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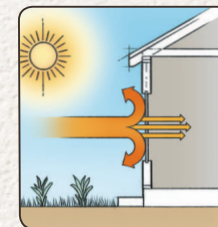
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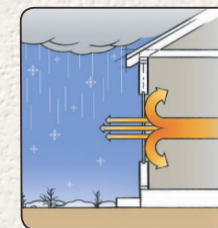
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Compare your answers to others in the industry with instant results in our online Remodeler's Poll. See page 9 for this month's question.

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WHO IS YOUR NEXT CUSTOMER?

This year's Kitchen/Bath Industry Show & Conference in Las Vegas may have been the most innovative and trend-setting trade show we've seen in years. With thousands of high-tech appliances, fixtures and amenities, the manufacturers who displayed their products (see pages 57-59 for some of the best new products we saw at the show) showed they have both you and your customers' needs and desires top of mind.

One of the most interesting things I found at the show, however, wasn't a refrigerator with a television screen or a spa with an MP3 player. It was a research project conducted by Merillat that used 1,252 interviews with consumers to reveal key insights into homeowners' attitudes and decision-making processes. The research was geared toward new-home buyers and focused on the kitchen, but the information can be extremely valuable for remodeling firms to formulate their sales and marketing strategies.

The results uncovered four distinct prospect groups: Luxury Leaders, Domestic Dwellers, Busy Bees and Career Builders. Depending upon your market, each is a hot target for remodeling services and each has a different way of viewing their home based on their lifestyles and interests.

The Luxury Leader is what many of you may call the high-end client. Their average annual income is \$138,200, and they own a 3,000-square foot home valued at \$370,000. They are highly educated, average 46 years old, and have grown children. Status is important to this prospect, so your marketing and sales should focus on providing pride and prestige through cutting-edge technology, fine finishes and trendy features.

Domestic Dwellers' average annual income is \$111,00, and they own a



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2,600-square-foot home valued at \$289,000. They are mainly college educated, and average 46 years old, and their children are grown, too. This group is a bit more practical, making decisions based on durability and efficiency.

Busy Bees have an average annual income of \$116,000, and they own a 2,800-square-foot home valued at \$305,000. They are also college educated and average 43 years old, and their children mainly still live at home. Time is of the utmost importance to this client, so efficient sales and communication systems will differentiate you from the competition.

Career Builders' average annual income is \$110,200, and they own a 2,800-square-foot home valued at \$294,000. They are college educated, and average 42 years old, and their children tend to still be living at home. Convenience, low-maintenance and especially resale value are important to this prospect, so selling on ROI can close the sale best.

For more information on the results of Merillat's research, log on to www.ProRemodeler.com. **PR**

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Beyond the usual suspects

Sometimes the best employees may not come from where you expect.

Philip Anderson, president of HDR Remodeling in Berkeley, Calif., has had great success adding employees who didn't follow the traditional path into the industry to his 14-person firm.

His production manager has an electrical engineering degree and worked as a computer consultant in Japan before coming on board four years ago. One of his project managers was trained as an engineer and spent the last few years flipping houses before joining HDR. And he just hired an MBA graduate to run the company's handyman division. Their experience in the corporate world has made the three very skilled



compromising with and managing customers in a way that many traditional employees are not, Anderson says.

"Instead of just getting a technician, we've gotten someone who was very well-rounded in their experience," Anderson says.

Anderson says he's probably drawn to nontraditional employ-

ees because of his own experience. He spent most of his life working in the corporate world, but when an employer wanted him to move, he quit instead. While looking for another job, he started doing small handyman projects. He found he liked it and started Honey Do Repair 19 years ago, which grew into his current design/build firm.

Building customer loyalty

When Case Design/Remodeling in Bethesda, Md., was looking for a way to increase repeat business, it looked outside the industry for inspiration and created a customer loyalty program.

"Case Dollars," launched in December, rewards clients by giving them 5 percent of their project price as a reward that can be credited to another project within one

year. So, if a customer has a \$100,000 remodel, they would receive \$5,000. They can use the Case Dollars to pay for up to 10 percent of a future project. The Case Dollars can also be transferred to another person.



The program has already resulted in at least \$700,000 in work that can be directly attributed to the promotion, says Joaquin Erazo, Case's vice president of marketing.

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

Everyone on the same page

As companies grow, one of the biggest challenges becomes keeping the lines of communication open. It can be tough to make sure sales is keeping up with what production is doing and that management is on top of everything.

Blackdog Builders in Salem, N.H., has tried to solve that problem with its "Weekly Job Jamboree Meeting," where the management, sales staff and project managers discuss the status of each project.

"It's a really powerful meeting for us as far as keeping everybody on the same page," says President David Bryan.

In the past, sales and production had their own weekly meetings and then would get together for a joint meeting once a month, but Bryan found that wasn't frequent enough for the teams to effectively communicate. Now people are aware of potential problems in time to do something about them, Bryan says.

During the meeting, participants go through each project that is in the design stage, has a contract signed, is under construction or is completed but still has payments pending. Sometimes the update is as brief as "nothing new" or it can be more detailed if needed. When the meetings started two years ago, they took about three hours but are now down to about an hour as everyone has grown used to the format, Bryan says.

ONLINE POLL QUESTION

What's most important to you when hiring a new employee?

To participate in this month's poll and view the results as they are tabulated, visit www.ProRemodeler.com

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MANAGING THE BACKLOG

How does your team process work flow?



PHOTO BY MARC BERLOW

Jef Forward, Owner Forward Designers & Builders

Forward Designers & Builders is a design/build company located in Ann Arbor, Mich., that does not provide architectural design as a stand-alone service.

Their current volume is around \$1 million with an average job size of \$130,000. Employees include a project manager, project manager's assistant, two project designers, a general manager and a bookkeeper.

www.planforward.net



PHOTO BY BILL GEIGER

Jacob Kirk, Director of Construction Wentworth Inc.

Chevy Chase, Md.-based Wentworth Inc. design/build firm is driven by architecture: the staff has two licensed architects — including owner Bruce Wentworth — two to three draftsmen and five field workers. The majority of work is subcontracted to an independent designer. The company does the carpentry but subcontracts framing. Job sizes range from \$100,000 to \$500,000.

www.wentworthstudio.com

With many jobs coming through the pipeline, who's in control, and how do they manage the backlog?

Jud: Our topic for today is managing the backlog. Jef, describe your process in managing backlog.

Jef: As a lead, a prospect comes into the office, and they are entered into ACT, our contact manager software. As they go through our design process, they're given different stages. That comes out on a report, which I can look at daily within ACT, to see how many clients we have in design, how many in pre-construction and how many we have in construction as well as the number of prospects. I'm trying to always keep certain limits on how many people we have in certain stages.

Jud: You have three stages and you want to keep so many people in each stage?

Jef: Yes.

Jud: Jacob, how do you manage the backlog?

Jacob: I meet with the director of architecture weekly to discuss schedules for jobs that are currently in design. We have two design phases: one is design and one is construction documents. We're paid a fee at both of those stages. Talking design as a whole, it can be about 3-6 months depending on the job to move it into construction. Our goal during this weekly meeting is to schedule the design work to allow for control over when these jobs are ready to build. Even at the very early stages of the job, it's very important to us for a number of reasons. One is to prevent multiple jobs starting at the same time, forecast schedules for our project managers to make sure the job and PM are a good fit. Our project managers have different talents and, depending on the nature of the client or the job, we want to select who is going to run it. The other is hiring, as needed, for both architectural studio and production. When we're looking 3-6 months out, it's a very tight market here for hiring, especially for anyone skilled on the production side. Lastly, it's for the cash flow so we can stage these jobs. Everything we design we move into construction or intend to move into construction. In

fact, there is a penalty if the client decides to go with someone else.

Jud: Jacob, what is an ideal number for your company to have in what you call "two phases" in this particular case?

Jacob: An ideal number would be about two projects per drafts. We have two draft persons on staff. So, 5-6 jobs would be about how many for our studio to stay productive and not be spread too thin.

Jud: How many would you be running and actually doing in construction?

Jacob: I'd say 4-5. That shows a little of our conversion ratio problem; we don't always convert our design jobs to construction. Four to five active jobs, we've noticed cash-flow wise, is what keeps things and business operating most effectively. The guys in the field would probably disagree and say 3-4; I think they feel a little overworked. But that's what we've noticed.

Jud: Jef, what's the ideal number for you?

Jef: In our design stage, we like anywhere between 4-6 in design and working. Our turnaround for design time seems to be similar, between 3 and 6 months. Our ideal turnaround would be between 2 and 3. We just can't get them to turn around that quickly. In pre-construction, which is where we're doing our construction documents, getting the job ready to start, ideally I would like three. But, right now we have two.

Jud: Jef, you were talking about how many projects you have in the pipeline. You said two and you'd like to have three. What do you do if you're in a situation where things are really popping and falling into place for you and you end up with six? How do you handle that?

Jef: I wouldn't let that happen; I wouldn't want that to happen. I would push people back in terms of their start times. I would be able to forecast that by looking at the progress of the design projects. If I had people coming to me with their projects saying they want to start tomorrow, I would

tell them I couldn't do it.

Jud: If you can't stay in your comfort zone, I'm going to call it, then you will tell them they'll have to wait or they'll have to find someone else. Is that a fair statement?

Jef: Yes.

Jud: Do you ever have people who say, "OK, we'll wait on you"?

Jef: Yes.

Jud: And is that largely because you have a reputation?

Jef: Yes, I like to think so. We're definitely working toward that. I also explain to people that in the design process it is very important to go through all the steps and all the decisions. We won't start a project until we've gone through that process. And that process takes time.

Jud: Jacob, the same question. How many do you have in the pipeline now?

Jacob: We have six jobs in design and we have three pending design contracts that could, in the next week or two, go into design. Over the next month, we also hope to have two of these go into construction. So, we'll keep six jobs in the pipeline.

Jud: What about a situation where you end up with

too many jobs? Would you run seven or eight jobs if it falls that way?

Jacob: The owner will push for that! He's hungry to grow. It has to do with Bruce starting his business over in 2004. We're growing very fast, and because of our growth, we've kept up with our backlog. Our backlog hasn't gotten too big for that reason. Our volume is steadily increasing. What we do throughout is, again, we're looking at a project and a schedule, and we set milestones throughout the design process. We let our clients know throughout that process where they're at and where we think they'll be. We're trying to manage their expectations through that process. So, if internally we have the need to push them out, we can do that and let them know in advance. For the most part, as long as we



Jud Motsenbocker
Contributing Editor

let our clients know upfront, it seems to go well. We have some clients who are very anxious to get going, and sometimes we can do that. We can expedite the process a little more and get them into construction.

Jud: Because you want your company to grow, would it be fair to say that you try not to get a backlog because you would just increase the number of employees you have to handle that?

Jacob: Yes. I think a backlog allows us to be in the comfort zone. I think a larger backlog could have a negative effect when you put clients off or ask them to wait too long. So, we try to keep it so we don't have a backlog or at least our backlog is manageable within the design process. By the time we're out of the design process, we never have more than a month or two before we're starting construction. It has a lot to do with keeping a client's enthusiasm going — the excitement for the project and everything else. We want these things to go from design to construction with no more than a month or two at the most lag time. We've managed that process through the design phase. Because the design phase can be up to six months long, it is manageable.

