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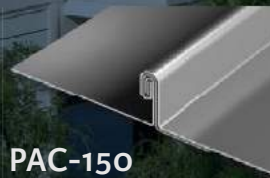
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How to deliver beautiful rooms while staying within budget boundaries

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COVER: This Washington, D.C., kitchen by Barnes Vanze Architects and Gibson Builders blends rich color, varied texture, and custom millwork. Photo: Anice Hoachlander

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The custom building game is an endeavor fraught with potential minefields. Sure, the sites are often majestic, the budgets are usually stout, and the products and materials are likely to be luxurious. But the clients can be demanding, the work has to be of the highest quality, and builders must collaborate with architects to make sure details are flawlessly executed or risk having to redo them.

Custom builders are expected to be up to date on all new advancements in construction, including the latest in products and materials, construction technology, green building, high-performance home construction, and building science. They are expected to use best practices for everything they do, no matter how much it costs. Their houses must also have the best-looking kitchens and baths with the best cabinets, tile, flooring, lighting, appliances, and everything else.

The residential construction industry as a whole looks to the custom market for design ideas, for early adoption of new introductions, such as large lift/slide doors, linear drains, triple- and quad-glazed windows, waterproofed wet rooms, high-tech mechanical ventilation systems, and much more. It's the reason why high-end trends trickle down to the entry- and mid-level builders. Manufacturers and production builders and remodelers observe what tracks with the luxury market, work out the kinks, and then find a way to deliver it to buyers and clients of lesser means.

This month we cover two challenging areas that custom builders are expected to master. One is sustainability and green building. It's a tough nut to crack for the entire industry, and not all custom builders have mastered the practice. Our guest columnist, builder Don Ferrier, helps alleviate some of the frustration by revealing the five biggest missteps practitioners make and listing some ways they can get off on the right foot.

Another area that they must master is designing kitchens and baths that offer plenty of wow factor. This is tough for everyone, but especially for custom builders trying to balance clients' big dreams with their actual budgets. Senior editor Susan Bady interviewed builders and architects for helpful advice on how to make the process easier so that it pencils out.

Having to shoulder these responsibilities elevates the importance of the custom builder and the custom market at large, but, as always, with great expectations comes great responsibility.

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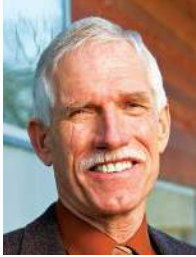
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AVOID GREEN-BUILDING MISSTEPS

The road to becoming a successful green builder starts with planning

By Don Ferrier

I completed my first super energy-efficient home in 1982, and started Ferrier Builders in 1984 with a focus on building some of the most energy-efficient homes in the United States.

Over a period of 34 years, during which my company has built numerous Energy Star, LEED, and National Green Building Standard-certified homes, I've experienced the same frustrations as other custom builders that are committed to building green.

I'd like to alleviate some of that frustration by revealing what I see as the five biggest missteps green builders make, and how they can get off on the right foot.

1. Failure to plan. The most common mistake is not taking the time during design and product selections to think through how they will impact the end result. In the rush to begin construction, it's easy to skip careful planning of the house design, site layout, and products used in all stages of construction.

2. Failure to communicate team goals. To successfully execute a green project, you must clearly and repeatedly communicate to the team the goals to be achieved and how you will help them meet those goals.

3. Failure to consider passive solar heat. Energy efficiency scores the most points in green certification, and I feel it's the most important. In our hot Texas climate, we are very careful to eliminate or minimize the heat from the sun entering the structure during the summer. The sun from the west is the worst. South is

next, east is third, and north has no consequence here for summer heat gain. If we build the most airtight home with the best R-values but the sun pours in through the windows during the hot months, we have committed energy suicide. We avoid this through elimination or placement of windows, overhangs, trees, etc. Conversely, in a cold climate, one needs the warm winter sun to heat the home, so it's critical to take steps to allow sunlight in.

4. Failure to evaluate the effect of products on indoor air quality. It's critical to look holistically at all items in the home, from subflooring, adhesives, and sealants for concrete and other types of floors to cabinets, countertops, paints, and stains. You must evaluate every product for adverse effects. A very airtight home can quickly become unhealthy if VOCs or formaldehyde are outgassing.

5. Failure to reduce, reuse, and recycle construction debris. For most crews, this is a new and foreign concept. It will take education, patience, and perseverance in the form of daily monitoring. Well-thought-out placement of recycling stations on construction sites is crucial.

All of us have faced these challenges, and all of them can be overcome through advance planning, good communication, and attention to the basic tenets of sustainability.

Don Ferrier is president of Ferrier Builders and Ferrier Custom Homes, based in Fort Worth, Texas.

STANDARD BEARERS



These custom homes faced down formidable competition to win Platinum in the 2016 Best in American Living Awards

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor

Every year, the NAHB's Best in American Living Awards (BALA) becomes more competitive, particularly in the one-of-a-kind custom/spec categories. It's obvious that clients are more demanding than ever, pushing builders and designers to flawlessly execute every detail. The BALA judges and the *Custom Builder* editors had their work cut out for them.

After much consideration, we've selected three Platinum award winners to feature in this issue: a Cotswolds-inspired "cottage" in Georgia's pastoral Serenbe community that was named Home of the Year, and spectacular homes on Lake Michigan and Lake Tahoe. The homes have three things in common: a more thoughtful use of living space; sustainable design and construction; and architectural styles that are blended to create something fresh and original.

BALA is the nation's foremost awards program, redefining excellence in home building. Every year, the program honors good design in single-family and multifamily homes of all types and sizes as well as communities, interior design, remodeling, and rental developments. For more on the 2016 BALA winners, visit bestinamericanliving.com.

HOME OF THE YEAR/PLATINUM AWARD FOR BEST ONE-OF-A-KIND CUSTOM OR SPEC HOME, 3,501 TO 4,500 SQUARE FEET

COTSWOLD CHARISMA

Swann Wynd Bridge House was the first home built in the Swann Ridge neighborhood at the master planned community of Serenbe. Bridge House, with its seven neighbors, stands out for its architecture—an adaptation of English Cotswold style.

"Serenbe has deep roots in a form of land planning that we refer to as hamlet-style, as in little English hamlets scattered across the landscape," explains architect Edwin Rhinehart. While the architecture is Southern vernacular, Serenbe's roads and paths have more in common with the English countryside, Rhinehart says.

Rhinehart Pulliam & Co. planned Swann Ridge and developed the architectural guidelines, using the 3,643-square-foot Bridge House as

the prototype. The home is named for the footbridge that spans a creek running alongside the house. Passersby can get a good look at the home but not peer inside the windows, which are 8 feet above the bridge surface.

