

# Professional Remodeler

APRIL 2008

## 2008 Kitchen & Bath Issue

**SPECIAL REPORT:**  
**ANNUAL BUSINESS**  
**RESULTS SURVEY**  
**PUTS BENCHMARKS**  
**WITHIN REACH / 26**

**AWARD-WINNING**  
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## Best of the Best Design Awards

The deadline for the Best of the Best Design Awards has been extended. The new deadline for Entry forms is May 15, 2008 and Entry Notebooks are due May 30, 2008. E-mail or fax your entry form now. You can't win if you don't enter.  
[www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com)



## 6th Annual Business Results Survey

Check out our survey to see how you match up against other remodelers and read Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet's blog for more on the study.  
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## Green Remodeling Blog

Read our new blog by green pioneer Carl Seville.  
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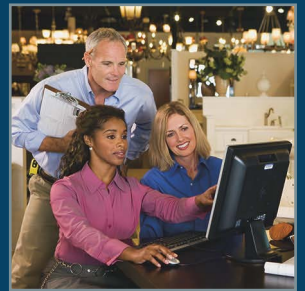
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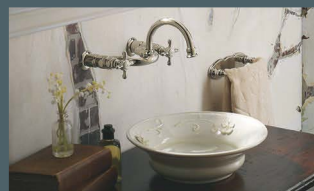
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# from the Editor

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

In 1979, I was a skinny 16-year-old working for my brother-in-law's small, suburban Chicago remodeling company. During most of that summer and many weekends, I was Ray's main gofer, push-broom mechanic and carpenter-in-training. I was also

his wife's favorite little brother, the youngest of six, so I was about as privy to the inner dealings of Ray's business as any of us who rode to the job site in the bed of either his pickup or his dump truck over the years.

Many details of that summer are not as vivid as they used to be. But I do recall that summer for one reason in particular. It was probably the hardest I'd ever worked in my entire life, and definitely for the least reward.

Ray must have felt the same way.

The 1979 Iranian revolution had led to an energy crisis, which, in turn, caused a recession that hit small businesses across this country extremely hard.

Everything about working for Ray seemed to change overnight. The interesting kitchen remodels, fun basement jobs and cool room additions were no longer a part of the job description. We did a lot of small jobs, maintenance and repair work, and even some landscaping and tree trimming. Nothing was out of bounds anymore.

Peg and Ray sold their house and moved into a fixer-upper, which we remodeled for what seemed like an

eternity, off and on, filling in the gaps between "paying" jobs. At the time, I thought their move was some kind of astute real-estate investment. But looking back now and recalling my sister's mood at the time, I realize it was actually one in a long line of difficult decisions

that needed to be made by a husband and wife running a small business the best that they could.

It was survival, pure and simple. But there was nothing simple about it. Ray had to bid on jobs he never would have before for a lot less profit, using cheaper labor (like me) and driving much further from home than we had before.

And now the "R" word has surfaced once again. Depending upon your market, you may already be caught in the throes of a recession or feeling the effects of a softening economy that has your leads decreasing, job sizes shrinking and profits dwindling. Like Ray, you may have to make decisions that will change the course of your business life, your personal

life and the lives of those who you employ.

Things eventually turned around for Ray's company and he's now retired after many great years in business.

Although a lot has changed in our industry over the past 29 years, what hasn't changed is the ability for you to make a few key moves — perhaps targeting smaller jobs, changing personnel or increasing the market area you serve — to survive the current state of the economy. What's your next move? **PR**



**Michael R. Morris**  
Editor in Chief

**"We did a lot of small jobs, maintenance and repair work, and even some landscaping and tree trimming. Nothing was out of bounds anymore."**

>> Contact me at michael.morris@reedbusiness.com or 630/288-8057

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## FEBRUARY COVER STORY ELICITS RESPONSE

The cover story of the February 2008 issue of *Professional Remodeler*, "10 Most Influential," left off the foremost researcher on the remodeling industry: Gopal Ahluwalia.

During his more than 30 years at the National Association of Home Builders, Mr. Ahluwalia has conducted research, economic analyses, and established data to track and inform the remodeling industry. Until the Remodeling Futures program at Harvard was established in 1995, Ahluwalia's research was the only remodeling data available outside statistics collected by the Federal government. In fact, he paved the way for later researchers and economists who now study the remodeling industry.

In the early 1980s, Mr. Ahluwalia worked with the resources of NAHB and his experience tracking the housing industry to create a body of knowledge and a repository of relevant remodeling data. Using his personal vision of the industry's latent potential and with his tireless professional dedication, Gopal helped to establish a distinct identity for remodeling as a legitimate and dynamic sector of the housing industry. In the process, he also created a deeper understanding of the fundamental workings of the industry and of the corresponding consumer market for the benefit of professional remodelers and countless other companies that serve this vast industry. Through his work he became a much quoted spokesman for remodeling, which, in turn, helped to confirm the NAHB Remodelers' preeminent standing in the industry. Mr. Ahluwalia is widely sought as a speaker and

serves regularly as a press spokesman on remodeling in national outlets. His thoughtful remarks and depth of knowledge continue to powerfully raise public understanding about remodeling.

Twenty-five years ago little was known about remodeling beyond the skeletal information published quarterly by the U.S. Census Bureau. Misperceptions about the industry abounded. Remodeling was looked upon as a mere diversion for builders when housing construction sagged, rather than as an industry by itself. At the time, it was widely believed that remodeling expenditures went up when new home sales went down, and the media reported DIY as the "big story" in remodeling while overlooking the steady climb on the professional front that

continues today. These are a few of the erroneous assumptions that were later dispelled with Mr. Ahluwalia's groundbreaking research.

Mr. Ahluwalia's research accomplishments include studies on the Cost of Business for Remodelers, consumer preference surveys, and surveys of remodelers. Studies of consumer preferences helped the remodeling industry evolve to meet consumer demand. He also has worked with the U. S. Census Bureau to study their statistics on remodeling and to improve their data collection. Additionally, Mr. Ahluwalia established the Remodeling Market Index, the only quarterly survey of remodelers about current and future market conditions.

Because of his research, Mr. Ahluwalia is the premiere expert on the development, trends, and future of the remodeling industry. Through his work, remodelers, suppliers, manufacturers,

economists, the public, and many others have an understanding of remodeling that would not be possible without Mr. Ahluwalia. His more than 30 years of service to NAHB have set precedents for future economists to follow for generations. Mr. Ahluwalia's dedication to increasing our knowledge and understanding of the market, his tireless devotion to the industry and NAHB Remodelers have largely impacted the change in the perception of remodelers from trades people to professional business owners.

It's a shame you neglected to include Gopal Ahluwalia on your top ten influential list because when it comes to understanding the remodeling industry, he has been the most influential of all.

**NAHB Remodelers,  
Washington, D.C.**

## TALK BACK

>> Excerpted from our Talk Back archives on **ProRemodeler.com**. Use Talk Back to comment on any article online.

How could you have left Linda Case off of your list? She has deeply influenced thousands of business owners through her roundtables business — Remodelers Advantage. She and her business partner, Victoria Downing, have more commitment to the welfare of the businesspeople who are the heart of the industry than half the people on the list.

**Susan Pierce, Architect  
Vienna, VA**

How can you post this list and not have Bob Vila and Norm Abrams. They have done more to get the homeowner interested in remodeling and were the original DIY guys on TV.

**David Kirkland, Regional Manager  
B&G Equipment and Supply  
Birmingham Alabama**



February's cover story, "10 Most Influential People in Remodeling," can be found on **ProRemodeler.com** by clicking on "Archives."



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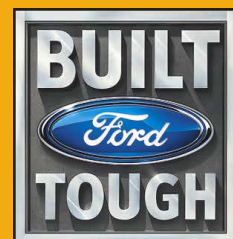
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## FIND THE SILVER LINING

I am just starting my vacation as I write this column. Writing this is my last bit of business to wrap up before giving my 100 percent focus to family, rest, relaxation and leisure. The weather forecast shows temperatures in the low 80s with a 30 percent chance of scattered showers and mild wind. Working with our DreamMaker owners and talking to many other companies in remodeling across the country, the economic forecast varies by location, too.

In business, like in our personal life, we have to find the silver lining in the forecast and how we might benefit from it. Depending on where you are from, the economic conditions have been changing since July 2005. Some of the early markets are now rebounding, while others are about as predictable as the weather itself.

What do we know about the weather/nature that could help us in business? 1) It goes through natural cycles and we can prepare for it. If you're in a rainy area, always have an umbrella handy, or if you have snow, have a windshield scraper. 2) The change in climate lets you know which kind of plants and trees best endure your environment. 3) We must plan different activities around the weather to receive the greatest benefits from what is available to us. 4) There is no one perfect forecast or climate for anyone who wants optimum health, personally or professionally.

### HOW DO THESE APPLY TO BUSINESS?

1) Concerning natural cycles and being prepared, the same holds true for marketing. We may find that we need to use different techniques for attracting new customers, i.e. proactive marketing, such as job signs,

trade shows, direct mail and asking for referrals verses waiting on them. Are you prepared for the economic weather changes that come with the life cycle of a business? If not, it will be a much tougher experience, just as it is when the natural weather changes. The difference is that it is typically more costly in business.

2) Natural climate changes affect the type of greenery that can survive and prosper, just as your company and the economic climate affect staffing. Often times in business, this is when you find out who is truly a right match for your company, team and culture. Even though it can be extremely difficult during these times, it benefits everyone. You're forced to lay off people or permanently let people go. If you choose well, your team will be stronger, and the individual who lost his or her job will have an opportunity to find a place that's a better match. It makes sense, but is just difficult to actually live through.

3) Without planning, we miss opportunities that often are easy to see if we would just invest the time. It takes a balance of looking at history — let's say for budgeting — while looking to the future to predict expenses that will naturally occur or will need to be eliminated due to growth or a downturn of business. I find it beneficial to have others involved in this process. Still, in the

end, you and I as leaders have to make the final decision. In addition, sales is a critical area to make sure you have a solid system in place to maximize your lead flow and your company's sales efforts.

4) As business owners, department

leaders, etc., it takes adversity and challenges to sharpen our business and people skills. Without it, we will have a dull edge and will thus be ineffective and inefficient in dealing with the opportunities that are coming around the corner.

Equipped with the right attitude and perspective of shifting our focus off the bad conditions and onto the facts of a natural business growth cycle, we can make the changes we need to prosper to the next level of business and personal success.

Having checked out the weather on vacation, I am now prepared to enjoy and receive the greatest benefit of the time and opportunities available. When I return I will be better prepared to take advantage of and enjoy the business opportunities, the ability to touch people's lives in a positive way and the fun of business. **PR**

*Doug Dwyer is president and chief stewarding officer of DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen by Worldwide, one of the nation's largest remodeling franchises. He can be reached at [doug.dwyer@dwyergroup.com](mailto:doug.dwyer@dwyergroup.com).*



Doug Dwyer  
Contributing Editor

**"I find it beneficial to have others involved in this [planning] process. Still, in the end, you and I as leaders have to make the final decision. In addition, sales is a critical area to make sure you have a solid system in place..."**

**>> For more Doug Dwyer on Leadership, visit [www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com)**



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## WHY YOU NEED A CLIENT-CENTRIC COMPANY CULTURE

Anyone who has been in this business long enough knows that remodeling is not a product business, it is a service business. It is not just that we do our jobs but how we do our job that makes or breaks a client's experience and satisfaction. A kitchen remodel may be award-winning, but if the project was over budget, behind schedule and riddled with issues, clients will remember the bad experience long after they grow accustomed to the beauty of the space and will be happy to tell everyone they know, too.

As remodelers, whether we know it or not, we deliver experiences first and projects second. So now you are probably expecting me to list ten things you can start doing today to solve all your client satisfaction problems. You'll get those tips in Parts II & III of this three-part article.

Keep in mind, client satisfaction is critical and to get there I want you to take a long, hard look at your company culture.

### WHY CULTURE MATTERS

Company culture is an incredibly powerful force that determines how your employees see and treat problems, opportunities and all the people that your organization comes in contact with: vendors, subcontractors, and, most importantly, clients! Culture is like mood — but the mood of the company can be either upbeat or depressing, respectful or belligerent, empowering or stifling — with many shades in between.

You can design processes to make clients happy, but if those processes are out of sync with your culture you will miss the desired result every time. How many times have you received services from someone, and they said all the things they were trained to say and did all the things they were

trained to do, but it was automated and impersonal or, my favorite, they acted as if they were doing you a favor by serving you? The only way that person can remain employed is if the company culture allows and reinforces that behavior.

### CREATING CULTURE

Does your culture empower and reward employees who deliver excellent client service? If not, why not? Now don't get me wrong; I realize there are many important components to a viable company, but few can have the long-term impact of a devoted client base committed to using only your company and, even better, who would pester their friends to use you! A client-centric culture will empower your people to make your clients not just satisfied, but really, really happy. If your client-centric culture is firing on all cylinders, your clients will feel the love from the first time they call your company right through the warranty work.

Creating the culture you want does not happen without effort. This is especially true if you already have a culture you don't want. If you are not happy with what you have, look in the mirror first and determine how YOU are shaping your organization. Then ask your employees to help you define and shape a revised culture — if they are part of the solution, you will have a much easier time gaining compliance. Incentives, rewards, recognition and, most importantly,

respect, will build a culture over time that supports your goals.

### KEY TO SUCCESS

OK. I said I wouldn't pass on any tips this time, but here comes one anyway: We have found that one of the most

powerful ways to deliver raving fans is through spontaneous service throughout the project by the people on the job. This is not something that can be regulated or dictated. Our employees are constantly looking for opportunities to pleasantly surprise our clients, like bringing a birthday gift to a child, taking care of a pet, bringing in the newspaper in the morning, helping with the groceries, letting the kids join the crew for lunch, etc. These touches rarely cost any money and often have nothing to do with the project we are building but everything to do with building caring and respectful client relationships.

In Parts II and III, I will provide more tools to help build on the concept of developing a client-centric culture to help you create



Dave Bryan  
Contributing Editor

**“Company culture is an incredibly powerful force that determines how your employees see and treat problems, opportunities and all the people that your organization comes in contact with.”**

clients for life. **PR**

Dave Bryan, CGR, CAPS, is the president and CEO of Blackdog Design/Build/Remodel in Salem, N.H. He is also a facilitator for Remodelers Advantage. Contact Dave at [dbryan@blackdogbuilders.com](mailto:dbryan@blackdogbuilders.com).

