005 came from repeat customers. The other 8 percent stemmed from referrals.

"That says it all right there," says Foster, 39. "My focus has always been to make sure that everybody was happy with the job when we left. And a lot of times, that meant eating a significant amount of profit or me backing up and doing something that wasn't in the agreement. But in order to be able to leave the people happy, I did it."

During the early years of his business, now in its 14th year, it might have been tempting for Foster to take a hard stance with clients whose expectations exceeded either the agreement or just plain business sense – or both. But by sacrificing short-term gains and opting to build solid relationships with long-term customers, Foster has created a steady stream of quality prospects that flows to him.

Truth be told, making the customer happy is the only way Foster, CR, has ever known to do business.

"It's driven by the fact that I don't like to let people down," says Foster. "I want my word to be as good as gold. We may have some bumps, and

Austin Foster meets with Rachel Murray following the third of three projects Construction Ahead completed for her, including a sunroom addition, master suite addition and kitchen/living room remodel.

Photography by Robin Nelson



Construction Ahead owner Austin Foster meets with his staff weekly to relay customer feedback and go over results of the GuildQuality surveys.

it may not go perfectly, but in the end my customers will get what they paid for, and the experience along the way will be a good one. It's all grown out of that. That's the root of it all, that I want everybody happy with my work. And you just try to push your guys to understand that and make sure they have that same mentality."

Delegation transition

If there's been a difficult part for Foster, it would have to be figuring out how to pull back from the field enough to work *on* his business rather than *in* it, while delegating others to work more closely with customers whose happiness has allowed his business to blossom.

During his company's first 10 years, Foster handled all the sales, estimating and project management and employed two carpenters to carry out the production. It allowed him to keep a firm grasp on the business but didn't allow for the type of growth that has come since. Over the last four years, he has added four full-time positions (an office manager, production manager and two lead carpenters), and plans to hire an estimator by January 2007.

"I started realizing I couldn't do it all myself," says Foster. "So I started giving more and more control to my guys and trained them to be lead carpenters about four years ago. We've been following that system since but still

keeping that focus on making sure that no homeowner has anything but good stuff to say. You can't get 100 percent satisfaction out of every customer. That's impossible. But we want to try and come as close to that as we can."

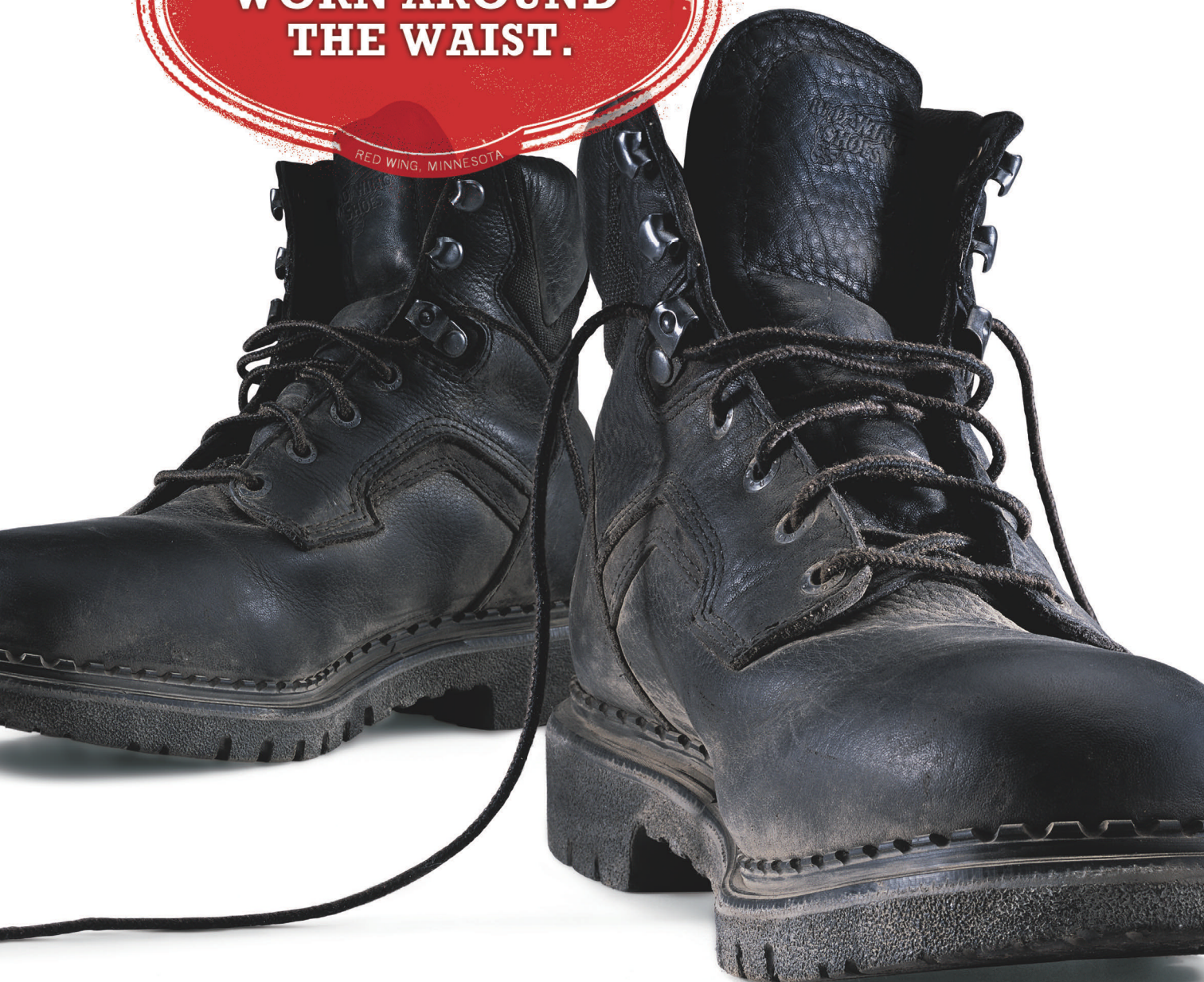
At the same time, Foster decided his company needed to become more system-oriented to handle the impending growth. Two years ago, he decided to hire GuildQuality, a customer satisfaction firm specializing in the remodeling industry, to conduct surveys of his clients so he could better document what was clearly a big differentiator for his company from the competition.

"Once I got to the point where things evolved and I was no longer in the field, I realized I really needed some way to continue monitoring customer satisfaction," Foster recalls. "In the beginning, I could track my customer satisfaction by the handshake at the end of the job. I had a good sense of what was going on. And even when I stepped out of the field and was acting as production manager, I was still in contact with homeowners and really staying in tune. I would tell people, 'Hey we've got satisfied clients,' and I was giving reference lists out always. But I wasn't able to quantify it."

Quantifying quality

GuildQuality provides survey results for every one of Construction Ahead's projects, as long as the homeowner

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“If there’s **hiccups or problems**, they know about them right away. We’ll tell them **we’re going to make up the time** on the schedule.”

— Austin Foster

responds. Foster is now able to show prospects third-party data in 14 areas of customer satisfaction: expertise; professionalism; innovation; schedule; construction quality; communication; problem resolution; cleanliness and safety; employees and subs; value; trust; punchlist; whether they would recommend the firm; and whether they would write a letter of recommendation.

“GuildQuality gave me the opportunity to be able to point to these numbers and say, you know what, we’re every bit as good as our peers and better than most,” says Foster. “And that’s been a real big help. It’s a way for me to keep control of customer satisfaction when I’m not there every day and still get a sense of how we’re doing.”