"Privacy was the driving consideration of the floor plan," Rhinehart says. "The house is attached to the footbridge and, as with most of the houses on that street, is fairly exposed." The plan was organized around a series of building forms that act like barriers.

The first barrier is the long, narrow mass of the main part of the house, with living and dining rooms being the most public spaces. The living room functions like a porch, with large windows that can be opened if the owners wish to engage with the

outside world. Beyond those rooms is the kitchen, and beyond that is the master suite, which is the most sheltered from public view.

The main level is 6 feet above the surface of the footbridge, with the window sills 8 feet above the bridge. A private deck between living room and master bedroom is separated from any activity on the bridge.

"Cotswold houses have a fairly simple palette of local stone and wood," Rhinehart says. "While we wanted to capture the essence of the Cotswolds, we felt that we could use local Georgia brick instead of stone walls." Rather than using stone roof shingles, Bridge House has a wood shake roof that's indigenous to the old Georgia vernacular. A secondary wood board-and-batten aesthetic reinforces that sense of

Swann Wynd Bridge House, in Chattahoochee Hills, Ga., is BALA's Home of the Year for 2016. Built by John Bynum Custom Homes, the residence evokes Cotswold charm with its masonry parapet walls, cypress board-and-batten siding, and exposed timber rafter tails and brackets.



The fireplace wall in the living room of Swann Wynd Bridge House consists of wide cypress boards placed vertically, accentuating the 12-foot vaulted ceiling. The same cypress is used on the ceiling in the entryway.

history, along with local fieldstone on the basement foundation walls.

“The house really has only three materials: light-colored, lime-washed brick; dark-stained wood; and stone foundation walls,” he says. “By simplifying the color palette, we were able to achieve an almost modernist sense of simplicity.”

Builder John Bynum’s biggest challenge was to preserve as much of the woods around the home as possible. Bynum’s crew didn’t build the footbridge, but they had to coordinate their efforts with the bridge builders to tie the two structures together.

“There’s a lot of really nice timber framework in this home,” Bynum says, “such as the mortise-and-tenon beams in the front entry. But the exterior details really set it apart.”

The BALA judges agreed, lauding the “incredible Old World craftsmanship with a light, contemporary touch, [which] keeps the overall feeling modern and clean while still evoking the romance and charm of the Cotswold Tudor style.”

One judge said, “Creative and sensitive use of materials, colors, and textures reward this home with a timeless character not easily or convincingly

achievable ... the home feels as if it were built 100 years ago, was properly maintained and cared for, and still stands strong and proud.”

The judges noted that the arrangement of the building on the site, using the bridge and small courtyards, cleverly maximized a challenging site.

PROJECT NAME: Swann Wynd Bridge House
LOCATION: Chattahoochee Hills, Ga.
DESIGNER/ARCHITECT: Rhinehart Pulliam & Co., Atlanta
BUILDER: John Bynum Custom Homes, Tyrone, Ga.
INTERIOR DESIGNER: J. Hirsch Interior Design, Johns Creek, Ga.
PHOTOGRAPHER: Emily Jenkins Followill Photographer

PLATINUM AWARD FOR BEST ONE-OF-A-KIND CUSTOM OR SPEC HOME OVER 8,000 SQUARE FEET

LAKESIDE NIRVANA

The clients wanted a vacation home large enough to accommodate their extended family, but with all the intimacy of a lakeside cottage. The builder and design team delivered that and more, creating a 10,000-square-foot retreat on the shores of Lake Michigan that reinforces the beauty of the natural landscape.

Flowing off a long, private drive lined with mature trees and lavish landscaping is a one-story carriage house that sits out in front, allowing the massing to build up to the two-story main house beyond. Expansive lake views and sunlight flood the open design of the first floor, while large pocket doors are incorporated to close off rooms for more intimate occasions.

The second floor offers additional opportunities for guest and family lounging in a common sitting room that's nestled between two master suites and three junior suites. On mild summer nights,

children can enjoy "camping out" on the second-floor sleeping porch. The lower level expands the vacation amenities with a recreation room, bar, and gym.

Just steps away from the shoreline, family members and guests can admire spectacular lake views and sunsets while relaxing by the fire pit in the backyard.

The judges felt that the home was extremely well detailed without being ostentatious. Architecturally consistent inside and out, it makes great use of a narrow lot.

PROJECT NAME: Michigan Lake House

LOCATION: Holland, Mich.

DESIGNER/ARCHITECT: Landry Design Group, Los Angeles

BUILDER: Mike Schaap Builders, Holland

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Joan Behnke & Associates, Beverly Hills, Calif.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Erhard Pfeiffer



Big but not overpowering, this Lake Michigan home is thoughtfully positioned on a narrow lot to take advantage of water views. A one-story carriage house placed at the front of the property builds up to the massing of the two-story main house.



Harking back to the original cabins that housed athletes at the 1960 Winter Olympic Games, the massing of Lakefront Retreat suggests a collection of separate buildings rather than a single structure.

PLATINUM AWARD FOR BEST ONE-OF-A-KIND CUSTOM OR SPEC HOME, 6,001 TO 8,000 SQUARE FEET

HOMAGE TO OLD LAKE TAHOE

Possessing 200 feet of Lake Tahoe beachfront property and some of the original cabins used to house athletes in the 1960 Winter Olympic Games at Squaw Valley, the clients and their building and design team knew they had the right raw materials for a special retreat. The massing of the 6,168-square-foot home downplays its size and harmonizes with the surrounding environment. It takes advantage of lake-view corridors from every room and seamlessly integrates indoor and outdoor spaces. There are two piers for easy

water access; strategically placed windows and retractable sliding glass door panels; and living spaces that accommodate both small, intimate family settings and large, extended gatherings.

Reclaimed materials used for both the exterior and interior finishes give the home a warmth and charm not often found in today's modern architecture, and ground it in the historical feel of old Lake Tahoe, the designers said.

The home is equipped to handle a crowd, offering five guest suites and multiple outdoor sitting areas including an upper-level

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The home's rustic style is reminiscent of old-world Lake Tahoe, brimming with warmth and comfort due to the interior furnishings and reclaimed wood.

sun deck. There are also indoor retreats such as a kids' lounge and a reading loft with a lake view.

The judges were impressed by the home's exquisite details. "Even though the materials are rough, they're used in a way that brings sophistication to a rustic design—very appropriate for this area of the country," one said. **CB**

PROJECT: Lakefront Retreat

LOCATION: Carnelian Bay, Calif.

