

# Builder Wise

JUNE 2006

## The heart of the outdoor room

*Natural-gas grills and fireplaces  
turn patios into extended living areas.  
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## features

### On the cover:

Photography by Robert Matta; styling by Sara Schindel.

Location: John Willis Homes, Atlanta, Ga.

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## Builder Wise

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# The heart of the outdoor room

*Natural-gas grills and fireplaces turn patios into extended living areas.*

BY JANE S. JONES

It's a trend that shows no signs of letting up: homeowners are increasing their living space by turning their patio, deck or backyard into what's being called an "outdoor room." Sometimes it's just placing outdoor furniture in a landscaped boundary. Other times homeowners create a brand-new living place to relax, entertain and enjoy the outdoors. Extras can include special flooring, multiple levels, lighting, a waterfall, spa, pond, pool, sound system, cocktail bar and other innovative ideas.

But simple or elaborate, at the heart of almost every outdoor room is the cooking area. More than ever, Americans love cooking and eating outdoors. From a no-frills hamburger cooked on a small grill to an elaborate meal of stir-fry Mediterranean vegetables and wine-and-lime grilled salmon prepared on a high-tech grilling system, Americans love cooking and dining al fresco.

It comes as no surprise that manufacturers are keeping up. The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association (HPBA)

reports that grilling and barbecuing are more popular than ever. In fact, from 1992 to 2005, the overall industry grew by a whopping 44 percent.

Natural gas grills are most popular with consumers because they are easier to light, require no waiting for the fire to start and there's less cleanup. They come in a variety of models and price ranges, from the simple grill on four wheels like grandpa had to elaborate 5-foot-long grills with food preparation areas, cutting boards, warming ovens and more.

Increasing the cooking area – and options – is a much-in-demand feature on today's grill. A side-burner is now



available on the new Char-Broil Commercial Series Grill, which can operate on natural gas or propane. This stainless steel grill's main chamber has a 62,500 BTU cooking system with five burners. A side-burner gives the cook a bonus griddle for cooking everything from bacon and eggs to stir-fry.

Infrared cooking, just like steakhouses use, is now possible for home patios. Each Solaire Gas Grill has a "rocket under the hood" — the Solaire Infrared Burner that provides the high heat necessary to lock in the juices.

Rotisseries have been so popular that manufacturers are finding new ways to incorporate them. For instance, Jenn-Aire has introduced a Heavy-Duty Rotisserie with a halogen light. It makes it a snap to tend to the chicken and still participate in the party.

## The grill is the big deal

Don't be surprised if the next outdoor party you attend has a complete kitchen outdoors. All-weather cabinets, outdoor refrigerators, stainless steel sinks, food-prep areas and other snazzy innovations are often included in a jaw-dropping backyard oasis. But the center of attention is still the grill, and many manufacturers offer a line of built-in and counter-top gas grills for island or wall units.

An all-in-one, free-standing center sure to cause grill envy is the Superb Outdoor Cooking Center. In addition to a lavish cooking area with a 56-inches-wide, brushed stainless steel grill, cast stainless steel burners and a steaming compartment, the optional cart has four electrical outlets, plenty of shelves, tool hooks and enough space for a small refrigerator.

According to recent research from Unity Marketing, luxury barbecue grills are owned by approximately 70 percent of what the market defines as "luxury" consumers. "Luxury consumers no longer pursue a conspicuous-consumption lifestyle," reports Pam Danziger, president of

## Jazzing up the cover-up

It used to be you could have any color of gas grill cover — as long as you wanted black. Now from Two Dogs Designs comes a line of grill covers to liven up the patio while protecting your grill.

Patterns and colors include chili peppers, lighthouses, barbecue, flamingos, patriotic theme, wine labels, golf, sunflowers, stripes, birds of paradise and more. Covers are available in three sizes to fit most dome, portable and cart-style gas grills.

Matching designer accessories are a fun idea. Matching place mats, napkins, chef's aprons, mitts and more are available. To see more, visit [www.twodogsdesigns.com](http://www.twodogsdesigns.com).



Unity Marketing and author of *Let Them Eat Cake: Marketing Luxury to the Masses*. "Rather, new luxury consumers are more interested in life-changing experiences than in buying more stuff."