Jud: That's a good point to bring out. You try to keep that enthusiasm in the client going and that's why you don't want that design-to-construction to get too long. What kind of situations disrupt your flow of the project from the pipeline into the construction phase?

Jacob: The two biggest disruptions we have that have a negative impact on the flow of the design to production process are, No. 1, tight budgets with the clients. We do high-end remodeling. There's a lot of money spent in architecture and the design studio to provide drawings with very elaborate details in the high-end remodeling. When we have clients with budgets it really disrupts the process because of numerous repricing, optioning out things, and just the hesitation on their part — "sticker shock" that usually takes a little bit to get over.

All the way through, it's a lot of back and forth and a lot of hesitation on the client's part. It delays our ability to move forward. Sometimes a job will even be held up for a week or two while the client considers things and looks things over. Even at the point where we're at a final price and ready to build, they're wanting to go back and revisit the budget, work in a change and [ask] how can they do that. It takes a lot of revisions, a lot of revisits by me or the subcontractors to reprice. So, having a tight

"We try to keep it so we don't have a backlog or at least our backlog is manageable within the design process."

budget is probably the most destructive thing to the process. The other would be the permitting process. We work in Virginia, D.C. and Maryland. We have three different systems that we're working with in terms of getting permits, with D.C. being the worst. Once we get into the construction documents stage, we will fast track a set permit that, hopefully, we can get out in two or three weeks to submit the permit. That is never in our control, and sometimes that will push the start of construction out past that month that we ideally want. That also prevents us from having that fixed price, the final price at the end of construction documents. Without having the permit set back and everything else needed, we really can't provide what we tell our clients we'll provide as a fixed price, which is all-inclusive. Those would be the two biggest disruptions. And along the lines of the permitting process is dealing with homeowners' associations and other things. There are a lot of historical districts in D.C. There are zoning waivers and a lot of other things that the architectural studio has to get through to get these projects going.

Jud: Jeff, what interrupts your flow of the project through the pipeline?

Jeff: I would say meeting times and client availability. We often struggle with getting

my schedule to meet with their schedules. It can be a week or two between meetings and feedback meetings. That would be the biggest thing that we struggle with.

Jud: Jacob brought up budget. Does that slow things down at all for you?

Jeff: No, it doesn't. In our process, we take people through design and we give solid budgets throughout. In terms of every design meeting, we're talking money as well. If we don't talk it at that meeting, then the next meeting is just about budget. When

we get to the end of design, we actually sign our construction contract there. It's a two-stage construction contract and if that's for, say, a large kitchen and interior remodel for \$130,000, we'll get them to commit that they're looking at a range between \$130,000 and \$170,000. Depending on some of the fixtures and materials they select in the pre-construction process, and also from feedback from our trade partners, that will affect the final price. When we get to the end of our construction documents, we will have all the options worked out for them. They typically want to see a couple of different things, so we're presenting it like a menu. We're building our markup into different areas so we can present a number of options. When they sign the bottom line we know we're starting in two weeks.

Jud: Jeff, when you first meet the client, at the first or second meeting is there any point in there where you're discussing the schedule, from design through build, so that would help you on your backlog or help you so they know what the schedule is? Does that conversation come up?

Jeff: That conversation comes up on the very first phone call. We talk about schedule, what their expectations are, what's realistic, as well as budget.

Jud: Jacob, how about you? Where do

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you talk about schedule and the length of time the project is going to take?

Jacob: It's always one of the first questions a client has: when can you do this and how long will it take? Just like: how much will it cost? Our salesperson meets with the homeowner, and they also come in for the initial design presentation. Talking budget at that time is vague until we get a good idea of the project and full scope of work. We're not quoting any time at that point; there's just too much and too early. Once we get actual design schemes developed and the job is brought to me, then we'll start talking budget, refining the budget and talking schedule. Usually at that point, we'll also give the client an outline on what

to expect through the design and construction process, when we'll look for key meetings throughout the process, and when we can expect to finalize this. Then we'll give it to them. It really helps the client to stay focused when we give that to them in terms of coming back with their selections and the homework they're supposed to do as a client. As we get closer to the end, we'll actually hone in on a date for the start of construction. That's usually pending on permits.

Jud: Depending on what city you're in?

Jacob: Yes.

Jud: Who oversees and controls that so, in your case, you don't have backlog?

Jacob: Kevin and I. Bruce is the salesperson. The three of us get together and talk weekly about this. We have company-scheduled meetings every Friday where we talk about jobs that are currently in design or construction and any perspective clients. Kevin and I meet for an hour or two weekly — we call it the design/build meeting. We're looking at these projects in design and trying to manage them. At that point, sometimes Bruce will sit in with us, or at least we'll get back to Bruce on where we're at. That helps him give feedback to the clients when he's meeting them, in terms of what type of jobs we're trying to get and where we can fill the holes. When we see we have a hole, and we have a PM available, and it would be nice to get a kitchen or bathroom.

Bruce could really focus on that. It allows him to pick and choose the clients a little more, too. There are a number of clients in the area that we'd just rather not work for. Once we get little bit of a backlog, we can do that. As far as who oversees the management, it's the three of us.

Jud: I think it's important that you indicate that you do it on a weekly basis. Do you also, in this process, notify the client as to just exactly where they're at or what you're doing? Do you have a process of

“Having a tight budget is probably the most destructive thing to the process.”

getting a hold of the customer or client every two weeks or 30 days or some kind of a number?

Jacob: I wouldn't say that there's a process. At that point, the design studio would e-mail, and communications to the client are almost daily. We have key meetings for design presentation, selections and 90 percent CD review. Between all of that, I think that they just fine-tune things as they go through the process. Again, the communications with the client at that point is almost daily sometimes and a lot of back and forth, at least every couple of days. A lot of the questions are thrown out more casually and answered more casually.

Jud: Jef, how do you handle the backlog? And I know you don't have one, but how do you handle the workload?

Jef: While we're building a team; at some point in the next year we're going to be moving into a growth period. We're going to be aggressively trying to have up to five and six projects at a time. Right now, I'm in the stage where I'm building the team and we're getting our processes down. In terms of how we manage it right now and manage our workload, we have a weekly production meeting. In the meeting, we have our project manager, our general manager and myself. We focus on the next job that's coming ready to move into pre-construction. We have weekly meetings on that as well.

Jud: Again, we're back to the team effort, just like Jacob said. Jef, you're doing the same thing. Jacob made the comment that it's almost a daily conversation with the client one way or the other. How about you? How often are you in contact with the client?

Jef: I'm not in contact with them enough. We're currently trying to remedy that. We have a weekly e-mail that goes out with a schedule. Our project manager has a daily e-mail to certain clients. It's often not initi-

ated; it may be answering questions or things like that.

Jud: Does cash flow ever have anything to do with the project or the backlog of projects?

Jef: Yes, very much so! We're always looking at that. We want to maintain a certain amount of projects in construction at one time. Right now we're down to two. That became apparent to us about a month and a half ago, that we were falling behind, and we've quickly gotten two up; one start next week and the other starts two weeks later. We're in a particularly busy time right now because twice a year there's a large remodeling home tour in Ann Arbor and my own personal house is on the tour this year. I've been spending a lot of time with it. My general manager was actually able to pick up on this; we're falling behind on this and need to get these projects up and out.

Jud: Jacob, does cash flow make a difference when you're trying to shift these projects around?

Jacob: It does, somewhat. But it can only impact cash flow so much when you're looking at a job over the course of over 3-6 months to get in construction and trying to bring that in. **PR**

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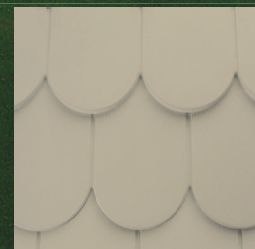
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AN OVERLOOKED KEY TO SUCCESS

The seventh key attitude goes beyond enjoying what you do

MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO I wrote about what I have determined are the six key attitudes to success in any area of life, especially business. The key attitudes are hard work, discipline, diligence, applying best practices, striving for excellence and faith. These are all still valid, critical and essential to being successful.

Since writing about the key attitudes, I discovered one key attitude I took for granted, which is a missing piece for many people. The seventh key attitude to success is having a passion for what you do and accomplishing it passionately! This doesn't mean you have to go around hyped up all the time; rather, you should maintain a certain intensity, drive and urgency about your day's activities.

How do you know you have passion? It is recognized and, typically, others will notice this attitude in you. They will say things like, "Boy you really like what you do," "You sure are committed," "You get a lot done in a day," or "I appreciate your positive attitude and willingness to go the extra mile."

While at Christmas dinner in 2005, I spoke with my brother-in-law about a new technology business he started for ranchers with game management programs. He was passionate about the new endeavor, which was a natural fit for him because he loves the outdoors and hunting. This was the first time I had seen him so excited about a business venture. My sister (his wife), who is chairwoman and CEO of a large national conglomerate of companies, reinforced my observation.

While talking with my brother-in-law recently, I observed he still has the passion for his new business. Not only is his

business growing, but he is enjoying the process. So, is his entrepreneurial undertaking without all the ups and downs of growing a new business? No, it is not, but it's better because it matches one of his passions in life.

For me, my passion in business is helping to touch, change and transform other people's lives for the better by providing an opportunity to achieve stronger profit margins and a better quality of life.

It's a lot of work. It takes discipline to do everything; diligence not to give up;

people on your bus in the right seat.

Like my brother-in-law, I believe we are all uniquely gifted to work in a specific field or job type, or with a purpose that can apply to many different types of businesses.

If we can find and accept our area of

giftedness (without worrying about comparing ourselves to others) and if we can be secure in where we are, then we will find freedom, energy and excitement to consistently do our jobs well. However, the opposite is true as well. I once, early in my career, sold floor cleaning equipment and had no



Doug Dwyer
Contributing Editor

“The seventh key attitude to success is having a passion for what you do and accomplishing it passionately.”

seeking and applying best business practices; striving to do everything with excellence; and having faith it can be done. But without a passion and a purpose behind that passion, it would be just a job.

This not only applies to us as business owners but to our staff as well. If you have employees who aren't passionate in their current position, then help them see how they could be or help them find a different position where they can be passionate in your company or elsewhere, if needed. In the end, you and your employee will both be happier and you will have the right

passion for this. It was drudgery. I hated it and could barely get myself out of bed to go to work. I needed to make a change and eventually did.

Don't settle. Choose to live passionately and encourage those around you to do the same. **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.

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Growing by

**PHASING OUT OF
ONE REMODELING
ARENA ALLOWED
DANNY LIPFORD
TO FIND SUCCESS
IN ANOTHER**

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

LEARNING TO LET GO CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT things for any business owner to do. Sometimes it needs to happen so a business can grow, sometimes so a company can outlive an owners retirement, or sometimes so an owner can explore other interests.