ARCHITECT/INTERIOR DESIGNER: The Sandbox Studio, Truckee, Calif.

BUILDER: NSM Construction, Truckee

LAND PLANNER: Ogilvy Consulting, Tahoe City, Calif.

PHOTOGRAPHER: Vance Fox

2016 BALA JUDGES

SUSAN BADY, Senior Editor, *Professional Builder* and *Custom Builder* magazines, Arlington Heights, Ill.

ED BINKLEY, Design/Business Director, BSB Design, Safety Harbor, Fla.

STEPHANIE HENLEY, Co-President, Beasley & Henley Interior Design, Orlando, Fla.


YU-NGOK LO, Principal/Design Director, YNL Architects, Los Angeles

KAREN KASSIK-MICHELSON, Designer, Michelsohn & Daughter Construction, Anchorage, Alaska

CHRISTINA PRESLEY, President/Founder, Epic Homes, Littleton, Colo.

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SHOWROOM

SALES STRATEGIES

Thinking like a buyer, positioning your company as a trusted advisor, and setting boundaries are ways to improve selling skills and protect your profit

By Mike Beirne, Senior Editor

The strengths of a home builder's skill set typically include being adept at assessing risk, entitling land, securing permits, negotiating with finance people, and, of course, managing construction. But selling tends to be the weak link.

Sales consultant and author Jeff Shore says that the advice he first gives his builder clients who are looking to improve in this area is to *decide what you are*. For example, are you a home building company that has to sell houses, or are you a sales company that builds homes?

"I think we often approach this backward, with the 'If I build it, they will come' attitude," Shore observes. "Well, I built it, and nobody came. So now what do I do?"

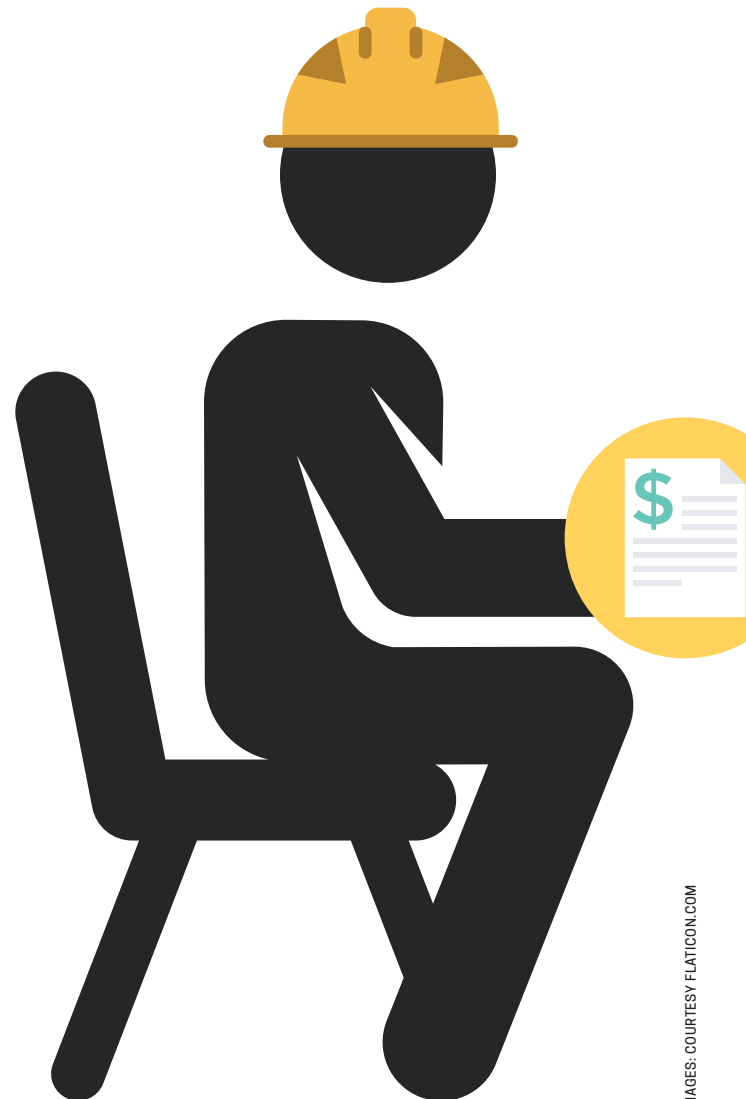
BUILDING TRUST

Fred Reikowsky was a builder and remodeler for more than 30 years before he sold his construction company and, ultimately, got involved in business coaching, starting his Canton, Ohio-based company, Legacy Business Leaders,

in 2012. Most of the builders he has counseled initially lacked a documented sales process or practice that they would consistently follow. Consequently, they reaped inconsistent results.

"I usually challenge builders to look at the sales process in terms of a lot of mini-closes," Reikowsky says. "Even when that very first phone call comes in and you're trying to prequalify the lead and ask to set up a time to meet—that's the first mini-close."

A good sales process is a series of mini-closes. Reikowsky explains that the builder should invite the prospect to take small steps through the sales process in a logical way so the buyer perceives the builder as a trusted advisor, and the builder, in turn, knows that the prospective client is onboard. If a prospect objects to any of the steps—even after you've attempted to explain how the process is in his or her best interests—the builder should recognize that the client might become a difficult customer. At this point, it may be time to "graciously invite" the client



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FOR CUSTOM BUILDERS



to leave your sales loop, Reikowsky says, adding that, when dropping a prospect is done well, “you can actually create an advocate for your company even though you’re not doing business with them. I’ve seen it happen. In fact, it’s happened to me. It’s amazing. Someone once called and said, ‘I got your name from so and so. They’re not building with you, but they really liked you.’ That’s a good thing.”

CUSTOMER MINDSET

A beginning step toward improving selling skills is developing a sales mindset. How does a builder steeped in years of construction schedules, house plans, and relationships with subcontractors do that? Get into the head of your customer, Shore says.

“If I’m counseling small builders, the first question I’m going to ask is: What does the avatar of your buyer look like in detail? I mean, get a blank whiteboard and really sketch out who this buyer is, where they are in the buying process, and what else they’re going to be looking at,” Shore says. His rationale: Starting with a strong idea of who is going to buy this house paves entry into the mindset of your customer. “Everything you do as you go through this process is seen through the filter of the eventual purchaser of the home,” he points out.

Before founding Dwell Development, in Seattle, Anthony Maschmedt worked in corporate sales and marketing for an international professional hair care products manufacturer that competed against giants such as Procter & Gamble and Unilever. He already had a sales mindset, so he saw the mission for Dwell as building its brand, even more than building houses.