Having an outdoor natural-gas fireplace, where family and friends can gather for relaxed conversation, is one such life-changing addition. One of the most popular models is the Weber Flame Outdoor Gas Fireplace, which creates all the ambience of a roaring fire with the convenience of gas. The Weber Flame includes lava rocks and eight moveable ceramic logs to provide a beautiful, natural looking flame without worrying about flying embers. Brooke Jones, Weber product manager, says this product has been specially designed so company can sit all around it and be able to see over it. "Having the natural-gas model makes for a longer



experience," she points out.

In fact, natural gas is a major player in many outdoor rooms. "Where natural gas is available, we encourage builders and homeowners who are creating an outdoor living area to stub in a gas line outside," says Leslie Wheeler, spokesperson for the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association. "The availability of gas outside offers a homeowner convenience and flexibility for a variety of products, including grills, lighting and even patio heaters." 🏡

## Three cheers for grill pads

Savvy homeowners protect the outdoor "floor" from the stains and splatters associated with good grilling, and a popular choice has been the durable, earth-brown Original Grill Pad from DiversiTech.

Now the grill master can show school spirit with the new line of officially licensed Collegiate Edition Grill Pads. Choose from the logos of Vanderbilt University, University of Miami, University of Georgia, Virginia Tech, University of Tennessee and dozens of others.

The Grill Pad is heat and weather resistant, cleans easily with a garden hose and has a slip resistant textured surface. For more information, visit [www.diversitech.com](http://www.diversitech.com) or your favorite retailer.



# REMODELING BOOM

*Homeowners want the latest and the greatest, and remodelers work hard to keep up with the trends.*

BY JONAS JOHNSTON

If you think 2005 was a big year for home remodeling, hang on to your hard hats. While remodeling spending in 2005 passed \$200 billion for the first time, the National Association of Home Builders Remodelers™ Council forecasts for 2006 the largest increase in spending in more than 10 years. The Council predicts an increase of more than 13 percent, to \$238 billion.

“Everybody wants the latest and the greatest,” says remodeler Al Capogrossi, owner of Concept Creators in Stone Mountain, Ga. “Whether it’s the latest in stone floors or the newest gas cooktop, people love it when their remodeling project includes new trends and innovations.”

Some of the newest trends in remodeling include creating specialty spaces in a home, such as a home theater, wine room, office or workshop. Adjoining rooms to the master bedroom are often included to create a private retreat within the master suite.

Another attention-grabbing idea is using eye-candy colors, such as orange, bright greens, lighter blues and pink with brown, according to *Nation’s Building News*, the online newspaper of the NAHB. And chandeliers aren’t just for dining rooms any more; they also bring drama to kitchens, bathrooms, or just about any room in the house. In flooring, wood remains the most popular



choice, but homeowners love the idea of mixing two or three hardwoods in one room.

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## Kitchen central

The kitchen has always been the focus of most home remodeling projects, and 2006 is proving to be no exception.

Some people are opting for what’s known as a minor kitchen remodel. Industry experts say that for about the nationwide average of \$14,913, a homeowner can expect new cabinet doors and drawers (with cabinet boxes left in place), a moderately priced oven, cooktop, countertop, sink and faucet,

and resilient flooring. The payback at resale time? About 98.5 percent of the cost.

Other homeowners are opting for major kitchen remodeling, a decision that can transform the way a family or couple lives, as well as increase the value of the home. After all, kitchens are bigger and more important than ever in new-home construction, and remodeling trends often follow new-home ideas. Tony Buontempo, owner of Buontempo Homes of Westfield, N.J., builds many homes that have no division between the kitchen and the great room. "People spend 60 to 80 percent of their time in the kitchen, so it makes sense to blend it with the rest of the house," Buontempo says.

Especially when it comes to the major re-do, people want their remodeler to be able to offer suggestions of the newest materials, appliances and designs.

"Often, the kitchen is not just a place to cook and eat but rather where the family meets," points

out Odus Sweetin, owner of Sweetin Construction Company of Chattanooga, Tenn. "A soccer mom drops off one kid, dad has just finished cooking dinner for another, and mom takes that child to the next event. The kitchen is often the family meeting place."