That's how things started out for remodeler Danny Lipford when he started a small cable access television show in Mobile, Ala., nearly 20 years ago. Since then that side interest has grown into "Today's Homeowner," a nationally syndicated weekly home improvement show airing in more than 150 cities.

When Lipford started the show in 1988, it was a live call-in show he used as an effective way to market his remodeling firm, Lipford Construction. It did just that, with business tripling in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANNY LIPFORD

Letting Go

the first two years the shows broadcast, Lipford says. Because of the popularity of the show, by 1997 it eventually grew to about 25 markets in the Southeast.

"I always intended it to just be a marketing tool, but then it became something important on its own," he says.

Things really started to change in 1998 when the owners of Today's Homeowner magazine asked to partner with him on a national show. Within six months of its June 1998 launch, the show broadcast in more than 100 markets. Lipford even began appearing as a regular guest on CBS' morning show and The Weather Channel. But in 2001 things took an unexpected turn. That's when the Times Mirror magazine group was sold to AOL Time Warner, which was also acquiring the This Old House

Danny Lipford's on-camera duties (above) take him across the country to cover projects and trade shows for "Today's Homeowner," but he knows that Lipford Construction is in good hands when he's away from his Mobile, Ala., headquarters.

A strong management team (left) is important for an owner looking to spend less time in his business. The Lipford team is (from left to right): General Manager and Estimator, Bob Caron; President, Danny Lipford; Production Manager, Wiley Bullock; and Office Manager, Barbara Johnson.

“I always intended it to just be a marketing tool, but then it became something important on its own,” Lipford says.



Danny Lipford not only manages his own weekly show, he also writes and produces all the content for his segments on The Weather Channel, along with video shorts on his Web site. He is also scheduled to make more than 20 appearances on CBS' "The Early Show" and will be producing a DVD series later this year.

brand. They didn't need Lipford's show anymore.

Rather than fold up shop, though, Lipford decided to make the risky move of going out on his own, putting his own resources behind the show. He licensed the "Today's Homeowner" name and now has a staff of 15 people dedicated solely to the program. With Lipford's new responsibilities, the show became a full-time job, so if he wanted to keep Lipford Construction going, he had

to be willing to let somebody else run the company.

"I had to take a major step back if this was going to work," he says.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

Three people now handle the day-to-day responsibilities of the company: General Manager/Estimator Bob Caron, Production Manager Wiley Bullock and Office Manager Barbara Johnson.



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Kitchen projects are the most popular projects for Lipford Construction. Danny Lipford's television appearances have improved the company's profile resulting in more high-end projects than before.

Before deciding to launch the new show, Lipford had several talks with the three to make sure they were up to the job.

"I told them I needed a commitment from them to stay here and work together to keep this company running," he says. "They made the commitment, and they've really stepped forward in a big way."

In fact, the company had its best year in 2006, with revenues topping \$2 million, a success Lipford credits to the management team.

The key to the successful transition was the training Lipford gave the staff for years to take on more responsibility. So although they were adding new duties, they were not unprepared.

"Our ability to make the change started several years earlier," he says. "I'm a big believer in seminars and conferences, so I'd been sending Bob and Wiley to every single one they could go to."

At the time, both were production managers, and Lipford was handling the estimating. As Caron took on more estimating



responsibilities, he attended more seminars on topics such as markup and margins, which led to more company success.

"Honestly, he brought in better markups and more profitable jobs than I did," Lipford says. "He wasn't afraid to charge what

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“The reason this worked is that we’d been moving in that direction for years and they were ready to take on the load when I needed them to,” says Lipford.

we needed to charge, where I, as an owner, had been a little afraid to do that.”

Like many owners, Lipford had a hard time letting go.

“I think there’s a bit of paranoia there where I thought if I wasn’t there selling the job, I wasn’t going to get the work,” he says.

The transition was difficult at first, Caron says.

“I think it was pretty tough for him to let go in the beginning,” he says. “It took us a year, maybe even longer, for him to be comfortable that we were working the way he wanted us to. We understood that, because the bottom line is it’s his name on the sign.”

Lipford adjusted and now the company is thriving. Much of that continued success is due to the systems Lipford put into place years ago, Caron says.

“Danny laid a pretty good foundation for everybody,” he says.

“He set the standards for us so we know exactly what he expects.”

DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITIES

While Lipford is still the sole owner of the business, the management team handles most of the major decisions. He receives

weekly printed updates of where the company stands and has short meetings with the team when it’s necessary. They have an annual planning meeting, and four times a year the team meets for several hours to check in on the business plan and how the company is reaching its goals for the year. Lipford also attends the three or four companywide meetings every year, although he lets the management team run them.

Lipford’s celebrity status occasionally has its own consequences; sometimes clients are disappointed he won’t be doing their projects.

The company usually handles those concerns by explaining that Lipford is still involved in the business, but that the management team runs the day-to-day operations. If necessary, Lipford will become involved in the occasional project, such as a \$900,000 remodel and addition — the largest in company history — that the company did last year. In that case, Lipford met the homeowners and talked to them about the project but left the bulk of the work to the management team.

PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

The most important part of being able to transition out of the daily responsibilities is having the right people in place, Lipford says.

“If I had not been fortunate enough to find these three industrious employees, the transition would have been a lot harder,” he says.

Keeping an eye out for talent is important for any owner who wants to someday take a smaller role in his company. Owners need to constantly look for people who can someday run the company — even if that someday is years away — because making a successful transition is a long-term project that takes careful planning and training, Lipford says.

“The reason this worked is that we’d been moving in that direction for years and they were ready to take on the load when I needed them to,” he says.

As for the future, Lipford is confident that both Lipford Construction and “Today’s Homeowner” can continue to grow; more projects for the company, a series of DVDs and a possible book deal are all part of the plan.

“With the people we have in place now, I think both companies are only going to be more successful,” he says. **PR**

KEEPING HIS DAYJOB

With his success in television, it would have been understandable if Danny Lipford had given up his remodeling business Lipford Construction. But he says he never seriously considered it as his ratings grew.

“TV is a fickle business, and I’ve always figured I wanted this to fall back on if things didn’t work out,” he says.

The fact he runs a remodeling company also gives him credibility with his audience, he says.

“My experience is probably the biggest key to my success,” he says. “Consumers are educated. They know when somebody knows what they’re talking about. My credibility has helped me tremendously to build and maintain the show.”

He also didn’t want to let down the employees who had invested so much time and energy in building the company.

“I think they were worried I was just going to shut it down,” he says. “With the team we have in place, I knew we didn’t need to do that, and they really stepped up and proved me right.”

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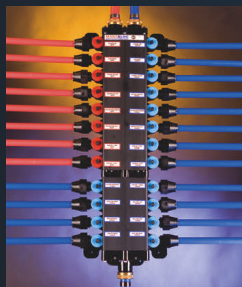


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Seizing the Moment

FIVE TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN A DOWN MARKET

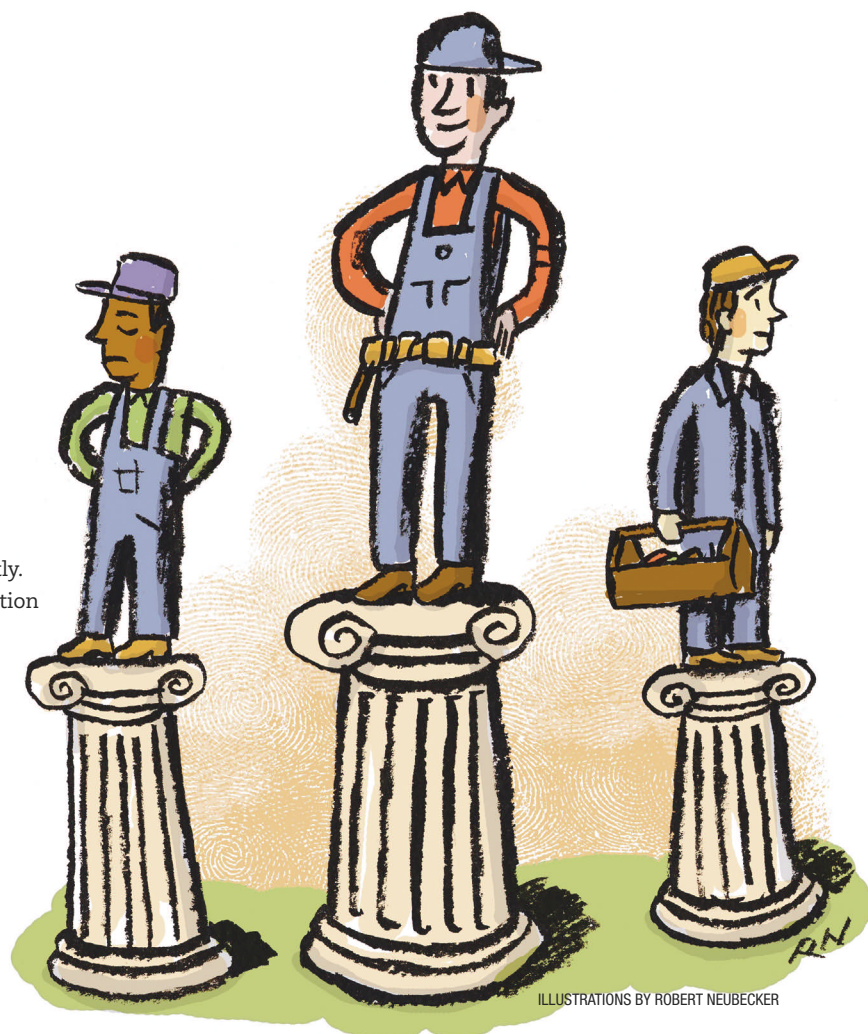
By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

AFTER RECORD REMODELING LEVELS for the last few years, 2007 and 2008 are predicted to be flat or down slightly. Although conditions vary from market to market, competition is getting stiffer in a lot of places.

Every market, even a down one, has its opportunities, though. Here are five ways remodelers are successfully taking advantage of a down market.

IMPROVE YOUR LABOR FORCE

One advantage of a slower market is that many companies have to let people go. That means there may be some more talented people available that you couldn't have hired a year ago. Even if the remodeling market is great in your market, the new-construction slowdown has probably resulted in plenty of good employees being laid off.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT NEUBECKER

Jason Levinson, president of Maryland Heritage Custom Builders in Frederick, Md., has added three good employees in recent months that he says he probably couldn't have hired if the new-construction market was better.

"There are a lot of good people out there that would probably be doing something else if not for the slowdown," he says.

If a company relies on trade contractors for most of its labor, there's opportunity there as well.

"We use a lot of subs, and before this, I couldn't get a trade contractor to call me back," he says. "They like the regular business of production building, but now they're becoming available to spot builders and remodelers."

GO SMALL

Most economists divide the remodeling market into two segments: improvements, and maintenance and repairs. Although improvements usually fluctuate depending on the market, maintenance projects are a solid market that continues to grow. While someone may put off a new kitchen, small projects are less likely to be ignored.

