

# Professional Remodeler®

JANUARY 2007

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## On the Horizon

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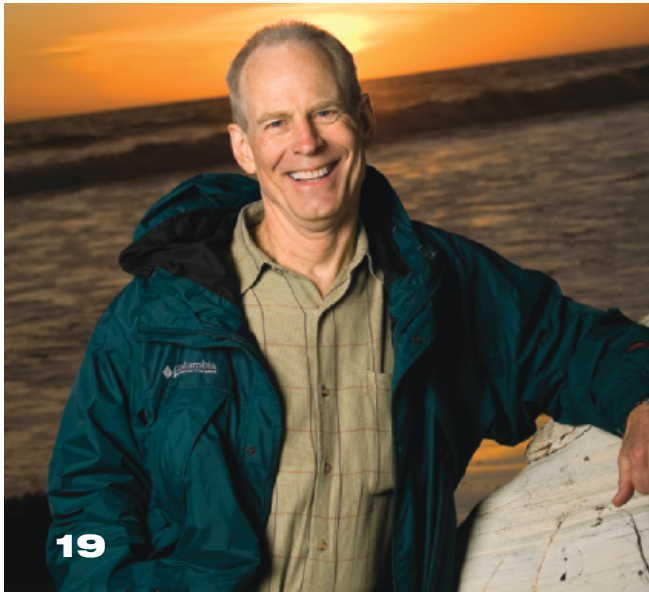
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VOLUME 11 NUMBER 1



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See how your answers compare to others' with instant results in our online Remodeler's Poll. For this month's question, see page 15.

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Welcome to the new and improved *Professional Remodeler*.

As I write this, it's three days before Christmas. By the time this issue hits your desk, all the holiday hubbub will be over, New Year's resolutions will have been pledged and the books will be officially closed on 2006.

It's a great time for a fresh start, both for your business and for our staff at *Professional Remodeler*.

This issue marks the beginning of our 11th year serving the professional remodeling industry, so we felt it was a perfect opportunity to debut what will be our annual tribute to innovation in remodeling. Our cover story on industry innovators (page 19) features eight company leaders whose approach to business is on the leading edge.

You'll also notice that we've added some new departments that will be a regular part of every issue.

Trade Secrets (page 15) is our answer to your desire for more best business practices from successful firms across the country. If you're looking for ideas to improve any area of your operation — from sales and marketing to design and production — you'll find it here. Be sure and participate in our reader poll every month, which you'll find in Trade Secrets, by logging on to our recently revamped Web site, [www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com).

Perhaps the most exciting addition to our table of contents is the launch of a new column, The Board Room, where each month a different member of our editorial advisory board will write about the most important topics facing our industry. You won't want to miss a single article from this highly respected group of industry leaders, starting with this month's column on innovation and change by past national NARI president Paul Winans.



**Michael R. Morris**

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You requested more information on the latest products available in the marketplace, so we've tripled our coverage, with separate sections devoted to new products, interior products and exterior products every month.

We've doubled our efforts to provide award-winning designs as well. Each portfolio will feature an interior and exterior project (pages 36 and 42 this month).

Last but not least, you've surely noticed the bold new logo and cover design that art director Larry Nigh has created. Larry's flair for innovative, eye-catching design carries from the cover throughout the magazine, and it's a fitting reflection of the industry we serve. My hat goes off to him for the colorful approach he's taken in every part of the magazine.

Please let us know what you think of the new *Professional Remodeler*. We've made these improvements with your needs and interests in mind, so I look forward to your feedback and ideas as we move into 2007.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy and prosperous new year. **PR**



# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR WEB SITE

Web site maintenance is a necessary evil for today's businesses



PHOTO: © GARY BENSON/GETTY IMAGES

## Terri King, Co-Owner Blue Canyon Construction

Located in Seattle, Blue Canyon Construction is a remodeling firm and custom home builder. In business since 1992, most projects are in the Seattle and Puget Sound region. King's husband, Rick, who has been in the business since 1976, serves in sales and manages the field. Terri handles marketing and manages the office. There are 10 employees in the field and two in the office. [www.bluecanyonconstruction.com](http://www.bluecanyonconstruction.com)



PHOTO: MARC BERLOW

## John Habermeier, Co-Owner Synergy Builders Inc.

The company, located in West Chicago, Ill., specializes in finishing basements in the western suburbs of Chicago. Habermeier has a showroom set up like a basement with a theater to show virtual tours of the designs he creates on a tablet computer. Steve Taylor is co-owner of the company. They have about 17 employees. [www.synergybasements.com](http://www.synergybasements.com)



## What's the purpose of your Web site? Is it used to generate leads, educate the customer or showcase your projects? Once you have it, you'll realize that there's a certain amount of care and feeding that goes into maintaining it in this ever-changing technology. This month's discussion should help resolve some of those questions.

**Jud:** The course of our conversation today is in regard to your Web sites. We'll talk about different parts and pieces of it. John, I'd like to know how long you've had your site and how you got started. Did you have a professional do it, did you do it in-house, and how did that work out?

**John:** Our site is about 4½ years old. We initially started our Web site not thinking that it would generate new leads. We thought it was something we could put on our vans so when people saw them they could get our phone number off of our Web site. It's evolved quite a bit over the last 4½ years.

**Jud:** Did you have it professionally set up?

**John:** Initially, we had it somewhat professionally set up. We've been through two revisions to date. We're going into our third major overhaul in the next few months.

**Jud:** We'll get into that a little later. Terri, how about you?

**Terri:** We've been up for about a year and a half. I really didn't want a Web site in the beginning because it was too much to keep up. However, it seems you're not a valid business if you don't have a Web site! We finally took the jump. We had a design firm who did our branding initially, worked with a PR company who did the copy, and a team of photographers who did the pictures, and the tech people who were also part of the design team. It took a lot of hours and time from our in-house staff, myself and our director of development for almost nine months.

**Jud:** Terri, do you have anything unique

on it, such as moving pictures, video or anything like that?

**Terri:** We don't. We want it to be fast and user-friendly. When you have video or moving pictures it slows it down. We decided not to go with that.

**Jud:** John?

**John:** The same thing. It's a text driven Web site, for the most part. Right now, I don't have a lot of flash on there. We do want it to be search-engine friendly. We do have a photo gallery and information about us, our portfolio, etc.

**Jud:** John, what do you see as the function of the Web site: marketing, customer relations, project management — all or none of the above? Could you elaborate on that?

**John:** Marketing our Web site gets us potential clients that current circles of word of mouth can't reach. It helps our referral customers get an idea of our processes and product lines and introduces them to us as a potential business partner.

**Jud:** You made the comment that, realistically, you're getting leads from that now.

**John:** Yes. We generate a lot of leads through our Web site, and it accounts for about 35 percent of our new raw leads that come through the door. We have our qualifying process. Through the qualifying process that number really goes down drastically. We have to qualify a lot of those, and I'd say only about 25 percent of them turn into potential prospects where we would actually schedule an appointment.

**Jud:** You're saying that the qualifying process, as far as you're concerned in your type of business, has been a big deal as far as the leads that you generate off of the site.

**John:** Yes, definitely.

**Jud:** Terri?

**Terri:** The primary focus for us, definitely, has been marketing. It drives our marketing goal, getting people to our Web site. We do that by e-mails, postcard mailings to archi-

texts and our print ads. The Web site really helps; it's a great sales tool. Before we go out to meet our clients, they've all visited our Web site. It is heavily copy driven, and it's amazing how much the people read. They read through everything, so that really cuts down on the educational process out in the field for someone who does sales calls. It's enjoyable; people like to visit it.

**Jud:** Terri, do you have a way of counting how many people go on there and how long they stay?

**Terri:** We do. We monitor when we've done a mailing or we've done advertising and how that effects the hits that we have.

**Jud:** Do you find that when you do a mailing of some kind that the hits raise at some point?

**Terri:** It does. That was the point, and I'm happy to see that.

**Jud:** Let's clarify this. You generate leads from the site. Terri, you said that you've done that. Do you have any idea what your closing rate is on your Web site?

**Terri:** We don't. The intent was never to generate leads on our site. We are such a small company that, as you've said, the qualifying process can take time. We

don't really have time to do that. It's not something that we have done.

**John:** One thing to add to that. The intention for our Web site is to expand our word-of-mouth referrals. It's to get in front of customers in slightly different geographical areas. We're in a very niche business. Just to give a little background about our clients: our client statistics are newer houses, which are three to 10 years old, so our geographical parameters are always moving to follow new construction three to 10 years behind. Once neighborhoods get built out, word-of-mouth referrals typically stay within certain neighborhoods. When new subdivisions pop up, we need to get in front of those customers early. So that's what our site really benefits us for. It gets us into a new ring of referrals and word-of-mouth.



Jud Molsenbocker,  
Contributing Editor



**Jud:** John, let's go back to what Terri said. If you have a particular neighborhood that you want to focus on, do you do a mailing of some kind in the neighborhood to try to get them to your site?

**John:** Yes. We actually do door-to-door circulation with our Web site clearly printed on there. We do yard signs with our Web address on there. We'll start saturating a neighborhood by directing them to our Web site, which then gives them our contact info.

**Jud:** John, you've had your site 4½ years and Terri's had hers 1½ years. Did you find it took a while to "take off?"

**John:** Yes, it has. I think we're just hitting stride with it now. We're just getting to the point of realizing the potential that it has. I've just initiated a relationship with an Internet marketing firm that will be assisting us in our site renovation.

**Jud:** Terri, did you find that it took a while to take off? Is it still in the mode to take off? What was your response to that?

**Terri:** I'm hopeful that, as John says, he feels that he's just hitting stride. It gives me hope that there's no way to go but up and that's great.

**Jud:** That's probably a good thing for you to hear, Terri. I want this in a ballpark figure, if you will. Terri, do you have any idea what the design and construction of your site costs?

**Terri:** A helluva lot. I'm sure we have over \$30,000 into it.

**Jud:** Would you say in that \$30,000 you've tried to put some kind of a number on your time.

**Terri:** No, that wouldn't include our time.

**Jud:** John, do you have a handle on cost?

**John:** Yes. Sorry, Terri, it's not that much. When you're asking about cost, are you including marketing costs, such as "pay-per-click" type fees?

**Jud:** I'm going to say no to that.

**John:** Just the raw cost of set up?

**Jud:** Just to set it up and get in on there so you could call me up and say, "Hey Jud, check my site, I've got one now!"

**John:** I originally invested \$1,200 for

my site. I did the photographs myself and basically did a very simple site. It's very text driven, which helps with the search engines. The new Internet marketing company that I'm going to be working with gave a quote of \$5,000. That excludes photography time. I'd still have to pay a professional photographer to photograph all my jobs and then put those on the site.

**Jud:** So, there may be a couple thousand dollars involved in that. Did you find it difficult, a mistake you made, or something

**"It seems you're not a valid business if you don't have a Web site."**

you didn't know at the time to be able to get it onto the Internet into the search engines? Did you have a problem getting to the search engines, or did someone help you; how did you handle that?

**John:** That's a very time-consuming process. There're two different ways to do that. The paid services that are pay-per-click. And that's by Google, Yahoo! and a lot of different major search engines. If you use Google, there is the main section, which is the left side, and on the right side there are sponsored links. On the sponsored side, you can get higher ratings if you pay more money. You have to go in and type in our keywords. On the main body of search engines, that's a very complicated process. It's through search engine optimization. There are articles written in ink in every major business publication and that's referred to as the "Google den."

That's the term used; it's very difficult to get high rankings. One of my local competitors is probably one of the best in the country in getting high ratings on the left-hand side. That is something I do struggle with. I'm going to have to outsource because the level of expertise required to do that is beyond my current capabilities. I am working with a marketing firm to improve my visibility.

