

Custom Home

The Art and Craft of Custom Home Building • November/December 2004

Custom Home
Nov/Dec 2004

2004 Custom Home Pacesetter Awards

By Meghan Drueding, Shelley D. Hutchins, and Bruce D. Snider

The Pacesetter Awards program celebrates its 10th anniversary with an impressive lineup of 17 outstanding honorees. Co-sponsored by CUSTOM HOME and the National Association of Home Builders' Custom Home Builders Committee, the Pacesetter Awards honor the highest achievers in the business of building custom homes. The winners were chosen by the magazine's editors for their excellence in one of six categories that reflect the critical areas custom builders must excel in if they are to run successful businesses. The categories are marketing, management, customer service, design, production, and innovation.

Each member of the Pacesetter class of 2004 is a standout in one of these categories.

All of them bring commitment, creativity, and professionalism to the business of custom home building. Their stories show what it takes to be the best in the business.

2004 Pacesetter Awards Production

In small custom building companies, communication is seldom a major concern. The right hand always knows what the left hand is doing. The larger a company becomes, the farther lines of communication are stretched.

Communication—both within the company and with clients, suppliers, and subcontractors—becomes a matter of

Larry Weinberg and Josh Baker

procedures or perish. Larry Weinberg (left photo) and Josh Baker, principals of BOWA Builders, have taken their company past the \$20 million mark with rock-solid procedures built around a deceptively simple set



of internal and external reports. ■ The regime kicks off each project with a checklist of permits, utility-company and neighbor notifications, and long-lead selections. Field superintendents file daily and weekly reports. Clients get a weekly progress memo from the production staff, usually via e-mail. By keeping clients updated on decisions they need to make—and producing a record of such notifications—the weekly memo can be a lifesaver, says Weinberg.

BOWA Builders Inc.
McLean, Va.
Type of business: custom
builder, remodeler
Years in business: 17
Employees: 83

2003 volume: \$21.5 million
2003 starts: 2 custom homes,
26 major remodels,
102 small projects

"The intent is not to replace face-to-face meetings. But clients are busy, architects are busy. Not having that meeting can be devastating to a project." ■ Perhaps the sharpest arrow in BOWA's quiver is what Weinberg and Baker call "the daily huddle," a mandatory 10-minute conference call for each work group that ensures that employees start the day fully informed. "It also gives us the opportunity to pass information from management through the company," says Baker, and the daily open-channel works horizontally as well as vertically. When one crew needs extra hands on the job, for example, "There's not

this back-and-forth and phone tag. They literally say 'Can you spare a couple of people from noon to two o'clock?' It gives you the ability to shift resources effectively." ■ Other simple but smart production procedures include tracking unscheduled lumberyard runs, retaining independent safety inspectors to conduct unannounced site inspections, and publishing a regular newsletter to notify subcontractors of upcoming projects. ■ Custom building is a game of continuously shifting variables, Weinberg says. "When you're a company of 15 people it's not that hard to adjust." Thanks to an unblinking focus on communication, "as a company of 90 people we're just as nimble."—B.D.S.