With fewer than two dozen closings annually, Maschmedt was “a small fish in a big pond,” he says. In a market dominated by Craftsman-style houses, he differentiated his brand with sleek, modern homes that were five-star Built Green certified. Then he focused the message of his selling process on the value that Dwell homes can deliver to buyers.

In talking to prospective buyers, Maschmedt says he would point out the benefits of building an energy-efficient home: “If you have the option of building a sustainable home that’s more energy efficient, and you can show prospects the value of that compared with a code-built home—which is the worst-built home you can legally build and get away with—it’s just logical for people [to choose you as the builder],” he says. “People bought our homes during the downturn when they could have bought short sales, code-built, and all other kinds of products. They have to see the value, and we have to beat that drum.”

That drumbeat included educating brokers, mortgage writers, and appraisers about the tangible and intangible benefits of a Dwell home through press releases, speaking engagements, and marketing via videos on Dwell’s website. Today, the spec builder presells almost all of its houses, even before framing begins.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Past customers are a rich source of information when you’re researching buyers. Go to the people who actually wrote you the check and ask what motivated them to do business with you. Building a great house is merely “the ticket to the dance,” Shore says,

since there are many competitors that also construct wonderful homes. The kind of answer a builder should be seeking is what was it about you that would prompt a customer to tell friends and others thinking of new construction to call you.

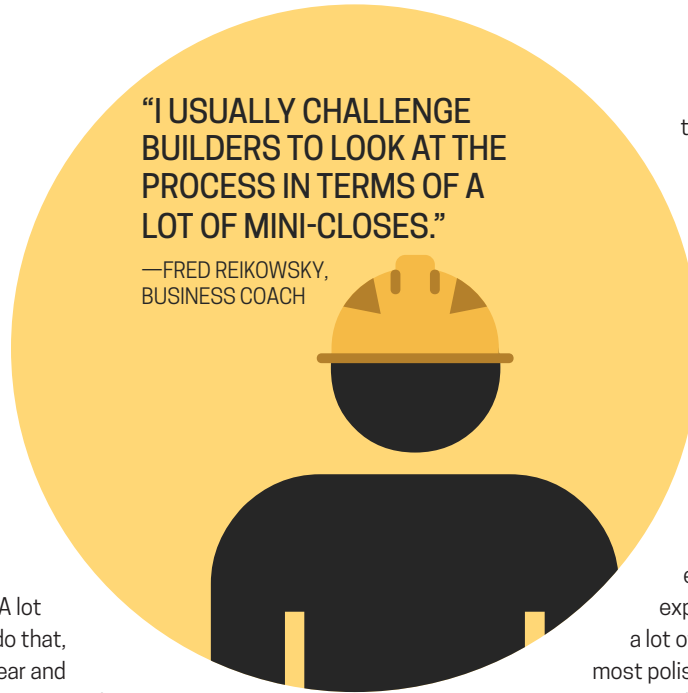
“There is a boldness here,” Shore says. “You’ve got to talk to customers. A lot of builders don’t want to do that, but if they get over that fear and discomfort, they’re going to get market knowledge directly from homebuyers that they won’t get anywhere else.”

Too many builders set getting the contract as their primary goal so they can break ground and trigger a release of funds from the bank or the client. Instead, Reikowsky says, business owners should have these two goals: Make a profit, and make customers really happy. He calls it the win-win outcome of a successful sales process. Most builders are too scripted, he says, as in, “Oh my gosh, I might lose this sale. I really need this sale. I need to take another house this month.” But all that does is jeopardize their side of the win. Many builders, he adds, are more about win-lose than win-win, and, as a result, are constantly undermining their own best interests and profits. “Win-win is a discipline,” he says. “It’s not a thought; it’s not just a great idea. It’s a discipline that takes time and being very intentional.”

Developing a sales mindset may also require changing the builder’s perception of the customer. Although some builders cringe at spending more time on phone calls and face-to-face meetings with customers and would prefer to avoid dealing with client emotions, complaints, change orders, and, ultimately, conflict, hiding from the customer can ruin the relationship. “The reason that is such a huge mistake is that those homebuyers are coming to the small builder in the first place because they *want* the connection with the person who is actually going to be building their home,” Shore says. “They could choose a [big company], but then they feel disconnected from

“I USUALLY CHALLENGE BUILDERS TO LOOK AT THE PROCESS IN TERMS OF A LOT OF MINI-CLOSES.”

—FRED REIKOWSKY,
BUSINESS COACH



the builder and the process.

When they’re working directly with the builder, they love that. They take pride in that. So the idea of minimizing contact with your customer goes directly against the reason they’re your customer in the first place.

We need to increase the conversation between the builder and the customer.

And the customer doesn’t expect a salesperson; they’re expecting the builder. They give a lot of grace, even if you’re not the most polished person in the world in your presentation skills, that’s OK. That rawness is exactly what they’re looking for.”

SETTING CLEAR BOUNDARIES

However, even if a builder is diligent about being more available and open with buyers, the relationship still needs parameters. Set expectations with buyers from the onset about the frequency of meetings and the methods for contact. Small builders can jeopardize their well-being by allowing customers to call them at all hours, Reikowsky says. Clearly explaining communication protocol is just one of a series of expectation-setting exercises that the builder must go through to show prospects that the company has a detailed process for taking care of customers. Other processes that should be outlined include how change orders and selections are handled, what to anticipate regarding extra costs and overages, the impact of weather on the schedule, scopes of work, and how the warranty process functions. Defining and explaining these expectations can provide more mini-close opportunities for builders.

“That’s going back to what I said about building a bridge between price and value,” Reikowsky says. “You can do that by saying something like, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Prospect, I want you to know that we have a process here at ABC Builders and what we’d like to do at this point is to share some information about that process with you. Could we do that?’ That’s a closing question, and 99.9 percent of prospects are going to say, ‘Sure, I’d love to see that.’”



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BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

Clearly defining expectations and getting buy-in from clients early also can make conflict resolution easier.

Establishing trust early in the process means that when you need to say no, clients understand and don't perceive you as "being a jerk about it," Shore says. "That trust allows us to sustain the relationship. This is Stephen Covey stuff, when you talk about an emotional bank account," he says, referring to the author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. "If I've invested enough in our emotional bank account and want to make a withdrawal, I'm not going to be overdrawn. Increase the communication. Don't decrease it for fear that there's going to be an emotional conflict. Increase it and get to know that customer, so that when you have to tell them no, it doesn't damage the relationship."