**Jud:** Terri, how did you get visibility on the Internet?

**Terri:** We're not looking to necessarily just have people search us as remodelers or custom builders. Most of the people going to our site are just going to look at Blue Canyon Construction. What you talked about and John mentioned is over my head. It's interesting to hear you talk about it, John. It's very complicated. We talked about that, too, with marketing in the beginning. We decided that you were always getting "one upped." One thing that helps is that the name of our company is the name

of our Web site. That does make it easy.

**Jud:** Obviously for all of us is to figure out how to get that ranking that John has stated, as far as being able to get your name up there first. If they pull it up the way I've looked at the other ones, you may be on page 27! John what you're referring to, you're trying to get up there so that you'll be higher on the food chain if nothing else.

**John:** Yes. And, higher on the left-hand side, the unpaid search engine side. That's pretty important, especially because I'm in a very niche business.

**Jud:** Terri, did you try to learn about how to set this Web site up? Did you attend any classes or anything online? How did you both learn to do this?

**Terri:** As far as the design of what we wanted?


**Jud:** Well, just where to start.

**Terri:** We're pretty intuitive about who and what we are. Web sites are pretty basic. You have your portfolio and education piece and the "about us." In that sense, it's pretty basic stuff. You're narrowing it down to getting it to represent who you are as a company.

**Jud:** That gave you your outline. Then, how did you learn to put it together, or is that where you hired a company to do it?

**Terri:** Yes, we did hire a company to do it, but we were very hands on. Basically, they



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# Remodelers' Exchange

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**Jud:** Are you able to update your own?

**Terri:** No. We don't do that. It's done outside. More money.

**Jud:** John, do you update your own?

**John:** I was going to talk a little about things I'll be doing with my redesign. Since my initial Web site, I've actually put together a hit list of things I want as improvements to my new site. Do you want me to talk about those?

**Jud:** Go right ahead. Tell us about your redesign.

**John:** We're going to be entering our third overhaul to our site. Some of the things that I want to do with it is include auto-reply options. For example, almost every site that you go to has a "contact us" page where you fill out a data sheet. One of the things I'm going to be doing on our site is an auto-reply feature. As soon as someone fills out a form on my site, they automatically get notified saying "We're interested in your project and will be contacting you via phone within the next 24 hours or next business day." One of the other things I want to do to the site is add a picture gallery, which will have two different levels. The second level will be a much more significant picture gallery and it will have log-on requirements. With the log-on requirements, if someone's interested in looking at some of our project pictures, and I'll have a very extensive gallery on there, they'll have to give me their name so I can contact them to know whether or not they are a prospect. I'll have really cool teaser pictures on the front. Again, it's very much a niche business. With basements there are a lot of things — bars, entertainment centers, themed basements, and things like that. Digging deeper, they'll be able to download galleries.

**Jud:** I'd be interested in that, John, to see how that works out and see how many people will give you that information. They know that when they give that to you that it's their key to get there.

**John:** Yes, it really is. I want to put in a better tracking system on the site so I can identify unique users and the direction they were driven from.

**Jud:** Can you track them now, at all?

**John:** Yes and no. I have the ability to track the number of people that come to my site, but not their unique link. I don't know whether they were driven from Yahoo! or Google or any of the other links that I have. HGTV, we have a link there. There are about 20-30 different places where we have links. It's sometimes difficult to identify where they come from and how much time they've spent on our site. There are tools out there that enable you to look at that. Talking about tracking, one thing that we do when we get calls from people, we ask questions such as "where did you hear about us?" If they say the Internet, then we have higher-level questions that we ask. We'll ask if they were in Google or Yahoo!. When you're trying to track the customers they may say the Internet but they may have seen the Web site on one of the trucks. Nothing replaces verbal questioning. They might have found you on the Web site, but initially they saw the Web site from your trucks.

**Jud:** Terri, let's elaborate on some of the things that John



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answered for us in regard to how detailed you can get on your tracking system. Let's start with that.

**Terri:** All of our ad house that hosts our site — that's where all of our details come from. It's pretty detailed — where people are coming in, which pages they're visiting.

**Jud:** Can you e-mail them back? If I come to your site, do you have a way of knowing I was there and can you e-mail me back?

**Terri:** No.

**Jud:** Give us your dream site, Terri. John has already said what he wants to do. How about your dream site?

**Terri:** As much money as I've spent, I hope I have my dream site! I'm really happy with our site. It's got a huge potential for growth, and that's what I would work on. More projects or a portfolio. One of the things to be careful about is how our site is portrayed. Some people have gone there

and looked at the projects we've had. We had all of our nicest projects on there. They might think we didn't do small projects or we were too expensive for them. We went back in and put some smaller-sized projects in. On the flip side of that, if we don't put enough high-end projects in, then architects or higher-end clients may not think that we do those kinds of projects. I didn't realize that we'd have to be so careful about the balance of what we put in the portfolio.

**Jud:** Good point!

**John:** A real good point.

**Terri:** Yes. And the level of the education pages. We really want to expand on that. We've tried to with not only things we have written but what people from our industry have written. That gives more validity.

**Jud:** Third-party advertising, if you will.

**Terri:** There you go. We have a great

"go shopping" page, which is our only kind of project management piece that helps clients after they've come to work with us. That links to all our suppliers' Web sites, so if they want to go shopping for something, they know where the showrooms are, or they can go on and do product research. I think a favorite part, besides the portfolio of our site, is our employee bios. People just love it. However, you always have to work on that as you hire new employees — you have to get the bio and the picture. It's one of people's favorite parts of the site.

**John:** I have the same thing. I'm looking at your site right now. Real similar concepts in our sites. **PR**

>> For the rest of the discussion on this

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## Perfecting the art of listening

Most remodeling clients come out of the process unhappy about something. Three years ago, Stebnitz Builders in Delavan, Wis., decided to see what they could do about that. The company sent a survey to past clients and potential clients who hadn't hired Stebnitz to see what they liked about their projects, what they didn't like and what could be improved.

"What we found was that people were really frustrated with the communication they received from people in this industry," says Chris Stebnitz, the company's sales and brand manager. "We came up



with the realization that what they wanted was a remodeler who will listen."

For the next two years, Stebnitz looked at its processes to see how employees could improve their listening skills. Employees have been

trained on the techniques of active listening, such as eliminating distractions and making eye contact. The company has created a system of forms that are used every step of the way to gather information. Stebnitz also trained its employees on notetaking so they could better capture the key points the client makes.

"We share those notes with the client, so we can make sure that we've gotten it," Stebnitz says.

The company has already seen significant improvement in its feedback from customers, especially in communications, Stebnitz said.

>> If you have a **Trade Secret** you would like to share, e-mail Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet at [jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com](mailto:jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com).

## Fire, ready, aim

It's always important to check your tools. That's a lesson David Powers, owner of Ocean Breeze Awnings & More in Surfside Beach, S.C., learned the hard way a few years ago.

The company was installing vinyl siding on a brick house, using wood strips to attach the siding to the home. To attach the wood strips, an employee used a powder actuated gun with a .22 shell to

## Priceless consulting for free

When Menold Construction & Restoration completes a project, the team wants to hear about any little thing that went wrong.

The Morton, Ill., design/build remodeler looks at those problems, no matter how small, as the best way to improve its operations. A couple of weeks after a project wraps up, the project manager and designer visit the client for a post-project meeting. "Our goal is to just listen and take notes," says Vice President Steven Driscoll.

After the meeting, the project manager creates a report and sends it to everyone involved in the project. The management also collects the reports to look for recurring complaints that can be

corrected. Meetings tackling issues take about an hour; afterward, Menold sends the clients a note and gift certificate to thank them for their time — a minor cost for what Driscoll says has been invaluable information for the company.

"It's free consulting for us that is worth much more than any survey or outside consultant could be," he says. It also shows customers that the company cares about quality, which helps its repeat and referral rate.

Says Driscoll: "We love it because we create those customer cheerleaders who are going to go out of their way to promote us because we take care of their needs."



fire the anchor.

Unfortunately, the gun was loaded with the wrong anchor depth, and each time he fired, an anchor shot through the brick and the wallboard and into the house. He only realized his problem when the homeowner came out and told him he was shooting anchors all over the house. Luckily, nobody was hurt during the mishap.

To submit your humorous job site stories, e-mail Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet at [jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com](mailto:jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com).

### ONLINE POLL

## What do you expect to be your company's biggest challenge in 2007?

To participate in this month's poll and view the results as they are tabulated, visit [www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com)



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Wednesday, Feb. 7	Thursday, Feb. 8	Friday, Feb. 9	Saturday, Feb. 10
<b>10-11am</b> <i>How to Earn Tax Credits and Market Better Built Homes,</i> Doug Garrett, Building Performance & Comfort, Inc.	<b>10-11am</b> <i>How to Earn Tax Credits and Market Better Built Homes,</i> Doug Garrett, Building Performance & Comfort, Inc.	<b>10-11am</b> <i>How to Earn Tax Credits and Market Better Built Homes,</i> Doug Garrett, Building Performance & Comfort, Inc.	<b>10-11am</b> <i>How to Beautify Your Outdoor Living Space with SYMMATRIX™ Scenic Series Decking,</i> Dow
<b>11am-Noon</b> <i>How to Increase Home Sales with Performance Built In,</i> Chris Mathis, M C Squared	<b>11am-Noon</b> <i>How to Increase Home Sales with Performance Built In,</i> Chris Mathis, M C Squared	<b>11am-Noon</b> <i>How to Increase Home Sales with Performance Built In,</i> Chris Mathis, M C Squared	<b>11am-Noon</b> <i>How to Increase Home Sales with Performance Built In,</i> Chris Mathis, M C Squared
<b>1-2pm</b> <i>How to Build Smart, and Reduce Costs, Callbacks and Lawsuits,</i> Joseph Lstiburek, Building Science Corporation	<b>1-2pm</b> <i>How to Build Smart, and Reduce Costs, Callbacks and Lawsuits,</i> Joseph Lstiburek, Building Science Corporation	<b>1-2pm</b> <i>How to Build Smart, and Reduce Costs, Callbacks and Lawsuits,</i> Joseph Lstiburek, Building Science Corporation	<b>1-2pm</b> <i>Energy and Moisture Solutions,</i> Dow
<b>2-3pm</b> <i>How to Design Better Performing Walls,</i> Jay H. Crandell, ARES Consulting	<b>2-3pm</b> <i>How to Design Better Performing Walls,</i> Jay H. Crandell, ARES Consulting	<b>2-3pm</b> <i>How to Design Better Performing Walls,</i> Jay H. Crandell, ARES Consulting	<b>2-3pm</b> <i>Finishing a Better Basement,</i> Dow
<b>3-4pm</b> <i>How to Beautify Your Outdoor Living Space with SYMMATRIX™ Scenic Series Decking,</i> Dow	<b>3-4pm</b> <i>How to Beautify Your Outdoor Living Space with SYMMATRIX™ Scenic Series Decking,</i> Dow	<b>3-4pm</b> <i>How to Beautify Your Outdoor Living Space with SYMMATRIX™ Scenic Series Decking,</i> Dow	





# THE BENEFITS OF ADVERSITY

## ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO LEARN

is at a time of adversity. It's unpleasant to go through short-term adversity and it is definitely unpleasant when it's long-term. The old saying "No pain, no gain" is often referred to with sports, but it applies to business men and women in the remodeling industry as well.

Business adversity happens for many reasons. It could come from your market shifting; a major change in staff; technology needs; product innovations; new, better and/or more competition; not hitting growth and profit objectives; the need to restructure your company; too much debt service; wearing too many hats; trying to do too many things at once; or trying to be everything to everyone, etc.

My guess is that one or more of these reasons hits home with you and your company's situation. With all that has happened in our country in the last five years and with the housing slowing down, remodeling is becoming more of a moderate climate. And with winter here, opportunities for adversity are at a peak.

Some years ago, I faced a very difficult time in my career; we changed the name of our company and expanded our services. We borrowed a considerable amount of capital to make these major changes. Right after that, my top salesperson married and moved, which left me with two inexperienced sales people in the middle of a difficult transition. With so much of my time spent on the innovation of the new change over, I could not focus on sales at the level needed. So, it was a catch-22.