Foster shares individual results from the projects with his staff for training and improvement purposes; he also receives aggregate data over numerous projects from GuildQuality that shows how his company compares to his peers.

Construction Ahead has a 97.8 percent recommendation rate; the remodeling industry average is 68.9 percent. The company’s 86.7 percent easier-than-expected rate far exceeds their peers’ 76.5.

“I don’t have any formal kind of [customer satisfaction] training for my guys,” says Foster. “But there has always been, from me, a lot of emphasis placed upon it. I share feedback with them all the time. Anytime I get a note or letter from a homeowner, good or bad – and they’re mostly good – the first thing I do is make sure in our regular meetings, that I bring it out. I say ‘Look, I got this letter, pass it around and let everybody hear what was said about one of our guys.’ It reinforces what we’re trying to do and the message we’re trying to get out, and it gives the guy who got the comment a sort of bragging rights. He feels good about himself and wants to work that much harder. And the hope is that it kind of pushes him and the others toward doing better so they can get those kind of comments, too.”

Cultivating satisfaction

Foster’s personal values are certainly at the heart of Construction Ahead’s penchant for creating happy customers. But that doesn’t mean there isn’t a structured process behind it all.

From the very beginning of the working relationship between him and the customer, Foster creates an atmosphere conducive to achieving their ultimate happiness. He promptly contacts a prospect once a lead comes in and then communicates regularly with them throughout the bid process.

“It’s all about keeping your word,” says Foster. “I know that sounds pretty simple, but whether it’s returning phone calls in a prompt manner, or making sure that when you say you’re going to get back to them with a bid on Monday, you get back to them with a bid on Monday, you follow through. Or at the very least, if you can’t keep your promise, call on Friday afternoon and say, ‘My week went crazy; it’s going to be Wednesday,’ and then call them on Wednesday and have the bid ready. And that goes from the very beginning all the way through the process. Do what you say you’re going to do.”

The honest communication doesn’t stop once the sale is made. Foster provides the customer with a calendar of the job schedule with the contract, showing all dates of the major steps that the project will entail. This provides the client with the proper expectations from the start, so when the job stays on schedule, they know he has fulfilled all those expectations.

“They’re able to follow along and see how we are doing,” he says. “In this industry, guys will get the job started, clear out the kitchen and then they disappear for four days and no phone call, so it’s important to have something happening at all times. We run our schedule real tight, and we get into trouble with it sometimes when an inspection gets delayed or something. But we try to always have something happening at the job so the customer knows we’re working to stay on schedule. If for some reason nothing’s going to happen one day, then my guys know the expectation is that the homeowner better hear about it from them directly that, ‘Hey, no one’s going to be there tomorrow, but we’re still working. We had a glitch in the schedule, no worries.’ It’s all about communication.”

Foster also schedules frequent meetings with the customer during the course of the job to keep them informed about what stage they are at, what’s happening next, and what changes, if any, have been made to the original plan.

“If there’s hiccups or problems, they know about them right away,” he says. “We’ll tell them we’re going to make up the time on the schedule by putting a few more people over here this week or whatever, and they see that we’re

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“It’s not that hard to **keep them happy** when they see that we’re making **every effort** to **keep on the schedule.**”

— Austin Foster

trying to bring them back on schedule by doing that. It’s just keeping them informed about exactly what’s happening along the way so they know what to expect; they’re not guessing as to what’s happening this week. It’s not that hard to keep them happy when they see that we’re making every effort to keep on the schedule that we committed to in the beginning. And that really goes a long way to keeping them happy.”

When major changes are necessary, Foster is diligent in making sure everything is discussed thoroughly and then put in writing. Changes over \$1,000 are automatically signed by both the customer and Foster before any of the altered work is done. Even some changes below \$1,000 are done in this manner, depending upon the situation.

“We have a field change order that if the homeowner wants to move a door or something, the lead carpenter can give them a rough estimate, and they initial it, and it gets sent to the office,” says Foster. “We process it and get the actual cost and get it back to the homeowner right away. There’s always some gray area. At what price point can you go on with the work and at what point do you have to stop until the actual cost has been approved and signed? Most of the time our leads have a pretty good sense of what they can get away with and what needs to be signed by the office. Again, if you give the customer the expectation of how change orders are going to go and follow through with that process, they respond really well to it.”

Keeping the job site clean during the entire project is another area where Construction Ahead excels. Foster learned, like most of the other procedures that keep his customers happy, that cleanliness is important based on his own personal preference for how he likes to work.

“That came from my days on the job,” he says. “It’s just my personal way that I like to work. I don’t like to work in a bunch of clutter, so that whole policy in the way we do things was really to fit me, even though I’m not out there anymore. And we get a lot of good responses from

customers about that. We use a portable air scrubber on all our demolition and drywall. It goes a long way towards keeping the dust down. We tell them that we use dust control but that we can’t guarantee 100 percent dust-free. But it does make a difference. It’s the same with the setup of the job. Our tools and equipment are stored in a nice, neat pile or in an out-of-the-way area. At the end of the day, and certainly on Fridays, when that homeowner comes home, they can walk through their \$80,000 kitchen and not have to step over boards or not be able to walk through it and see how it’s unfolding and see it and be excited about it. That is one of the things we get a lot of comments about. ‘It’s so clean, and the job really looks neat.’ All that goes back to making it a pleasant experience for them. In a nutshell, it’s about not giving them something to gripe about, and you won’t have problems.”

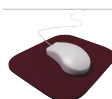
Sales and marketing strategy

Foster has formulated his sales and marketing strategy to take full advantage of Construction Ahead’s wealth of satisfied past clients. His marketing campaign consists mainly of a quarterly newsletter to past customers, because essentially 100 percent of last year’s work came directly from past customers – 92 percent repeat and 8 percent referral.

“Every year’s not 92 percent, but all of our advertising is really just reaching out to past customers,” he says. “The way I look at marketing, when you start looking at the money, at least in my opinion, you start throwing it out there to the general public, you’re really inviting a lot of tire kickers in. So our strategy has just been to make sure that we stay in touch and on top of all the people that we already have dealt with. We let them know how much we appreciate them, that we’re thinking about them – and that’s fed us a lot more work.”

And when Foster is in the competitive bid process, he uses his communication skills to help close the sale.

“When they say, ‘We’ve had two guys come out and they haven’t gotten back to us yet,’ I say, ‘How do you expect their customer service is gonna be when you call them three-quarters of the way through this project and it’s over budget and you’re behind schedule? How do you think they’re going to react then, if right now while the entire profit and all the positives are still on the table, they can’t get back to you in a timely fashion? How do you think they’re going to be when there is a problem?’ And that helps. I close a lot of sales that way.” **PR**



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Going on Spec

One design/build firm found itself capitalizing on a rowhouse remodel in Washington, D.C.

By Wendy A. Jordan
Contributing Editor



Brothers Ethan and Chris Landis, co-owners of Landis Construction, never search for spec remodeling projects. “They fall in our lap” at the rate of about one a year, says Ethan. If the Washington, D.C., design/build company’s other spec remodels were lapdogs of the Chihuahua variety – buildings that didn’t require much in the way of improvements – Landis’s latest spec property was a mastiff.

