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2008 Builder of the Yea

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Veridian Homes Behind the Green Curtain

A Midwestern builder pairs a team approach with environmentallyconscious building practices

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DAVID SIMON, president of operations for Veridian Homes, wanted to make sure the company name reflected its green principles. The result is a company name that is also a shade of green.





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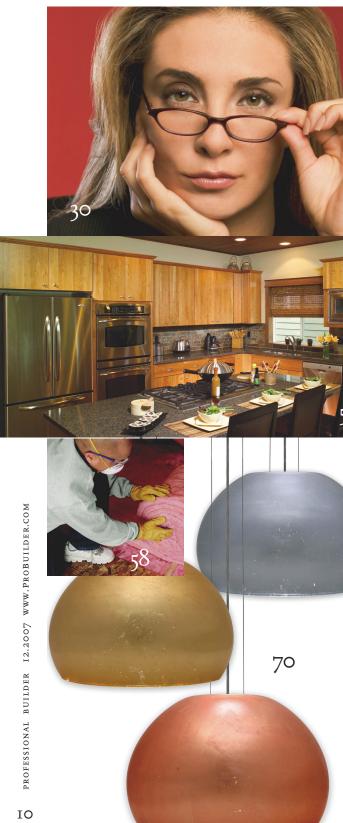
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Recognizing Improvement

Selecting a home building company to honor with the *Professional* Builder Builder of the Year can be alternately rewarding and harrowing. We love getting to look inside fabulous companies and see how they work. The experience is a bit like an auto mechanic getting to rummage about under the hood of a Maserati. Just being there is fun.

However, we also feel the heaviness of the responsibility in identifying a company for this recognition. By selecting a company, we are elevating it to the pantheon of home builders, and holding that company up as a beacon of success. If we make a wrong selection, we undermine ourselves, of course, but also the previous compaof Madison, Wis., we have most definitely gone right. Please turn to page 42 to find out all the wonderful things these people do. In this space, though, I want to focus on one thing in particular that allowed us to choose Veridian for this award. It can be summed up in two words: "continuous improvement."

The phrase is a common adage of the quality improvement folk, and as such it has lost of some of its meaning. I often hear companies speak about their continuous improvement. I seldom see a company that truly does it. Most have spent a bit of time developing processes and implementing them. Then those processes stay in place without change for years, even if



I often hear companies speak about their continuous improvement. I seldom see a company that truly does it."

nies we have selected and the industry as a whole. We take that duty seriously.

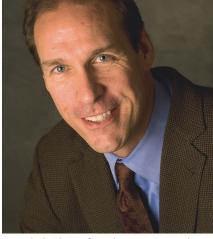
Now, raising such concerns when I am about to praise the company we have selected for the 2008 Professional Builder Builder of the Year award may seem like I'm coming in the side door, but it is important to note how wary the editorial staff was of making this selection in the current housing environment. We worried we could easily have gone wrong.

But by selecting Veridian Homes

the results they deliver are meager or declining.

In my estimation, there are two things that prevent true continuous development in builders; they are two things that Veridian has in abundance.

The first is a culture of improvement. Culture is about people. If you hire employees who are not interested in improving themselves, you are unlikely to create a culture of improvement. You need people who are questioning and challenging, con-



stantly looking for a better way to do something. If everyone on your staff is satisfied and happy, you will quickly become stagnant. Hang around with the people at Veridian and you notice immediately that while they have pride in what they do, they also have a measure of dissatisfaction that drives them to look for ways to do it better.

The second thing is a way to improve. Believe me, if you have people around you who are dissatisfied with the status quo and you don't provide them a way to improve it, you will quickly see them undermine the whole system. If you are lucky, they will leave because you do not want such improvement-driven employees rooting around under the hood of your Edsel. Veridian has the systems in place that allow such quality people to tinker and build and excel. The result is continuous improvement.

For that, we honor Veridian Homes with the Professional Builder Builder of the Year award. PB

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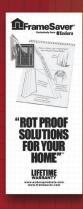
Paul Deffenbaugh Editorial Director 630.288.8190 paul.deffenbaugh@reedbusiness.com

Giant 400 online survey

Every year, Professional Builder reports on the 400 largest home builders in the United States. The "Annual Report on Housing's Giants" has become an industry-defining list. This year, we need your help. With the current shake-up in the housing industry, we are anticipating major changes in this list. Even if you never thought you would meet the requirements, we would like to hear from you. Like you, we're curious to see who the new players are. Maybe your company is one of them. Please go to www.probuilder.com/ 400survey to complete a survey.

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Housekeeping

Clarification

In the September issue of Professional Builder, Vanguard was incorrectly listed as the manufacturer on Page 99. The company name has been changed to Viega.

Correction

In the Mid-September "100 Best New Products" issue, Marvin's Outswing French Door on page 32 was incorrectly listed as a window. The magazine regrets this error.

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- Mike Karns, Director of Purchasing, Winchester Homes



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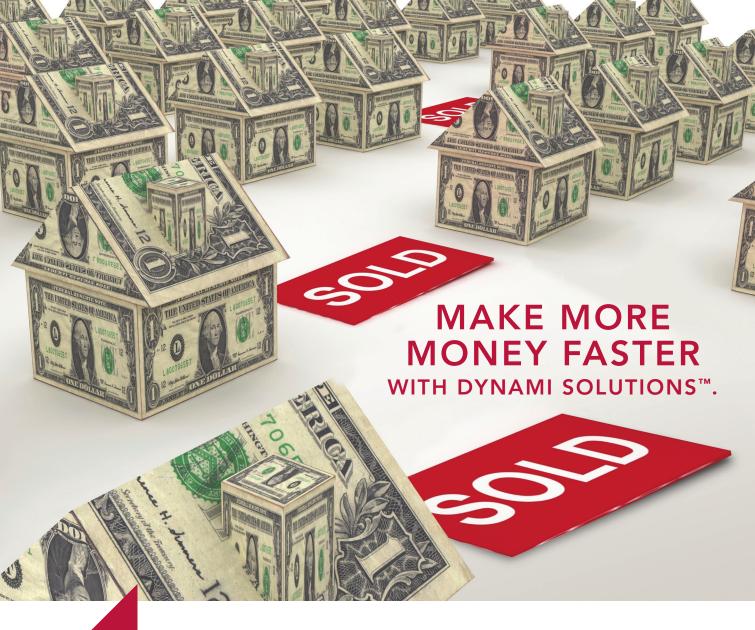
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\odot CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

10 Survival Tips

Are you following these tips to stay afloat?

Think 2007 was a difficult year? For some exhausted and fatigued builders, it's hard to imagine things getting much worse, but we don't know what's around the corner. Here are 10 home building survival tips to ensure you're around when the opportunity bell comes ringing again.

- **1.** Combat the media. There are a lot of good reasons to buy a home today: interest rates are still low, housing prices are falling, home builders are offering sizeable cash credits and incentives, and a surplus of new homes means that there are a lot of choices for buyers. This information needs to be shared with prospective buyers in a convincing way that counters the negative news they hear.
- **2.** Revamp your lending. Consider working with brokers who are better equipped to shop around for the best deals. Opt for a variety of partners who are willing to hustle for your home buyers' best interests.
- **3.** Tap your HBA. Now is the time to work with fellow builders for the sake of the entire industry. In Atlanta, the local home builders association launched a public relations campaign to promote why now is a great time to buy. Jointly produce an educational brochure that is distributed through banks, home improvement stores,

home shows and targeted mailing lists.

- **4.** Share selling tips. Share real estate best practices with buyers. Consider providing a home staging guide or offer to list the home. One builder I know has its own realty company and is offering a 4 percent commission instead of the standard 3 percent to the buying agent.
- **5.** Promote your successes. Because the high number of foreclosures has made prospective buyers nervous, let everyone know if any of your communities have zero or very few foreclosures. If they see evidence that you don't close on homes buyers won't be able to afford, they will have more confidence in partnering with you.
- **6.** Offer credit advice. Consider partnering with a credit improvement service that can help customers correct false information and resolve credit problems that are preventing them from getting the best loan.
- **7.** Maximize referral marketing. Your delighted



customers are your best sales tool. Sponsor weekly events and activities that bring prospects and loyal customers together so that potential buyers can hear first-hand what a great builder you are.

- 8. Realize that all prospects are not the same. You should be identifying how each prospect comes to you and spending time where it is most likely to pay off with referred buyers. To help build trust with referred buyers, share something with them about the home buyer who made the referral: a simple remark about a special feature of their friend's home, for example.
- **9. Create organic compensation plans.** Now is the time to make sure your sales staff is compensated in a way that motivates them to deliver the best service while closing

the most sales. For example, what would happen if your sales staff was guaranteed commissions on any buyers who came in because of a referral from one of their previous clients?

10. Achieve customer loyalty. The businesses that are holding their own during these tough times have a pipeline of happy customers making referrals. By maximizing referrals, some builders have been able to keep sales steady instead of declining. If you don't have many sales coming from referrals, you have much lower chances of survival.

No single strategy is going to save a struggling home builder. Rather, it will take a holistic approach that attacks the problem from every angle and perspective. Quality home builders are going to be the last Mohicans standing — be one of them. **PB**

Paul Cardis is CEO of Avid Ratings Co., a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home-building industry. He can be reached at paul.cardis@avidratings.com.

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Why you should consider emotional intelligence when you hire

Emotional intelligence (also known as Emotional Quotient Index) is one of the hot topics among business leaders and HR professionals lately. It came up several times during a human resource workshop I attended at the ULI fall meeting in Las Vegas. Is this just a fad that's resurfaced among the doctoral crowd or something actually useful at the business level? Let's take a look.

Emotional Intelligence Defined

This is where it gets a little sticky — the actual definition appears to be a workin-progress among psychology professionals. Dr. Gary Williamson, managing partner with PSP Metrics, cites self awareness, managing emotions, self motivation, empathy for others and relationship building as the five common elements in most popular definitions. So in some respects, psychologists have been testing for EI for years without calling it that. Here are some other definitions:

- Our ability to manage and regulate our emotions in a healthy and balanced manner to achieve personal and business goals
- The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others; for motivating ourselves;

- and for managing emotions in ourselves and in our interpersonal relationships
- The ability to restrain negative feelings such as anger and self-doubt and instead focus on positive ones such as confidence and congeniality
- The ability to recognize what works and doesn't work within a company, and/or what is required to achieve results as part of a team
- An individual's fit with the social, political and management culture of an organization

In his 1995 book "Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ," psychologist Daniel Goleman claimed that people with strong emotional skills excel in life, sometimes even more than those with a high IQ. He doesn't discount the value of IQ or professional work skills



Psychologist Daniel Goleman claimed that people with strong emotional skills excel in life, sometimes even more than those with a high IQ."

but points out that, although these strengths might get you in the door of a company, emotional skills will help you thrive once you're there. As Goleman notes, the best achievers in companies tend to have much better interpersonal skills than average performers.

Need an example? Consider this: on paper, Michael Jordan and Dennis Rodman both had extraordinary athletic skills, maybe not equal, but certainly well above the NBA average. Jordan succeeded in working as part of a team, leading the Bulls to multiple championships. Rodman constantly feuded with his teammates and managers, creating dissension in the organization. His accomplishments — and more importantly, those of the teams he played for pale in comparison.

Why It Matters

The next time an opportunity surfaces to hire a franchise player for your company, take some time to assess how the person will "fit" within your organization from an interpersonal standpoint. **PB**

Rodney Hall is a senior partner with The Talon Group, a leading executive search firm specializing in the real-estate development and home building industries.