The result: sales suffered and I needed more capital to pay to reengineer the

**"The old saying 'No pain, no gain' is often referred to with sports, but it applies to the remodeling industry as well."**

company. After leaving the bank and going to grab some lunch one day, it hit me like a ton of bricks: we cannot afford to continue to burn money at this pace. I was faced with having to take an extremely hard look at the numbers from a dollars and cents standpoint. The only realistic solution, given all the circumstances, was to downsize the company by one-third of the staff.

If you have ever experienced this, or anything close to this, it is a difficult place. But, when faced with a challenge of this magnitude, you can either let it crush you or decide to make the best decision you can and move forward.

I learned many lessons from this adversity: 1) Even the best plans can be unpredictable, and to grow, you have to take risk. 2) Numbers don't lie. 3) We grow tremendously through adversity; and we would not know what we know today without it. 4) A business person will have to make difficult decisions as a leader. 5) Many of the people let go during the downsizing were actually holding the company back for many different reasons. 6) You can accomplish more with a small team committed to growth and change for the company to succeed. 7) You have to



Doug Dwyer,  
Contributing Editor

have faith it will work.

It is critical to have a support group when dealing with adversity. It could be made up of a business coach, a business owners group, experts in the industry, family, and/or team members. There is a proverb that says, he that seeks many counselors is wise.

Managing our own attitudes

during the ups and downs of our ever-changing world and business environment is one of our most important jobs. The right attitude creates consistent positive movement forward.

Significant growth comes through adversity; embrace it by accepting it. Learn from it, but don't beat yourself up over it. Make necessary changes and help others face it. It is not easy or fun, but at some level, it is inevitable and will come. Be prepared and capitalize on the benefits it produces for you, your business and others. **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@dwyergroup.com](mailto:doug.dwyer@dwyergroup.com).*

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A man with short, light-colored hair, smiling, wearing a dark green jacket over a light-colored shirt and jeans. He is standing on a beach with a large piece of driftwood behind him. The background shows the ocean and a sunset sky with warm, golden light.

# 2007 Innovators

EIGHT COMPANIES THAT STAND  
OUT FROM THE CROWD

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

**WHAT MAKES AN INNOVATOR?** The eight remodeling companies on the following pages were selected not because they're the biggest or even the best known, but instead because they have found a different way to do business. Whether it's a focus on green construction, an imaginative Web site or a dedication to quality and customer satisfaction, they've all found key business practices that have helped them create their success.

Dennis Allen, owner of Allen Associates  
in Santa Barbara, Calif.

PHOTO: GARY LAUFMAN





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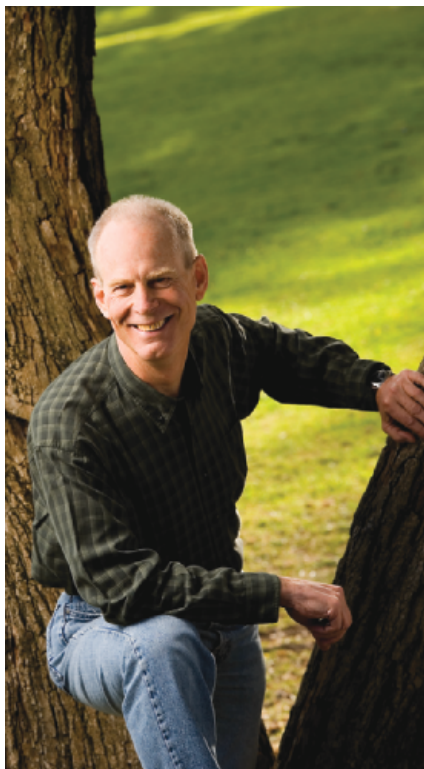


PHOTO: GARY LAUFMAN

## DENNIS ALLEN

**DENNIS ALLEN IS WELL KNOWN** as one of the pioneers in the green construction market. His company, Allen Associates, builds and remodels dozens of homes a year, all of which incorporate at least some green building techniques.

For Allen, green construction is not just about the products he uses, but also about the process. He wants to build and remodel homes that will last, so resources aren't expended 10 years down the road for another remodeling project.

Allen constantly looks for products that will be more environmentally friendly and cost-effective. Although most clients like the idea of green building, he still finds it difficult to sell if prices are significantly higher.

"One of our challenges is to give people as much green as we can and still stay within their budget," he says.

Allen tries to talk with clients about

items such as energy efficiency and indoor air quality to emphasize the personal benefits. That's what will help green become more mainstream, he says.

For remodelers interested in learning more about green building, Allen cautions against trying to do too much too fast.

"Don't shoot for the sky initially," he says. "Try just one or two things on a project that you haven't done before. Everything has a learning curve, so just keep easing into it."

### Allen Associates

Santa Barbara, Calif.

**Owner:** Dennis Allen

**Founded:** 1983

**Employees:** 78

**Type of work:** Full-service remodeling, custom homes

**2006 revenue:** \$21 million

[www.dennisallenassociates.com](http://www.dennisallenassociates.com)



PHOTO: BILL GEIGER

## JOE DUVAL

**WITH A HIGH REFERRAL RATE** and plenty of repeat customers, Joe Duval knew his company must be doing a good job pleasing its clients. At the same time, he wanted to make sure that River Crest Design Build was doing everything it could to keep customers happy.

The company created a report card system that tracks customer satisfaction from the initial sales meeting to project completion. The report cards are postage paid postcards that the homeowner just has to drop in the mail.

The potential client receives the first card at the initial sales call, so the company can get feedback even from those who don't hire River Crest. Clients are also given a report card after the initial design meeting, during the design stage and every time there is a draw, with a final report card at the end of the project.

The cards ask the clients to grade River

Crest on items such as attention, communication and cleanliness on a scale from 1 to 5. The scores average a 4.7, but it's the low scores that give the company an opportunity to make things right before the problem snowballs.

"Anytime a 3 comes in, it comes to the project manager's desk and my desk," Duval says. "That requires a call to the client to take care of the problem. A 2 or a 1 requires an immediate visit by the project manager to the client."

### River Crest Design Build

Annapolis, Md.

**Owners:** Joe and Jeanne Duval

**Founded:** 1986

**Employees:** 28

**Type of work:** Design/build remodeling

**2006 revenue:** \$5.75 million

**Projected 2007 revenue:** \$6.3 million

[www.rivercrest.com](http://www.rivercrest.com)





PHOTO: MARC BERLOW

## JOHN HABERMEIER

**JOHN HABERMEIER SAYS** too many remodelers don't embrace the technology they need to become more efficient.

By using a tablet computer, a Leica Disto laser and Chief Architect, Habermeier devised a process that cut his design time from 25 to 2 hours for the average project.

When a potential client calls the office, they go through a brief interview where the salesperson talks to them about their basement and makes sure they are a serious prospect. At that point, the client has to make two appointments — one in their home and a follow-up appointment at the Synergy showroom. The company won't schedule a first appointment without a second.

At the first appointment, Habermeier uses his computer and laser to gather measurements. The showroom appointment is as soon as the next day and always less than a week after the first

appointment. The showroom is designed to look like a basement and includes a home theater area with an 8- by 5-foot television screen that Habermeier uses to give the clients a virtual tour of the two or three designs he has created.

The process has such a "wow factor" for clients that Habermeier estimates it allows him to charge 10 to 15 percent more for projects and has increased sales by 25 percent.

### Synergy Builders

West Chicago, Ill.

**Owners:** John Habermeier and Steve Taylor

**Founded:** 2002

**Employees:** 17

**Type of work:** Finished basements

**2006 revenue:** \$2.6 million

**Projected 2007 revenue:** \$3.2 million

[www.synergybasements.com](http://www.synergybasements.com)



PHOTO: ED WHEELER

## JEFF KALINER

**FOR MOST WINDOW AND SIDING**

companies, the biggest problem is finding competent installers.

That was the problem Power Windows & Siding decided to tackle in 2004 with its factory training program for window installers, which they've named Total Care Installs.

"We wanted to do a better job of reducing service calls," says CEO Asaf Shaposhnick. "We were having too many callbacks and were ending up having to discount too many jobs."

Now, all installers are required to become certified by the American Architectural Manufacturers Association. The AAMA hopes the two-day certification program reduces callbacks, improves energy efficiency and teaches installers to work more quickly and efficiently. To maintain their AAMA certification, installers must be recertified every four years.

The program has resulted in a significant reduction in callbacks, allowing the company to install more jobs and increase business by almost 20 percent last year. The company has also seen an increase in referrals from satisfied customers, Shaposhnick says. The Total Care Installs program has become an important part of the company's sales presentation as well.

"It's something the competition's not doing, so it's a big plus for us when we're meeting with clients," Shaposhnick says.

### Power Windows & Siding

Brookhaven, Pa.

**Owners:** Adam and Jeff Kaliner

**Founded:** 1987

**Employees:** 90

**Type of work:** Exterior remodeling

**2006 revenue:** \$17.7 million

[www.powerwindowsandsiding.com](http://www.powerwindowsandsiding.com)



PHOTO: © GARY BENSON/GETTY IMAGES

## RICK AND TERRI KING

**FROM THE TIME THEY DECIDED** to launch a Web site, Blue Canyon Construction owners Rick and Terri King knew they wanted it to be something special.

"We had a really strong vision of what we wanted it to be like," Terri King says.

By visiting the site, clients can learn almost everything they want about Blue Canyon before Rick ever makes a sales call. They can see the company's work in the portfolio section and learn about the firm and its employees.

"They know our philosophy and they really get a sense of our crew and what they do," King says. "It's amazing how many people have gone on to the site and read everything."

The site also includes an educational section — something that was very important to King — with articles on finding a remodeler and what to expect during the process.

"Most sites don't have an education piece, so we felt that was a real need," she says. "I feel like we're educating people for the entire industry."

One of the most innovative parts of the site is the Go Shopping section, which contains links to the sites for the company's vendors of items such as appliances, cabinets and flooring. It allows customers to go to one Web site and see what Blue Canyon offers.

**Blue Canyon Construction**  
Seattle

**Owners:** Rick and Terri King

**Founded:** 1996

**Employees:** 13

**Type of work:** Full-service remodeling, custom homes

**2006 revenue:** \$2.4 million

**Projected 2007 revenue:** \$2.8 million

[www.bluecanyonconstruction.com](http://www.bluecanyonconstruction.com)



PHOTO: TIM TADDER

## GARY MARROKAL

**GARY MARROKAL RELIES ON** trade contractors to provide most of the labor for his award-winning firm, so the quality of their work is key to his success.

"We are only as good as our subs, so we have to pay close attention to everything they do," he says.

The company constantly rates trade contractors on the quality of their work, timeliness and cleanliness. If a company's grades start to slip, Marrokak warns the owner of the problem. If the problems continue, he's not afraid to replace a contractor.

But building a positive relationship with trade contractors also requires being a good company for which to work.

"You have to treat your trade contractors with the same respect you treat your employees and your clients," Marrokak says.

That means letting them know when they do a good job and paying promptly,

Marrokak says. Contractors also like working for him because they know how tough he is on the trades.

"A good framer likes working on a job where they know that the concrete guy is going to get his work done, clean up and be out of the way on time," he says. "On the other hand, you let one trade get away with poor work and the other guys notice, and maybe their work slips as well."

**Marrokak Construction Co.**  
Lakeside, Calif.

**Owner:** Gary Marrokak

**Founded:** 1981

**Employees:** 27

**Type of work:** Design/build remodeling

**2006 revenue:** \$16.7 million

**Projected 2007 revenue:** \$18 million

[www.marrokak.com](http://www.marrokak.com)





PHOTO: STEVE WOIT

## BRUCE SCHWEICH

**STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD** in the remodeling field can be difficult. One way to do it is to offer a service nobody else does.

David Schweich Construction has found success converting crawlspaces into livable space in Minnesota's Twin Cities.

