

# Professional Remodeler®

SEPTEMBER 2008

CHALLENGING THE INDUSTRY'S BEST

## The Deepest Cut

**MAKING THE  
TOUGH DECISIONS  
ON LAYOFFS / 17**

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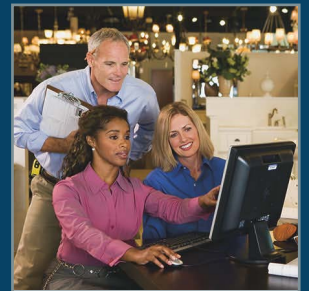
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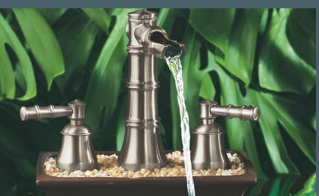


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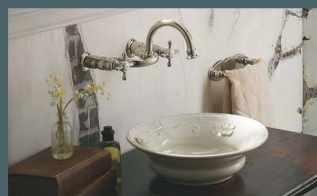
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VOLUME 12 NUMBER 9



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# ProRemodeler.com

### Navigating the Downturn

Download an archived replay of our FREE interactive August Webcast, featuring three of the No. 1 volume remodeling companies in their respective markets. You'll hear Market Leaders and industry experts Sal Ferro from Alure Home Improvements in Long Island, N.Y.; Gary Marrokal from Marrokal Construction in San Diego; and Andy Wells from Normandy Builders in



Chicago discuss the strategies they've implemented to help them stay on top of cash flow, target the right customers, improve closing ratios and more. Learn just how these industry leaders and their management teams are directing their firms through the difficult economic times that have hit the remodeling industry in 2008. Register at [www.ProRemodeler.com/Webcast](http://www.ProRemodeler.com/Webcast).

### Looking for Young Leaders

We're searching for the people who will be setting the agenda for the remodeling industry for the next decade and beyond. Nominate someone at [www.ProRemodeler.com](http://www.ProRemodeler.com).

### Remodeling Notes

Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet posts the latest news and views from the remodeling industry several times a week.  
[www.ProRemodeler.com/Sweet](http://www.ProRemodeler.com/Sweet)

### ONLINE POLL

## Have you laid off any employees in 2008?

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





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## staff

### EDITOR IN CHIEF

**Michael R. Morris**  
630/288-8057; michael.morris@reedbusiness.com

### SENIOR EDITOR

**Jonathan Sweet**  
630/288-8170; jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com

### MANAGING EDITOR

**Judi Damm**  
630/288-8193; judi.damm@reedbusiness.com

### ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR

**Sara Zailskas**  
630/288-8197; sara.zailskas@reedbusiness.com

### PRODUCTS EDITOR

**Nick Bajzek**  
630/288-8187; nicholas.bajzek@reedbusiness.com

### SENIOR EDITOR, E-MEDIA

**Mark Jarasek**  
630/288-8171; mark.jarasek@reedbusiness.com

### SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

**Wendy A. Jordan, Ann Matesi**

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

**Doug Dwyer, Jud Motsenbocker, Tom Swartz, Alison P. Iantosca, Paul Winans**

### EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

**Paul Deffenbaugh**

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR

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### DIRECTOR OF EVENTS

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### VICE PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHING DIRECTOR BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION GROUP

**Julian Francis**

### PUBLISHER

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### SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

#### Customer Service, Reed Business Information

8778 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80126  
Phone: 800/446-6551, Fax: 303/470-4280  
subsmail@reedbusiness.com

### CEO, REED BUSINESS INFORMATION

**Tad Smith**

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## THIS LIST WILL BLOW YOUR MIND

Change. There's a whole generation of remodelers (and doctors and lawyers ... and, yes, editors too) who fight it at every turn. But instead of climbing up on my soapbox and preaching that you should get on board with the concept of change, I'm going to share something with you that has helped me adjust my thinking over many years of rapid change in the journalism profession.

It's called the Mindset List. Every August since 1998, two professors at Beloit College in Wisconsin put together a list of cultural statements that can be made about the students entering college that year. For me as a business journalist, it's a reminder of the constantly changing frame of reference that my audience and their customers are undergoing.

Here is a sample of this year's list (the entire list can be found at [www.beloit.edu/mindset/](http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/)):

- GPS systems have always been available.
- Coke and Pepsi have always used recycled plastic bottles.
- Shampoo and conditioner have always been available in the same bottle.
- Electronic filing of tax returns has always been an option.

- The Warsaw Pact is as hazy for them as the League of Nations was for their parents.

- Employers have always been able to do credit checks on employees.

- Clarence Thomas has always sat on the Supreme Court.

- IBM has never made typewriters.

- They have never been able to color a tree using a raw umber Crayola.

- There has always been Pearl Jam.

- "The Tonight Show" has always been hosted by Jay Leno and started at 11:35 EST.

- They may have been given a Nintendo Game Boy to play with in the crib.

- Macaulay Culkin has always been "Home Alone."

- Caller ID has always been available on phones.

- They never heard an attendant ask, "Want me to check under the hood?"

- Iced tea has always come in cans and bottles.

- The Hubble Space Telescope has always

been eavesdropping on the heavens.

- And Sammy Davis Jr., Jim Henson and Stevie Ray Vaughan have always been dead.

So take a look at the complete list online (it won't hurt!) and reconsider the times. It just may help you cope, as it has me, with these changing times and their impact on your business. **PR**



**Michael R. Morris**  
Editor in Chief

**As a business journalist, it's a reminder of the constantly changing frame of reference that my audience and their customers are undergoing.**


**>> Contact me at [michael.morris@reedbusiness.com](mailto:michael.morris@reedbusiness.com) or 630/288-8057**

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## Our Mission

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## POSITION YOURSELF AS A COMPETITIVE LEADER

Last year, I had the opportunity to attend the Franchise Mini MBA program at Nova Southeastern University. During the three-day course, one of the topics that really stood out to me was the “Three Strategic Areas of Focus” related to creating value for customers. These three strategic areas of focus — product leadership, operational excellence and customer intimacy — are known as the Value Disciplines, a concept developed by Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema.

So, why is understanding this model important to your business? As you know, understanding where your business is positioned in today’s competitive landscape is important to knowing where your business will be tomorrow. By gaining a better understanding of what makes your business superior, you will be a more effective leader and will be able to better strategically plan for the future.

To help you understand the concept, I found the following definitions from the book “Strategic Thinking: An Executive Perspective” by Cornelius DeKluyver, to be helpful.

- Product Leadership is when “companies typically produce a steady stream of state-of-the-art products and services ... by offering more value and better solutions.”
- Operational Excellence is “a strategic approach aimed at better production and delivery mechanisms.”
- Customer Intimacy “concentrates on building customer loyalty.”

It is suggested that most successful companies stand out in one of the value disciplines — either accidentally or intentionally. While it is challenging to be superior in two of the three disciplines, it is nearly impossible to be superior in all three. Every business, including yours and mine, should strive to be competitive in two of these disci-

plines and superior in one.

To give you a better idea of which value discipline applies to your business, I’d like to define how this might apply to the remodeling industry. Let’s first look at product leadership. This discipline would apply to a remodeling firm focused on cutting-edge innovations, such as incorporating the latest green remodeling products or the newest cabinetry technology into a project. This is a remodeler who is willing to embrace new concepts, try new things and be the first to market. This organization is not afraid to stretch beyond the norm to create an entirely new system or process. Leadership within this firm is willing to embrace new concepts.

A remodeler who focuses on operational excellence might be one who focuses on a niche, such as pull-and-replace bathroom packages. This type of organization does minimal, if any, design/build work, but rather focuses on quick and simple production work. This remodeler has strong systems in place for an efficient operation while offering a limited selection of standardized remodeling options that make the buying experience easier on the client. In new construction, operational excellence of this type would be known as the track home building concept, which can be a very effective strategy.

The third discipline, customer intimacy, would apply to a remodeler who focuses on putting the customer’s long-term relationship above everything else. This might be a remodeler who takes

special care to keep the client’s house clean or who spends extra time finding the exact product a customer requests to ensure complete customer satisfaction. This type of organization might send birthday, holiday or project anniversary cards to the client, as well as

follow up with customer satisfaction calls or surveys and a remarketing program. An organization focusing on customer intimacy knows exactly what each customer wants and accommodates accordingly, employing the philosophy of “customers for life.” Many design/build firms fall into this category.

Is your remodeling business focused on product leadership, operational excellence or customer intimacy? As you can see, it can be quite easy to identify where your organization excels within the remodeling industry. By understanding this, you can double-check your current and future goals to make sure they are in line with your value discipline.

I encourage you to set a reminder to review the disciplines periodically and to stretch your team to focus on one primary discipline. This will help you better position your remodeling business as the competitive leader in your market and gain more traction. **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

**Understanding where your business is positioned in today’s competitive landscape is important to knowing where your business will be tomorrow.**

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

# young leaders

call for nominations

## ***Professional Remodeler* is looking for the next generation of leaders.**

The January issue of *Professional Remodeler* will feature the **Young Leaders** — those people **under 40** who will be setting the agenda for the remodeling industry for the next decade and beyond.

To submit your nomination, please complete the form at right and fax this page to 630-288-8145 or e-mail the information to Senior Editor Jonathan Sweet at [jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com](mailto:jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com).

