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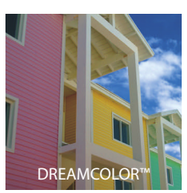

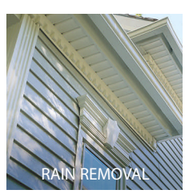

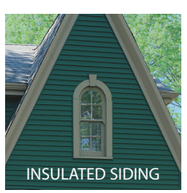

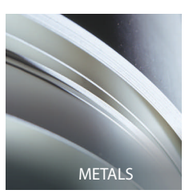

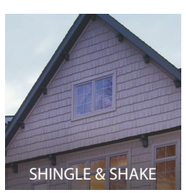

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Green Remodeling Webcast

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Best of the Best Design Award Winners

Log on to view an expanded slideshow presentation of all our 2007 Best of the Best Design Award winners.
www.ProRemodeler.com

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For the latest news and topics of interest to remodeling firm executives, visit our blogs by Jonathan Sweet and Mike Morris.
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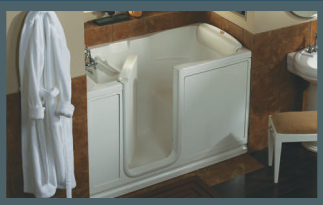

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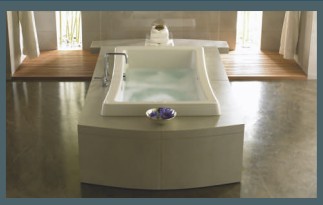

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GREAT DESIGN IS KEY TO SUCCESS

The best design/build, full-service, and kitchen and bath remodelers in the country all have one thing in common: they produce great designs and deliver a high quality of construction on a consistent basis.

No matter how good your firm is at marketing, sales or project management, your chances of succeeding for any length of time in the remodeling business are much lower if you don't produce quality results for your customers. Everything else you do feeds off this one key attribute that all great remodeling companies possess.

The only reason a client hires a remodeler, after all, is because they have a desire to improve the look of their home. And if the results don't meet their quality standards for design and construction, the likelihood they'll hire you again or recommend you to their friends and neighbors is extremely low.

The companies among this year's 56 Best of the Best Design Award winners (see page 25) are all great examples of organizations that take a lot of pride — and put a great deal of emphasis — on their design and construction departments. The projects they produce effectively feed the pipeline of most of their future work via repeat business and referrals. The companies that *really* get it also leverage this emphasis they put on design by marketing their design prowess to help generate business.

This year's Best of the Best competition was the most competitive ever, with a record 235 entries in 20 categories. Although I'd like to think we've had something to do with the rapid growth in the competition over the past three years, it's more likely because more remodeling firm owners are realizing how important winning design awards is to their marketing strategy. We even help each of our winners promote the award by providing a turnkey press release to send to local media outlets, as well as logos to use on all their marketing materials. Winners even get a trophy to display in their office or showroom.

The $175 investment they make — the entry fee — is one of the most cost-effective things they do to substantiate their excellence for prospects and differentiate them from their competition. They're already producing the great designs; entering their best projects in a national design award competition such as ours just makes sense.

So, if you're not thrilled with the quality of design that's going on in your company, isn't it about time you did something about it? Make it a priority to improve this key area of your business. Like this year's design award winners already know, the investment you'll make will pay dividends for years to come. To enter next year's contest, beginning in December you can log on to www.*ProRemodeler.com/design-awards* for an entry form. **PR**

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Our decks go equally well with red wine, BBQ sauce or ketchup.

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Smart car promotes green goals

When Shirey Contracting's production staff drives around town they're sure to be noticed, thanks to the new Smart Car the company recently purchased.

The car is an important part of the Issaquah, Wash., company's campaign supporting its Build Smart green construction division. With its compact size (about 8 feet long by 5 feet wide) and colorful paint, the car gets a lot of attention.

"You need to be in a good mood when you drive it, because everybody wants to talk to you about it," says President Donna Shirey. "People out in the community are talking about it; people want to sit in it. It's getting a lot of attention."

The environmentally friendly car gets about 50 miles per gallon.

Shirey first got the idea to buy one of the cars when she and her husband and partner Riley visited Europe this past summer.

"As we were going around, we started seeing all these itty-bitty cars everywhere," she says. "By the end of the week, I said 'I want a Smart Car for our business.'"

The Smart Car is produced in Europe by a joint venture of Mercedes and Swatch. Although the company has owned the car for only a few months, Shirey is already planning on buying more for the business, she says.

"Once you drive that little thing, you say it's just great," Shirey says. "It feels like a big car inside."

Binder system keeps clients in touch

With clients becoming increasingly busy between work and evening activities, it's not uncommon for Kasten Builders to miss connecting with their clients face-to-face.

So earlier this year, the Novato, Calif., company started using job binders to keep homeowners up-to-date on project progress.

"Sometimes clients would get home and they'd look around and think nothing had been done all day," says Vice President Pete Kasten. "Now they can see exactly what work was done."

The company uses two binders: one that goes back to the office and one that stays at the home. Every day, the job foreman records in the binders which employees and trade contractors were on the job, how long they were there and what work was done. Internally, it helps the company verify timecard information and material usage, as well as track change orders. For clients, it keeps them informed of the work. That's especially important for time and materials jobs, which represent about 30 percent of the company's business.

"We've had a little bit of a problem with changes in the past," Kasten says. "This way, we have evidence of what we've done everyday, so if the client has any questions, we can take care of it right away."

ONLINE POLL QUESTION

Do you have a showroom for your remodeling business?

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

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

A happy staff = happy clients

Many remodelers survey their clients after a job is completed. But how many canvass their employees to make sure they're satisfied?

Sun Design Remodeling Specialists in Burke, Va., started employee satisfaction surveys in 2006 with the idea that the best way to create an exceptional experience for clients was to have satisfied employees. The survey allows management to make sure the company is meeting its goal of creating a culture of "charity, truth and fun," says Jennifer Kidwell, the company's director of communications.

Employees take the survey twice a year and management uses the results to create or change policies. Almost 60 percent of employees participate in the surveys, a rate that Kidwell says is increasing as they realize its impact. Changes implemented because of employee feedback include offering AFLAC insurance, revamping the performance evaluation system and additional training for employees.

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PROS AND CONS OF SHOWROOMS

Could a showroom or design center work for you?

PHOTO BY ED WHEELER

Dennis Gehman, President
Gehman Custom Remodeling

Located just north of Philadelphia, Gehman Custom Remodeling services southeastern Pennsylvania. It is a full-line, full-service design/build/remodel company that has been in business for 17 years. The 21 employees work out of a mid-19th century renovated barn in Harleysville, Pa. Its yearly volume is about $3 million.

www.gehmanremodeling.com

PHOTO BY RON WURZER/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Tenhulzen, General Manager
Tenhulzen Remodeling

Tenhulzen Remodeling, based in Redmond, Wash., is a second-generation company going through a business transition. The firm, in business for 28 years, is a full-line residential design/build remodeling center that now includes a custom home division and a real-estate division. The company has 30 employees, and its volume is about $6 million a year.

www.tenhulzen.com

Showrooms and design centers can put you a step above the rest of the pack and help control your client's expectations.

Tom: Dennis, how would you define your view of showrooms and design centers?

Dennis: A showroom to me has some physical displays set up, much like it would be in someone's home or in an office. A design center is more where we're pulling out sample blocks of Corian or granite or stain blocks for matching samples.

Tom: Mike, is there a difference between showrooms and design centers and, if there is, how would you describe the difference?

Mike: The distinction I have with showrooms is that they tend to be built in the event of a coming trend with everything installed. It gives you a good perspective on how it all ties together. Sometimes the problem with that is it's too limiting. People may get attached to certain products that may not work with their home. By having a design center, you have the flexibility to go on with different directions using sample pieces, as Dennis described.

Tom: Mike, what types of displays do you have or see having in your design center? Would you say yours is more of a design center than a full-fledged showroom?

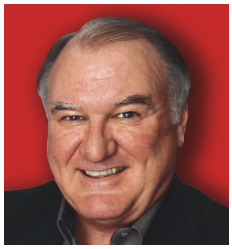
Mike: Absolutely. We've always considered the office as kind of a petting zoo. When you walk in there, you see different types of materials all over, including skylights, windows, different wall coverings, etc. The design center itself is pretty neutral in its appearance. It's broken into two areas. Mostly what we've focused on there is storage capacity and features for accessing product. Lots of counter space, natural light, different lighting environments for winter months, and lots of different materials. We keep the materials fresh and have our vendors and trades people come in regularly to keep the materials updated.

Tom: Dennis, describe yours. What type of displays do you have? Does it go beyond kitchen and bath?

Dennis: We have a combination showroom and design center. We had a design center for many years. During the first half of 2006 we invested time and finances to put in displays. We have a full working kitchen where we can bring clients in, have a party and cook a meal. People can touch and feel items on display. We have a full working master bathroom/spa, short of a toilet. We were afraid of the consequences there. We have a room that we call the media center. It's basically a small home theater. Our conference room is really what began as the design center where we were pulling the pieces out and imagining what it would do together.

Tom: Dennis, why did you decide to invest in a showroom?

Dennis: We felt like we wanted to take our business to the next level as far as the scope of projects and clientele that we were attracting. Part of this, in a sense, got pushed on us. There was a lumberyard material supplier about 5 or 6 miles from here that had wonderful displays. People could go there and would say, "we like the second display on the left," and we knew all about those displays. About three years ago, that company went out of business. We no longer had that kind of resource nearby. In talking to other people around the country, we learned that people would say you're going to sell what you show; it's also expensive; and you've got to stay on top of it. We've definitely found out the first two, and we're only a year and a quarter into it, so staying on top of it hasn't been too much of a struggle so far.



Tom Swartz
Contributing Editor

Tom: Mike, follow up on that. You've put together some obvious expense and things of that nature for a design center. Why did you do that? What made you go to an in-house design center?

Mike: Basically, it comes down to control. We want to make sure our clients are comfortable with a controlled environment and not just turning them loose out to the local flooring showroom or faucet selection location. All of that is here. We want to be cognizant of their time as well. They're typically dual-income families with limited time. All of the meetings are mapped out in advance, and we make sure we have the product here to show. The investment pays for itself in terms of the service that the customer experiences through the process.

Tom: Interesting. Mike, let's follow up on that, when you say the investment pays for itself. One of the things in my research getting ready for today's discussion, cost came up. How do you see it paying for itself; higher gross margins, better production, less bad orders or a host of other things?

Mike: It's making sure that when we get a client in to design — that we have a higher probability of selling them in the construction. Many times people go out and find products that they just can't afford, and that bumps them out of the marketplace. They just decide they can't afford this project now, "we'll buy a boat instead." By saying yes to this and no to that, guiding them in their decisions, and showing them only the elements that would fit their budget, that helps to keep them on track. We think that, by offering them that service, we have a differentiation in the marketplace. We're not just saying, "Yes, you can have that, and by the way it costs more so we'll make more off of you." We're really cognizant of their budget and fiscally responsible.

Tom: Dennis, what Mike just said is that the investment pays for itself. Do you see this? Here you are in year two of a fairly good amount of money. Do you see it paying for itself?

Dennis: It certainly is heading in that direction. We've experienced a bit of slowness for only about the first year of having the showroom. The projects that we did sell for the most part were of an increased value from what they had been previously.

Tom: You sell more using the showroom?