"There are thousands of homes in this area that have been built with only a crawlspace beneath them," says project manager Bruce Schweich. "This is a way to add on to the house without any additional footprint."

The average project is about 400 square feet and costs the client about \$35,000 for an unfinished basement. About half of the projects are finished as well, Schweich says, adding another \$30,000 to the project cost.

"It's something we've been doing for 30 years, so we have a track record of doing a good job with it," Schweich says.

David Schweich originally started

doing crawlspace conversions as a way to keep crews busy during Minnesota's harsh winters. The company prefers to do the labor-intensive projects during the winter but still tackles them throughout the year.

"We don't disturb the existing foundation, so we have to go in and shovel out most of the dirt by hand," Schweich says. "It usually takes us four to five days to dig it out by hand, which is why we like to do it in the winter when we don't have as many other projects."

**David Schweich Construction**  
Lakeville, Minn.

**Owner:** David Schweich

**Founded:** 1973

**Employees:** 17

**Type of work:** Full-service

**2006 revenue:** \$2.4 million

[www.davidschweichconstruction.com](http://www.davidschweichconstruction.com)



PHOTO: DAVE BRADLEY

## RAYMOND AND THERESE WIESE

**IN 2005, THE WIESE CO.** saw business grow by more than 50 percent and faced the problem of juggling more projects while preserving the quality for which the company was known.

At the same time, owners Raymond and Therese Wiese faced a situation where their top lead carpenter, Tom Cochrane, wanted more challenge in his work.

The two problems ended up creating a unique solution. The Wieses decided to put Cochrane in charge of supervising the work quality of all jobs, offering him a new challenge and maintaining the company's reputation. He still runs his own jobs, but once a week he also visits the jobs the other leads run.

"He ensures that quality is observed everywhere," Therese Wiese says.

For the employees, it took some getting used to, Wiese admits.

"It was a very difficult thing in the

beginning because of the egos involved," she says. "The response from the other leads was 'What's this mean? He's going to be telling me what I'm doing wrong all the time?'"

The others have now accepted and actually appreciate the system; they realize that it's not about pointing fingers but instead doing the best job for the client.

Not only has it led to brainstorming among the leads, but the owners can better focus on business growth and practices.

**The Wiese Co.**  
Natick, Mass.

**Owners:** Raymond and Therese Wiese

**Founded:** 1992

**Employees:** 14

**Type of work:** Design/build remodeling

**2006 revenue:** \$3.5 million

**Projected 2007 revenue:** \$4 million

[www.thewiesecompany.com](http://www.thewiesecompany.com)

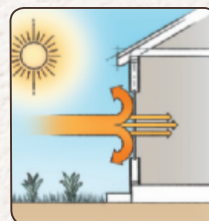




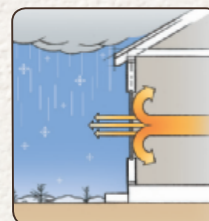
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## *JELD-WEN Congratulates the 2006 Innovators*

Synergy Builders, West Chicago, IL

River Crest Design Build, Annapolis, MD

Marrokal Construction Co., Lakeside, CA

The Wiese Co., Natick, MA

Allen Associates, Santa Barbara, CA

Blue Canyon Construction, Seattle, WA

Power Windows & Siding, Brookhaven, PA

David Schweich Construction, Lakeville, MN

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*Professional Remodeler*  
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Oak Brook, IL 60523  
Fax: 630/288-8145

**Describe what makes your company an innovator.**

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Type of work (check all that apply)

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- ☐ Custom homes
- ☐ Commercial remodeling
- ☐ Exterior remodeling
- ☐ Handyman
- ☐ Other

# Professional Remodeler.



# Five-Year Plan

HOW A REMODELER WENT  
FROM MOVING HIS DRIVEWAY  
TO CHANGING HIS ENTIRE HOUSE





By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

**SOMETIMES REMODELING PROJECTS** come about because a family needs more room. Other times because a homeowner wants a new look. But in the case of remodeler Michael Pollard's home, it all started because of a driveway dispute with his neighbor.

While Pollard and his wife were away from home, his new neighbor tore up timbers that ran along the driveway, stacking them on the edge and blocking entrance to the garage. Then he built a new cedar fence (with the ugly side facing Pollard's home) along the edge of the driveway and property.

Pollard decided he had to sleep on it before doing anything drastic. Early the next morning, as he looked over the property survey, he found his solution.

"I realized we could just move the driveway to the other side of the house and build a new three-car detached garage," he said.

Once he made that decision, the rest became a whole-house remodel. He converted the existing attached garage into a family room; added a new dining area; remodeled the old, cramped kitchen; updated the wiring and plumbing; built a new gazebo in the backyard; and redesigned the landscaping in the front yard. The project ended up taking almost five years before finally being completed in 2006.

The first step was pouring the new driveway and building the new garage so the old driveway could be demolished as soon as possible. The driveway was 6-inch thick concrete with 6 by 6 wire mesh and rebar to provide reinforcement for Chicago's harsh cold conditions and increase its lifespan.

Although he planned for a detached garage, Pollard, owner of Pollard

**Architect Gary Steiner designed the dining room addition to take advantage of natural light and the garden view. The outside seamlessly matches the Colonial style of the existing house, even without using the same brick.**



#### PRODUCTS LIST

**Appliances:** Sub-Zero, Viking **Doors:** Marvin **Faucets:** Kohler, Moen **Lighting fixtures:** Halo  
**Sinks:** Elkay, Kohler **Windows:** Marvin

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF MIKE POLLARD





**Pollard transformed the cramped kitchen and breakfast nook into a modern kitchen with new high-end appliances, granite countertops and hardwood floors.**

Construction Co. in River Forest, Ill., still wanted it to match the appearance of his brick, colonial-style home. He couldn't find a brick similar enough to the 68-year-old exterior, so he used brick salvaged from the remodeling project. As part of the conversion of the existing garage to a family room he had planned to add more windows. So he made sure the brick was carefully removed from the walls where the windows were being added, then cut each brick to make tiles that he mounted to the exterior of the garage.

"The split-faced brick made the garage look like it belonged," Pollard says. "We didn't want it to stand out."

The last step before the old driveway could be removed was pouring the footings for the addition.

"We had to squeeze the concrete truck into the narrow space between the house and the neighbors' new fence," Pollard says. "It was tight, but we made it work."

Throughout this entire process, the neighbors filed complaints to the city and so the building inspector became a regular visitor to the job site. Pollard was never found to be in violation and there were no serious delays caused by the reports, but it did become a nuisance and further deteriorated the relationship with the neighbor, he says.

Luckily, while the remodel was underway, the neighbor

## THE FINANCIALS

Although Pollard didn't have a concrete budget in place when the project started, he still ended up spending more than he had initially planned on the house. Originally budgeted at \$300,000, it ended up costing \$365,000, due mostly to upgrading the windows and having to use a different roof than he planned.

During the project, he switched to Marvin Infinity windows, because of their appearance, energy efficiency and ease of use. The change cost \$18,000 but was well worth it, Pollard says.

"The windows are probably the best feature in the whole house," he says. "The windows are so important to the design that making the right choice was crucial."

### Budget History

Estimate:	\$396,000*
Estimated cost to produce:	\$300,000
Add-ons and cost overruns: (Upgraded windows, slate roof, higher prices for other materials from 2000 to 2005)	\$65,000
Final price of job:	\$474,000*
Cost to produce:	\$365,000
Gross profit:	\$109,000*
Estimated gross profit percentage:	32%*
Actual gross profit percentage:	23%*

\*If the project were billed to a client

Pollard didn't change the roof shingles just because he changed his mind (or on a whim). Originally, he had intended to use a manufactured shingle that replicated a natural slate look. However, the manufacturer discontinued the product after quality problems arose, so Pollard had to

switch to natural slate, adding about \$25,000 to the job. While he was glad to not have to deal with the quality issues, it did mean higher installation and product costs.

There were other minor changes and costs for both his materials and subcontractor labor also increased over the five years Pollard remodeled his home.

On this project, Pollard estimated he would have had only a 23 percent gross profit margin, which is well below what he normally would make. His usual margin ranges from 32 percent for large jobs up to 50 percent for smaller projects.

"I take on only a handful of projects a year, so they have to be profitable and they have to be enjoyable," he says.



Railing worth a second look.

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**When his neighbor built a cedar fence that restricted access to his garage, Pollard decided to move his driveway to the other side of the house and build a new, detached three-car garage. He was able to match the brick of the house by using brick salvaged from the remodel of the existing garage.**

moved. Pollard's new neighbors turned out to be a former classmate and his wife. He worked with them on designing and building a new fence that they both liked.

### BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN

Although it was the driveway and garage that prompted the project, the kitchen and dining room became the centerpiece of the remodel. Pollard and his wife had been unhappy with their small kitchen and attached breakfast nook for years. The area was cramped, the passageways were narrow, and there simply wasn't enough room for them to use it in the way they wanted.

"We couldn't be working in here at the same time," Pollard says. "We were constantly tripping over each other trying to maneuver between these two little rooms."

Pollard created the new kitchen from the two existing rooms and a small portion of the addition. Pollard removed the wall and pass-through dividing the rooms, essentially rebuilding the kitchen from the ground up. He added an island, replaced the floors with hardwood, installed Marvin windows, used granite countertops and select high-end Viking and Sub-Zero appliances.

The new dining room is Pollard's favorite part of the remodel. With its vaulted ceilings and walls of windows, it's a place where he can sit and relax while looking at his wife's gardens in the backyard.

"Despite any problems we had along the way, this made it worth it," he says. "This room is, to me, the best part of the project."

Pollard credits architect Gary Steiner, his longtime design partner, for his ability to make a room that is so different from the rest of the house look like it belongs.

"Even on the outside, it matches," he says. "Even though it's not brick, it still looks like it's part of this colonial house and could easily have been there for years."

### THE CLIENT AT HOME

Keeping a client happy during any remodeling project can be a challenge. When that client is sitting across the breakfast table every morning it adds a whole new dimension to the problem.

"My wife knew what we were getting into going in," Pollard says. "We didn't disagree too much, but it was a little frustrating at times that it wasn't getting done sooner."

With the housing market booming, Pollard had plenty of opportunities to work for other people during the five years he remodeled his home. Pollard's 30 years in the business allow him to pick and choose his clients. He only tackles a handful of jobs each year, but those jobs can take a year or more to complete.

"We decided we had to make some money while the market was doing so well, so we'd look at other jobs as they came along," Pollard says. "If I found something I liked, we'd drop this and go





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**Pollard built a gazebo next to the garage to house the relocated hot tub and planters for his wife's flowers.**

focus on that job for a while, then we'd come back to ours."

Communication is the key to making any remodeling project go smoothly, but it's doubly important when doing work on your own home, Pollard says. Even with good communication, Pollard's wife became frustrated by the lack of progress a few years into the project.

"I remember it was a Sunday afternoon, I was just sitting down to watch the Cubs game when my wife came in and saw me sitting there," Pollard says. "She just looked at me and said, 'It's time to finish our house now.'"

That led to a flurry of activity that got the house completed after five long years. If he could have done anything differently, Pollard says he would have taken on less outside work and gotten his own home done more quickly.

"I really should have told more people 'No,' but when you hit it off with a client and they have an interesting project, it's tough to do that," he says.

He also says he should have treated it more like a project for an outside client, with a budget, plans and schedule in place before he started.

"Even if things come along and you can't stay to a schedule,

## SNAPSHOT

**Michael Pollard**

Pollard Construction Co.