Sweetin, who also hosts a radio program, reports that homeowners are going away from the sleek, modern look, and moving toward a more natural or Old World look. "Plus, kitchens are definitely more interesting," he says. "Remodelers are less restricted in what we can do because homeowners like it when you mix it up a bit, such as counter tops of different heights, or using granite and laminate countertops in the same kitchen."

## Everything old is new again

Eugene Baker, owner of C.E. Baker Construction, Inc. of Yorktown, Va., also sees the trend to an antique look. "People want cabinets with a glazed look that gives an antique-looking finish," Baker says. "The last four kitchens we've done have featured that look. You paint or stain on one color, and then come back later and wipe another color in the cracks and crevices. It's a tremendous amount of work for the cabinet people, but it's a look that homeowners love."

Many manufacturers are offering stoves, refrigerators and other appliances to complement a vintage kitchen. Causing attention at the 2006 Kitchen and Bath Show was the Elmira six-burner, all-gas range, fashioned after a Victorian-style wood burning cookstove, available in white with brass trim and in colors.

Because kitchens are often the center of entertaining,

remodelers are incorporating features and traffic-flow patterns to help homeowners use their kitchens for a party, a holiday extravaganza



or a small gathering. "Wine refrigerators are now even more popular than trash compactors, and it's not unusual to have a television as part of the kitchen plans," reports Barry Burney, owner of Burney

Homes, Inc., a building and remodeling company serving clients north of Atlanta. "Everything revolves around the kitchen, especially at a party. To help prepare the food for a crowd, five-burner gas ranges are important, and everybody wants dual ovens."

"People do like those big chef ranges, sometimes because they love to cook and sometimes just for the status of having it in their kitchen," Capogrossi adds. Capogrossi reports that no matter what brand, size or look of cooktop that people choose, most want to be sure it's a gas cooktop because gas is easier to control and because of its reliability.

Buontempo says clients of Buontempo Homes love the gas sealed six-burner, 36-inch Viking ranges. "People love cooking on natural gas, and they love having a quality appliance," he says.

Baker also says that entertaining is often the reason why people prefer their kitchens so large and open. "Instead of a wall, the kitchen is sometimes divided from the family room by a island or peninsula of cabinets, to make it easier for the kitchen to be part of the rest of the house," Baker says. "It's up to the remodeler to understand how the kitchen will be used." 🏠

## In-the-know pros know about tankless water heaters

Has a client asked you yet, "What about those tankless water heaters? What's your opinion?"

They will. "Consumers rely on their builder or remodeler to be the expert, to be up-to-date on the best the industry

offers," says Bob Barnard, owner of Barnard & Associates Remodeling, Inc. of Fayetteville, Georgia. "And knowing about the big benefits of tankless water heaters is important."

Barnard installed a gas tankless water heater in his own home to see if it could keep up with his teenagers and their long showers. "Not only does it keep up, but it saves us anywhere from \$40-\$50 a month in energy costs," he reports.

A gas tankless hot water system supplies endless hot water to multiple outlets simultaneously without any fluctuation in temperature. The gas-fired unit heats water only upon demand, without storing hot water 24/7.

Once Barnard was convinced of the advantages, Barnard & Associates began recommending gas tankless water heater systems to clients. The company has now installed tankless water heaters for 10 clients. "It's been like a snowball effect, because people love the way the tankless systems work, and they tell their friends," he said.



# Building homes and friendships

BY JACK MCGEE

*John Willis Homes believes that buying one of its houses should reward home-buyers for a lifetime.*

A

Atlanta home-builder John Willis has developed an ideal business blueprint. The foundation rests on broad experience in the residential marketplace; the first level is a proven track record; and the second story consists of a successful team approach. Since establishing his company in 1992, Willis has followed this blue print to the letter, overlaying it with one major principle: to build homes that exceed all expectations while developing great working relationships with customers before, during and after a home sale.



John Willis

“Our philosophy in general is to build homes for our customers that truly exceed their expectations,” says Judie Woodall, executive vice president.

“While doing that, we have enjoyed the opportunity to develop terrific working relationships with our clients. We want each homeowner to be delighted and proud of their home so that they will share the experience with their friends and family. That’s really what it’s all about.”

The approach seems to work, judging by the comment of one John Willis customer who summed up his building experience this way: “When all was said and done, I had my dream home and a good friend in John Willis, someone I can feel proud to recommend to anyone.”