Dennis: Correct.

Tom: How much did it cost you to get started, and can you put a dollar amount of how much you've spent and are spending to keep it updated?

Dennis: To get started is kind of tough to answer. We were here in this building as kind of a design center since 1998. We invested about a quarter million [dollars]. Our projections were that we would recover that in two to three years' time.

Tom: Are you on schedule with those projections?

Dennis: We are behind on those.

Tom: Mike. How much did it cost to set up your design center, and how much does it cost to keep it updated?

Mike: When we first moved into this office, we had no inkling of bringing design in-house at that point. The initial start-up cost for that was pretty significant, but it got us out of the house. An addition was done about five years later to the building. That addition was about 650 square feet, which was our primary location for our design center. Outfitting that was pretty much uitilitarian, but it did get some nice exposure to the different features. It just depends on your local marketplace to put the value of what sort of investment that would be in terms of the square footage. Just recently, we had a garage as part of our initial build out that was taken over now for design center expansion. We're bringing on additional architects and designers to fulfill that need and help grow our capacity overall. In terms of expense, we found that our process justifies the cost. Just by having that exposure for customers to come in, two and three customers at a time now really gives us the benefit to adhere to their time schedules, their needs and the type of products we're prepared to show them.

Tom: Your showroom initially was approximately 650 square feet, and now you've gone into the garage and another 400 square feet?

Mike: Yes. About 1,000 now, total. And a huge work station.

Tom: Dennis, how large is your showroom?

Dennis: Counting the work station like Mike indicated, we have about 3,500 square feet.

Tom: Does that include your office? In other words, you have working displays and your office has cabinets above it that you're going to sell, too?

Dennis: Yes, exactly. We have different cabinetry displayed in each work station.

Tom: Dennis, how often do you change out the displays? Do you bear the cost? Do your vendors bear that cost? What does it cost you to keep this thing up?

Dennis: We're still trying to figure that out. The reason we have such a large space is we took what was a dairy barn and renovated it for our offices. We're in town on the main drag. It's a big volume of space; we didn't want to destroy the integrity of the barn. That has worked well for us with just the traffic going by. The reality is we could have torn this barn down and built a new building for a lot less money in the beginning. But, we're remodeling contractors and wanted to make a statement with it.

Mike: I was on your Web site a few days ago and like the use of that space!

Dennis: Thanks. It has worked well. We got a National Contractor of the Year Award (CotY) from NARI for it. We continue to have that displayed when people walk in.

Tom: How often do you change it out?

Dennis: We're set up so that every 7 years the whole thing gets changed out each year. Displays, work stations and that kind of an area.

Tom: Do you bear the cost of that, or do you share that with vendors, etc?

Dennis: It's somewhat shared. That's primarily because the cabinet manufacturers will give us a showroom discount and those kinds of things. Sometimes when you say vendors you're talking about subcontractors and trade contractors. One of the bonuses we offer to our clients is that, especially with interior work, it's all our own employees. We're doing all this work ourselves. We don't have an electrician or tile setter to go to and say, "Can you help us?" for work coming down the road because the reality is we're not giving them any.

Tom: Mike, how often do you change out your design center? Is there a major cost to that?

> **"The investment pays for itself in terms of the service that the customer experiences through the process."**

Mike: The expansion into the garage was our first major capital improvement in terms of the design center in a long time. Again, it was cabinetry and display costs. Something to be aware of in conjunction with the display cabinetry is that some manufacturers will require that you then buy a certain volume from them. When you get into that sort of environment, you want to set up a good relationship and display the type of cabinetry that you will actually be installing. It's kind of an as-needed basis. Our original portion had some shelves set up for display of cabinet doors. They're starting to sag, so there is need for modification there, too. It's really updating as needed and to offer the products that are going to be displayed.

Tom: One of the things people say is they're too costly and too much to keep up. We've had one here — ours is much more of a design center as well — because we don't change it out as often as we can, and cost has something to do with it. In this particular case, do you go to your manufacturers and ask them to do more than just sell you the product at display costs?

>> For the answer to Tom's question and the rest of the discussion, visit *www.ProRemodeler.com/bestpractices*

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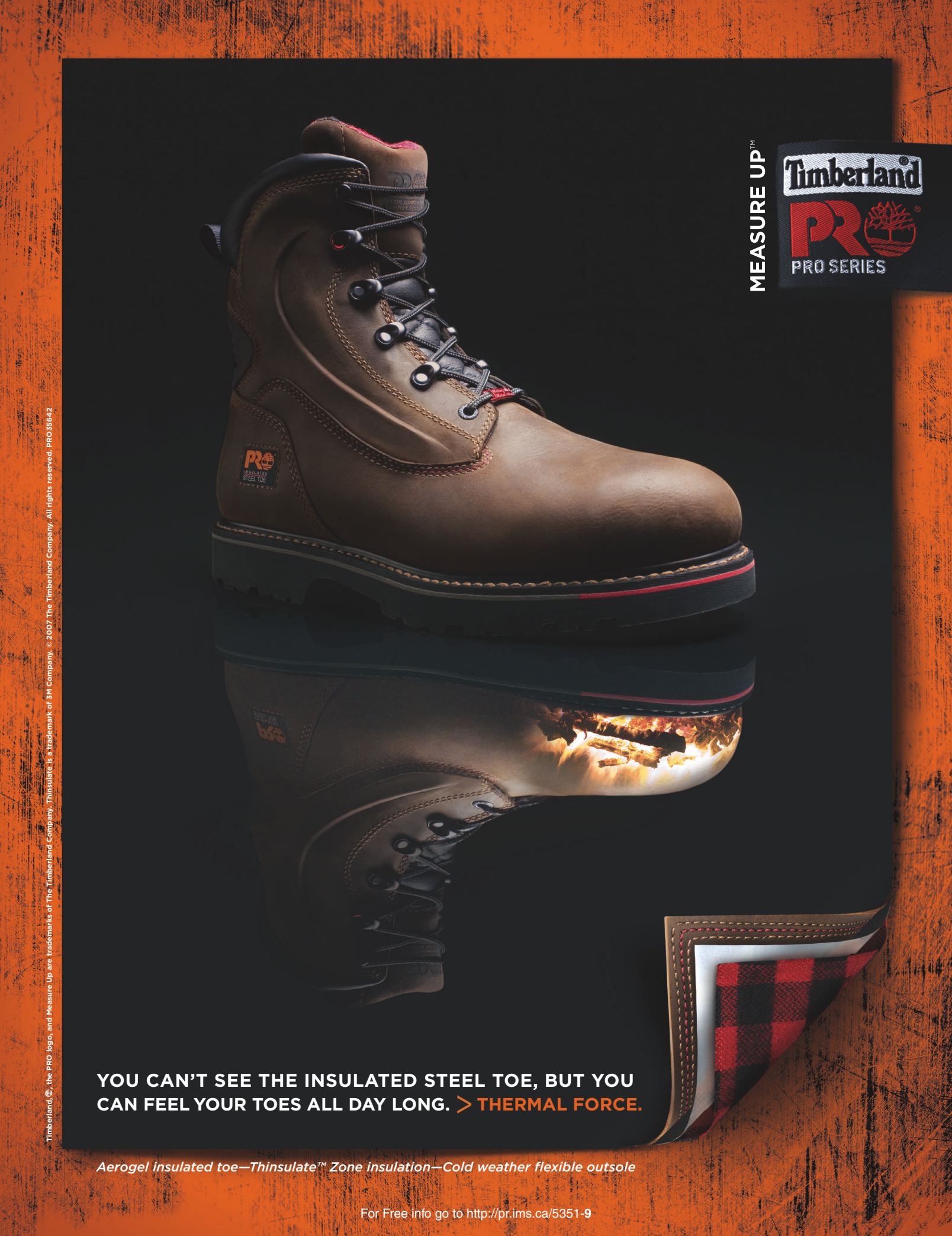

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BUSINESS FOR SALE

The job you hold affects your business' sale price down the road

IF YOUR BUSINESS IS ONE of your nest eggs, you might want to start examining it closely. Because whether you want to retire in two years or twenty, what you do today can go a long way toward what you will get when it's time to sell your business.

As the owner of a company that has franchises across the U.S. and as the shareholder of a franchise management company with several brands, I've spent the better part of 23 years not only helping people buy a business, but also selling it to another owner when they were ready to retire or move on to their next chapter in life. And while my experience involves companies with national brand names, I've learned there are a couple major factors in the asking price for any business, franchise or independent. The first is the number of hats the owner wears in the day-to-day activities of the operation, and the second is having well-running systems in place.

What's the Math Look Like?

There are independent firms that specialize in helping you through the sales process so you get the most for your years of hard work and investment in the business you created. And the most desirable buyers aren't shopping for today's value of your business; they are shopping for what it can become and the perceived ease with which it can happen.

I break it down into three categories that define the multiple you can command. This number is multiplied by the pretax net profit, or EBITDA, of your business to determine its worth. But remember, if you're doing the job of many, you also have to account for how many people your buyer must hire to replace you after the sale. And that means a lower return.

- **Owner/Operator:** If you are the owner/operator of your business, you're the core of your operation. You're wearing almost every hat, including doing some or all of the installations. You probably don't take vacations and skip sick days for fear of losing business, falling behind or because you need to keep up. Take you out of the picture, and the business will slow down or not exist. In this instance, your business may be worth 1–2 times your pretax net profit.
- **Salesman/Production Manager:** If you are an owner who isn't in the field but you're doing the majority of sales and/or production for the company, you are single-handedly bringing in most of the money that justifies everyone's job. Your business may be worth 2-3 times pretax net profit.
- **General Manager:** Perhaps you've developed systems for your business so you can focus on the bigger picture of senior management. You delegate work, and you've assembled a team of skilled people to execute assignments as well as lead. If you are an owner in the role of a general manager, many facets of the business succeed without your direct involvement. That means your business may be worth 3-5 times your pretax net profit.

Then there's the wildcard. A buyer comes along who wants your business bad enough to pay a premium. He doesn't want to start from scratch and he likes your location, business niche, the territory you cover and/or wants to capture a large part of the market. He's shopping for an opportunity, and you've got it. In those rare cases, you can generate a higher multiple.

When determining what your business is worth, all pretax net profit should be calculated minus the owner's compensation for all positions he or she fulfills and at a fair market wage for hours worked. Additional factors that often affect the total sales price are real estate, certain equipment, franchise rights and/or other unique licensing agreements.

If you're not willing to gamble on the wildcard and you want to proactively pick your successor, you may want to consider recruiting your future buyer. I've seen many business owners hire a talented employee, groom that person to excel in the business, and promote him to a position of authority whereby he one day bought the business.

Doug Dwyer
Contributing Editor

You've Got Options

So whether you're at the center of the action or a master at overseeing, whether you wear a tool belt to work or you lead from your office, understanding your position today speaks volumes for your future position in a life after remodeling. Or if you plan on staying in the business and passing it along to another generation, building it as if you would sell it some day will position it to be a stronger company with greater worth as an asset. You already work in a business with deadlines, but your retirement may be the biggest deadline of all. **PR**

Doug Dwyer is president and chief stewarding officer of DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen by Worldwide, one of the nation's largest remodeling franchises. He was a major shareholder in The Dwyer Group, a publicly-traded company that accepted private equity in 2003 and sold for a multiple of six times its pretax net profit. He can be reached at doug.dwyer@dwyergroup.com.