**Location:** River Forest, Ill.

**Type of company:** Design-build

**Years in business:** 28

**2006 sales volume:** \$1 million

**Projected 2007 sales volume:** \$1 million

**Annual jobs:** 2 to 5

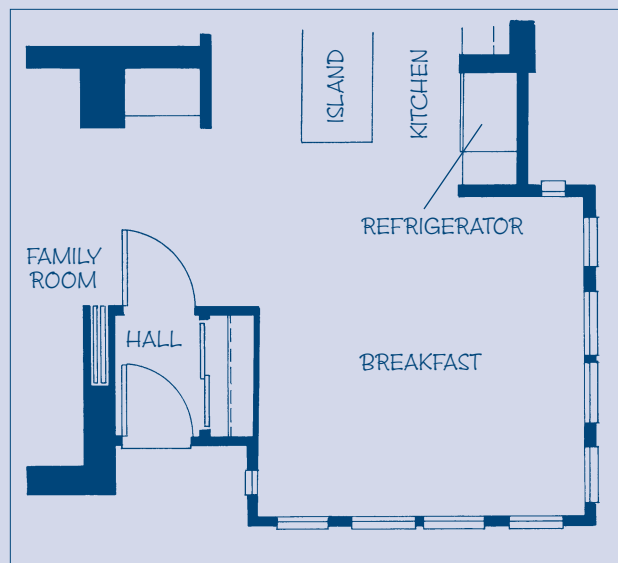
**The project:** A remodel of Pollard's own home, prompted by a dispute with the next-door neighbor

**Biggest challenge:** Integrating the remodel into the schedule of the company's projects while dealing with continuing problems with the neighbor.

**Contact:** [www.pollardconstruction.com](http://www.pollardconstruction.com) or [pollco@comcast.net](mailto:pollco@comcast.net)



After



at least you have a reference point that you can share with your spouse," he says.


Despite the headaches along the way, Pollard says he'd definitely do it again and, his wife agrees. With plans to eventually sell their home now that their children are away, they've discussed what they'll be looking for in their next house.

"I wasn't sure she'd ever want to go through it again, but she recently said to me 'Maybe we should buy another place and remodel it,' so I guess it couldn't have been that bad." **PR**

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# GO WITH THE FLOW

The Wright Street Design Group's biggest challenge was to design a logical, open flow between the game room, great room and theater room so that each space was separate but connected without the use of hallways.

AFTER PHOTOS BY FRED GOLDEN PHOTOGRAPHY



Thoughtful design, superior subcontractors and extra effort allow a finished basement project to go swimmingly

## BASEMENT REMODEL

**REMODELER AND ARCHITECT:** Wright Street Design Group, Ann Arbor, Mich.

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Ann Arbor, Mich.

**AGE OF HOME:** 12 years

**SCOPE OF WORK:** Turning 3,000 square feet of unfinished basement space into a lavish living area complete with a 600-square-foot addition for an indoor pool

**THOUGH THE HOMEOWNERS** had high hopes for the remodel of the lower level of their home, their project had been in limbo for some time given discord with their neighborhood association, which did not approve a previously designed addition that drastically enlarged the home's footprint. So when the homeowner brought Wright Street Design Group of Ann Arbor, Mich., to the project, it was imperative that the group work within the existing footprint to create an open, warm and informal space while keeping any additions to the basement as minimal as possible.

Wright Street founder, owner and principal designer Stanley Monroe estimates that he created at least a dozen iterations (with numerous sub-iterations) before the construction phase. After about

## BEFORE



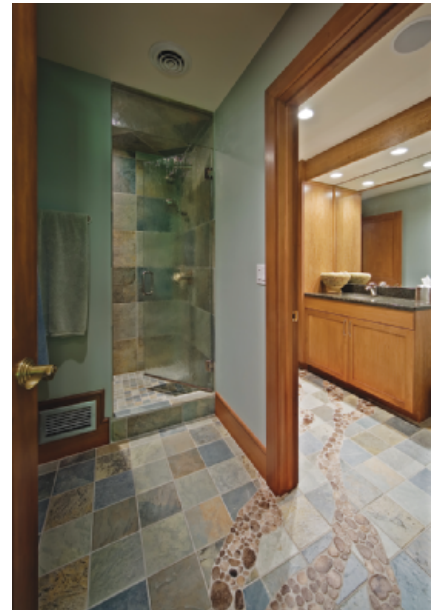
## PRODUCTS LIST

**HVAC:** Carrier **Doors & Windows:** Eagle **Fireplace:** Temco  
Travis **Home Systems & Controls:** Home Automation Inc.  
(HAI), Lutron **Lighting Fixtures:** Juno **House Wrap:** Tyvek  
(DuPont) **Insulation:** CertainTeed **Locksets:** Baldwin **Paints  
& Stains:** Benjamin Moore, Sherwin-Williams





The theater room (above) was situated in a space that didn't receive natural light from outside, so available window areas could be utilized elsewhere. The homeowner's collection of Petoskey stones were cut, polished and incorporated into the bathroom floor tile (right).



The swimming pool room addition is noteworthy because, in addition to being finished with a paving brick, it maintained a view of an existing oak tree that the homeowners cherished. "We worked carefully around it. It was a small challenge, but these are the types of things that are very important to the homeowner," says Stanley Monroe of Wright Street Design Group.

six months of design time, he finalized a layout that worked within the existing structure of the basement's nine steel columns putting rooms that required natural light around the perimeter. The only

structural work required stabilizing a sinking foundation and repairing a vertical crack from the eve board to the footing and repatching the masonry in the corner where the new fireplace was placed to ensure the

## Swim Space

To keep the swimming pool addition small, Monroe made two key decisions in his design: He drafted the space with a smaller exercise pool than previously suggested and he positioned the addition underneath an existing upper deck of the home. Also, the pool's mechanics had to be below the basement slab, which required two weeks of underpinning. And with a stone patio replacing the deck on top, the addition had to have a concrete structural slab and steel engineering to support the new weight. An on-location steel erector allowed the remodeler to pinpoint all the anchor/plate locations where steel columns would fit, size all the parts and have them fabricated.

The addition took almost three months to execute.

"It took a lot of trust, supervision and guidance, and a lot of back and forth," Monroe says. To maintain the addition's walkout, he says, it required that the roughly 7- by 14-foot, pre-fabricated pool be brought downhill for installation, which was very tricky. "But it was important that the pool had a walkout and that when you enter the basement from the upper level, you saw that the pool was visually aligned and connected to the entire space and not just a separate room off on its own."





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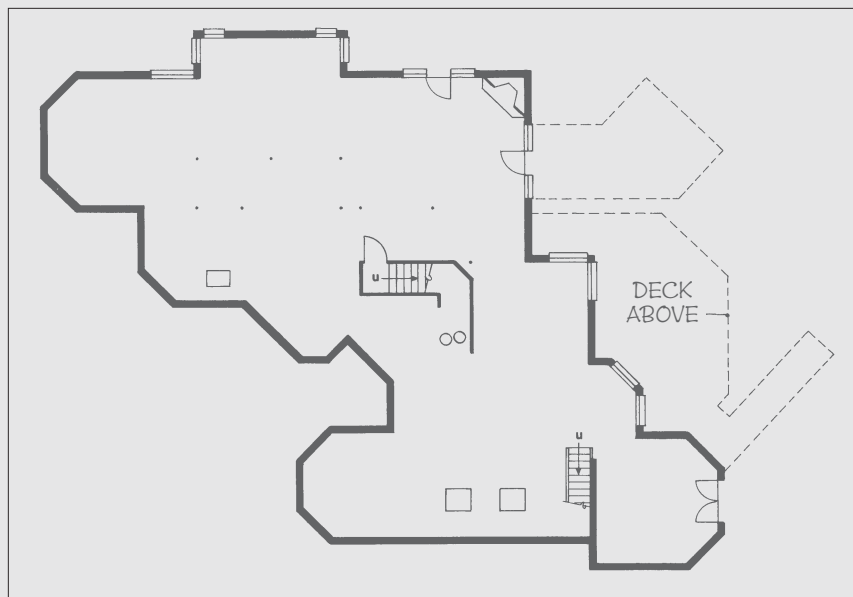
chimney was adequately supported.

Monroe says it was imperative to have a logical flow among the game room, great room and theater so that each space could easily access the snack bar and people

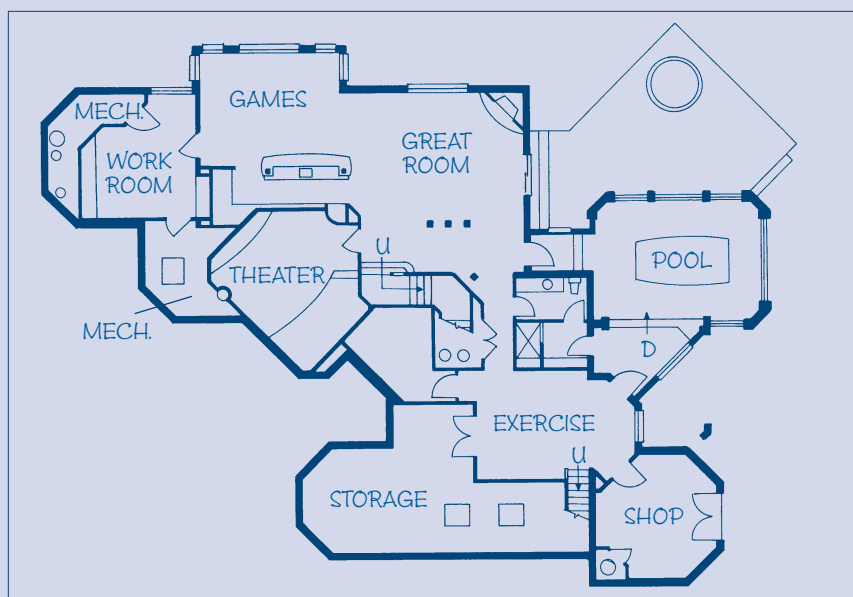
were not segregated from one another during a large gathering.

He avoided using hallways to connect rooms or floor plans that called for furniture placement to define rooms.

Before



After



This project's details included incorporating both arched and full-circle windows that echoed those in the existing home; using wood and stone finishes; and emphasizing nude, soft colors that gave an "up North" feel that complemented the natural Midwestern landscape of the home. For example, the homeowners had an extensive collection of Petoskey stones they wanted to incorporate, so a Wright employee spent several hours slicing and polishing the stones that were later used in the bathroom tile.

"The key is not to stop until you solve every problem, both for the client and how you feel the space should function as the designer," Monroe said. "I never like to stop



**The Wright Street Design Group had to limit its design within the home's existing footprint, except for a 600-square-foot pool addition.**

until I feel I've solved every issue — traffic, a comfortable sense of space, view and light. Once you get that overall scheme, you go further."

"It started midway through the project, and it took several months to complete, but it's important that you listen to every little thing the client says," Monroe says. "They may not know all the details or how it should come out, but you get a feel from them of how they want a space to look, feel and function, and you get to present ideas that help them carry that out. And that's invaluable."