Willis, an Atlanta native, takes pride in the number of referrals he has received from satisfied customers over the years. In addition, John Willis Homes has won numerous Gold Professionalism Awards presented by the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association for professionalism and excellence in home building. Willis was also honored by the Association as the 2004 Presidential Award winner and the 2005 Builder of the Year Award.

## A team approach to success

Although he is directly involved in every home sale from the early design stages to closing, Willis is quick to credit his success to his builders and team of professionals. He relies on their expertise and experience to do whatever it takes to fulfill the company's promise to customers of consistently striving to go beyond what is customarily expected of a home builder.

The philosophy and team approach has worked well: John Willis Homes continues to break records year after year. Willis' goal is to ensure that every customer he builds a home for is so pleased with their purchase that they provide his company with the highest compliment of all – a referral to a friend or family member.

Not surprisingly, the company puts major focus on customer care. "We've streamlined our customer care commitment," explains Woodall. "We provide each one of our customers with a homeowner's manual that clearly identifies the building process, from concept execution to decorating selections, and then outlines what their responsibilities are in caring for their home."

The manual outlines the company's homeowner warranty, which includes one-year coverage on workmanship and material defects. The plan provides a two-year warranty on plumbing, electrical and mechanical; and 10-year coverage on the home's structural components. The warranty program underscores what the company considers to be a defining characteristic that sets it apart – craftsmanship.

"We diligently work to ensure that we demonstrate that in every aspect of our communication with customers," says Woodall. "All of the appointments of our homes, both interior and exterior, are far beyond what our competitors offer. A lot of our standard features wind up being upgrades in our competitors' homes."

## Managing expectations

The company feels that it is important to manage customer expectations over the course of the entire homebuilding process. "We have four different walk-through orientations so there is very clear communication throughout the process," Woodall notes. "We want to make sure that everybody stays on the same page during the seven to 10 months it takes to build their home. We are extremely patient and we understand that a home purchase is a very emotional decision. By streamlining the process, and with effective communication, we are able to manage our customers' expectations and create an environment where everyone wins."

John Willis Homes has found that equipping its homes for natural gas



Craftsmanship, quality and value are the hallmarks of a John Willis Home.

dovetails with its overall emphasis on customer care. "The natural-gas component has been reliable and consistent for us," Woodall says. "There really haven't been any surprises, so our owners' requirements for the commercial-grade cook tops in their kitchen appliances have made natural gas a seamless choice for us."

In tracking customer feedback, the company has identified another recurring theme with respect to a preference for natural gas, according to Woodall. "Customers who have had electrical appliances tell us they prefer gas because of power outage situations. They know they can still function in their home with little interruption with natural gas."

## River District at Berkeley Lake

Natural gas is only one of many outstanding amenities featured in one of John Willis Homes' newest communities. The River District at Berkeley Lake is a unique gated community that consists of 74 executive, custom homes. Adjacent to the banks of the Chattahoochee River, the community offers three distinct price points, ranging from \$700,000 to more than \$1.5 million.

"The thing that truly sets this neighborhood apart is the tremendous amount of time we spent developing the outdoor living areas as they relate to the interior living space," Woodall says. "In each case, the interior space gracefully spills out into the outdoor living area where we have provided an outdoor fireplace, splash pools, water features and a very high-profile landscape package that creates more of a private haven for each owner."

Woodall is quick to point out that providing every owner with this level of craftsmanship, quality and value is a key to John Willis Homes' success. "We can build the most luxurious home in the world, but if we don't demonstrate a high level of attention to our customers' needs, then we have not done our job." 🏠



# Meet your AGL Reps in Georgia



**Name:** Mark Dooly  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Gwinnett  
**Number of years with AGL:** 20  
**Favorite house style:** Traditional Ranch  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room, for family time and entertainment.  
**Favorite music:** Country  
**Hobbies:** Fishing  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Grill, because I love the flavor given from grilling.

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**Name:** Chuck Gerlach  
**Title:** Commercial Account Executive  
**Territory:** Cobb County  
**Number of years with AGL:** 16  
**Favorite house style:** Country/Craftsman  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Family room – great for relaxing and enjoying family and friends.  
**Favorite music:** All kinds, but especially classical, easy listening, country, rock, Broadway, oldies, swing, jazz, etc.  
**Hobbies:** Fishing, reading, photography  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** I love my grill because everything tastes better cooked on the grill.