**Deadline: November 3, 2008**

**Professional  
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Describe what makes the nominee a **Young Leader**:

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Nominated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of nominee: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's title: \_\_\_\_\_

Nominee's company: \_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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## BALANCE: THE KEY TO THE SALES AND MARKETING BUDGETING PROCESS

I met a girlfriend for lunch the other day. We had both just finished with client meetings and it was an idyllic late summer, New England afternoon, so we sat outside. We sipped from tall glasses of iced tea, wore colorful but tailored clothes, and both had recent pedicures. It all felt very “Sex and the City” until we hugged goodbye and headed off in our minivans to collect our kids, our dogs and our dry cleaning. This is my life, and I love it. Balance. It’s how I can be “Sex and the City” and Mega Mom within the same day. And it’s how I can be in charge of both sales and marketing for my company.

Much like the juxtaposition of my personal life, my sales role and my marketing role don’t necessarily go hand in hand. It took me awhile to figure this out; I constantly and consistently hear “sales and marketing” in the same breath — especially in small companies. Sales though is more like the “mom” role. It needs to be disciplined, consistent and concerned, always looking ahead to make sure everyone is going to be fed and helping everyone set realistic goals so they aren’t disappointed. Marketing on the other hand, is “Sex and the City:” fun, colorful, spend-thrift, sexy, enticing.

Given that so many of us are asked to manage both sales and marketing, when it comes time to budget, how do we align the two? In my firm, we operate on the calendar year. Come late August, our controller hands me big sheets of paper with lines and dollar signs, but no amounts. The sticky note attached reads, “Please prepare budget projections. We’ll meet in a month to review. Let me know if you have any questions.” Questions? Yes, I have questions. It’s August; how do I think about January? I’m still trying to wrangle in another lead to make this year’s

projections and now I have to think about next year? I had a dream about an F.H. Perry Builder blimp flying over Fenway Park; can I up the marketing budget?

Balance. Sales first. Nothing can happen without sales. Thinking about January and February in August and September is a terrific way to figure out what current projects are going to carry us into the New Year. I can trend out potential change orders, think about current leads in the shoot and see us solidly through the first quarter. For the rest of the year, I try to think about trends. When do leads typically come in? What kinds of projects do we typically attract? What revenues have we achieved in past years? Then I put the dream cap on to stretch the possibilities. What revenue projections do we dare think about knowing what the backlog looks like? What leads can become projects? What dream project can we add to the list? Balance: a combination of in-the-bank work and reasonable dreaming.

With this balanced sales budget in hand, it’s much easier to then align the marketing budget. Based on a consistent brand, the audience we want to reach, and the dream projects, I can think about how to mete out marketing dollars to achieve sales goals. Much like developing the sales budget, my marketing budget always starts off with the same foundation: plugging in what has always worked.

Next, I add what I have already promised to advertising sales reps for the coming year. Lastly, I dust off my trusty dream-cap again and add in a few, perhaps wild ideas should the

money tree be particularly fruitful next year. I never want to cut back on a marketing plan entirely if times are tough, but I like to know what’s first to go because it was only a wild idea anyway. My self-check in the end is making sure my marketing budget is roughly 1 percent to 2 percent of my sales budget. This percentage is an industry standard and has been a pretty typical ratio for us in the past few years.

Luckily, for me, one doesn’t need a finance MBA to create these budgets. In fact, it’s probably better that I don’t have this education because then I might discount gut, intuition and dreams. It’s

also good for my personal life: How could I be “Sex and the City” and Mega Mom without trusting these three things as well? And for the record, I don’t actually drive a minivan...yet. **PR**

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



Allison P. Iantosca  
Contributing Editor

**Given that so many of us are asked to manage both sales and marketing, when it comes time to budget, how do we align the two?**

**>> Coming in December: Stay on track with your sales and marketing plan in the New Year.**



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## Growing through acquisition

Like many remodeling firms, The Kanon Group not only has to worry about its financial future, but also that of its subcontractors.

So when one of its exterior subcontractors told President Greg Rittler that he was going to be shutting down, Rittler decided to buy his company. Rittler says the siding and roofing services the contractor offered would be a good way for his Towson, Md., design/build firm to diversify in the current downturn.

From working with him for 10 years, Rittler knew the sub did good work. The problem was simply having the business acumen to survive in the downturn.



"We're going to essentially put him back on his feet and have him run this part of the business," Rittler says.

The new division should help the company capture more business as homeowners turn to smaller projects, Rittler says. The company's average design/build job size was about \$100,000, but the average

exterior job is about \$10,000 to \$15,000.

"We think there's a nice market out there of people that need to do that roofing or siding replacement job but aren't looking for a large kitchen or addition," he says.

Kanon has added two new employees — one for roofing and one for siding — plus the former sub. The company will use subcontractors to meet any additional labor needs. This is similar to the model Kanon uses for its design/build projects.

Last year, the company had \$1.2 million in sales. Rittler says he expects the new division to add about \$1 million but that \$500,000 is probably more realistic for the first year.

>> 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).

## Beyond floor plans

John Mangan is always looking for ways to use technology to make his company run more efficiently.

That's what prompted Mangan, president of Mangan Group in Takoma Park, Md., to make the change from CAD to Building Information Modeling, or BIM. The difference is a "4-D" approach to design, Mangan says.

Revit from AutoDesk (the specific software the company uses) not only allows three-dimensional design, but also incorporates the time element into the plan. The software lays out exact times and dates for each stage of the project to create a realistic schedule.

The software also helps with optimizing designs. For example, by using GPS technology Mangan has been able to design projects to make the most of passive solar. By entering any date and the GPS coordinates, Mangan's designers can see what the angle of the sun will be on that day and plan accordingly.



RENDERING: COURTESY AUTODESK

### THE GREEN PIECE

## A new use for old materials

One of the biggest ways remodelers can make an impact on the environment is by reusing the materials they strip out of a home. That's where The ReUse People come in.

The ReUse People is a nonprofit firm dedicated to helping remodelers and homeowners reduce what gets dumped into landfills by salvaging building materials for reuse in low-income housing in the United States and Mexico.

The company does deconstruction only, no building or remodeling. About 95 percent of its business is residential with a small amount of commercial.

The contractors the company works with have found it to be a good sales tool, says President Ted Reiff. Not only do the homeowners get to feel good about helping the environment, they also get a tax deduction for the donated materials.

Reiff estimates that using deconstruction and salvaging the materials adds about 25 percent to the job time compared to simple demolition.

"It takes a little longer to take things out carefully, so there's an additional cost there, but that additional cost is made up by the tax deduction," Reiff says.

The group started as a temporary building materials drive in Southern California in 1993 after severe winter storms destroyed thousands of homes in Tijuana. After the success, the founders decided to make it a permanent effort. The ReUse People has since expanded to several locations in California, as well as Chicago; Boulder, Colo.; and Kansas City, Mo. The plan is to be in 20 to 25 major metro areas in the next few years, Reiff says.

For more information, visit [www.thereusepeople.org](http://www.thereusepeople.org).

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MAKING  
THE TOUGH  
DECISIONS  
ON LAYOFFS

# The Deepest Cut

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

IT'S A POSITION NO REMODELER WANTS to be in, but with a slipping economy and work dropping off, many owners are having to make the tough decision to lay off employees.

While it's not an easy call, deciding to let employees go may be the only way to survive the current downturn. Labor's the biggest expense for most companies but also their greatest assets. For remodeling company owners, it can be even harder to make these decisions. They aren't CEOs of large corporations letting 1,000 faceless employees go. In many cases, these are friends, people who are almost like family.

"The question is what's most important, and to me it's saving the entity, the business," says Jim Strite, president of Strite Design + Remodel in Boise, Idaho. "We have to make the decision: do we run a company

into the ground because we desire not to let anybody go, or is the goal to run a viable company so that when the market does turn around we provide an opportunity for those that were let go to come back?"

### MAKING THE CALL

One of the most difficult parts can be knowing when to make the decision to lay off employees. Is a downturn a temporary blip you can weather or is it a more serious problem that requires action?

For Strite, the answer became obvious this spring as leads dropped to 50 percent of the average. Those jobs that were coming in were much smaller than what the company had taken on before.

"Since we're an open-book company, it's a little bit easier because we share the numbers with the folks every week," Strite says.

It was at a weekly Thursday meeting earlier this year that the management team (made up of Strite, the office manager and the production manager) explained the situation to the employees and

**"The question is *what's most important*, and to me it's *saving the entity, the business.*"** — Jim Strite

asked for their suggestions by Monday on how to save money.

The team came up with several suggestions from reducing hours for all employees across the board to taking the water cooler out of the office. In the end, the management team opted to lay off three employees (a design assistant, a project manager and a field craftsman), cut the office work week from 40 to 32 hours and take a large salary cut themselves.

"The numbers tell a story, so we had to rebuild the budget for the year based on the number of calls we were getting and the close ratio," Strite says.

It was a similar situation that prompted Jason Kirkpatrick, president of Kirkpatrick Construction, to release two of his four lead carpenters this spring. While the Centreville, Va., firm usually has work lined up months ahead of time, the company was working almost week to week by this spring.

"For four months we had about five leads," Kirkpatrick says. "I used to go on five leads in one week. It was crazy."

Kirkpatrick decided he either had to put all four lead carpenters on a part-time schedule or let two go. He decided he was better off keeping his two best employees than trying to save everyone. Since then, things have turned around and the company is booking enough business to easily keep the two leads busy.

"I had to make a decision on how to keep my 'A' players," he says. "I didn't want to risk

## 5 TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL LAYOFFS

**A**ttorney Dan Levine specializes in labor and employment law for Shapiro, Blasi, Wasserman & Gora P.A., in Boca Raton, Fla., and has handled thousands of employment disputes.