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Best of the BEST Design Awards

Unique By Design

2007 BEST OF THE BEST DESIGN AWARD JUDGES

Left to right: John Habermeier, Synergy Builders; Daniel Griffin, Griffin & Associates; Scott Sevon, Sevvonco; David McNulty, McNulty Design Group; Dave Clark, Stebnitz Builders; and Mark Fox, Gardner/Fox.

WHILE THE REMODELING MARKET may be slowing, this year's Best of the Best Design Awards competition shows that homeowners are still willing to pay for what they want.

That was probably the biggest trend in this year's award-winning projects, as clients consistently spent money to stay in areas they liked rather than move to a new location. Upscale features were the norm as homeowners looked to create more space and a home that reflected their personalities with unique designs.

With a record 235 entries in 20 categories, this year's competition was the most competitive ever. Entries were judged on construction quality, creativity, design and problem solving.

A total of 56 projects won awards, including 16 Platinum Awards and one project chosen by our judges as The Best.

Lakeside Beauty Showcases Benefits of Going Green

REBUILD ON EXISTING FOUNDATION

Remodeler and Designer: Absolute Remodeling
South Salem, N.Y.

AFTER PHOTOS BY SYLVAIN CÔTÉ

By Ann Matesi, Senior Contributing Editor

FOR REMODELER, SYLVAIN CÔTÉ who says he often draws on his background in art and visual photography for his work, this whole-house renovation in South Salem, N.Y., is his masterpiece. Reconstructed on the octagonal foundation of a home that was originally built in 1983, this thoughtfully redesigned and skillfully crafted 3,750 square foot lakeside home is as functional and environmentally friendly as it is pretty to look at.

Côté says that one of the driving factors behind this project, which is actually his own house, was to demonstrate the merits of green building to his local market, which he believes has been slower to embrace the concept than other parts of the country. "I really became inspired by the practical sense of it after attend-

Rebuilt from the ground up, this Craftsman-style home was constructed to demonstrate the merits of green remodeling techniques and materials. The exterior features durable, engineered finish materials that require little upkeep. The home's rear elevation is designed to maximize the views offered by its lakeside site.

Two salvaged beams suspended from the roof create a dramatic catwalk on the upper floor.

ing a workshop in Austin, Texas, back in 2004," he says. "From a marketing standpoint, I recognized that this is the perfect time for a project with this focus in my area. But the reality is that it goes much deeper than marketing. Green building is not a trend. It is here to stay."

Rebuilding the new, Craftsman-style home on an existing foundation provided the remodeler with both economic and green reuse benefits, Côté says. By building up rather than out, materials cost less, he says. He had the existing home removed down to key floor joists on the foundation, salvaging any materials that could be reintroduced into the new construction, including 10 of the home's 12 original rafters. He also preserved the massive stone fireplace and chimney that serves as the main load-bearing support structure for the roof of the uniquely shaped home. The chimney was extended an additional 15 feet to accommodate the home's new upper level. All stones were reclaimed from the existing home, ensuring a perfect match.

"Reconstructing the roof was definitely an engineering challenge," he says. "It was much more difficult than we had initially thought." But the results are spectacular. With no interior load-bearing walls, the home features an open floor plan that can be easily modified to accommodate future changes in lifestyle requirements or to improve accessibility.

Engineered materials were used on the home's exterior to provide better durability and make it easier to maintain.

Interior finishes include raw and reclaimed materials such as wood, wrought iron and stone, as well as a natural earth plaster finish on the walls. Other energy-saving features such as radiant heating; Energy Star-rated appliances; LED, CFL and halogen lighting; and two heat recovery ventilators were also part of the project.

"In addition to all of its green features, this home's unique layout simply adds another dimension to its appeal," says Côté.

Raw, but not virgin, and reclaimed materials were used for the home's interior finishes. Beams on the lower level are Douglas fir with a wire brush finish. Heart pine beams on the main level were salvaged but had to be re-milled because they were different sizes. The wood flooring was also reclaimed and included mixed pine, chestnut and hickory. The massive central fireplace provides a focal point for the interior spaces. Its chimney is load bearing for the roof, says remodeler Sylvain Côté. "The roof structure essentially supports itself."

Remodeler: Sun Forest Construction, Bend, Ore.
Designer: Tozer Design Studio, Bend Ore.
Interior designer: Siri Design, Portland, Ore.

WHOLE-HOUSE OVER $501,000

AFTER PHOTO BY PAT CROSS STUDIO

The staircase structure mimics the shape of a flowing river, and its open design permits natural light to flood the interior of the home. Alder was used throughout the project with the exception of the floor, which is hickory. "Alder is a very popular species in this area," says remodeler Mike Montgomery, "and it accepts stain beautifully."

A Natural Fit

Purchased for its beautiful riverside location rather than the 1980s-inspired contemporary character of its original design, the owners of this house in Bend, Ore., had a plan in mind for the home when they bought it. Their goal was to completely remodel it, inside and out, in a style that would celebrate its bucolic Pacific Northwest location.

Although the home was in need of a major renovation, local land management controls — which prohibit enlarging houses in environmentally sensitive, waterfront locations — limited the couple in what they could do.

"These restrictions are really the impetus that drives the residential remodeling market in this area," says Mike Montgomery, remodeling manager for Sun Forest Construction, which the client hired for the project. "Land use regulations today do not allow new construction to be as close to the river as in the past. Because of this, there are a lot of people buying older homes, with the intention of remodeling them, just so they can be closer to the river. The major requirement, however is that they work within the existing footprint of the original structure."

The homeowner wanted to remodel the home using a palette of natural materials that would blend with the rustic surroundings and enhance the view of the river from inside. "They really wanted to feel as though they were right on the river when they were inside the home," says Montgomery. "The redesigned interior gives you the feeling that the space just flows outside."

The 10-month-long project involved extensive interior demolition work, the remodeler says. "We did reuse some of the original framing, but that was about all." The clients worked closely with both the project designer and the construction team throughout the remodeling process to select materials and finishes that would lend themselves to the look and feel they wanted to achieve.

Other updated elements included a new HVAC system; rewiring of the electrical system; reconfiguring the plumbing; refinishing the interior walls, remodeling the kitchen, bathrooms and existing staircase; and replacing all the windows. The entire house was re-roofed for aesthetic and structural benefits.

The only new livable square footage that was added, says Montgomery, was a media room that was converted from part of a garage space.

The homeowners, who use this as their primary residence, truly consider it their "home of a lifetime."

Remodeler: CASE, Anoka, Minn.
Designer: Yeager Design Group, Minneapolis

WHOLE-HOUSE UNDER $250,000

AFTER PHOTOS BY THE CARNEY GROUP

The original fireplace was completely disassembled and rebuilt with a solid pour concrete hearth and mantel, limestone tile face and white oak upper cabinetry panels. "The only part we kept was the firebox," says remodeler Bob Mock.

Removing overhead ceiling beams and adding a window that flanks a built-in desk on one side, and a display niche on the other, contribute to the updated aesthetic in the family room.

Obsolete Style a Thing of the Past

The whole house remodel of this '70s rambler in Edina, Minn., transformed the home's interior living spaces from passé to sleek and Asian contemporary. That's thanks to new fixtures and finishes and an expanded floor plan that works better for its owner's on-the-go lifestyle.

"It was a very dated house in terms of style and function," says remodeler Bob Mock, who owns his own remodeling firm based in Anoka, Minn. The client, one of his past customers, wanted to remodel her home's front entry, kitchen, mud room and living room and add a bathroom and pantry. The project also involved replacing all windows and doors.

To expand the space in the kitchen, interior walls were removed between it and the adjoining living and dining rooms, which required creative framing to accommodate an existing ceiling header. In addition, the main furnace flue was rerouted into a void in the wall between the kitchen and the new bathroom. This made it possible to replace the solid walls on either side of the staircase with a pair of open lathe walls, which are visible from the new entry foyer.

The open-wall design surrounding the staircase fulfilled the client's desire to eliminate the closed-in feeling associated with an interior hallway. Other improvements included removing outdated decorative beams from the family room ceiling and re-building the home's "beehive-style" fireplace.

Custom-built riff-cut white oak cabinets with overlay curved doors were incorporated into the remodeled kitchen, giving it a very sophisticated appearance. New white oak flooring was also installed throughout the home.

"We actually opened up four different walls in the home," says Mock. "It was a tricky process to transfer the loads on what was a hand-framed roof."

Some of the finish materials that the client selected for the project had to be specially ordered, including upgraded white oak interior doors and custom limestone tile used in the kitchen, bathroom and fireplace. This extended the length of the overall project by nearly a month, the remodeler says.

"The homeowner had very strong ideas about how she wanted the remodeled spaces to look, but it was hard for her to articulate these ideas upfront," says Mock. This caused several mid-project changes that slowed progress but did not create a negative working relationship with the homeowner. "Actually, she was a great client to work with because she was totally realistic. She knew what she wanted and was willing to accept delays if it meant achieving her desired results."

Remodeler and Architect: Feinmann
Arlington, Mass

ADDITION OVER $100,000

AFTER PHOTOS BY JOHN HORNER PHOTOGRAPHY

The home's Japanese-inspired entry is serene and peaceful. Translucent exterior panels custom-built to mimic shoji screens, on the left, provide the perfect complement to their real counterparts on the inside.

The shoji screens are made of a laminated material that will withstand abuse from the homeowner's cats. The screens can be drawn to enclose the "scholar's study," which doubles as a guest room.

East Meets West in Inspired Design

Although she had already been advised by three architects to tear down her modest, 56-year-old home in Lexington, Mass., rather than remodel it, the owner knew her house was something special, and she was determined to preserve it. Peter Feinmann, president of Feinmann, an award-winning design/build remodeling firm based in Arlington, Mass., thought so too.

The home was originally designed and built as part of a neighborhood of experimental houses in the early 1950s using the Deck House style of architecture, which was based on modernist simplicity and post-and-beam construction techniques.

Feinmann's client, a university professor of Japanese sociology, wanted a multi-use addition onto her home that would serve several functions. This included a more architecturally significant entry, a spacious home office and a serene sitting area.

"Our inspiration for this project came from an off-hand comment that she made during one of our preliminary meetings with her," says Feinmann. The homeowner mentioned that she had always wanted a Japanese "scholar's study," which is traditionally a contemplative workspace enclosed by shoji screens.

"As we explored this idea, we realized how similar this concept was in appearance and inspiration to the actual style of her home. We recognized that we had a great opportunity to do something really special here."

The design for the new addition features post-and-beam construction that continues outward from the existing house, preserving the continuity of its original design while creating a brand new "Japanese" wing that includes all the elements the client was looking for, as well as a single-car garage.

Feinmann's design team researched materials that would complement the design's balance of Eastern and Western architecture. They discovered a translucent sandwich panel material typically used for commercial installations that they could customize to create a shoji-style window for the front elevation of the addition. "It was just what we were looking for," says Feinmann. The product had the same insulating properties as a typical exterior wall but allowed light to shine through it. "We now could bring light into the space without sacrificing privacy. And it was no more complicated to install than a conventional glass window."

Another challenge that Feinmann faced with this project: his client left the country to spend six months in Japan shortly after the design process began. "But we still had to continue working with her even while she was gone so that we would be ready to begin construction as soon as she returned." Meetings were conducted over the phone or using the Internet.

"The result is a unique space that exceeded our client's expectations."

Remodeler and Architect: Landis Construction
Washington, D.C.