It had so much going for it – it was a handsome 1900-vintage three-story rowhouse in one of the most prestigious and well-located in-town locations. Not only did the house sit in a historic district where Landis had done several projects and wanted to do more, but the redesigned and renovated house could be a showplace of the core work Landis does, says Ethan.

It would be no low-cost, quick-turnaround project. The owner hadn’t lived in there since a small fire charred one end of the second floor 25 years earlier. Though sprinkled with fine turn-of-the-century features, the interior was hopelessly deteriorated and dated. Bringing the house back to life would require a gut remodel tempered with painstaking restoration of period details and reconstructing the two-story rear extension.

The project landed in Landis’s lap after the owner died in 2004. One of the owner’s relatives asked Landis to estimate the cost of remodeling the house, thinking she might buy it from the estate, then remodel and sell it. The relative decided not to proceed with the project, but Ethan couldn’t pass it up. In October 2004, Landis took out a loan and bought the property from the estate for \$600,000, planning to sell it quickly and customize the remodel with features and finishes of the new buyer’s choice. That’s not what happened.

Contractor as client

Demo began in March 2005, but construction was delayed an additional four months while Landis waited for a permit to be issued from the backlogged city permit department.

The neglected façade was an eyesore. New roofing, tinwork, period-style windows, a brass kick plate on the door, vintage door hardware and cleaned, repointed masonry brought it up to snuff without altering its historical integrity. *Photos by Yerko Pallominy*

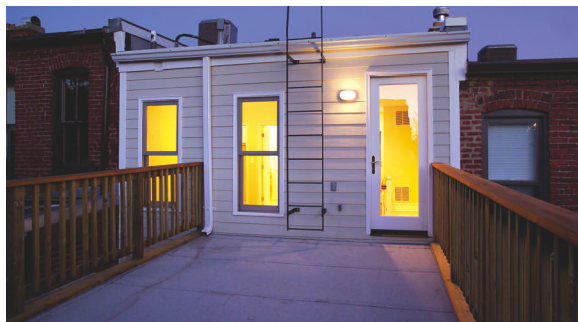


The third floor opens onto the new roof terrace.

At one point early in the construction process, potential buyers talked to Ethan about customizing the remodel. “The people danced with us for a month,” during which they went on vacation, says Ethan. When they came back they decided not to buy. “It was costing too much to sit on” the property, Ethan says, so he became both contractor and “client” and the remodel moved forward.

Anticipating the priorities of buyers looking to live in the neighborhood, he oversaw the design of a remodel that celebrated the old-house charm but created a modern, open floor plan. Every inch counted in the shoebox shaped house, which is only 16 feet wide and about 62 feet front to back. He pulled out first-floor walls to create a wide open kitchen-dining-living space. The second floor gained a bathroom and laundry area so that both the master bedroom and the second bedroom have private baths. Two rooms on the third floor were designed to be bedrooms or office space; they share a bathroom and a new third-floor roof terrace.

The basement presented opportunities as well as problems. Ethan wanted to raise the ceiling — or lower the floor — of the basement in the main house and the rear addition to add a versatile space the owners could use as an in-law suite, office, home theater or nanny apartment. In a landlocked rowhouse with access only through the front door or a narrow alley, this meant three days of digging by hand and lugging the dirt away bucket by bucket. “We dug out



THE FINANCIALS

In fall 2004, when Landis Construction bought a 3,000-square-foot rowhouse for \$600,000, Ethan Landis estimated that renovations would cost \$550,000 and take about 11 months. As it turned out, “We did more and we spent more,” he says. The tab for the full renovation, plus the cost of holding the property three extra months due to delays, eroded gross profits by several percentage points. Nevertheless, on a square foot basis of around \$206, Landis says the \$620,000 final construction cost was “actually pretty good.”

Ethan and his brother, company co-owner Chris Landis, “ran [the project] through our books at close to what retail costs ought to be” to remodel the house for an outside client, Ethan says. But after selling the house for \$1.57 million in 2006 — the going rate then for fully remodeled houses like this in sought-after, in-town locations — they determined that it would be better from a financial standpoint to declare the income as a capital gain, taxed at 15 percent, rather than as business profit.

To ensure preservation of the historic façade and reap additional tax benefits, Landis Construction donated a façade easement to a local nonprofit architectural conservation group called The L’Enfant Trust. The

donation cost Landis about \$15,000, including processing charges and the fees paid to an appraiser and an expediter. The appraiser calculated the façade to be worth 9 percent of the value of the house. Ethan and Chris donated the easement as equal partners, so each could claim a one-time tax credit of 4.5 percent of the property value.

Budget History

Initial estimate:	\$550,000
Change orders: (additional underpinning and structural work for rear addition, wood flooring, basement water protection)	70,000
Final price of job:	620,000
Cost to produce:	492,000
Budgeted gross profit	30%
Actual gross profit	21%



Before

Before the renovation, a pantry cut off the kitchen from the living area. Large dressing areas wasted space on the upper floors but left some bedrooms closetless. Landis created an airy, open kitchen-dining-living area and reallocated the upstairs space to carve out an extra bathroom on the second floor and closets for all rooms.

about 2 feet,” down to the main plumbing line to yield 7½ foot ceilings says project manager Alan Hobbs.

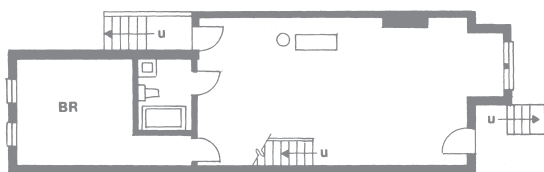
Meanwhile, Hobbs had found that the old house had virtually no foundation. To underpin the structure, he and his crew poured footings every four feet along the party walls, toting in wet concrete by the bucket. Hobbs

removed a basement beam to open the room, then doubled up most of the ceiling and floor joists in the house to carry the load.

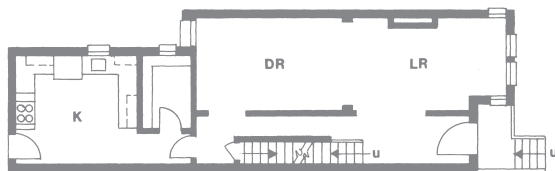
Capturing the charm

Though white walls and shiny new fixtures made the inte-

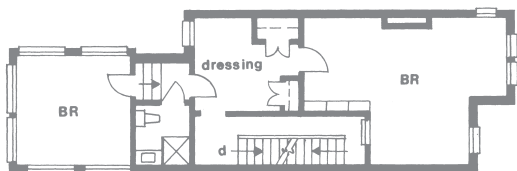
Before



BSMT



1st FL

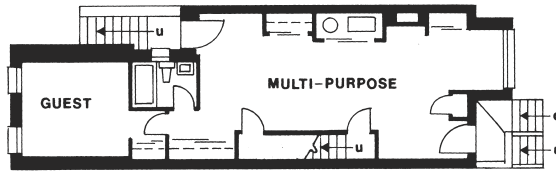


2nd FL

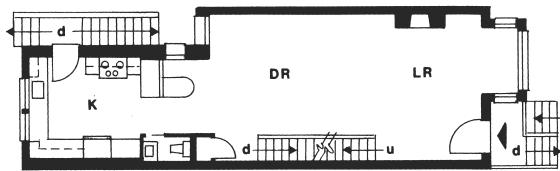


3rd FL

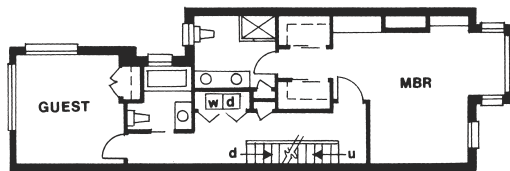
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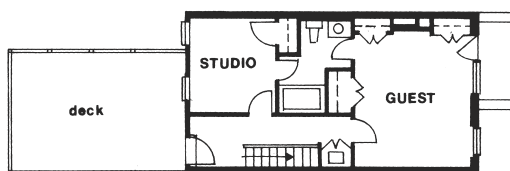
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1st FL