**>> For Parts II and III of A Client-Centric Culture, see the July and October issues or visit [www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com)**



# IS YOUR MODEL RECESSION-PROOF?

Whether you're single-line or full-service, opportunities exist for success

**WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES** and disadvantages of running a specialty or full-service company during a market slowdown? How does that affect your approach to marketing, sales and financing? There is opportunity for success no matter what type of remodeling business you run.

**Tom:** It's the impression of some that replacement jobs sell better than design/build in a soft market. Do you agree?

**Bob:** I would agree with that, particularly right now. With the energy cost being what it is, one of the benefits of upgrading to replacement windows is that you can improve your home's energy efficiency. With the green building and remodeling movement gaining such popularity, this ties in with that as well. Certainly, that gives us a bit of a competitive edge, in my opinion, over a design/build/remodeler.

**John:** I agree, with respect to the size of the job. In larger jobs in design/build, they won't sell as well because people aren't

putting as much in their homes. They're afraid to spend as much of their savings or invest into the house as much in a soft market. They want to hold on to what they have. But, if it's a smaller job, I think they'll sell just as well in a soft market.

**Tom:** Does a slowdown motivate you to look at the economic opportunities.

**Bob:** It does, but I also know that when things slow down, so many companies are ready to "throw in the towel." When things slow down, you do notice a little hiccup from time to time, which is a normal part of the business cycle. That's when we try to look at ourselves in the mirror. Is this the time to upgrade our brand and our image, trademarking, our logo and things of that nature? We look at all of our systems, our business offer that we utilize, etc. We try to upgrade those things. This way, we're poised, we're ready, we've got the systems perfected. When the economy does come back in a boom — and it will, and I think it will very shortly — we're prepared to leap and bound ahead of our competition.

**Tom:** Do you use financing in your business and, if so, how has it been affected?

**Bob:** I'd say 50 to 55 percent of our projects are financed. Of that, I'd say 95 percent is a same-as-cash type financing, or a no-payment, deferred interest type of plan where the client has almost a year or right at a year to pay off the entire balance of the project. Keep in mind, my average ticket is about \$13,000. The design/build project is way north of that!

**Tom:** Do you do that through a local bank or a national financing company, or both?

**Bob:** A national financing company on 95 percent. When we do a home equity or



PHOTO: CHARLES EDWARDS

**BOB:** "My philosophy is that if I have to lower my price in order to earn someone's business, my salespeople aren't conveying the quality of work that we deliver."

home improvement loan, that's done locally.

**Tom:** John, do you use financing at all?

**John:** Most of the homeowners get a home equity loan for their financing. The majority of the ones we work for are actually either selling stock or they've saved up the money for the project.

**Tom:** Bob, do you see advertising and

## This month featuring:

**John Gillette, Owner**

Craftsmanship by John, Houston

This full-service, design/build/remodel firm has been in business since 1991 and had a revenue volume of \$2.5 million in 2007 with \$3.5 million planned for 2008. The firm has 27 employees.

**Bob Birner, Vice President & General Manager**  
Amazing Siding Corp., Tomball, Texas

In business since 1989. Last year's volume was about \$5.5 million with expectations of \$6.5 million to \$7 million for 2008. The firm has six employees.



**JOHN:** "In larger jobs in design/build, they won't sell as well because people aren't putting as much in their homes. They're afraid to spend as much of their savings..."



PHOTO: CHARLES EDWARDS

**marketing as different animals?**

**Bob:** I do see them as different animals. I think that they dovetail together, obviously. Marketing, to me, is branding. Advertising, to me, is direct response.

**Tom:** One leads to top-of-mind awareness and the other is lead generation. What are your three top marketing tools?

**Bob:** The Internet. Talk radio. And then, finally, direct mail. These are stand-alone direct mail pieces. It's not a marriage type mail product where it's bundled in with other companies or vendors. It's our own unique piece that we mail ourselves.

**John:** The advertising we do is only with yard signs and the signs on the vehicles. And we also have a Web site.

**Tom:** Do you get many leads from it?

**John:** Yes, we get about four a month.

**Tom:** Marketing and advertising is not a major part of lead generation for your company, is that fair?

**John:** Yes. The signs are one of our biggest lead generators. Then, word of mouth. We work in a very small area. Marketing for us would be the extra customer service that we do. We do charity projects, help out with the Boy Scouts, with people that are past customers, and things like that. We do little extras for past customers, repairs, etc., and don't charge for certain things to keep our name out there.

**Tom:** Are referrals an important part of your business now?

**John:** Yes, about 75 percent last year.

**Tom:** Do you track that, Bob? And is it higher or lower than that?

**Bob:** It's lower than that but I'm working to get it higher.

**Tom:** John, do you find yourself at any time thinking it's necessary to lower prices to keep the volume going?

**John:** That's what I did about four years ago to try to keep up with the builders coming in doing their small markups.

**Tom:** Was that successful?

**John:** It was successful for the customer, but not for me. It was hard to stay in business.

**Tom:** Bob, do you ever find yourself lowering prices or offering specials that are going to keep pricing down?

**Bob:** My philosophy is that if I have to lower my price in order to earn someone's business, my salespeople aren't conveying the quality of work that we deliver, then we have a problem with our sales — we don't have a problem with the customers' ability to digest the price.

**Tom:** Bob, since the financing is part of your sales strategy, and you use it quite a bit, is it getting tougher to get people to use it or get them approved today?

**Bob:** I don't think so. One of the things that we do — and one of the reasons I think that we've been so successful — is that we

qualify for financing. There are many companies that don't have the relationship or financial stability by which they can qualify for many of these financing programs. Automatically, that gives me a competitive advantage over my competition. I can give them very competitive interest rates. Most people, with today's busy lifestyle, would be glad not to have to go to the bank if we can give them a competitive rate for the project. We do that for them at no charge as a part of the service we provide in our company.

**Tom:** John, do you see any of your clients having problems with financing?

**John:** No, not that I'm aware of. I haven't lost anything because of it. I haven't had anyone say they would have to try another avenue before we start the project.

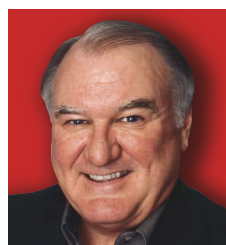
**Tom:** What advice would you give a remodeling contractor who might be struggling with their business model and how they can best succeed?

**John:** I would say that you have to do what you're able to do best and really enjoy it. I choose to have full-time employees so I can feel more control over the jobs. That's harder to do if you sub it out. It's a service company. If you want to provide good service and deal with the customers, then it's a great line of work to get into.

**Tom:** What you're saying, John, is have a business plan in place and follow it rather than say I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'll do the same thing as last year.

**John:** Correct. You know things are going to go up and down, and if you don't plan, you can't.

**Bob:** I'd take it a step further. If you don't plan, you're still planning. You're just planning to fail. **PR**



Tom Swartz  
Contributing Editor

**TALK BACK**

>> For the rest of the discussion on this topic or to listen to the podcast, visit [www.ProRemodeler.com/bestpractices](http://www.ProRemodeler.com/bestpractices)



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## Owners as employees

When Cobb Hill Construction's owners hire a new project manager or supervisor, one of the first things that catches their attention is if the applicant has owned his or her own company.

"That's one of the important criteria we look for because we need them to be able to make those important decisions on their own," says Jerry Kingwill, vice president of operations.

Three of the company's four project managers are former owners, as are a majority of the job site supervisors. Cobb Hill uses a project manager model that puts major decisions into

the hands of the on-site management. With the office handling sales, billing and hiring decisions, the supervisors only have to focus on getting the job done well, on time and on budget. The Concord, N.H., company does a mix of commercial and residential work, both new construction and remodeling.

"It's almost as if they are running their own independent company," Kingwill says. "It's their project. They have responsibility and ownership for it."

Having run a business in the past, former owners have a better understanding of the

financial side of construction and the impact of every decision on the bottom line, Kingwill says.

"They know what it means and what it takes to make a dollar."

Many have become long-term employees because they know what the alternative is.

"They don't like chasing the money; they don't like the pressure of not going home at night," Kingwill says. "We give them a lot of freedom, so they are acting in the capacity where they still get to do what they want to do, without the headaches."

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

## Eye catchers

When somebody is behind a truck from Ocean Breeze Awnings & More, they'll know exactly what the company does.

That's because all four of the Surfside Beach, S.C., company's trucks have personalized license plates for the company's outdoor living services: SCRNRM, SUNROOM, PATIORM and DECKMAN.



"It seems to have worked out pretty good for us," says COO David Powers. "A lot of people see us from behind when they're waiting in traffic, and it's gotten us a lot of attention."

Powers came up with the idea about 1½ years ago. He has always had personalized plates on his own vehicle and thought it would be a good way to grab people's attention.

"When people see personalized tags, they're always trying to figure out what they stand for, so I figured it was something people would notice," he says.

### THE GREENPIECE

## Walking the (green) walk

Being green isn't just about using the right products when you're remodeling. But it's also about the way you approach your entire business.

That's the attitude Michael McCutcheon has tried to instill at McCutcheon Construction, his award-winning design/build firm in Berkeley, Calif., where he's made a concerted effort to green his offices.

To improve indoor air quality, McCutcheon removed the carpet in the office and replaced it with polished concrete. For better energy efficiency, the company has changed its light bulbs to fluorescent. Throughout the building, McCutcheon setup recycling stations and the company uses 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper for its copiers and printers. The company is also shifting to smaller, more fuel-efficient company trucks and encouraging

trade contractors to do the same.

"It's important to be consistent," McCutcheon says. "We want people to know we're doing it and not just talking about it."



To that end, McCutcheon has a recycling symbol on all of its recent marketing materials to let potential clients know that the flyer or brochure is printed on recycled paper.

"It touts what we're doing and brings it to everyone's attention."

McCutcheon wants that commitment to be shared by his employees and has even started using applicants' interest in green construction as a litmus test during interviews.

"Some people get really excited, but others, their eyes just kind of glaze over," he says. "... It tells me they aren't good at thinking about others and aren't going to get excited about new challenges."



# Professional Remodeler Best of the Best Design Awards



## 2008 Call for Entries

Professional remodeling contractors, architects and designers—here's your chance to gain national acclaim for your projects completed between January 1, 2007 and May 1, 2008.

The *Professional Remodeler* Best of the Best Design Awards recognize the best construction quality, creativity, design and problem solving in 20 entry categories.

Judging is conducted by an expert panel of remodeling professionals and the editors of *Professional Remodeler* magazine. Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze awards are awarded in each category.

Enter by May 15 at  
[www.ProRemodeler.com/designawards2008](http://www.ProRemodeler.com/designawards2008)



You will receive an official project notebook for each project you enter. Official project notebooks must be submitted no later than May 30, 2008.

Winners will be honored at the *Professional Remodeler* Best of the Best Design Awards Celebration at the September 2008 Remodeling Show™ in Baltimore, and featured in the November issue of *Professional Remodeler* magazine! Enter today!

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**NEW Extended Deadlines:**

**Entry forms and fees due May 15, 2008**

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# A Measure of Success

IF YOU'RE HOPING TO BENCHMARK YOUR COMPANY, LOOK NO FURTHER; OUR ANNUAL BUSINESS RESULTS SURVEY WILL HELP



By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

**MOST REMODELERS STRUGGLE TO KNOW HOW** they measure up against other firms. Are you charging enough? How does your average job size match up? Are you paying yourself a big enough salary?

Finding the answers to those questions is the idea behind our annual Business Results Survey, now in its sixth year. With the feedback of more than 400 respondents drawn from our circulation and other industry groups, this year's study gives you a good benchmark to see how you compare to other companies across several areas, including revenue, personnel costs, marketing, sales and more.

## SIZE MATTERS

Not surprisingly, there are significant differences between companies based on their volume, which the tables on this page illustrate. We broke the industry down into four groups based on revenues: less than \$500,000; \$500,000 to \$999,999; \$1 million to \$3 million; and more than \$3 million.

(For reference, 24 percent of respondents had revenues under \$500,000; 20 percent were from \$500,000 to \$999,999; 34 percent from \$1 million to \$3 million; and 22 percent over \$3 million.)

The starkest difference is in job price, where we see the average go from \$9,847 for the smallest firms to \$133,456 for the largest. This would seem to indicate that many of the smallest firms are performing a lot of home repair or "handyman" work, while the largest firms are getting the bulk of the high-dollar projects.

One area where there is surprisingly little difference is years in business, with the average increasing from 19 years up to 25 years. This flies in the face of conventional wisdom that remodeling companies will grow in revenue as they become more mature. Clearly, there are companies with small volumes that have no intention of moving beyond that \$500,000 revenue level. And they must also be finding a way to be profitable if they've been in business for almost 20 years.

We did see some subtle differences. While 64 percent of companies with \$500,000 or less in annual revenue have been in business for more than 10 years, that number jumps to 87 percent for the companies with the highest revenues. In fact, 62 percent of those have been in business for more than 20 years.

### The "average" remodeling firm

Years in business	21
Field employees	4
Office employees	1
Salespeople	2
2007 installed volume	\$1.2 million
Annual jobs	83
Average job size	\$65,216

### Less than \$500,000

Years in business	19
Field employees	2
Office employees	1
Salespeople	1
Annual jobs	26
Average job size	\$9,847

### \$500,000 - \$999,999

Years in business	19
Field employees	3
Office employees	1
Salespeople	2
Annual jobs	61
Average job size	\$11,356

### \$1 million - \$3 million

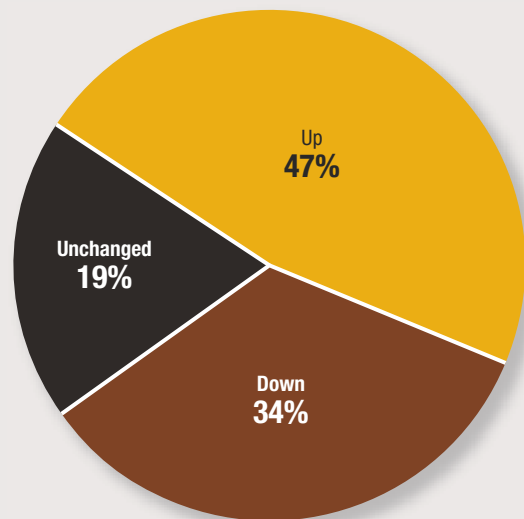
Years in business	20
Field employees	5
Office employees	2
Salespeople	2
Annual jobs	88
Average job size	\$18,866

### More than \$3 million

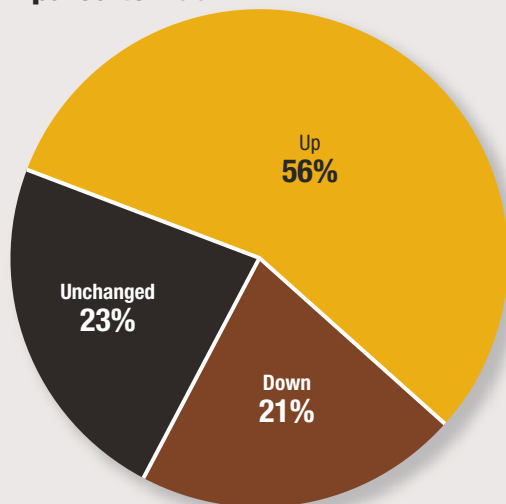
Years in business	25
Field employees	10
Office employees	4
Salespeople	3
Annual jobs	157
Average job size	\$133,456



2007 revenue compared to 2006



Expected 2008 revenue compared to 2007



## Mixed results for revenues

**LAST YEAR WAS BRUTAL IN NEW CONSTRUCTION.** Although remodelers were hit with some of that pain, the problems seem to have been less widespread. Nearly half of our respondents saw an increase in business in 2007, and only about a third saw business decrease.