---



**Name:** Merrill Guice  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** South Georgia  
**Number of years with AGL:** 6 months  
**Favorite house style:** Federal  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** My second floor balcony overlooking the street. Its quiet out there!  
**Favorite music:** Rock & Roll  
**Hobbies:** Musician, essayist, amateur astronomer  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** My gas range. If they took it away I would refuse to cook!

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**Name:** Mike Hitt  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Middle and South Cherokee County  
**Number of years with AGL:** 24  
**Favorite house style:** Country Farm  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** My favorite room in the house is the living room because I can sit in my recliner and relax.  
**Favorite music:** Country  
**Hobbies:** Coaching baseball and playing golf  
**Favorite natural gas appliance and why:** My favorite is my natural gas grill because of the fun-filled cookouts with family and friends.

---



**Name:** Cheryl Jones  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Conyers  
**Number of years with AGL:** 10½  
**Favorite house style:** Log  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room – love the big screen TV and watching movies with family and friends.  
**Favorite music:** Rock & Roll  
**Hobbies:** Gardening, reading, cooking vegetarian meals and spending time with family and friends  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Surface unit – the flame is easy to control, and the food tastes better.

---



**Name:** Kelley Kiser  
**Title:** Account Executive – Multi-Purpose  
**Territory:** Atlanta and Peachtree  
**Number of years with AGL:** 4  
**Favorite house style:** Tudor and English Country  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room. I love spending time with my family.  
**Favorite music:** Alternative rock  
**Hobbies:** Movies! I'm a big movie buff  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Range – nothing cooks food like natural gas.

---



**Name:** Gary McLeod  
**Title:** Account Executive – Commercial  
**Territory:** Cumming  
**Number of years with AGL:** 25 ½  
**Favorite house style:** Traditional  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Family (bonus) room because of the big screen television and pool table. Need I say more?  
**Favorite music:** Country and old time rock & roll  
**Hobbies:** Travel. Recently retired from coaching youth athletics  
**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Natural Gas Street Lights. I'm from Savannah and my wife is from the New Orleans area. Both cities use a lot of gas street lighting and it gives an ambience of romance and beauty that electric street lights cannot match.

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**Name:** Emily Osborne  
**Title:** Sales Coordinator  
**Territory:** Sales support for all territories in GA/TN  
**Number of years with AGL:** 1  
**Favorite house style:** Ranch  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Kitchen, for the

obvious... to cook and eat!

**Favorite music:** Rock and pop

**Hobbies:** Painting and jewelry design

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Range, because of its versatility.

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**Name:** Thomas Parks  
**Title:** Commercial Account Executive  
**Territory:** Gwinnett  
**Number of years with AGL:** 2  
**Favorite house style:** Bungalow  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** My favorite room in

the house is the living room because that is where I like to relax.

**Favorite music:** Rock

**Hobbies:** Traveling, boating, cooking, playing sports and socializing with friends

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** My gas grill because I like to BBQ.

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**Name:** Kent Stafford  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Henry, Spalding, Butts, Meriwether, Pike and Lamar counties  
**Number of years with AGL:** 15  
**Favorite house style:** Ranch

**Favorite room in the house and why:** Trophy room. It gives me an area to display animal trophies and antique sporting equipment.

**Favorite music:** Gospel, classical and southern rock

**Hobbies:** Hunting, fishing

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Fuel Cell – any time you can use new technology, have control of producing your own power without having a negative impact on the environment, I feel you have a great product.

---



**Name:** Lori Thomas  
**Title:** Sales Coordinator/Sales Support  
**Territory:** Top 50 builders/All areas  
**Number of years with AGL:** 2  
**Favorite house style:** Brick  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room because

of the TV and the warm gas fire place.

**Favorite music:** R&B

**Hobbies:** Running, reading, TV, movies, and basketball

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** My natural gas range because it cooks all of the wonderful food I eat.



**Name:** Charlie Waters  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Southeast GA  
**Number of years with AGL:** 21  
**Favorite house style:** Ranch  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room – because

that's where the TV is located and the gas logs.