An important part of any builder's sales process is determining the budget. Prospects may be hesitant to provide details about how much they have to spend because they want to get the builder's best number. One approach for getting a figure that builders can be confident in is bracket budgeting. Reikowsky advises that after meeting with a client—who, for example, says he wants to spend \$120 per square foot building a new home—get more information about the house they want to build, and then produce an estimate. You can say something like, "Based on what you shared with me, we can build this home for somewhere in the range of \$140 to \$150 per square foot. Would that work for you?"

If the client agrees, that's another mini-close, and having that approval removes the builder from the position of being a price giver. To get to this point, Reikowsky recommends that builders refine their estimating skills, at the very least by looking at job history and crunching the numbers on a spreadsheet to see how their bids compare with actual costs. "Have an estimate that you are confident in," he says, "and bracket those numbers in such a way that allows you to ask the questions that will get you a solid answer."



"WHAT DOES THE AVATAR OF YOUR BUYER LOOK LIKE IN DETAIL? ... GET A BLANK WHITEBOARD AND REALLY SKETCH OUT WHO THIS BUYER IS."

—JEFF SHORE, SALES CONSULTANT

Along the lines of having the client and builder on the same page, he recommends that builders document change orders and their impact on the customer's budget. If a client wants to enlarge the kitchen from the dimensions of the original plan, the builder should present a document showing a bracketed estimate—if presenting a single figure isn't possible at that time—and the revised running total cost for building

the house. Asking clients to sign off on the revision enables "owning their budget," Reikowsky says. They're also less likely to be surprised later by the final cost.

Getting pushback from the prospect on price is another challenge in the sales process where builders are at risk of giving in and ceding control of the project. Often, in their eagerness to get a contract, a builder offers to draw a house plan thinking that step will move his company closer to a deal. But if the client decides to take those plans and shop around for quotes, now the builder is in a bidding war with competitors. A design agreement can help wrest such control from the homeowner and protect the builder's profitability.

Other names for this document are a pre-construction agreement or a preliminary design agreement. Whatever the name, the builder, through this document, offers—for a small fee—to draw up house plans using his or her draftsman or an architect. The key proviso is the stipulation that the plan belongs to the builder, not the client. "It's a case of: If you're signing a design agreement with us, and we're designing your home, the assumption is that you will build with us," Reikowsky says. "We already agreed on the price bracket and you [the prospect] are learning how to trust us, and we're learning to trust you, so there is a trust level established. And, since the design agreement has been signed, we aren't selling price anymore, only selling value. In other words, the builder is doing away with a price mentality and shifting to a value mentality. That's the bridge you have to build to be a successful custom builder." **CB**

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Circle 752



PHOTO: ANICE HOACHLANDER



This informal French cottage-style kitchen has cabinets that look like freestanding furniture. The island, too, has a furniture-style base, and a butcher-block surface that matches the antique French sideboard. The Gothic design of the green cabinets was inspired by a hotel in Avignon, France. Gibson Builders constructed the home designed by Barnes Vanze Architects.

THE K+B EQUATION

Kitchens and baths, especially, require custom builders to walk the line between making clients happy and pushing budget boundaries

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor

Kitchens and baths are opportunities for a custom builder to really shine. When clients bring photos of European cabinets, pro-style gas ranges, steam showers, and other sexy features to a meeting, builders are inclined to go all out in order to please them.

But because some of the costliest line items in a custom project, particularly cabinets, are allocated to the kitchen and bath, budgets can quickly spin out of control. A critical part of the builder's job is to educate clients, and a conversation about options, pricing, budgets, and allowances has to happen early on.

"High-end cabinets like Poggenpohl, Poliform, or Siematic are budget busters," says Washington, D.C., builder Jim Gibson. "I tell clients, 'Those cabinets are going to cost you \$100,000-plus. I offer a healthy allowance for kitchen cabinets: \$60,000 to \$70,000. If you want to exceed that, great, but we try to design for that number.'"

Builder Nate Wissink of Elevation Homes, in Wayzata, Minn., typically uses a custom cabinetmaker, but says cabinetry costs for his projects "run the gamut" from high-end, such as Poggenpohl, to low-end, such as Ikea. "Before a project goes out to bid, we can get an idea of what the cabinets will cost based on similar-size kitchens we've done," Wissink says.

Heartwood Design, of Afton, Va., fabricates custom cabinets and built-ins for Gibson Builders. "About 10 years ago, we noticed our kitchens were getting outrageously expensive," Gibson says. "One of our clients recommended Heartwood, so we went to Afton and toured their shop. Now they're probably doing 80 to 85 percent of our kitchens."

Gibson Builders has amassed a large photo library that demonstrates the high quality and versatility of Heartwood's work. This is often enough to convince clients that custom cabinets



Custom built-ins, including a bench and bookshelves, adorn the nook in the kitchen of this Chapel Hill, N.C., home, designed by architect Keith Shaw and built by K. Alan Co.

are the way to go. “They can do pretty much anything, whether it’s stainless steel, wood, stain grade, or paint grade,” Gibson says. And the turnaround is fast (for one recent project, Heartwood delivered finished cabinets in eight to 10 weeks, compared with 12 to 14 weeks if they had been ordered through a retailer). The quality is consistently high, and Gibson typically saves 5 to 10 percent.

Anthony “Ankie” Barnes of Barnes Vanze Architects, in Washington, D.C., has done many projects with Gibson and Heartwood. Barnes says, “Jim and his team are great partners in such exercises. Together with Heartwood, they help us achieve value for the client.”

Like Gibson, builder Rocky McCampbell of K. Alan Co., in Chapel Hill, N.C., prefers to use a custom cabinetmaker. “It results in a more aesthetically pleasing result, with less unsightly spacing between doors and minimal filler usage,” McCampbell says. “A custom cabinet shop usually can make better use of a provided space.” While cabinet manufacturers may have the advantage when certain finishes are desired, McCampbell prefers the flexibility of the custom approach.

Typically, the process involves multiple meetings between (at minimum) the client, the cabinetmaker,

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See what Damien Busillo, President of DLB Custom Home Design, and other experts are saying about modern design trends.



Circle 758

TOP: Simple farmhouse-style cabinets bring the hardware and other decorative elements to the forefront. Multiple work areas help organize meals.

BOTTOM: Dual appliance garages keep the coffeemaker and toaster hidden, with open shelving above and drawers below.

and the builder. Many times, the architect and interior designer are also present. “In my opinion, the more minds, the better, with the requirement that egos be checked at the door,” McCampbell says.

WHY CABINETS ARE SO EXPENSIVE

One reason cabinetry is such a big-ticket item is that it’s a large component of a custom home and an extension of the interior architecture, says Keith Shaw, principal of Shaw Design Associates, in Chapel Hill, N.C.