The results were relatively constant across companies of all revenue size, with the \$1 million to \$3 million group being the only one to have more than half (54 percent) report an increase in business.

Remodelers are slightly (emphasis on slightly) more optimistic about 2008, with 56 percent reporting they expect business to increase, compared with only 21 percent that expect a downturn. If those numbers hold, it would be better than 2007, but it's a far cry from a few years ago. Again, those numbers hold steady for companies of all sizes.

There were no significant regional differences in revenue increases or decreases in 2007 or 2008, although respondents in the Midwest did report smaller median revenues (\$900,000) than those in other areas. The Northeast (\$1.25 million), the South (\$1.4 million) and the West (\$1.2 million) all came in significantly higher.

One other interesting note on revenues: Although it's difficult to say if the relationship is causal (are they more successful because they're in associations or in associations because they're successful?), the larger a firm is the more likely it is to be a member of NAHB, NARI or some other association. The average revenue of association members was \$1.4 million, while non-members averaged \$725,000.

Only 32 percent of companies reporting less than \$500,000 belong to any association, compared with 50 percent for \$500,000 to \$999,000 firms. Sixty-six percent of companies with revenues in the \$1 million to \$3 million range and a roughly equal (statistically speaking) 63 percent of those above \$3 million are association members.

At the same time, 53 percent of those who belonged to associations saw an increase in business in 2007 compared with 40 percent of those that didn't.



## Labor tops expenses

**LABOR, WHETHER EMPLOYEES OR SUBCONTRACTORS**, was the largest expense across the board, with the average company spending 21 percent of its revenue on direct labor costs and 25 percent on subcontractors. (We've boiled key expense numbers down to real dollars in the adjacent table.) The amount spent on direct labor didn't vary by company size — all were in the 20 to 21 percent range — but the largest companies spent more on subcontractors — 27 percent for those over \$1 million compared with 21 percent for those under \$1 million. Building materials accounted for 25 percent of revenue on average, with little difference by company size (24 to 26 percent range).

Owner's compensation averaged 5.5 percent, with the percentage dropping from 8 percent to 3.5 percent from the smallest to largest companies, although the real dollars obviously increased because of the companies' larger volumes. For the smallest firms especially, the real dollar numbers that equates to seems low. As many of these companies are sole proprietorships, perhaps survey respondents were not including the full benefits in profits, company trucks, etc., that they pull out of the business.

The average company is aiming for a gross profit of just under 30 percent, with 57 percent of companies falling between 20 and 40 percent. Disturbingly, 31 percent of firms are aiming for a gross profit below 20 percent. Association members, perhaps because of numerous seminars hitting on the importance of setting the right price, aimed for higher gross profits, with 57 percent looking for gross profits above 30 percent compared with only 24 percent of non-members doing the same.

While all sizes of companies were aiming for roughly the same gross profit, we did uncover differences in what they actually achieve. The average company has a gross of 25 percent, with an average of 21 percent for companies under \$500,000, 24 percent for companies \$500,000 to \$1 million and 27 percent for companies over \$1 million. About 62 percent of the smallest firms are getting gross profits below 20 percent, compared with 37 percent of companies with volumes above \$500,000.

Whether because of a flaw in our survey or because of inaccuracies in the way numbers were reported by respondents, we were unable to get an accurate figure for net profits in this year's study.

### Gross profit percentage

All companies	<b>25%</b>
Less than \$500,000	<b>21%</b>
\$500,000 to \$999,999	<b>24%</b>
\$1 to \$3 million	<b>27%</b>
More than \$3 million	<b>26%</b>

### Amounts spent on key expenses

2007 Revenue	< \$500	\$500 to \$999	\$1 to \$3m	> \$3 m
Direct labor	\$53,775	\$136,576	\$303,750	\$999,000
Subcontractors	\$54,425	\$146,827	\$405,000	\$1,326,500
Materials	\$63,550	\$173,738	\$353,100	\$1,217,500
Owner's comp	\$19,425	\$43,030	\$72,000	\$178,000

The average company has a **30 percent** target gross profit, but only achieves **25 percent**.



### Which services are subcontracted

Plumbing	<b>82%</b>
Electrical	<b>81%</b>
HVAC	<b>78%</b>
Concrete	<b>68%</b>
Countertops	<b>66%</b>
Roofing	<b>65%</b>
Masonry	<b>65%</b>
Drywall	<b>64%</b>
Painting	<b>58%</b>
Flooring	<b>57%</b>
Architectural	<b>50%</b>
Cabinetry	<b>48%</b>
Siding	<b>42%</b>
Carpentry	<b>35%</b>
Windows/doors	<b>35%</b>
Demolition	<b>30%</b>
Interior design	<b>28%</b>
Decks/patios	<b>24%</b>

## Running lean

### NEARLY HALF OF THE REVENUE A COMPANY BRINGS IN

goes to labor, in-house or subcontracted. The average company responding to our survey reported four field employees and one office staff, not including the owner. More than 90 percent of remodelers have five or fewer office employees. About 13 percent reported no field employees and another 48 percent reported having one to five, so most firms are running with small teams, and/or making extensive use of subcontractors.

Not surprisingly, employee numbers grew as company size increased, but even the largest firms only reported 14 total field and office employees.

An average of 41 percent of fieldwork is performed by subcontractors, although 11 percent said they use no trades at all. The

An average of  
**41 percent** of labor  
is performed by  
subcontractors.

smallest firms were the least likely to subcontract work, with those under \$500,000 farming out only 32 percent of labor, compared to 45 percent for those from \$500,000 to \$3 million and 40 percent for those over \$3 million.

Specialty trades topped the list of services for which companies used trade contractors, with about 80 percent subcontracting plumbing, electrical and HVAC work. Many companies also subcontracted office jobs. Half reported subcontracting architectural services, 28 percent interior design and 8 percent sales.



## Whole-house, kitchens top projects

**THE AVERAGE COMPANY WORKED ON 83 JOBS IN 2007**, with an average job size of \$65,216. At the same time, there were quite a few companies doing smaller amounts of work; 38 percent reported fewer than 20 projects in 2007. And that may have been the place to be in 2007, as companies doing fewer, larger projects seem to have enjoyed more success last year; those who reported business was up had an average project size of \$126,694, and those who said it was down or unchanged had an average job of \$36,940.

**Home repairs** was the most popular job category in 2007, but **whole-house remodels** accounted for the most revenue.

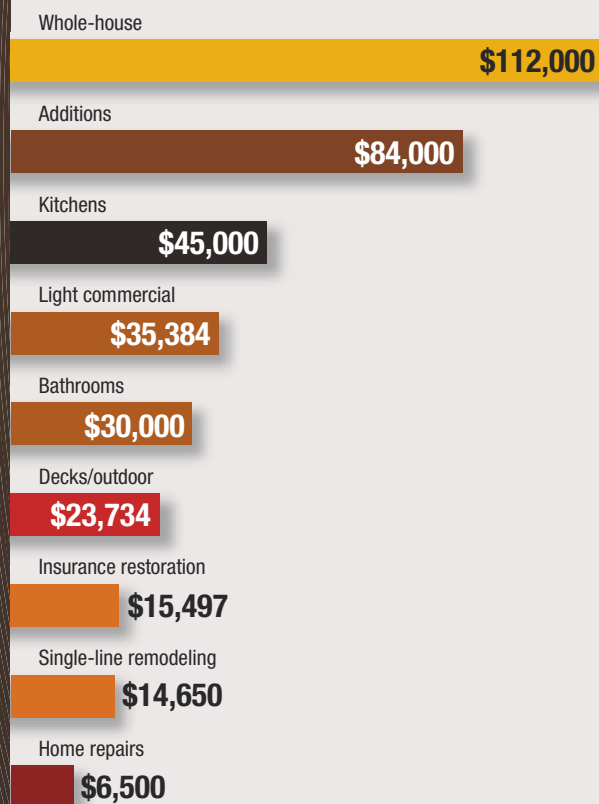
The most popular type of job in 2007 was home repair work, accounting for more than a quarter of all remodeling projects. Because of its low average price tag (see adjacent chart), though, that category only accounted for about 5 percent of total revenue. The top revenue producers were whole-house remodels and kitchens, both at about 15 percent, and additions at 14 percent. Whole-house projects topped the list for the South and West, while kitchens led in the Midwest and additions in the Northeast.

Other popular projects were bathrooms and single-line remodels, each accounting for about 11 percent of projects, and 12 percent and 7 percent of revenues, respectively. Besides remodeling, the average company also built about two custom homes a year, representing about 10 percent of total revenue.

A reason for the slippage in gross profit we noted previously may be that some remodelers had trouble sticking to their schedule. Only about 78 percent of jobs closed on time last year, and 14 percent of companies closed less than half their jobs on time.

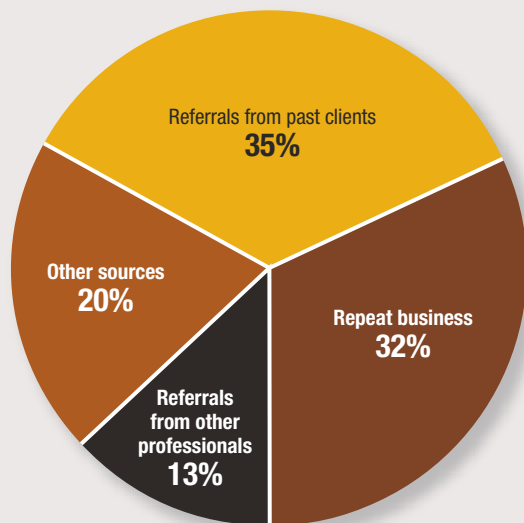
The average company closes **85 percent** of jobs on time.

### Job size by type





## Where the business comes from



## Most successful marketing tactics

(besides repeats and referrals)

Job/truck signs

18%

Company Web site

13%

Yellow pages

9%

Online referral services

9%

Home shows

7%

Print advertising

7%

Direct mail

6%

E-mail marketing

3%

## Repeats and referrals lead the way

**REMODELERS ALWAYS SAY** repeats and referrals drive their businesses, and the results seem to bear that out, with about 80 percent of leads coming from repeat business and referrals from past clients and other professionals.

Repeat business generates 32 percent of leads, although 22 percent of companies reported they get less than 10 percent of their business from repeat customers. Referrals from past clients account for 35 percent of leads, and 33 percent of companies report getting more than half their business that way. Referrals from other professionals such as suppliers and architects resulted in 13 percent of leads, [but 66 percent of respondents

## The average company spends just over **1 percent** of revenue on marketing.

said those referrals account for less than 10 percent.]

The average company gets almost 20 percent of leads from other sources, but more than a quarter of all firms said they exist solely on repeats and referrals. Of those other sources, job/truck signs were the most popular, being used by 67 percent of companies. Other common tactics were a company Web site (56 percent), organization membership (50 percent), print advertising (42 percent), Yellow Pages (38 percent), direct mail (32 percent), online referral services and home shows (both at 26 percent). No-call lists have clearly had a major impact over the last few years. Telemarketing, once a significant tactic for many remodelers, is now used by only 2 percent of companies.

We also asked respondents to select their two most successful marketing tactics besides repeats and referrals. Top choices were a mix of the low- and high-tech: job/truck signs, company Web site, print advertising, Yellow Pages, online referral services and home shows.





When we build a window, we know it's not just our reputation that's on the line. It's yours, too. So all of our products are engineered for exceptional reliability and superior strength. They're designed in styles and shapes to suit any décor or home type. And they're backed by one of the best lifetime warranties in the business. Plus, with our fast 7-day delivery time, you can be sure that your Simonton windows will be there when you and your homeowners expect them. So choose Simonton—the name that will live up to your good name. To learn more call 1-800-SIMONTON or go to [www.simonton.com](http://www.simonton.com).



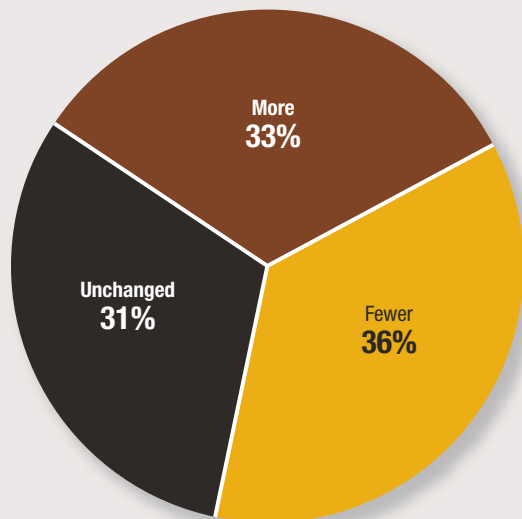
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## 2007 leads compared to 2006



## Sales volume per employee

All companies	\$668,883
Less than \$500,000	\$90,666
\$500,000 to \$999,999	\$202,999
\$1 to \$3 million	\$253,750
More than \$3 million	\$2,195,603

## METHODOLOGY

408 remodelers completed the survey via the Internet. Survey data were collected between Jan. 8 and Feb. 11, 2008. Survey invitations were e-mailed to randomly selected remodelers who are subscribers to *Professional Remodeler's* print and electronic editions, as well as members of various trade groups.

## Small sales staff the norm

**JUST AS WITH FIELD AND OFFICE STAFF**, companies are running very lean operations in sales as well. Including the owner, companies reported an average of 1.8 salespeople. The only company size to average more than one sales employee beyond the owner were those over \$3 million. More than half of all companies — more than 70 percent of those under \$1 million — reported no salespeople besides the owner, and 98 percent said they had five or fewer.