EXTERIOR

AFTER PHOTOS BY YERKO PALLOMINY PHOTOGRAPHY

The home's new Craftsman-style front elevation features a well-balanced design that draws the eye to its focal-point entry.

The deep front porch provides the homeowners with the outdoor living space they were looking for and includes both recessed lighting and Prairie-style sconces. The porch ceiling features a tongue-and-groove fir finish.

Exterior Facelift Creates Focal Point Entry

When the owners of this 52-year-old home in Kensington, Md., decided it was time to update its front elevation, the couple's No. 1 priority was to add a front porch that would improve its curb appeal and provide them with a sheltered outdoor living space their house was lacking. With the help of his design and construction team, Washington, D.C.-based remodeler and architect Chris Landis gave the home a new streetscape that exceeded his clients' expectations, transforming their dated rambler into a true neighborhood gem.

"The change is really remarkable," says Landis of the home's new Craftsman-inspired facade. It now features a deep, full-width covered porch with ample space for a table and chairs accented by a prominent gable that's supported by a quartet of battered columns.

The primary challenge of the project was that the house had two front doors: a formal entry at the mid-point of the home but invisible because it was turned parallel to the street; and a second door, next to the driveway, that opened directly into the kitchen. This lack of a clearly defined entrance was both aesthetically unappealing and constantly confusing visitors, says the project's designer Garth Russo.

Russo's solution was to eliminate the informal entry, replacing it with a window to bring more light into the kitchen, and to face the main door toward the street. The single gable of the new roofline emphasizes the home's new entrance — the focal point.

Landis' clients were also keen on using green materials and practices for their new porch, says project manager Andrew Kerr. "They had already decided they wanted to use Lyptus for the porch decking." Lyptus, a hybrid of the eucalyptus tree, is a plantation-grown, sustainable wood that matures quickly and resembles mahogany in color and grain.

"It's not a true exterior product, but we did our research and found that we could use it because it was a covered application. We also treated it for increased weatherproofing," adds Kerr.

Other materials included Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified eastern white cedar shingle siding and trim, as well as the home's original brick accent siding that was salvaged and reused on the base of the new porch columns.

The materials and color palette introduced on the front of the home were carried to its other elevations for continuity.

"We wanted to give the front of the house a facelift, and, at the same time, tie these dramatic changes into its existing side gables so that everything made sense visually," says Russo. "This project was extremely successful in transforming the overall look of the house."

Remodeler and Designer:
Sun Forest Construction, Bend, Ore.
Interior designer: Handcrafted Log Homes, Sisters, Ore.

EXTERIOR

A pergola adds character to the exterior of the Pacific Northwest home without creating too much shade for the new outdoor entertaining space.

Designing the spa required skilled craftsmanship. Discrete knife joints were used to connect the logs without visible nails.

AFTER PHOTOS BY PAT CROSS STUDIO

Rustic Beauty Celebrates the View

After purchasing this 15-year-old, Pacific Northwest beauty in Bend, Ore., its new owner wanted to improve upon the home's visually striking, but worn, Craftsman-style exterior character and, at the same time, increase his opportunities for sheltered outdoor entertaining. Perched on a heavily wooded, rocky outcropping, the home's rear elevation had a fantastic overview of the community golf course.

"He really wanted to add some richness and texture to the home's exterior as well as a sheltered deck that would not impact his view of the golf course," says Mike Montgomery, remodeling manager for Sun Forest Construction, the local design/build firm that had originally built the home.

The design for the project involved matching the 1,000-square-foot extension of living space to the exposed log structure of the home. A new gated entry needed to blend as well.

Other exterior improvements included replacement of the windows with commercial-grade, tinted ones; adding copper gutters and downspouts; repainting the original siding; replacing all of the home's French doors; and adding a new snow-melt driveway, walkway and rear deck.

When it came to developing a plan for the new deck, the homeowner wanted to avoid an architecturally heavy patio structure that would require so many posts that it could obstruct the views out of the back of the home. "It was also important that the new structure allow light to penetrate into the interior living spaces," says Montgomery.

Getting the necessary construction materials — primarily large logs — to the site presented the remodeling team with a significant scheduling challenge. Community regulations dictated there would be only a one-hour window in the early morning for deliveries. "And we could only use a small crane during that same hour for unloading," he says.

Matching the new logs to the original wood on the home also had to be addressed, the remodeler says. "We ended up sandblasting the new wood as well as all of the existing beams, logs, exposed overhangs and natural wood on the house so that everything had the same finish."

The real beauty of the project is the craftsmanship that was involved in assembling the new log structures, Montgomery says. "All of the joints are hidden. Everything was done so seamlessly that none of the connections are visible — even in the places where the posts are joined to rock. The results are amazing."

Remodeler: Lewis Aquatech, Chantilly, Va.
Landscape architect: Donovan Feola Balderson & Associates, Montgomery Village, Md.

OUTDOOR LIVING

The terrace gives the homeowners many points of interest including planting beds, a fireplace and multiple seating areas.

AFTER PHOTOS BY DON GWIZ

Water cascades over the pool's infinity edge into a recirculation pond.

The Great Outdoors, Refined

When the owners of this upscale residence in Washington, D.C., decided they had outgrown their home, they initially explored the possibility of moving. They soon realized, however, that they loved their current location — a heavily wooded, very private site on the northwest side of the city — too much to leave it. Instead, the couple elected to update their living arrangements with a $500,000 addition and a back yard remodel that included new hardscaping and a dramatic new pool.

The home's former outdoor living space included a large elevated wood deck off the main body of the house and a conventional, rectangular in-ground pool and gazebo at the rear of their lot. A lawn separated the deck and pool area.

"It was fine for its day, but it was definitely in need of updating," says Donald Gwiz, vice president of marketing and sales for Lewis Aquatech, a local construction company hired by the homeowners to reorganize their outdoor amenities. The company, which specializes in creating outdoor environments, had also installed the original pool for the clients.

A new site plan was developed for the rear yard permitting the outdoor living space to work in concert with the home's grand new addition. A multi-level flagstone terrace with planting beds, a Carderock stone fireplace with its own sitting area, an outdoor kitchen and a direct, hard-surface connection to the pool replaced the wood deck.

The new pool now runs perpendicular to the home. This created very dramatic sight lines that run from inside the home to the pool and beyond, culminating in a sensational, infinity-edge waterfall that complements the contemporary, nature-inspired design theme of the project.

Construction access to the back yard was a challenge, says Gwiz. "There was literally no way to get back there except through the adjacent property. The neighbors were very generous in allowing us to install a temporary construction road on their lot so that we could access the site. It was really a remarkable partnership between neighbors that you don't always find these days." Lewis Aquatech implemented a fast-track, six-month construction schedule for the project to minimize disruption for the families involved.

"Our clients are thrilled with their new outdoor living space," says Gwiz. "Not only does the yard work much better for them in terms of function, but it has really enhanced their new addition as well."

Remodeler and Designer: Magee Construction
Cedar Falls, Iowa

OUTDOOR LIVING

Custom concrete countertops feature internal steel reinforcement that increases their durability. Formed concrete backsplashes, also site-built, were designed to incorporate electrical outlets within their profile.

AFTER PHOTOS BY WAYNE MAGEE

Recessed and task lighting incorporated into the room's decorative ceiling beams provide extra light for overcast days or evenings.

Open Invitation to Step Outside

This award-winning outdoor living space serves as an alfresco kitchen and a sheltered entertaining area for a homeowner who is both an avid chef and a local general contractor with a discriminating eye for good design and high quality materials, says remodeler Wayne Magee, owner of Magee Construction in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Cooking facilities, a conversation area and a multi-level wet bar are all contained beneath an architecturally distinctive roof designed to complement the home's contemporary style and protect from the elements, says Magee. The new addition blends in form and function with the home's existing 1,110-square-foot cedar deck.

Radiant heating in the outdoor room's concrete floor extends its season from early spring to late fall.

During the day, six skylights flood the outdoor room with natural light. The skylights are vented and remain open most of the time, Magee says, to permit excess heat to escape, as well as to prevent the buildup of odor and smoke when the grill is in use. Sensors automatically close the overhead windows at the first sign of rain.

A grid-style sidewall adds an element of privacy for the interior of the outdoor room, shielding it from direct view of the adjoining property without closing in the space visually. The grid detail also made it possible to design the space with strategically placed, but invisible, electrical outlets and switches that make the room function efficiently.

The kitchen area is designed and equipped to facilitate the preparation and service of meals entirely outdoors and includes a host of high-end, stainless steel appliances, including a 54-inch grill, a refrigerator, an ice box, double burners, an oven, a warming drawer and custom utensil trays.

A multi-level island/wet bar, which features custom-built mahogany cabinetry suspended on a steel tube frame, serves as the focal point.

Achieving the rich black color specified for the room's site-formed concrete countertops proved to be one of the most challenging elements of the project, says Magee. "We really had to get everyone on board with just how critical the finishes were to the success of the space."

Demand for outdoor living space is moving north into housing markets in a big way, says Magee. "We have more clients interested in adding them all the time," he says. "No matter where you live, everybody likes to be outdoors. Some people are a bit surprised by the costs involved, but the reality is that outdoor rooms can be as elaborate as their indoor counterparts."

Small Space, Big Challenge

Remodeler and Architect: Normandy Builders
Hinsdale, Ill.

CONSERVATORY/SUNROOM

AFTER PHOTOS BY DMS PHOTOGRAPHY

Recessed and indirect cove lighting incorporates into the room's barrel vaulted ceiling. Douglas fir paneling provides a striking contrast to the painted molding. Radiant heating within the travertine tile floor and storm windows that replace screens extend the space's usable season for the homeowners.

Masterfully planned and beautifully executed, the three-season room addition blends so well into the rear elevation of this 3,500-square-foot French Country-style residence in Hinsdale, Ill., that it is hard to believe it was not always a part of the home. The style and scale of its architectural details and finish materials so seamlessly match the rest of the home.

The room's modest 8- x 10-foot size, however, belies the complexity of the design process required to make it happen, says project architect Troy Pavelka of Normandy Builders. Zoning requirements in the upscale community strictly regulate home size based on a percentage of lot coverage, and the existing home was already very close to that limit.

"According to the local zoning commission, the home could not take up any more than 25 percent of its buildable site," says Pavelka. "This meant that we were restricted to a footprint of only about 65 square feet for the new space. The reality is that we were really lucky to be able to get an addition in there at all."

Recognizing just how important the room was to the client, Pavelka says the goal of his design was not only to capture every square foot of living space as possible, but also to maximize the visual impact of the room's interior. "I really looked at the room from every plane and packed it with as much as I could."

The architect came up with a unique solution that allowed him to gain an additional seven square feet inside the room. "We were able to cantilever the dominant wall, which was the rear wall that contains the dormer, out over the foundation. The finished living space actually overhangs the foundation by nearly a foot."

Visual cues taken from the home's exterior elevation were used to create the design for the addition, says Pavelka. "The most obvious one was the large barrel dormer that was incorporated into the existing hip roof. We created a smaller version of that for the sunroom." The home's existing rooflines were also extended.

Inside, a barrel vaulted ceiling raises the ceiling height in the space to nearly 11 feet, expanding the room vertically while windows on three sides do the same on a horizontal axis.

"This room is really deceptive," says Pavelka. "For a small space, there is a lot of big design going on in there."