2nd FL



3rd FL

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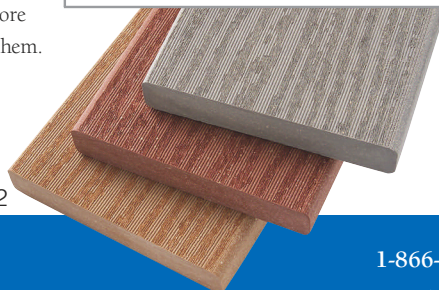
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Landis Construction was able to preserve much of the rowhouse's original antique charm, including the heart pine flooring, while updating most of the walls and fixtures.

rior of the house look bright and fresh, Ethan preserved as many antique features as possible. That included much of the antique heart pine flooring. Refinishing the floor and feathering in new, matching strips added a week or two to the job, but it was probably worth doing. "It's a charm thing," Ethan says. He was able to reuse the old stair treads, banister and many of the pickets, replacing damaged pickets with custom-made clones and putting in a custom-turned railing on the newly opened first floor staircase to match the old railings.

The interior still displays the patina of age but, served by all new plumbing and wiring plus high-efficiency HVAC systems and insulation, it offers a level of comfort unheard of when the house was originally built.

After decades of neglect, the house's façade regained its standing in the neighborhood. Landis cleaned up the front door, fitted it out with period hardware from a salvage store, and installed energy-efficient windows that look like originals. Hobbs pulled out and reset a masonry panel under the bay window, replaced the copper gutters and formed new decorative tin fascia around the third floor balcony. When he removed water-damaged limestone bricks from the third floor to replace them, he was surprised to discover that they were not bricks at all but cinderblocks with a concrete veneer. Landis set up a little "brick factory" on site, dipping about 50 brick-size cinderblocks in concrete and slipping them into place on the historic façade.

SNAPSHOT



Remodelers: Ethan Landis and Chris Landis, Landis Construction Corporation

Location: Washington, D.C.

Type of company: Design/build

Staff model: 20 office, 25 field

Years in business: 16

Sales history:

2002	\$3,000,000
2003	\$4,950,000
2004	\$5,590,000 residential \$620,000 commercial
2005	\$7,300,000 residential \$1,170,000 commercial
2006 (projected)	\$9,000,000 residential \$1,010,000 commercial

Annual jobs: 55-60

Workweek: 40 hours

Software: AutoCAD, Master Builder, Microsoft Office, 3D Sketch, Photoshop, PageMaker, Illustrator, Corel Draw, Dreamweaver

Contact: 202/726-3777, www.landisconstruction.com

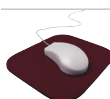
Attracting a buyer

As soon as Landis finished construction in March 2006, Ethan listed the property. After three weeks, the house sold for \$1.57 million, \$21,000 more than the asking price. The new owners were expecting a baby and bought the house for many of the reasons Ethan had predicted: the in-town location; the nice, friendly neighborhood; the old house; the light, bright, open spaces. For the new owners, the house is a smart investment.

Was it a smart investment for Landis Construction? "I would seriously consider doing it again," says Ethan. "I wouldn't jump at it." Chris puts it this way: "You always have to look at the cost-benefit analysis. We would have made more money doing other things for clients and getting paid as we went along. Ethan would have been out selling more work. But it's a great-looking project. We're going to put it on our Web site" to spread the word about the good work Landis Construction can do. **PR**

PRODUCTS LIST

Bathtubs: American Standard. **Dishwasher:** Bosch. **Heat pump and gas furnace:** Carrier. **Insulation:** Icynene. **Interior door hardware:** Baldwin. **Kitchen cabinets:** Crystal. **Whirlpool tub:** Americh. **Windows:** Weather Shield.



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great room

Upward, Outward and Onward

Revamping the floor plan and adding a seemingly sky-high skylight changed the aesthetic balance of this home

Having purchased their second home, the homeowners initially came to Eren Design & Remodeling intending to simply update the kitchen. But Eren owner and general contractor Janice Donald had worked on many of the other homes in that subdivision, and she knew that if the homeowners really wanted their Tucson, Ariz. home to be a standout, they needed to look up, up and away from the kitchen.

“Raising the ceiling in the entryway was the feature that would have the single biggest impact in this project,” she

says. “We painted the picture of what was possible – what we saw that they weren’t looking at – and as soon as they could see what was possible, we began taking down the walls.”

The ceiling height was raised from 7 feet, 9 inches to 8 feet, 10 inches. A 10-foot-high skylight was added to make the entryway more majestic and less confined and to capture the beautiful mountain and city views. Knocking down the walls and raising the ceilings made each individual facet of the great room – which, collectively, set the tone

Remodeler: Eren Design & Remodeling Co., Inc.

Project location: Tucson, Ariz.

Scope of work: A whole-house renovation, with special focus on the great room (entryway, living room and dining room)

The home’s new design works in concert and breathes new life into existing elements and spaces. The columns and revamped exposed beam lend the clearstory windows aesthetic balance. Likewise, widening the pocket doors, which mimic the front doors in the entryway, establishes a likeness that is reflected in the furniture choices and kitchen cabinetry and windows.

After photography by Robin Stancliff

and establish the character of the home – and created the open, spacious feel the homeowners wanted.

The lighting scheme of the great room – especially the ambient lighting in the skylight (cove lighting hidden behind molding), down-lit columns and the pin lighting added to highlight specific pieces of art in the home – creates a warm and inconspicuously smart relationship between the three spaces. Donald says that more attention to detail was given in this project as they were able to execute it as a true turn-key project: Eren did all of the interior decorating, chose furnishings and created other individual touches, such as the handcrafted fireplace screen and the handcrafted hardware on the exposed beam.

“Our clients really did want something different than the other houses in that subdivision, and by us completing every part of the design, we made sure it had the Eren signature,” Donald says of the four-month, \$450,000 project. She estimates that the great room represents approximately 15 percent of the total



The raised ceiling along with the arched entry and column supports helped to create an open feel to the kitchen and keep consistency throughout the house.

No Frame is the Same

Even though Eren Design & Remodeling in Tucson, Ariz., has experience working on similar home models in that neighborhood, they soon found what all good remodelers know: you never know what you’ll find once you get behind the walls. Once the entryway was stripped to install the skylight, they discovered the entryway was the transfer for gas, water and HVAC. They first added another HVAC unit to the far end of the house to relieve the load on that primary unit, and then they built a soffit down the length of the master bedroom to reroute the existing HVAC lines which feed both the master bedroom and living room. Finally,

the gas and water lines were pushed to the roof line, which gave the necessary space for entirely reframing the area so it could accommodate each of the skylights.

