


# Foundations

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**PROJECT OF THE MONTH**

## Made by Hand

Amish timber-frame homes maintain a tight niche.

**J**ohnny Miller and Levi Husterler generate most of their business through the Internet, but they still build houses the old-fashioned way. Many of the timber-frame homes their company has built over the past 35 years have been commissioned on nothing more than a verbal agreement and a handshake. And the framing members are still crafted exclusively with hand tools. *(see on page 30)*

## Foundations

"It's been suggested to us that we use a CNC (computerized timber framing) machine, but we have found that with hand-cutting you can get a much tighter joint," says Miller, co-owner of OakBridge Timber Framing, a business that is owned and operated by Amish family members spanning three generations in Howard, Ohio.

"We use a draw bore technique, meaning we offset the pinholes of the tenon and mortise intentionally so they aren't perfectly aligned. Then we secure each

joint with a 1-inch hickory pin, which wiggles through and smashes it tight," he explains. "We also do a shoulder bevel, which creates tighter joints long term. We don't use high-tech equipment because we know we can achieve better craftsmanship by hand."

Certain traditions run deep. Having been brought up on barn raisings involving scores of hands, Miller and Hostetler allow the home buyers who comprise 80 percent of their customers (the rest are builders) to

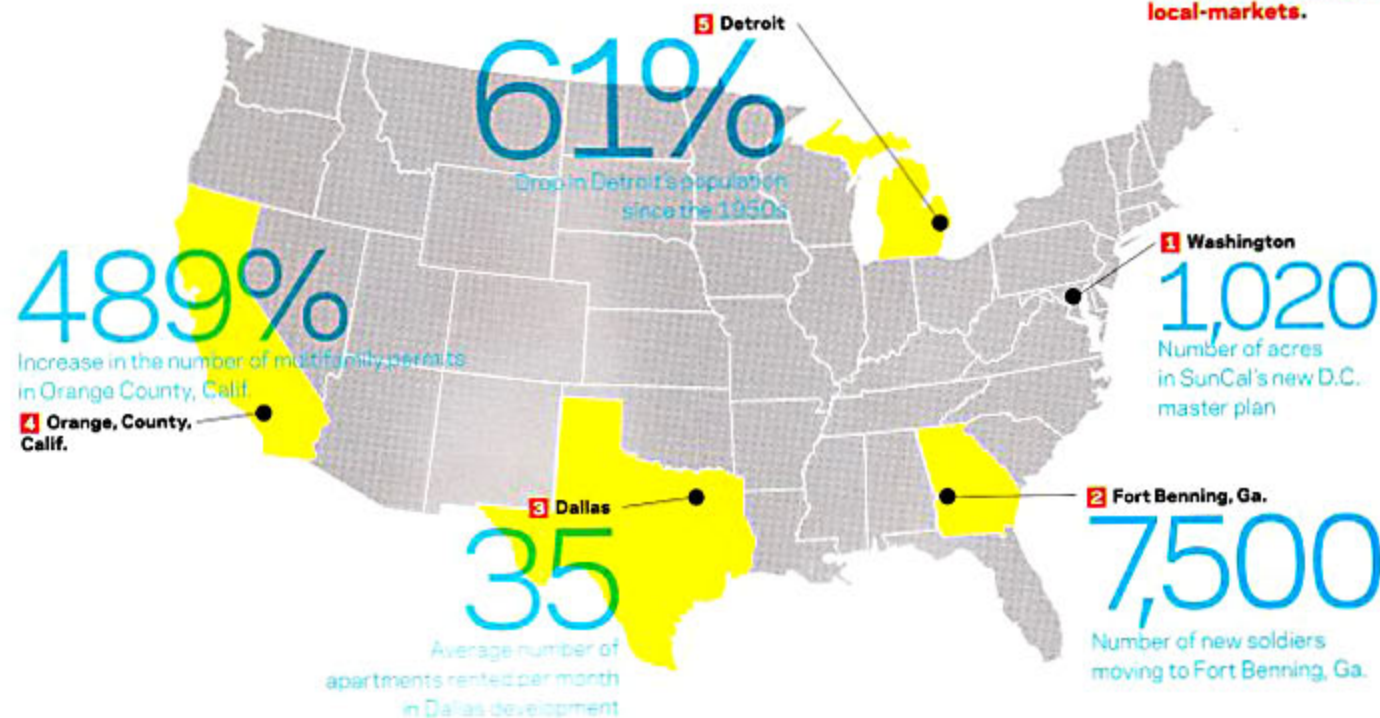


**Home Sweet Barn** The owners of this rural home considered buying and restoring an old barn, but decided on a timber-framed addition instead.

### FIELD REPORT

## D.C. Flag Plant, Piney-Wood Drones, and a Rental Rush

Coast-to-coast down-market opportunities spotted and seized.