He says that layoffs can be especially challenging for small businesses that don't have set policies for handling them. He recommends five things small businesses can do to avoid exposing themselves to legal and financial risk:

**1. Get a release** – The importance of getting the employee to sign a "release from all claims" during the termination process cannot be overstated. This document can help shield the business against future civil suits. However, companies need to make sure the release conforms with age discrimination guidelines.

**2. Offer a severance package** – It's a mistake to think that severance packages are only offered by big corporations to high-level executives. The reality is that any business can put together a reasonable severance package for its employees. These don't have to be expensive, and they can be tailored to any employee. Severance packages can go a long way in cooling off an angry or hostile former employee.

**3. Cut your losses** – Don't challenge unemployment claims. This mistake probably leads to the most revenge-motivated discrimination suits.

**4. Avoid the IC Mix-Up** – Know the legal definition of an independent contractor. An independent contractor may technically qualify as a company employee, which increases a company's liability when terminating them.

**5. Be Nice** – Generate goodwill on the way out. Pay for accrued vacation/sick time, company cell phone bills, etc. By being nice — even to those whom you feel don't deserve it — a company can avoid motivating an ex-employee to get even by filing a lawsuit, grievance or claim.

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losing them in an effort to keep everybody. I feel like I really made the right decision in doing what I did.”

While some companies are using the downturn to get rid of sub-par employees, Strite says it wasn’t easy to lose any of the team.

“All of them were key personnel, so we had to look at what would have the least impact on us,” he says. “It came down to whose work we could pick up with the remaining personnel.”

Remodeling Designs also took a business-based approach to deciding which employees to lay off when cuts became necessary last fall. After a record first six months of 2007, work vanished in the second half of the year, as the local Dayton, Ohio, economy was hurt by slowdowns at General Motors and in the mortgage industry. By the end of September, the company had to let five of its eight project managers go, most of them longterm employees.

The company chose which ones to lay off by looking at the gross profits of their jobs over the past year. The three with the highest job profitability kept their jobs.

**“The toughest part is you just worry about the guys putting food on the table and making ends meet.”** — Kelly Eggers

“It took the personal part of having to lay people off out of it,” says Vice President Kelly Eggers. “It made sense from a business perspective, and it reinforced with our project managers how important it is to be profitable on their jobs and to come in on time and on budget.”

The company has been able to bring back all but one of the project managers after work picked up earlier this year. (And that employee didn’t come back for non-economic reasons.) All along, Eggers believed the downturn would be temporary and wanted to take care of the employees during the time off. So Remodeling Designs continued to pay the health insurance for the employees and their families while they were out of work.

“I worried about their families, and I did not want them going without insurance,” she says. “I figured if I at least showed good faith and paid for their insurance, it gave them one less thing to worry about.”

Typically, the company pays 100 percent of the employees’ insurance and puts \$100 a paycheck toward the families’ coverage. Once the employees came back on board, Eggers set up a payment plan for them to pay back the family portion of insurance, which the company had covered at 100 percent during the layoff.

“These were all good employees and I wanted them all back, so we did what we could to help,” Eggers says.

That loyalty paid off for Eggers as employees turned down other job offers during the layoff so they could come back to Remodeling Designs when business picked up.

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY

However the decisions are made, making sure employees know the situation is important, for those who leave and those who remain.

That’s another advantage of an open-book approach, Strite says. When employees have been seeing the company numbers for years, they’re going to be more likely to trust the owner that there’s a problem.

“It’s important to keep everyone abreast of what’s going on,” he says. “Without clear communication, they start creating their own stories and spreading those stories, and that’s very difficult to turn around. Open communication cuts through all that talk.”

Kirkpatrick says he also tries to keep his team up to speed in weekly company meetings. Once he let the second lead go, the two remaining were understandably nervous.

“I just flat-out told them the truth,” he says. “I let them know where we were in the pipeline, that I was out there looking for jobs. The feedback that I got was that my guys really appreciated it.”

Communication is important not only with the employees, but also within the management team, Strite says. Whether it’s a team like his or a husband-wife team, having someone to talk the problems over with can be important.

“Remodelers want to please people, so letting people go isn’t easy,” Strite says. “You’ve asked them for dedication, and then to have to turn around and let them go is not a comfortable position.”

Kirkpatrick says that the feeling of failing his employees was the worst part of the experience.

“It’s my job to have work lined up and give them job security,” he says. “It was really hard, sitting in a company meeting Monday morning, telling guys we have no work for the week. I felt in some capacity that I somehow let my staff down.”

Eggers echoes that sentiment.

“These guys are like family,” she says.

“The toughest part is you just worry about the guys putting food on the table and making ends meet.” **PR**





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# Stepping Back

TAKING THE HARRELL OUT  
OF HARRELL REMODELING

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor



**EVERYBODY'S MORTAL, AND THE IDEA IS** not easy for most people to embrace. It's one of the reasons many remodelers don't have a succession plan in place.

Iris Harrell was no different. For years she didn't give much thought to more than the next year in her award-winning design/build firm.

"I finally have passed the test of realizing I'm not going to live forever," says the CEO of Harrell Remodeling. "There are 46 people whose lives are greatly affected by what happens to this company. What will they do if something happens to me?"

For Harrell, the answer has been an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), where a portion of company profits are used to purchase stock in the company every year. The company is currently 24 percent employee-owned, with a goal of 100 percent ownership in five years. The program helps to keep employees focused on profits, because the more profitable the company is, the faster it will become 100 percent employee-owned.

To participate in the ESOP, employees have to work at least 1,000 hours a year and have completed at least six months of service with the company. Shares are distributed proportionally based on an employee's wages. (There are several legal and business ramifications of an ESOP. For more information, visit [www.esopassociation.org](http://www.esopassociation.org) or [www.nceo.org](http://www.nceo.org).)

With no children to pass the business on to, Harrell and her partner (and former COO) Ann Benson wanted to see the company live beyond them.

"There's some ego involved," Harrell says. "I want to leave a legacy, to see this company go on to the next generation."

Although selling to a new owner was an option, Harrell says she wanted to make sure the company's culture was preserved and the current employees were rewarded for their years of work.

"I think the people who brought me here should be the ones who take it on further," she says.

## LETTING GO WITHOUT LEAVING

Implementing an ESOP has addressed the financial aspects of succession, but the task now is handling the human side of the transition.

Getting the right employees is important. When making hiring decisions, Harrell prefers to hire for a culture fit rather than construction skills, figuring those can be taught.

**Harrell Remodeling CEO Iris Harrell still loves what she does, but she wants to prepare the company to be successful without her day-to-day involvement.**

Over the next four or five years, the task is to groom the employees to take over. It will be made easier because of the presence of General Manager Ciro Giammona, who already handles much of the day-to-day management.

"He makes my life so much easier as CEO," Harrell says. "The staff in general is great. Any company would love to have these people."

Benson retired last year after her second stint with the company, but Harrell says she's in no hurry to retire. At the same time, she wants to prepare the company for life without her.

To that end, she's cut her time in the office to under 40 hours a week and doesn't come into the office on Fridays anymore. Next year, she's aiming for 32 hours a week and 27 or 28 in 2010.

"The reason is if I continue to be here all the time, they'll continue to look at me to make the decisions," Harrell says. "As long as I'm here 40 hours a week, people will think the ship can't run without me."

One of the biggest challenges for Harrell, she says, has been reducing her role in sales. Her role as the leading salesperson and the engine for growth in the company has been a source of pride for her for years. It still takes up about 25 percent of her time but is not the focus it once was. This year, Harrell says she'll account for about 10 percent of the company's projected \$10 million in sales. She plans to cut that to 5 percent next year and be totally out of sales in two years.

While still spending time on sales, Harrell now focuses on marketing. She writes columns for two local papers and, along with

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Harrell Remodeling**, Mountain View, Calif.

**CEO:** Iris Harrell

**Company focus:** Design/build

**2006 volume:** \$8.3 million

**2007 volume:** \$11,039,000

**Projected 2008 volume:** \$9.5 million to \$10 million

**Employees:** 46

**Founded:** 1985

**Biggest challenge:** Preparing the company for the transition to the next generation and keeping the Harrell Remodeling brand strong even as Iris Harrell reduces her everyday role in the company.

**Web site:** [www.harrell-remodeling.com](http://www.harrell-remodeling.com)

## “As long as I’m here 40 hours a week, people will think the ship can’t run without me.”

other staff members, sets up workshops and gives speeches on topics such as green remodeling and universal design.

By freeing herself from everyday responsibilities, she can also set the agenda for the company, or what Harrell calls the “visionary things,” e.g., anticipating the growth in green five years ago because of what she was seeing in other parts of the state and training her staff to be ready for that as demand has increased.

“People are just starting to catch on here, but it’s important because I think it is the movement of the future,” Harrell says.

She also has been able to spend time on building the Harrell brand. Harrell admits she knew little about what the Harrell brand was before she hired a marketing firm to help her with it several years ago.

“We didn’t know what distinguishes us from other people,” she says. “We can say it’s quality, but everyone says quality.”

To drill down to the true differentiators, the marketing company interviewed 10 of the firm’s favorite clients to see what they thought of Harrell Remodeling. The results were anonymously presented to Harrell and her top managers. Working with the marketing company, they were able to identify several key branding points that set the company apart.

One key finding was that the clients felt the Harrell team were good listeners. This is something the company has cultivated by sending designers and top-level production staff to Sandler sales training.

“We respond to the client’s pain and what they want and

need,” Harrell says.

That message was carried over to the branding with the company’s tagline: we never forget it’s your home. The tagline is used on all of the company’s marketing pieces.