Handyman divisions can be an opportunity in any market, but if the rest of your business

is slow it can be a good source of steady income. 4V Construction Corp., a design/build firm in New Rochelle, N.Y., started a handyman division last year and now has three full-time employees dedicated to it.

"We've turned it into a profit center on its own," says company President Anthony Cucciniello.

ello. "We don't get rich off of it, but the branding is key for us."

The average job is \$250 to \$300 for the division, but it can often lead to bigger work. Earlier this year, 4V signed a \$250,000 addition that started as a \$700 door repair, Cucciniello says.

4V charges an hourly fee, plus a 15 percent markup on materials. Previous customers are billed for the service, but new customers have to pay at the time of the visit. The division also gives 4V an opportunity to serve past customers in a way it wasn't able to before. In the past, the company tried to service them when they had a small repair, but that usually meant pulling a lead carpenter off a job and possibly disrupting other projects.

"The reality is if we were doing remodeling and trying to do handyman work, we were losing money," Cucciniello says.

... OR GO BIG

On the other hand, aiming for the very top of the market can be a successful strategy as well. Four years ago, HP Builders in West Chester, Pa., made the decision to focus on "luxury remodels." Since then, the company's average job size has increased from \$25,000 to more than \$400,000. Company President Terry Keenan describes the new target market as "high net-worth people that expect the best."

These are the type of clients who are less likely to be affected by the fluctuation of the market but, because home sales are down, are more likely to remodel than buy a new home, Keenan says.

"The market that we're in, it doesn't matter what the economy is doing," he says. "That was absolutely part of the decision. We didn't want to get caught in the ups-and-downs of a middle market."

Focusing on the high-end market requires an increased emphasis on customer service. It's necessary to be very flexible with time, because the clients are more likely to be busy working long hours. Protecting the house is important, too, because many of these homes are like "museums," Keenan says.

HP has stopped advertising, and the company's



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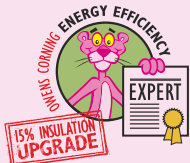
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most important marketing piece is a catalog mailed to homes valued over \$1 million. It is also distributed to other providers of luxury services, such as high-end home theater installers.

PARTNER WITH REAL-ESTATE AGENTS

With home sales down, many real-estate agents are looking for additional ways to improve business. Remodelers can offer their assistance in improving homes both before and after the sale. Homes on the market can offer a good opportunity for handyman services, and recently purchased homes are good targets for larger improvements.

Tim Frost, president of Peregrine Contracting in South Burlington, Vt., works with two local real-estate agents. He advises remodelers to seek agents that sell the types of home they typically remodel.

"You need to show them that there is some sort of benefit of associating with you," he says. "It's very important to be highly professional and let them know you do quality work."

Frost remodeled the home of one of the agents he works with. He formed his partnership with another by taking her to some of his best projects to show the company's work. When he gets a project from one of their referrals, Frost is quick to thank the agents with a gift certificate or dinner at a nice restaurant.

"Let them know you value their help and work to keep in constant touch," he says.

INVEST IN PROPERTY

Another way to keep a steady source of income is to purchase rental properties. Remodelers have an advantage over many landlords in that they can buy and improve — and then maintain — properties for less than someone not in the business.



The Basement Guys in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, owns 19 properties (35 total units) around the Columbus area.

"The real-estate market in Ohio is really down now, so it's the time to buy," says company President Luke Secrest.

Secrest targets properties that are in need of repair, particularly foundation work, which the company specializes in.

"We look for properties that other people are afraid of," he says.

Once the remodeling is done, the company turns management over to a local property management company. The Basement Guys handles all the regular maintenance but don't have to worry about the day-to-day dealings with renters. That's a step Secrest recommends other remodelers take.


"People need to realize where they make their money," he says. "Trying to manage the renters yourself is more trouble than it's worth."

Once you buy a few properties, it gets easier to find more, Secrest says.

"You run across a number of deals once you start buying," he says. "Neighbors start calling you, banks start calling you. Once people hear you're in the market, there are always people willing to sell." **PR**

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Market Opportunity

THIS SPEC REMODEL WAS
AS MUCH ABOUT MARKETING
AS IT WAS ABOUT PROFIT

By Jonathan Sweet

WHEN THE OWNERS OF VB HOMES saw this Virginia Beach home, they knew they had a project that would allow them to showcase their work.

"It needed an updated look, but it was in a great neighborhood of expensive homes close to the beach," says company President Chris Ettel.

The simple brick ranch home had been owned for many years by an elderly person who had not invested much in the house. The building appeared to be structurally sound, and home values in the neighborhood could support a major renovation, Ettel says.

VB undertakes one or two spec remodels a year. When choosing a home for a spec remodel, VB's management team considers two major factors: if it will fit into their schedule of other work and if it offers a good marketing opportunity. In this case, the home fit both requirements.

"We knew we could make a pretty dramatic transformation, which is great for marketing," Ettel says. "It was an opportunity to show what we could do in this neighborhood."

GROWING SCOPE

Originally, VB was planning the remodel to be smaller in scale, with some exterior work to upgrade the curb appeal and cos-

metic improvements in the bathrooms and kitchen. Although that probably would have resulted in a more profitable project, once the design team got into the home it saw an opportunity to really showcase its work, Ettel says.

"We took it a lot further than we needed to," he says. "We wanted to inspire other homeowners and show them what they could do. It was more about that than trying to make more money on it."

That also expanded the timeline of the project, as what had originally been planned for a few months stretched into more than a year. Ettel suspects the project probably could have been completed in 10 months if field crews had not been pulled to work on other jobs at times.

The final project ended up adding only a few hundred square feet to the home but looks like a much bigger transformation. That effect was accomplished mainly through raising the roof and converting the attic space into two bedrooms, a bathroom and a sitting room that overlooks the ocean across the street. The plan originally called for just the bedrooms and the bath, but once construction started, the field crew told the design team it thought there was room to take advantage of the ocean view.

"That's when we decided to add the 'eyebrow' to give us a little more room and allow for the arched segment-head window," Ettel says.

The new addition was sided with James Hardie fiber cement, and VB painted the existing brick on the first floor to match. While that alone would have been enough to drastically improve the look of the home, the VB team made several other changes to improve its curb appeal.

The team added a circular drive that leads back to the basement-level garage behind the house. The home sits on a hill, so the front yard sloped down to the street. VB changed that with a terraced lawn and stone retaining wall to provide a more attractive approach to the home.

"We hadn't planned on doing it, but it allowed us to do a lot more with the landscaping," Ettel says. "Otherwise, we would



One of the major goals of the remodel was to drastically improve the curb appeal of the home, which was accomplished with a large front porch, a new color scheme and extensive landscaping.

PRODUCTS LIST

Appliances: GE, Jenn-Air **Doors:** Masonite, Thermo-Tru **Faucets:** Delta, Kohler **Siding:** James Hardie **Windows:** Simonton

PHOTO BY D. KEVIN ELLIOTT, ELLIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY



The new family room featured a handcrafted masonry fireplace and vaulted ceilings. It was built on the site of the enclosed porch, which had to be torn down when structural problems were discovered.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Date	Stage of Project
Dec. 15, 2004	Project start
April 15, 2005	Framing
May 15, 2005	HVAC/electric/plumbing rough-ins
June 15, 2005	Insulation and wallboard
July 15, 2005	Interior trim
August 15, 2005	Cabinetry
Sept. 15, 2005	Painting
Oct. 15, 2005	Flooring
Nov. 15, 2005	HVAC/electric/plumbing finals
Dec. 15, 2005	Final painting, finishing of hardwood floors
Jan. 5, 2006	Project completion

have just had a rolling hill down to the road.”

Finally, they added on a large front porch to once again take advantage of the ocean view.

“It makes the house a little more inviting and really gives you that sense of neighborhood,” Ettel says.

Inside, the company also made significant upgrades. The existing home had three bedrooms on the first floor. The team kept the bedroom in the front of the home with its own bath intact, but converted the two back bedrooms into a large master suite, eliminating one bedroom and adding a bathroom. VB made the change with the idea of appealing to older homeowners who would want their living space on the first floor, although it turned out that a younger family with children ended up buying the home.

The kitchen was also upgraded with new appliances and finishes and redesigned to improve the flow by opening it up to the dining room and new family room. The family room was added where the enclosed porch had previously been and now features vaulted ceilings and a new masonry fireplace. Tearing down the porch was not part of the original plan but became necessary when VB discovered it was not structurally sound.

One of the more significant changes was the moving of the staircase. The original home featured a hidden staircase right inside the front door that went up to the attic space. VB moved the staircase to the back of the home, facing the kitchen, which created extra space in the front hall that the company used to build a new half bath on the first floor. Throughout the home, VB improved the energy efficiency by adding insulation and replacing the windows.

The company also added a laundry room in the basement with the garage, as well as added a pump and new drainage to the basement to address previous flooding problems. In retrospect, that’s the one part of the project Ettel would have done differently.

“In hindsight, we should have just enclosed the basement and not used that space, and instead added an attached garage at

THE FINANCIALS

Normally VB Homes would have a margin at about 38 percent, but this project was about more than making money.

“There’s a marketing opportunity out of this that we take into account as well,” says company President Chris Ettel. “Because of that, the margins were a little tighter than they normally would have been.”

Technically, the Virginia Beach,

Va.-based company was only the remodeler of the home, not the owner. VB’s owners have a separate partnership that acts as the developer when they purchase homes to remodel or build spec homes. So in this case, that partnership paid \$500,000 to VB, then sold the home for \$1 million, resulting in a \$50,000 profit above and beyond the \$100,000 profit VB made on the remodeling.

Budget History

Estimated remodeling cost	\$375,000
Final remodeling cost	\$400,000
Price charged for project	\$500,000
Gross profit	\$100,000
Budgeted gross profit margin	25%
Actual gross profit margin	20%
Original purchase price	\$450,000
Final sale price	\$1 million



PHOTOS BY D. KEVIN ELLIOTT, ELLIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY

The kitchen and bathrooms were gutted and rebuilt to replace the dated finishes with more contemporary styles. The kitchen was also opened up to improve the flow between it and adjoining rooms.

a higher grade," he says. "It's been a constant challenge to keep that garage dry, even with everything we did. There's a reason you don't see a lot of basements out here."

FOCUS ON DESIGN

The project was a success for the company from both a marketing and a profit standpoint, Ettel says. The home sold in about two months and has also helped land other work in the area. It also gave VB a chance to stretch and see just what it could do from a design and construction standpoint.

"This is an example of the perfect design/build collaboration," Ettel says.

The company is putting an increased focus on design lately, with the addition of architects to the staff and a change in name from VB Contractors to emphasize it is not "just contractors."