Ninety-one percent of owners spend at least part of their time selling. Even for those companies over \$3 million, that number is 83 percent. Of those owners who do sell, 35 percent of their time is spent on sales, and 20 percent spend more than half their time selling.

The owner sells projects for **91 percent** of companies. On average, **35 percent** of the owner's time is spent selling.

Despite the downturn in the market in 2007, 33 percent of companies reported receiving more leads last year than they did in 2006 and only 36 percent reported a decrease. There is, of course, a strong correlation between leads and sales — 52 percent of those that saw business increase reported more leads and 51 percent of those whose business was down saw fewer leads. At the same time, that means 48 percent of those that had larger revenues had fewer or the same number of leads (and 17 percent of those who lost business actually increased leads).

Companies reported converting 47 percent of qualified leads into sales. (We defined qualified as someone the remodeler met in person or at least provided a ballpark price.) Thirty-nine percent converted more than half their leads into sales. The smallest companies had the best conversion rate, as those under \$1 million sold 51 percent of leads and those over \$1 million closed less than 45 percent. **PR**

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# People Power

GOOD EMPLOYEES  
AND A DEDICATION  
TO INTEGRITY HELP  
KITCHEN MART  
SUCCEED IN A  
CHALLENGING  
MARKET

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor



**UNTIL RECENTLY, IT WASN'T THAT HARD** for most remodelers to find work. With home prices soaring and equity growing, homeowners everywhere were eager to improve and remodel their homes. And Sacramento was no different.

"We had more work than we knew what to do with for seven years," says Kitchen Mart President Dave Hollars. "We were swimming in good times, but it's caught up with us now. I think really what's happening for 2008 is just this shakedown and settling down — let's figure out where the floor of the housing market is and we'll pick it up after that."

While things may have gotten tougher, Hollars is confident that the Sacramento, Calif.-based company will continue to be successful because of the firm's focus on hiring good people and a culture of integrity that sets it apart from many of its competitors.

"I call them kitchen and bathroom cowboys," he says. "They've got a pickup truck and an A-frame and a lumber rack, and we have to compete with those guys."

## RESPECT AND INTEGRITY

Success starts with treating customers with respect. A failure to do so is why contractors walk around with a "bull's-eye" on their heads, Hollars says.

"It's a self-imposed bull's-eye," he says. "They have a failure to communicate with consumers and do follow-up calls and make it to appointments on time."

That's why one of the Kitchen Mart rules is not to be late for an appointment without letting the client know. With an increasingly busy client base, saying someone will be there between 7:00 and 8:00 and showing up at 7:30 just won't cut it.

"We have 50 cell phones in this business, and if you're going to be five minutes late, you're calling and saying, 'I'm just around the corner and I'll see you in a few minutes,'" Hollars says.

The message of respect and integrity is constantly reinforced with every employee, from the first phone call ("They have to answer it with a smile, because smiles can be heard.") to the final walkthrough with the project manager.

"I don't just say it once a month at meetings," Hollars says. "I have to instill integrity, I have to promote integrity and I have to show integrity, because if it's not there from the very top, they're going to see that."

As part of the company's efforts to ensure quality, at the end of every project Hollars sends out a letter and a Kitchen Mart Report Card. The company gets about 65 percent of the report

**Dave Hollars believes that Kitchen Mart's company culture will help the firm make it through a challenging remodeling market in northern California.**

cards back, and it allows Hollars to act quickly if there are any problems — or to reward someone who was singled out for recognition.

"Being a service business like we are, it would get back to me really quickly if somebody doesn't have integrity, doesn't follow through," he says. "Everyone here understands the standards and that if the standards aren't met, they're just not here."

Clearly, that message is resonating with clients, who bought enough kitchen and bathroom remodels for the company to achieve double-digit growth in revenue for the last several years. More than 80 percent of the company's business comes from repeats and referrals.

"Especially in times like these, you need to bank on your referral base," Hollars says. "We have to nurture that referral base because we've earned those one at a time."

Every person who calls Kitchen Mart is asked how they heard about the company. If the lead comes from a referral, the person who referred the new client gets a personal thank you letter from Hollars and a gift card to Borders, Starbucks or Sees Candies. The program has worked very well for the company and encouraged more referrals and repeat business.

## A SOLID TEAM

Building a company culture of respect and integrity requires having a good team of employees in place. Hollars is looking for people who want to make a career, not just get a job.

"If they want to be here for a while, I can build this company without having to worry about who's installing it, who's fabricating it," he says.

For that reason, the company takes time in hiring people, and

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Kitchen Mart, Sacramento, Calif.**

**CEO:** Jim Bartol

**President:** Dave Hollars

**2007 projects:** 611

**2007 volume:** \$10 million

**Projected 2008 volume:** \$10 million

**Employees:** 57

**Founded:** 1976

**Biggest challenge:** Building a workforce so the company can continue to grow

**Web site:** [www.kitchenmart.net](http://www.kitchenmart.net)



## “I have fantastic journeymen now that are in their 40s and 50s, and I need to make sure I have a talented young workforce.”

while Hollars delegates sales and production, he still handles the personnel decisions.

“That’s important to me,” he says. “We are asking someone to trust us when they give us the keys to their home. I don’t take that lightly.”

Kitchen Mart is a drug- and alcohol-free workplace and adheres to regular drug testing. The company also uses a three-interview hiring process to get to know applicants better before they make a decision.

The first interview is only about 10 minutes long and is a chance for Hollars to talk to the applicant and tell him or her about the company. He also mentions the drug policy at this interview, causing some applicants to eliminate themselves from consideration.

For the second interview, also a short 10 to 15 minute meeting, Hollars is joined by the manager for which the applicant would be working. The third interview is the longest, with Hollars, the department manager and human resources.

“It might seem like it’s a waste of time, but there’s a reason for three interviews,” he says. “At the first one, everybody’s nervous. We’re just feeling each other out. At the second one, I get to see if they’re the same person I met on the first interview. And if they come back for the third interview, then I know they want the job.”

While economic conditions may play a short-term role in slowing the company’s growth, Hollars knows that in the long term the company’s success hinges on building a solid team of employees.

“I have fantastic journeymen now that are in their 40s and 50s and I need to make sure I have a talented young workforce,” he says. “In a society where swinging a hammer or running a Skil

saw is not seen as a glorious job, how do you get young people to realize you can make a career out of this?”

Toward that end, Hollars stresses the career potential of remodeling during the hiring process and that Kitchen Mart offers good pay and benefits, although, as a small business, that’s getting tougher every year.

Hollars’ own history with the company is a good example of why it’s important to hire good people. Starting as an installer in 1997, he worked his way up to vice president in 2000 and president in 2004, taking over from CEO Jim Bartol, who founded the company in 1976.

Hollars came to the company as a referral from a DuPont sales representative who knew he was an experienced installer looking to leave Hawaii and return home to California.

“I wasn’t thinking at that point of a manager or anything, certainly not somebody to take over the company, but just as a knowledgeable installer,” Bartol says.

After working for the company for a short time, Hollars actually left to work for a shutter company right next door.

“I just felt like I needed a little step away from the kitchen world,” Hollars says. “That only lasted a few months, and I was back on his doorstep.”

Bartol rehired him, breaking his rule of never taking back a former employee, because he thought so highly of Hollars. He recognized his skills as a people person and quickly moved him into management.

“Dave picked up the ball and ran with it very, very nicely,” Bartol says. “It was a two- or three-year transition where Dave and I would work closely together, and he gradually took over and I became less and less active with the business.”

Hollars is quick to credit Bartol as a mentor and says he is responsible for much of his and Kitchen Mart’s success.

“Whatever I need, he’s there for me,” he says. “I value his opinion like no other.”

Three years ago, Bartol and Hollars initiated a buy-sell agreement, with Hollars gaining more ownership every year. Currently he owns about a third of the company and Bartol owns the rest. While a constant resource for Hollars, Bartol has removed himself from the day-to-day operations of the company and is enjoying retirement.

“One of the nice things is he’s handed me control and he doesn’t get in the way,” Hollars says. “I couldn’t have asked for a better transition.” **PR**

## A WEEK IN THE LIFE

How Kitchen Mart President Dave Hollars spends his average week

Reviewing contracts and coaching sales	10 hours
Meeting with key members of management	10 hours
Reviewing company numbers	4 hours
Marketing efforts and planning	5 hours
Visiting projects	5 hours
Long-range planning for growth	5 hours



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# Championship

A REMODELER HITS THE BALL OUT OF THE PARK WITH AN INGENUOUS MAKE-OVER



Oriented toward the family room, the angled island links the kitchen with the entertainment space; hand-hewn wood floors unite the two areas. Varied cabinets and shelves in the kitchen and bar achieve a European country ambiance.



# Kitchen

By Wendy A. Jordan, Senior Contributing Editor

**THE PRESSURE WAS ON FOR DANVILLE, CALIF.,** design/build remodeler George Gayler. When he stepped into John and Stephanie Fox's house, "John's first words were, 'I saw my neighbor's remodeled kitchen and I was totally underwhelmed,'" recalls Gayler. And Stephanie, a real-estate agent, had been inside scores of houses in the area and was determined to make her remodeled kitchen and family area different from the norm. No granite counters, no slick, contemporary style for her. "I knew I had to hit a home run," Gayler says.

The dated, galley kitchen in the Foxes' 1978 house was walled off from the adjacent family room, isolating the cook. The family room itself was dark and drab. And it was sandwiched between the kitchen and garage, requiring the Foxes to lug incoming groceries and outgoing garbage a long way.

Two or three remodelers had come by, tossing out a few uninspired ideas and sketchy estimates for improving the kitchen and family area. Gayler was in a different ballpark. In his initial meeting with the Foxes, he showed creative spark, proposing to remove the wall between the rooms and flip the whole 583-square-foot floor plan, putting the kitchen next to the garage and designing an inviting kitchen-great room. He gave them a rough estimate of \$250,000 to \$280,000, which included a bump-out that the Foxes requested. But Gayler's open floor plan promised to yield livability, light, space and views without the



Before

**A wall between the old kitchen and family room isolated the bland room and confined it to tight quarters. Little light reached the family room.**

## PRODUCTS LIST

**Apron sink:** Rohl **Cabinets:** Precision Cabinets and Trim **Dishwasher:** Miele **Hood liner:** VAH  
**Microwave drawer:** Sharp **Oven:** La Cornue **Refrigerator and warming drawer:** Jennair  
**Skylights:** Velux **Windows:** Milgard **Wine grotto:** Marvel

AFTER PHOTOS: NATHANIEL BENNETT PHOTOGRAPHY



bump-out, and at a cost much closer to their \$185,000 budget.

## CLIENT INSIGHT

To work up a full-fledged design, Gayler and design coordinator Meredith English interviewed the Foxes in detail about their wants, needs and at-home lifestyle. The quality of the Foxes' furnishings also guided them in developing a comprehensive estimate with realistic price points for products and finishes.

"Stephanie had a discerning, sophisticated taste," says English. "She wanted the kitchen to look European and eclectic. And most important to her was that it be original in the design and the interior finishes." Gayler and English specified cabinets and shelves in assorted heights and depths for a warm, country effect. To blend with the country look, they boxed out the range hood and hid it behind furniture-look molding.

The cabinets are a subtle yellow inspired by an antique table in the family room. Earlier the Foxes had installed hand-hewn maple flooring in other rooms; Gayler continued the flooring into the kitchen and great room. The Foxes chose a large, European-style range as a kitchen centerpiece; an apron sink completes the European country theme.

John, who does most of the cooking, wanted to be able to socialize with guests, see the outdoors and have a view of the family room fireplace while making dinner. Gayler accomplished that and more. He removed the kitchen wall, replaced a small



The skylight and raised ceiling provide drama and light, while the restyled corner fireplace, wood-finished beam, European-style range and rustic chandelier add warmth and character.

## THE FINANCIALS

With 22.5 percent draws at production milestones, remodeler George Gayler's cash flow on the Fox project was healthy once work got underway. Change order payments were due when the orders were signed.

The Fox project ran like clockwork. "There were no dead days, no letting things fall behind," says project manager Paul Panepinto. That's largely because the company commands the attention of trade contractors. "Most trades are dying for cash flow," explains George Gayler. "They want 70-80 percent when rough is completed, and 20 percent at finish." Gayler's trades get the cash immediately. Once a contractor's work is done, the

### Budget History

Initial estimate:	\$250,000-\$280,000 (includes room addition)
Bid reduction:	-\$100,000 (room addition)
Final estimate:	\$185,596
Change orders: (vaulted ceiling in kitchen; patio door; remove existing deck; repair roof leak elsewhere on house; repair vacuum and garage lights; add electrical and circuit for barbecue; pre-wire for surround sound; paint house; replace all doorknobs)	\$28,092
Overage on allowances:	\$8,112
Final price of job:	\$221,800
Cost to produce:	\$148,923
Gross profit:	\$72,877
Budgeted gross profit:	33%
Actual gross profit:	32.9%

Gayler project manager signs off on it and calls the office. "The contrac-

tor can pick up a check on the way home," Gayler says.

Gross profit on the Fox project came in a hair below the 33 percent budgeted. Gayler says most jobs, including this one, are covered for up to 2 percent slippage. And he blames himself for the slippage. It tends to be "an estimating error on my part, usually underestimating labor," he says. Or, as with the Fox project, it's caused by "giving things away. We had to put the pier in [for the raised ceiling], which I had not expected, so we did it at no charge. And we put in power beams — at a cost to us of \$1,000 — to repair a sagging roof.

"Chalk it up to good will," says Gayler. Besides, such giveaways "make my job look nice. I put it in marketing."



## COMPANY SNAPSHOT

### Gayler Construction

**Owners:** George and Darlene Gayler

**Location:** Danville, Calif.

**2006 volume:** \$3.45 million

**2007 volume:** \$1 million

**Projected 2008 volume:** \$3 million

**Web site:** [www.gaylerconstruction.com](http://www.gaylerconstruction.com)

**Biggest challenge:** Raising the ceiling over the finished space

kitchen window with patio doors, and installed an angled island with stool seating to give John expansive outdoor views plus an easy connection to guests. John can enjoy the former family room fireplace, which became the focus of a seating area in the corner of the kitchen. As a bonus, Gayler repositioned and angled the wall between kitchen and entry, giving John a view of the living room fireplace, too.

