

The Changing World of Construction

by Michael Watson

Residential contracting as a builder is changing...dramatically! I use the story of my own father to relate this truth. My Dad was an auto mechanic from the 50's and 60's. He was an auto repair specialist as was his father. Dave (my Dad) was an outstanding craftsman. He could figure out a solution to things people did not realize was a problem mechanically. The challenge was he lived in the world of mechanics. Structural things like carburetors and pistons. Several years ago that simplicity went away. The world of computers and technology was replacing the analytical minds of the average mechanic. Cars communicate with computers now and mechanics are called technicians. For Dave, that meant either work only on older vehicles, get a new education, or hang up his torque wrench. He chose to move into antique cars and did quite well at that.

The world of contracting has drawn that same line in the sand. Drawing plans on a scratch pad and showing it to a building official no longer flies. Just as cars are becoming Hybrids, Green Building and Universal Design are entering building arena. California has the Title 24 doctrine that dictates lighting, heating, cooling, and insulation. I guarantee you within the next couple of building code updates residential fire sprinklers will become mandatory in Kern County. The Fire Department for the County of Kern is putting their foot down when it relates to fire clearances, fire tanks, fuel mods, and property access.

Structural materials have much higher criteria for seismic, flood, and fire requirements. Preliminary soils reports are now required in Kern for Homes that are more than 2 stories. Wind and Seismic shear calculation has increased and now Certified Inspections are required at specific construction points by professionals outside of County Inspector capabilities.

Yes this does mean an increase in costs, but people are still going to build homes...custom homes. And with that it creates a requirement for a new breed of Contractor. More and more the industry is seeing people enter the field of contracting that have never worn a tool belt; folks that are graduating schools and moving directly into the building industry, building *technicians* if you will.

At the same time, older more experienced Contractors and Engineers are drowning in all the new technological aspects and either hanging up their tool belts and slide rules or sticking to remodeling and smaller projects less critical. A new age of Architect/Engineers is emerging as well.

My interpretation of the best solution is to be a field experienced contractor ready to embrace the changes and to seek continued education to further enhance and to meet the higher demands in this new age of building. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) offers excellent programs and certifications for, "Certified Aging in Place Specialists" known as CAPS; an intense program that educates builders and certifies them to evaluate and implement accessibility issues commonly known as handicap accessibility. Though the word, "Handicap" is not a favored or politically correct term today, it still universally identifies and describes the much needed movement of structures that creates a non-barrier environment for all.

The NAHB also provides certifications for “Green Building”, a course that empowers builders to be known as, “Certified Green Professionals”. It educates contractors in regards to creating an environment that produces less toxic emissions from glues , carpets, paints, chemicals used to create cabinets, products of a recycled aspect, and how to heat and cool your project more naturally using solar, geothermal, and using better building practices and materials.

This is just the tip of an iceberg in the world of contracting, and these are exciting times despite the economical climate and its uncertainties. The goals are simple: “Continue to meet the needs of a growing population and at the same time, reduce our carbon footprint, build with recyclable products, reduce or eliminate the use of toxic off gassing materials, and build with everyone in mind, not just the budding athlete but also for the aging and disabled”. Then, on top of this, to meet the growing building criteria of State regulations regarding, flood, fire, seismic, and wind shears. This may be overwhelming for most, but not for the Building Professional that embraces these growing criteria.

Watson Brothers has chosen the path of an informed builder/remodeler. It comes with growing pains, late nights, after hour education programs, and thinking outside the proverbial box. It means setting aside pride issues like, “we have always done it this way, why change now!” Bottom line, it means change, something we can buck or embrace.

As a NAHB Certified Green Build Professional, a Certified Aging in Place Specialist, and holding a Certificate of Completion for the 2 semester college course regarding the 2008 California Building Code, I urge you to contact us and experience our true desire to serve you with World Class Customer Service in regards to Remodeling, New Construction, and Design Work. Stop on by or visit us on the World Wide Web at [www. Watsonbci.com](http://www.Watsonbci.com) to see how we hare handling change and growth.

-Sincerely Michael Watson

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