



2015 JESSE H. NEAL
AWARD WINNER



3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025
847.391.1000 • Fax: 847.390.0408

STAFF

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Denise Dersin
703.992.7640; ddersin@sgcmail.com

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Amy Albert
818.308.6648; aalbert@sgcmail.com

SENIOR EDITOR

Mike Beirne
847.391.1051; mbeirne@sgcmail.com

CONTENT MANAGER

Ingrid Bush
202.780.9591; ibush@sgcmail.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Michael Chamernik
847.954.7976; mchamernik@sgcmail.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Susan Bady | Bob Schultz | Scott Sedam

DESIGNER

Robin Hicks

GROUP DIRECTOR – PRINCIPAL

Tony Mancini
484.412.8686; tmancini@sgcmail.com

DIRECTOR OF EVENTS

Judy Brociek
847.954.7943; jbrociek@sgcmail.com

DIRECTOR OF AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Doug Riemer

MANAGER OF CREATIVE SERVICES

Lois Hince

MARKETING DIRECTOR

Michael Porcaro
847.954.7925; mporcaro@sgcmail.com

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

Circulation Department, Professional Builder
3030 W. Salt Creek Lane, Suite 201
Arlington Heights, IL 60005-5025
circulation@sgcmail.com

REPRINTS

John Premetz
219.670.0045; johnapremetz@att.net

CORPORATE

CHAIRMAN EMERITUS (1922-2003)

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CHAIRPERSON

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For advertising contacts, see page 102

Soft Sell

The last scene of the final episode of *Mad Men*, AMC's hit TV series, finds advertising mastermind Donald Draper seated in a lotus position, chanting at a meditation retreat on the California coast. While the others in the group are looking within, Don is dreaming up one of the most famous and successful TV commercials of all time, the 1970s "Hilltop" Coca-Cola ad, in which a huge chorus of flower children croons about teaching the world to sing in perfect harmony.

It's a clever bit of storytelling, but not because we've caught our antihero in the act of not meditating. Don's Esalen epiphany captures a moment in the history of commerce: when advertising becomes fully aware of its own astonishing ability to leverage youthful idealism to sell a soft drink.

The Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who rejected working in the family lighthouse business in order to become a writer, is credited with saying that "Everyone lives by selling something." But in modern times, being brand-aware is being smart because a crucial aspect of good quality is the reliable products you choose for constructing your homes. Sound products help you keep the promise you make to buyers, and they help you maintain your hard-earned reputation.

Each month we devote several pages to delivering the latest in new products. But this month we center almost the entire issue around them. How do we know they're worth the trouble? You told us. The 100 products featured here were selected by you, the readers, as those you're most interested in using.

But there's more to this issue. We've partnered with the NAHB's Home Innovation Research Labs to bring you the latest results of its brand-use survey, which HIRL has been doing annually since 1994. Now compiled for the first time into an extensive report, the study asks builders in 32 regions of the U.S. about the brands of flooring, kitchen appliances, HVAC systems, interior paints, decking, and other products they're currently using. The methodology was developed in the 1970s by PhDs with strong grounding in both statistics and the housing industry. "I have the first research ever published, with coffee stains all over it," says Ed Hudson, director of market research at HIRL.

So, on the pages that follow, no hard sell, just top picks from professional builders. After all, what more trusted endorsement is there than a recommendation from a peer?

Amy Albert, Editor-in-Chief

aalbert@sgcmail.com

@amyalbertLA

@ProBuilderMag



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