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NEW HOME KNOWLEDGE

Close Every Customer

If your sales team focuses only on the presentation, it's already lost.

If you want to fill a room to capacity at a home building conference, post a sign at the entry that reads: Learn the Secrets to Closing Every Customer.

I receive phone calls or emails from builders at least once a week denouncing their sales team's closing skills: "We hired them when all you needed to do was take orders, and now that you actually need to ask for the order, they lack basic closing skills." Well this is a good way to begin a conversation, because as the old saying goes, the first step to facilitating change is to acknowledge the problem.

But the next step is where many managers and owners often get off track on the secrets to closing. Most say they want every presentation to conclude with the sales agent's asking for the sale.

I respectfully disagree. Yes, it's true that the No. I reason customers don't buy is because salespeople simply were not asking. But to define closing skills as a one-line commitment statement at the end of a sales presentation oversimplifies the issue and masks the process used by those who possess great skills in asking for the order.

So let's begin with the basics. Closing is a process, not an event. Closing begins

at the first moment a sales professional and customer meet. Closing doesn't end until the customer buys at your community or jointly concludes with your sales professional that your community and their needs are simply not the right fit.

Although individual customer needs vary, commitments necessary to close a sale include seven specific prerequisites or tie-downs prior to gaining agreement to write the sale: the benefits of the new home outweigh the cost of staying put; the right location; the right community; the right builder; the right floorplan; the right homesite; and the right financing. Any shortcuts in asking for the order without commitments on all of the above and you and your sale professionals are blind squirrels looking for nuts.

The problem that many new home sales professionals have with closing is in understanding their role in the buying process. Many believe the key to improving their selling skills is to simply acquire more knowledge about what they have to sell, i.e. the community, the home, the fea-





To define closing skills as a one-line commitment statement at the end of a sales presentation oversimplifies the issue."

tures, the builder, etc. They then use this knowledge to weave a compelling story about how wonderful it will be to live in their community, with the belief that the more compelling the presentation the better their sales. Wrong!

Sales presentations without numerous "time outs" for customers' feedback that answers how your product compares with what they had in mind or gaining commitments on key sub-points simply postpones the mystery of whether a customer is a true candidate for a home purchase.

Great closers gain agreement on the most fundamental aspects of a home purchase throughout their presentation. By gaining conformation on sub-points, they become confident that asking for the sale is not an annoyance but rather the next logical step to solving the customer's home buying needs. The key is understanding the sales role as that of gaining feedback and using the information to influence the customer and solving needs. Sales agents who focus primarily on their presentation skills rarely become great closers. Those who rely on great questions and listening skills ascend to the top of our industry and become known for their outstanding closing skills. The choice is yours. PB

John Rymer is the founder of New Home Knowledge, which offers sales training for new home builders and realestate professionals. He can be reached at john@newhome-knowledge.com.



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O SELLING TO WOMEN

A man and a woman walk into your model; they've got money to spend and are looking to buy. When you begin your sales presentation, who do you focus on? If you say the man, you'd be wrong.

"The home building industry, as well as anybody with a product to sell, must recognize how important it is to appeal to the woman buyer," says Doris Pearlman, MIRM, and president of Possibilities for Design. The Denver-based firm specializes in market-driven interior space merchandising and trend-setting design.

"[The woman] is the real driver behind the home buying decision. And her top concern remains how this purchase will enhance her lifestyle as well as that of her family."

Simply put, "If the wife doesn't immediately like the home, then the couple won't be buying it," says Jed Gibson, president of Toll Architecture in Horsham, Pa., a division of Toll Brothers responsible for new plan development for the national builder's northeastern region.

Under the Influence

The married woman remains a vocal and influential partner for her spouse when it comes to buying a home. However, as women have achieved economic independence through the years, the single female home buyer has emerged as a legitimate and profitable target market for builders to focus on. In fact, single women purchased one in five homes in 2003 as opposed to one in 10 purchased by single men, according to the National Association of Realtors.

And the makeup of the typical American household has changed dramatically as more women have made



She's in control of the purchasing decision whether she's single or married, has kids or doesn't, or is young or old. So why are you ignoring her?

the choice to leave the role of full-time homemaker in favor of employment opportunities outside her home. In the past 40 years, for example, each successive generation has demonstrated a steady growth in female-centered, single-person households, non-family households and dual-income households. Married couples without children will account for nearly half of the projected growth in households over the next 10 years, according to the Nation's Housing report for 2006 compiled by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

"In the past, many builders turned a deaf ear to these emerging markets and continued to focus solely on designing homes for the traditional nuclear family. Interior designers found themselves having to disguise flaws in their homes because of this disconnect," says Georganne Derick, president of Merchandising East in Ellicott City, Md. Derick, who has won more than 90 regional design awards, is a frequent speaker, writer and trends expert.

"Women are more involved in the buying process than ever before, and that makes their role very significant," says Gloria Easler of Easler Construction located in Henry County, Ga. Easler, 2007 president of the Atlanta HBA's Metro South chapter, as well as a long-time Realtor, says new home merchandising should focus on convenience, flex space, time-saving features and casual living areas centered on the kitchen.

Architect Anne Olson, president of Olson Architecture in Niwot, Colo., is a nationally-recognized speaker on the subject of designing homes with women in mind and frequently serves as a judge for industry-related design competitions. "It makes the most sense to consider the

woman when designing a home because she's already thinking of how to take care of everyone else," Olson says. "Meet her needs by improving the way the home functions — beginning with its design — and you've met the needs of everyone else living in there as well."

In a tight housing market, builders tend to adopt a marketing strategy that is totally cost-driven, Olson says. "When everyone else is selling basically the same thing, then all you have is cost to differentiate yourself from your competition. If, however, you make the effort to set yourself apart through better design, you will reach the woman buyer because she cares deeply about design."

And kitchens and master bathrooms continue to be the rooms that sell homes, agree the experts.

The Kitchen

The kitchen is the ultimate home multitasking space, and it tops the list in rooms that are important to the female buyer. The well-designed kitchen assists her in handling everything from meal preparation and informal dining to supervising children's homework.

"It really is the center of the home for women buyers of all ages," agrees Pearlman. "This is the gathering space that allows family and friends to spend time together, so it must be comfortable and cozy. But they also want it to be open, look fabulous and have all the bells and whistles."

Women are likely to opt for upgrades in the kitchen, says Kay Green, a nationally recognized leader in model home and sales center merchandising.

Key features that make a kitchen irresistible to many female buyers include:

• Multi-user design. The concept of the traditional work triangle, with its

GET TO KNOW THE WOMEN IN YOUR TARGET MARKET

IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE that marketing programs targeted to female home buyers must be developed with her age and lifestyle requirements in mind, says merchandising expert Kay Green, who offers tips on what turns on female buyers in today's key markets.

Female Retiree/Empty Nester:

"Empty nesters want a really big, highend kitchen," says Green. "This is the first generation of women that have worked full time outside the home, and entertaining is still a big part of her life." They're looking for:

- Top-of-the-line kitchen finishes and appliances
- Dual master suites
- Formal entertaining areas
- Classic architecture and high-end finishes

Baby Boomer Women

Born between the late 1940s through the 1960s, women of the baby boomer generation are typically move-up buyers, work full time and have older children who still live at home. "Baby boomers also love large kitchens, but they tend to use it more as a family gathering space than for entertaining," says Green.

They're looking for:

- Open kitchen/family room design to promote family connections; an adjoining "tech center"
- His and her spaces including studies, closets and vanities
- Dedicated special interest spaces such as meditation rooms, hobby rooms and exercise rooms
- Maintenance-free features

Millennial Women

Female buyers born after 1970 belong to Generation X and Y and are otherwise knows as the millennials. They generally make up the young singles and first-time home buyer markets. Green sees them as the new wave of influence in the housing market. "Gen X and Y women are OK with multi-family housing and condominiums. They are more likely than their predecessors to embrace green building concepts, recycling and new technology."

They're looking for:

- Security features in parking and building access
- Central area for entertaining friends, but not necessarily a large kitchen
- Efficient space planning
- Contemporary design

focus on optimizing the kitchen workspace and appliance location for the convenience of a single chef, has given way to new arrangements that promote socializing and make it practical for two or more cooks to work at the same time.

- Islands. Islands continue to be one of the most important and practical focal points in the kitchen. Not only do they contribute valuable work and storage space, but they also tend to be the spot where everyone gathers.
- **Luxury finishes.** Television shows, catalogs and even big box stores highlight the wide range of new products for homes available today. "And women

want these things in their homes," says

- Customizable cabinetry. Special features including dedicated-purpose pull-out drawers, bins and built-in organization options are always highly desirable in kitchen cabinets.
- Professional-style appliances. According to our experts, women prefer the look of stainless steel appliances in their kitchens and choose larger refrigerators, ranges and separate cooktops whenever possible. They are also attracted to kitchen gadgets including refrigerated and warming drawers; wine coolers; and drawer-style dishwashers.



- Women collectively earn more than \$1 trillion annually and influence \$2.4 trillion of the \$3 trillion in annual consumer sales
- By 2010, the number of households headed by women with no spouse will increase to nearly 31 million, or about 28 percent of all households in the U.S.
- Women own 53 percent of stock
- Women own one-third of all U.S.
 firms and open a new business every
 seconds
- Nearly 80 percent of all household spending is controlled by women
- 40 percent of all households with assets over \$600,000 are headed by women
- 51 percent of the private wealth in the U.S. belongs to women
- Women make 80 percent of health care decisions
- Women make 91 percent of the home purchasing decisions
- Women make 94 percent of the home furnishing decisions

Sources: Women's Mortgage Industry Network; Fannie Mae; Doris Pearlman, Possibilities for Design; "EVEolution: The Eight Truths of Marketing to Women" by Faith Popcorn and Lys Marigold

The Master Bathroom

The female buyer looks to the master retreat to provide her with a sense of escape from stress of her busy lifestyle. For her, the crown jewel of the space is a luxurious bathroom that looks and functions as her own personal spa.

The oversized jet tub that has long been the focal point for the well-appointed master bathroom has been replaced by the spacious, luxury shower as the top choice for women when it comes to bathroom amenities. Vertical multi-head shower bars, ceiling-mounted rain showerheads and handheld personal body sprays all make the shower more appealing. And built-in seating is a must.

Other hot features in the bathroom:

- Separate his and her vanities rather than a single counter with two basins
- Private toilet
- Chromatherapy lighting
- Aromatherapy showerheads
- Luxury footbaths
- Steam showers
- Practical storage solutions such as tower cabinets
- Spa features including towel warming bars and radiant heating in floor

The Command Center

The newest dedicated space in the home, the "command center" may be a completely separate room or simply a nook adjacent to but visually separated from the kitchen. The command center must include a planning desk and built-in organization features.

"It has become a very important space for both stay-at-home and working moms," says Olson. "With its close connection to the kitchen, the command center keeps women connected to the activity going on in the home rather than isolating them."

The Family Foyer

In today's woman-friendly floor plans, the mud room — that traditional catch-

all space connecting the garage to the main living space of the home — has been redefined, reconfigured and appropriately renamed the family foyer.

Gone are the washer and dryer, and in their place, the space may have a small bench or desk and a built-in mail shredder and charging station for cell phones or iPods; cubbies or lockers for storing coats, shoes and backpacks; and even, perhaps, a tiled dog-washing center with its own floor-level faucet for cleaning muddy paws.

"The stuff that we carry around with us every day needs a place to go when we get home," says Gibson of this new and very popular stop-and-drop space.

The Laundry Room

"The feedback that we get most often about the laundry room is that people prefer not to walk into their home through it," says Gibson.