Another characteristic was that Harrell Remodeling was expensive and reliable. Harrell has embraced that idea by emphasizing that you pay well to get the best.

“We do things differently, but it’s for the betterment of our clients,” she says. “We’ve learned not to be ashamed of that. We hire the best staff, so we’re going to have to pay well. Otherwise, you won’t get the outcome you want.”

The biggest challenge in branding has been to balance the recognition of the firm’s name with the expectation that Harrell herself will be involved in the project.

“When you go to Kentucky Fried Chicken, you don’t expect to see the colonel there, but you know he would approve of the gravy,” she says. “We’ve got to get past people thinking I’m driving every truck, that I’m designing every job, but at the same time deliver the message that I approve of what’s going on.”

The workshops have been an important part of that, allowing the employees to take center stage. Giammona and other staff are taking a public role with the company through the workshops, podcasts and articles.

“It’s teaching all of our people to be presenters — making them comfortable behaving famously, as Sandler would say,” Harrell says.

### KEEPING THE FIRE BURNING

Learning to let go hasn’t always been easy for Harrell, but it’s what will allow her to keep doing the job for years.

“Somebody heard me say that I get eight hours of sleep a night and only work 40 hours a week, and they said they didn’t know contractors were allowed to do that,” she says. “I think you have to do that or you’ll get burned out. You have to have a life apart from the business to regenerate yourself when you come back to the business everyday.”

For Harrell, that inspiration has come from Benson, who has always encouraged her to keep focused on life outside the business. Harrell says for her it’s been a matter of finding her spiritual roots but that everyone should find what gives them an escape.


“There’s another reason we’re here besides putting that casing on tomorrow,” she says. “I look for ways I can make a positive impact, nurture myself and still help others.” **PR**

## A WEEK IN THE LIFE

How Harrell Remodeling CEO Iris Harrell spends her average 40-hour work week. Harrell also does not come into the office on Fridays and takes about 12 weeks of vacation a year.

Administration (e-mail, manager meetings, coaching)	21 hours
Marketing (including speaking engagements and networking)	9 hours
Sales (working approximately two leads per week)	5 hours
Design	5 hours





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# Historic Task

## ALLEGRO BUILDERS TOOK THE HARD ROAD TO SAVE THIS LANDMARK HOME

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

**WHEN LAMBERT ARCENEUX SAW** the building at 205 Bayland Avenue, his first inclination was to tear it down. The once-grand 1910 home had been seemingly ruined by years of neglect and abuse as it went from owner to owner before ending up as a halfway house for the homeless.

"It didn't look like it could be saved," Arceneux says. "The blight on the neighborhood was just tremendous."

So when Arceneux's custom home building firm, Allegro Builders, bought the property, a tear-down was exactly what he had in mind. The house sat on four lots in Woodland Heights, a historic Houston neighborhood, and Arceneux planned to demolish the home and build four new ones in its place. Allegro Builders specializes in building new homes that mimic period styles in the Houston Heights neighborhood and planned to do the same here.

But this house turned out to be something special — the personal home of William A. Wilson, the founder and developer of the Woodland Heights neighborhood. At 7,000 square feet, it was also the largest home in Woodland Heights and a potential cen-



terpiece of the neighborhood.

"We failed to really understand the significance of the property to the community," Arceneux says. "The neighborhood would have just been up in arms if we'd torn it down."

Enter Bill Baldwin. The local Realtor and his partner, Joe Gonzalez, decided to buy the home from Allegro and hire the firm to bring it back to its original grandeur.

### SOUTHERN INSPIRATION

Baldwin was inspired to buy the house after returning from a trip to Savannah, Ga., where he had taken a tour of homes that had been restored by antiques dealer Jim Williams (the subject of the book and film, "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil") from the 1950s to 1990s.

"He had taken just the same type of houses — ones that had been neglected for decades — and he took them and transformed them into these amazing Southern homes with these overhangs," Baldwin says. "It was the large overhangs that made me come





**Allegro Builders restored the former halfway house to its original 1910 look. The 12-foot-deep porches and custom windows were painstakingly recreated based on vintage photographs and newspaper articles uncovered by homeowner Bill Baldwin during extensive research on the home.**



## PRODUCTS LIST

**Appliances:** Viking **Doors:** Bison Custom **Fixtures:** Kohler **Hardware:** Baldwin **Stone & Tile:** Master Tile **Roofing:** Elk **Windows:** Jeld-Wen

back to Houston and relook at that house and what it could be.”

The style of the Bayland home was reminiscent of the buildings in the traditional Georgia city — a look that was not common in Houston.

“As I looked at it again, I decided this home should be saved if it was at all possible,” Baldwin says.

Baldwin wanted to work with Allegro on this difficult project because of the company’s experience with period-style homes. He had partnered with the company for a decade on other homes. Allegro had also built the home he was living in at the time, as well as his office. Baldwin was also impressed by the work Arceneaux had done remodeling a neglected house that became Arceneaux’s personal home.

“We were committed to using them because they understand the nature of these homes; they understand how they need to fit into the neighborhood,” Baldwin says. “They bring a quality and an expertise that not everybody could.”

And although Allegro doesn’t typically remodel homes, Arce-





Although no records exist of what the interior of the home originally looked like, Allegro and Baldwin incorporated features such as the large foyer and staircase and custom woodwork to reflect the spirit of the era.

neaux was interested in the project as well. He thought that remodeling the vintage home would be a good experience for his staff that would help them when building their period-style new homes.

"That's how I learned to do period-type houses — by taking them apart and putting them back together," Arceneaux says. "True artisans know how a home is built."

## NO EASY TASK

Once the partners decided to save the home, they knew it would be a massive undertaking. The interior was a wreck, the exterior was horrendous and previous owners had grafted three homes

## PROJECT TIMELINE

2005	Stage of Project
<b>Dec. 15</b>	Demolition begins
2006	Stage of Project
<b>Jan. 30</b>	Foundation poured
<b>Feb. 28</b>	Framing
<b>Mar. 31</b>	Windows/siding installed
<b>April</b>	Insulation
<b>June 15</b>	Trim work begins
<b>July 31</b>	Painting
<b>Aug. 31</b>	Plumbing installed
<b>September</b>	Floors placed
<b>October</b>	Appliances installed
<b>October</b>	Project inspection
<b>November</b>	Final punchlist items completed
Payments were made by monthly draws	

onto the building in ill-advised additions.

"It was unlivable," Arceneaux says. "There were holes in the floor, the windows were missing, the stench in the house was just miserable. It was just terrible, but it did have good bones."

And to save the building, Allegro was going to need to go all the way down to its bones. The company demolished the additions and stripped the inside to the original studs. Besides the framing and brick, which was reused on the porches and in the new wine cellar, nothing else was salvageable.

"Everything else had been ruined," Arceneaux says. "There was nothing left for us to use."

Baldwin drove the design for the remodel as he dove into researching the home by poring over old photos, talking to long time residents of the neighborhood and consulting with the

## THE FINANCIALS

**A**s a predominantly new-home builder, Allegro Builders works at a smaller gross profit than most remodelers.

On the average home the company builds (with a price tag north of \$1 million), Allegro looks for a 15 percent gross profit. That's what President Lambert Arceneaux was aiming for on this project as well, although he knew it might change a little as Allegro remodeled the unique home for Realtor Bill Baldwin. The company had worked with Baldwin several times in the past, and Arceneaux liked the experience that

### Budget History

Initial estimate	\$725,000
Change orders	\$250,000
Other cost overruns	\$25,500
Final price of job	\$1,000,500
Cost to produce	\$875,000
Gross profit	\$125,500
Budgeted gross profit	15%
Actual gross profit	12.5%

remodeling the historic home would give his employees.

"He was a friend of ours, so we were willing to take it closer to 12 percent than we would have for most clients," Arceneaux says.

During the year-long project, the

company went over budget on several items as new problems were discovered and Baldwin decided on changes along the way, most notably adding the 1,000 square foot wine cellar. Baldwin even ended up going for a second loan to pay for the rising costs.

"We just ended up doing a lot of stuff we didn't plan on that we had to cover in change orders," Arceneaux says.

"I could tell that given the right time, effort and money, it was going to be amazing," Baldwin says. "Once I got passionate about it, I was relentless until it was perfect."





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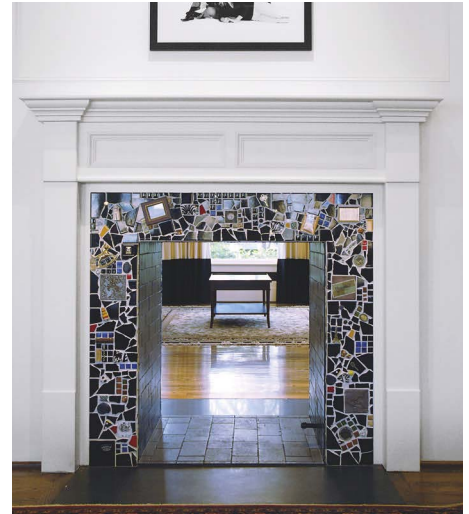
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**The team moved the kitchen from one side of the house to the other to create more open space. The fireplace, which had been between the kitchen and dining room, now separates the redesigned family room and living room. One side features a custom mosaic of family mementos.**

local historical society to return the home to its original design.

Because William Wilson was so well known, there were many articles written about him, the neighborhood and the house, so Baldwin was able to use them as resources. There were many exterior photos of the home, but no interior shots that Baldwin could find. However, he did find someone who had played in the house as a child and was able to tap the memories of the next door neighbors who had lived there for 75 years.