“Depending on the client’s desire for executing the level of detail defined in the design goals, many of the classic cabinets you see in photos are costlier to install and build,” Shaw says. Custom colors that are trending now can also add to the expense, since the cabinet shop must purchase a large amount of paint instead of using a stock color.

McCampbell says that upper-end cabinets are generally made with good, stable hardwoods, which are expensive materials. Also, clients take it for granted that costly features such as self-closing drawer and door hardware and rollout shelving will be included. “In like manner, the overall cabinet configuration has become more complex as a result of customers desiring

NO DETAIL OVERLOOKED



The custom cabinetry, built-ins, and millwork in this new home in Chapel Hill, N.C., required meticulous attention to detail, says interior designer Kimberly Brewer Nawn of KBN Interiors, in Charlotte, N.C. The hub of the large kitchen is an island surrounded by different areas for food preparation, cooking, dining, entertaining, and cleanup.

Once architect Keith Shaw created the millwork designs, Nawn worked with the trades to specify profiles that would achieve the correct balance and scale for the spaces. Xylem, a fabricator of custom cabinets, furniture, and millwork based in Raleigh, N.C., produced these details. Many of the built-ins, including the integrated cabinetry, storage, and seating in the nook as well as the pantry cabinet and shelving, were constructed by the builder K. Alan Co. The kitchen cabinets are hard maple, painted white with walnut drawer fronts. The range hood is also painted and features riveted chrome decorative banding above the cooktop. A waterfall countertop, made of quartzite with a leathered finish, adorns the island. Pullout drawers are located in the toe-kick space. Other features include a farm sink; 48-inch, dual-fuel range; warming drawer; wine cooler; and an undercabinet refrigerator, in addition to the built-in refrigerator/freezer. The island has a prep sink and a pop-up electrical power station.



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Circle 774

TOP: The family enjoys casual meals either at the island or the bay opposite with its comfortable banquette.

BOTTOM: This shared boys' bath is in a custom home built by Gibson Builders.

Washington, D.C., interior designer Skip Sroka calls it a "Jack-and-Jack bath." The trough sink and countertop are made of poured concrete, and the faucets resemble old well pumps.

specific-use cabinets and door/drawer front detailing," he says.

To avoid breaking the bank on a custom kitchen or bath, Shaw determines what the cabinet budget should be and then works at different construction levels to achieve it. "In the secondary areas of the home, such as the laundry room or mudroom, cabinets are often selected from semi-custom lines," he says. "This makes it easier to keep costs down since the cabinets aren't built specifically for one project or home."

Value engineering is also a big help. "We find areas that are redundant or unnecessary to the overall design and scale back in those areas," Shaw says. "If a public space like a kitchen has plenty of special details, we can still capture the main design aesthetic of a home."

McCampbell's own crew does all the carpentry work including rough carpentry and trim carpentry, as well as boxing and siding, hardwood installation, and any cabinetry not contracted to the cabinetmaker.

GET COSTS UNDER CONTROL

To achieve accurate bottom-line cost results in a custom kitchen or bathroom, builders must first have a thorough understanding of

FRENCH CONNECTION



For this rustic-chic French villa in Washington, D.C., built by Gibson Builders, the clients envisioned an informal French cottage kitchen with all the trappings necessary for serious American cooking.

Barnes Vanze Architects whipped up a kitchen design that delighted their Francophile clients. As principal architect Ankie Barnes

puts it, "They wanted a furniture-style kitchen that included some built-ins as well as an antique French sideboard. They were also intrigued by the possible introduction of some French Gothic elements, which look like repurposed, 'foundation' furniture."

The cabinet design was inspired by the Hotel la Mirande in Avignon, France, which Barnes has visited. Heartwood Design fabricated the cabinetry with a commonly used French bolection molding door panel.

There is a walk-in pantry and multiple surfaces for prep work. The long island keeps "helpers" out of the chef's way, but within easy distance for conversation, and doubles as a family dining table. The clients also wanted the look and feel of real plaster walls inside the home. Venetian plaster would have been ideal, but it involves skimming the drywall with a special veneer plaster that includes a lime plaster, marble chips, and pigment. "It's a handsome but pricey finish," Barnes says. "After much research on our part and several rounds of samples with Gibson's plaster subcontractor, we found a simple pigmented drywall sparkling plaster that did the job for less than half the cost."



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Circle 772



TOP: This pizza oven is the focal point of the kitchen and also doubles as a fireplace for the home's open living areas.

BOTTOM: The green, recycled-glass countertops in this master bath are the key element in the room. The mirror "floats" in front of the window rather than blocking the view.

the customer's vision, McCampbell says. To turn that vision into a designed space, they must then:

- Understand the characteristics of the designed space by producing accurate floor plan and wall elevation drawings depicting finished floor thicknesses, wall dimensions, wall opening locations and dimensions, and interior trim dimensions and characteristics.

- Select appliances, plumbing fixtures, and specialty items before construction begins.

- Produce plans and elevation drawings depicting exact cabinet or vanity layout/locations derived from an understanding of the desired function, comfort of use, appliance location, and storage requirements. Countertop material selection and design and edge detailing decisions go hand in hand with cabinet and vanity layout.

- Finalize specifications for tile, shower enclosures, wall finishes, cabinet hardware, and bathroom accessories.

Mark Larson, principal of Rehkamp Larson Architects, in Minneapolis, uses the concept of "high/low" to help clients identify what has the most value to them versus things that are of lesser importance and can either be eliminated or done more cost-effectively. **CB**

CHOOSING A FOCAL POINT

At an open house celebrating the completion of this home in Minnetonka, Minn., visitors couldn't stop commenting on the massive, wood-fire pizza oven in the kitchen. While the clients obviously love homemade pizza, the oven does double-duty. "Not only can you cook in it, it actually heats the space," says Mark Larson, principal of Rehkamp Larson Architects, in Minneapolis. "We liked the idea that this house didn't need a fireplace." The pizza oven anchors the open floor plan, presiding over the dining and living rooms.

Larson says the home really has two kitchens. The "extrovert" kitchen consists of the pizza oven, a wall oven, a microwave, and an integral stainless steel sink. The second, "introvert" kitchen is a galley tucked into an adjacent alcove.

"It includes the cooktop, the refrigerator, and the dishwasher," he says. "That's where you clean up. No one hangs out there except the person who's cooking; they're all gathering around the pizza oven."

The clients decided to allocate most of their kitchen budget to the pizza oven and an adjustable audio and lighting system installed near the ceiling under the clerestory windows. The cabinets are from Ikea, and the flooring is an inexpensive ceramic tile with a simple pattern. Elevation Homes of Wayzata, Minn., was the builder.