"Design/build gets thrown around so much now that we're focusing on marketing ourselves as 'architecture/build' just to show how important the architecture is to us," Ettel says. **PR**

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COMPANY SNAPSHOT

VB Homes

Owners: Chancey Walker, Chris Ettel, Rick Stageberg and Todd Savage

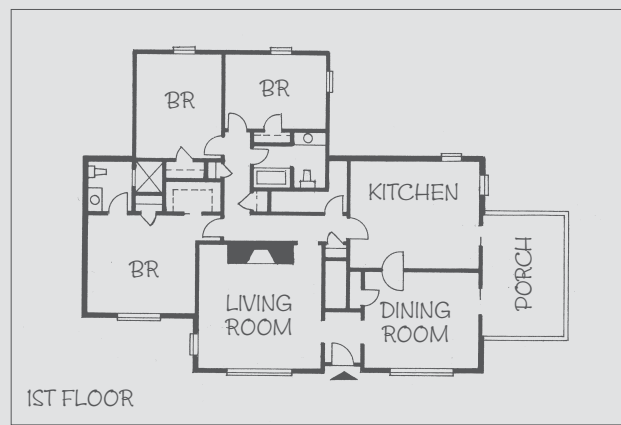
Location: Virginia Beach, Va.

2006 volume: \$4.5 million

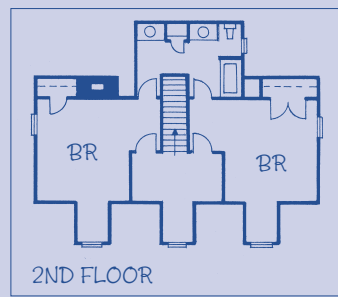
Projected 2007 volume: \$4 million

Web site: www.vbhomesliving.com

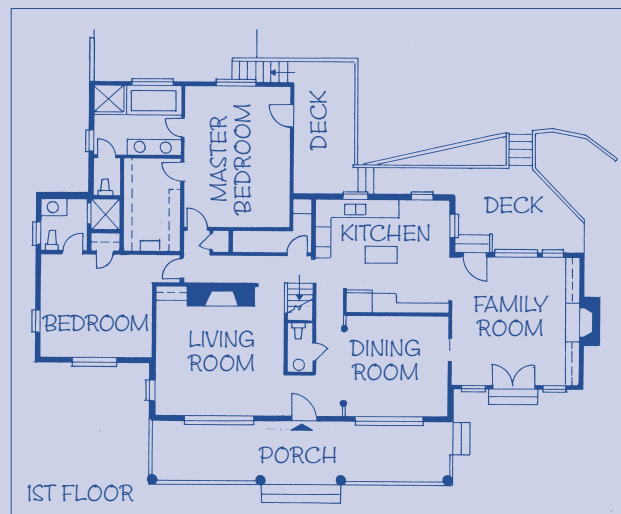
Before



After



After



SYMPHONY OF STYLE



A showhome creates an enviable master suite with appointments that hit all the high notes



MASTER SUITE ADDITION

REMODELER AND ARCHITECT: The Bainbridge Crew, Charlotte, N.C.

PROJECT LOCATION: Charlotte, N.C.

AGE OF HOME: 94 years

SCOPE OF WORK: Two-story addition, with the focus on the master suite

RICK BAINBRIDGE JR. COULD SEE the potential in this four-square-style home when he bought it in 2005. A bad 1950s remodel and a duplex conversion had robbed the home, which was built in 1913, of its original charm.

"Overall, the house had good bones. It just needed work, mostly because it wasn't laid out well," the company CEO says.

Bainbridge made the focus of the Charlotte, N.C., home the master suite and was

Soft textures from cashmere throws, window sheers and silk accents help balance the rustic headboard with the fireplace surrounds. The chandelier adds grandeur and plays well off of the room's subdued color palette.

PRODUCTS LIST

Faucets, Fixtures & Sinks: Kohler **Paints & Stains:** Sherwin-Williams **Millwork & Molding:** Flex Trim **Vanities:** Wellborn **Windows:** Pella

AFTER PHOTOS BY DUSTIN PECK PHOTOGRAPHY



The two-story addition includes a family room on the first floor and transformed the second floor bedrooms into a master suite with nine-foot ceilings, hardwood flooring, wood-burning fireplace and his and hers walk-in closets.

BEFORE



adamant through each plan revision the area remain a crown jewel. “We focused on the master suite because, while it was the most expensive area to redo, I felt it would be recouped,” Bainbridge says.

Many master suites in the region tend to fall on the first floor, but he wasn’t confident a first-floor location would give the suite the impact it needed. The team decided to position the suite directly off the staircase landing on the second floor.

“Creating the landing off of the staircase with the arched opening and the risers going up made it look really good,” Bainbridge says.

Stepping It Up

An additional staircase to the master suite helps set it apart from the other rooms on the second floor and make the space even more luxurious. The Bainbridge Crew team was lucky to have extra space in the staircase, the closets and dressing room in the existing home to use for an 8-foot hallway off of the second floor landing. “Adding those five risers and the double doors really do a lot without losing a lot,” he says. “The access in the turnaround prevented us from losing one of the bedrooms, and we didn’t have to cut into those walls.”



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Chrysler Financial



The new master bedroom has touches that speak to both fashion and function, including a masonry fireplace and a washer and dryer in the new 10- by 10-foot walk-in closet.

The designer of the bathroom, Audrey L. Gammon, ASID, of Gammon Residential Design, says she organized the room to create symmetry and harmony. To make the

space warm and soothing, she used bronze accents on the honed and filled limestone floor; dark mahogany furniture; and nickel plumbing fixtures.

"The furniture pieces become cabinetry and are reminiscent of a modernized European bathroom," she says. "All of the elements aided in creating a level of finish that made a new spa space with old-world accents."

Prior to starting the project, Bainbridge convinced the president and conductor of the local symphony to use the home as the showcase in the Symphony Guild ASID Designer House, a fundraiser used by symphonies nationwide.

The resulting 1,000 square feet suite was such a draw that it sold very shortly after the fundraiser.

"I think the products had a lot to do with how successful this project was," Bainbridge says. "Though they're new, they still characterize the spirit of the home and help the interior of the addition blend with the existing home." **PR**

— Meghan Haynes

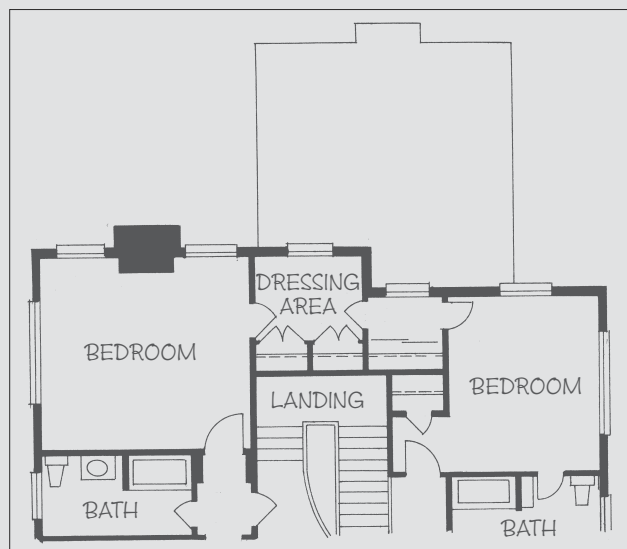


The bathroom has small elements — such as a glass tile border around the shower and the limestone border detail around the tub — that add spatial definition to each of its areas. The detailed tile arc and the tub also accentuates the tub curvatures and draws attention to the fact the tub is centered under the window.

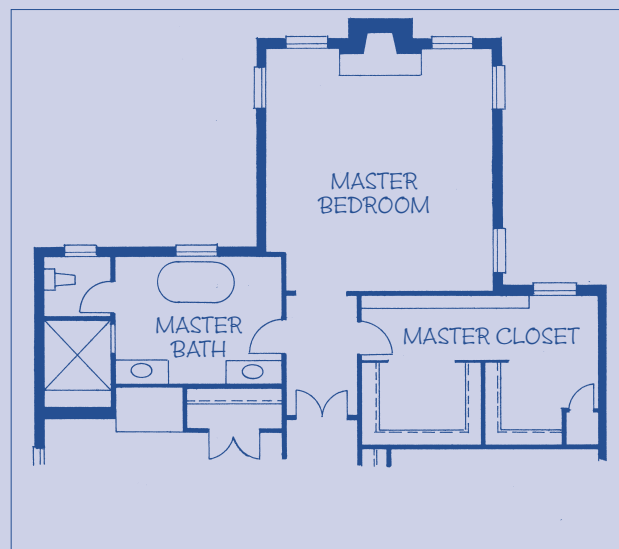
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CONCRETE RESOLVE

A garage addition to a historic mansion drives home the need for sound structure and solid foundations

GARAGE & PORTICO ADDITION

REMODELER: Plath & Co., San Rafael, Calif.

ARCHITECT: ED2 International, San Francisco

PROJECT LOCATION: San Francisco

AGE OF HOME: 111 years

SCOPE OF WORK: A garage/deck addition to a landmark home; remodeling an adjacent cottage and connecting it to the main home

PUTTING AN ADDITION on a San Francisco home often imposes immediate challenges, given the elevations and rises that are characteristic of the terrain. Other challenges made this project particularly unique: its historic registry listing (the home was built in 1895); a fragile sandstone veneer that could not be duplicated yet had to be echoed in the addition's cladding and towers rising four stories above the building site. Thoughtful and

Adding planter boxes to the new patio creates a streetscape finish similar to the previous look.

PRODUCTS LIST

Doors & Windows: Andersen **Garage Door:** City Overhead





PHOTOS BY BILL BALLAS, PLATH & CO.



Many of the trees and foliage, including two large palm trees from the original backyard that now flank the garage door, had to be preserved.

thorough solutions became the hallmark of the project's success.

The multigenerational family that lived in this mansion needed a garage to accommodate its vehicles, and the family wanted a backyard for congregating and entertaining. It also wanted to upgrade a small but deteriorating and slightly dilapidated cottage just adjacent to the main home to have a more pronounced relationship and traffic flow between the two buildings, creating more living space. The homeowners approached Plath & Co. to do the addition because the company had done three jobs for the family since it bought the home in the early 1990s. One seismic job brought the home up-to-date with current unreinforced masonry building (UMB) standards.

"This was an original building, a San Francisco landmark, a 19th century, close

to 15,000 square foot brick mansion. And it's clad in sandstone, so you live under a lot of eyeballs keeping you on the straight and narrow," says Plath & Co. President Steve Plath, about the necessity to balance the standards of the historic registry board, zoning restrictions and building code requirements with the homeowners' needs and wants. "In finishing the street side of the garage, it was important that we didn't duplicate the main home. Even though it's a historic property, architecturally you had to be able to delineate the new from the old — but it had to be a comfortable transition."

After an intense and lengthy six-month excavation (which lowered the backyard by 12 to 15 feet to street-level), the project got a big break when an exploratory pit revealed that the foundation of the main home was deeper than needed and



required no underpinning. But tiebacks — in this case, about 20 — would be necessary to ensure the more than 100-year-old foundation would accommodate downloading from the addition and would not rotate and be susceptible to side-to-side shifting, a real concern in "earthquake country," Plath says.