"While it wasn't a restoration, on the outside we were painstaking in trying to replicate it," Baldwin says. "For the interior, we embellished a lot, but it was in keeping with the spirit."

The biggest challenge was replicating the windows, none of which were standard sizes or even the same size from window to window. Allegro worked with Jeld-Wen for months to create the custom windows.

"Some of the windows had 32 lites in just the upper sash, so it was very, very expensive and time consuming to get it done," Arceneaux says. "It took us forever, but I think the windows make the house."

Another eye-catching feature of the home is its 2,000 square

feet of porches. The old photos of the home showed a wrap-around porch running from the front of the home around the right side. By the time Allegro purchased the home, only the front porch was standing, and the area on the side was covered by one of the later additions. Porches are a feature that Arceneaux likes to incorporate into many of the homes he builds. In Houston, most homes are built on slabs, he says, so elevating a house slightly and adding a porch can really set a home apart from its neighbors.

The new porches run 12 feet deep around the front and side, along with a smaller porch off the rear of the home. Baldwin says the family uses them frequently for entertaining and as an extension of their living space.

The final part of recapturing the original exterior look came from recreating the original Cypress siding. Although the home was originally done in old-growth Cypress, Allegro was able to have new-growth Cypress custom cut and milled to closely match.

With no records of the interior of the home, Baldwin and Allegro simply tried to keep the style consistent with the era, while updating for modern needs. The trim, staircase and newels were all custom. The entire house was redone with oak floors throughout. In the kitchen, the cabinets were custom, as was the oven hood. Walls were moved, hallways created and spaces rearranged to undo the choppy remodeling done over the years.

One feature that wasn't moved was one of the original fireplaces, which Allegro was able to restore. Originally between the kitchen and dining room, it now sits between the family room and hallway after the kitchen was shifted to the other side of the home. The restored fireplace features a custom mosaic of mementos from Baldwin's family on one side and marble on the other.

One decision that was made later in the remodel was to add a wine cellar. Allegro is known locally for the wine cellars the team builds. The entire 1,000 square foot basement is dedicated to a

## COMPANY SNAPSHOT

### **Allegro Builders**

**President:** Lambert Arceneaux

**Location:** Houston

**2007 volume:** \$15 million

**Projected 2008 volume:** \$15 million

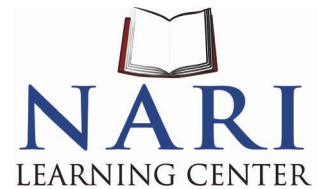
**Web site:** [www.allegrobldrs.com](http://www.allegrobldrs.com)

**Biggest challenge of this project:** Matching the historic look of the home with modern materials



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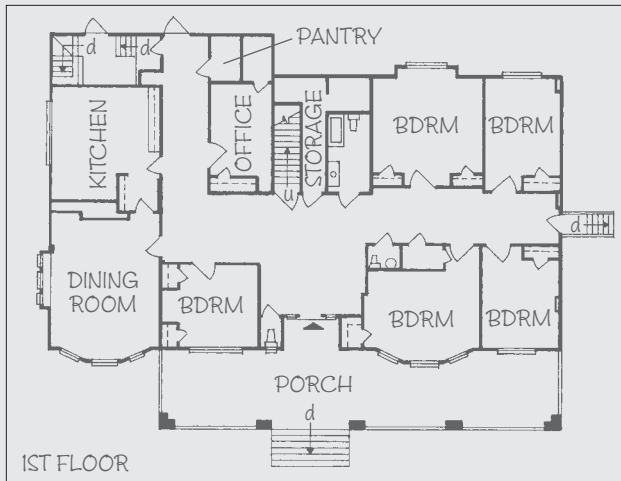
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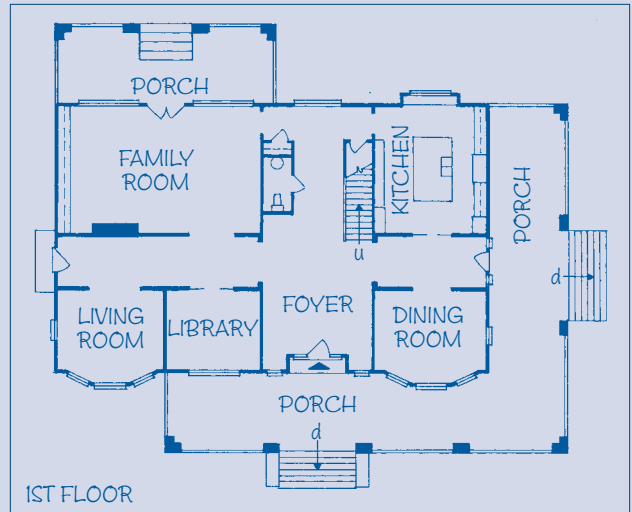
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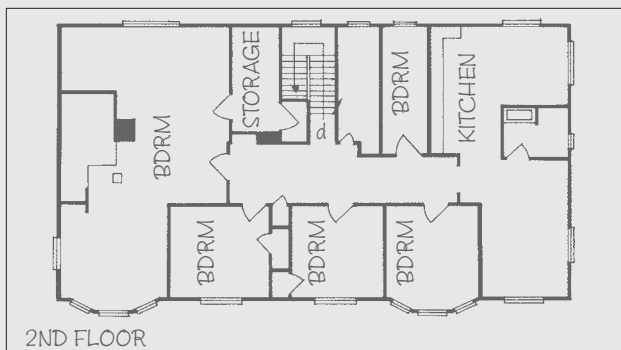
Before



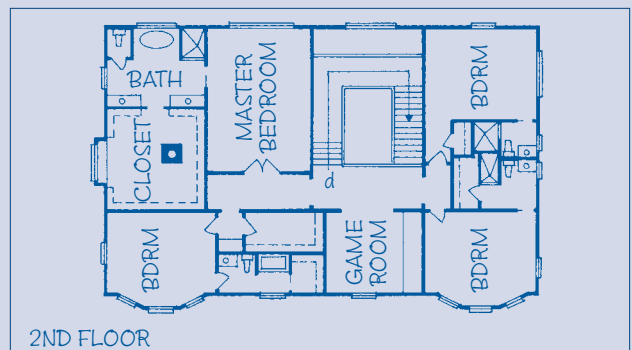
After



Before



After



cellar and includes storage space for 1,000 bottles of wine, a large tasting area and a bathroom.

There was a basement in place, but it leaked. Allegro solved the problem by digging a trench around the basement, then sealing and waterproofing the wall. Then they poured another concrete wall, treated and sealed that, and installed a drain and sump pump. So far it has worked perfectly, Arceneaux says.

The walls are made of brick salvaged from the home and new brick chosen to carefully match. The ceiling is made of cedar, which is a touch that Arceneaux likes to put in all his wine cellars. It gives the cellar the smell of cedar instead of a musty smell, he says.

## MAKING AN IMPACT

While the home is a feat of construction, it has also made a big difference for the neighborhood. The project won the Houston Business Journal's Landmark Award, which recognizes a project each year for its positive impact on a neighborhood and the community.

"The neighborhood is just a different place," Arceneaux says. "It really, truly changed that neighborhood. Everything around it is now worth twice what it was before."

It's enhanced the image of the company as well. Allegro has gotten a lot of positive attention for the decision to remodel instead of tearing down the home, enough so that Arceneaux is now contemplating starting a second company that would focus on renovations.

"In Houston, we just tear down houses really fast, and I'd like to do it differently," he says.

This project was an important step in that direction, Baldwin says.

"Our city does not really cherish remodeling or restoration of older homes," he says. "This shows people you can save the old and embrace the new." **PR**

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# CHEF'S SPECIAL

A remodel makes the most of a kitchen's view and frees up space for entertaining

By Ann Matesi,  
Senior Contributing Editor

## KITCHEN REMODEL

**REMODELER AND ARCHITECT:** Sylvestre Construction, Minneapolis

**PROJECT LOCATION:** Minneapolis

**AGE OF HOME:** 80 years old

**SCOPE OF WORK:** Expand and reorganize existing kitchen to capture lake views and increase functional space

**WHILE THE KITCHEN REMODEL** was just one element of the ambitious whole-house makeover of this 1920s lakeside cottage in Minneapolis, it was this part of the project that really made the difference when it came to transforming the home's character from dark and dated to modern and inviting.

Today, the kitchen functions not only as a completely modern workspace for the clients' daughter, who is a professionally

trained chef, but also as the gathering center of the home.

"Remodeling the kitchen had a remarkable impact on the overall livability of the

**The new kitchen island features a recycled red birch counter made from wood reclaimed from the bottom of Lake Superior. The perimeter countertops are granite topped by a glass tile backsplash.**



entire house by redirecting its entertaining opportunities to the new 24-foot-long space at the rear of the home,” says remodeler John Sylvestre, head of Sylvestre Construction, the local design/build remodeling firm responsible for the project.

Once cramped and cluttered, the completely updated kitchen now takes full advantage of what was always its most appealing, but formerly overlooked, attribute: its lakefront orientation. Space expanded both visually and physically when the remodeler removed an interior wall

between the existing kitchen and an adjoining room and then increased the depth by six feet. The new design now offers two dining options — a large island with snack bar seating as well as a built-in dinette; new appliances, cabinetry and finishes; and a distinctive coffered ceiling punctuated by stained beams and strategically positioned task lighting.

A garden window above a new sink, corner windows surrounding the banquette and an oversized sliding patio door, give the homeowners a bright, cheerful and much

more welcoming room.

The clients had used Sylvestre for several small-scale projects, and when the time came for their long-planned major remodel of the home, they turned to him again. In addition to the kitchen, the basement and second floor were updated.