### CEILING SURPRISES

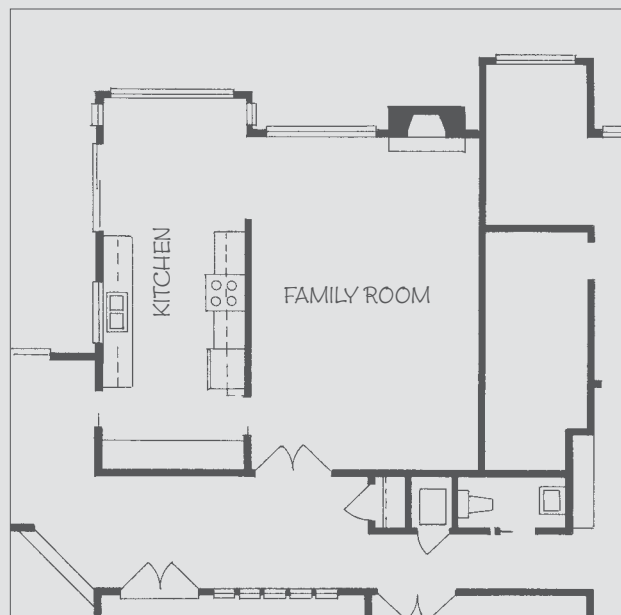
During the design phase, Gayler presented the option of creating a cathedral ceiling. The Foxes declined because of cost. But, as production began they changed their minds. Gayler encouraged them to think about the \$13,000 change order overnight. "Once my clients establish a budget, I try to show them how to keep it there," he explains.

"I really appreciated that," says Stephanie. The Foxes decided

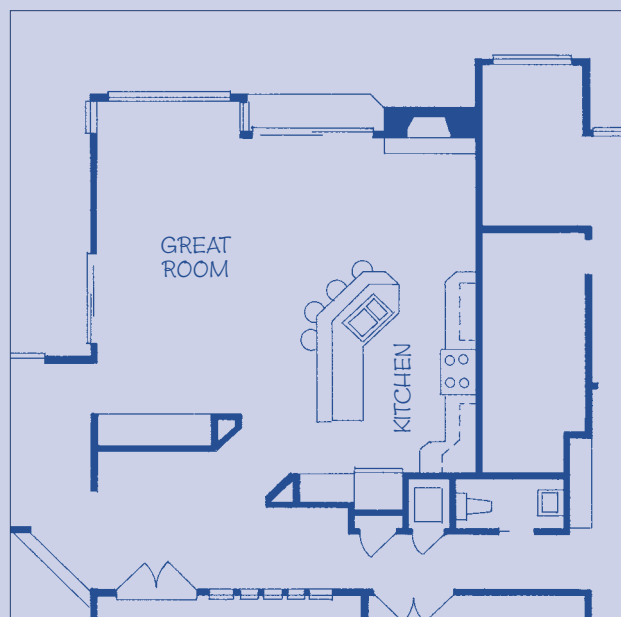
## PROJECT TIMELINE

2006	Stage of Project
<b>May 1</b>	Initial meeting; design agreement signed
<b>June 6</b>	Contract signed; 5% payment
<b>Aug. 14</b>	Demo begins, cabinets ordered; 22.5% payment
<b>Aug. 17</b>	Change order payment
<b>Sept. 17</b>	Change order payment
<b>Sept. 22</b>	Repair roof leak; Change order payment
<b>Sept. 26</b>	Rough electrical and plumbing completed; HVAC installed; 22.5% payment
<b>Sept. 30</b>	Change order payment
<b>Oct. 6</b>	Insulation and drywall installed; 22.5% payment
<b>Oct. 19</b>	Cabinets installed; 22.5% payment
<b>Oct. 29</b>	Change order payment
<b>Nov. 10</b>	Change order payment
<b>Nov. 22</b>	Substantial completion; 5% payment

Before



After



**The original plan had a walled-off kitchen and a windowless family room. Gayler placed the kitchen close to the garage and created an open family room/kitchen area.**



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## PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

## THE POWER OF PERSUASION.



**Project manager Paul Panepinto retrofitted an antique sideboard to form the base of the family room bar. The furniture-style upper cabinets, made for the space, match the kitchen units.**

the vaulted ceiling would be worth the extra dollars.

Production manager Paul Panepinto planned to support the existing trusses, then remove all but the top cord, install a new engineered ridge beam across the 13-foot-high peak and sister new rafters onto the old truss top cords. Gayler had accounted for all that in the price. He was surprised, however, when the structural engineer said a new pier needed to be added inside the house. A drilling subcontractor excavated a 10-foot-deep, 12-inch diameter pier under the new supporting interior wall. Gayler's crew added steel reinforcing, filled the pier with concrete, and closed the floor back up.

Though Gayler intended to enclose the beam in drywall, the Foxes liked the look of the exposed beam. Stephanie wanted it finished to match the wood floor. Like Michelangelo, Panepinto's crew labored at ceiling height, balancing on scaffolding to sand the beam and paint it to echo the distressed

wood below. "It was work," says Panepinto.

### PHOTOGENIC FINISH

Early in the planning process, Stephanie chose the cabinet paint color. When she went to a showroom and saw the softening effect of glazing, she decided to add glazing to the mix. John thought the cabinets would look terrible. Gayler repeatedly reassured him. The day the cabinets arrived was a nail-biter. To everyone's relief, John agreed they were perfect.

On the other hand, Gayler was leery of using the white Carrara marble counters Stephanie wanted. "George, my friends, even the counter supplier, told me not to put in the Carrara marble," says Stephanie, because the soft marble stains easily. She chose it anyway. But she seals it often, uses marble scraps as hot plates, and figures a few stains will add to the patina.

For the great room bar, Stephanie bought an antique sideboard, which Panepinto retrofitted as a base cabinet with wine cooler. The upper cabinets harmonize with the kitchen units. The combo looks unique and cost less than a full suite of new cabinets in the bar.

Gayler helped the Foxes save thousands more. First, by extending the brick above the family room fireplace, which helped it fit into its new kitchen setting; the Foxes had thought of moving the fireplace. Second, by recommending a more economical cabinet door style than the inset style they'd considered. They also recessed their standard refrigerator in a cabinet opening, where it resembles a luxury built-in.

The project itself rolled in essentially on budget — change orders and allowance overage account for the higher final cost — and before Thanksgiving, as promised. "They love" the new space, Stephanie says. As a real-estate professional, she adds, "I won't refer anybody I wouldn't use in my own house." She's enthusiastically spreading the word about Gayler. And it's a home run for Gayler Construction. **PR**



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# FANTASTIC FINISH

Homeowners wanted the master bathroom to make a bold statement; art deco proved the way to go.

## BATHROOM REMODEL

**REMODELER:** Washtenaw Woodwrights, Ann Arbor, Mich.

**ARCHITECT:** Architectural Resource, Ann Arbor, Mich.

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

**AGE OF HOME:** 80 years old

**SCOPE OF WORK:** To create a compact, efficiently functioning master bath within minimum available floor space

By Ann Matesi,  
Senior Contributing Editor

**THE GLASS AND POLISHED CHROME** in the new art deco bathroom in this craftsman bungalow in Ann Arbor, Mich., delivers on the bold statement the homeowners intended to make when they selected its bright finishes.

**The new second-floor bathroom features an interesting blend of materials and finishes to create the art deco-look the homeowners desired. Such details include spa glass wall tile, 8-inch glass block used to create translucent interior walls, and hexagonal floor tile.**

## PRODUCTS LIST

**Tile shower surround:** Walker Zanger **Showerheads:** Grohe  
**Cabinetry:** Holiday Kitchens, custom **Glass block:** Vetro-arredo  
**Sinks:** Kohler **Faucets:** Newport Brass **Toilet:** Porcher  
**Floor tile:** Dal Tile **Lighting:** Robern, Halo, Kichler



AFTER PHOTOS BY STANLEY LIVINGSTON

The bathroom's modernist style is a deliberate departure from the traditional character of the 80-year-old home, says project remodeler Bruce Curtis, founder of Ann Arbor-based Washtenaw Woodwrights. And this is exactly what his clients were hoping to achieve. "They really wanted their personal bathroom to have a lot of pizzazz, so when it came to materials selection, they made very deliberate choices in order to create a space that would stand apart from the rest of the house."

The upper floor bathroom marks the culmination of an ambitious, award-winning whole-house restoration project in which the two-story home was transformed from two rental units into the single-family residence it was originally intended to be.

Replacing what had been a converted kitchen for second-floor tenants, the bathroom now serves as a unique and luxurious master bath for the homeowners, who purchased the bungalow several years earlier with the goal of restoring it.

The project was undertaken in two separate stages, says Curtis, who worked closely with local architect, Michael Klement of Architectural Resource, and

the homeowners from start to finish.

The bathroom remodel came after a new front porch, kitchen and breakfast nook was completed. In place of the original hall bathroom that had served the bedrooms

on this level, the home's upper floor now includes a very handy second-floor laundry room.

Curtis calls the new bath "a real show stopper." It features distinctive blue glass



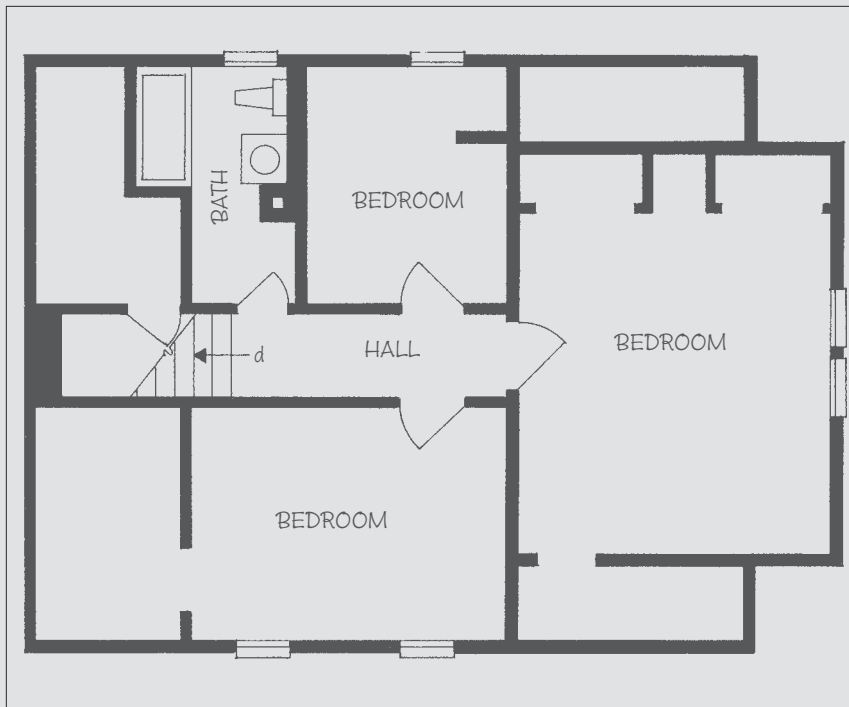
**The vanity counter is actually ½-inch plate glass with a frosted edge and base that rests on a custom-fabricated, chrome-plated steel tube support system. Two of the three mirrors above the vanity hide recessed medicine cabinets.**

## BEFORE

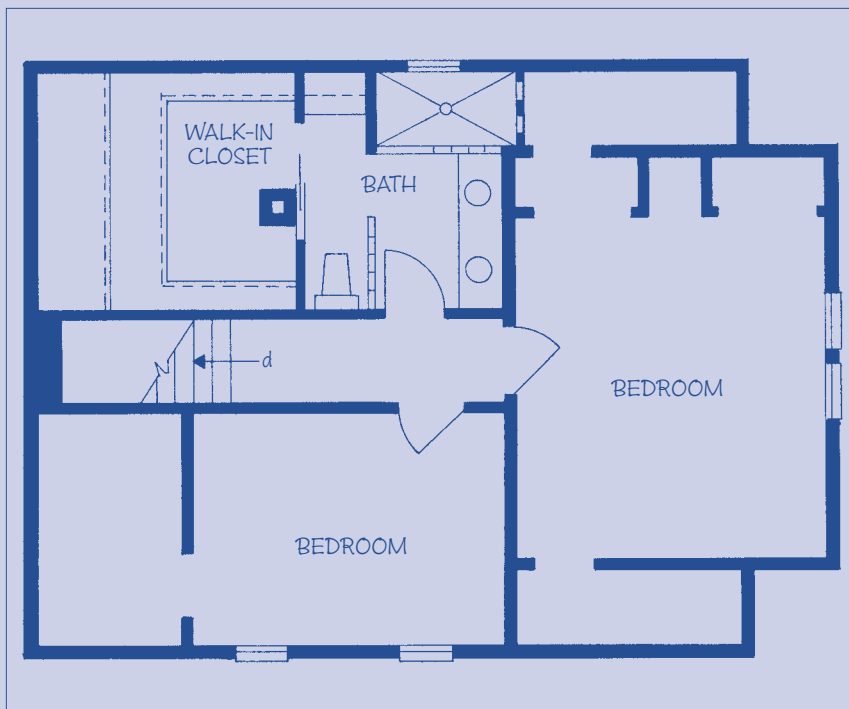




Before



After



block walls; a frosted glass vanity with two countertop-mounted, vessel-style lavatories; an oversized, open shower with a ceiling-mounted rain shower head and wall-mounted body spray system; a separate linen storage alcove with its own counter; and a semi-private toilet.

### Color Schematics

His client's tenacious adherence to the color and texture scheme they envisioned for their bathroom presented Curtis with a significant challenge when it came to maintaining the original production schedule for the project. In fact, the overall job took nearly a year to complete due to delays incurred in either procuring materials the clients had chosen or reordering them in different shades when the homeowners were unhappy with the colors when the products arrived.

The clients selected a new, deeper shade for the glass tile used for the shower surround as well as for the tinted glass blocks that form the shower and divider walls. The glass vanity countertop also had to be returned to the

### A Smart Move

**H**is client's request for a second-floor laundry room to replace the original bathroom on their home's remodeled second floor did not faze remodeler Bruce Curtis.

In reality, he says, adding a laundry room is much less complicated than adding a bath. "Once you have the water lines in, all you need is a grey box in the wall for drainage." In this case, the job was easier because plumbing already existed.

"These homeowners, like most, were concerned about what would happen in the event that the washing machine overflows, but that is not really a problem these days. There are lots of products on the market today to alleviate those kinds of worries."

One solution that Curtis finds works well for second-floor laundry rooms is a washer that sits inside a specially designed floor pan that is lined with sensor strips. When a water leak is detected, a relay automatically shuts off the water supply to the washing machine, preventing an overflow.

## MERIAM REED

**Owner:** Reed & Company  
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**Owner:** DreamMaker  
Bath & Kitchen of Naples,  
Naples, Florida,  
est. 2003

### *Meriam Reed knows what it takes to make a house a home.*

First, as a real estate broker and now as a remodeler, she has made a career out of listening to clients describe the house of their dreams and then making those dreams come true.