Once the foundation was fortified and the cottage and portico were properly shored, the 45- by 54-square-foot addition was built. It features a heated 10-car garage and

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Support Systems

In a project like this, support is the end-all, be-all to a successful project, even more so than in other projects because of the age of the structures and the attention to preservation. Shoring the cottage took special expertise, says Plath & Co. President Steve Plath as the structure was very vulnerable. "We had to support this auxiliary structure the whole time, and it was in terrible condition — the roof had failed and the floor framing had rotted," he says. While building the porch, the crew dug pits around the porch and filled them with concrete for structural support.

Plath pins this project's success on his highly skilled and thorough subcontractor. "The construction techniques required for this work are more typical of large commercial projects rather than residential, and Sunshine Construction and Jack Barcewski did a fabulous job," Plath adds. "He was the one who did all that really, really tricky work."



Using removable stone pavers as the patio floor allows easy access to the mechanical controls and systems that regulate the garage and deck. The pavers also expedite water drainage onto the roof and roof membrane just below. The pavers sit on adjustable plastic posts that range from 6 to 18 inches tall.

patio deck, and the addition was clad in stucco that matched the color, shape and texture of the original sandstone. Four 11-ton concrete beams carry all of the loads for the deck.

A concrete basement was added to the wooden cottage. The cottage was then

connected to the main house to allow interior access from the garage, which called for a cut in the almost 2-foot-thick structural, load-bearing rear wall just left of the existing portico, creating the 16-foot-wide, full height connecting span. The wall was reinforced with steel beams.

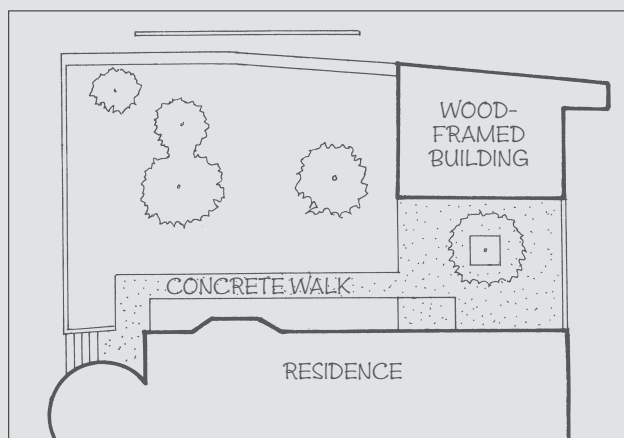
The total remodeled and addition space amounts to 5,000 square feet and took approximately 1½ years to complete. **PR**

— Meghan Haynes

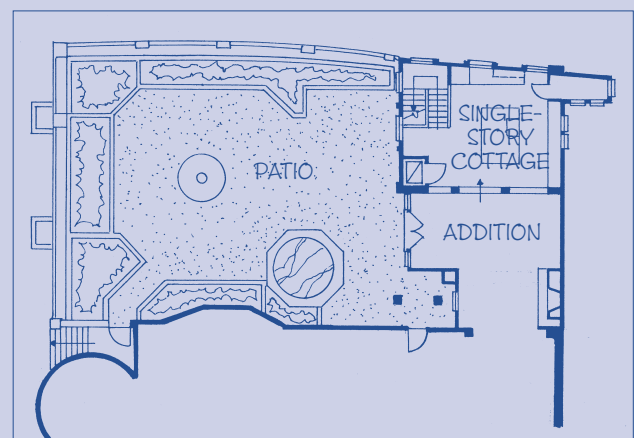
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SPEED THAT REMODEL

Technologies to help install a home's basics

By Susan Conbere
PATH Partners

SPEED YOUR NEXT REMODEL with six proven technologies from the PATH Concept Home that result in faster installation of plumbing, floors, switches and egress systems. Some of these technologies will also enhance the beauty and environmental performance of your project and may cost less to install.

Air Admittance Valves (AAVs)

"The number one benefit of an AAV for remodelers is that they don't have to break out walls or ceilings or stairwells to run vent pipes through to the roof," says Jack Beuschel, president of Studor, a manufacturer of AAVs. "This is especially useful in homes with historical value."

Even for a remodel in a non-historic home, AAVs make sense. "Installing a bathroom or wet bar in the basement or running a vent from the bathroom is time consuming and can be complicated," says Beuschel. "But with AAVs, you don't have to run another vent — just tie into the building drain." Remember: fewer roof penetrations equals less chance of developing a leaky roof.

In older homes, the vent pipes may be deteriorated anyway, but with an AAV, you just cap off the old vent and move the fixtures wherever you want. This saves time, labor and material costs and gives you the freedom of design and layout without having to find a way to vent fixtures in new locations — without damaging the interior of the home.

Air admittance valves allow remodelers to add a vent without breaking through walls or ceilings to run pipes to the roof.

Check that the product is code compliant in your area. If not, many jurisdictions will allow the product as an alternative.

PEX Piping and Plumbing Manifolds

"Remodelers that have used a PEX system before, especially in a large home, love it because they don't have to destroy the house to do the piping," says Marissa Chandley, marketing director of Viega, which makes Vanguard Piping Systems. "You don't have to tear the walls out, don't have to worry about fire hazard, don't have to solder or glue. PEX also lends itself to working in very tight spaces, compared to a rigid system, where the fittings don't move."

PEX won't corrode or develop pinhole leaks; inhibits mineral build up; and, above all, is flexible, bending where a rigid system would require a solder or glue joint. PEX piping is quieter than metal pipes. There's also less lost heat, which saves customers energy.

If you need to redo all plumbing, also consider using a plumbing manifold, which acts much like a circuit breaker box for each fixture. The hallmark of this system is the ability to turn off the water to any one fixture during repair without affecting water use elsewhere in the home.

A manifold can speed the remodel because you have the fewest possible fit-



PHOTO COURTESY OF STUDOR

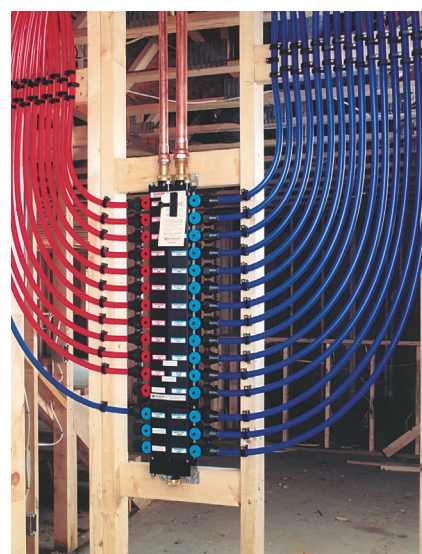


PHOTO COURTESY OF VIEGA

A plumbing manifold is useful if you're redoing all the plumbing. Installation is fast because you use the fewest possible fittings.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TAPCO



Adding a window well egress system is faster than digging a big hole for new stairs and a new doorway and allows natural light into an otherwise dark area.

tings: one at the manifold and one at each fixture. "Installation is faster, and if you make any mistakes, they won't be behind the wall where they're hard to reach," says Chandley. She advises against using a manifold if you can't install it close to the water heater because the hot water will have farther to travel, meaning energy lost.

Considering both labor and materials, manifolds together with PEX can be less costly to install than rigid pipe plumbing systems. Cost of the manifold varies depending

on the number of ports, whether they include gate valves, and the materials they include.

Window Well Egress System

Your client calls for a basement remodel and wants to add a bedroom. But there's no legal egress.

You can start digging a really big hole for expensive new stairs and a new doorway, or you can install an egress well to make your job easier.

"If the customer has a livable space for a

bedroom in the basement, you must have two escapes other than the stairs to the first floor to meet code," says Brad Brown, president of Tapco, which manufactures Wellcraft Egress Window Wells.

The well can be as big or small as needed and comes with a built-in ladder. To install, dig a hole and use a saw to enlarge the existing basement window, usually by maintaining the existing width but making it taller so you don't have to replace the header. Frame it, bolt the new window well to the foundation, and backfill with peastone or gravel for better drainage. The whole process takes a day or two. And you can put a window well anywhere there's an existing window. Grade is not a concern because the unit can be stacked as high or as low as you need it.

A cover is recommended to keep children and animals from falling in. Advise your clients to keep it clean because it can become too heavy to lift if it's covered with snow or wet leaves.

Modular Carpet

Modular carpet tiles stick not to the floor but to each other, so the carpet can be picked up one tile at a time or moved as a unit. Each tile can be a different color, pattern or texture.

Customers will enjoy designing their first carpet, and when they tire of the old design, they can rearrange the tiles or order a few new tiles for a new look and feel. You also don't have to throw out the whole carpet if one piece goes bad.

Remodelers love the speed because they can place the carpeting right on top of old linoleum, vinyl, concrete, or anything else unsightly without having to pull up the existing flooring.

Measure the area, order the tiles, and slap it down. Cut with a carpet knife to install. There are no adhesives or nails.

A nifty tool from carpet manufacturer Flor allows remodelers to design the carpet online. Flor also sponsors a return and recycle program. When clients are done with the carpet, they can ship it back to the company at no cost to be recycled.

Built for more than just speed

	Speed	Aesthetics	Greener than the conventional alternative	Cheaper to install than the conventional alternative
Air admittance valves	•	•		•
PEX piping and plumbing manifolds	•		•	• (sometimes)
Window well egress system	•	•		•
Modular carpet	•	•	•	
Wireless switches	•			•
Project management software	•			

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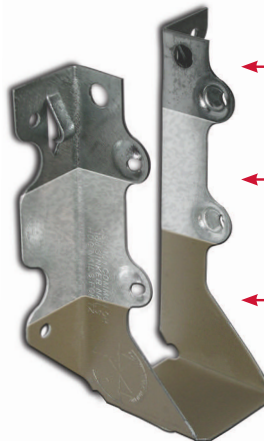
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Modular carpet can be placed on top of many old surfaces without having to pull up the existing flooring. The tiles stick to each other and not the floor and can be moved as a unit.

Flor says its product goes down well on just about anything, indoors or outdoors, except unfinished waxed floors, unsealed concrete floors and carpet. An antimicrobial intercept between the backing and the fibers prevents the growth of mold, so it can be used in bathrooms and basements as well.

Wireless Switches

Add a switch wherever you like without doing any wiring, demolition, patching or repainting and without disturbing any existing asbestos or lead paint. All you have to

do is bring electricity to the point where the appliance is located. A receiver in a light box or outlet picks up a radio signal as much as 150 feet away. The switch operates with a batteryless remote.

In renovation and remodeling projects, PulseSwitch Systems, maker of Lightning Switch wireless transmitters, claims savings of hundreds to thousands of dollars per switch because it avoids demolition and repair costs.

You can program a 3-, 4-, or even a 30-way switch with one receiver. Some manufacturers offer dimmers.

Project Management Software

If you're still charting your remodel with pencil, paper or Excel, consider yourself behind the times. Project managers from all kinds of businesses are turning to scheduling software that helps them organize, track, and manage their project details.

Project management software helps the remodeler communicate better with suppliers, contractors, and customers. The tool allows you to view the whole project on a timeline, which can be printed either as a Gantt chart or a regular monthly calendar that shows everyone their roles—and their relationships with each other. Change one component of the project and all related components will update automatically. Now it's easy to show that if supplier A fails to deliver on time, it affects the timeline for everyone else.

