

Making Dreamhomes a Reality



by Jerri Anne Hopkins

Whether you dream of a completed honey-do list or a sprawling mansion, one award-winning Eastern Shore builder can make your dreams come true.

It might seem counterintuitive, but a slow economy may be the best time to start a home building or home renovation project. Interest rates are down. Suppliers, builders and contractors are holding their prices down to attract more clients while business is slow, and there are plenty of them actively looking for work to do. When the economy turns back up, and it is beginning to show signs of doing just that, the demand for homebuilding services will increase dramatically and prices will, literally, go through the roof.

Think back to 2003-2004. In the aftermath of Hurricane Isabel, the demand for home repair services was so huge that builders and handymen had orders backed up for months. Prices soared as a result. Once the economy heats up again, people who have been putting off home building and renovation projects will be lining up for those services and paying premium prices for them.

Brad Lundberg of Lundberg Builders in Stevensville, MD, says, "I think people who have the ability to do it now and don't will be kicking themselves in six months to a year. When it turns around, the increases will come fast and furious."

He should know what he's talking about. After over thirty years in the homebuilding trade, he's seen the economic cycle repeat itself several times over. Lundberg started out as a carpenter, working for other people, learning from experienced craftsmen. In 1977, he asked for a raise and was refused. That spurred him to go out on his own and he began the great adventure of owning his own business. "I had no clue what it entailed," he acknowledged, laughing. "But I was a carpenter and got plenty of work, so it just kept on growing. I started with small jobs, then put on some additions, then picked up increasingly larger jobs and hired some help, and here we are today."

No doubt it wasn't quite that simple. Lundberg began by doing carpentry work during the weekday (and sometimes weekends) while working on estimates, bids and other paperwork in the evenings and weekends. Anyone who has run their own business knows that one works pretty much all day everyday and that many pitfalls lie waiting for the unwary. Lundberg ruefully admitted falling into a few along the way. Obviously, he got out of them again, because Lundberg Builders today is a thriving concern employing 20 people full time, including his daughter Jennifer, who manages the office. "She does the hard stuff, keeps everything straight," he said, smiling. "All I have to do these days is sit back and talk to people."



showing the tall windows and cozy seat on the first floor level.

Twenty-six years ago, in 1982, Keith Germerhausen, project manager, joined Lundberg, followed six months later by architect and designer Bob Moreland. Most of the full-time staff have been with Lundberg ten years and more. That so many talented staff members continue to display such loyalty and dedication is a true testament to Lundberg and his company. Lundberg also has a number of independent subcontractors and skilled craftsmen that he calls on regularly for projects. They are carefully chosen not only to match the project at hand but also to maintain

Lundberg Builders turned an old home into a charming guest house.





The Gibson's Grant model home showcases Lundberg Builders skills as well as many aging-in-place features.

Lundberg's high standards of quality and customer service.

Over the years, Lundberg Builders has grown from a one-man concern to a full service custom design build firm, specializing in residential construction in Anne Arundel, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, and Caroline Counties. Lundberg prefers to keep his projects within an hour or so drive from their offices in Stevensville to maintain the highest levels of quality control. "Of course, for the right project," Lundberg said, "we'll be glad to do more traveling. We just want to make sure we can do the job right."

Doing the job right and keeping the client happy have always been Lundberg's most important concerns. His passion has always been for high quality custom home building, bringing a client's vision to life and making it as close to perfect as possible. "Our typical customer wants something done right," he said. "That doesn't mean it has to be exorbitantly expensive, just that they want it done right."

However, a typical customer for Lundberg would be an atypical customer for an ordinary builder. They have completed a wide variety of projects for their clients in many styles, including historic renovation, classic styles and ultra-contemporary. They handle everything from simple handyman tasks to mansions of over 15,000 square feet, from one-room additions and kitchen makeovers, full renovations, tear-it-down-and-start-over to completely new construction beginning with the client's concept and finishing with the last flower in the landscape.

Lundberg explains, "We want to work for people who want something more than the average tract home builder can provide. Something with custom touches, something more than just Model A or Model B. We can't match their price, but we can double the quality."

Two buildings that display Lundberg's craftsmanship and attention to detail are their new office building in Stevensville and their model home in the new development of Gibson's Grant, both on Kent Island.