Matching exterior architectural details such as an existing eyebrow dormer and dramatic rooflines allows the new sunroom to seamlessly integrate into this home's rear elevation.

Remodeler: The McAllister Group, Charlotte, N.C.
Architect: Insight Architects, Charlotte, N.C.

RESTORATION

AFTER PHOTOS BY INSIGHT ARCHITECTS

The restored bungalow blends with the scale of the neighborhood, says architect Vince Ciccarelli. Its design includes a pagoda-style second-story addition, which provided space for two new bedrooms. The home's original windows were disassembled and refurbished rather than replaced.

The chimney for the home's existing coal-burning fireplace was rebuilt and a gas-fired coal basket insert installed to replace the original. The new surround and hearth features a tumbled marble finish. The fireplace's original mahogany mantle was refinished on-site.

Team Effort Revives Neighborhood Treasure

Remodeler Larry McAllister is quick to share the credit when it comes to identifying what made the renovation of this century-old bungalow in Charlotte, N.C., such an overwhelming success.

"Having a great architect on board and a great client makes all the difference," says McAllister. He should know. His 10-year-old firm has a solid reputation for high-quality restoration work in the greater Charlotte metropolitan area. "Getting approval from the local historic zoning commission can be a tricky and time-consuming process. Typically, a project has only a 25 percent chance of gaining approval from the board the first time through. Sometimes this can take months."

Not so for the proposed renovation of this 1,200 square-foot home in the city's highly desirable uptown district. The plans, developed by local architects John Shurley and Vince Ciccarelli, were approved the first time through, says McAllister. Their design called for more than doubling the home's square footage with a rear addition, an upper floor and an attached garage. New spaces included a large family room, additional bedrooms, a home office and an updated kitchen.

"The real beauty of this project was that the house had a lot of nice historic elements to it already," says Ciccarelli. "These provided us with a good starting point in terms of the design. Another really important fact was that the clients, who had purchased the home several years earlier with the goal of restoring it, accepted the bungalow style and were willing to allow us to focus on that rather than on appealing to their specific tastes. They encouraged us to detail the house appropriately."

Period-specific accents include wavy glass, mortised door handle sets, salvaged heart pine floors and Arts and Crafts-style staircase railings.

The house was in bad shape, says McAllister. "It really had very poor bones, so it required a lot of retro-engineering on our part." For example, the remodeler discovered during demolition there were no footings underneath its brick walls.

Taking advantage of an unpaved rear access lane and the natural slope of the lot, the architects integrated the garage into the main body of the home's rear elevation.

"This was really a tight site," says McAllister. "And we pushed the lot coverage to the maximum buildable footprint. Everyone involved with the project made sure that their work was near perfect, and the architect did a heck of a job preserving the original cool character of the home."

Remodeler: Cabinetry & Construction, Richmond, Va.
Architect: Charpentier & Chen, P.C., Richmond, Va.

FINISHED BASEMENT

Remodelers updated the basement fireplace with a new tile surround that complements the other finishes in the room.

AFTER PHOTOS BY JOHN MAGOR PHOTOGRAPHY

The steps leading up to the main level of the home were redesigned to resemble a front door rather than a stairwell, says remodeler Robert Wright.

Basement Remodel Creates Urban Escape

The synergy between old and new in the remodeled basement of this proper Georgian-style residence in Richmond, Va., exudes the eclectic charm of a downtown loft, taking the homeowners' entertaining options to a whole new level.

"Their goal," says Certified Remodeler Robert Wright, "was to capture unused space in their home and create a totally unique area for relaxing."

Wright's clients had in hand design sketches for a new floor plan for the basement, which had been previously remodeled to include a bedroom, full bath and recreation room. The plan called for reorganizing the space and opening it up by removing all of the existing interior walls, none which were load-bearing, with the exception of those separating the living area from the bathroom and storage space.

"My clients were looking for a very modern, urban look for the finished space in their basement and had also brought us clippings of ideas they liked," says Wright, owner of the Richmond-based remodeling firm Cabinetry and Construction, responsible for the 1,000-square-foot project. "We're typically involved in very traditional projects, so this was something new for us. But it was an interesting challenge and we were excited to take it on."

The new space features a striking focal point fireplace and a stylized corner bar with custom-built bamboo cabinets and a concrete countertop backed by a glass block window. The tile for the bar was chosen to complement the new surround for the room's existing fireplace.

Wright worked closely with the client in selecting the color scheme and materials for the project. The unique blend of textures and finishes combining with elements that were already there is what really gives the space its unique character, Wright says.

The basement's existing foundation walls were power-washed to partially remove their previously painted finish, giving them a custom, distressed appearance. The ceiling joists were also left exposed, as were the two main structural steel I-beams. All ceiling elements were painted a soft charcoal black to make them less conspicuous and give the area a more contemporary appearance. The concrete floors, once covered with vinyl tile, were stripped and acid washed to reflect the new warm orange and cool green color scheme.

Wright says the trapezoidal "bow-tie" that floats above the conversation area is one of his favorite elements. This detail, created by joining two ceiling-mounted contrasting-color triangles, has recessed lighting.

"All of the details used for this project were very sharp, very high quality," says Wright. "That really comes through in the finished space."

Remodeler and Architect: CBI Design Professionals
Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

SPECIALTY ROOMS

AFTER PHOTOS BY BETH SINGER

The ceiling coffers are all formed concrete and the walls are finished with drywall backed by a vapor barrier. Multiple windows in the pool room ensure that it has beautiful views of its own.

Indoor Pool Requires a Unique Solution

When Robert Clarke, owner of CBI Design Professionals, a design/build firm in Southeastern Michigan, built this spectacular lakefront home seven years earlier, he says he knew his clients planned to add a pool in the future. "What I did not anticipate was the extent that they would take it to," he says.

The client's pool is incorporated into a new addition, a spectacular below-grade pool house constructed in similar fashion to a concrete envelope, says Clarke, who designed and built the one-of-a-kind project for the homeowner, who is a local concrete contractor himself.

The luxury home sits on a hillside site that affords its owners lake, nature preserve and wooded views that they did not want to sacrifice for their 1,697-square-foot pool house addition. "Since preserving the view was paramount, we decided that the best place for it would be on the same level as the home's walk-out where it would have the least impact view-wise."

The solution was to build the pool house addition on grade with the home's walkout basement. The structure is built in similar fashion to a concrete envelope, says Robert Clark, whose Bloomfield Hills, Mich., firm designed and constructed the 7-year-old home and its addition.

To accomplish this, the pool was excavated 12 feet below the home's existing foundation walls, which required substantial shoring and engineering work. "The water level of the pool is actually two feet below the basement floor height," says Clarke. "We had never done something like this before."

The pool house itself was constructed of formed concrete poured in similar fashion to the way a commercial structure is built, Clarke says. "We had to be very careful when it came to waterproofing the structure because the interior wall was never going to be exposed."

The roof of the pool room is a combination of cast-in-place concrete vaults and concrete plank; all were waterproofed. Interestingly, the room's ceiling serves as the base for a patio and lawn above it. Skylights incorporated into the lawn area above the pool room flood the below-grade space with natural daylight. Small openings in the concrete beams, which contain the skylights, are connected to the room's air handling system so that the windows are continuously bathed in a stream of warmed, dry air. "This eliminates the possibility of condensation on the windows and 'rain' inside the room."

The pool house features its own air handling system that recycles the air, keeping the odor of pool chemicals out of the main house. "You can't even smell chlorine when you stand next to the pool," says Clarke. Because the ground temperature at this level stays at a constant 50 degrees, temperature fluctuation was not a major concern.

"We had to overcome some significant engineering challenges for this project but the results were really remarkable."

Remodeler and Designer: Daniels Design & Remodeling
Fairfax Station, Va.

KITCHEN OVER $151,000

AFTER PHOTOS BY BOB NAROD, PHOTOGRAPHER

The new kitchen features a variety of rich colors and textures that give it an old world elegance which is far removed from its plain predecessor. The counter surfaces include a mix of granite, tile, marble and wood.

The wrought-iron accented seating area at the kitchen's multi-level center island is designed to complement the new circular staircase nearby.

Kitchen Story with a Custom Finish

The run-of-the-mill 1980s-style kitchen in this production-built home in Centreville, Va., was transformed from ordinary to extraordinary. The 10-month-long remodeling process involved not only new cabinetry and high-end appliances, but also big improvements in its space planning and visual connections.

"This project is actually the starting point for a work in progress," says Edward (Ted) Daniels, president of Daniels Design & Remodeling in Fairfax Station, Va. "The homeowners wanted to create a true custom kitchen that was elegant but still warm and comfortable. At the same time, the wife expected this project to set the standard for her future plans when it came to improving other areas of the family home."

This kitchen remodel presented two complex construction challenges that were effective and economical, Daniels says. The first was the development of a custom support system, which consisted of an "invisible" structural load-bearing column installed in a void in the new cabinetry, replacing a load-bearing wall that had to be removed to widen the space.

The second involved reconfiguring a large mechanical chase containing an air return duct and a flue that obstructed one wall. The air return was rerouted from the basement into the foyer area. Use of a shallow, but wide, duct system minimized the soffit in the basement and maximized air flow. A new HVAC system, with a built-in power ventilator, was installed to address the issue of removal of the flue.

The firm also relocated the main-floor laundry room to the basement, and incorporated a more functional, family-friendly mud room instead.

The transition between the kitchen and adjoining great room had originally been partially blocked by a staircase that serves as a secondary access to the home's upper level. This staircase was removed and replaced with an open, circular one.

Daniels credits the success of the project to a team effort, which included everyone from his on-staff architectural designer to the cabinetry and interior designers to the carpenters, as well as a homeowner who had a clear vision of what she wanted. Their innovative ideas and cost-effective construction suggestions were key when it came to transforming the original narrow, cramped kitchen into the show stopper that it is today, he says.

"This is a great example of what a talented team can accomplish. I am really proud of them, and my clients could not be happier."

Remodeler and Architect: HomeMasons
Manakin-Sabot, Va.

KITCHEN $61,000 – $150,000

AFTER PHOTO BY GIAMMARINO DWORKIN PHOTOGRAPHY & STYLING

The kitchen island provides the homeowners with generous workspace. Its mass is downplayed by leaving one end open and accenting it with table leg supports. The 1½-inch-deep countertop was chosen to give the island a "beefier" look that sets it apart from the perimeter counters, says remodeler C. Mason Hearn Jr..

Bright Ideas for Brand New Kitchen

Developed for a pair of hip, young restaurateurs in Richmond, Va., this award-winning redesign transformed their bland, traditional kitchen into a polished contemporary workspace where they can relax together or entertain small groups of family and friends in style.

Part of a whole-house remodeling project involving their 35-year-old home, the couple gave C. Mason Hearn Jr., president of HomeMasons, a general idea of what they were looking for but left the specifics to him.

"The first things we ask our clients when we redo a kitchen is 'Tell us about your routine. How do you want to be able to cook in your kitchen? How do you want to be able to eat in your kitchen?'" says Hearn. "In this case, we had newlyweds who had not really developed a sense of that yet. The only things that they were very certain about were the high-end, stainless steel appliances and modern aesthetic that they wanted to introduce to the space. Most importantly, they wanted the kitchen to function better for their lifestyle, which was very casual."