The 14-month project cost \$650,000. **PR**  
— Meghan Haynes

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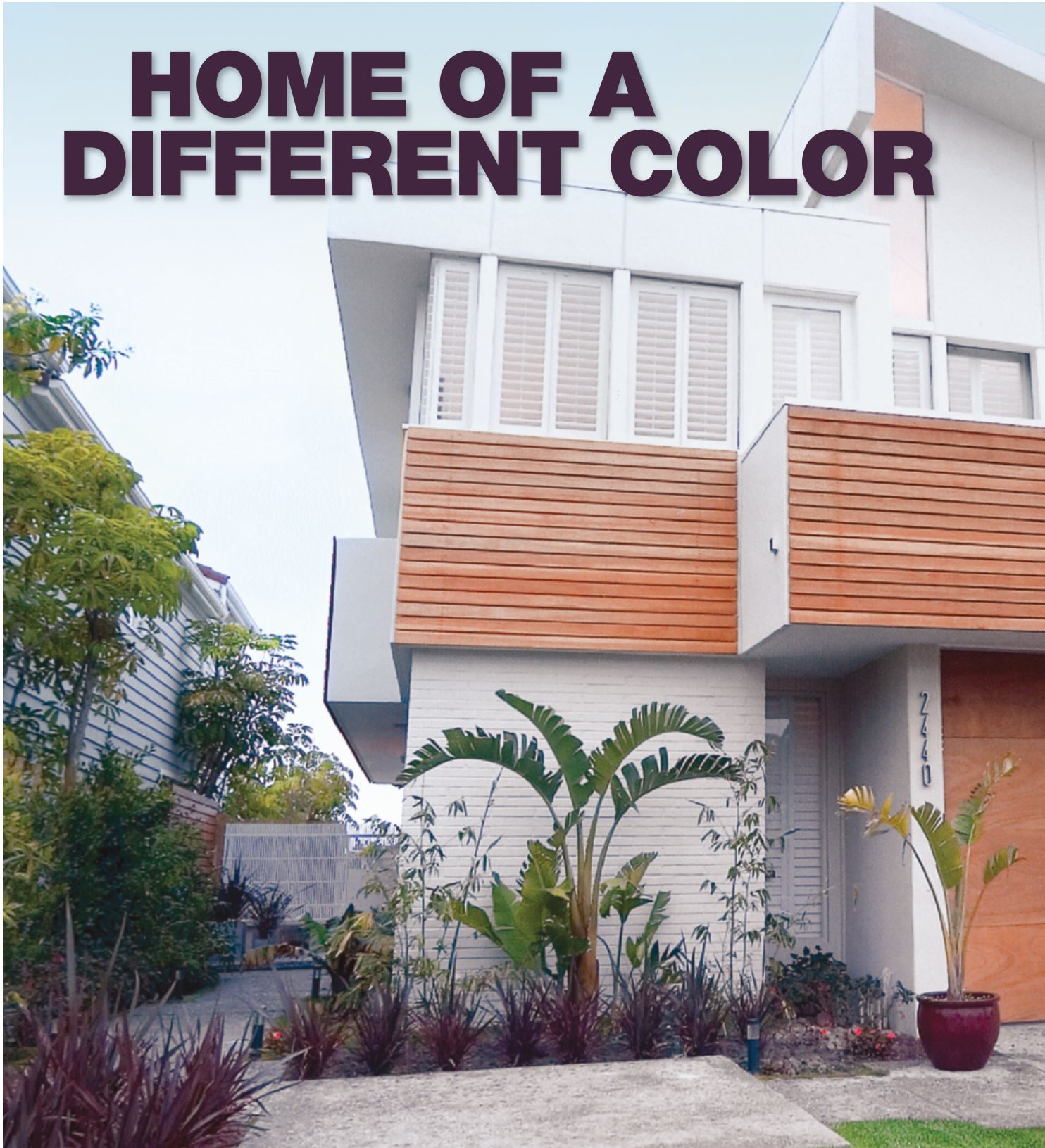
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# HOME OF A DIFFERENT COLOR







A spec project reforms a dated  
'Miami Vice'-like home to  
complement its neighborhood

Cream-colored paint and wood slats rejuvenate the brick and stucco exterior of this home to give it a fresh, contemporary look.

## WHOLE-HOUSE

**REMODELER AND ARCHITECT:** Byrd Development, Woodland Hills, Calif.

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Oxnard, Calif.

**AGE OF HOME:** 25 years

**SCOPE OF WORK:** Updating the streetscape of a contemporary, 3,500-square-foot home to blend with the neighborhood

**WHEN BYRD DEVELOPMENT** principal Richard Byrd — whose company currently does almost 100 percent of its projects as spec work — saw this 1980s harbor home, he knew it had the potential to retain its architecture without being both unapproachable and passé.

"The home had great bones, but it stuck out like a sore thumb in its neighborhood," he says. "We knew if we could soften both the landscape and the streetscape, the contemporary architecture of the home wouldn't be so stark against the rest of the

## BEFORE



## PRODUCTS LIST

**HVAC:** Carrier **Garage Door Openers:** Chamberlain (LiftMaster) **Home Systems & Controls:** Lutron **Insulation:** Georgia-Pacific **Paints & Stains:** Benjamin Moore, Pratt & Lambert, Farrow & Ball **Millwork & Molding:** Architectural Timber & Millwork **Roofing:** CertainTeed, Owens Corning **Windows:** Milgard

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASMINE CAMPBELL





**Wood slats inside mimic the look of the exterior and give the home continuity and warmth that can otherwise be hard to convey in a second home. Floor-to-ceiling windows bring in all the natural light indicative of a Miami waterfront home.**

homes on that street.”

To help this integration, the team painted the exterior stucco and brick in creams, whites and tans. Wood slats then replaced the foam green siding to tone down the architecture and make it appear more natural. Finally, lush tropical greenery was added to resemble a Miami home, and the foliage accents the wood and plays up the neutral colors.

Inside, the group scrapped everything except the drywall, replacing the marble floors with an exotic hardwood and installing a high-end, in-home broadcasting system to





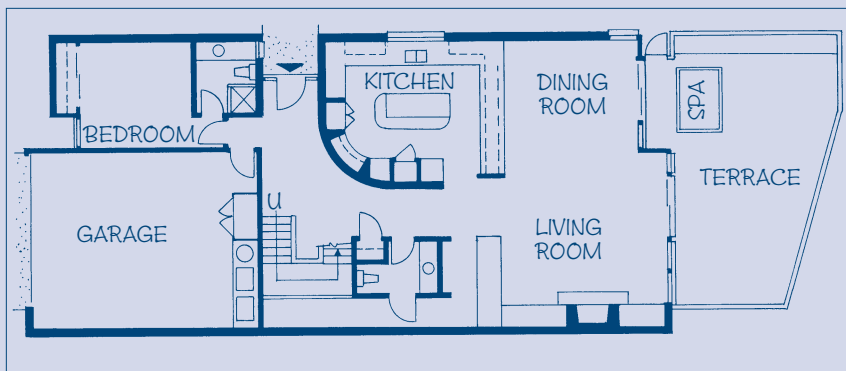
**A minimalist approach, neutral colors and exotic plants give the master bath the Miami-tropic ambience.**

## Like No Other

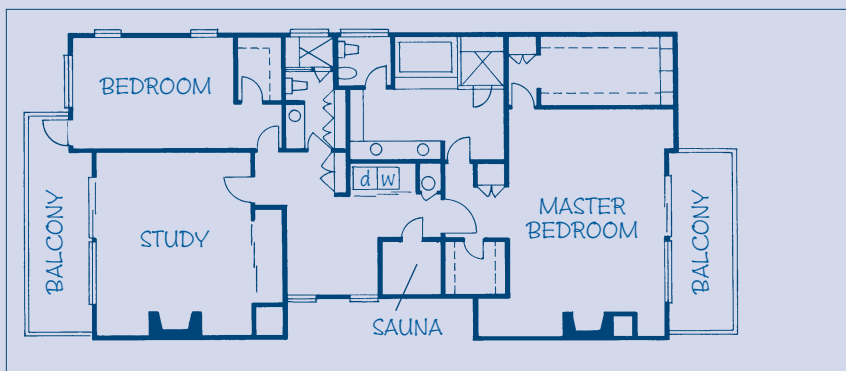
**R**ichard Byrd at Byrd Development believes the crown jewel of this project lies in the finishes — Marabou hardwood floors imported from Indonesia, seven-layer custom lacquer on the cabinet doors and furniture-quality tobacco finished on the solid core 8-foot doors

“This project really made us refocus the company in terms of spending more time in the design and planning phase, with storyboards just making sure every detail is picked out, planned and purchased before you start construction,” Byrd says. “Having a design that’s really been thought out increases your choice of materials because you are better-prepared for long lead times and you have more time to thoroughly investigate every option.”

## AFTER



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“The design of this home is so simple and minimal that we had to really make every aspect pop, and that’s why material choices were so key,” Byrd says. “When you just have plain white walls and nothing else, you need to have major statements, whether that’s the flooring, the siding or some other element.”

The home — purchased as the homeowner’s second home — sold two weeks after the project closed. “It was situated in the best part of the channel and had great down-channel views, so the way we organized the flow of the rooms definitely helped make it appealing,” Byrd says of the six-month project and \$400,000 investment. “But more than that, the quality of the materials shows through. I see so many other builders that try to cut costs in finishes, and that’s the wrong way to go. With best finishes and best design, we’ve seen that the buyer will pay extra.” **PR**

— Meghan Haynes

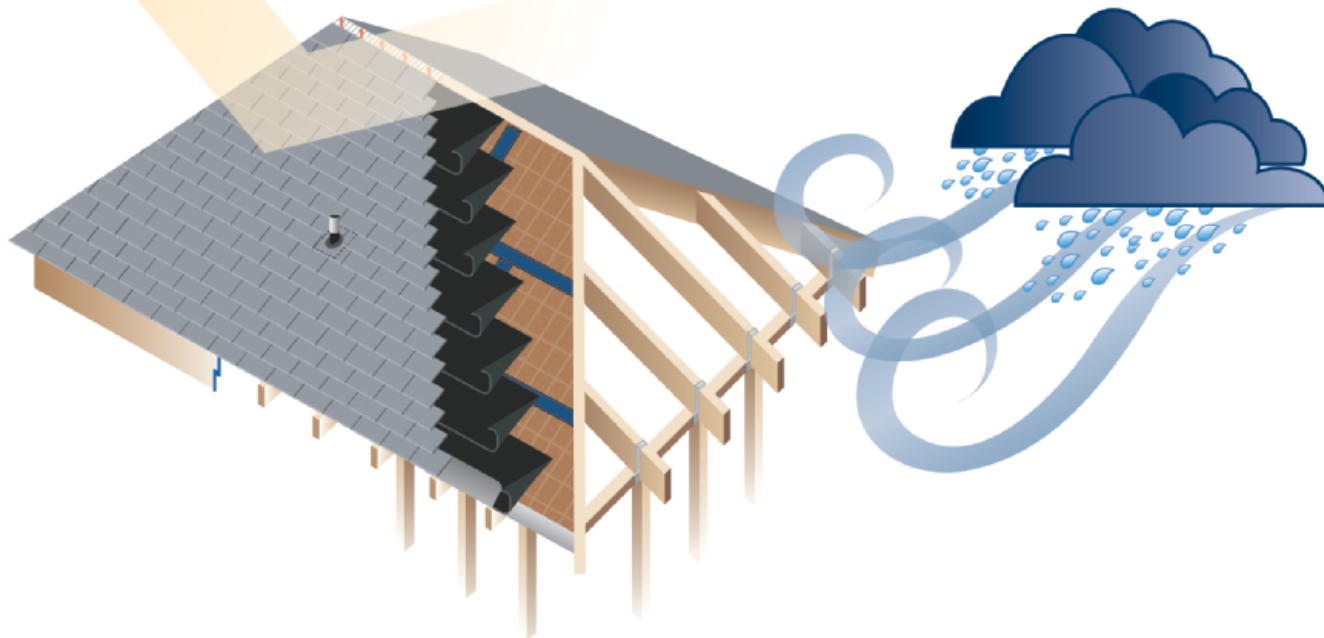
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# MOLD-FREE REMODELS



A new guide can help protect your projects from moisture problems

By Mike Blanford  
PATH Partners

**MOLD DAMAGE CAN BE COSTLY**, but you'll have nothing to fear if you control moisture. Mold problems — and solutions — are rooted in the design, construction and operation of buildings. Applying several easy building practices and technologies, can keep your remodels mold-free.

A new publication from the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing, "Moisture-Resistant Homes," offers the following guidance to curb causes of mold.

## Bulk Moisture

**Roof Coverings:** To protect against water intrusion from severe, wind-driven rain,

apply bituminous adhesive tape to roof sheathing joints before installing the roof underlayment. This practice provides protection against water even if a roof is severely damaged. See PATH's Roofing Tech Set.