"It's a way to organize your project and make sure there's accountability for each of the subcontractors," says Dennis Bilowus, president of AEC Software, which produces the FastTrack Schedule program. "It also makes the customer aware of their responsibilities, building in lead time for selection of materials. Clients can see that if they haven't made their kitchen countertop selections, the painter will be affected because he can't do the painting."

Ryan Kish of AEC Software claims that remodelers are finding the software useful not just for project management, but for bidding on new jobs as well.

"A lot of our customers are showing rough outlines of projects to a client when they make a proposal, says Kish." We are hearing this makes a really big difference for winning new business because it validates that the firm is strategic in its approach. Some remodelers are even using it to develop their long-term business plans."

FastTrack Schedule comes with about 30 templates that can be customized. One of these is a kitchen remodeling schedule, which can be modified for almost any type of project. **PR**

Concept Home Just Completed

Using some of the most advanced ideas in the housing industry, PATH has just completed construction of its first Concept Home in Omaha, Neb. PATH hopes this will be the first of many Concept Homes built faster with less waste and more durable, environmentally friendly materials than traditional stick-built homes. Concept Home building technologies and techniques offer lessons for builders and remodelers on how to cut building and energy costs; increase durability and reduce maintenance; allow greater flexibility in home design for different stages of life; and reduce the impact of the home on the environment. Plans for the home are available for free online. Learn more at www.pathnet.org/concepthome.

>> For more Solutions, visit

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QUESTIONS? Contact PR Editor-in-Chief Michael Morris at michael.morris@reedbusiness.com or 630.288.8057.



The *Professional Remodeler* 2007 Remodeler of the Year will be honored at a special celebration at the 2007 Remodeling Show™, October 10-12, in Las Vegas, and featured in the December 2007 issue of *Professional Remodeler*.

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HANSGROHE

The minimalist Euroaktiv series from Hansgrohe includes three different faucets: Metris, Talis and Focus. The Metris has a lavatory mixer as well as tub configurations. The Talis has a spout that points its water stream in a perfect 45-degree angle into the sink and the Focus features a smaller handle.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-125>



SYMMONS

The latest addition to Symmons' Elements bathroom fixture line is the Carrington Suite, which includes a bathroom faucet, showerhead, tub/shower valve and roman tub faucet. Finishes include polished chrome, Radiance satin nickel or Radiance polished brass finish. The faucet has a 2.2 gallon-per-minute flow rate with ceramic control components, aerator, lever handles, lift-rod and pop-up drain assembly.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-126>

CRYSTAL CABINETRY

The Lyptus-Masculus cabinet line from Crystal Cabinetry is made from the company's Blackstone stain on Lyptus wood. The cabinet doors have perforated metal insert panels and a quiet-close base. The framed upper cabinets have brushed iron laminate interiors.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-127>



KOHLER

Expanding on its DTV thermostatic control line, Kohler's DTV II offers chromatherapy and a fully personalized steam component, with music as a new feature. The unit's media module can either stream music or Internet radio from a PC or be directly connected to an MP3 docking station wirelessly or through a network connection.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-127>



CAPITAL COOKING

Featuring a motorized rotisserie system built into the oven cell, Capital Cooking's Precision Series also sports 19,000 BTU burners and the company's Flex-Roll roller racks. The Power Flow burner system, according to the company, is cleaner and more efficient than past models. Model sizes include 30, 36, 48 and 60 inches.

For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5346-128>



AMERICAN STANDARD

Playing to what the company calls an upcoming trend and bridging the gap between oil-rubbed bronze and wrought iron, American Standard's Blackened Bronze finish has dark, warm colors that are less glossy than the company's other offerings. The finish is available on most of the company's faucets.

For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5346-130>

GINGER

Forged from solid brass and hand finished, the Columnar shower fittings from Ginger include shower columns, pressure-balanced systems, hand showers (shown), pivoting shower heads and ceiling-mounted rainfall showerheads with a 9½-inch projection and pivoting body sprays. Hand showers feature a button on the handle to lock in temperature settings and can be finished in chrome, oil-rubbed bronze, satin nickel and polished nickel.

For FREE information, visit

<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-129>



XYLEM

Part of a complete powder room collection, the Essence Vanity from Xylem features a large lower shelf and optional round or square green-tinted glass or grey marble vessels. Finishes include walnut or striped zebra wood. A 24- or 20-inch version is available and a 20-inch mirror is offered.

For FREE information, visit

<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-131>





GAGGENAU

The BO 250 and BO 280 24-inch and 30-inch ovens from Gaggenau features a minimalist design with clear black text on a backlit LCD control panel on the oven's all-glass door. The side-opening door opens a full 180 degrees, and the oven cavity is covered in easy-to-clean blue enamel. The interiors have flat cavity side walls for more cooking space. Eighteen heating modes and optional accessories are available.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-132>

NUHEAT

The Harmony Thermostat for radiant flooring and other applications from Nuheat comes in 110- or 220-volt versions. The Energy Star-rated controller has a backlit display and buttons with programmable temperature settings. The unit is flush mounted and can be mounted behind any double-gang decorative faceplate.

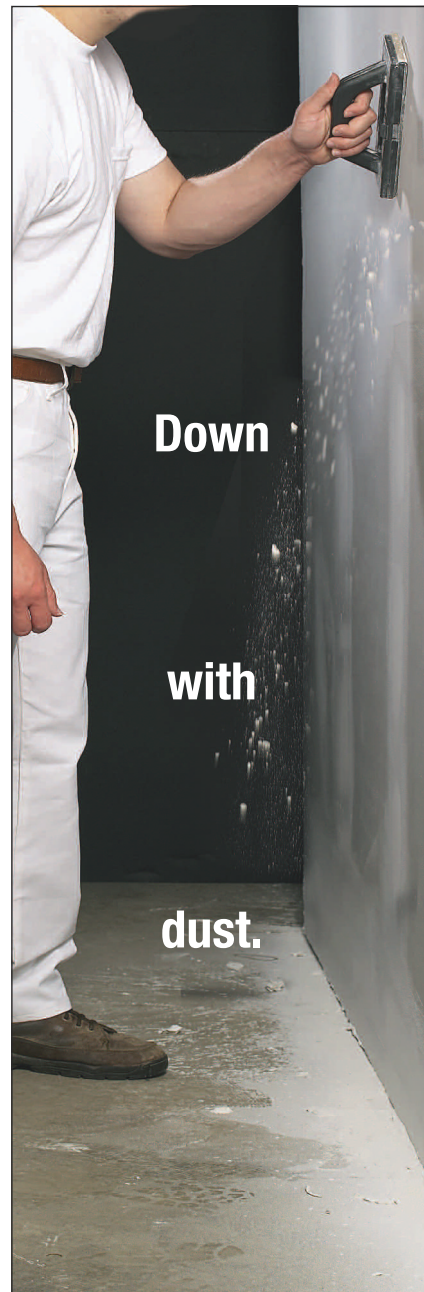
For FREE information, visit
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THERMADOR

The HD Series dishwashers from Thermador include the HD94, which features a sensor touch control panel and only creates 44 decibels of noise during operation. The series also includes the HD64 and HD43, both of which are available as fully integrated models for custom panels or in stainless steel versions.

For FREE information, visit
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A Concrete Opportunity

Concrete is one of the fastest growing material choices for countertops as homeowners continue to look for unique ways to upgrade their kitchens.

"When people remodel, they're also upgrading and customizing," says Jeff Girard, president of the Concrete Countertop Institute. "A concrete countertop is the most customized countertop you can build."

Concrete countertops can be shaped, colored, stamped, embedded with materials and modified in a variety of ways. Concrete countertops can either be precast (built in a shop off-site) or cast in place (poured on-site). To properly build a concrete countertop takes practice and training, so remodelers thinking of offering this service need to consider taking classes to learn the intricacies of countertop construction. Even someone with extensive experience in concrete flatwork might need training.

"There are a lot of misunderstandings about how concrete countertops are constructed," Girard says. "These are more like structural beams than slabs on ground because of the engineering involved."

CCI offers classes in both precast and cast-in-place countertops, with a full schedule available at www.concrete-countertopinstitute.com. Other sources for training include the Decorative Concrete Institute (www.decorativeconcreteinstitute.com), as well as several manufacturers that offer training with their products.

If remodelers are only installing one or two countertops, they might be better off hiring a specialist rather than going to the expense of training, Girard says. The Concrete Network (www.concretenetwork.com) is a good source for finding decorative concrete professionals.



LG

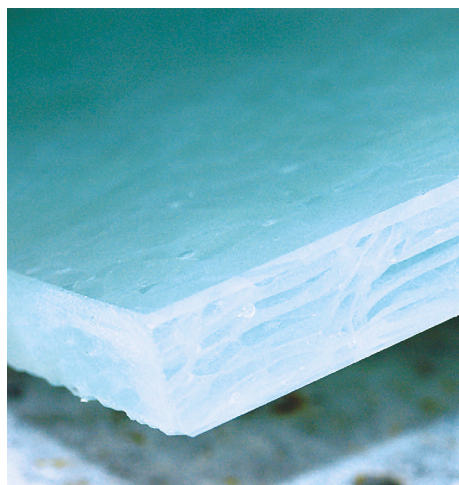
The LG Eden countertops were developed using at least 12 percent pre-consumer recycled materials. The countertops are available in six natural colors: cocoa, honeysuckle, ivy (shown), jasmine, juniper and lemongrass. The Eden line is non-porous, anti-microbial and stain-resistant and backed by a 15-year warranty. LG Eden is certified for its recycled content by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS).

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-135>

SYNDECREE/ELDORADO STONE

Featuring 13 trademarked colors and 12 aggregates, Syndecree's countertops are composed of natural minerals, recycled materials and concrete. At half the weight of ordinary concrete, the slabs are shipped in 8-foot by 30-inch slabs that are 2½-inches thick and weigh 360 pounds. Customized edge details can be ordered.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-136>



COVERINGS ETC

Made from 100 percent recycled glass with no added resins, Bio Glass from Coverings Etc are made in white and light green; dark green, brown and blue colors will be available later in the year. The slabs allow light sources to shine through. Natural finish slabs come 110 by 40 by ¾ inches, and polished versions are slightly smaller.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-137>



CRAFT-ART

The Antique Heart Pine countertop by Craft-Art is derived from reclaimed wood. According to the company, the custom wood countertop has a yellow-brown straw color with reddish brown accent rings. A quarter-sawn technique creates a vertical tight-grain wood texture. Tops are available in plank and edge-grain style using full-length boards, or end-grain style for a checkerboard-type pattern. The company will also use other non-endangered domestic and exotic species upon request.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-138>



SWANSTONE

The Everyday Plus Countertops by Swanstone are constructed as a single piece with seamless front and side edges. According to Swanstone, this limited construction also reduces fabrication costs. The line is made in standard sizes, and custom fabrication is also available. The company also offers drop-in and undermount solid surface sinks to correspond with the countertops. A 10-year warranty is provided.