A more sensible solution, agree the experts, is to locate the washer and dryer in its own separate room adjacent to the family foyer, or better still, to move the laundry facilities closer to where the laundry is actually being generated — near the bedrooms.

Opportunities for Organization

"Clutter leads to stress for women," says Derick, "and they are always looking ways to help eliminate it from their homes. Serendipitous chunks of storage space will appeal to her."

These include:

- Bulk storage areas
- Walk-in pantries
- Multiple closets
- Built-in organizers
- Window seats, benches and niches

"Women are attracted to little alcoves and niches as opposed to large formal offices or dens," adds Green. "A big reason for this is their desire to stay connected to the rest of the household."

Other Key Features

- Curb appeal. The exterior style and finish of her home is very important to the female buyer because it immediately expresses perceived value and the owner's personality, Easler says. Female buyers tend to be drawn to opportunities to express their individuality through their home.
- Ability to customize. Women appreciate being able to establish their own style in their home, and builders have a great opportunity to reach the female buyer on this level by giving them lots of choices, says Derick. For small or mid-size builders who don't maintain their own design center, she suggests allowing a woman to make her own selections at her local home center. The result, she says, is a home with a more custom look.
- Less volume. Rather than big soaring ceilings, women feel more comfortable with modest, 10- to 12-foot heights.
- Interior jewelry. "Finishes make a big difference to the woman buyer," says Olson. Interior drama can be achieved through the use of applied moldings, beamed ceilings, columns, unique doors, and beautiful plumbing fixtures, cabinetry hardware and custom lighting.
- Healthy alternatives. Women are very concerned about establishing a healthy living environment within their homes. Hard surface flooring including wood, tile, stone and laminate, for example, has become very popular with female buyers in all markets because it requires less maintenance and seems cleaner than conventional carpet.
- Flexible floor plans. Women readily see the sense in floor plans that offer flexibility in adapting to their own or their family's current needs as well as to their lifestyle requirements as they change.
 - Practical technology. Women are

not as technology-driven as men," says Pearlman. "If it is not easy to use and does not simplify their lives, they are more likely to do without it."

■ Outdoor living space. Covered porches, three-season rooms, decks, terraces, lanais and grilling porches are very popular with women in all markets. Many homes today include several distinct outdoor areas, including one connected to the kitchen or great room and another off the master suite or den.

Catch the eye of today's female

home buyer with unique and luxurious interior details, plenty of opportunity to customize her home inside and out, and a floor plan that simplifies her busy life and you'll be on the right road toward making the sale — even in a tough market. **PB**

LOG ON Read 'Get to know your female home buyer' online at www.ProBuilder.com/best practices

WHAT MAKES A WOMAN DIFFERENT WHEN IT COMES TO BUYING A HOME?

EVEN WHEN MEN AND WOMEN look at the same home, they tend to focus on entirely different spaces. What they are really looking for are places within the home to call their own.

Men tend to be linear thinkers and approach the home buying process as a matter-of-fact business deal. Women, on the other hand, are more relationship-driven, and when making a big purchasing decision such as buying a home, they are more likely to want to discuss the process with others, including friends and family, says marketing guru Doris Pearlman. "They like to run ideas back and forth with others."

"Men are always more interested in bottom line prices and terms," adds Gloria Easler, marketing director for Atlanta-area Easler Construction. "If the product has a place for their plasma television and adequate garage space, it is functional for them. Women still buy on emotion and how a space feels. Amenities really matter to women buyers."

Women are tactile and like to be able to see and touch the things they are buying.

"They definitely don't respond to the same stimuli as men do," says Derick. "Men are attracted to grand spaces, lots of wood and cutting-edge technology. Women respond more to rooms with softened edges, organization features and great landscaping."

Architect Anne Olson says women are already overburdened. "They are attempting to simplify their lives with the choices that they make in their homes. There have been studies done that show that a woman's blood pressure goes up four points

when she returns home at the end of the day while a man's goes down. That's because she feels as though she is starting her second job when she gets there."

"Stress reduction is the No. 1 desire for women today, and this drives the trends for the things that appeal to them when they are considering buying a new home," says interior designer Georganne Derick. "More and more often women are working, taking care of themselves, a husband, children, and perhaps even elderly parents."





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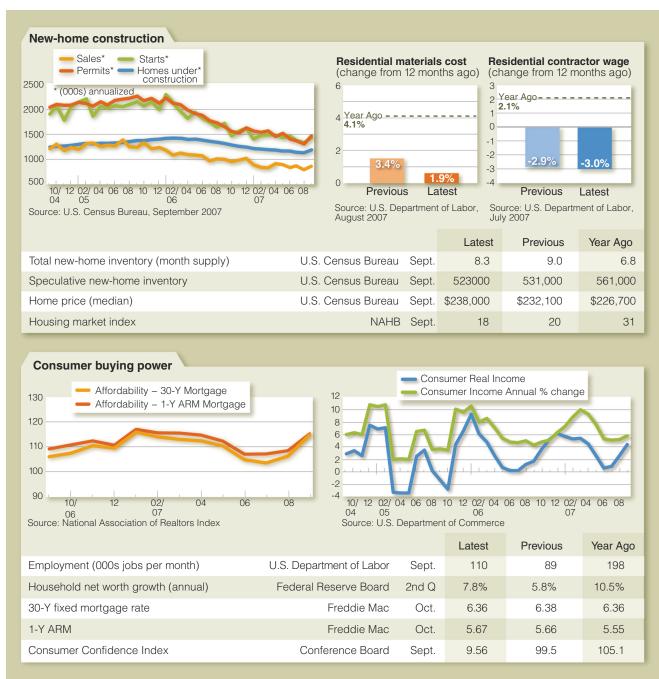


Industry Analysis

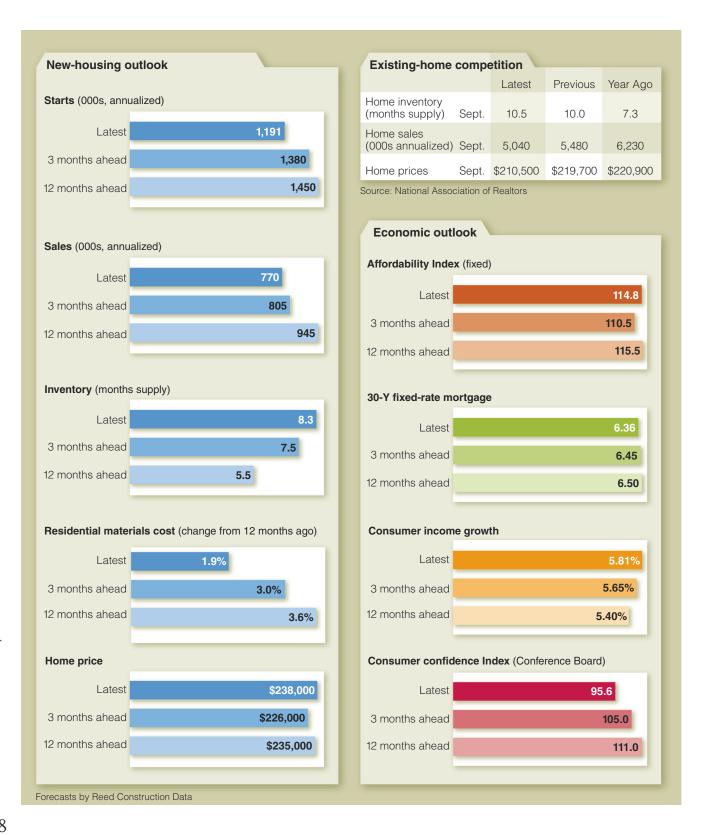
>> BY JAMES HAUGHEY, REED CONSTRUCTION DATA

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Industry Analysis





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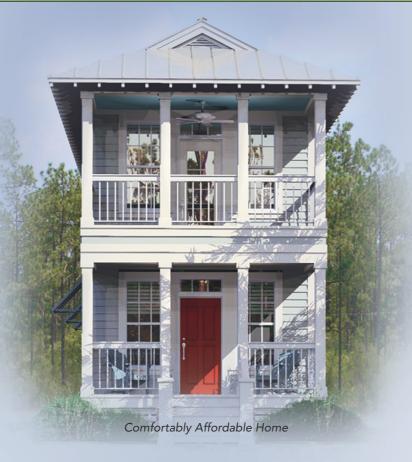


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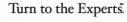
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2008 Builder of the Year

Veridian Homes

Team Building

Quality-driven green builder's game plan calls for a team effort that pays off with satisfied customers. >> BY ANN MATESI, SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

To David Simon, president of operations and co-founder of Veridian Homes, the secret to building better homes and communities starts with a better building team.

Led by Simon and partner Jeff Rosenberg, president of land development and acquisition, the Madison, Wis.-based firm focuses on traditional community development based on smart growth principles and green building practices. But what really makes Veridian Homes — Professional Builder's Builder of the Year for 2008 — a vanguard for the industry is the extent to which the company empowers its building team members to affect the process.

Company management does not just invite participation and feedback from employees, trade partners, and even home buyers to some degree. The team insists on it. It backs that up by constantly seeking out the latest in best practice and quality improvement methodologies more often associated with today's most successful business leaders outside the home building industry and adapting them for their own employees to use.

This approach has made the four-year-old company a winner, both in profitability and industry accolades. What also make Veridian Homes unique are the company's programs to continuously reevaluate the efficiency of its building processes; its rigorous attention to quality improvement; insistence on top-notch employee and trade partner ethics; and steadfast dedication to reducing the impact that its operations have on the environment.

Today, Veridian Homes is the largest residential builder in the state of Wisconsin, constructing nearly 500 single-family and attached homes and condominiums a year ranging in price from \$170,000 to \$700,000, earning it a market share of over 30 percent. Every year, the company measures itself against all NAHB-sponsored Builder 20 groups nationwide and has remained in the top 25 percent in terms of profitability since it was founded. The company predicts profits to be \$121 million in 2007 and \$136 million in 2008. These are impressive figures, particularly in light of the economic uncertainty presented by today's housing market.

"Sure, this market is a tough one," says Simon, "But we will weather it, and it will rebound. What has really helped us is that we already have established extremely strong brand recognition with our buyers for quality and customer service. This is not a panacea, but it helps. You have to constantly reevaluate things to make sure that you are meeting your customers' needs. At the same time, you have to make sure that you are priced appropriately."

Veridian Homes maintains a portfolio of more than 40 plans, including single-family, twin-home (the company's term for duplex plans), townhome and condominium designs, and offers buyers virtually unlimited options for customizing them. This flexibility in price, style and product line allows the builder to appeal to a broad spectrum of buyers ranging from first timers to empty nesters. They also have a series of home plans designed for more upscale buyers.



"If every builder in the country were to become Energy Starcertified, think about the impact that would have on the environment."

 David Simon, president of operations, Veridian Homes "We recognize that it takes a lot of effort on their part for people to move," says Simon, "and the reality is that they are just not that willing to do it. We do everything we can so that the process is hassle-free for them."

The company makes a wide range of financing options and incentives available to buyers to simplify the purchase process, including a 0% down payment program, another that guarantees the sale of the buyer's existing home, rent liberation programs, and a program that rewards repeat buyers with a discount on the purchase price of a new home when they buy from the builder again.

"Our mission is to build great homes and great communities," says Simon. Company employees are guided by the principle that "under-promising and over-delivering" is the best way to have a satisfied customer in the end.

Relishing the Role as a Leader

"We may not be a large national builder," says Simon, "but we are a big one in Madison, Wis. Even so, we look at our vision as one customer at a time, one home at a time. Our goal is to make each customer feel as though they are the most important person in our lives when we work with them."