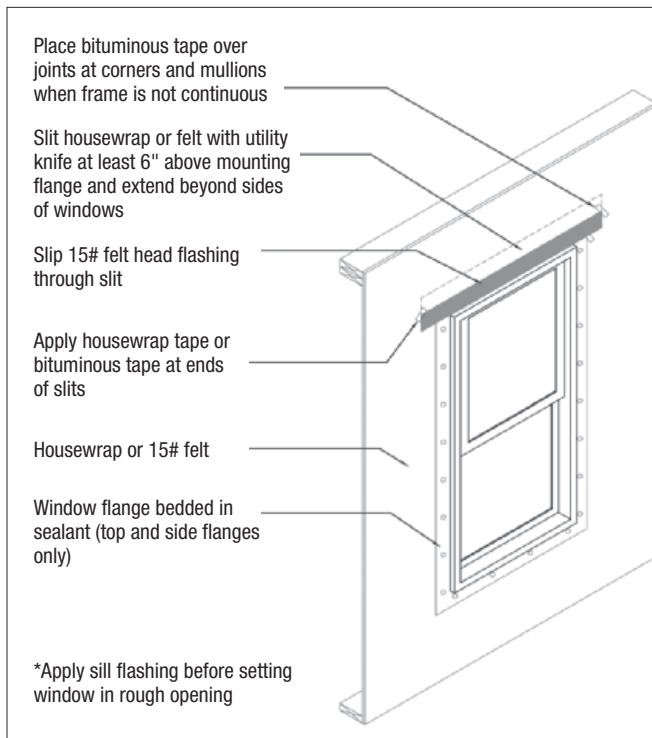
**Window and Door Installation:** Many window and door performance problems stem from incorrect installation because many contractors fail to follow the manufacturer's directions. If installers only check the packaging after the job is underway or completed, various components intended for moisture resistance — such as gaskets, flashing components, and

**Sealing roof sheathing joints with bituminous adhesive tape before installing the underlayment will protect against water intrusion if the roofing materials are severely damaged.**

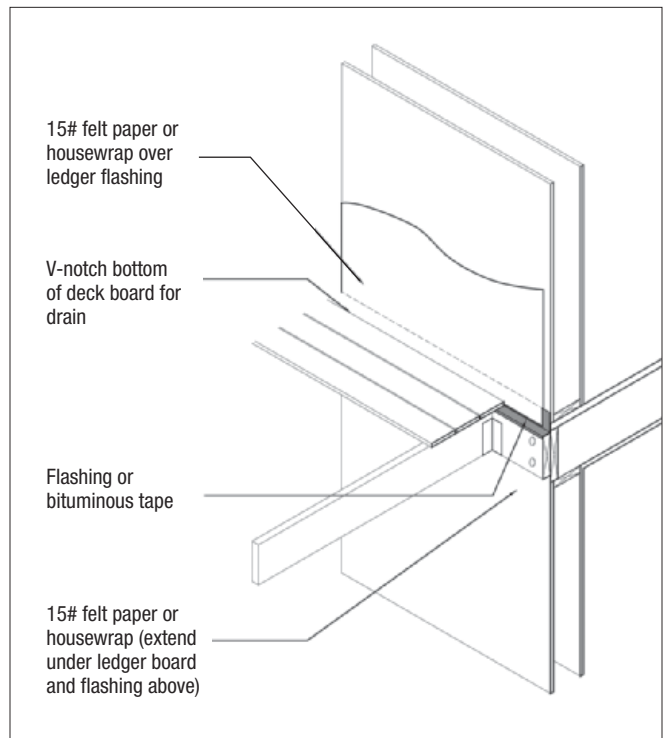
clips — have been thrown away. Be sure you're properly informed, and update training for your installers as needed.

**Wall Components Flashing:** Window and deck ledger flashing are essential to prevent water damage. A variety of manufactured windowsill and door threshold flashing components such as pre-molded pan flashings are available in lieu of site-built flashing components.





**Follow these steps and all manufacturer's instructions for the best moisture-resistant window installation possible. Be sure to use all the gaskets and flashing components provided with the window.**



**Proper installation of window and deck ledger flashing is essential to prevent water damage. Use manufacturers' pre-molded pan flashing whenever possible instead of site-built flashing components.**

### Basement Insulation and Finishing:

Install basement insulation and finishes so they dry to the interior. If you put low-permeability and continuous vapor retarders such as polyethylene sheeting or vinyl wallpaper on the interior of basement finishes, they may trap moisture vapor moving through the foundation. Unfaced fiberglass batt insulation and permeable paint finishes work well for basement walls that are framed and covered with gypsum wallboard — but pay attention to the details.

Because below-grade portions of the foundation wall must be able to dry to the interior, use semi-permeable rigid foam insulating sheathing products (for example, EPS or XPS). Product permeability levels vary by manufacturer, so check project specifications to ensure that the perm rating is greater than 1 perm for the requested thickness.

**Site Planning:** When you develop a site plan, show land and drainage patterns that

convey surface waters away from the building site. For sites that provide natural drainage away from the building, the main challenge is elevating the foundation enough to maintain good drainage.

Proper grading to direct surface water and roof water runoff away from the home is one of the simplest and most important ways to avoid moisture problems. When possible, the finish grade should fall at least 6 inches over a distance of 10 feet from the building. The steeper this slope and the farther it extends from the home, the better. Proper backfilling and compacting to prevent settlement are important to maintain good long-term drainage.

Very flat sites may require mounding the foundation pad and coordinating appropriate foundation elevations for proper drainage. On sloped sites, excavating and grading up-slope must sufficiently drain away from the building's perimeter and against the direction of the site's natural water flow.

### Moisture Vapor

Moisture problems related to water vapor can be confusing because they have multiple causes. Seemingly unrelated decisions that you make for one building system will affect the migration of water vapor in a house. And, removing a cause will often correct or prevent a problem even in complicated scenarios where several factors are involved.

**Building Materials:** Protect building materials from exposure to the elements during storage and construction. Keep wood products such as structural panels and framing lumber under roof whenever possible; at least raise them off the ground, cover them with a waterproof tarp and secure the tarp carefully to protect materials from rain.

Inspect shipments of lumber and other framing materials upon delivery to confirm that they're moisture- and mold-free. This will be easier if you come to an agreement with your supplier when you order the



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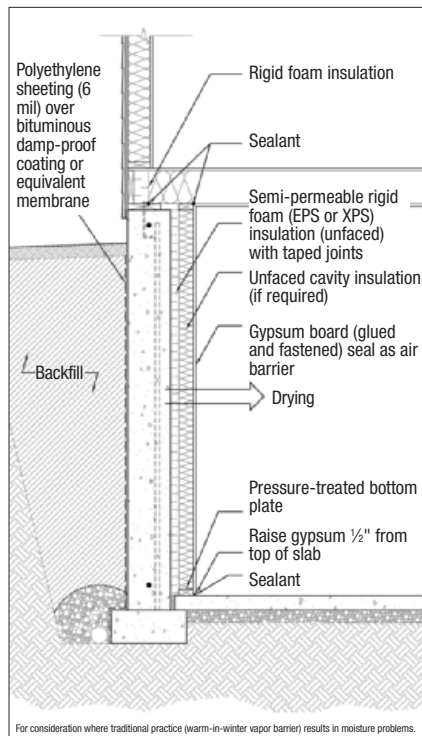
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**Below-grade foundation wall insulation and interior finishes must be installed correctly so moisture vapor can dry to the interior.**

materials. An agreement will be helpful in heading off a dispute about what to do with a product shipment that is wet or moldy.

Use a moisture meter to check the moisture content of building assemblies such as exterior walls. This is especially important if the wall assembly includes layers that slow the drying process once

the wall is closed in. Depending on moisture exposure before and during construction, materials may store enough moisture to promote mold growth for some time after construction is complete.

Wooden materials generally will not support mold growth at a moisture content of 19 percent or less. Other materials within a wall assembly, such as insulation, also should be dry at the time of close-in.

If you're aiming to control drywall cracks and nail pops as well — a large source of callbacks due to moisture — the maximum moisture content of framing lumber at close-in will be lower. For most areas of the U.S., the moisture content of framing lumber should be no more than 10 to 15 percent at the time of close-in. However, the amount of shrinkage in dimensional lumber can be unpredictable. For additional information on the effects of moisture on framing lumber shrinkage and expansion, refer to *The Wood Handbook*, a product of the Forests Products Laboratory.

**Ventilation:** You can also combat moisture vapor at its source. When interior relative humidity levels become a concern, provide more whole-house and spot ventilation and add controls that automate ventilation.

Controls that enhance ventilation include humidistats, combination light/fan switches, timers with switches and combination light/fan switches with a programmable delay control for the fan.

Choose Energy Star qualified fans, and go for a sound level of 0.3 sones or less. The Energy Star qualification will ensure that the fan is energy efficient; the low sones will ensure that it isn't so noisy that the homeowner refuses to use it. **PR**

*Mike Blanford writes about better building practices on behalf of the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (www.pathnet.org). PATH is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Learn more at www.pathnet.org.*

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### Resources

To learn more about combating moisture problems, see:

- "Durability by Design: A Guide for Residential Builders and Designers," available at [www.huduser.org](http://www.huduser.org)
- "EEBA Water Management Guide," available at [www.eeba.org](http://www.eeba.org)
- "The Wood Handbook," available at <http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us/>.

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## NEW PRODUCTS

### KLEIN TOOLS

The Insulated Nut Driver kits manufactured by Klein Tools feature 3-, 4- and 6-inch hollow shafts. The tools are for long-bolt applications and allow full engagement with the nut to hold fasteners securely in place. The shafts also provide some distance from electrical sources.

Each kit includes a custom Cordura nylon carrying case that has an interior document pocket for maximum organization.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-125>



### WATT STOPPER/LEGRAND

The latest vacancy/occupancy sensors by Watt Stopper/Legrand save energy by automatically turning lights off in empty rooms and replace wall switches. It boasts a night light, has dual switching with one sensor for control of two loads (such as bathroom lights and exhaust fan); a backlight; and a light level sensor that adjusts light output according to daylight levels.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-126>

### EMECOLE

The Concrete Crack Repair/Waterproofing system from Emecole is a two-step method with an epoxy surface seal applied with the company's patented Jake gun on the outside of the crack. Liquid polyurethane or another epoxy is pumped through injection ports to fully fill the crack and seal the surface.

**For FREE info go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-127>



### RIDGID

The JobMax fittings bag by Ridgid has six interior pockets and three exterior pockets made of Neoprene with a double-wall construction. The bag is rated for all weather use, and its interior is PVC-coated to resist water. The bag also has an abrasion-resistant bottom. It measures 11½-inches high by 17½-inches wide.

**For FREE info go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-128>

## BESA LIGHTING CO.

The Maxi Cable Glass Pendants by Besa Lighting Co. are large cable pendants for foyers, lofts, two-level great rooms, entryways, lobbies and other areas with a tall ceiling. The pendants come in a 15-inch teardrop, 24-inch globe and 36-inch tall cylinder version. They are supported by three wire cables and are adjustable up to 10 feet.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-129>



## LOPI

The Leyden cast iron wood stove by Lopi holds up to 65 pounds of wood in log lengths up to 21 inches with a 2.3 square foot firebox. One full load of wood produces up to 18 hours of burn time. The stove has a top loading option, and a built-in heat-exchange chamber transfers heat off of the stove for added efficiency.

**For FREE info**  
**go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-132>

## TRIMBLE

The latest products in Trimble's Spectra portable laser tools include the LG20 Crossbeam Generator, HR250 Precision Laser and HD50 Handheld Distance Laser. The HD50 (shown) is accurate to  $\pm 1/16$ -inch at 165 feet and can measure hard-to-reach or hazardous areas. The LG20 replaces a level, square, plumb bob, chalk and optical instrument and features self-leveling and universal accessories.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-130>



## FOMO PRODUCTS

The Handi-Stick polyurethane foam adhesive from Fomo provides an airtight seal and durable bond. According to the company, the product works quickly on insulated concrete form construction and on architectural foam. The product is pressurized, and 1,000 lineal feet of adhesive bead can be applied without changing cans.