The original kitchen comprised several small areas that did not work well together. Hearn replaced a poorly constructed, previous addition, which included a mud room and powder room, with a bright and cheerful breakfast area. "The original floor plan was very chopped up, and there was not much light getting into the kitchen. We took all of these little spaces and rebuilt them as a single area that now flows into the kitchen." A large window on the new exterior wall floods the space with natural light.

Reorganizing the cabinetry in the working portion of the kitchen and adding a center island more than doubled the amount of available storage and counter space.

In addition to professional-grade appliances, the new kitchen features a sophisticated palette of colors and textures, including burgundy-stained cherry cabinets; stainless steel hardware; deep-profile, engineered-stone counters; and African slate flooring. Translucent glass panel doors in the upper cabinets and a bright white ceiling keep the room from becoming too dark or looking overly commercial.

"In a way, this project was a restoration of the original fabric of the home," says Hearn, "because we were able to remove previous inappropriate work and replace it with an addition that is much more style-appropriate. The new kitchen is much better organized and much better suited to the clients' lifestyle. Besides, no home is complete without a kitchen that really looks good."

Remodeler and Architect: Design Construction Concepts, Northbrook, Ill.
Interior designer: Behr Design Studio, Chicago

BATH OVER $41,000

Translucent-panel glass doors separate the master bathroom from a new walk-through dressing area. This view shows the bath's shared space, which includes a soaking tub and seating area.

AFTER PHOTOS BY KASKEL ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY

This luxurious remodeled bathroom is filled with custom-designed elements, including separate vanities, hardware and lighting fixtures.

Transparent Panels Clearly a Better Option

When the owners of this contemporary, 10,000-square-foot custom ranch in Highland Park, Ill., decided it was time to update their personal space in their 20-year-old home to better suit their empty-nester lifestyle, one of the key areas they wanted to improve was the appearance and function of their master bathroom.

Design Construction Concepts, a full-service architectural design and management company located in Northbrook, Ill., was actually the second contractor that the couple had hired for the project, says Principal Michael Menn. "We actually came in after the initial demolition was already done."

The overall scope of the project involved remodeling and enlarging the entire master retreat and adding a den. The master bathroom portion of the project presented Menn, also a registered architect, with an interesting design challenge.

Each of the spouses wanted to have their own personal space in the bathroom, as well as a central sitting area with a large soaking tub. "This was a very regimented couple with discriminating tastes," says Menn. "Their privacy was very important to them but they also wanted their bath to provide them with the opportunity to display pieces from their extensive art collection, including paintings and sculpture."

Menn's plan was to create a contemporary and luxurious bathroom for his clients that would be both compartmentalized and spacious at the same time. "I wanted to avoid dividing the area up into a number of closed-off rooms."

His solution was to use half-frosted, half-clear glass partitions as walls flanking a central tub to create separate his-and-her water closets, one of which included a toilet and bidet, and the other a toilet and urinal. A triple-panel window above the soaking tub brings natural light into the room and provides the clients with a wonderful view of their heavily wooded, two-acre home site.

Menn also encouraged the couple to incorporate universal design features into their new bathroom including low profile toilets, a curbless shower and decorative, but strategically positioned, grab bars.

As the result of their unhappy experience with their previous contractor, the couple was insistent that all access to the work area be restricted to the rear exterior of the home. "They did not want workmen to be walking directly through their home. This meant that we had to install, and then later remove, a 250-foot gravel access lane that ran from the driveway to the construction site."

"The client's new bathroom meets their lifestyle needs and provided both the privacy and shared space that they were looking for."

Remodeler and Designer: Curb Appeal Renovations
Keller, Texas

BATH UNDER $40,000

AFTER PHOTOS BY CURB APPEAL RENOVATIONS

Not only is this remodeled bathroom spectacular to look at, but the new step-in shower is much more practical than the sunken tub that it replaced.

The new vanity and mirror were custom designed and built by the remodeler and feature a lacquer finish that complements the granite counter and travertine vessel sink.

New Shower a Safe Bet for Bath Remodel

Although they had recently remodeled much of their home, the owners of this 35-year-old traditional ranch realized they still had one key space left to address: the guest bathroom. Not only were they unhappy with its dated appearance but also with the safety issues presented by its sunken tub.

The homeowners, who frequently entertain overnight visitors, including their aging parents, had grown concerned about just how accessible the sunken tub in their secondary bathroom was for their guests.

"They wanted to make the facilities easier for everyone to use as well as do all they could to prevent accidental falls," says Robin Mathews of Curb Appeal Renovations, who co-partners the Keller, Tex. design/build remodeling firm with husband, Rob. "We had been responsible for remodeling other areas of this client's home, and they came back to us a year later for suggestions on how to re-adapt their bathroom to make it more practical and convenient for their guests."

The project was a straightforward one, says Mathews, involving upgrading the fixtures and finishes as well as replacing the tub with a large step-in shower.

The original slab foundation beneath the tub was sunken to accommodate its extra depth. Once the tub was removed, the plumbing was rerouted to create a central drain for the new shower, and concrete was poured to bring the floor level up to the rest of the room. The firm incorporated a modest slope into the new floor to facilitate drainage. Finally, a sliding, framed shower door unit was mounted on the three-inch curb that separates the shower from the rest of the bathroom.

Mathews, who has a degree in interior design, worked closely with the homeowners as they made their selections for the new finishes and fixtures for the remodeled space. "They really wanted it to have a "wow" factor. Generally, I don't pick out things for my clients, but I do try to guide them. I want to make sure that they consider how the space is going to be used so that they make choices that are appropriate for the project. I don't want them to be unhappy later on."

The remodeled bathroom is not a true barrier-free project because the shower is not a roll-in design and the room is not large enough for the required 5-foot turning radius necessary to accommodate a wheelchair. "But it is so much more functional and beautiful than before," says Mathews. "Working on it was so much fun."

Remodeler and Designer: Lytle Construction
Sacramento, Calif.

ACCESSIBLE REMODEL

A 45-degree wall provides privacy between the toilet and shower areas within the bathroom's open design. "It was a real challenge to get all the mortar beds to work with all of the things that were going on in this space," says remodeler Walt Lytle.

The roll-under sink was designed and custom-built to meet unique needs but is still fully functional for the entire family — or different owners — to use.

Barrier-Free Bathroom

Although this Elk Grove, Calif., home had been custom-designed for its owners nearly 30-years earlier, the master bath no longer functioned efficiently for the wife, who had been diagnosed with a degenerative disease that left her dependent on the assistance of a caregiver for the majority of her daily needs. The goal for this remodeling project was to make the master bathroom more functional for the homeowner's personal use while enhancing the resale value of the home itself.

"We wanted to use materials of today to create a functional, modern space in a style that was still appropriate for the home," says remodeler Walt Lytle.

"My client came to me with concept drawings that he had created himself showing how he wanted the remodeled bathroom to look and function," says Lytle, whose Sacramento-based firm received a 2007 CotY award for another universal design bathroom. Lytle says that he collaborated closely with his in-house design consultant, Rebecca Chappell, for this project.

Universal design features included replacing the tub/shower combination with a roll-in version in which the whole floor slopes toward a main drain; strategically position the grab bars and electrical outlets; widening the doorway and replacing the door itself with a lockable, pocket model; and using large pulls on all drawers and door handles.

The homeowner's desire was that the entire room be completely watertight so no water would permeate the home's wood framing. "They initially wanted the whole room, including the ceiling, to be tiled," says Lytle, "but we were concerned that this would create too much of an institutional look." A water-resistant plaster ceiling was installed instead and the tile, while still extensive, was downplayed.

Creating a true wet room proved to be the most challenging element of the project, the remodeler says. "We installed new ⅞-inch mortar bed throughout the bathroom, including the floor, walls and ceiling. That is a lot of extra weight." Extra foundation piers and special lathing were added to increase structural support.

Lytle designed a mock-up lavatory for the homeowner and, with her assistance, identified the best placement for any items that would enhance her independence. This included a roll-under sink, which was designed and fabricated in the remodeler's shop. Because her left side is stronger than her right, a faucet with a lever control on the left was chosen.

This remodeled bath passes the test of true universal design with flying colors. Lytle says although it is functional for the wife, others are also able to use it with comfort and ease.

Whole-House Over $501,000

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Whole-House Over $501,000

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Cambridge, Mass.

Whole-House $251,000 – $500,000

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Whole-House Under $250,000

Architectural Resource
Ann Arbor, Mich.

Addition Over $100,000

Case Design/Remodeling
Bethesda, Md.

Addition Over $100,000

Pollard Construction Company
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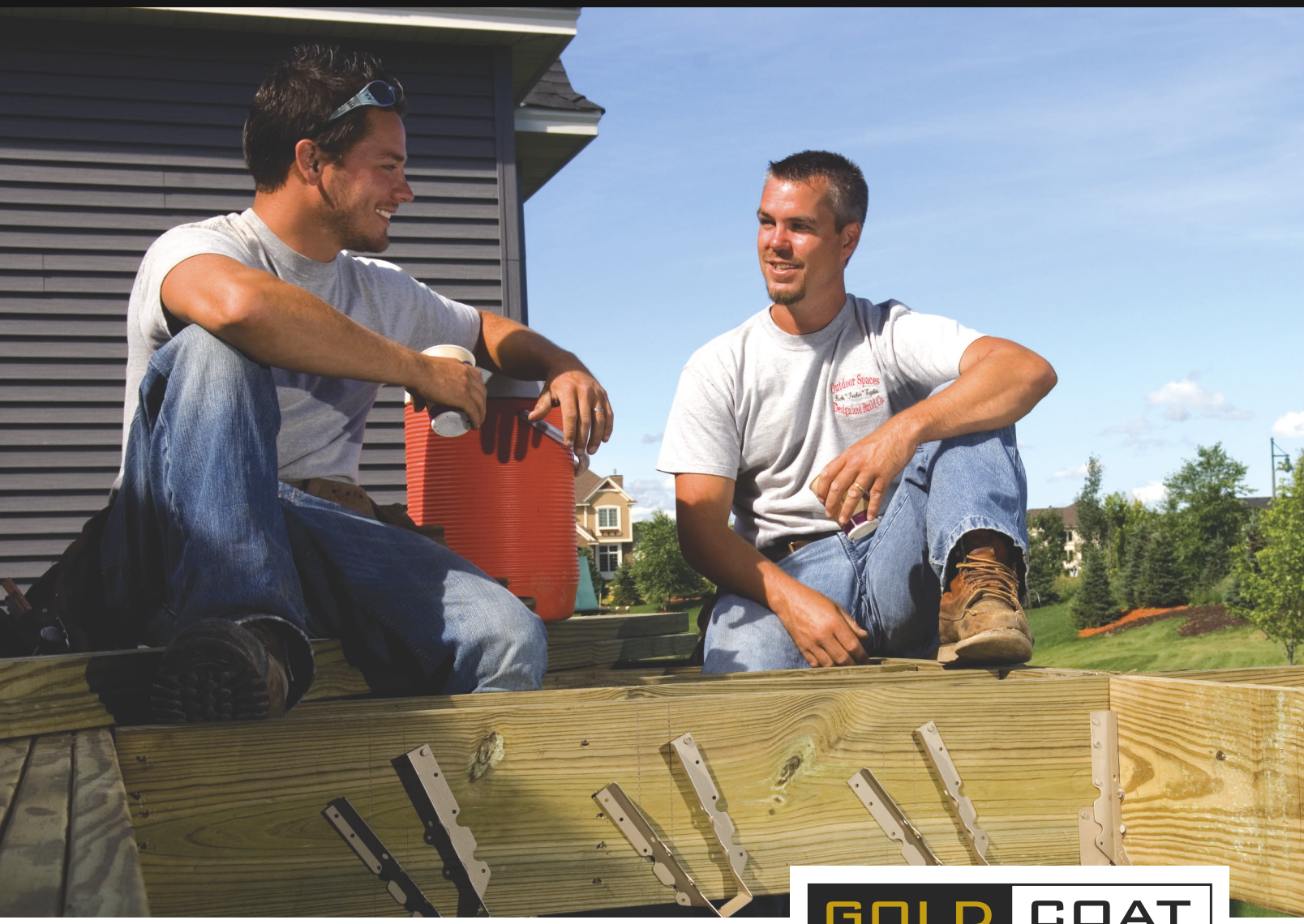

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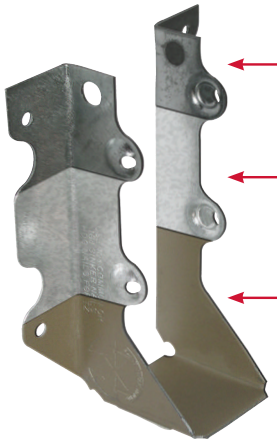

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With a ceiling high enough to add wood-frame beams, this 400-square-foot lower-level family area creates a spacious yet cozy getaway. The custom-built walnut cabinetry, columns and beams add warmth and comfort, while the painted white ceiling adds enough contrast to brighten the space. Careful symmetry results from steel support beams that are framed and finished as boxed columns. The wall cabinetry is designed to store books, media equipment and a 63-inch plasma television. Note the mesh-front cabinet doors that house speakers.