**Favorite music:** All

**Hobbies:** Horseback riding, golf, coaching football, baseball

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** My furnace because it is warmer than a heat pump; water heater because of the recovery time; gas range because I can still have my coffee when the power goes out.

---



**Name:** Lane Woodall  
**Title:** Account Executive – Multi-Purpose  
**Territory:** Clarke, Oconee, Madison and Jackson counties  
**Number of years with AGL:** 7 months  
**Favorite house style:** Neoelectic  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Family/Living – For a

variety of activities, including family talks/devotions, playing board games/cards, watching TV, or my favorite: wrestling and tickling my children.

**Favorite music:** Pop-Rock from the '70s and '80s

**Hobbies:** Reading and coaching my three kids in a variety of sports

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Tankless water heater, because when the family needs to get ready at the same time to go out, it is nice to have an abundance of hot water when I finally get the shower.

---



**Name:** Gordon Youngs  
**Title:** Account Executive  
**Territory:** Cobb County  
**Number of years with AGL:** 22  
**Favorite house style:** Ranch  
**Favorite room in the house and why:** Living room, because

it's the room for relaxing.

**Favorite music:** Country

**Hobbies:** Hiking, bicycling

**Favorite gas appliance and why:** Furnace, because it keeps the house at a consistent, comfortable temperature and delivers air at a temperature warmer than body temperature.

## Typar® House Wrap

Keeping wall cavities dry is a critical building challenge because moisture can lead to one of today's biggest problems – mold. After all, the average home generates three to six gallons of moisture vapor each day, much of which dissipates into the walls.

Typar® House Wrap delivers a good combination of water holdout and perm rating (breathability), which is an effective way to minimize moisture. Its non-woven structure does not absorb or retain water. As a Type I air barrier, Typar can be used in both residential and light commercial applications. What's more, UV inhibitors are in Typar's coating as well as its fibers.



Typar withstands the rigors of the jobsite, performing at more than twice the industry standard for grab tensile strength. And it withstands the rigors of time. Typar does not degrade due to surfactants,

successfully resisting cedar oil from siding and soaps from power washing.

Visit [www.typarhousewrap.com](http://www.typarhousewrap.com) or call (615) 847-7000 for more information.

## Teppanyaki Table Grill

Backyard patios or decks become a Japanese steakhouse with the natural gas-powered Teppanyaki Table Grill made by Test Rite. This timber-slatted table top includes a cooking surface for hibachi-style cooking as well as a flat griddle. The table grill drew quite a bit of attention at the spring Hearth Patio and Barbecue Show.

The cooking concept is the same as for gas grills, with the same type of ignition and grill grates, and it includes a stainless steel control panel and cabinet and a steel cover for protecting the unit when not in use. Heat capacity is approximately 36,000 BTU. The Teppanyaki



(teppan means iron plate and yaki means stir-fry) Table Grill comes with benches so family and friends can sit tableside and enjoy the show. For more information, contact distributor North American Outdoors at [www.na-outdoors.com](http://www.na-outdoors.com) or call (800) 226-8711.

## The 411

Visit these Web sites for useful information for yourself and your customers.



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Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) on the subjects of your choice. It's a great way to keep current on competitors, your industry or developing news stories.



[www.termite.com](http://www.termite.com)

This consumer Web site about termites and termite control features state-by-state updates on infestation, control systems and consumer

protection. Learn how to protect yourselves and provide assurance for your clients.



[www.worsthandyman.ca/](http://www.worsthandyman.ca/)

Actually this site is about Canada's worst handyman, but anyone involved in building will get a kick out of it. Video clips let you choose the right way or the wrong way to perform a task, and the results are often hilarious.



[www.buygasappliances.com](http://www.buygasappliances.com)

This site will give you information on the newest natural gas products available, such as gas lights, lanterns, grills, ranges, water heaters and more. Plus, natural gas experts can answer your questions via phone or e-mail to help you choose the perfect product for your needs. It's rare to find such a wide selection of natural gas appliances in one place.

# 2006 AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

The second annual AGL "An Evening with the Stars" awards ceremony was held April 17, 2006, at Kingsmill Resort & Spa in Williamsburg, Va.

These awards honor AGL's best and brightest for their outstanding performances during the previous calendar year.

Presenters were Suzanne Sitherwood, senior vice president of Southern Operations,  
and Hank Linginfelter, senior vice president of Mid-Atlantic operations.