Rehkamp Larson and Elevation Homes surmounted another design challenge in a home in Lake Elmo, Minn. The clients are avid bird-watchers and have spotted more than 100 species on the 10-acre site since relocating to Minnesota, Larson says. Obviously, views in this home are paramount, so even the master bathroom has vistas.

"The master bath is at the perimeter of the house and has a long view to the south over a restored prairie," Larson says. "Though it has a lot of privacy, we liked the idea of making the window a horizontal slit, kind of like a bird blind. You can't be seen sitting down, but when you're standing up, you can see out."

Rather than eliminate a window over the sink, they added a mirror in front of it at one of the mullions. "The perimeter of the mirror is lighted, and it glows at night so you can see your face," he says. "As you move around the room you can also see behind the mirror from different angles. So you have both the view and the mirror."

Like the pizza oven in the Minnetonka home, the green, recycled-glass countertops are the focal point of this bathroom. Other elements, such as the white floor-to-ceiling subway tile, were chosen to complement the integral countertops, Wissink says.





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THE WRIGHT STUFF



Nies Homes has ventured into contemporary design via Prairie Style modernism.

A Wichita family builder beats succession-planning odds, channeling the Midwest's signature modern style for a new generation

By Teresa Burney; Photography by Shane Organ

In 52 years, Wichita, Kan., builder Nies Homes has transformed from a man-led business, into a woman-led business, into a tight family business building new-style houses on the prairie that have visitors saying, "I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

The matriarch of Nies (pronounced "Nees") is Cherie Nies-Cowgill, 58, who took over day-to-day control from her father, family patriarch and founder Clifford Nies, about a decade and a half ago and has already beaten the family-business succession odds. According to *Forbes* magazine, only a third of family businesses make it to the second generation. Nies has its third generation now transitioning into control.

Nies-Cowgill recalls her father coming to her and saying that he was tired of making all the decisions. He also told her that if she didn't want to take over the business, he would shut it down. "It just seemed a shame," Nies-Cowgill says. "In this industry, it takes a lot to get the equity built up. I had two boys in high school and I told [my father] I would love to keep the business running until they got out of high school and decided if they wanted to go into the business."

The busy mother of four went back to work part time, selecting the interior treatments for the company's spec homes. She didn't have to worry about management or construction at first; a nonfamily member was doing that at the time. But when the construction manager quit, Nies-Cowgill stepped up and totally took over the business.

It was a little scary, she recalls. "But I had my dad's counsel, and my father and I think alike. I was the main person running it, designing the homes and doing the up-front decision-making, and he was supporting me. It was awesome."

Nies-Cowgill also received other helpful advice from builders of similar size around the country by joining NAHB's Builder 20 Club. "It was an amazing support for me," she says.

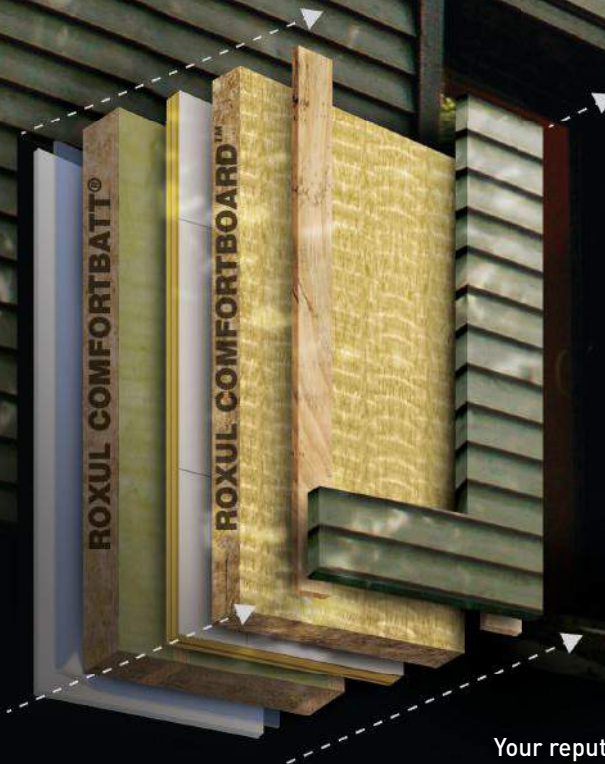
Design, a passion for Nies-Cowgill, led her to make what some may consider a radical move in the relatively traditional Wichita market.

With some urging and help from a colleague, Phil Kean—a member of her Builder 20 Club and the designer of the New American Home 2017—she rolled out a modern-style home on the prairie, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's famed modernist style. It had some modifications, however. For example, the roof wasn't flat because that didn't conform to neighborhood architectural guidelines.

Everyone in the family was on board with the new concept, despite the possible risk in a traditional market. Even patriarch Clifford, then in his 80s, championed the design with its Prairie-style modernism. The house drew praise from visitors, and Nies-Cowgill has four or five customers interested in building a version of the home. The old style appeals to younger buyers, she says. Her son Curt built a modern farmhouse, and son Nick is looking to build a modern design home, too. "They don't want a home that looks like their parents," Nies-Cowgill says. "They want their own statement, their own style."

As the company transitions to the third generation, the family has prepared by attending family business forums at the local university where families work through bringing the next generation into the business. "The key is that each one of us has our talents, our own areas of competency," Nies-Cowgill says. And fun is important, too. The family works hard together and plays hard together, too. **CB**

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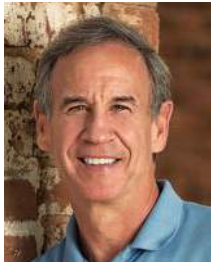
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PHOTOS: SPACECRAFTING

DESIGN SPOTLIGHT: SPECIALTY ROOMS



GUS RUBIO

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Featuring cedar walls, mahogany cabinetry, cigar storage, a barrel tile ceiling, and a ladder system, this humidity-controlled wine room (1) holds 1,972 bottles. The stairway to the living area has custom-turned woodwork, including newel posts and tower finials. Access is also possible via a wood-paneled elevator. 2) The gym in this home is pro quality. With architect Mel Dias, we ensured that floor supports could handle the dropping of heavy barbells. The gym has a second story with cardio equipment and a stretching area. Home automation delivers music, satellite TV, and security. The fitness area extends outside to a push-sled track and half basketball court. Few need a gym of this caliber, but many would enjoy a scaled-down version. 3) This rustic wine tasting room was inspired by the homeowner, who lived in France for several years as a young girl.