Levels

When this bar was designed, the designer needed to include an entire array of kitchen appliances. The owners wanted to be able to use the space for entertaining, cooking and eating while enjoying their in-ground pool. The raised bar hides two under-counter refrigerators and a dishwasher, a cooktop, a warming drawer and the countertop microwave. High-end finishes are used throughout the space: granite countertops, cherry cabinets and slate flooring. Two 27-inch televisions suspended on swivel mounts enhance the bar experience.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BUCKEYE BASEMENTS

PHOTOGRAPHY: JIM TETRO PHOTOGRAPHY

Storing wine requires specially climate-controlled rooms with carefully designed slots to accommodate bottles of wine with minimal vibrations. Not all wine should be stored at the same temperature, so rooms, like this one, may have zoned adjustments for storing both red and white varietals. Storage racks typically are made of redwood or other woods that have low susceptibility to rotting or mildew. In addition, the rooms require low light, so it's ideal to situate them in a windowless part of the basement. Here, the entry door is sealed when closed to maintain a constant temperature and humidity inside the room.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GREG HADLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

This is where the family truly lives. The projection-screen TV in this media room satisfies the family's desire for entertainment, while the nearby fireplace sitting area easily becomes a focal point on long, cold winter evenings. The walk-out includes a full-glass-light sliding door, so natural light can enter. During movie screening, however, shades are drawn to return the basement to its subterranean roots. Notice how the wood cabinetry built-ins around the fireplace and the screen harmonize and add warmth.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF KERZNER REMODELING AND CONSTRUCTION

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Distortion reduction ceiling tiles and wall panels create an ideal setting for home theater viewing in this 350-square-foot lower-level room. Adding to the ambience, cool shades of gray cover the floor, walls, ceiling and seating. Similar to actual theater lighting, wall sconces provide adequate light for the room. The back row of armchairs also sits on a platform, contributing to the feel of a real movie house.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB NAROD PHOTOGRAPHY

Dividing spaces with half walls and arch-framed pass-throughs help create the kind of sightlines that foster openness and depth in a lower level. Painting the ceilings white also helps the rooms feel spacious and bright. A larger-than-normal egress window along the home's exterior wall delivers a shot of sunshine. Used for playing pool or piano, or sitting in the adjacent living area and watching a movie, the connected spaces easily accommodate a crowd.

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GREEN REMODELING: THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Select the right materials for a more sustainable home

By Kelly Cutchin
PATH Partners

SOME CLIENTS want their remodel built to green standards through and through. They want the result to be energy- and resource-efficient and built with locally available, sustainably harvested renewable resources that are non-toxic.

Others may be happy with a green top-dressing: building with conventional materials but finishing with natural fiber carpets and paints that don't off-gas volatile

Adding recycled glass offsets the amount of energy-intensive cement used in concrete countertops and creates a durable, beautiful surface.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHIREY CONTRACTING

Cherry cabinets, quartz composite countertops and a recycled glass tile backsplash are all green in their own way, respectively highlighting the principles of local renewable resources, durability and resource efficiency.

organic compounds (VOCs).

Whatever the job, reaching the finish line successfully means identifying green finish materials. The first step is to identify your clients' green priorities. And if your clients don't have any yet, this could be a golden opportunity to make them glad they hired you.

Surface Dressing: Paints, Plasters, Stains and Sealants

Interior walls and surfaces are where going green can make the biggest impact. Most conventional paints, stains and sealants contain solvents to improve viscosity and speed drying time. These solvents off-gas VOCs from days to years. No-VOC products such as milk paint and clay plasters produce decorative results without compromising air quality (for a comparison chart on these products, go to www.proremodeler.com/solutions).

An August 2007 industry survey put indoor air quality at the top of the list of green building benefits homeowners are willing to pay for. This is good news for you and your crew, because materials with fewer VOCs are healthier to work with.

"Building an energy-efficient home increases the need for non-toxic building materials," says Donna Bade Shirey, President, strategic planner and company visionary of Shirey Contracting, a Washington-based green building and remodeling firm.

"When we build anything new, we use structural insulated panels (SIPs), creating an airtight structure, so off-gassing is a big problem," says Shirey. The company therefore specifies low-VOC materials for all its jobs.

What qualifies as low-VOC? The varying definitions can be confusing:

- EPA defines low-VOC as 250g/L for latex paints, 380g/L for oil-based.
- For inclusion in the GreenSpec® product directory, 50g/L is the limit.
- GreenSeal defines low-VOC as 50g/L for interior flat, 150g/L for other finishes.

Whichever definition you choose, always specify the lowest-VOC materials that fit the bill in terms of durability, coverage and available color range.

Paints may be touted as having zero VOCs, but include colorants that contain VOCs. For example, a white paint will be low- or no-VOC, but if you want a bright color, the amount of VOC-containing pigment added might bring it over the threshold. Ask your dealer if custom coloring will increase emissions.

Oil-based, water-based and beeswax-based low-VOC stains and sealants are just as durable and appealing as higher-VOC versions (for a comparison chart on these products, go to www.proremodeler.com/solutions). Some of these products may take a little getting used to — for example, heating the oil- and beeswax-based finishes by placing the can in a pan of warm water eases application — but you should be up to speed within one or two jobs, and you'll have increased your skill base to include new materials.

Lay the Ground Rules: Identify Green Flooring Options

After paints and sealants, flooring materials make up the most square footage in a home. To be green, flooring must be durable so it won't have to be replaced or won't have to be replaced as often. This saves the energy of creating and transporting a replacement and keeps the original material out of a landfill. Green flooring options should also be easy to clean and repair, shouldn't off-gas, and shouldn't foster mold or other allergens.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SHIREY CONTRACTING

This kitchen features bamboo flooring, quartz composite countertops and solid maple cabinets.

One place to start is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which provides a third-party certification guaranteeing that the wood is grown and harvested using sustainable forestry practices.

Other materials to consider include tile; natural linoleum; textured and colored concrete; cork; bamboo and natural fiber carpets backed with natural mold- and mildew-resistant materials (for a comparison chart on these products, go to www.proremodeler.com/solutions). If you need a high-VOC sealant, consider using factory-finished products.

"Sometimes we use bamboo flooring or reclaimed hardwood that is pre-finished in the factory so our workers and clients are spared the exposure to VOCs," says Shirey. "The off-gassing has already occurred by the time the materials are installed."

Old Mother Hubbard, What's in Your Cupboard? Non-Toxic Cabinets

Cabinet casings are usually built of plywood or medium density fiberboard (MDF) containing urea-formaldehyde that off-gasses. Cabinet materials can off-gas for years, affecting the air and possibly even the foods and housewares stored there.

Sealants are available that seal in those toxic gases, but you can go a step further and offer your clients cabinets made of wheatboard, bamboo laminate or FSC-certified pressed-board casings that use fewer toxic adhesives that substantially reduce off-gassing or avoid it all altogether. These materials generally cost more (for a comparison chart on these products, go to www.proremodeler.com/solutions), but are installed much like conventional casing materials, so labor costs shouldn't increase much, if at all.

The 'Coolest Green Finish Material': Countertops

Green finish materials can really shine in countertops. Countertops usually account for a relatively low square footage, so you can consider more expensive materials; after all, they are used every day and highly visible.

"Countertops are the coolest green finish

PHOTO COURTESY OF ICESTONE

Recycled glass and pigmented concrete combine to form a durable, resource-efficient surface material that shines like a jewel, proving that green products come in all colors of the rainbow.

material," says Brittany Williams, architectural team leader of the LEAF House, University of Maryland's entry to the DOE-sponsored Solar Decathlon. Countertops in the LEAF House are made of cement with high fly-ash content mixed with 40 percent recycled glass from a local reclamation site. The result is a locally sourced material with high-recycled content that sparkles.

Resources

New finish materials enter the market constantly, so stay up to date. Useful resources include:

- PATH's Technology Inventory: toolbase.org/techinventory
- PATH Tech Set 9: Indoor Air Quality: pathnet.org (click on Tools, then Tech Sets)
- Building for Health Materials Center: buildingforhealth.com
- Environmental Home Center: environmentalhomecenter.com
- EPA's Indoor Air Quality site, which includes a section on green building: epa.gov/iaq
- Forest Stewardship Council: fscus.org
- "Green Building Products: the GreenSpec Guide to Residential Building Materials" by Mark Piepkorn and Alex Wilson

To be green, countertops should be durable, stain- and scratch-resistant, and food safe. To have broad appeal, they should be beautiful, too. Some traditional materials, like tile and natural stone, already meet these criteria. The building materials industry has responded to increased demand for green products by creating more countertop options, from recycled glass tiles to quartz-based polymers to paper-composites (for a comparison chart on these products, go to www.proremodeler.com/solutions).