### *What did being a real estate broker teach you about remodeling?*

**Meriam:** In real estate you learn quickly that aesthetics are among the most important selling features of a home. If a house looks dated or worn, it can take a lot longer to sell and may sell for less. Home buyers pay close attention to kitchens and bathrooms. It can make or break a deal.

### *Did your real estate experience influence your decision to start a remodeling company?*

**Meriam:** A seller can earn a significant return on investment for updating or remodeling kitchens and bathrooms.

**DreamMaker has opened our eyes to new opportunities for our business.**

So, for me, the connection between real estate sales and remodeling was clear. In 1991, my husband, Gerald, and I moved to Florida and became contractors. And 15 years later, we converted our business into a DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen franchise.

### *Why buy a franchise?*

**Meriam:** We were doing well on our own, but we weren't moving forward. We



Photo: Gerald and Meriam Reed

Plus, being part of a national brand gives us name recognition.

### *What's been the biggest benefit to becoming a franchise owner?*

**Meriam:** DreamMaker has opened our eyes to new opportunities for our business. For example, before joining DreamMaker, we paid full price for project materials. DreamMaker offers us the ability to purchase quality materials at a substantial discount due to group buying power. Additionally, DreamMaker provides us with strong marketing support and other systems, such as a recruiting system, that have helped take our business to the next level.

And things keep getting better. In 2006, Meriam Reed was named Woman of the Year for the DreamMaker franchise network. And today, she sits on the national Marketing, Advertising and Promotions Committee for DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, helping to guide the brand as it continues to grow on a national level.

For the Reeds [and for their customers], DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen really is a dream come true.

About DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen:

Based in Waco, Texas, DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen has approximately 110 independently owned and operated franchises nationwide.

wanted to grow in terms of structuring and operating our company to realize better profits.

### *How did DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen impact your business?*

**Meriam:** Once we became franchisees, we learned new ways of doing business. DreamMaker has an established system that has been used by business owners of remodeling companies all across the country. Anytime we have a question, we look to the system for answers. If we need clarification, we can seek advice from our peer network of franchisees or the corporate staff. Each franchisee has an exclusive market, so none of us are competitors. The system encourages a friendly environment and the free flow of information.

### *What about the bottom line?*

**Meriam:** Now, as kitchen and bathroom specialists, we have the confidence to quote jobs at a higher price point. We've used the extra revenue to offer health insurance to our employees and give to charities that are close to our hearts. That's something we always wanted to do as an independent contractor.

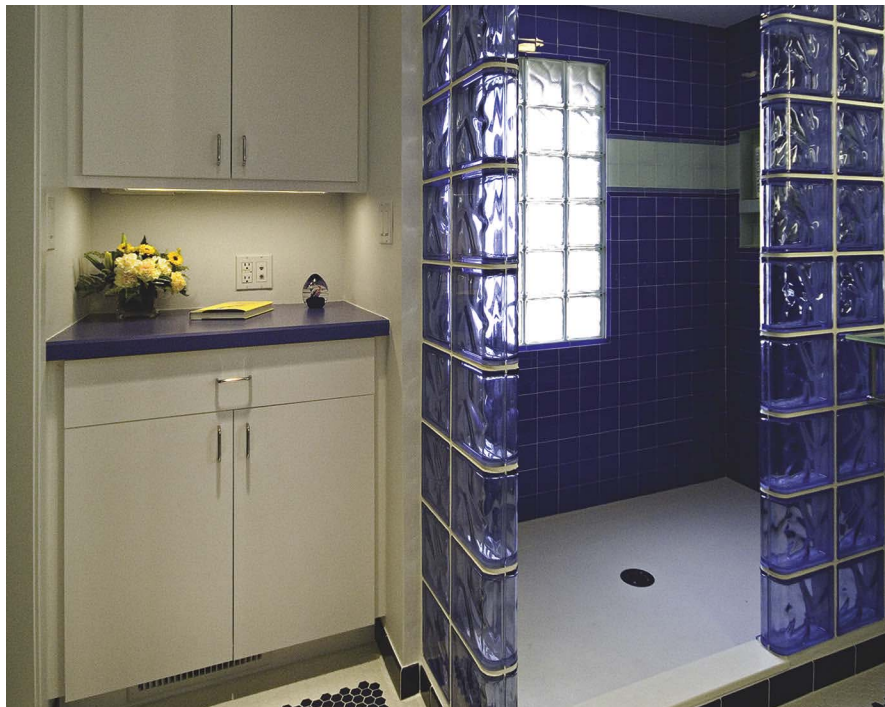
### *Have your customers noticed a difference since you joined a franchise?*

**Meriam:** DreamMaker shares our value of giving customers world-class service. Eighty percent of our clientele are returning customers and referrals.



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**800-253-9153**  
[dreammaker-remodel.com](http://dreammaker-remodel.com)





**The alcove between the shower and the walk-in closet was the perfect place for the linen storage cabinet and counter.**

manufacturer several times due to imperfections embedded within its surface.

"We really lost control of this project in terms of time because of the materials themselves. It is definitely not our style to have a project like this go so far beyond the projected completion date," says Curtis. "But when you break the mold of working with materials that you are comfortable and familiar with and branch out into using materials that you have not used before, delays are to be expected."

"I have certainly learned how important it is, when you are experimenting with new products or techniques, to understand and plan for difficulty in obtaining them in the first place, as well as the potential for delays in case things need to be reordered or reinstalled."

His advice:

- Know that you can get the materials that have been selected and understand the lead time required for obtaining them.
- Communicate this information to your client from the start.
- Research any unusual materials or installation techniques that may be necessary so you can get the best results the first time.

Respecting his clients as part of the overall design team, as well as keeping them up-to-date on the project status — and the cost increases from change orders — minimized his clients' frustration at the extended schedule, says Curtis.

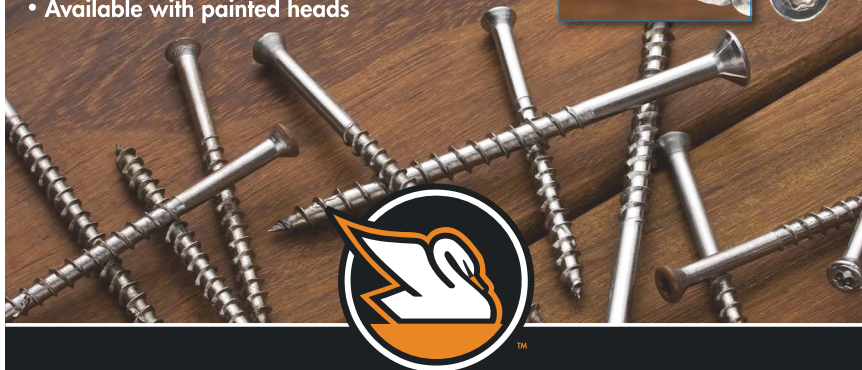
Ultimately, Curtis says he owes the successful outcome of the project to the cooperative working relationship among himself, Klement and the homeowners.

"There were really a lot of design heads working on this part of the project the whole time. This really made a huge difference because you just can't pull off a job like this without that.

"And, finally, when you have something turn out as well as this one did, all of the challenges you faced getting there are forgotten down the road." **PR**

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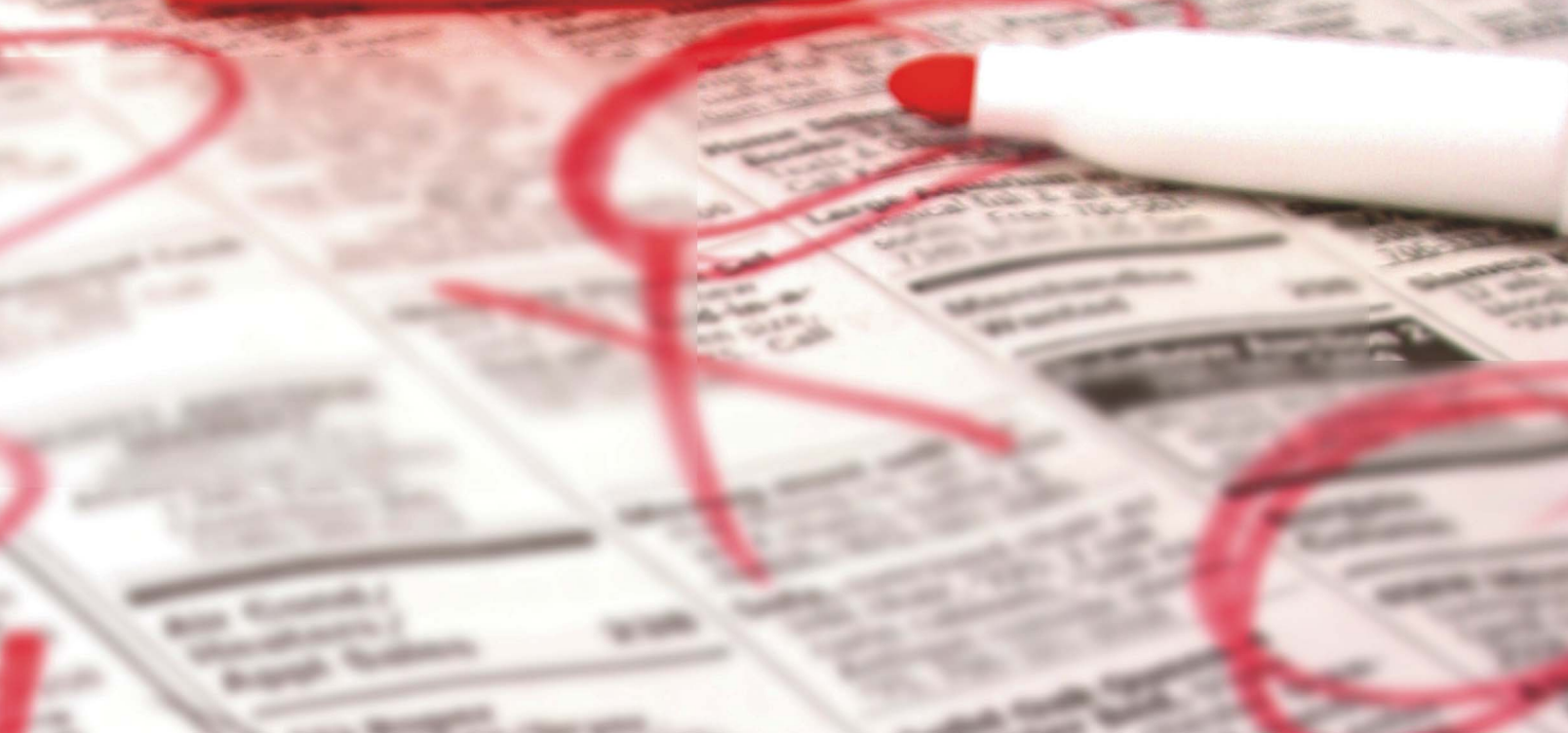
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Describe what makes you or your company an Innovator:

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Type of remodeling: (check all that apply)

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Full-service | <input type="checkbox"/> Insurance    | <input type="checkbox"/> Exterior    |
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Name: 

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Send this nomination form to:

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# IF IT DOESN'T CRACK LIKE A DUCT...

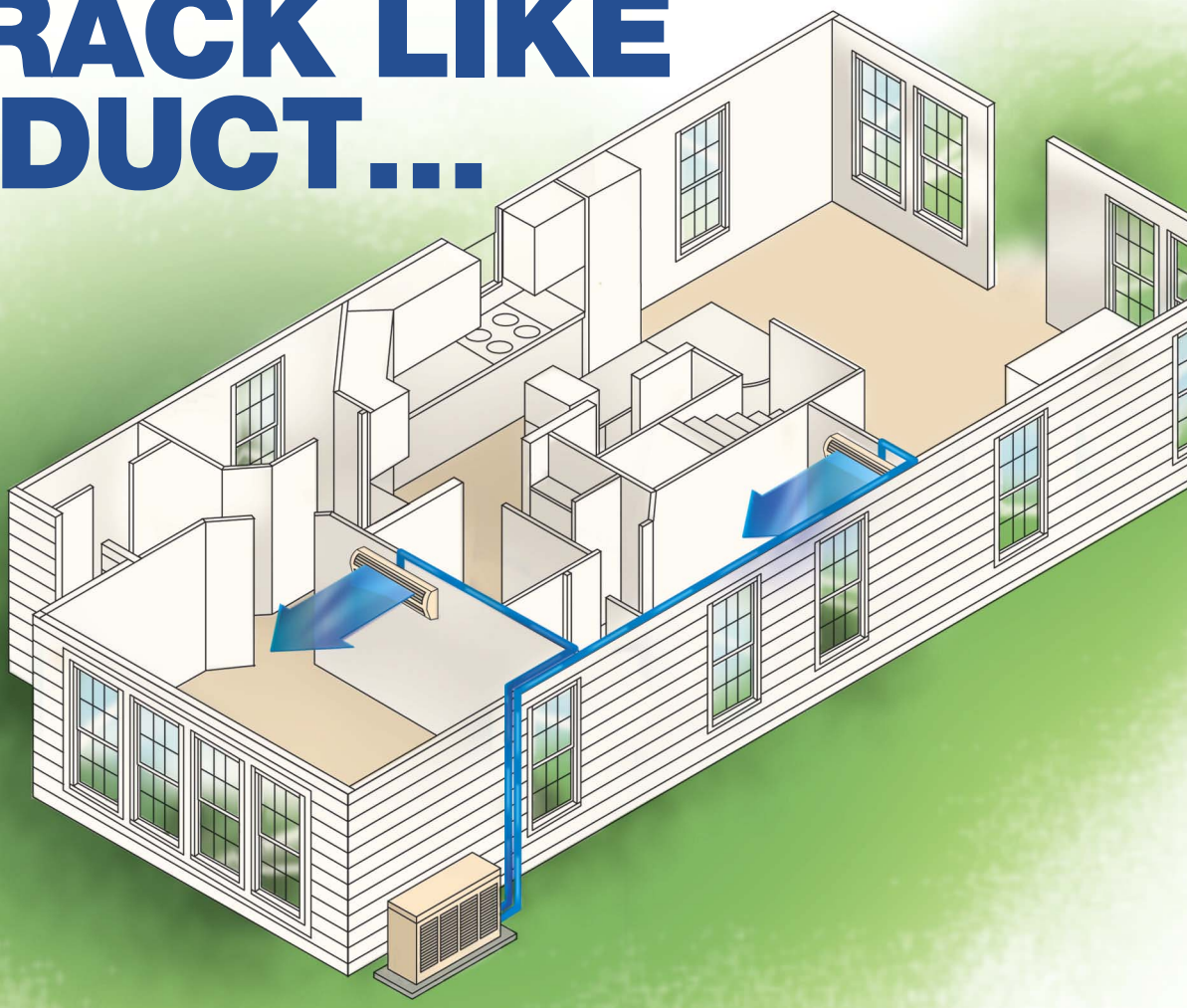


ILLUSTRATION BY TOM RYBARCZYK

## Ductless mini-split heat pumps make HVAC retrofits easy

By Glen Salas  
PATH Partners

**DUCTLESS MINI-SPLIT HEAT PUMP** systems provide an excellent way to heat and cool a room addition, a basement remodel or even a small home. They combine the flexibility of room air conditioners with the efficiency and comfort of central HVAC systems, and they don't require ductwork, which makes remodeling quicker, easier

and less intrusive.