“It was a complex feat to get the four skylights balanced and centered in that existing framing and making them appear as one unit,” Donald says of this three-week process. “Our designer worked very closely in the field to ensure the skylight was centered in the space, worked well with the front doors and had presentation integrity.” All of this was accomplished without adding any soffits to any of the rooms in the great room area and thereby diminishing ceiling height.





project cost and five weeks of the total project time. "With the free reign we were given from our clients, we were able to do everything we could possibly think of to rejuvenate this home and make it stand out." **PR**

– Meghan Haynes

PRODUCTS LIST

HVAC: Broan-NuTone. **Doors:** Andersen, Pella. **Fireplace:** Flame Connection. **Home Systems & Controls:** Accura. **Lighting Fixtures:** Kichler. **Locksets:** Baldwin, Schlage. **Paints & Stains:** Dunn Edwards. **Millwork & Molding:** Royal. **Security Systems:** ADT. **Windows:** Milgard, Pella



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Initially, the entry doors stood near a mirrored wall, which bordered the wet bar in the next room. Eren removed the bar to create an appealing, angled view into the living room that would add more natural light. However, because the mirrored/wet bar wall was bearing, Eren used hollowed-out concrete posts to camouflage the needed post-and-beam supports, that infused the space with style, spatially defined each room and kept costs down. "That wall span was probably close to 20 feet, so there would have been lots of engineering fees to have an expensive single beam. The concrete posts are not obvious and don't give away that what we were trying to accomplish was support."

When Size Matters



Proper HVAC sizing improves efficiency, health, comfort

By Scott T. Shepherd
PATH Partners

When doing an addition or renovation, remodelers often have to reconfigure or even replace the home's heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system.

If you want your customers to be really happy with the job, sizing the system correctly is key.

"Properly sized HVAC systems lead to satisfied and comfortable customers; lower initial and operating costs; reduced callbacks; and healthier indoor air quality," says Carl Seville, former owner of SawHorse Inc., in Atlanta and currently president of Seville Consulting, a company that helps remodelers, builders, and homeowners incorporate

sustainable practices in their projects.

In every job, Seville recommends comparing the size of the system to the needs of the house. Many homes have been built with oversized HVAC systems that cost more to operate and leave the home feeling damp and drafty.

Through proper sizing, you may also be able to reduce your equipment costs.

"We've been in situations where we could take a ton or more off the HVAC system by doing a careful and accurate Manual J-load calculation," says Seville. The Air Conditioning Contractors of America's (ACCA) Manual J is the industry standard for HVAC sizing.

Rules made to be broken

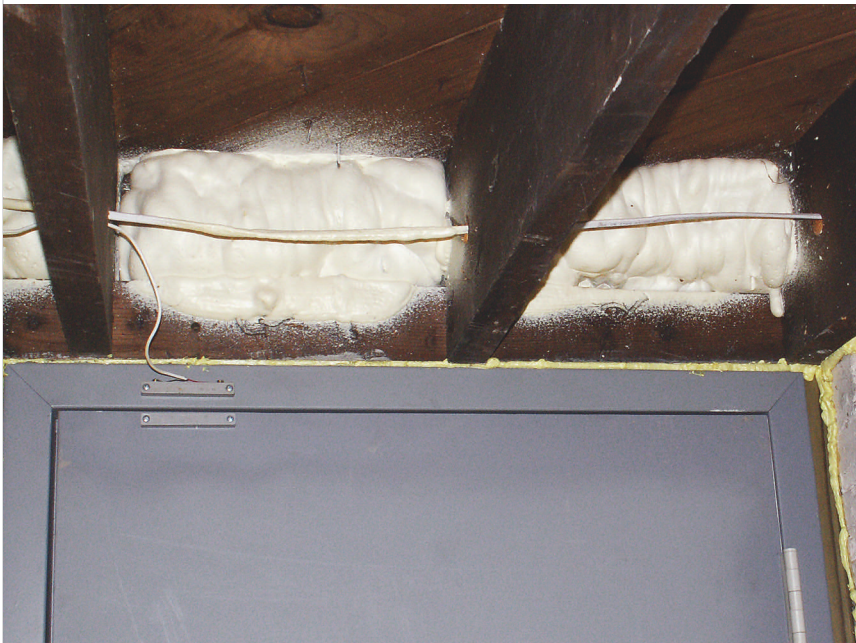
Too often, builders and contractors rely on rules of thumb to determine HVAC

Use the ACCA's Manual D to calculate the proper size of ductwork in newly remodeled spaces.

size. The accepted estimate is that the HVAC unit should provide 1 ton (12,000 Btu) of air conditioning for 400 to 500 square feet of building area.

However, this rule fails to take into account how well the home is insulated, how well it's sealed and the local climate. In a very efficient house, 1 ton could condition 800 to 1,000 square feet of space.

"Many HVAC contractors don't understand that the system has to be right-sized to dehumidify well," Seville says. "They are afraid of undersizing the system because they don't want their customers to complain about being hot in the summer. But a house simply



The accepted estimate of 12,000 Btu of air conditioning per 400 to 500 square feet of space doesn't take into consideration how well the home is insulated.

won't be dehumidified properly if the HVAC is oversized. We've seen situations where the owners have to keep a house at 65 degrees in the summer to keep it dry."

"Air conditioners cool a house first, then dehumidify it," he adds. "If an HVAC unit is too large, it will short cycle. That is, it will turn on, cool the house down, and turn off again before removing much humidity from the air. Frequent starting and stopping increases energy consumption, makes the home uncomfortable, contributes to mold and indoor air quality problems and wears down the equipment faster."

"A right-sized system combined with proper air sealing creates a healthier house. Together, the two will maintain a comfortable humidity level, reduce the occurrences of allergy-causing mold, and help keep dust and pollen outdoors."

A better way

The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH) provides guidance on HVAC sizing in "*HVAC Package*

for New Construction – Forced Air System," a Tech Set available at www.pathnet.org.

HVAC systems should be sized using ACCA's manuals J and S, the industry standards for residential load calculations and equipment selection required by most U.S. building codes. These load calculations will ensure that the system achieves optimal efficiency.

"Using Manual J, a contractor calculates heat loss from the house through walls, ceilings and leaky ductwork, and infiltration through windows, doors and other penetrations," says Seville. "Manual J also helps calculate heat gain into the house from sunlight; people; lights and appliances; doors; walls; and windows."

Most of the information needed for sizing cooling loads can be taken directly from house plans. Essential information includes solar gain, which is a function of window area; orientation of the house; window type and glazing (such as Low-E, low solar heat gain coefficient, gas-filled); shading from landscaping and building overhangs; and shingle and siding type and color.

"Most remodelers don't own the software and don't perform the loads themselves," Seville says. "But there is always the risk that an HVAC subcontractor who knows how to use the software may not correctly size a system for a particularly well-sealed and efficient house. That's why the remodeler or builder needs to be involved. Make sure the inputs are accurate."

There are also simpler versions of Manual J – Manual J-8 Abridged Edition for instance – that make it easier to learn the procedures and do the hand calculations.

If you need to replace or install ducts, they should be designed to ensure proper air distribution using ACCA's Manual D. Do load calculations room by room to properly size the ductwork. Also, place the plenum in a central location to minimize duct lengths. This will reduce material and operation costs.

PATH's Tech Set recommends sealing all ducts, including plenum junctions, with foil tape that meets UL 181, or with mastic, the only sealant approved by the ACCA.

If you are replacing the HVAC unit, place the outside condensing unit out of direct sunlight and in a location with consistent airflow.

Old home with modern air

In remodeling a historic Atlanta home, Seville used proper HVAC installation and sizing practices that significantly reduced the home's energy use and improved indoor air quality.

Although the home more than doubled in size – from 2,300 square feet to 4,700 square feet – the energy bills remained the same. And the home was more comfortable than before.