Translating that sentiment into practical application takes a keen awareness of today's buyer markets and a willingness to roll with the changes.

"First and foremost home builders have to recognize that our business is all about how we can fulfill our customers' dreams — how we can enrich their lives through the homes we build for them," says Simon, "But it is just as important to realize that every year consumer's expectations are going up. To be successful we have to be constantly reinventing ourselves to meet those evolving expectations and to keep pushing the bar in terms of satisfaction and of quality.

"Our industry must continue to move forward, and I think that we were one of the last to get that message. On the whole, we have been slow to adapt to the changes in the marketplace. There exists the constant challenge to move beyond the status quo because other industries are doing it.

BUILDER'S PITCH FOR RECYCLING ON THE JOB SITE

When it came to convincing construction trade crews that recycling was a good way to be kinder to the environment, it wasn't always easy for Gary Zajicek, Veridian Homes' vice president of construction.

"Initially getting them to participate in job site recycling was like pulling teeth," says Zajicek. "The reality was that most of these guys were coming from a background where it was throw-anything-extra-as-far-as-you-can. As a result, we would end up with just tons and tons of waste. We tried over and over again through our discussions and on-site training to get them on board. We would see a little success, and then it would fall back again. But we never gave up."

For Zajicek, the turning point occurred during a presentation he was giving to the company's trade partners on the merits of green building practices and erosion control. On the screen, he flashed a slide showing an aerial shot of Lake Mendota, Madison's picturesque recreational lake that borders the city.

"One half of the lake was blue and

pristine and the entire other half was muddy brown. Their jaws just dropped. I said 'Do you see what is going on here? This is a silt plume coming from the construction sites in Madison, Wis., because of the lack of green environmental practices. Now let's go over what role you play in this each time that you are on a job site.' That one slide did more convincing than two or three year's worth of talking."

In addition to establishing a "willingness" to recycle by reinforcing the con-



JOB SITE RECYCLING is one of many green practices company management insists upon.

cept during its weekly BUILD meetings, the builder also introduced a cost factor.

To get framing crews to use lumber more efficiently, the company reevaluated the way excess wood was disposed of. "Now when a new home is built, the framing contractor gets one 8-cubic-yard dumpster for scrap wood," says Zajicek. "We had already established through our framing processes and practices that, if they have used their materials properly, one dumpster was more than plenty. If they need another dumpster for excess material, then they are responsible for paying for its removal. This really caught on fast because if they were not doing things efficiently, it cost them.

"Ultimately, we have created a win-win situation for everyone because material costs are down and landfill costs are down."

The builder has also set up a central collection area in each of its communities under construction to collect scrap vinyl, drywall, concrete and cardboard. "We ask them to help us recycle these materials, and now they do," says Zajicek.



Our customers are used to getting higher levels of service elsewhere, and it just makes sense that they are going to expect it from us as well."

By streamlining its operations, Veridian Homes has been able to achieve an aggressive benchmark, starting and finishing 2½ homes every working day. At the same time, the company is constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve quality of the processes, techniques and materials it uses for building homes. So far, the efforts have paid off with a higher than 50 percent reduction in defects, and accolades from buyers. In national surveys conducted by Avid Ratings, Veridian's customer satisfaction scores consistently measure in the top 10 percent of more than

300 builders analyzed. In market research of its own customers conducted in 2006, 73 percent of their new home buyers responded that they did not even consider a builder other than Veridian Homes.

Celebrating its Green Genes

Veridian Homes' commitment to green building is a natural when you consider the strong foundation in environmental stewardship and community involvement each partner brought with him to the new venture. "Green building is a part of the business culture that we both came from," says Simon, "and we continue to believe that it is the right thing to do. It allows us to give back to the community. Our efforts make it easier for the homeowner to develop sound environmental practices as well. What easier way is there for our customers to participate in the green building movement than to purchase one of our homes? They are green, they are healthier and they save energy."

When it comes to protecting the environment, the builder takes its role very seriously, constructing all of its homes and condominiums to meet Green Built Home and Energy Star program stan-

dards. Veridian Homes also participates in a variety of green-building programs on local, state and national levels including the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental

Design for Homes pilot project. It was also officially recognized as a participant in Wisconsin's innovative Green Tier program, a Department of Natural Resources-administered program designed to reward businesses that differentiate themselves by systematically delivering superior environmental performance with economic benefits.

THE VERIDIAN HOMES MANAGEMENT TEAM

INCLUDES (back

row, from left): John Maasch, vice president of sales, marketing and customer relations; Dan Gorski, vice president of estimating, purchasing and design; Bill Bublitz, vice president of finance: Garv Zajicek, vice president of construction; Don Esposito, vice president of land acquisition and development; (front row, seated): David Simon, president of operations; Jeff Rosenberg, president of land acquisition and development.

Veridian Homes Mission Statement

We build great homes by never losing sight of what is important: our customers, our employees, our communities and the environment in which we live.

"Our efforts at job site recycling started out with small steps, but little by little everyone began to ask, "What can I do to make a difference?"

 Gary Zajicek, vice president of construction,
 Veridian Homes Through cooperative efforts with its trade partners, Veridian Homes has initiated its own program for recycling scrap wood, vinyl siding, cardboard and concrete. It recycles more material than any other home builder in its state and also devotes more time and resources to land planning, habitat restoration and water conservation to restore the harmony between new communities and the environment.

"Green is everywhere these days," says Simon. "You have to consider both. Making the decision to build green does not have to be a costly one for the customer if you go about it in a systematic way. You have to ask yourself, 'How can I improve this product without raising the cost?' It is not so much about having to use more expensive products as it is about making sure that you are using the proper installation methods and can meet third-party inspections. Ultimately, the most important thing is to make sure you are providing a high-quality, comfortable living environment for the consumer and that the home is truly performing the way it should."

The company practices what it preaches. Rather than constructing a brand new headquarters for its operations, it opted to renovate an abandoned furniture store in Monona, Wis., instead. The sleek and modern facility features 22,000 square feet of office and meeting space and Veridian's award-winning 3,400-square-foot in-house design studio.

The office space, designed by office furniture innovator Herman Miller, features a visually striking "open office" concept that promotes worker creativity, conversation and community. Employees are grouped in unique neighborhood arrangements that provide opportunities to hold meetings in backyards rather than in enclosed meeting rooms.

Dedication to Quality Improvement

Veridian Homes maintains its course for continuous quality improvement in a number of ways, including self assessment, both as a company and on a personal level, based on the Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award criteria; participation in the National Housing Quality Award program, which includes a third-party assessment component; customer feedback; Six Sigma methodology; and process mapping. The company also goes through SWOT analysis at an annual strategy planning meeting.

Veridian maintains a coordinated schedule of monthly, bi-weekly and weekly meetings between senior management, departmental managers, employees and trade partners to promote efficient two-way communication and discuss company and departmental goals and strategies, timelines and action plans. Feedback from employees and trade partners is highly encouraged and helps the builder identify areas for improvement.

In 2004, Veridian Homes was one of three builders in the country and the only one in Wisconsin to earn Certified Builder status for Quality and Safety Management Systems through NAHB's Research Center's NHQ program for its construction, sales and customer relations departments.

Participation in the Certified Builder program is designed to increase efficiency and consistency in building practices. Certification, based on ISO 9000 quality standards, is achieved through a rigorous third-party audited review of a builder's business practices to ensure that all elements of its quality assurance system are incorporated to provide greater customer satisfaction. Since then, the company's land development, purchasing, estimating and design departments have also been incorporated into this certification.

The company also earned the 2006 NHQ Gold Award, the housing industry's highest recognition for quality achievement and world-class business practices. Entries are judged by industry experts who evaluate the role that cus-

BUILDER GOES FOR THE GREEN IN PRODUCT SELECTION

It doesn't matter what color it is on the outside; every home that Veridian Homes builds is green on the inside. By specifying recycled or high-efficiency products where it counts, making better use of materials and reducing waste, a builder can play a big role in reducing pollution and conserving natural resources in their area, says Veridian Homes' co-founder and president of operations David Simon. "The process starts during the planning and design stage and continues right through to how that home functions for its owner."

The company uses:

- EnergyStar-rated HVAC systems
- Programmable thermostats
- Low-flow faucets and showerheads
- Exhaust ventilation timers
- Thermal breaks in concrete basement walls (all single-family homes include a basement as standard)
- Engineered wood products to reduce the need for long spans of dimensional lumber
- High performance windows
- Low-VOC paints
- Carpet with Carpet and Rug Institute IAQ (indoor air quality) label
- Blown cellulose attic insulation that contains more than 75 percent recycled material
- Gas fireplaces with non-standing pilot systems that save natural gas
- All homes wrapped and taped with a moisture/air infiltration barrier as standard

BUILDING COMMUNITIES WITH CHARACTER

Veridian Homes' focus is on developing environmentally sensitive, smart-growth communities that feature a mix of housing products that mesh with traditional neighborhood design principles. The builder, a strong proponent of small-lot ordinances in its region, currently has 18 neighborhoods under development in the greater Madison metro area.

"Primarily our neighborhoods are designed using the concept of new urbanism," says David Simon, president of operations for Veridian Homes. "This is really all about knitting together a variety of housing choices, businesses and recreational opportunities into a well-rounded community with a town-square focus."

The company has taken more traditional architectural styles, such as bungalow and craftsman, and blended it with contemporary styles, Simon says.

Veridian encourages buyers to select rich exterior colors using its models and spec-built experimental homes as examples to demonstrate the beauty of bolder choices to buyers who may have difficulty visualizing the finished product, says Dan Gorski, vice president of estimating, purchasing and design. This includes deep shades of red, tan, green and blue. "Many people are afraid to go

too bold with their color selection, but a sea of grey-sided homes can really become monotonous."

The builder also enforces a strict anti-monotony code for the single-family homes: no two will be repeated within seven lots of each other in any direction. Other features that add character to each community include wrap-around porches on homes built on corner lots, and variation in garage location. For narrow-lot applications, side-yard windows are carefully sized and positioned to bring in natural light without sacrificing privacy for the homeowner. All single-family homes Veridian builds feature a full basement as standard.

Plans are constantly being reviewed, says Gorski, not only to improve construction efficiencies but also to keep the builder on-track with consumers' changing tastes and demands. The company employs its own staff architect to develop new plans and refine existing ones.

"We researched benchmarks from across the country on the newest and best designs as we developed our stock of plans," says Simon. "We also listen to our consumers through a combination of surveys and focus groups made up of customers who are actually living in our homes now. We ask them for their comments on how things are working for them and for suggestions on what they would change."



VERIDIAN HOMES FOCUSES ON building communities based on traditional neighborhood design principles that include open space and common gathering areas.

tomer-focused quality plays in the builder's construction, business management, sales, design and warranty service.

"We are not perfect," says Simon. "Nobody is. And our quality improvement process is not about achieving perfection. What it is really about is how we can build a better product for our customers, take information about our weaknesses and then build better systems around them."

The company relies on a system that documents action plans that guide the firms processes. "We refer to this as PDCA: plan, do, check, act. Plan it; go out and do it; check your work; and act on the exceptions," Simon says.

This provides the model for the company's team approach to building homes. The team comprises not only of Veridian employees but also with its trade partners and vendors, says Simon.

Streamlined Construction Management

Veridian has developed its own even-flow production system designed to eliminate fluctuation in on-site workload through good project management and planning, and strict adherence to a consistent construction schedule. Using techniques such as balanced scheduling of its trade partners and just-in-time delivery of materials allows the company to reduce return trips for trades and have fewer callbacks to the job site, and the steps increase the reliability of material availability.