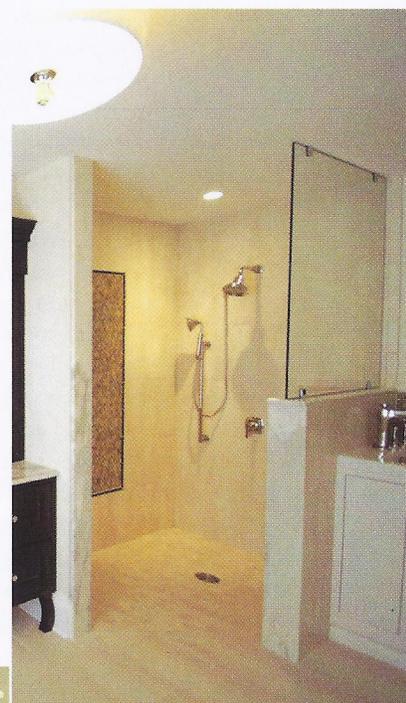
When Lundberg decided to build a new office space, he wanted three things: enough room for future expansion, a showroom to display both their craftsmanship and some of the product lines they offer, and to stay on the Eastern Shore. After looking at many sites, they settled on an elderly house on Main Street. At first they considered renovating the house, but eventually chose to take it down and

design something new that reflected the historic charm of Stevensville. The resulting building, which they moved into only a few months ago, looks as if it had been there for years but incorporates the best of modern building practices, including many environmentally friendly techniques and materials. Lundberg himself and several of his staff are Certified Green Professionals and continually add to their knowledge of environmentally friendly methods, materials and technology so

that they can help their clients decide what is best for their individual projects.

Lundberg points out that there are many factors to consider when choosing to go green. It's more than just saying, "Use energy and water saving appliances." It's knowing, for instance, which appliances and fixtures are good choices for a particular project, helping balance costs and efficiency, how to take advantage of natural light, or which materials are truly green and which have unexpected consequences.

Lundberg cites bamboo flooring as an example of the latter. Bamboo is indeed a renewable



Top right: the walk-in shower in the Gibson's Grant model home is a welcome aging-in-place feature, with no step up or wheelchair barrier.

Above: a contemporary bath with soaking tub, separate shower and custom touches.

resource but, when one considers that most of it needs to be transported halfway around the world, locally harvested hardwood flooring may be a better choice for the environment.

The new building showcases many such "green" choices in its offices as well as the skill and craftsmanship on which the company prides itself. The gorgeous desk in Lundberg's office is made from a single piece of impossibly wide reclaimed old timber, skillfully crafted and finished. Several



Above: this custom kitchen displays Lundberg's expertise in cabinetry as well as stone counter tops and tile work.

Left: the model home kitchen offers aging in place features such as a microwave drawer in the island and cupboards with drop-down shelves as well as custom cabinetry to conceal the refrigerator and other appliances.

different types of stone and tile work were used in counter tops throughout the building. Lundberg gleefully pointed out that the brick archways and walls, which are made with salvaged brick, have fooled many people into thinking they were over 100 years old.

The model house in the Gibson's Grant development incorporates many green features and it also displays another specialty of Lundberg Builder's—aging in place. Aging in Place refers to those features which help provide safe and barrier-free living spaces to homeowners as they grow older, allowing them to continue leading independent, comfortable and fulfilling lives in their own homes. Features such as walk-in showers, wide doorways, private elevators, drop-down shelving, bathroom grab bars and lowered counter heights are all convenient today and will be in place to help the homeowner later.

As Certified Aging in Place Specialists, Lundberg Builders work to make sure their clients' long term needs are fully met. But the Gibson's Grant model home is especially important to Lundberg, not just because it highlights so much of his company's services, but because his mother lives there. She confided that she likes the gas fireplace because she doesn't have to carry wood for it, and that she loves the easy-access drawers and shelving in the kitchen, as well as the microwave oven drawer in the center island, but that she's really tickled with the master suite's large walk-in shower and the separate walk-in tub with massaging jets. Lundberg said that the grandchildren's favorite part of the house is the media room with its huge video screen and plenty of room to play Wii.

There are two other facets to Lundberg Builders that may surprise some of their clients. One is their handyman services. While the company evolved from Lundberg's handyman origins, so many of his customers returned to him for small jobs and repairs that he finally had to allocate a van and crew for that specific purpose, and later added a second van and crew. "We have a lot of our customers who ask us to come back and do little things, like add shelves to a closet, or do some repair work. So we added the vans rather than pull people off our big projects. We do what we need to do to keep people happy," Lundberg said. "Maybe we succeeded too well. There are a lot of clients who think that's all we do. They don't know we do custom home building at all!"

The second facet is a new venture for Lundberg: 314 Design Studio. This offshoot of the company will specialize in kitchens, baths and cabinetry. They had so much call for these specific projects that Lundberg decided to make it a special part of the company. He has added a designer just for 314 Design Studio and will be devoting the third floor of his new building, which had been reserved for just such an eventuality, to kitchen and bath design as well as display space for tiles, cabinets, fixtures and hardware.

"We're here to take care of our customers, whatever they want," Lundberg said. You can be sure he and his staff stand behind every word.

For more information, contact Lundberg Builders, Inc., 314 Main Street, Stevensville, MD ; 410-643-3334; www.lundberbuilders.com.