"The real pay-off for the remodeler is counted in customer satisfaction," Seville says. "When the equipment functions properly, the home is more comfortable and the air quality is better. The homeowners notice that immediately. Then they start to see the impact on their util-

ity bills. Rising energy prices make this improvement even more valuable.”

“Load calculations cost approximately \$100 or \$200 per house and take between one and two hours for an average home. However, this cost is often recouped immediately because the system can typically be downsized. If a number of homes with similar plans are being calculated, costs are even lower.”

In the end, Seville’s decision comes down to quality, not cost.

The right person for the job

If you have to replace, install or upgrade an HVAC unit, you’ll probably rely on your contractor. But not all HVAC contractors are equally informed about sizing issues. Ask these three questions to determine whether the contractor is as qualified as he thinks:

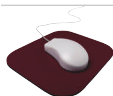
1. What are your duct sealing methods?
2. What software or calculations do you use to size your HVAC system?
3. In which previous projects have you used this software or calculations?

“Contractors should know Manual D and J,” says Glenn Hourahan, ACCA’s vice president for research and technology.

“A lot of times a contractor will say they know them – and they should because they are required by code – but by asking them how they are doing it, you can discover that they don’t even have the correct tools.”

Although spending the extra time to find the right contractor may seem like a chore, Hourahan says it’s nothing compared to the time lost to a callback or work lost because of a bad reference. **PR**

Scott T. Shepherd writes about better building practices on behalf of PATH. The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH, www.pathnet.org) is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



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Resource Information

To learn more about HVAC sizing, consult the links provided online. Visit www.ProRemodeler.com and click on “When Size Matters.”

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Onan

The Onan HomeSite 6500 portable power generator delivers 5 kilowatts of power with a 13 horsepower engine, circuit breaker protection, cast iron sleeve and a 6.5 gallon fuel tank. The generator can run nine continuous hours and is outfitted with two plug-ins. Whole-house residential standby generators are also available 2.8, 4 and 45 kW.

763/574-5000

www.onan.com

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Luxaire

The Microchannel MiniCube 13 SEER air conditioner from Luxaire is the smallest unit of its kind. Available in one- to three-ton sizes, the unit uses an aluminum tube coil with micro channel technology to provide higher efficiency without a corresponding increase in coil surface area while using less refrigerant. The unit's footprint remains 21¾ inches square and the height varies from 22½ inches to 30¾ inches depending on the unit's capacity.

405/364-4040

www.luxaire.com

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Napoleon

The Park Avenue fireplace line from Napoleon features a night light, a heat-circulating blower, the company's Phazeramic flame burner technology, cast iron andirons and a handheld remote to control both the night light and flame height and intensity. The fireplaces burn at 26,000 BTUs and come with fluted refractory or sandstone herringbone panels.

705/721-1212

www.napoleonfireplaces.com

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American Fluorescent

Designed by artist Stephen Blackman, the Wellesley Chandelier from American Fluorescent is a five light, energy-efficient model that also features high-temperature wax candles for an authentic feel. The fixture uses five triple 13-watt compact fluorescent bulbs and one regular 13-watt CFL. Each chandelier has a dimmable ballast, flush mount, sconce and outdoor lantern.

847/249-5970

www.americanfluorescent.com

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Lutron Electronics

Based on its predecessor, Lutron's Maestro IR remote control dimmer has LED light level indicators and raise/lower buttons. The infrared remote control can be used up to 30 feet away from the dimmer. The remote can be replaced by most programmable universal remote controls. For builders, screw terminals have replaced wire leads and wire connectors, reducing clutter in the back box and installation time.

888/LUTRON1

www.lutron.com

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Desa

Direct vent fireplace systems can be upgraded with Desa Hearth Products' VersaFire burner and log design system. The system standardizes the burner and log interfaces, delivering more BTUs with a realistic-looking flame pattern. The line is available in various dimensions and styles. The company's Ceramat silicon carbide-coated mat allows gas to flow efficiently.

866/672-6040

www.desaint.com

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Fantech

The REG100FL luxury bath fan with fluorescent light from Fantech is Energy Star qualified and has a 5½-inch housing to fit between floor or ceiling joists. The 6-inch exhaust grille has a 14-watt compact fluorescent bulb. It features a 122 CFM fan and a one-vent assembly. Two-vents and 263 CFM fan models are available.

800/747-1762

www.fantech.net

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Carrier

A programmable digital control for Carrier's Infinity System provides longer heating and cooling cycles at lower fan speeds for energy savings and more consistent temperatures throughout the home. It measures and regulates temperature, humidity, air-flow, ventilation, indoor air quality and zoning in a single control. It also advises when it's time for regular maintenance and filter changes.

860/674-3000

www.carrier.com

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Heatilator

The latest line of fireplaces from Heatilator is available as a direct vent or b-vent configuration in 36-inch and 42-inch sizes. The facades are available in a standard refractory pattern or a weathered option and also feature a larger log size.

Available fronts: modernist, arts & crafts and Jamestown.

800/927-6847

www.heatilator.com

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Emerson

The Tommy Bahama ceiling fan line from Emerson includes the Marine, a 54-inch hardwood-blade fan trimmed in silver or bronze. The blades are available with teak, dark cherry or medium antique with housings. A halogen light is included with an optional plate for non-light use. The fan comes with a wall control unit and 80-inch lead wires.

314/553-5000

www.emersonclimate.com

Circle 134 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-134>



Kichler Lighting

The Independence line from Kichler lighting incorporates modern and colonial-era Williamsburg style with Shaker feel. This line is finished in oiled bronze and has exposed candelabra lamps and mocha silk shades to hide faux candles. The line is also offered in an antique pewter finish accompanied by satin-etched glass shades.

Fax: 216/573-1003

www.kichler.com

Circle 135 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-135>



Rheem

Featuring the Guardian flameable vapor ignition resistance technology, the Rheem FVIR power vent gas water heaters have vent run capabilities that make it possible to vent vertically or horizontally up to 100 feet with 2-inch or 3-inch PVC, ABS or CPVC pipe. Each model features a quiet blower and electronic ignition controls.

800/432-8373

www.rheem.com

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International Comfort Products

The 14 SEER SoftSound SX 2400 residential heat pumps from Comfortmaker, a division of International Comfort Products, has a wider fan propeller diameter, two-speed motor and a sound jacket for quieter operation. The unit also has an LED fault indicator to diagnose system malfunctions and a 10-year limited warranty on the compressor.

305/406-1177

www.icpusa.com

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Ouellet Canada

Capable of temperature readings every 15 seconds and cycling heat 240 times-an-hour, the digital electronic thermostat from Ouellet can, according to the company, lower energy costs from 15 to 20 percent. The baseboard heater model is in accordance with OSHA standards and listed for use in both the United States and Canada. Available in several models and voltages.

800/463-7043

www.ouellet.com

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Leviton

For automated control of fluorescent lights, appliances or high wattage incandescent lighting, Leviton's X10-compatible, 15 amp wall switches use a mechanical relay to switch the load, opposed to triacs for switching. The wall switch modules come with an interchangeable white/ivory paddle switch cover and require a neutral wire connection.

800/824-3005

www.leviton.com

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SunStar Heating Products

Available as a natural or LP gas model, the EN10 10,000 BTU per hour vent-free radiant gas room heater from SunStar has a Piezo spark ignition system that uses a pilot light. The EN10 has two configurations in either a top-mounted manual control or a non-electric thermostatic control. The heater has an automatic gas shut off if oxygen levels fall below normal in a room.