Under the even-flow system, customers receive a guaranteed closing date — and a fixed price — on the day they sign their contract. "They know from the start exactly what day they can move in on," says Gary Zajicek, vice president of construction. "In fact, they know what day the concrete basement is going to be poured, what day the roof is going to go on, and what day the carpet is going

"When you think about it, most home builders don't really build anything. We manage a process, people and expectations."

 David Simon, president of operations,
 Veridian Homes to go in because these dates have already been set as a part of the schedule. What we have done is evaluate the building process from the closing date backward to the beginning. Every step of the process is assigned a set date that we have all agreed to stick to."

The even-flow concept was met with skepticism by Veridian's trade partners. "There was apprehension and doubt among our trades as to whether or not something like this would actually work," says Zajicek. "It did take some convincing to get them on board and several months of trial and error to get it right."

The construction management team holds weekly BUILD (Building, Understanding through Initiatives in Learning and Development) meetings to evaluate scheduling with its trade groups that are divided into beginning, mechanical and finish categories. All trades meet as a group during the fourth week. Discussions include scope of work, review of completed work, and identification

of jobs that are coming up.

"These weekly meetings were initially set up to bring together the scheduling and verify its accuracy," says Zajicek. "As even-flow has become more and more accepted by the trades, we discuss the schedule less. The meetings have now become a means of educating our trades on exactly what our expectations are, of sharing ideas and identifying areas for improvement."

Similar to their uncertainty about the scheduling process, Zajicek met significant trade partner reluctance when it came to their required participation in the BUILD pre-planned meeting schedule.

"We take participation by the trade partners in these meetings seriously and we address this right from the start, beginning in our interview process with them. When they sign a contract to work with us, they understand that they will be joining us in these BUILD meetings.

Research and development is not a typically a term associated with home building, but another benefit of the company's process-driven approach, Simon says, is that it provides more opportunity for experimentation with new concepts and technology in its spec-built projects. "It really allows you to better benchmark, track results, improvise and try out new ideas."

Veridian has experimented with improved framing techniques that can significantly reduce the amount of lumber required to build a home; has recently built a test home using Q.A. Duct, a plastic-based ducting system which, for the first time, passes the UL-181 requirement for use as an aboveground heating and cooling distribution system; is the first home builder to receive an exemption for the Wisconsin DNR to allow grinding of oriented strand board (OSB) with dimensional lumber, for use in erosion control "socks" and as ground cover on its construction sites; and is currently testing a recycled and recyclable plastic grid system that can be used to replace stone as an erosion-control tracking pad on construction sites. The company has also built six LEED-certified homes.

Building a Trade Partnership

Veridian management refers to the company's outside labor force as trade partners rather than sub-contractors because it sees these key relationships as an opportunity for a joint venture between the builder and the trade group.

"When you think about it, most home builders don't really build anything," says Simon. "We manage a process, people and expectations. Our trades are really the ones who come together and build the home, so we are putting a lot of responsibility

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

Through its wood and cardboard recycling programs, Veridian Homes diverted more than 2,400 tons of wood products from state landfills in 2005. Other construction materials can be recycled and reused in a number of ways, including:

Recycled Drywall

- Manufacture of new drywall
- Cement production
- Soil nutrient
- Fertilizer
- Bulking agent for composting
- Animal bedding
- Athletic field marker

Recycled Concrete

- Erosion control
- Shoreline protection material
- Base material for road construction
- Base material for footings and foundations
- Landscaping
- Drainage material around underground pipes
- Aggregate material in new asphalt or concrete

VERIDIAN HOMES EDUCATES its

trade partners in the merits of recycling construction materials.

Recycled Vinyl Siding

- Sewer or irrigation piping
- Electrical conduit
- Garden hoses, outdoor furniture and fencing
- Non-electrical cable coatings
- Floor mat backings
- Molded tool handles
- Industrial sheeting and tarps

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in their hands in terms of what we will eventually provide to our customers."

The company has developed a culture of "help-ful engagement" with its trade partners that is beneficial to both, he adds. "This is unlike the typical environment they are familiar with. Our message to them is, 'Tell us how can we be of help to you in doing your job better?'"

This includes encouraging each trade partner to develop higher levels of management practices and quality in their own business by promoting, supporting, and paying for certification classes and their related materials sponsored by NAHB Research Center's NHQ Certified Trade Contractor Program. To date, 22 out of approximately 80 trade partners have achieved certification status, with many others preparing for certification.

As trade partners adopt more professional business practices, the builder has seen a reduction in the need to over-supervise projects.

Veridian has also formed its own 15-member Trade Partner Advisory Council, which includes a representative from each home building function, meeting on a monthly basis to discuss concerns and provide feedback. Trade partners are encouraged to bring to the table their ideas for using new products as well as innovative green building techniques they come across.

The company also includes a trade partner representative on many of its cross-functional improvement teams, surveys them every 18 months to solicit their feedback on how Veridian can improve operations, and sponsors an annual trade partner conference that features presentations, information, guest speakers and brainstorming sessions on building industry best practices.

Get the Right People On Board

Veridian's hiring practices are based on considering a candidate's unique skill set and assessing their potential to embrace the company's vision and mission, rather than concentrating solely on their industry experience.

"Most companies hire based on experience and they fire based on experience," says Simon. "We look at it the other way around. We begin by determining how they will fit into the unique business culture we have established here and then educate them on our processes."

Specific goals for employees are linked with the company's performance planning and development process so that each has a clear picture of the role they play. This also helps employees to establish priorities and identify resources, accomplishments and opportunities for on-going professional

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES YIELD IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

Veridian Homes' quality initiatives focus on adopting business improvement practices and processes designed to enhance decision making on a company-wide basis to meet its strategic and operational objectives. The company uses a variety of methods for checking and improving quality including self-assessment; third-party assessment; Six Sigma process mapping; and feedback from surveys of employees, trade partners and customers. Performance improvement results include:

- Sold cycle time for model homes was reduced from 32 to 15 days.
- Drafting time on model homes was shortened by more than 1 hour.
- Estimating time on model homes was cut by 32 percent.
- Material variance (difference between ordered and required) was reduced for lumber by 20 percent, by 24 percent for siding, and by 38 percent for trim.
- Paperwork processing required 208 fewer hours per year through the introduction of a production scheduler software system developed by BuilderMT, for a total estimated savings to the company of \$200,000 through performance increases.
- Improvements in escrow and warranty processes reduced person hours by 200 per year.
- Introducing 10 interdisciplinary defect-reduction teams, which included both Veridian employees and trade partners, led to 50 percent fewer defects.



development. Employees are rewarded through participation in a profit-sharing program based on sustained improvements in cost, quality, cycle times, customer service and company profit.

Simon hosts a bi-weekly meeting that all 93 fulltime employees attend where the company's vision and mission are reviewed, updates from various departments are presented and quality-related issues are discussed.

In addition, managers meet weekly with employees within their departments to discuss anything that affects their job performance. This allows the manager to focus on each employee and helps to resolve job-related or personal frustrations early on, gives the manager constant feedback to which processes are working and which are not, and keeps

THE BUILDER'S
HOMES blend
traditional design
with contemporary
amenities, including
open living space,
volume ceilings and
pilotless gas fireplaces
that save energy.

"We always remember that the homes we are building are surrounded by homes that people are living in."

 Gary Zajicek,
 vice president of construction,
 Veridian Homes problems from escalating within the company.

While the multitude of scheduled meetings may, at first glance, seem to be a time bandit, says Simon, it is actually the exact opposite. "When you start holding meetings in a structured format, it actually frees up a lot of time. People tend to hold the line on complaints and their need to share information haphazardly when they realize that there will be a set opportunity to do so every week. Questions are addressed and answers are given."

Ultimate Goal: A Satisfied Customer

Veridian Homes never loses sight of the importance of the buyer in the home building process, says Simon. "Consumers are individuals to us and we do our best to consider their unique needs. Yes, we have specific systems in place for building their home, but we also recognize that there has to be a certain amount of interaction with them during the process as well. We look at their personality type, identify how involved they want to be, and then do our best to accommodate that.

"We still have to meet our deadlines, but we have found that by giving buyers a voice, we learn a lot more about what their expectations are and how we can meet them. We make sure that we are reaching out to our buyer in a variety of ways as their home is being built."

Planned interac-



VERIDIAN HOMES
CONSIDERS satisfied
buyers strong
ambassadors when it
comes to generating
new sales.

tions between builder and buyer take the form of a carefully orchestrated series of handoffs from one specialist to the next as the home moves from stage to stage. The team still exists in the background, but a specialist in sales, design coordination, construction management or customer relations takes a lead role in working with the buyer at various stages before and after they close on their home.

Interacting with the buyer also allows the builder to educate them, says Simon. "Before a buyer moves in, we have a customer service representative demonstrate to them what is unique about their home and how its systems are designed to function. Education is very important in order for the consumer to get the best results."

A satisfied customer is the most valuable sales tool of all when it comes to attracting new buyers, says Simon. In just four years, Veridian Homes has

PROVIDING EMPLOYEES WITH QUALITY TOOLS

Veridian Homes employees have access, via the company's intranet, to a "quality toolbox" assembled to help them support the builder's quality initiatives.

The employee toolbox focuses on developing, launching and implementing company-wide business improvement practices and processes, including:

- Tools and resources for personal and professional growth
- Quality improvement training for all employees that helps them understand the terms and methodologies embraced by company management "We want to make sure that, as we continue to grow as a company, we continue the quality," says David Simon, president of operations for Veridian Homes. "As we have success we are constantly refining the toolbox so that we don't lose our quality platform."

The Toolbox includes:

- Templates
- PowerPoint-based training
- Videos
- Trade partner certification materials
- Builder certification materials
- NHQA criteria
- Baldridge criteria
- Six Sigma DMAIC process
- Veridian Homes' plan-do-check-act
- Value stream mapping
- Failure mode effects analysis (FMEA)
- 5S, 8D, international team excellence tools
- TRIZ (problem solving methodology)
- Monthly updates from American Society for Quality
- Acronym reference guide

achieved brand recognition in its region of 94 percent and a customer satisfaction score of 93 percent.

The company is also a strong proponent of community involvement, contributing \$250,000 annually to not-for-profit charities and organizations through its own foundation.

"Winning awards is not our objective," says Simon, "but they do serve as reassurance that we, as a company, are headed on the right track. We have a strong drive and desire to be the best in terms of what we can provide for our customers in terms of better homes, better neighborhoods and a better environment. Our awards provide us with a benchmark to let us know how we are doing." **PB**

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A Peaceful Oasis

A Japanese home builder joins a Washington state firm to create a quiet yet convenient haven.

If anyone can craft designs to make the most of a small space, it's the Japanese. And if any builder in the Pacific Northwest understands sustainability and the natural evolution of neighborhoods, it's Bennett Homes. So when Sumitomo Forestry Co., one of Japan's largest home builders, was looking for an American partner, Bennett was a natural fit. The result of their joint venture, Dahlia Park, was nearly sold out by the time this article went to press.

Dahlia Park is a neighborhood of 109 single-family homes at Issaquah Highlands, one of Seattle's most popular master-planned communities.

"This was really our first big joint venture," says Gayl Van Natter, vice president of sales and marketing for Bellevue, Wash.-based Bennett Homes. "[Sumitomo] liked the idea of a masterplanned community because they believe in all the generations being together. Also, Issaquah Highlands is Built Green and Energy Star-certified, which is very important to the Japanese."