**"Our entire city will benefit from this new market approach of service delivery. You deserve a city that works."**

— Detroit Mayor Dave Bing

**News You Can Use** BUILDER, with the help of Hanley Wood Market Intelligence, scans news across the nation each month for interesting, informative, and useful items, choosing a handful of the most significant for this Field Report.

**Q** For more information on local markets, go to [www.builderonline.com/local-markets](http://www.builderonline.com/local-markets).

be part of the construction process. Each client has the opportunity to drive in one or two of the linchpins that hold the house together.

"During the frame-raising, we often have a pin-signing ceremony where family members can sign or dedicate a pin to someone they love. Then we take a picture of them driving the pin. It gives them an experience they never forget," Miller says.

One customer dedicated a pin to his mother, who had recently passed away. An-

other couple brought their entire family from Kansas City to their home's frame-raising.

There are other personalized touches, too. Thank you letters often come with homemade raspberry preserves. Customers are invited for workshop tours and home-cooked meals. And each spring, OakBridge sends a package of 50 saplings to each client from the previous year, so that the trees used to build their homes are replenished.

"Most of our customers have enough land to accommodate new trees," Miller says, not-

ing that the 15 or so timber frames they build each year are typically cut from white oak, pine, or Douglas fir.

It may be old school, but OakBridge's down-home ethics have kept business stable at a time when other home builders have struggled to survive. "We value honesty and treat others as we would like to be treated," Miller says. "We feel that our work is part of our purpose and why we are here. When you do things for a purpose, it's very motivating." — JENNY SULLIVAN



### SunCal Rises

The California developer is buying distressed land from coast to coast.

**1** SunCal has planted its flag on the East Coast, buying bank-owned Harbor Station, a stalled master planned community in the Washington, D.C., suburbs. The land, 35 miles south of the capitol, is one of the last large undeveloped parcels in the area.

The 1,020-acre parcel has approval for up to 4,000 homes and 3.7 million square feet of commercial development. About 45 percent of the property is preserved open space.

A Jack Nicklaus golf course is already complete as is extensive grading. SunCal did not disclose the sales price.

"We now have expanded our geographic outreach and are involved in projects from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean," says Frank Faye, SunCal's COO, adding it is looking for even more opportunities.

### Drone on the Range

Fort Benning, Ga., needs more space for war games.

**2** Sure the U.S. Army practices fighting wars on video screens in war rooms, but it also needs to practice on the ground, too.

Fort Benning, soon to grow by 7,500 soldiers when the U.S. Armor School moves in from Fort Knox, Ky., plans to expand its 182,000-acre footprint by 82,800 acres for field training.

"Technological advances, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, Stryker Infantry Combat Vehicles, and Battle Command Systems, create the capability to detect targets and conduct operations over greater distances," Fort Benning's Maneuver Center of Excellence wrote in answer to the question of why the Army needs more training land. Stewart County, just south of Fort Benning, is the Army's first choice of six nearby.

### Whistle Stop Winner

Rental apartments on a Dallas train line lease fast.

**3** In sprawling, car-dependent Dallas, where single-family housing is both plentiful and affordable, Huffines Communities is building rental apartments on a new train line that stretches

from Dallas to Denton, Texas. The project, called Hebron 121 Station, took off even before the first units were built, renting an average of 35 units a month.

"It's an absolute home run," says Robert Kembel, Huffines' president. The project has plans for 1,700 apartments and 250,000 square feet of retail and office space.

### Sunny Orange County

New-home permits surge.

**4** Bolstered by a swell of rental apartment projects, new-home permits nearly tripled in Orange County, Calif., in the first half of 2011, to 3,434, the highest level in four years, the Construction Industry Research Board reports.

Single-family permits were a third of the permits, up 66 percent. Multifamily unit permits, both for sale and for rent, jumped 489 percent to 2,174.

"It's mostly rental activity in the five-plus unit category," says Jonathan Dienhart, director of published research for Hanley Wood Market Intelligence.

Still, there was a glimmer of good news for new-home sales. Sales increased 10 percent year-over-year and foreclosures are down by 8 percent, he says.



### Detroit Triage

The shrinking city rations services.

**5** The city services Detroit residents receive will soon depend on their address under Mayor Dave Bing's plan to ration them.

Everyone will receive police, fire, emergency help, and garbage pick-up. But other services will be dispensed according to designations.

"Steady" neighborhoods, would receive more code enforcement, debris clean-ups, street light repairs, and business recruitments.

"Transitional" areas can expect more building demolitions and road improvements.

And "distressed" areas would get vacant building demolition, job training, assembly of land for reuse, and cash to enhance vacant lots.

"Our entire city will benefit from this new market approach of service delivery. You deserve a city that works," Bing said.

— TERESA BURNEY