**For FREE info go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-131>





### Discouraging mold growth

While fancy fixtures and flashy tubs can help sell a job, sometimes the most important part of a bathroom project happens in the walls.

Mold and moisture concerns continue to drive development in the wallboard industry as manufacturers work to create products that discourage mold growth.

"Everyone's just really afraid about it, so we are constantly looking at ways to offer a higher degree of protection," says Kieren Corcoran, product manager for Georgia-Pacific.

Manufacturers are designing the new wave of products to resist mold by removing the paper — the mold's food source — from wall products for tubs and showers.

"We've removed 99 percent of the organics, so even if you have the mold spores and the moisture, you still inhibit the mold growth," Corcoran says.

G-P's DensShield Tile Backer, for example, replaces the paper with fiberglass mats and has a moisture-resistant coating.

While USG offers mold-resistant products like its Durock cement board, product solutions are only part of the equation, says John Pappas, product marketing manager, drywall systems, for USG Corp.

"We're always looking at new product developments, but we're working to educate professionals and consumers about mold issues as well," he says. "Proper installation is the most important part of keeping moisture out. Products are not a silver bullet."

Toward that end, USG is focusing on training and sharing information through an informational Web Site and as part of the Responsible Solutions to Mold Coalition.

G-P is also doing its part in training, with installation clinics on building moisture resistant bathrooms at industry trade shows.



### DANZE

The Antioch Single Handle Articulated Spout kitchen faucet by Danze has an arched spout with a one-foot reach for large multi-bowl sinks and a side sprayer. It is available in chrome, brushed nickel and oil rub bronze finishes and comes with a matching deck plate to cover any existing holes.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-133>

### SPEAKMAN CO.

The Versatile Shower System from Speakman Co. shower products combines a handheld and mounted showerhead in one polished chrome unit. The package attaches to any existing fixed arm-mounted showerhead and includes a 6-foot metal hose, a wall-mounted holder and hardware for diverting water to the hand-held component.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-134>



### WARMLY YOURS

The ClearlyYou mirror defogger from Warmly Yours is an electric system that transfers warmth to the glass surface to prevent moisture build-up during bathing. It is installed behind wall-hung mirrors and comes equipped with pre-attached power leads to any 12-volt lighting fixture or 2- by 4-inch junction box.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-135>

## TOTO

The Washlet S400 toilet seat from Toto is made from an antimicrobial plastic and features an automatic flushing system. The lid closes 90 seconds after use, and the seat can be raised by button or wireless remote. It also has a self-cleansing function and heated seat.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-136>



## ARTISAN

The Brass Basin Collection from Artisan is cast in solid brass in scalloped, smooth and floral shapes. There are 12 models available and the basins are 5¼-inches deep and are 19 inches wide. The company also has stainless steel offerings and has a 25-year warranty on all of its sinks.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-137>



## SAFETY TUBS

The Acrylic walk-in bathtub with a built-in adjustable seat from Safety Tubs allows those with limited mobility to get in and out of the tub easier. When closed, the door seal flattens and keeps the water in, and the weight of the water keeps the seal leak proof. A hand shower that's included can be mounted on the tub or the wall.

**For FREE info go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-138>



## OCEANIA BATHS

The standard-size Sakura shower/bathtub from Oceania Baths measures 60 by 30 by 12 inches and is built for alcove installation. It sports a 22-inch acrylic backsplash, pre-installed reinforced grip bars, a fold-down seat and a low-maintenance, joint-free surface. The combination tub features the company's AeroMassage therapeutic systems.

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For Free info go to <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-21>



### COPPERFIELD

The HomeSaver UltraPro Chimney liner from Copperfield is made of a flexible, stainless 316 TI alloy and, according to the company, is engineered to stand moisture, extreme temperatures, corrosive flue gasses, repeated cleaning, and daily use. The liners replace traditional clay liners inside chimneys and are UL-listed.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-140>



### ELK

The Elk HighPoint Premier 300 from Elk Premium Building Products is a lightweight, low-profile vent that hugs the roof and allows the hip and ridge shingle above to achieve the desired look. The system can withstand high temperature changes and can be gun-nailed without connector straps or gasket material.

**For FREE info go to** <http://pr.ims.ca/5319-141>



### CERTAINTEED

The Restoration Millwork Exterior Trim from CertainTeed is a solid PVC finish trim that mimics top-grade lumber. The line includes trimboards, beadboard, full-size sheets, one-piece corners, brickmould and drip caps. The trim comes finished on all sides, can be painted and is milled in 18- and 20-foot lengths. It has a 25-year limited warranty.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-142>



### UNIVERSAL FOREST PRODUCTS

The one-piece corner mould was recently added to Universal Forest Product's TechTrim line of primed cellular polymer exterior products. The corner mould has a wood grain texture and adapts to 88- to 92- degree corners. It is available in 10-foot lengths widths of 4 and 6 inches and requires one coat of exterior paint.

**For FREE info go to**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5319-143>





### BERGER BUILDING PRODUCTS

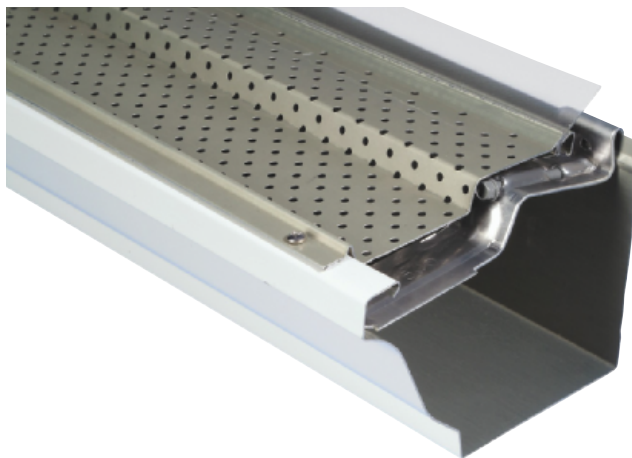
The No Leaf solid gutter cover from Berger Building Products can be used on new or existing gutters. The system's bullnose design creates surface tension for rainwater flow. It is installed under the first row of shingles and is made of .024-gauge aluminum in 4-foot lengths in 19 colors. The company offers a 20-year limited warranty.

For FREE info go to  
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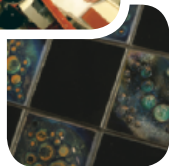
### ALCOA

The latest extension to the Leaf Relief line of gutter products from Alcoa Home Exteriors includes the Retro-fit gutter. Made out of aluminum, the gutters have a vinyl polymer strip for sealant and debris prevention. The units can fit existing gutters and can be applied around corners. 5- and 6-inch versions are available.

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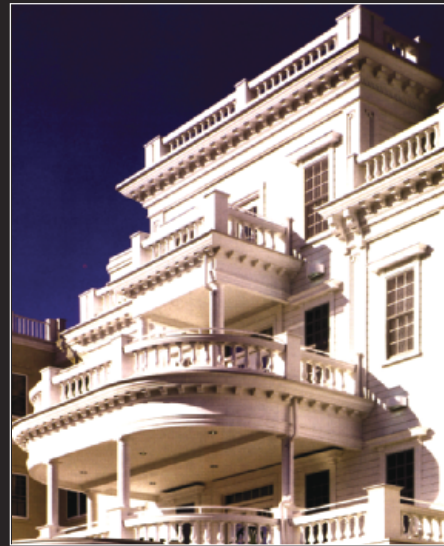
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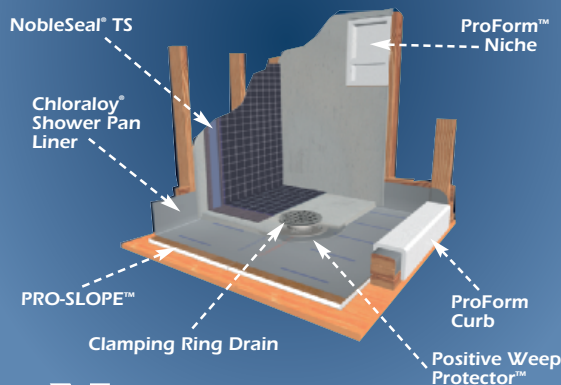
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## INNOVATION AND CHANGE

Here we are at the beginning of 2007. All is possible at this time of year because we're leaving the past behind. Working in the remodeling industry is certainly a good way

to learn about new beginnings. Change has been one of the few things we can count on!

As a high school student working summers starting in 1965 with a builder on Long Island, N.Y., I worked with a brace and bit; a Yankee screwdriver; and other non-battery operated tools. I never imagined how constant and unpredictable the extent of innovation would be. Laser levels, battery-operated everything, nail guns — 31 years later it is impossible to imagine remodeling without these tools.

When my wife, Nina, and I moved to San Francisco in 1974 we loaded everything we owned into and on top of (what else?) a VW van. With a mattress in the back and our cat joining us, we set out to discover the rest of our lives. The sense of possibilities and driving to the unknown were wonderful to experience. We had a place to move into but had no jobs and knew virtually no one. Taking that chance was a turning point in our lives.

In 1978, I had a chance to build a house. To do that I would need to be a licensed contractor. I didn't want to do that. That would mean I would be one step closer to being a businessman, and that was something I never wanted to become! As a member of the counter-culture, I wanted to keep at arms-length anything that hinted at my selling out.

Needless to say, I did get the license. The house was built, and taking that chance gave me the opportunity to learn more about estimating accurately and building in an urban environment. I was often attracted to projects

that were unusual and challenging but not always easy. Money? Profits? Yes, I knew they were important but thought, life is short, — and it was going to be so cool to drive 50 miles one way to do a library restoration or try to figure out how to build a third-story addition on a house with no parking in front.

Over time, being a businessman became more comfortable. Today, I still look for challenges, but I decided to run a business that makes money. If taking on a challenge came with making a profit, I was interested. I got into this industry to shape reality, to bang nails and watch change happen in the world I was working in. I did not start building and remodeling to become a salesperson. Then I realized that I already was a salesperson and I could only become a better one. Doing the same project for more money was a no-brainer. So I decided to learn a selling system and develop my sales skills. We resist doing what we know we need to do. If you are lucky, you realize that you need to introduce innovation into your mindset sooner than later. Often it is more comfortable to simply do what you did the day before — even if is painful or ineffective — because it is familiar.

As we move into 2007, each of you will be faced with new choices and challenges. What have you been postponing? Make a pledge to yourself and your loved ones that you will introduce at least a little of those activities and experiences into your life now, while you have the time to enjoy them, instead of waiting. Remember, all you can count on is that you never really know what the future holds. Find your trip from Long Island to California soon. Change your perspective and live your future today! **PR**



### Paul Winans

*Advisory Board Columnist*

**Birth Date:** Feb. 10, 1950

**Company:** Winans Construction

**Location:** Oakland, Calif.

**Industry Involvement:** President of NARI National 2005-2006; Facilitator for Remodelers Advantage

**Favorite Business Book:** "Five Dysfunctions of a Team" by Patrick Lencioni

**Best Advice You've Received:** Raise your gross profit goal, from Les Cunningham

**Greatest Business Achievement:** Being able to be away from our business 4 months of the year with our company able to function successfully

**Pets:** Cats, Carmine and Ralph  
**I Drive:** A BMW 528ia

**Favorite Musical Groups:** Bruce Springsteen, Van Morrison, Puccini

**Favorite Comedian:** Jonathan Winters, Bill Murray

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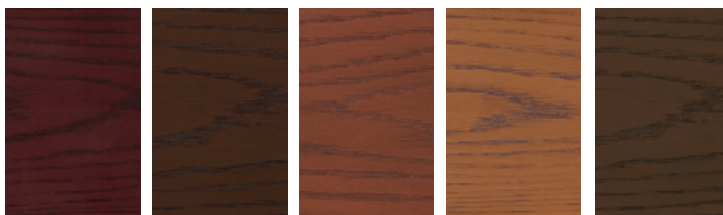
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