Paper composites, like Richlite and Paperstone, are made of recycled paper and resin. They are a popular choice at Shirey Contractors where, Shirey says, "clients love the fact that they're made from recycled materials and they're beautiful. They're also relatively easy to install." PR

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

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A tough duct seal is crucial, and the Foil-Grip 1403-181BFX from Hardcast/Carlisle Coatings & Waterproofing fits the bill. Suitable for all duct configurations and below-grade applications, the 1403-181BFX is a 17mm, 40-year, pressure-sensitive sealant that sticks instantly to any duct surface. It can be applied in temperatures ranging from 35 to 110 degrees.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-127

DAKOTA PRODUCTS

Your trucks stink — cigarettes, B.O. and dirty tools all can lead to a witches' brew of smells. The Non-Smoke Eliminator from Dakota Products may help — just spray the headliner, seats and carpet at 14 inches away. If that doesn't cut it, try spraying the intake and let it settle for an afternoon before airing out.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-126

KLEIN TOOLS

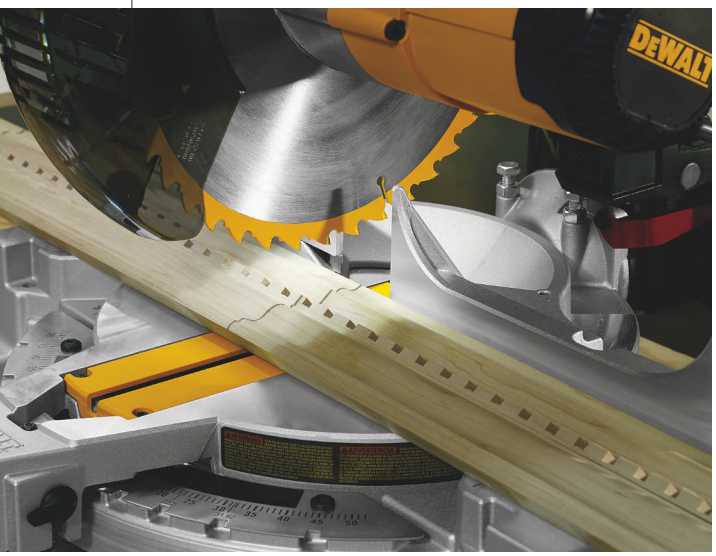
Six new lightweight lockback pocket knives from Klein Tools are compact and durable. The models fit comfortably in a pocket and open quickly and safely with one hand thanks to a textured thumb stud. The corrosion-resistant, multiple-style blades are made from AUS 8 stainless steel and hardened for a long life. Plus, they look cool.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-128

DEWALT

The XPS Crosscut Positioning System from DeWalt is an encapsulated LED work light that can be easily mounted onto the cutting head of the company's DW713, DW715, DW716 and DW718 miter saws, meaning users get more light that helps to improve cut alignment. The lamp has an approximate five-year work life.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-129



SAKRETE

The non-shrink construction grout from Sakrete is another addition to the company's litany of "just add water" products. The grout is a non-metallic structural hydraulic cement, specially formulated for high-strength grouting. The non-shrink grout is non-corrosive and has three different consistencies to ensure easy usage in any project.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-130

AUTON MOTORIZED SYSTEMS

The new TV lift with the company's SmartMotor technology from Auton Motorized Systems features a rail-free design that accommodates TVs from 32 to 52 inches and eliminates the need for pre-specification of television size prior to installation. These lifts include an integrated RF receiver for remote control, are easy to install and come with a one-year warranty.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-131

DANZE

The latest bathroom collection from Danze includes the Corsair. It features a signature scaled single-control lavatory faucet, which uses the company's ceramic valve pressure system. A two-handle Roman tub faucet can be equipped with Danze's Soft Touch personal shower. The collection is available in chrome and brushed nickel finishes.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-132

QUADRA-FIRE

The QFP44 direct-vent gas fireplace from Quadra-Fire features a 1,400-square-inch viewing area and a ceramic log set cast directly from actual firewood for an authentic experience. According to the company, it is the largest furnace-rated, direct-vent gas fireplace on the market, generating more than 50,000 BTUs per hour.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-133

TULIKIVI

The newest collection of stylish, eco-friendly fireplaces from Tulikivi includes the Kajo. The wood-burning fireplaces are made entirely of heat-retentive soapstone. A four-hour fire can warm up to 1,000 square feet for as long as 24 hours. Larger doors offer a better view of the fire, too.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-134

DIMPLEX

New models in the Symphony Maestro electric fireplace collection from Dimplex don't require any roughing-in, so homeowners can move them anywhere. The fireplaces come with a remote control and recreate a realistic wood fire in a 26-inch firebox. Based on average national residential electricity rates, consumers can enjoy the flame for just three cents per hour.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-136

SOUTHWEST KIVA

Featuring the latest in prefabricated modular masonry precast fireplace technology, the Sonoran Series from Southwest Kiva is lightweight and easy to install. The modular system comes lined with actual firebrick and is available in running bond, herringbone and split brick, as well as a variety of colors in 36-, 42- and 48-inch sizes.

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Stauf Adhesives' new SMP-960 (shown) and 940 MS polymers provide easy spreading and clean-up, immediate installation and environmental compliance. Both the SMP-960 and SMP-940 are moisture cured products that contain no water, isocyanates, solvents or VOCs. The SMP-960 features an additional moisture barrier and sound abatement property.

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The Harmony Interior Latex by Sherwin-Williams offers a high-hide and durable finish. Formulated with anti-microbial agents, the Harmony is a zero-VOC, low-odor coating that allows homeowners to immediately use newly painted rooms. The water-based formula is available in primers to topcoats and comes in eggshell, flat and semi-gloss finishes.

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Available nationwide, the Supress Soundproofing Adhesive for wood from Suppress Products is a high-performance, water-based damping compound specifically designed for laminated plywood, OSB, particle board and MDF for floors, walls and ceilings. Each standard-size tube fits existing equipment on the job site, and covers an average of 15 to 25 square feet with no hazardous chemicals or solvents.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5351-139

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The Titebond Concrete Joint Sealant from Franklin International is a Polymer-based system. According to the company, it has a low VOC content of only 9 grams per liter, is solvent-free and contains no isocyanates. Once applied, the sealant rapidly skins over. It also can be painted when it is tack-free and provides a permanent seal once cured.

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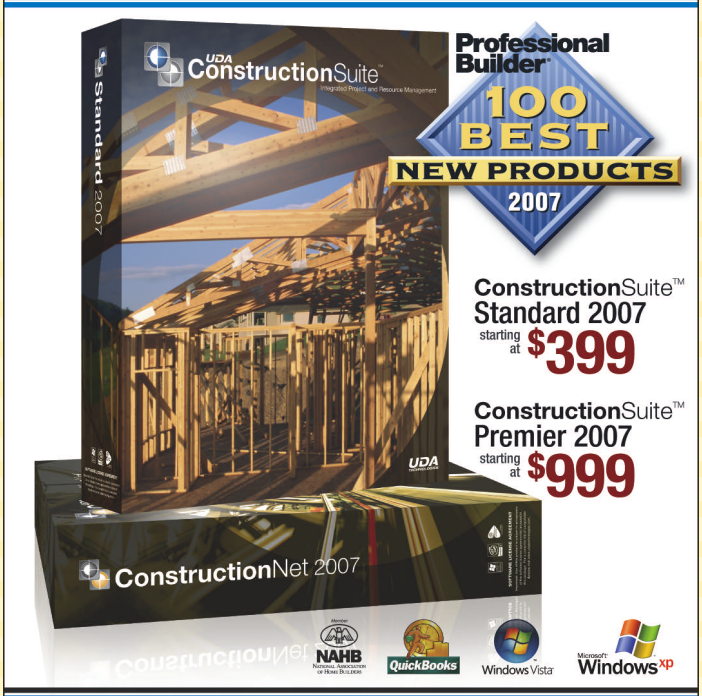

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Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation (Required by Title 39 United States Code 3685) of Professional Remodeler (ISSN-1521-9135), published monthly (12 issues annually) at Reed Business Information, 8878 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80129-2345. Annual rates $77.90 USA; $97.00 Canada; $128.50 Mexico and Foreign.

Complete mailing address of known office of publication is Reed Business Information, 8878 Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80129-2345.

Complete mailing address of headquarters or general business office of publisher is Reed Business Information, Division of Reed Elsevier Inc., 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010.

Full names and complete mailing addresses of Publisher and Editor are: Publisher, Julian Francis; Editor, Michael Morris; Managing Editor, Judi Damm.

Reed Business Information, 2000 Clearwater Drive, Oak Brook, IL 60523.

The owner is Reed Business Information, Division of Reed Elsevier, Inc., 360 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010.

Extent and Nature of Circulation	Avg. No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Nearest Filing Date
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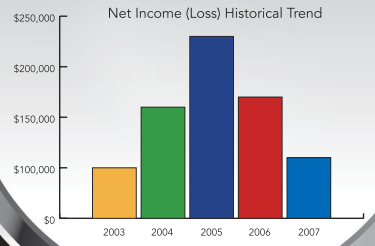

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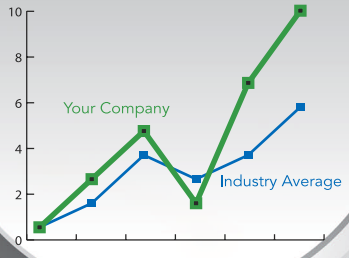

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ACCOUNTABILITY 2.0

No, it's not another bean counting column.

At the risk of using an overused word, it's about accountability.

We're fortunate to be living and doing business in one of the most technologically advanced nations in the world. And although our industry isn't known for its cutting edge *use* of technology, it still abounds with examples that make our daily personal and business lives more productive and easier.

Cell phones, assorted Berries (that I can't keep track of), wireless this and that, remote work stations (I'm writing this from home), electronic calendars, organizers, messengers, assistants, ad nauseum — I wonder, though, if sometimes this high-tech world breeds a bit of low tech reversion.

What happened to the simple times in business where documents and calendars were something you could put on one page, with no links and no reminders? I often tell the story (and I can't believe I'm old enough to be in the "story telling" population) of my first days in business in a rural enclave of South Dakota, when virtually everything we did was on a handshake and a nod of agreement. When you said something, you did it, and when you did something you admitted to it. (Attorneys were not allowed in South Dakota until this century!)

I believe we need to look seriously at what's happened to our personal accountability to ourselves, our associates and our customers. I don't believe it's okay to excuse any action or inaction by saying "I left you a voice mail" or "It was on the fax" or "Didn't you get my e-mail?" (although even that can be verified nowadays). What happened to looking someone in the eye, or at the very least, speaking to someone on the phone and saying "I understand and can do that" or "I know what you mean and will get that to you" — and then actually getting it to them! Actually demonstrating that understanding! Texting and e-mailing take civility and humanity out of communication; there's no inflection, no tone, no audible emphasis.

I ran a construction business in the aforementioned rural enclave, and guess what — no cell phones, no faxes, no instant messaging, no pagers. We made commitments. We did what we said. We kept appointments because we knew someone was counting on us. Sure, we were just simple farmers, but a word was a word, a commitment a commitment. We just did it.

I'm the first to admit that I am an e-mail adherent and love its ease of use and accessibility. But we shouldn't make the mistake of hiding behind it when we don't want to face an issue, threat, client or associate. Simply leaving a voicemail is not the same as getting an acknowledgement or acceptance. Entering the date on your PDA is not the same as committing the time. A text message response is not a handshake.

I'm not advocating a return to Pony Express and an indelible "X" as your marker, but I am advocating affirming and confirming things in person — bringing humanity and emotion back into transactions and relationships. And I'm all about doing what you say, and saying what you do. But go ahead, e-mail me a response! PR

Gregory Miedema
Advisory Board Columnist
Birth Date: Aug. 26, 1961
Company: Dakota Builders
Location: Tucson, Ariz.
Greatest Industry Involvement/ Positions: Chair (president) of our local Home Builders Association, as well as Remodelors Council founder and chair for the first 10 years; trustee and second vice chair for NAHBR
Best Advice I've Received: My dad: Do what you say and say what you do (Or was it the other way around?)
If I Weren't a Remodeler…: I would have stayed in school and become a doctor (scary indeed)
Most Important Issue Facing the Industry: Land development (lack of it); over regulation, labor shortages
Greatest Business Achievement: Making it to 20 years
Hobbies: Brewing beer, working out, crosswords

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