“What was so important about this part of the overall project,” says Sylvestre, “was that we took two spaces — the sitting room and kitchen — that were largely overlooked and out of the way, and combined them to create a gathering space that really functions as the central hub of the home now. This has completely altered the arrangement of the main floor living space, making it much more sensible for the way a family lives and entertains today.”

The kitchen had originally been remodeled in the early 1970s but had not been updated since then. The key, says the remodeler, was creating a single large room out of these two disjointed spaces.

“The sitting room was not doing anything for the house in terms of function. All it did was make the kitchen a much smaller and more restricted area. The family already had a dining room in the house to use for formal entertaining when they needed it.”

They were ready to sacrifice the separate sitting room to enlarge the kitchen itself, he says. “And, since this side of the house faces the lake, the opportunity to get as much glass on this elevation as possible would really increase the view potential sig-



The variety of wood finishes used throughout the kitchen lend the space a warm and welcoming ambiance and match details found throughout the rest of the home.



## PRODUCTS LIST

Cabinets: Steven Appliances: Viking Windows: Marvin  
Countertops: Paramount Granite Ceramic tile: Tile X Design

## Ceiling Design Hides Eyesore

A beautiful coffered ceiling is one of the most distinctive features of the new kitchen, says remodeler John Sylvestre. The design actually disguises a structural beam that was added to support the home's upper floor after a partition wall was removed between the kitchen and sitting room and the entire rear wall was extended six feet.

“The original sitting room was an unnecessary and confusing space and the result was an improperly laid-out kitchen. In order to make the most of the space, we removed the partition wall between the two rooms and added a 6-foot by

27-foot addition. A single steel beam, which spanned the entire width of the kitchen, had to drop below the existing joists and presented us with a significant design challenge because it was visible.”

The solution was to use the beam as the basis for the creation of a grid of “wood” beams that frame the ceiling coffers. “While only one beam is actually structural steel, all of them were finished in stain-grade fir so that they would match,” he says.

“In this case, it was the structure that really drove the design.”



**New sliding patio doors create a bright sitting area at the base of the staircase that leads to the upper floor.**

nificantly. This was very, very important to our clients.”

When it came to selecting the appliances and finishes for the space, the homeowners’ desire was to have a space that featured the latest in commercial-grade amenities but one that would, at the same time, complement the overall style of the home and be warm and inviting.

The continuity of the color scheme, as well as the repetition of details and materials found in other rooms, ensured that the new kitchen would appear as though it had always been a part of the home.

While this project was planned and completed before green became a hot button for the remodeling industry, says Sylvestre, it does include a number of environmentally

friendly elements, such as: high-efficiency appliances; reclaimed red birch countertops for the island and banquette; and energy-efficient windows and doors.

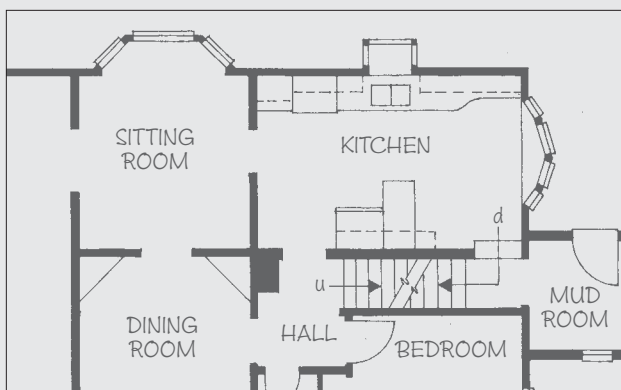
“Our practice is to try to offer all options, green or otherwise, to our clients at the outset of a project as design suggestions. When it comes to making the choice, we give them as much helpful information as possible — including the pluses and minuses of each option. They don’t always opt for the green options but we are finding more and more people are asking about them all the time.”

Ultimately, the homeowners are thrilled with their spacious new kitchen, he says. “They now have this huge room that they can really get a lot of people into comfortably when they need to. It is really a great entertaining area. But, it’s also a really comfortable space for just one or two people as well. Their comments to us were that we more than delivered on what we promised them.” **PR**

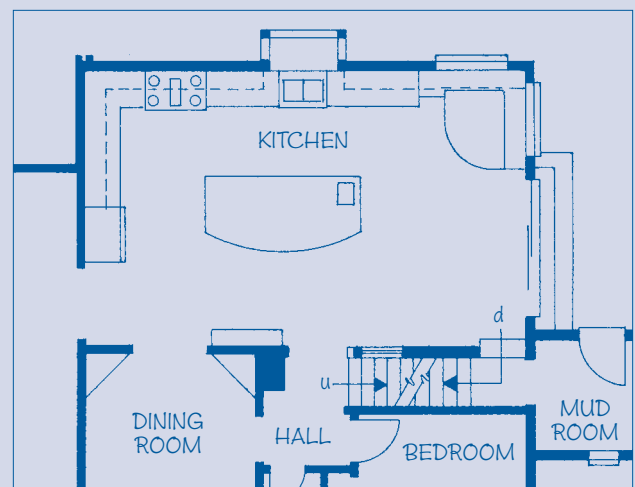
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Before



After





# Q&A WITH THE CURMUDGEON

*Professional Remodeler's green guru helps you get started on a greener path*

**M**any of you haven't been properly introduced to our resident curmudgeon, Carl Seville, so we've taken the liberty to sit down with the well-informed guru of green this month to address the issue of how a remodeling company can get started on the path to fame and fortune on the green superhighway. Be sure to add Carl's blog and our other *Professional Remodeler* staff blogs to your RSS feed to stay up on all the latest industry news, including green, association updates, trends and economic activity in a timely fashion that only the Internet can provide.

**Professional Remodeler:** So, Carl, how does one get started building a green remodeling company?

**Green Building Curmudgeon:** Training, training, training. Start with NARI and NAHB or your local program if you have one. Look for advanced training at seminars and trade shows such as the National Green Building Conference, ACI (formerly known as Affordable Comfort), the Building Performance Institute and EEBA (Energy and Environmental Building Association). Other training that is very useful for remodeling is Home Performance with Energy Star and HERS rater training. Buy the books, "Green Remodeling" [by David Johnston] "Natural Remodeling for the Not So Green House" [by Carol Renolia] and "Green from the Ground Up" [by David Johnston and Scott Gibbon]. You can also hire an experienced green remodeling consultant to advise you on your first projects — their experience will be invaluable.

**PR:** How do I figure out how much it will cost to get started?

**GBC:** Understand what is different from your normal process; define it clearly in your estimates and trade contractor scopes; and identify the cost differences. Realize that there are tradeoffs; money spent on making a house more efficient will allow you to reduce the cost of HVAC systems, as they can be smaller.

Other less tangible benefits include improved indoor air quality, which leads to healthier and happier clients as well as a cleaner house. While many of the methods that achieve this cost more, many homeowners are willing to pay more for a higher-quality product. The challenge is to help them understand the value. It is similar to a car. A Yugo will get you there, but do you want to drive it?

Another issue to address is that it is very likely that some of your standard techniques may not be as high a quality as you should aspire to, and in some cases may barely meet the energy code. Make a commitment to improve your work, step by step, job by job.

Finally, there is a learning curve, and making changes will cost more initially. You will find that those costs will go down and the long-term benefits such as happier clients will reduce warranty, callbacks, minimize complaints about comfort and improve your company's reputation, which will pay off in the long run.

**PR:** How do I figure out what is really green and what is greenwashing?

**GBC:** While there is some greenwashing in buildings themselves, this mostly deals with products

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

claiming to be green when that is not the case.

There are few objective sources on building materials, but one to look at is BuildingGreen.com. It's kind of a Consumer Reports for green building. They review products and list those that they determine meet their claims for sustainability.

**PR:** How do I sell green to clients?

**GBC:** They should be asking you for it by now, but if you need to sell it, look for marketing information from local green building programs, testimonials from green homeowners, statistics on energy savings, etc.

**PR:** Where is the best place to find sustainable and healthy materials?

**GBC:** Look for local sustainable building product distributors and trade pubs like this one.

The screenshot shows the Professional Remodeler website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'BEST PRACTICES', 'SOLUTIONS', 'INNOVATIONS', 'PRODUCTS', 'FORUMS', 'RESEARCH / DATA', 'AWARDS & EVENTS', 'COLUMNISTS', and 'BLOGS'. Below this, a featured article by Carl Seville is displayed. The article title is 'Is your mind closed or open? How about your foam?' dated Wednesday, August 13, 2008. The article text discusses the debate between open and closed cell spray foam insulation. To the right of the article is a vertical image of a yellow measuring tape. Below the article, there's a section for 'RECENT POSTS' and 'RECENT COMMENTS'.

Add Carl's blog to your RSS feed by logging on to [www.ProRemodeler.com/Seville](http://www.ProRemodeler.com/Seville).