1-7-SUNSTAR

www.sunstarheaters.com

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Electrolux

Offering HEPA filtration, the Afuera central vacuum system from Electrolux features the company's CleanStream filter from the makers of Gore-Tex. The vacuum has 550 watts of power and has an LCD display to inform users when it is time for maintenance or filter changes. The filter is guaranteed for the life of the system.

800/896-9756

www.electroluxusa.com

Circle 141 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-141>



A.O. Smith

The Vertex residential power-vent gas water heater from A.O. Smith has a 90 percent thermal efficiency and generates 76,000 BTUs of heat. The unit can output 127 gallons in the first hour and has a 92 gallon recovery at a 90 degree rise. It also features side taps for combination systems.

800/527-1953

www.aosnewproducts.com

Circle 142 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-142>



Progress Lighting

The indoor Oxford silver ceiling fan has a three-speed reversible motor and features reversible 52-inch cherry or oak blades. Made by Progress Lighting, the Oxford's canopy can be applied to sloped ceilings up to 45 degrees. An outlet box mounting plate has a simple wiring hook-up and an oversized hanger ball reduces vibrations and wobbling.

864/599-6000

www.progresslighting.com

Circle 143 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-143>



Panasonic

With a depth of 3 3/4 inches, the WhisperValue ventilation fan uses less energy than conventional fans and is Energy Star-certified. The fan has a back-draft damper and white metal grill with detachable adaptors, secured duct ends and adjustable mounting brackets. The model also features a double-hanger bar system for ideal positioning.

866/292-7292

www.panasonic.com/building

Circle 144 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-144>



Heat & Glo

The Soulstice gas fireplace from the Modern Collection by Heat & Glo has a low heat output feature for extended use and a programmable function to start the fireplace. A sleep timer turns the unit off at night. The fireplace features the company's Halo surround and has a metallic finish for a contemporary look.

888/427-3973

www.heatnglo.com

Circle 145 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-145>



GE CFL

Extended-life compact fluorescent lamps from GE include 12,000-hour Spiral lamps and 10,000-hour reflectors. They come in 10-42-watt varieties and have a 2,700 maximum lumen output and burn at 2,700 degrees Kelvin with a color-rendering index of 82. They last 60 percent longer than previous CFLs. Regular plug-in, self-ballast and bright-stick designs are available.

800/GE-LAMPS

www.gelighting.com/na/business_lighting

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Fedders

The latest line of 13 Seer compact split AC systems from Fedders range from 1.5 to 4 tons, have a top air discharge, a large coil surface and an easy access control box. Each unit also has a factory-installed liquid line filter dryer and a brass suction and discharge service valve. The exterior is coated with a 1,000-hour salt spray polyester finish.

908/604-8686

www.fedders.com

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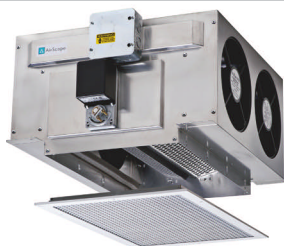
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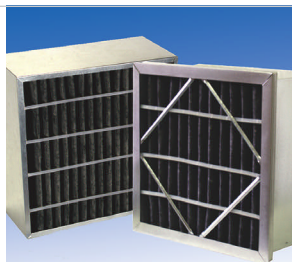
HVACQuick

The AirScape 1.7 Whole House fan from HVACQuick is a central exhaust fan which can be used as an AC unit in warmer climates or to complement existing units. It consumes one-tenth the energy of most air conditioners and has a motorized, insulated door. It operates at 60 Hz for 140 total watts with 1700 CFM at high speed and 1000 CFM at low speed. It installs between 16 or 24 inch O/C joists.

877/711-4822

www.hvacquick.com

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D-Mark

Also designed for pharmaceutical and cleanroom applications, the D-Mark OdorGuard Rigid Cell HVAC Filters offer extended surface chemical filtration. The filters use granular activated carbon or a 50/50 blend of carbon and activated alumina impregnated with 5 percent potassium permanganate to remove odors, VOC's and light gases.

800/343-3610

www.dmarkinc.com

Circle 149 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-149>



Noritz

Often no bigger than the size of a suitcase, the compact tankless water heaters from Noritz output 190,000 BTUs an hour. They can be installed indoors or outdoors and have a power-vented 4-inch flue. The units are activated with direct ignition rather than a pilot light.

877/966-6748

www.noritz.com

Circle 150 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-150>



Myson

The WhispaE 110-volt kick-space heater has 30-inch hoses and a 1/2 inch compression fitting. Made by Myson, the unit may be connected to a timer or thermostat for control. It can handle temperatures up to 250 degrees Fahrenheit and works at 100psi while drawing 13 amps on high.

800/698-9690

www.mysoninc.com

Circle 151 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-151>



Hunter

The Casbah fan line from Hunter is available in a pewter finish with faux leather and a satin bronze finish with faux acorn leather. Both styles have four dark walnut veneer blades with a 52-inch span. The fan is powered by a 172 mm by 15 mm AirMax motor and can be installed in flush, standard or angled mountings.

800/4HUNTER

www.hunterfan.com

Circle 152 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-152>



Lennox

The Elite Series outdoor gas fireplace by Lennox has a stainless steel front face and its firebox parts are weather resistant. The unit has a contemporary tall design and has a hidden burner of lava rocks to create a natural presentation. The fireplace burns at 60,000 BTU and is available with screened opening widths of 36-inch and 42-inches.

714/921-6112

www.lennoxhearthproducts.com

Circle 153 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-153>



Broan

Fresh Air Systems from Broan includes the HRV90H, a compact, heat recovery ventilator for homes from 1,500 to 3,000 square feet. The unit is designed specifically for use in places with limited space. It eliminates excess moisture during the heating season while recovering heat from outgoing stale air. It has a net recovering efficiency of 65 percent when operating at low speed at 32 degrees.

800/558-1711

www.broan.com

Circle 154 or go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5220-154>



Trane

According to the company, the CleanEffects system from Trane removes 99.98 percent of airborne particles such as bacteria, pollen and mold spores from the filtered air – even particles as small as .3 microns. It uses electricity comparable to a 75 watt light bulb. Testing was done by LMS Technologies in the laboratory and by Environmental Health & Engineering (EH&E), under real-world operating conditions.