Until the Japanese builder came on board, a small lot, for Bennett, meant one that was 50 feet wide and 100 feet deep. Many of their lots were 60 or 65 feet wide. Home sites at Dahlia Park range from 3,600 to 5,000 square feet, with compact yards that are easy to maintain but still provide usable outdoor space in the form of garden rooms. It's a fairly dense community, netting approximately nine units to the acre.

"Now that we're getting into 35-footwide and even 30-foot-wide lots, we have

no idea what to build other than a boxcar," Van Natter says. "Sumitomo has had a great deal of experience with small lots, and their expertise is extremely valuable to us."

Homes for Life

The Seattle architectural firm of Weber + Thompson developed a design program for Dahlia Park that fills a hole in the local market. "The developers of Issaquah Highlands were very interested in having a community with amenities focused on the [move-down] buyer," says Kristen Scott, principal of Weber + Thompson. "Younger families were moving [to Issaquah Highlands], and their parents wanted to move to the area to be closer to their grandchildren. But Issaquah is mostly very large homes on large pieces of property, which isn't really appropriate for an older couple wanting to scale back."

Every two-story home has dual master suites: one up, one down. Bennett calls them "lifetime" home designs that are flexible enough to adapt to the homeowner's needs. "When people are nimble enough, they often want to [have a bedroom upstairs] to give them privacy from the rest of the house," says Scott. "But once they decide it's time to climb fewer stairs, they can have the master suite on the main level."

The twin masters also serve a variety of household configurations, such as couples with an aging parent or returning adult child; single people who want to live in the same house but not share a bathroom; and friends or family who visit regularly.

Interestingly, though empty nesters were expected to be the primary market for Dahlia Park, the first buyers were

VITAL STATS

Dahlia Park

Location: Issaquah, Wash. **Project name:** Dahlia Park

Model: Essex

Builder: Bennett Homes, Bellevue,

Wash.

Architect: Weber + Thompson, Seattle Interior Designer: Bennett Homes Developers: Bennett Homes and Sumi-

tomo Forestry Co., Tokyo

Model opened: March 2006

Home type: Single-family detached

Sales to date: 106 Community size: 109 units

Square footage: 1,600 to 3,200 square

feet

Price: \$450,000 to \$870,000 Buyer profile: Singles, dinks, families,

empty nesters

VOLUME SPACES, such as this two-story family room, make interiors feel light and airy. The loft provides a generous amount of space for many uses, including a home office or sitting area.

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A

NATURAL MATERIALS SUCH AS WOOD AND STONE warm the kitchen of the Essex model. Bennett Homes' joint-venture partner, Sumitomo Forestry Co., did the

interior design.

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primarily singles and dinks, plus a number of families. It wasn't until the smaller, less expensive homes were sold out that older buyers began to account for a higher percentage of sales.

Several plans (including the Essex, shown here) have a first-floor hobby room near the garage that can serve as a home office, library, sewing room, study, potting shed or woodshop. Some have attic rooms with windows — reminiscent of Grandma's attic — that can be used to store family treasures or put to other uses such as a sewing room, office,

playroom, study or hideaway.

Weber + Thompson had to follow a rigorous set of design guidelines developed by Issaquah Highlands. "The core values were 'timeless, traditional architecture,' which dovetailed nicely with the main buyer group we were looking at," says Scott. "These people were looking for things with that iconic 'I'm home' motif — the sheltering roof, the big overhangs."

The home designs evoke the density and architectural variety of older Pacific Northwest neighborhoods that have evolved over time. Front elevations range from Tudor to Craftsman and utilize materials such as shingles, stucco and brick.

Barking Spot

The focal point of Dahlia Park is the park itself. This central green is part of the property Bennett Homes purchased from Port Blakely Communities, developer of Issaquah Highlands. A series of terraces create an amphitheater feel and invite a variety of activities, from family picnics to impromptu football games.

At the perimeter of the site, homes have frontloaded garages and backyards adjacent to the sur-

IN MY ROOM

Perimeter lots at Dahlia Park are 50 feet by 100 feet, while interior lots are 44 feet by 82 feet. That doesn't leave much space for a yard, but Weber + Thompson carved out something special with inspiration from the Japanese: the *tsubo niwa*, or garden room. This central courtyard expands views and augments the flow of traffic from the kitchen to the outdoors.

"[Dahlia Park] is in a beautiful setting up in the foothills, so having an outdoor lifestyle is something we wanted to reflect, even though the homes are on smaller lots with less personal space to take care of," says architect Kristen Scott of Weber + Thompson.

In smaller homes that face the interior of the site, the garden room is on the side of the house and accessible from the kitchen, great room or master bedroom, depending on the floor plan. The larger, perimeter homes have garden rooms in the back, facing the greenbelt.

"Our idea with the smaller houses was to have an outdoor space in the center of the floor plan and let a lot of different rooms look out onto it," says Scott. "We did a use easement with the adjacent property, adding another 5 or 6 feet and extending the outdoor space all the way over to a landscape buffer. The houses were designed so there were no windows looking into the garden of the home next door."

Garden rooms range in size from 12 by 17 feet to 15½ by 16 feet. Included in the base price of the home is a concrete patio with room for seating and dining areas and a generous barbecue area. Stepping stones form a path surrounded by low-maintenance landscaping native to the Pacific Northwest.

Four themed garden rooms — upgrades that run from \$12,000 to \$20,000 — are offered: the Outdoor Chef, the Retreat, the Gardener and the Entertainer. They include such features as built-in cooking centers with sinks and gas barbecues, bistro-bar serving areas, water features, potting tables, birdbaths, raised planters, fireplaces and "rocks" that camouflage outdoor speakers. Home buyers can add fencing, gates, decking, fountains, pavers and whatever else their hearts desire.

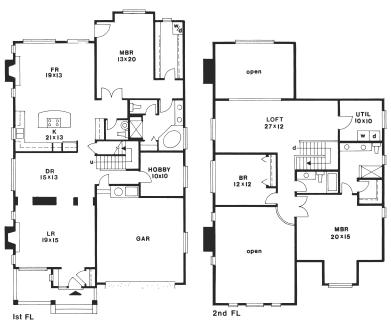
"Compared to the little 12-foot by 10-foot piece of leftover backyard that's so often what you end up with on such homes, Bennett did a great job," says Scott.

GARDEN ROOMS AT
DAHLIA PARK can be
fitted with everything
homeowners need to
enjoy their outdoor
space, including
landscaping, planters
and built-in cooking
centers. One of four
themed plans is
shown below.





THE LIVING AND
DINING ROOMS of
the Essex exhibit
clean lines and plenty
of windows that
brighten up the home
on a gray Seattle day.



THE 3,218-SQUARE-FOOT ESSEX PLAN backs up to protected woodlands. Homes at Dahlia Park were among the first in the Northwest to achieve a four-star level of Built Green.

rounding protected greenbelt. Homes on interior lots have alley-loaded garages, with entries and front porches facing the park.

But by far, the amenity with the biggest draw for buyers has been Bark Park, a dog park up the street from the entrance to the community that serves all of Issaquah Highlands. "An awful lot of people take their dogs there and throw Frisbees and hang out," says Van Natter. "We've received a lot of comments from homeowners who said they wanted to be close to Bark Park."

Though Dahlia Park is surrounded by greenbelts with trails connecting to the Issaquah Highlands town center, the retail amenities are at least a mile and a half away, says Van Natter. But that's just fine with buyers.

"Our homeowners like the fact that when they drive down the street toward the entrance to the neighborhood, because of Bark Park on one side and some open space on the other side, it's almost like they're on a little island," she says. "Even though they want to be near all the hubbub and activity, they don't want to be in the throes of it. So they've found our community to be kind of idyllic." **PB**







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BEST IN CLASS SURVEY

Survey Says!

Find out who tops the list in our annual Best in Class product survey.

Professional Builder's 2007 Best in Class prod-

uct survey turned up some surprising results. The competition among manufacturers is tight. After all, once builders find a product they like they tend to stick with it.

Although the industry product giants top most of the categories, the survey should give some of the larger producers some concern. There are upstarts in several categories, and in others, the leading manufacturer only has a small margin of market share ahead of its competitors — a testament to the realities of today's downturn as builders are looking for better deals and newer products to help keep them in the black.

Like the other Best in Class surveys conducted by our sister publications *Custom Builder* and *Professional Remodeler*, respondents were plucked at random from the magazine's readership and completed our survey between Aug. 22 and Sept.17. Those surveyed include builders, architects and producers of manufactured or modular homes.

A total 504 builders and architects completed the e-mail survey. The respondents identified the products they evaluate, recommend, specify, approve or purchase for use in the homes they build or design. To minimize respondent fatigue, each survey participant was asked brand questions for no more than six products for which he or she has purchased. The results of 2007's Best in Class survey can be found on the following page.







Survey Methodology

The respondents represented builders from all segments of the home building industry. Of those surveyed, 67 percent of production builders reported building 10 or fewer homes in a year, with 20 percent building 10 to 99. Only 7 percent identified themselves among the top-tier of building 500 or more homes in a year. Most (80 percent) identified themselves as a builder, with architects (15 percent) and manufactured home builders (3 percent) rounding out those surveyed.

For each product, 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]?

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Best in Class Winners

	Aware Used (Past 18 mos.)		Prefer
Brick and Stone			
Total (Base)	253 231		231
Owens Corning	79%	48%	33%
Eldorado Stone	54%	24%	16%
Boral Bricks	35%	20%	13%
Hanson Bricks	23%	9%	6%
Decking			
Total (Base)	230	226	226
Trex	74%	52%	40%
Georgia-Pacific	51%	19%	9%
CertainTeed	47%	9%	6%
Weyerhaeuser	43%	11%	7%
Entry Doors			
Total (Base)	302	297	297
Jeld-Wen	81%	29%	13%
Pella	77%	26%	10%
Therma-Tru	76%	50%	37%
Marvin	70%	16%	6%
Peachtree	67%	9%	4%
Garage Doors			
Total (Base)	264	257	257
Overhead Door	77%	44%	35%
Wayne-Dalton	61%	30%	19%
Clopay	58%	27%	19%
Jeld-Wen	48%	9%	5%
Housewrap			
Total (Base)	259	257	257
Tyvek	95%	79%	70%
Owens Corning	53%	12%	5%
Typar	47%	17%	5%
Insulation			
Total (Base)	255	250	250
Owens Corning	93%	75%	51%
CertainTeed	69%	32%	10%
Johns Manville	64%	30%	10%
Dow Styrofoam	59%	25%	4%
Interior Doors			
Total (Base)	268	257	257
Jeld-Wen	78%	42%	28%
Masonite	74%	49%	31%
Pella	59%	19%	11%
Peachtree	52%	11%	5%

	Aware	Used (Past 18 mos.)	Prefer
Exterior Moulding			
Total (Base)	224	215	215
James Hardie	62%	37%	18%
Fypon	59%	29%	13%
Azek Trimboards	58%	33%	21%
Georgia-Pacific	56%	25%	11%
CertainTeed	54%	21%	7%
Interior Moulding			
Total (Base)	256	227	227
Georgia Pacific	56%	27%	16%
Fypon	48%	22%	7%
Azek Trimboards	45%	24%	7%
CertainTeed	44%	16%	6%
James Hardie	34%	20%	7%
Roofing			
Total (Base)	265	262	262
CertainTeed	79%	39%	19%
Owens Corning	73%	34%	13%
GAF	72%	32%	14%
Georgia-Pacific	63%	12%	4%
Timberline	56%	20%	7%
Johns Manville	51%	6%	0%
Elk	51%	26%	18%
Tamko	44%	17%	6%
Siding			
Total (Base)	266	264	264
CertainTeed	76%	35%	14%
James Hardie	76%	50%	37%
Alcoa	66%	18%	6%
Georgia-Pacific	65%	17%	4%
Owens Corning	58%	13%	2%
Weyerhaeuser	55%	8%	2%
Lousiana-Pacific	48%	6%	2%
Windows			
Total (Base)	302	302	302
Andersen	94%	46%	23%
Pella	93%	36%	16%
Jeld-Wen	83%	27%	7%
Marvin	82%	22%	10%

This table shows the products each builder was asked to rank in terms of awareness, use and preference. The bold items denote the top percentage earner in the preference category.