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DESIGN SPOTLIGHT: SPECIALTY ROOMS



RICHARD LANDRY, AIA
LANDRY DESIGN GROUP, LOS ANGELES

The first step in design is asking clients to ponder how they live and entertain and the life they anticipate as their families mature. Those answers, along with knowing which home style the clients like, provides the basis for a plan. 1) Home theaters, entertainment centers, gyms, and wine rooms often are customary in homes with ample underground space, but sometimes we're asked to design a room for beauty

treatments and massage. 2) Situated alongside a gym and full spa in the basement of a classical Chicago home, this room owes its relaxing ambience to a fireplace, rich materials, a warm palette, and cove lighting. 3) Another unusual request was made by clients whose daughter practices meditation. There, we designed a meditation tower. The serene space is an exotic mélange of colors and cultures, yet it works in this residence. **CB**



PHOTOS: ERHARD PFEIFFER



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Series 610 Single-Hung and Series 620 Sliding Windows from Western Window Systems can be glazed on the inside for easy installation. Designed with a 4½-inch frame depth, both window styles can be directly milled to most other Western Window Systems' product lines, such as hinged or sliding doors. The male/female mulling feature—unique in aluminum window products—eliminates the need for operable inserts. Series 610 is available in widths up to 48 inches and 72 inches in height, while Series 620 has a double-sash option available up to 96 inches in length. Both are available in thermally broken aluminum for better energy performance. westernwindowssystems.com circle No. 851

3. SHOWER

The SmartControl rainshower system from Grohe allows the user to control and set all shower settings with a push-and-turn button, which has ridged edges for easier use with wet fingers. The shower features TurboStat technology, a metal thermostat handle that quickly delivers water at the desired temperature. A SafeStop button prevents users from accidentally raising the water temperature to more than 100° F, and CoolTouch technology prevents exposed metal surfaces from heating up. grohe.com/us circle No. 852

4. SINK

Homeowners who cook often (and frequently use oversize pots and pans) will appreciate this spacious, forward-positioned farmhouse sink. Galassia's vintage-inspired Reversible Farmer Sink measures 30 by 18 inches with a 10-inch depth and has a counter-flush front apron that makes it easy for users to reach into the basin. Made from fine fire clay, the sink is available in White, Biscuit, or Black, and the front apron can either be flat or slightly concave (shown), depending on which side of the sink's reversible design is forward facing. ceramicagalassia.com circle No. 853

NEW PRODUCTS



5.



6.

5. BATHROOM FAUCET

Single-handle and vessel faucets in the Zura bath collection from Delta Faucet feature Touch20.xt technology, which enables users to turn water flow on and off with a touch of the faucet's spout, hub, or handle. The faucet also has a hands-free mode that senses a user's presence within 4 inches, shutting off water flow once hands are withdrawn. Deck-mount lavatory faucets come in a split Matte Black and Chrome finish, with other options including Chrome, Polished Nickel, and Stainless. deltafaucet.com circle No. 854

6. SLIDING DOORS

Lift and Slide door systems from Sierra Pacific Windows create large openings up to 10 feet high and 23 feet wide for unencumbered views. Smooth sliding panels, which feature a wood interior and aluminum-clad exterior, save space by stacking on one or both sides of an opening. The line has an advanced weeping system, which provides a very low profile leg on the interior sill for a more modern design. A full knock down frame drops into a built-up sill for easier installation. sierrapacificwindows.com circle No. 855



7.

7. LIGHT FIXTURE

The BeveLED Block from USAI Lighting is a high-performance LED lighting solution for exposed concrete ceilings where recessed lighting isn't an option. The 5-inch square Block encloses surface-mounted junction boxes in concrete ceilings, emitting white light in color temperatures from 2,200K to 6,000K, with beam spreads ranging from 25 degrees to 90 degrees. The fixture comes in a choice of White, Black, Gray, Bronze, or custom colors, and the unit can be specified with solid sides (shown) for ceilings that have recessed conduit. usailighting.com circle No. 856

8. PORCELAIN TILE

Dexwood, a pressed porcelain tile from Ege Seramik, offers the realistic texture and look of natural wood. Tiles are available in several sizes, including 6-by-36-inch and 18-by-36-inch panels and 11-by-13-inch hexagonal mosaic sheets. Large-format tile reduces grout lines, resulting in a smoother monolithic appearance. Porcelain is easy to clean and maintain, and the tiles can be installed outdoors or indoors on floors and walls. egeseramik-usa.com circle No. 857

8.



THE NEW AMERICAN HOME™ NAHB 2017



The New American Home 2017 was designed and built by Phil Kean Design Group. The home was designed in what they call pods, which lets homeowners customize how they use the 8,245 square foot open-plan home interior. Outstanding elements include many glass walls, a 2,000-square-foot rooftop terrace, and new products that play a key role in making it beautiful and innovative.



The home will be open for tours during NAHB's International Builders' Show, Jan. 10-12, 2017 in Orlando, Florida.



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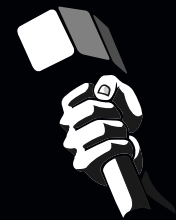
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Building a stronger future

LOUVER MANEUVER



The fixed vertical louvers on the western façade of this Long Island beach home provide privacy from the street as well as shade from afternoon glare, casting artful patterns of light throughout the home's interior. On the exterior, they offer a decorative screen that's strikingly showcased at night, when the 1,725-square-foot house is lit up from within.

The owners preferred natural ventilation to air conditioning, so the stationary panels, which are installed in front of operable windows, are angled to capture summer winds and block winter ones—a challenge that was met thanks to digital modeling and plenty of mock-ups, architect Paul Masi says.

Each fixed louver is ceiling height. A single piece of material is wrapped around a frame, with tapered strips that admit light. When it came time for Masi and his team to choose the canvas and assembly that they thought would work best for the southwest-facing louvers, battering from the seaside elements was a big question. "What if the screen began to look like a weather-worn flag, ending up in tatters?" Masi recalls thinking. To ensure that it wouldn't, the fabricator made a full-scale model that he attached to his truck. Then, he proceeded with field trials. "He drove around with it on his truck for months," Masi says, "and there was no issue. Having the canvas as one continuous piece turned out to be stronger in the end."

—Amy Albert



PHOTOS: BATES MASI + ARCHITECTS

PROJECT Amagansett Dunes, Amagansett, N.Y. **ARCHITECT** Bates Masi + Architects, East Hampton, N.Y. **BUILDER** Thomas Cooper Construction, East Hampton
LOUVER FABRICATOR Wm. J. Mills & Co. Sailmakers, Greenport, N.Y.

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