Your client will also be pleased with the overall aesthetics compared to window units, because you won't need to block windows.

"Wherever a conventional system can't easily go, we use ductless mini-split heat pumps," says Donnie Potter of Potter

**The mini-split system allows the homeowner to heat or cool select rooms within the house rather than the entire house.**

Heating & Electric in Waldorf, Md.

S.D. Lohr, an award-winning remodeling firm in Waldorf, Md, uses mini-splits in single room additions and sunrooms.



IMAGES COURTESY OF PATH PARTNERS



**In-room air handlers can be mounted almost anywhere. The wall-mounted units above and to the right are easy to install and maintain.**

"They are cost-effective to put in and clients love them," says Tina Lohr, co-owner.

### How They Work

Mini-split systems — so named because small indoor units are located in each room or zone — operate like conventional heat pumps with outdoor condensing units and indoor fan coils. With mini-splits, refrigerant is piped directly from the outdoor unit through small-diameter insulated refrigerant lines. It goes to an individual evaporator unit and air handler mounted in the room that you're cooling or heating. A quiet fan blows the indoor air across the cooled or heated coil and then directly into the room. Each room or zone has its own thermostat.

With a conventional heat pump, refrigerant lines run from the outdoor condensing unit to a central indoor evaporator coil, where the air is heated or cooled. The conditioned air is then distributed through ductwork branched off to various rooms, which may or may not have separate zone controls.

In the mini-split system, the refrigerant



lines that run to each fan coil unit take up much less room than typical ducts, which makes installation easy in a retrofit.

### Where They're Used

At first, ductless mini-split heat pumps were installed primarily for cooling. Now they often provide heating for year-round comfort.

And like conventional units, it is important to size mini-splits appropriately.

"We always do the Manual J [Air Conditioning Contractors of America's residential HVAC Manual J load calculation] for the whole house," says Lohr. "If the existing system can't handle the new load, we'll replace the whole thing and size it appropriately if that makes economic sense. If the existing HVAC is new and working well, we'll use the ductless mini-split for the addition."

Coleman & Laurienzo Builders, of Damascus, Md., uses ductless mini-split heat pump systems in its Classic Addition (profiled in *Professional Remodeler* January 2008). The mini-split is a small, quiet and easy-to-install HVAC system that is compatible with the packaged approach Coleman & Laurienzo uses when adding great rooms.

Ductless mini-split heat pump systems are increasingly versatile. Mitsubishi now supplies a system in which one outdoor unit can service up to four zones.

"This system is good to use in multiple rooms when installing ductwork is not possible," says Potter. "Take for instance a small beach house on a slab with a too-small attic. An air handler can be installed in each room of the house. And no ducts."

### Installation and Operation

Ductless heat pumps are installed using conventional methods for heat pumps and air conditioners. Unlike ducts, which are bulky and require special structural consideration, split-system piping can often be routed through walls and joists. Just make sure to insulate both service lines.

The indoor air handling unit can be installed on the wall, flush-mounted or suspended from the ceiling. Ductless units are



easily connected by refrigerant lines running through a small opening in the wall or ceiling.

"It's pretty quiet anyway, but one of the great things is that you can move the outside unit away from the building if noise is an issue," says Lohr.

With a minimum SEER of 13 and a minimum HSPF of 7.7, split systems are also an energy-efficient choice, especially when you consider that many systems far exceed those minimums. According to Potter, all Mitsubishi ductless heat pump systems two tons or less are 16-17 SEER. Also, system energy losses are lower because distribution takes place through insulated refrigeration lines rather than ductwork (which is often leaky and can account for a third of the energy usage for heating and cooling). According to the NAHB Research Center, distribution energy losses in conventional systems have been as high as 30 percent, while distribution losses for ductless systems are about one to five percent. And because each zone has its own thermostat, occupants can modify temperatures in a particular part of the house. The ability to control each zone separately can also lower your clients' energy bills.

**The outdoor unit is slim and requires minimal ground or service clearance and can be installed wherever it is convenient for the remodeler and the homeowner.**

#### What's the Price?

The cost of ductless heat pumps has declined as the technology has become more established in the market. The NAHB Research Center's 2004 poll of ductless heat pump suppliers showed material costs for ductless heat pumps between \$500 and \$900 per ton, depending on the type of system and the number of zones desired per unit. S.D. Lohr's systems generally cost about \$2,500 installed for a 1½ ton system.

"When you include the cost of ducts, the ductless heat pumps are always less expensive than the alternative — and quicker to install," says Potter. **PR**

*Glen Salas 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](http://www.pathnet.org).*

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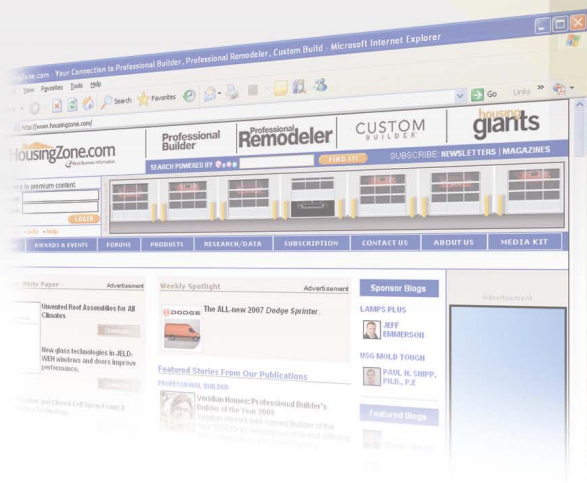


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# HOW TO SPEC TOILETS

## Water conservation and drought make a good toilet a must have

**T**he water supply system is under significant stress. Reservoirs and aquifers have limited capacity and are difficult to expand due to the cost and fragile ecosystems. Meanwhile, severe drought has expanded from the west (where it is a permanent condition) to the southeast. As temperatures rise and population swells, no region will be exempt from water shortages.

Conservation is the first line of defense against shortages, but it's also the prime directive in green building. What can a remodeler do? Spec a good toilet, because 30-40 percent of residential water is flushed down the drain.

The toilet market is divided into low-flow units rated at 1.28-1.6 gallons per flush (gpf) and high-efficiency toilets using less than 1.28 gpf. To earn EPA's WaterSense label, a toilet must use less than 1.28 gpf and clear at least 350 grams from the bowl. (After 2013, this will be the statewide standard in California.) However, the flushmark continues to drop. LEED for Homes grants 2 credits for toilets using 1.1 gpf or less.

Some plumbers worry that high-efficiency toilets don't generate enough hydraulic push to clear drainlines. Don't fret. Studies indicate they meet or exceed the waste carry requirements — even without supplemental flow

from showers, baths, or washers.

Here's a better arena for anxiety: Price isn't indicative of toilet quality. Furthermore, all high-efficiency toilets and WaterSense toilets — toilets the EPA labels as water-efficient — are not created equal. When overloaded, some toilets back up. Others routinely require two or more flushes to clear the bowl. You want a loo that flushes with the least amount of water.

Several years ago, the California Urban Water Conservation Council launched the Maximum Performance program to evaluate toilets. The protocol require researchers to flush toilet paper plus sausages of soybean paste, beginning with 250 grams and moving up in 50 gram increments until it takes a second flush to clear the bowl. Poor performers fail the 250 grams threshold, while the best whoosh down 1,000 grams. (The latter is overkill, because 99.5 percent of waste is less than 350 grams.)

### Supplemental Links:

[www.epa.gov/watersense/docs/het\\_suppstat508.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/watersense/docs/het_suppstat508.pdf)

[www.cuwcc.org/uploads/product/MaP-11thEdition-08-01-14.pdf](http://www.cuwcc.org/uploads/product/MaP-11thEdition-08-01-14.pdf)

[www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/toiletrebatelist.htm](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/toiletrebatelist.htm)

[www.epa.gov/watersense/pp/find\\_het.htm](http://www.epa.gov/watersense/pp/find_het.htm)

## Coming down the pipeline

**T**ypically, greywater systems reuse water from sinks, showers, dishwashers and washing machines — but not toilets. However, toilet tanks are an ideal receptacle for greywater. Sinkpositive replaces the lid of an ordinary toilet with a small sink that drains into the toilet. The AQUUS System, shown

at right, places a holding tank under an existing sink and then pumps discharge to the toilet tank. The Brac System is a whole house approach, recycling water from showers, tubs, and washing machines to toilets.

As water supply problems worsen, composting toilets — which are very different in smell

and mode of operation from the outhouse — may become as common in the U.S. as they are in Scandinavia, where the limitation is topsoil for leach fields.

### Links:

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

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

[AQUUS-Diagram.html](http://AQUUS-Diagram.html)

[www.bracsystems.com/home.html](http://www.bracsystems.com/home.html)

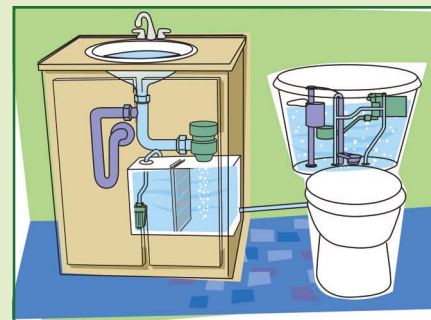
>> If you have ideas or comments, e-mail the author at [GreenRoomDept@mac.com](mailto:GreenRoomDept@mac.com)

## Two Sides of the Leak Issue

**J**ohn Koeller, the Conservation Council's toilet expert says, "Our studies have shown that toilet leaks are really nowhere near as much of a problem as they were 10 years ago." Why? Older toilets had a ball cock fill valve. With increased nighttime pressure in the municipal system, water slipped down the overflow tube. "This problem has been largely eliminated with the advent of the pilot valve in most gravity-fed toilets today."

But Terry Love, a Bellevue, Wash., plumber who has installed thousands of toilets, says some are more prone to leaks than others — and all will eventually leak, unless homeowners replace flappers and seals every five years or so. To prevent this, he suggests including a toilet section in the homeowner's maintenance manual — and be sure to spec the right parts.

Toilet technology is more complex than one might imagine, ranging from gravity-fed models that dominate the market to pressure-assist, dual flush and flushometers. Love prefers gravity-fed models, the easiest to repair.



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF WATERSAVER TECHNOLOGIES



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Andy Wells, Jack Steindl and Reg Marzec  
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# The Winner's Circle

## OUR INAUGURAL BEST IN CLASS KITCHEN & BATH SURVEY REPORTS ON WHAT BRANDS REMODELERS ARE USING

**THE 2008 BEST IN CLASS KITCHEN & BATH** survey rated brand awareness, uses and preferences of the top remodeling industry manufacturers and their products. The respondents were randomly selected from *Professional Remodeler's* readership and completed our survey via e-mail between December 2007 and January 2008. We had 493 responses, with many (172) who reported working both residential and commercial remodeling jobs. Architects and residential kitchen and bath specialists made up 11 percent of the pool. Interestingly, most of our respondents reported as heads of their company and many — 76 percent — have been in business for 10 or more years.

For each product category, respondents were presented with a list of brands and manufacturer names and were asked three questions:

1. Of the [product] brands/manufacturers listed, which are you aware of?
2. Which of these [product] brands/manufacturers has your company used in the past 18 months?
3. Which one is your preferred brand/manufacturer of [product]?

Though remodeling jobs span across all price points and tastes, there is a tendency to see high-end names like Kohler, Moen, GE and Delta among the first when it comes to awareness and use. Those companies, based on our results, seem to do the best job of sticking in our heads when it comes to making product choices.

Merillat and Kraftmaid continue to be top companies for kitchens and bathrooms. In the past year, both have released upgrades such as roll-out trays, self-closing hinges and durable protective finishes.

Synthetic marble maker Corian and laminate producer Formica each share the same numbers in awareness and nearly the same in use. However, it seems our installers prefer to work with Corian. Engineered stone producer Silestone, while neck-and-neck in awareness and use, outranks acrylic solid surface maker Wilsonart.

Stainless steel is king in appliances. GE, which casts the widest net, also carries the widest cachet. Whirlpool and SubZero, interestingly, are within the sampling margin of error between each other in the field, despite the fact that they tend to cover different market segments.

Attachments, especially those integrated into the faucet itself, are in, and remodelers are using Moen, with its ChoiceFlow system and Kohler, with its integrated pull-down options. For those who find themselves under the sink, Delta's new Diamond water delivery system may help it move up a notch for next year's survey.

It is effectively a four-way tie in bathroom faucets in awareness. Out of the pack, Kohler carries use and preference, but not by much. **PR**

### Best in Class Survey Results

	Aware	Used (Past 18 mos.)	Prefer
<b>Cabinets</b>			
Kraftmaid	89%	43%	23%
Merillat	77%	28%	14%
Aristokraft	75%	18%	4%
American Woodmark	60%	16%	4%
<b>Countertops &amp; Surfaces</b>			
Corian	96%	61%	28%
Silestone	81%	40%	19%
Formica	96%	59%	10%
Wilsonart	87%	42%	8%
<b>Kitchen Appliances</b>			
GE	96%	70%	24%
KitchenAid	96%	58%	14%
SubZero	92%	48%	12%
Whirlpool	93%	48%	9%
<b>Kitchen Sinks</b>			
Kohler	96%	73%	40%
American Standard	94%	51%	10%
Moen	83%	39%	7%
Delta	81%	36%	5%
<b>Kitchen Faucets</b>			
Kohler	96%	67%	25%
Moen	96%	65%	21%
Delta	96%	59%	13%
American Standard	91%	43%	6%
<b>Bathroom Sinks</b>			
Kohler	95%	75%	65%
American Standard	94%	55%	15%
Elkay	74%	23%	5%
Sterling	53%	14%	2%
<b>Tubs/Whirlpools</b>			
Kohler	92%	55%	38%
Jacuzzi	94%	46%	29%
American Standard	90%	37%	7%
Lasco	50%	17%	7%
<b>Toilets</b>			
Kohler	98%	75%	47%
Toto	64%	40%	24%
American Standard	96%	61%	19%
Sterling	50%	10%	2%
<b>Bathroom Faucets</b>			
Kohler	96%	67%	29%
Moen	96%	64%	23%
Delta	95%	57%	15%
American Standard	94%	49%	6%



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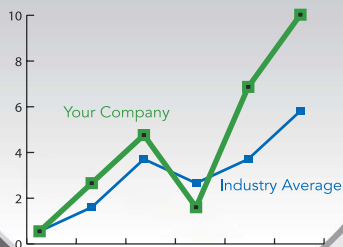
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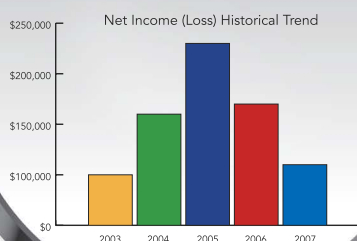
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## Industry Intelligence

Overviews and analysis from industry experts





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## BOSCH

The new CS5 circular saw by Bosch is designed to be a work-horse tool for framers, roofers, deck builders and remodelers. The CS5 also features a left-facing blade for better visibility and line of sight. It features a 15-amp motor that delivers 6,200 RPM — more than enough guts to cut through 3/4-inch plywood and other dense materials.