Noticeable Trends

Awareness and preference of **manufactured stone** tops the brick and stone category with 22 percent of builders who report using manufactured stone in the past 18 months. Eldorado Stone, Boral Bricks and Owens Corning take the largest bites of market share.

In **decking**, composite board manufacturer Trex holds a distinct advantage in brand awareness, use and preference. The market appears to segment significantly in preference with the remaining competitors.

Entry doors is an extremely competitive category. Few of the major manufacturers enjoy a commanding lead over their competitors. Therma-Tru doors, interestingly, ranks slightly behind Jeld-Wen and Pella in awareness, yet 37 percent of those surveyed preferred Therma-Tru entry doors.

Similarly competitive is the **garage door** market. Manufacturers have been stepping up style and durability in their products, such as carriage style doors. 44 percent our respondents used overhead doors on the job within the past year and a half use Wayne-Dalton and Cloplay neck-and-neck for second.

Like the results in our sibling surveys, Tyvek **housewrap** is still the number one contender. Nearly all of those surveyed reported awareness of the product and more than 3/4 reported using the venerable product on their homes. Owens Coming and Typar housewrap products, in second and third places, respectively, still hold significant market share.

The **siding** market has seen tremendous innovation in recent years — most major players have released reformulated or brand-new siding products. Half of the builders reported using James Hardie's siding products in the past 18 months, with CertainTeed just behind at 35 percent.

If there's one category that can be ranked the most contentious, it would be **windows**. Andersen and Pella are locked tightly in awareness, with Andersen (46 percent) ahead of Pella (36 percent) in terms of use. Marvin and Jeld-Wen are dead-even in awareness, with Jeld-Wen holding a minor advantage over Marvin in use in the past 18 months.

Despite the fact newer alternative-material **insulation** products have hit the market, Owens Corning's old-fashioned "pink stuff" enjoys the highest awareness, use and preference. CertainTeed, Johns Manville and Dow's Styrofoam each account for most of the remaining market share.

Severe weather is always a homeowner's nightmare. But today's **roofing** products are much more durable than their predecessors, offering higher wind resistance and decades-long guarantees. CertainTeed, GAF and Owens Corning snag most use in the field, but interestingly, slightly more (20 percent) of builders report a slight preference for Elk's roofing products.







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For the past two years, the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing has researched and designed its first PATH Concept Home in Omaha, Neb. The home shows builders how to incorporate flexibility into residential construction.

"We make it easy to change the house as the occupant's needs change," says Fernando Pagés Ruiz, president of Lincoln, Neb.-based Brighton Construction, which built the concept home.

According to Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, remodeling expenditures to "modernize or improve the livability" of homes reached \$176 billion in 2005, and 45

percent of these projects involve interior changes.

The hallmark of the concept home is its flexible floor plan. The ultimate benefit is that instead of selling the home or paying for a costly remodel, the owners can remain in their home as their needs change over time.

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Flexible Floor Plan

PATH borrowed its flexible floor plan building principles from commercial construction.

In the Concept Home, a centrally-located mechanical core keeps most of the HVAC, vent stacks and plumbing in one area, making it easier to access and easier to design around.

If a homeowner chooses to change the floor plan, complications that would normally arise — such as moving a loadbearing wall — are moot because of the home's core-based construction.

The Flex Room, an unfinished space above the garage, gives homeowners the option of adding a rec room, a bedroom

Free builder plans for this con-

cept home are available as CAD

pathnet.org/concepthome. Click

drawings and PDFs at www.

on Concept Home Omaha.

or study later on. The front porch is designed for future conversion to a first-floor master bedroom. And all three levels of the floor plan are designed

to readily accommodate an elevator if needed.

Flexible Products

Achieving a flexible design is made easier with innovative products. Here's a snapshot of four products that increase flexibility in the Concept Home.

- Pex piping and plumbing manifold. Pex piping and a Viega Manabloc manifold make plumbing relatively simple in any room. The manifold allows each water line to be shut off individually, making it easier to expand the plumbing to accommodate a full bathroom later on. Flexible piping is installed by snaking it through the home's floor joists.
- Wireless light switches. Lightning Switch's wireless switches allow home owners to move the switch location wherever they want, with no additional wiring.
- Removable baseboard cable channels. Raise your hand if you've ever been hindered putting a television on a wall

without an outlet or cable outlet. In the Concept Home, removable baseboard cable channels manufactured by WireTracks make rearranging a room's layout easy. Your buyers will love this because they can rearrange furniture, lighting and electronics without needing to rewire.

• Moveable Walls. The product that drew the most attention at the Concept Home was the moveable, non-loadbearing interior partitions. "This is a breakthrough system," Pagés Ruiz says. "It means that a family living in this house can easily reconfigure the first floor."

The Long Island City, N.Y.-based

New York Wall Company developed and installed a modular, pressurized wall system designed specifically for the Concept Home.

"The key to this partition is compression between ceiling and floor," says President Scott Webb. "It's a modular system with feet that create pressure between ceiling and floor. Then connectors are placed between the panels to provide vertical stability. Battens are installed onto the partition to hide any sort of seam that might be visible and make it unsightly."

The wall can be placed anywhere within the great room space, creating different floor plan possibilities. It's designed so the average homeowner can move the wall in less than an hour. **PB**

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



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Electrical fires can cause misery and damage. The technology of arc-fault circuit interrupters combined with proper wiring and maintenance techniques may help prevent residential fires.

There are few things more devastating to a homeowner than a fire. Despite best efforts from manufacturers, installers and inspectors, home electrical problems cause an estimated 67,800 home fires and \$868 million in property losses annually, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Fire Administration.

But there are steps builders can take to prevent electrical fires, which lead to an estimated 485 deaths and 2,300 injuries annually, according to the USFA. That includes using arc-fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs), which the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development listed as one of the many devices that can be used to prevent residential electrical fires.

Whereas conventional circuit breakers only respond to overloads and short circuits, they don't prevent arcing conditions that produce an erratic current flow. According to the National Electrical Manufacturers Association, arcs naturally occur in the operation of electrical

devices such as motors and switches. An arc fault occurs when wiring insulation damages the arc. These can produce extreme heat and lead to fires.

"Arc faults can occur in two ways: a series arc would be a broken current-carrying path in a single conductor, while a parallel arc would be an arc between two conductors or between a conductor and ground. Parallel arcs generally involve more energy," says Gerard Winstanley, program manager for NEMA. "An AFCI utilizes advanced electronic technol-



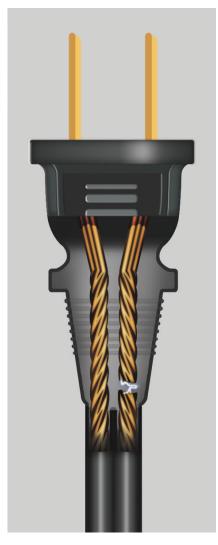
ABOVE: Some examples of typical AFCI units from several manufacturers. Right: Arc faults can occur in improperly sheathed or worn wiring. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEMA



ogy to monitor the circuit for the presence of normal and dangerous arcing conditions. It will analyze ... an arcing event and determine if it is hazardous, in which case it will interrupt power to the line."

According to NEMA, the 2008 National Electrical Code is expanding requirements for AFCIs. NEMA estimates AFCI protection in circuit breakers could prevent 50 percent or more of the fires caused by problems in the electrical system. The 2008 edition of the code also takes safety a step further by requiring that all new home construction builders install combination AFCIs to all 15-amp and 20-amp branch circuits not only in bedrooms, but in additional living areas in new dwellings and in the lighting system.

It is important to note that AFCIs are not a panacea; it is possible for a highvoltage surge to damage the arc-detecting circuits of an AFCI. "This is a very rare occurrence, and in this case, the device



ABOVE: An example of a how a typical arcfault occurs in appliances and other household electrical equipment. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NEMA

may still function as a circuit breaker. The test button on the AFCI will confirm whether the arc detecting circuitry is still functioning," says Winstanley. "We recommend that the operation of all AFCIs is checked on a monthly basis."

AFCIs may also be tripped inadvertently, though this too is rare. According to NEMA, the majority of the "nuisance trip" issues are related to installation problems. Specific examples include reversing neutral to ground wires, shared neutral wiring on single pole cir-

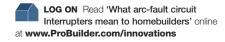
THE PRICE OF SAFETY

Electrical Wholesaling Magazine breaks down the cost of using AFCIs using a 2,500-square-foot home costing \$192,846. As per the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the average professionally installed cost differential between an AFCI and a standard circuit breaker is between \$15 and \$20. With the average number of circuits requiring AFCIs being 12, this equates to an approximate cost increase of \$180 to the builder.

cuits, and ground wires touching neutral wires. These are arcs that a standard circuit breaker would not detect, but an AFCI would and then shut the circuit down immediately. "As contractors become more familiar with the installation and operation of AFCIs, these wiring errors, reports of nuisance tripping will decline," says Winstanley.

"AFCIs are a relatively new technology and manufacturers are investing great effort in their development. It is very likely we will see further developments in these products. The key issue is safety. There are many home safety options, but AFCIs are a technological leap forward that provides immediate preventative protection to the home's electrical system," says Winstanley.

He believes the expanded NEC requirement will have a significant impact on home safety and decrease the number of lives lost and injuries that occur in residential fires. "Homeowners deserve the safest home possible. This is especially important with new home construction, where safety needs to be the number one priority in the home building processes." **PB**



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ProBuilder Product Report:

New Products



Coastal Industries

If your homeowners want their showers to match the kitchen faucet, look no further than Coastal Industries' Paragon series of shower enclosures, which now have an attractive anodized oil-rubbed bronze finish. The series has interlocking corner posts to make difficult angles a snap. Brushed nickel, silver, gold and platinum finishes are also available. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-125



▲ Jeld-Wen

According to Jeld-Wen, installers using their new Premium Wood Double-Hung Pocket Windows made with the company's AuraLast wood and Low-E glass can save homeowners 60 percent on material, time and labor costs. It's a heck of a claim, but because the windows are specifically designed to fit into the most common frames, you just might be able to pull it off. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-126

USG

It stinks when you're forced to come back to patch up cracks in the corners. A simple way to combat costs and angry homeowners is USG's Sheetrock-brand Paper-Faced Metal Bead. Made with a strong paper tape laminated to the rust-resistant metal form, it helps keep joint compounds, textures and paints tight and long-lasting. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims. ca/5340-127

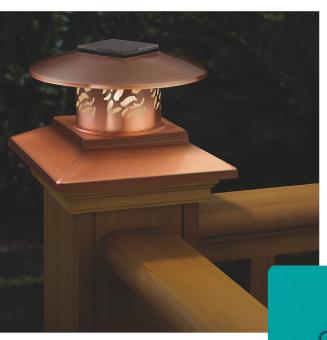


Elkay

Though refreshingly not branded a green product, Elkay's new Antique Copper Hammered sinks are made from 100 percent recycled copper. Part of the line is the Mystic collection sinks, which feature organic, curvy shapes in both 50- and 28-inch models, including a new circular bar sink option. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-128

ProBuilder Product Report:

Lighting



Progress Lighting

ca/5340-136

We've seen a lot of attention paid on the

consumer side to compact fluorescent light

bulbs but not a whole lot on the options avail-

able to builders who want to put them in their

homes. Progress Lighting's Energy Star-qualified

P83-26ICATDM is, according to the company,

the industry's first dimmable CFL fixture. It uses

a standard 26-watt CFL triple-tube lamp and

works with a standard incandescent dimmer.