### A NEW KIND OF TRADITION

Fourteen new knob and lever designs in Omnia's Traditions line are available in all of the company's finishes with multiple rose options, including unlacquered brass, polished chrome and antique bronze. All knobs and levers are available as passage tubular latch sets, which can be paired with a privacy bolt.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-251>**



### SHINE ON ME

Looking for a creative lighting solution? Graber's Light-Weaves Solar Shades have a new single-touch lift system to retract shades with a single tug of the cord. The improved continuous loop lift system reduces light gaps and accommodates larger shades. Graber also offers motorized shades for hard-to-reach windows.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-253>**



### FEED ME

You're not always cutting in ideal locations, and sometimes it's impossible to get a power tool in place. Bosch kept that in mind with 13 new self-feed bits ranging in size from 1- to 4 $\frac{1}{8}$  inches in diameter. All bits are equipped with a replaceable coarse threaded tip that draws the bit into the wood without pressing on it, eliminating run-out or wobble and pulling through the wood for consistently more accurate holes.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-252>**



### A NEW HORIZON

Able to complement a variety of design schemes, Hakatai's Horizon series of  $\frac{7}{8}$ -by- $\frac{7}{8}$ -inch tiles contains an array of colors. The glass blends combine glossy and matte finish for a hip look. Tiles in the Horizon series are approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick and mounted on mesh-backed sheets for easy installation.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-254>**





### DON'T PASS THIS UP

These occupancy and vacancy sensors from Pass and Seymour feature fixed-time delays, eliminating the need for adjustments. For homeowners who desire more flexibility, there's a model with an adjustable time delay and ambient light sensing. All models have 180 degree, 600-square-foot coverage. An LED locator light provides visibility in darkened rooms.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-256>**

### AN INTUITIVE KITCHEN PAL

An exclusive four-part Pure Convection system helps create uniform temperatures in Dacor's new 36-inch Epicure Renaissance wall oven. The new units feature a RapidHeat baking element to cut bake times. They sport electronic touch controls, six cooking modes and the company's proprietary filter. A 27-inch wall model for smaller installations is available as well.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-255>**



### LEVEL-HEADED

DeWalt recently released a series of new self-leveling rotary lasers. The DW074 has an automatic horizontal self-leveling system that provides accuracy at plus or minus 1/4-inch per 100 feet. Once the laser is turned on, it will begin to level itself, and the laser stops blinking when the unit is level. The unit also has a manual feature.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-257>**



### A CLEAR PROTECTOR

Guardian's new ClimaGuard 75/68 Low-E glass is made to withstand the worst winter chill. The glass takes in 75 percent of the sun's natural light while also taking in 68 percent of the sun's heat to warm homes naturally. A U-value of .28 provides excellent insulation.

**For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-258>**

## NEW PRODUCTS



### SMALLER MAJESTY

EcoStar released a smaller 10-inch profile in its Majestic Slate Traditional tiles. The recycled, synthetic tiles more closely replicate the look of standard slate tiles. Roofers will appreciate they're dramatically lighter because the tiles are made of post-industrial plastics and rubber. Like EcoStar's other products, the tiles install with 1½-inch stainless steel ring shank roofing nails.

For FREE info, go to <http://pr.hotims.com/20091-259>



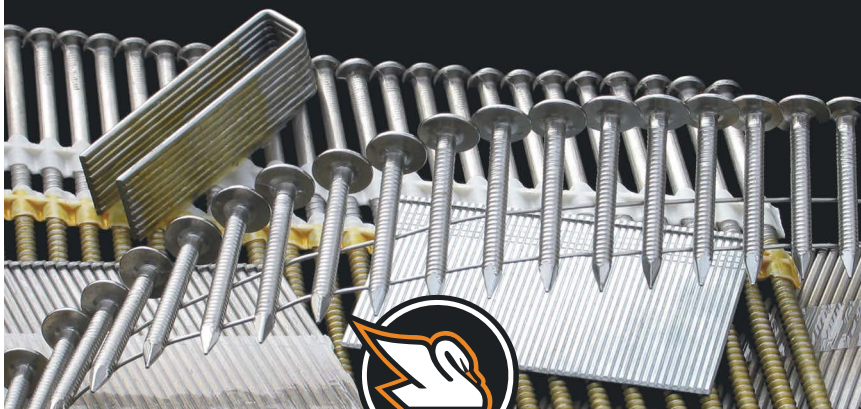
### STYLE LOCKED IN

Gorell Windows & Doors' new 5100 Series line of windows have been designed with a modern exterior, higher efficiency glass, greater structural stability and easier installation. The 5100 Series also has the company's stylish recessed locks that are hidden from the exterior side and give your clients an unobstructed view from the inside.

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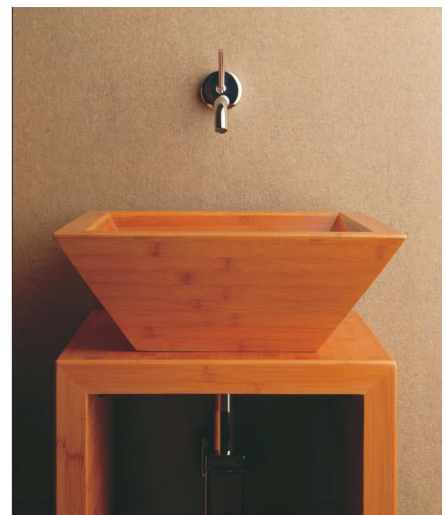
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### BAMBOO BONANZA

It seems bamboo-based products are popping up everywhere. Stone Forest has joined the trend with its new Quattro Bamboo Vessels. Naturally lightweight and water-resistant, these sinks are made from the laminated exterior of the plant shoot. The sinks can be wall-mounted and can be matched with the company's Bento Box, which can be configured to a seat or side table.

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## DALE RESSLER

**Owner:** DER Construction, Inc.,  
est. 1990

**Owner:** DreamMaker  
Bath & Kitchen,  
est. 2006,  
Bainbridge, Pa.

**Dale Ressler**, 46, knows all about remodeling – from the highs of national remodeling awards to the lows of medical scares and the physical labor that the career demands. As a general contractor and the owner of DER Construction, he's tackled a full spectrum of remodeling jobs for years to produce beautiful results for his customers. However, that mission to be all things to all people wasn't producing beautiful results for his future goals.

**DreamMaker has "given me an opportunity to work on the business much more instead of just trying to survive the week..."**

### *What was your independent business like before you bought a franchise?*

**Dale:** We did all kinds of remodeling, and it was good. It was really all I knew to do. The more I could do, the better I could be at staying busy. It always kind of scared me to get too focused in one or two areas for fear of running out of work. That was the real trepidation for me in figuring out the whole kitchen and bath world.

### *Why did you decide to buy a DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen franchise?*

**Dale:** Previously, at DER Construction, I knew I wanted an exit strategy. My wife and I talked about that a fair amount – kind of what I wanted to do in a second career more as a volunteer.



*Photo: Dale Ressler and his wife, Bobbi*

of those changes have given me an opportunity to work on the business much more instead of just trying to survive the week, keep enough work coming in and, if I had the chance, see if we were making any money.

And I set my goal that by age 50 I wanted to be able to make some of those changes. But a few years ago I realized I was no closer to that goal of 50 than I was at 40. Then, I had two shoulder operations about the same time. It was work-related. And my surgeon told me, 'you need to figure out what you're going to do for the next 15 years other than what you've done for the last 15 years that's gotten you here.'

When I was recuperating from the initial surgery, I realized we were okay for a couple of weeks. But if I was unable to work much longer, we would have fallen on our face. I had employees who counted on me, and I wasn't being a good steward if I didn't have the systems and knowledge in place to produce stability without me. Then DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen called and it seemed like the more we talked, it just became more evident that this could really be the key to that whole part I had been looking for.

### *What has been the biggest change since transitioning your business to DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen?*

**Dale:** Up until the point I bought DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen, I was still out in the field about 50 percent of the time. We didn't have a showroom. We operated out of a home office. So this was a pretty big shift. As soon as we became DreamMaker, we became DreamMaker - in a showroom. And now I had a place to go to work instead of my house. I also committed to pulling myself out of the field. So all

### *How has owning a franchise changed your outlook on the future?*

**Dale:** Now, I have a plan. I took "me" out of the equation. Right now, my goal is that we would be able to open another location about 2010. I would have never had the freedom to think that far ahead and begin to put the wheels in motion to plan something that's a year and a half away. That has been a huge accomplishment. My business is also the same size as before, but with a better profit. Independently, I had okay net profit, but last year as DreamMaker we more than doubled it. And I know that, with the systems I have in place, I can continue to accomplish that, make the customers happy and have people say, 'you did everything you said and more.'

### *About DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen:*

Based in Waco, Texas, DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen has approximately 100 independently owned and operated franchises nationwide.



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The Latitude and Affinity furnaces in Johnson Controls' York line feature a more compact design. The furnaces measure 33 inches high, which is perfect for closets, attics, garages and other tight areas. The Latitude model is a single-stage furnace, and the Affinity has a modulating gas configuration. Both operate quieter than the company's previous models.

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# GET INTO THE HOUSING ZONE

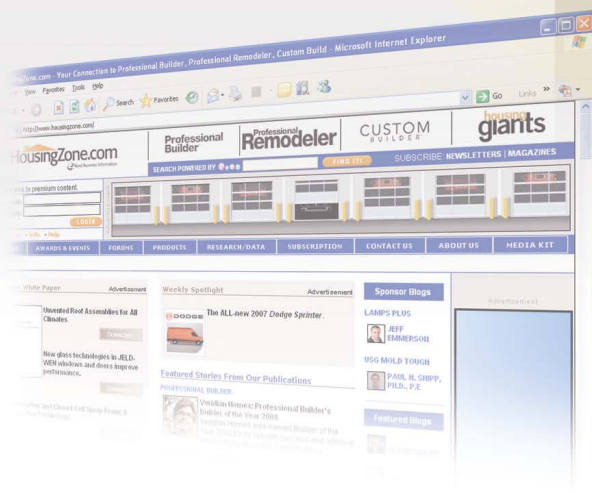
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Remodelers who need to have an air and water barrier should consider Carlisle Coatings' Barritech VP. Its structure allows moisture vapor to escape while stopping moisture from seeping in. Install it into exterior wall assemblies where building felt or paper would be.