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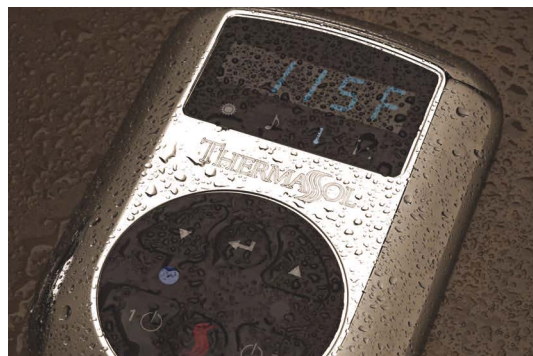
Created in conjunction with Robert A. M. Stern Design, the Building Blox collection of porcelain tiles made by Crossville features three patterns and a coordinating solid, all of which are available in nine colors. The tile may be used in multiple size, color and pattern combinations for floors, countertops, backsplashes or floor-to-ceiling rooms of tile.

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## THERMASOL

Features precise temperature adjustment, variable session times, sound system volume control, chromatherapy and two user presets when used with the Serenity Light and Music System. The Signature Series Controls by ThermaSol are made in traditional and contemporary styles. The Contemporary Series (shown) is made for modern, Euro-style or transitional fixtures.

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## QUALITY CABINETS

Citing a homeowner trend toward dark, bolder colors, Quality Cabinets has introduced two finishes that offer a new level of refinement and design sense to the line. Espresso for Oak cabinets and Dulce for Maple have brown hues with black overtones. While not offered as glazes, the Espresso and Dulce are available on all Quality Cabinets and Designer series cabinets offered in Oak and Maple.

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## WOLF DISTRIBUTING CO.

Part of its exclusive Palette Collection, the new kitchen countertops from Wolf Distributing Co. includes a line of ¾-inch natural stone kitchen countertops. The countertops are available for immediate delivery in three natural granite colors and five different profiles. The company also added a line of laminate countertops with 69 colors and two profiles.

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## LENNOX HEARTH PRODUCTS

A new addition to Lennox Hearth Products' catalytic vent-free gas fireplaces is The Elite Series. The fireplace is a smaller version of the current product line, measuring 23 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inches wide by 27 inches tall and only 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ -inches deep. The fireplace is designed to hang flat on a wall, making it ideal for contemporary living spaces, high-rises, lofts or any place where a chimney is not available.

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## CIFIAL

The statuesque Brookhaven L-Spout Series by Cifial is well-suited for those with universal design concerns. The crown lever handles of the L-Spout Series are easily turned on and off with minimal effort for those with limited range of motion or who are suffering from arthritis.

The series is available in eight finishes in three-hole wide-spread, wall mount and vessel bowl filler.

**For FREE information, visit**  
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## GE

Available in June, GE's tankless gas water heater is able to fit into some tight spots. Manufactured in both outdoor and indoor models, the tankless gas water heaters have a compact footprint (23 inches high by 14 inches wide and 10 inches deep) and are a mere 50 pounds. A 7.5-gallon-per-minute flow is available in natural gas; the 9.4-gallon-per-minute flow is available in natural gas or LP gas.

**For FREE information, visit**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5658-138>



## LINEAR

HD fans need to look no further. Linear's new HDTV line offers both high-definition audio and video switching and amplifier products. Highlighting the product line is a 4 by 4 matrix device that allows you to view any four HDMI sources on four video displays. Switchers include 3 by 1, 4 by 1, 2 by 2, 2 by 4, and 4 by 2 configurations. Accessories include boosters for enhancing the video signals over long runs.

**For FREE information, visit** <http://pr.ims.ca/5658-140>





## AMARR

In addition to adding four new stamped-steel carriage house designs to the Classica Collection, Amarr has now added the first color to the line, Sandstone. The new Classica models include the Northampton, a recessed panel design, and the Edinburgh, which is based on a distinctive herringbone pattern. The new designs are made in 28- and 32-inch section heights with decorative window and hardware options.

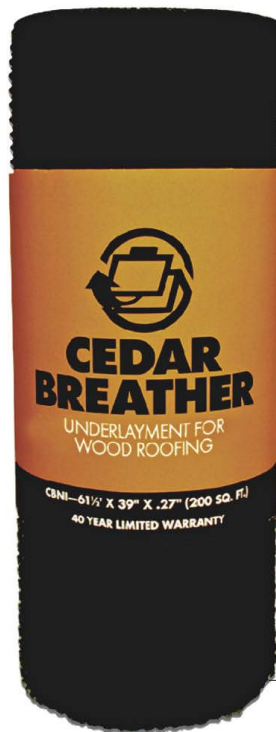
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## SEMCO

Built specifically for replacement applications, Semco's pocket double-hung replacement windows add visual appeal, save money on energy and bring convenience to a home. These modern windows fit right into existing frames. They can be cleaned on both sides from inside the house, and the extruded aluminum exteriors are stronger than roll-formed aluminum.

**For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5658-143>**



## BENJAMIN OBDYKE

Designed to preserve the staying power of wood roofing, Benjamin Obdyke's Cedar Breather is a fire-resistant underlayment for wood shingles and shakes that provides a space for continuous air flow between the solid roof deck and the shingles. This eliminates excess moisture and allows the underside of the shingles to dry. It can be rolled out over standard 30-pound felt without using any special tools.

**For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5658-142>**



## GREEN RIVER/BLACK HAWK

The Reserve Collection by Green River and Black Hawk offer natural cedar shingles made with Cedar Plus, a fire retardant. Hand-split, re-sawn and taper-sawn shakes are available in 24- and 18-inch lengths in  $\frac{7}{8}$ -,  $\frac{3}{4}$ - and 1-inch or greater thicknesses and random widths. Both companies used a variety of carbon-offsetting means to offer the products as "Carbon Neutral."

**For FREE information, visit <http://pr.ims.ca/5658-144>**



## OLDCASTLE ARCHITECTURAL

The latest addition to the Belgard Environmental series' line of permeable concrete products from Oldcastle Architectural is the Subterra Stone. Whereas traditional paver products merely allow water to run-off, Subterra uses a 9.5 percent void ratio, allowing rainwater to naturally drain through the paver into native sub soils — reducing the impact on the environment and storm water management systems while re-charging local aquifers.

**For FREE information, visit** <http://pr.ims.ca/5658-145>



## SHAKERTOWN

Western red cedar shingle siding scores points in both aesthetics and natural weather resistance. Shakertown's Rain Screen technology aids in the weathering department on the Craftsman One-Course cedar shingle panels. The panels are manufactured 8 feet long and are available in a 7-inch exposure size with a full plywood back, a thick  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch shingle butt and overlapping end-joints.

**For FREE information, visit**  
<http://pr.ims.ca/5658-147>



## WEATHER SHIELD

Casing options have been added to Weather Shield's Collections, Legacy and HR 175 product lines. The new one-piece casing profiles include 2-inch brick mold,  $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch Washington casing and 2-inch stucco mold made in customizable widths and two thicknesses. The two-piece systems include six flat casing and nine back band options.

**For FREE information, visit**  
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## SIMPSON DOOR CO.

A new choice offered by Simpson Door Co. on their French doors is the Water-Barrier Technology, the newest innovation from the company's Performance Series of weather-related products. The doors combine one-piece medium density overlay (MDO) and PVC sticking on the outside of the door to stop water from getting in.

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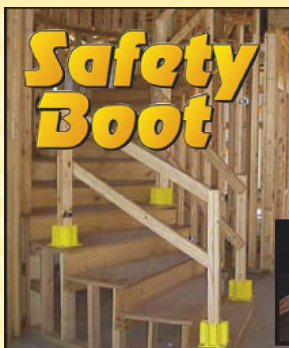
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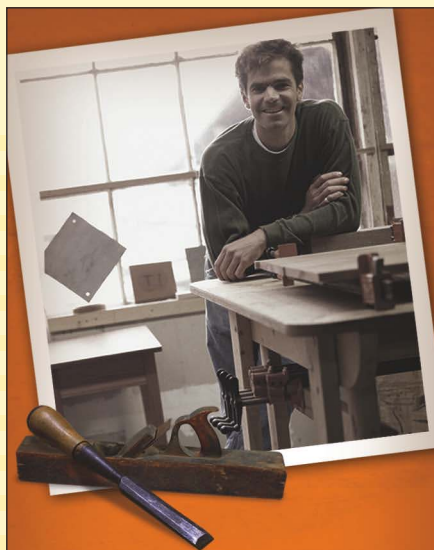
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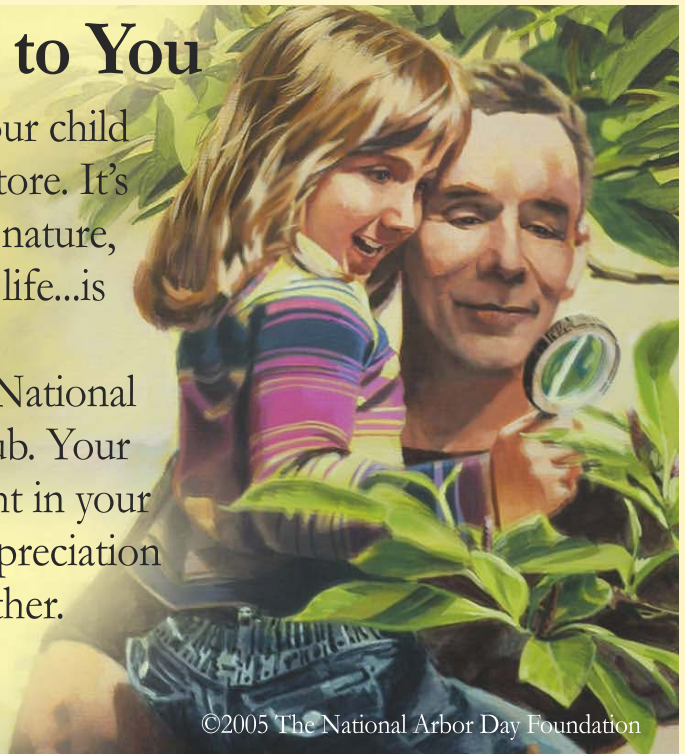
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## OVERCOME YOUR NETWORKING FEARS

**Y**ou are a highly sophisticated, well-adjusted grown-up who has generally been around the block a few times and can handle just about whatever life

throws your way. So why is it that the thought of networking, a thing so vital to your career, sounds about as good as finding a seat in the high school cafeteria? Networking is wonderful. Repeat after me: networking is wonderful. And you, too, can do it.

Networking events are really just big parties. There's usually good food, maybe a little wine, a host who wants to make you feel very welcome and a bunch of people who need to talk to a bunch of other people. It's a myth that you need to have a perfected elevator pitch or that you need to hand out 10 business cards a minute. Just like Mr. Studly in high school, all that anyone will remember of you is that you came on too strong. Relax. Breathe. And once you feel centered, here are a couple of other tips:

**1:** Like all good social events, it's always handy to have a wing man. See if someone else from your firm can join you. Often the event is free so it's no added expense, but it is double the exposure and always gives you someone to talk to.

**2:** A day ahead of time, e-mail the event organizer and ask for the RSVP list. Let them know you are using this event to network and it would be really helpful to see who else is going to be there so you can make the best of your night. This is a wonderful two-fold

opportunity. You can see if the crowd is a good fit for your business beforehand and you can determine the four or five people you really need to connect with to make the night a success.

**3:** Watch out for the hold-on-talkers. One way some have learned to cope with a networking event is to find one friendly face and talk to that person for the whole night. Lose that guy. Nine times out of 10 he's not even remotely related to your business nor is he going to help you meet anyone else.

**4:** Figure out who you know and have them introduce you to who they know. Unlike high school, where if you went up to a group of girls and stood next to them for a few minutes they would continue to ignore your presence, at a networking event, the group has to open up and include you in the conversation. If you see someone you know talking to someone else, go stand next to him or her. They'll open up the circle to include you.

**5:** Enter the fray. Walk directly to the bar, not to pepper your nerves with alcohol, but the line at the bar is one of the best places to start up a conversation. Usually someone in front of or behind

you is alone and looking for conversation, too. And, you don't have to talk business.

**6:** Yes it might be good to have a few snippets about who you are and what you do, but, honestly, don't you remember that funny guy who told the story about hitting a tree on his latest ski trip? You know, the guy who owns a condo at the same mountain your family has been going to for years? It's really nice to fill your world with familiar faces and friends.

**7:** Once you meet someone, introduce that person to someone else. You'll be surprised at how quickly people will describe you as the person everyone knows.

And that is the key to visibility and successful networking. Networking isn't about how many business cards you get out in a night; it's about increasing your circle of friends, one person at a time. Wouldn't it have been nice if there were someone to do this for us in high school? **PR**

*Allison Perry Iantosca is vice president of marketing and sales for F.H. Perry Builder, a preeminent custom builder and remodeler in the Boston market. She can be reached at [aiantosca@fhperry.com](mailto:aiantosca@fhperry.com).*



By Allison P. Iantosca  
Advisory Board  
Columnist

**"One way some have learned to cope with a networking event is to find one friendly face and talk to that person for the whole night. Lose that guy."**

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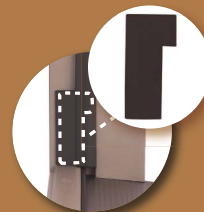
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