For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5346-139>



TOTALLY BAMBOO

Touted as 16-percent harder than maple, the Totally Bamboo countertops are made of solid bamboo in 1½- or 2-inch planks for kitchen countertops or islands. The line is constructed with the company's Multilam cross-band, which resists warping. Grain patterns include caramelized flat grain, vertical grain and natural parquet end grain. Planks arrive unfinished and sanded to 180-grit.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-141>

ULTRAGLAS

Made for both horizontal and vertical surfaces, UltraGlas can be made into small tiles to slabs, clad walls and flooring. The company claims the surfaces are non-porous, sanitary and low-maintenance. Size, shape, thickness, color, edge treatment, texture, design, finish and hardware accommodations may all be specified. Custom sizes may be created to coordinate with other site-specific elements.

For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5346-140>





GARAGA

The North Hatley by Garaga is a carriage house door style with durable polyurethane-insulated sectional doors. The door thickness is 1¾-inch and carries an insulation factor of R-16. Multiple heights and widths can be accommodated, along with window and hardware upgrades.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-142>



AMARR GARAGE DOORS

Inspired by popular entry door window designs, six window designs by Amarr Garage Doors will be featured in the company's DecraGlass line: allegro (shown), harvest, heartland, metro, tempo and Wichita. The garage door windows are all available in both short and long panel styles. A variety of finishes and colors are available.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-144>

WAYNE DALTON

Featuring steel construction and a two-coat, baked-on polyester paint finish, the 9700 series garage doors from Wayne Dalton come in six styles with decorative hardware and trim options available. The doors also have a pinch-resistant design to protect fingers and also feature the company's idrive computer-driven door opener.

For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5346-143>



SIMPSON

The latest Prairie French by Simpson Door Co. includes eight colors and multiple wood species in insulated or single glazing. Sizes include 1½- and 1¾-inch thicknesses and can be specified in widths ranging from 2½- to 3½-feet and in heights of 6½, 7 and 8 feet.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-145>





L.E. JOHNSON PRODUCTS

The Multi-Pass Sliding Door Hardware from L.E. Johnson Products is, according to the firm, a multi-panel door in the wall that requires little space. It is configured for three-door applications with three tracks or for multi-pass sliding door systems with individual track lengths and different parts. The hardware requires a 2-foot-wide, 10-foot-long wall space to house the doors.

For FREE information, visit
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JELD-WEN

Although they have been around for 400 years, Dutch doors are making a comeback, according to Jeld-Wen. The company's IWP Dutch Doors feature a fiberglass construction that mimics species such as mahogany, walnut, oak, hemlock, poplar, hickory, maple, pine, alder, cherry and fir. Shelves can be added to any door style.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-147>



MIRAGE SCREEN SYSTEMS

The Retractable Screens from Mirage Screen Systems can be made to fit most doors or windows, including in-swing or out-swing designs; patio doors; entrance doors; and French double doors. Door heights up to 110 inches and door or window widths up to 55 inches are available. A solar-powered design (shown) is also offered.

For FREE information, visit
<http://pr.ims.ca/5346-148>

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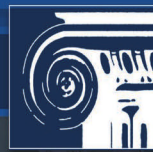
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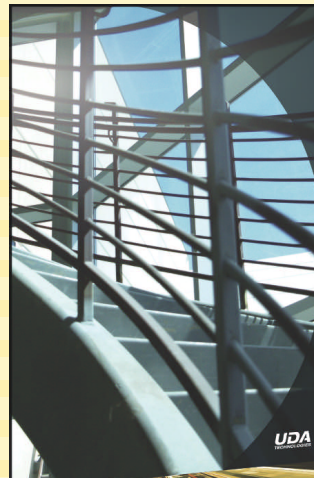
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BUILDING CULTURE WHILE YOU BUILD YOUR COMPANY

Nineteen years ago, when Sun Design Remodeling was started, I would not have been able to answer any questions about our company culture. As we have grown to more than 50 employees and have seen double-digit growth year after year, a strong, positive culture is what we have strived to achieve and has made us who and what we are today.

Why focus on culture? For us, focusing on culture has enabled us to attract great employees, clients and vendors who share our values and embrace our vision. We found that the best thing about focusing on culture is that you get to decide what type of company you develop and/or work for. A positive culture can lead to a company that is purpose-driven, fun, efficient, energetic and clean — a place where quality work is achieved and where honesty is highly regarded.

A negative culture can lead to high turnover rates of employees, high error rates, unorganized processes, decreased profitability and a lack of customer focus. For us, a positive culture was the only option.

Culture is the foundation of any company. Ask yourself, what is your culture now? What are your company's predominant attitudes and behaviors? Is there a difference in what they are now and what you would like them to be? Some companies don't have far to go to get to a positive culture; others may have a long way.

At Sun Design, we have been working on obtaining and retaining a positive culture for years. When we had approximately 25 employees, we created a shared vision for the organization. We developed guiding principles that consisted of the actions that we had to take to achieve our shared vision.

Both the shared vision and the guiding principles were brainstormed as a team exercise determining what type of company we wanted to work for. The teamwork exercise created the initial buy-in. Recently, we created our BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) for our employees to see where we were planning to be 15-18 years in the future. The BHAG created both excitement and commitment from the entire team, as the future looks

strong and everyone felt part of a company that saw them as part of the growth.

We determined very early it was crucial to build and maintain trust in our organization so that we could have any conversation — even a difficult one. We created four targets to empower our employees to make decisions by: our core values, what we are passionate about, what we are best in the world at, and our financial target. We have also created a board of advisors from the department heads and recognized individuals in our organization. They are responsible for creating our strategic plan and holding each other (including the owners) accountable to achieve it.

You can't change a company culture overnight. For us, it has taken several years. I suggest you visualize the culture you want, create a plan, communicate it to everyone and live it. Keep in mind that if people in your organization are misaligned with your new culture, they will probably leave. Be prepared, have a plan ready to replace them and stay on track. The final outcome — a positive culture — will be worth it. **PR**



Craig S. Durosko

Advisory Board Columnist

Birth Date: April 25, 1970

Company: Sun Design Remodeling Specialists

Location: Burke, Va.

Industry Involvement: NARI
Metro DC Board Member and Education Chair

Favorite Business Book: "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't" by Jim Collins

Best Advice I've Received: "You can't change anyone except yourself."

If I Weren't a Remodeler...
I'd be unemployed

Hobby: Mountain Biking

Favorite Drink: Fat Tire Amber Ale

Favorite Vacation Destination:
Mexico

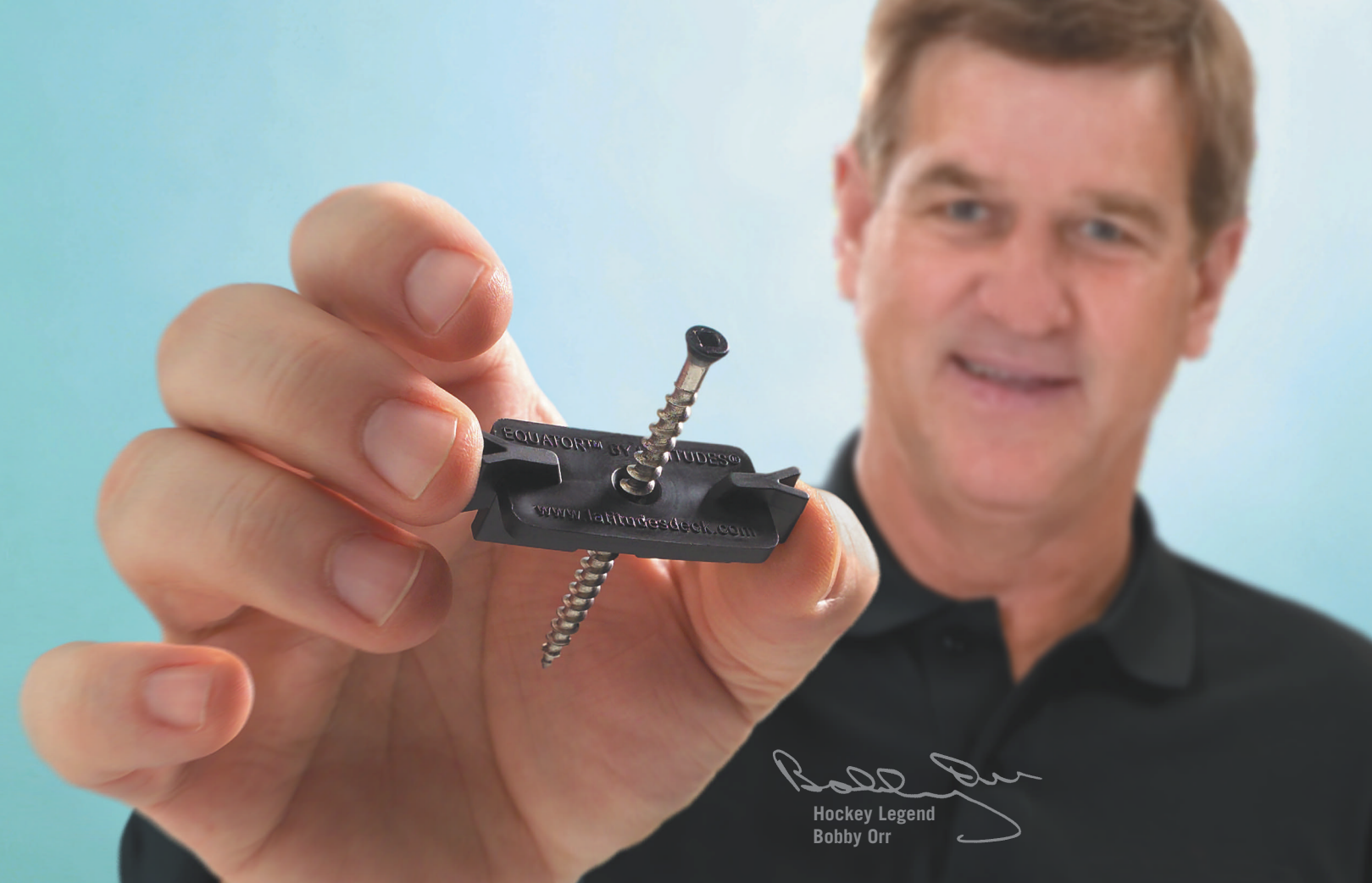
Best Memory from Childhood:
White-water rafting the Snake River in Wyoming

What I Wanted to Be When I Grew Up: A weatherman

Editorial Advisory Board

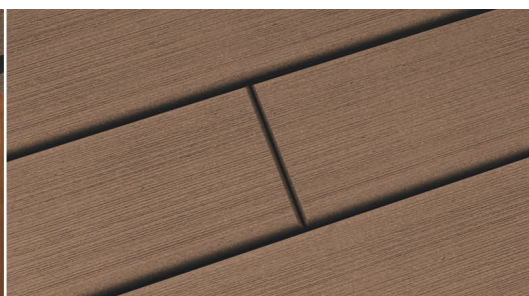
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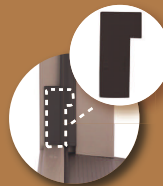
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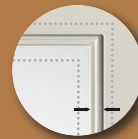
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