www.trane.com

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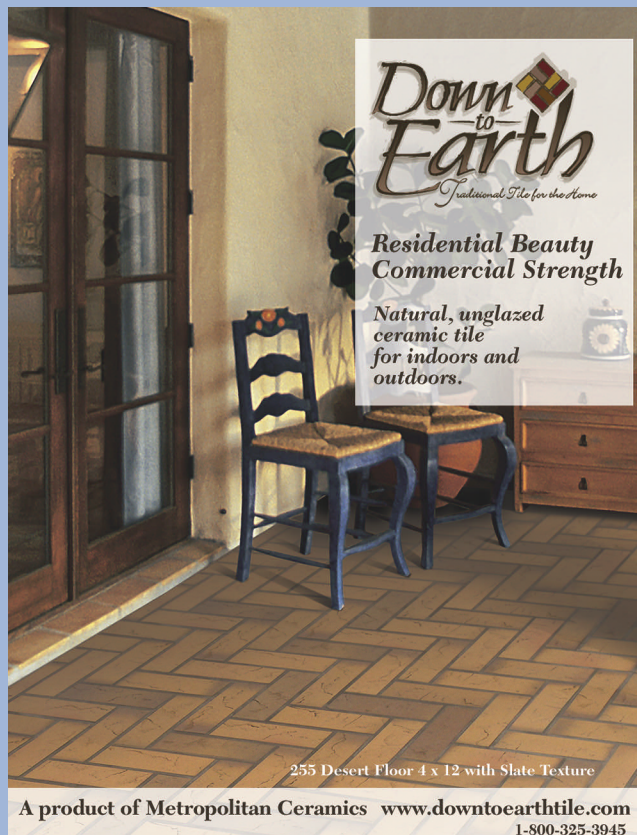
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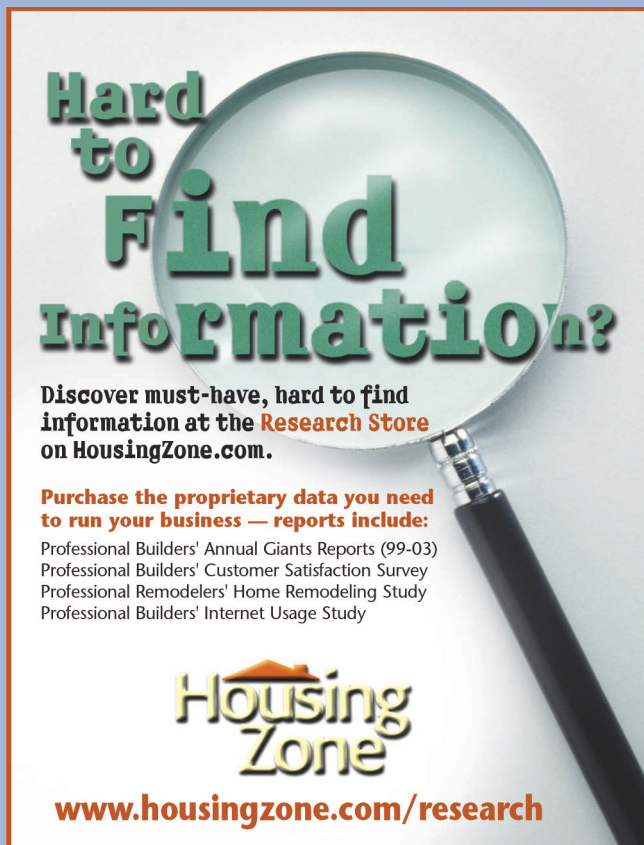
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Bathroom remodels add value

Survey reveals bath addition brings 20 percent increase

Data from the American Housing Survey and the NAHB shows that adding a bathroom can increase a home's value by as much as 20 percent.

"An added bathroom has one of the strongest impacts of any home feature on single-family detached home values," said NAHB economist Paul Emrath.

The results come from in-depth analysis by NAHB of the AHS data, concluding that remodelers in suburban locations can provide their customers with a precise estimate of how much bathrooms add to the value of their homes. The recently released data, from last year's survey, reveals that a half-bath adds approximately 10.5 percent to a suburban home's value and a full bath

adds about 20 percent.

Emrath said the results also suggest that homeowners prefer a balance between the number of bedrooms and bathrooms. Adding an extra bathroom increases the

home's value by a higher percentage when there are more bedrooms than baths.

"When the number of bathrooms is approximately equal to the number of bedrooms, an additional half

bath adds about 10 percent to the home's value, and converting the half bath to a full bath adds another 9 percent, so one additional bath adds about 19 percent to the value," Emrath said.

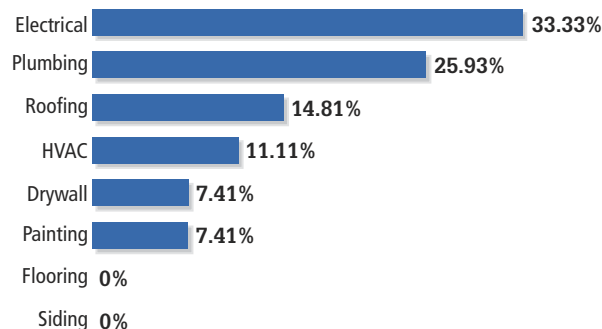


Green Project Book

Carl Seville of Seville Consulting is looking for green remodeling projects to feature in an upcoming book. Projects certified by third party professionals such as HERS raters or local green building programs are of particular interest. Projects should cover: energy efficiency, durability, resource efficiency and health-consciousness. Contact Seville at (404) 597-7782 or cseville@comcast.net

THE RESULTS

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Results from August reader poll as of August 25, 2006

THE POLL

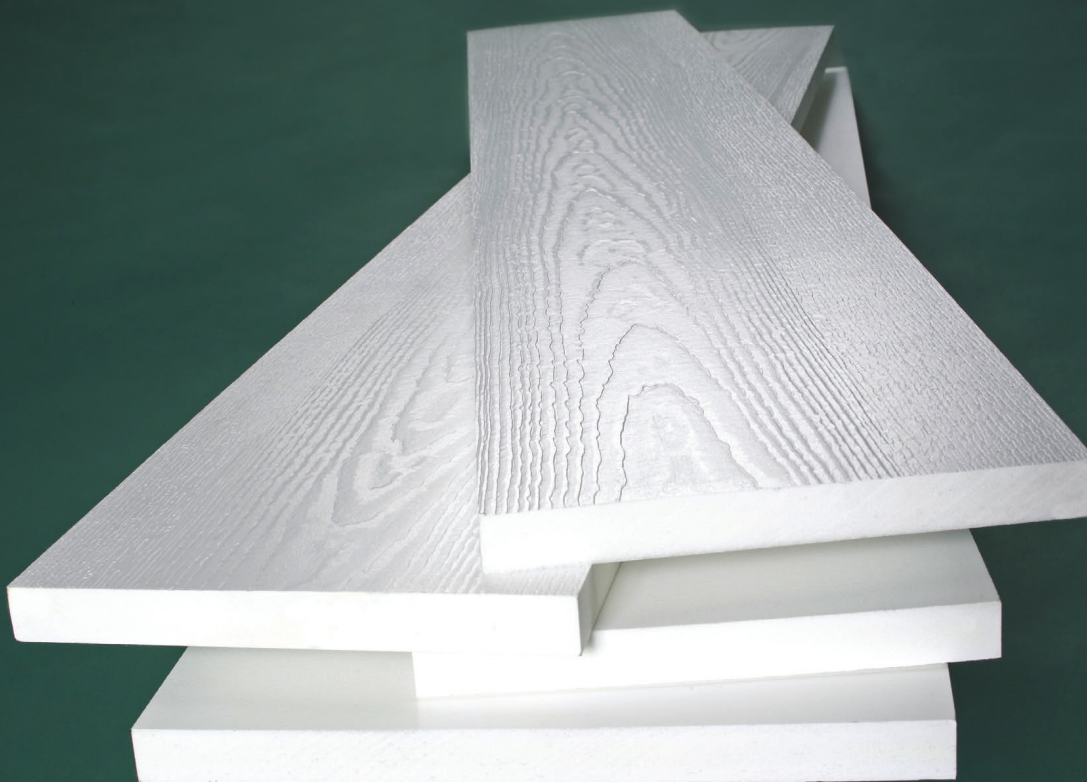
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3. Lack of salespeople who know remodeling
4. Non-English-speaking field employees
5. Lack of quality subcontractors
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8. Turnover in general

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