



LUXURY HOME

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GUNKELMAN FLESHER INTERIOR DESIGN Partners combine two design styles to create incredible living spaces **p. 82**

THE ARRABELLE AT VAIL SQUARE Vail's newest condo development is a hot commodity **p. 78**

THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN A melting pot of ethnic design influences has resulted in a region full of amazing residences **p. 102**

VACATION HOMES



TECH AMENITIES
Monmouth Custom Builders created this cabana as part of an expansive outdoor living area in one of its homes. The cabana features an audio and video system, perfect for entertaining.



Deal, NJ

CITY POPULATION: 1,040 (as of 2007)
SUMMER POPULATION: 6,000+
ATTRACTIONS: Atlantic Ocean beach, quaint downtown area, charming architecture, summertime hotspot

Monmouth Custom Builders in Deal, New Jersey, a summer resort town located along the shore in Monmouth County.

He wasn't done, though. He also hired a computer programmer to write software to keep the company's projects better organized. "It's the backbone of our company," he says. "It has many features. When a customer asks for additional work, we enter the request into the system and then e-mail the customer the change order. If the customer wants to approve the change order, they can click the approval link in the e-mail and the program will record their digital signature. Or they can click decline and we'll have a record of that."

The program also manages and keeps track of purchase orders, open tasks, bids from subcontractors, and contracts. Before the program was implemented, when it came time to pay a subcontractor, the project manager, field manager, and owner had to sign the bill before the bookkeeper cut the check. Now, the system allows them to approve the bill electronically. "It's an incredible system," he says. "There's no system on the market as good as this."

Thanks to this new team-based approach to decision making and an innovative, customized software program, the firm is thriving, with \$7.5 million in sales last year. It also recently won two awards from *Qualified Remodeler* magazine's Master Design Awards competition: first place for a historical renovation, and second place for an entire home remodel of more than \$100,000 in value. Monmouth has also been on the list of *Qualified Remodeler*'s Top 500 remodeling companies for the past three years and *Inc.* magazine's top 500 fastest growing companies for the past two years, as well as *Qualified Remodeler*'s Big 50 Class of 2008.

The company came from humble beginnings, though. He founded the company in 1966, then named Levy Carpentry Company. In 1988, the company was incorporated and started doing

Monmouth Custom Builders

CHANGE IN MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE TRANSFORMS
BUILDER TO MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR CORPORATION

by Daniel Caetano

To transform his custom home and remodeling business into a multimillion-dollar corporation, the Levy decided to make changes at the top. He, who prided himself in being a hands-on owner who did everything, relinquished some of his decision-making responsibilities to his employees.

That turned one to be one of the best business decisions he's ever made.

"It's very hard for an owner to give up control, but if the employees think like owners, they will make decisions like owners," says the owner of

PHOTO: GREGORY ITTLEMAN/PHOTO

business as Monmouth Custom Builders. From 1996 to 2000, the company was run out of Ike's house and out of the back of his vehicle. Then, Ike's brother, Jon, joined the firm in 2000.

Soon after Jon joined, Monmouth leased 600 square feet of office space. But as time went on, the company outgrew that space, so in 2007, it built a 6,000 square foot office building, which houses a kitchen showroom, design center, tile showroom, two conference rooms, and twelve offices. Today, the firm builds new homes ranging from 10,000 square feet to 4,500 square feet, and also does home remodeling, which consists of whole house renovations, historical renovations, additions, kitchens, baths, basements, and adding levels.

Monmouth also builds second homes and vacation homes. While Deal, New Jersey, is a small town with very few year round residents, the town is packed in the summer months. "Many residents come from Manhattan and Brooklyn to Deal for the summer," Jon says. "Deal is right on the ocean and has great beach clubs. There are not many restaurants in the borough itself, but there are many in the surrounding towns, such as the recently re-developed Abury Park and Long Branch."

Although the market for vacation homes has slowed due to the economy, both brothers know that the company will endure this downturn, mainly because of its dedication to customer service. "We listen to what our customers want and we deliver it for them," Jon says. "We put our heart and soul into every project. We don't make excuses for problems that arise in the field. We fix our mistakes, and then present them to the owners so they can make an informed decision. We never hide anything from our customers."

That's also why communication is a key attribute to its success. For instance, Monmouth employs on return every phone call and e-mail. "Contractors and builders are notorious for not returning phone calls or communicating properly," Ike says. "We communicate with our customers every day and let them know what's going on with their project. We give them answers right away, and if we don't have their answer, we let them know we're working on getting them an answer. Customers love being in the loop and not being in the dark."

With this business approach, it comes as no surprise that Monmouth Custom Builders has achieved the level of success that it has. ■