For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.

Maine Ornamental

A great way to incorporate lighting into your decking is through the post cap, and Maine Ornamental's Convertible Post Cap Lights fit the bill. Made in etched copper or in a New England lantern style, the caps provide the ambiance homeowners crave thanks to the included solar-powered LED light or candles for a Parisian café glow. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-



Meyda Lighting

Bringing some ski resort sensibilities to your lighting décor is the Tahoe Candle Drop Chandelier from Meyda Lighting's Old Forge Collection. The rustic-style chandelier hangs 37½ to 67½ inches from the ceiling and offers simulated dripping wax lights in three options: incandescent, compact fluorescent or small reflector spotlights. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-130



Lighting can be easier to incorporate into a smart home with Harmony Dimmers from Pass & Seymour, which are part of the company's Decorator line. The dimmers come in incandescent and magnetic low-voltage versions, and a constant memory setting restores the previous light levels after a power outage. A green LED glows when the dimmer is off. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-134



Lutron

Five colors debut in Lutron's snazzy Satin Colors line of colored dimmers, switches and accessories in what the company calls an "earthier" trend in furnishings. Some items you wouldn't expect to see in the line are phone/cable jacks, ceiling fan controls and wall plates for the Maestro, Diva, and Lyeno Lx product families. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-135





▲ LED Lighting Fixtures (LFF)/Cree

Out to "change the way the lighting industry thinks about LEDs" is LED Lighting Fixtures' 6-inch downlights. Using Cree's XLamp XR-E LED, the lights produce 650 lumens at 10-12 watts. At 60 lumens per watt for the entire fixture, the LLF lights, according to Cree, are the industry's most efficient general lighting fixtures for the home. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-131



Making a splash in your lighting décor are Besa's Mondo Glass Pendants. Always an eye-pleaser, Besa's newest cable pendants feature a distressed metallic foil construction in 20- or 24-inch dome profiles in gold, silver or copper. You'll find matching hardware in the company's KG Series. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-132





Sometimes some family members forget to turn off the lights when they leave the room. The RS vacancy sensors from Watt Stopper/Legrand solve that problem. The RS replaces standard light switches and has an LED built in so Dad won't step on junior's Legos at night. Dual relay models are available for switching two separate loads, such as a light and a fan. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-133





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ProBuilder Product Report:

Fireplaces



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Featuring the latest in prefabricated modular masonry fireplace technology, the Sonoran Series from Southwest Kiva is lightweight and easy to install. The system comes lined with actual firebrick for good measure and is available in running bond, herringbone and split brick, as well as a variety of colors in 36-, 42- and 48-inch sizes. For FREE information, visit http://pb.ims.ca/5340-137



from actual firewood for an authentic experience. It beats the pants off those electric models from the 70s, doesn't it? This puppy cranks out more than 50,000 BTUs per hour. For FREE information,

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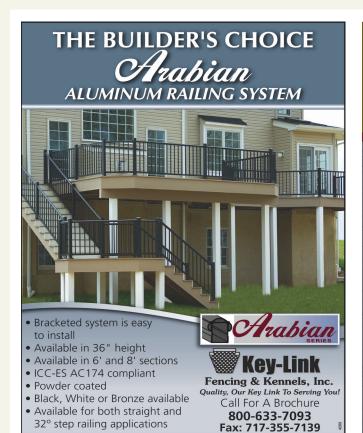


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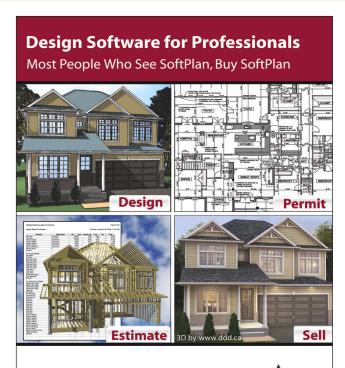


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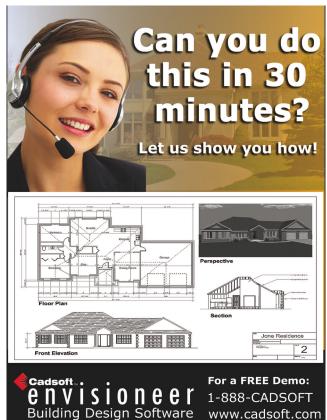
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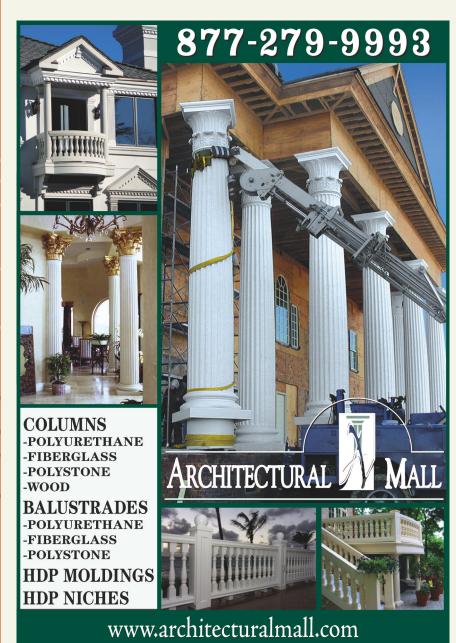






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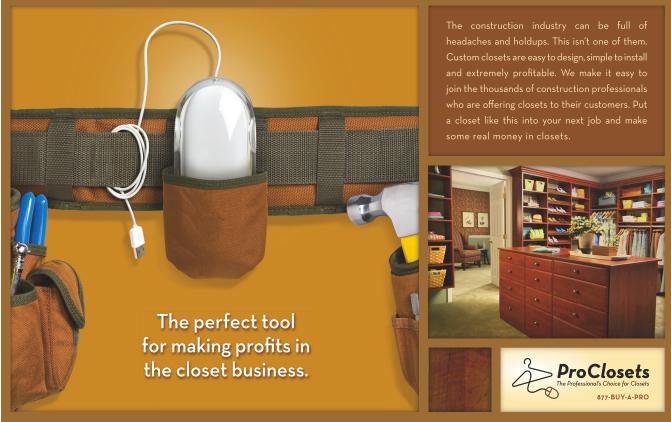
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Lean is Green

The economic case for building green

>> BY SCOTT SEDAM, TRUENORTH DEVELOPMENT

I recently observed the following scenario: a home builder's hand-picked "lean team" watched the president of their big lumber supplier write 100,000 on a flip chart. "What's that?" the lumber supplier demanded. The group guessed dollars, to which the supplier shot back "Right! Now, tell me what it's for."

The team suggested manhours, scrap, rework, overhead, cost of paperwork and cost of errors. While all good guesses, the response was, "\$100,000 is the amount of money we spent last year on 35,000 gallons of diesel fuel burned up on wasted trips to your building sites!" He noted that he added nothing for lost time for the 700 extra fill-ups required, depreciation, cost of tires, oil changes and other administrative and overhead costs.

During the discussion that followed, my mind did double-duty as I calculated some implications of the president's announcement. I had just received a call from Kathleen Guidera of the Energy Efficient Building Association. She asked me to be the closing speaker at their annual conference. She wanted a topic that would pique the conference participants' interest and encourage them to stay to the bitter end. I did some more math.

Let's say there are only 100

companies who experience similar amounts of waste in only the top 100 U.S. housing markets. That's 10,000 sites. If each site wastes 35,000 gallons of diesel fuel a year, that's 350,000,000 gallons. That is a conservative figure, if you consider the hundreds of smaller suppliers in each market and the still-huge amount of building that goes on outside of the top 100. Now imagine the amount of hydrocarbons and particulate matter that results, not to mention what was generated in the shipping and refining of the fuel before it reached the local trucks. All waste.

Then it occurred to me: that is the hot topic. Green building is growing in this country, but still, most builders equate green with higher cost. In this housing market, that throws up a huge obstacle. Yet conferences, magazines and company reps tout the benefits of all the whiz-bang green products out there. For example, every single Dumpster on a project

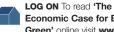
represents waste not just in the materials themselves, but in the manufacture and transportation of the materials to the site, and the removal of the scrap from the site. Every 12-foot, 4-inch long carpeted room represents waste in not taking best advantage of the standard 12-foot roll. Every room dimension not built on a 2-foot increment has major waste implications in lumber and trim. We recently worked with a builder to discover the company was burying eight to 10 yards of unnecessary concrete in every foundation, and that's what a single mixer holds. Just the wasted fuel for the excess material a single year calculates out to 10,000 gallons.

We teach builders how to build lean. As it turns out. we are also teaching them to build green. This is a win not only for the builders, suppliers and trades, but also for homeowner, the community and the environment. Silver bullets are rare, yet we are holding one right in our hands.

Improveyour margins and help the environment? The green

goes both to the environment and to your bottom line. Lean is green. PB

Scott Sedam is president of TrueNorth Development, a nationwide consulting and training firm focused on quality, process improvement and organizational development. He can be reached at scott@ truen.com.



Economic Case for Building Green' online visit www. ProBuilder.com/emergingissues





Below (top): Ventral Park by Bennett Homes Below (bottom): Magnolia Park by Steve Burnstead Construction





CREATING BETTER PLACES TO LIVE

More than simply a financial investment, our homes are the stage upon which we live our lives. Which is why professionals charged with building communities – developers, builders, architects and city officials – are looking at ways to create not only houses but whole neighborhoods that put people first.

This return to traditional neighborhood planning is proving a magnet for homeshoppers who appreciate the attention given to elements such as:

- Walkability
- A sense of place
- Sustainability
- Connectedness
- · Interesting architecture

Due to extreme moisture caused by the high rainfall in the Pacific Northwest, successful developers in the state of Washington are embracing innovative building materials. Among those leading the way is Andrew Miller, director of The Dwelling Company.

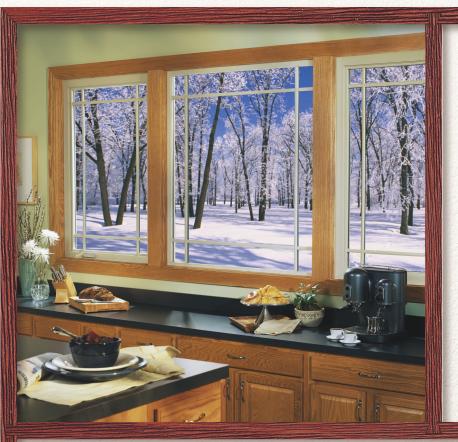
"We wanted quaint, cute developments, with distinctive colors for the cottages and bungalows. James Hardie siding is a staple for us; it holds paint so well and stands up to all the moisture we get here."



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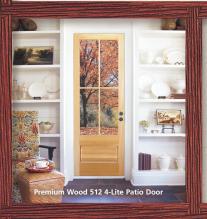


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In cold weather, Low-E glass reduces the amount of heat loss by reflecting it back inside.

We were energy efficient before it was cool. Or hot.









Wood Casement Window

Vinyl Geometric Window

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