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### SPRAY IT AND FORGET IT

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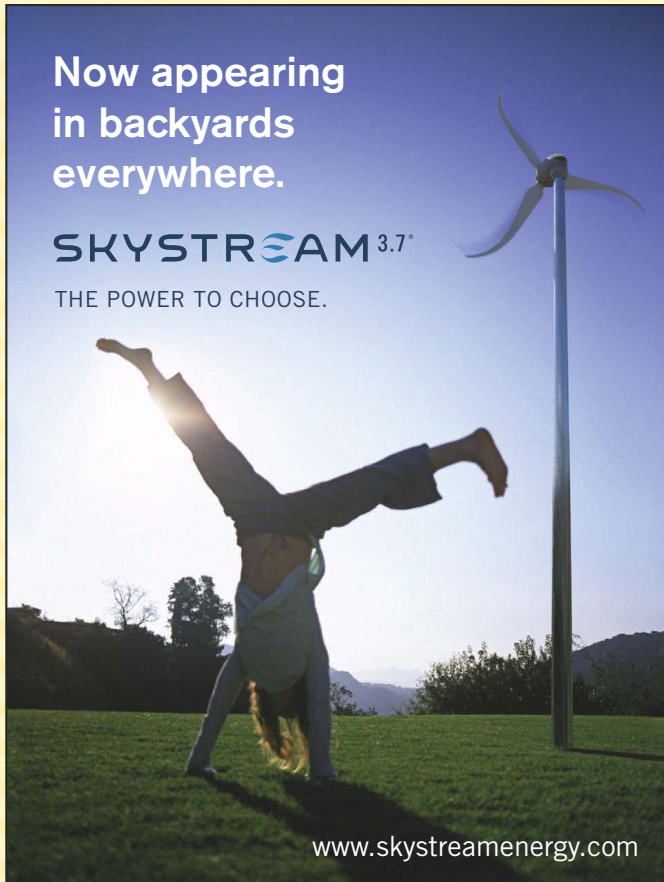


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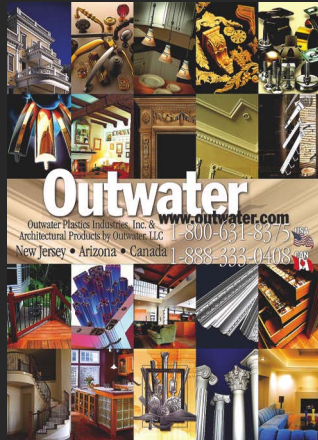
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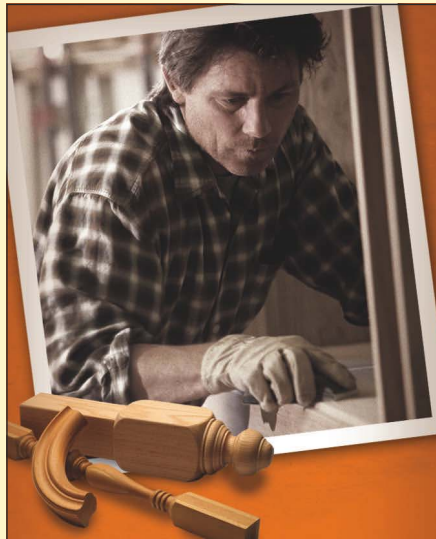
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## LEVELING THE SEESAW

Remember going to the playground when you were young and riding the seesaw? Some people call it the teeter-totter. Little more than a board centered on a fulcrum, you and a friend would get on each end, alternately pushing one another up and down.

After doing that for a while (sometimes trying to move the seesaw so violently that you would knock your partner off!) you might work with the person on the other end to try to get the seesaw balanced so nobody's feet were touching the ground. This took a little more work than simply pushing up and down: It took focus and balance on your part.

I mention the seesaw because the way we played with that is a lot like how we approach trying to create work-life balance in our lives as adults. It IS possible to create it, though not without investing effort that is often counter-intuitive for motivated people.

Why bother creating such a balance in your life? My wife, Nina, and I went to a wedding recently. The bride was the daughter of dear friends we met 33 years ago. We knew them before their daughter was born. Now we were watching her get married.

Sitting in the chapel, I couldn't help but reflect on where all the time went. How did she get to be such a beautiful young woman, no longer the young child who once played with our children?

I was grateful for the choices I had

made that allowed me to see much of the growing up their children and our children did in all those years.

At the same time, there were times when I was too consumed with work, so much so that I did not appreciate how ephemeral everything was. My seesaw got out of balance pretty regularly.

My experience of being alive for all these years so far is that each year makes it easier to understand how important it is to get the seesaw level. Yes, there will always be that tension between work and life on either ends of the seesaw. Those choices about what to pay attention to are your life in the long run.

How do you make it happen in your world? Simply put, take a longterm perspective when trying to decide what to do today.

What does this mean in practical terms? Consider this: when you are lying on your death bed what will you be reflecting on? Probably not that you wish you could have worked more hours and days!

Rather, you will likely be thinking about the relationships and memories you helped sustain and create. Try

keeping that in mind when the board is being pushed down by the weight of work and all its attendant obligations.

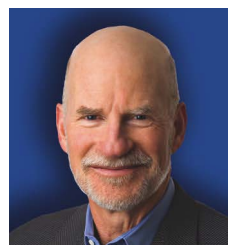
Put into your planner all those things that will help keep you healthy and keep you connected to family and

friends, then fit your work into the remaining space. This sounds like a simple thing to do, and I know that it is not. Remember how you had to work with your friend to get the board balanced and that it took more work than pounding your side of the board up and down?

Your life is as balanced as you take responsibility for making it be. There is no right way or wrong way to live your life. Do keep in mind what you want to be reflecting on when watching people who used to be your age going through one of life's wonderful transitions. That is all up to you. **PR**

*Paul Winans CR works with Remodelers Advantage, a peer group and consulting company serving the industry. He is a founder of Winans Construction, which he and*

*his wife, Nina, sold in 2007. He can be reached at paul@remodelersadvantage.com.*



By Paul Winans  
Advisory Board  
Columnist

**There were times when I was too consumed with work, so much so that I did not appreciate how ephemeral everything was. My seesaw got out of balance pretty regularly.**

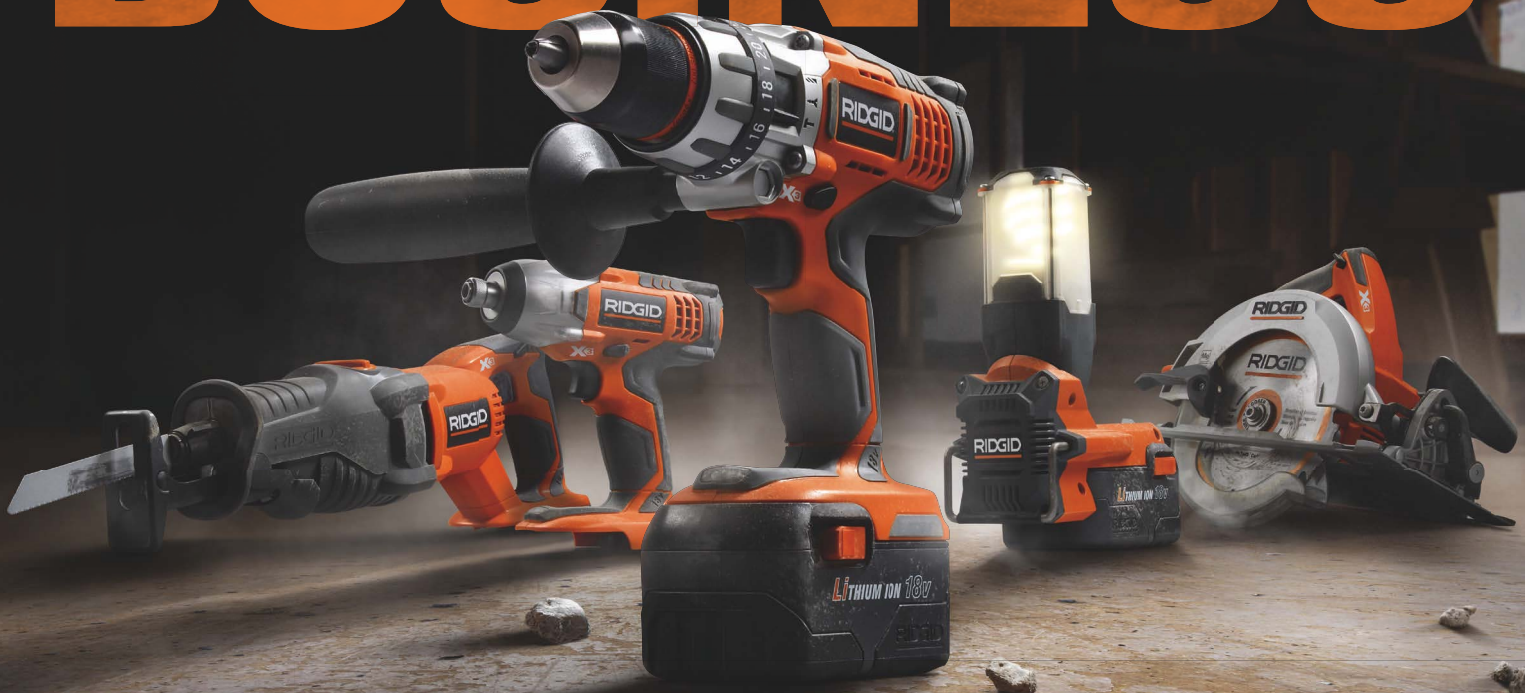
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