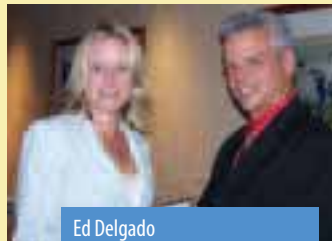
Ian Skelton  
2005 Presidential Award  
Southern Operations



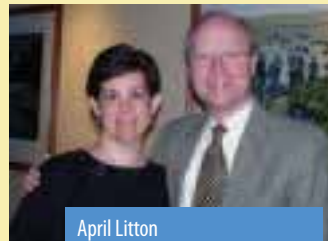
Kim Varran (left)  
2005 Presidential Award  
Mid-Atlantic Operations



Jana Hall Papa (right)  
2005 Award of Excellence  
AGL/CGC - Sales



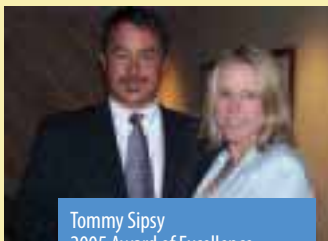
Ed Delgado  
2005 Award of Excellence  
FCG - Sales



April Litton  
2005 Award of Excellence  
VNG - Sales



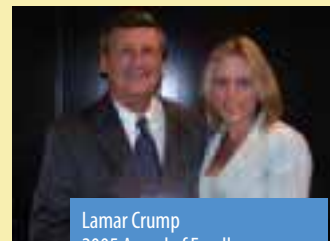
John Cody (left)  
2005 Award of Excellence  
ETG - Sales



Tommy Sipsy  
2005 Award of Excellence  
Southern Operations -  
Construction



James Stydinger  
2005 Award of Excellence  
Mid-Atlantic Operations -  
Construction



Lamar Crump  
2005 Award of Excellence  
Customer Service/Retention

# B U I L D I N G A

# B R A N D

*The total customer experience and consistent service delivery fulfill a homebuilder's brand image.*

BY JACK MCGEE

In a crowded market, brand strength and exceptional customer experiences differentiate one homebuilder from another and help to create a competitive edge. Just about every company has a slogan or tagline that identifies the builder and, at the same time, makes a promise to consumers. But more than any name, jingle or logo, how a company consistently manages its customer-care process – the totality of each customer's experiences and interactions – is critical to successful branding.

For Atlanta-based Monte Hewett Homes, it all stems from the company tagline – Building Homes For Life. “That means that we are here to build your dream home to fit you, to fit your lifestyle, what you want to do, and where you want to be,” explains Dina Gundersen, director of marketing. “We’re not just saying we’re going to build your house and then you’ll never hear from us again. We’re building a relationship as well.”

Building solid customer relationships provides a foundation for future growth and profitability. Loyal, satisfied customers are the source of repeat sales, and as any experienced builder knows, repeat sales are a vital component of long-term success. A strong brand,

reaffirmed by a gratifying customer experience, can go a long way toward establishing the confidence homebuyers need to make a purchase, or to refer their friends.

“We hope that you’ll buy your second and third home from Monte Hewett or think of us if you’re looking for a home for a family member or a friend,” says Gundersen. “So it’s a continual process of keeping in touch with our homeowners through a lot of after-sale service. It’s really about building a relationship and not just a house.”

For Monte Hewett, that means stressing the personal factor in customer relationships. “It really comes from a lot of personal contact with the people in our office, with the builders on site, and from Monte himself,”

Gundersen explains. “We’re constantly in contact with them.”

One of the most effective ways Monte Hewett Homes does that is by staging Home Care Days. The program provides an opportunity for homeowners in a specific subdivision to have breakfast while they meet with service providers to learn more about caring for their homes. The events are held quarterly in various Monte Hewett communities around the city.

“It might include HVAC people or the guy who installs the sprinkler system,” Gundersen notes. “They remind you what you should do on a quarterly or an annual basis to maintain your house. We’re there to help homeowners make sure they know what their responsibilities are for maintaining their biggest purchase.”

## Communication is key

That kind of exceptional customer experience helps to differentiate one builder from the next and can help builders gain a competitive edge. TouchStone Homes has been developing and building new-home communities in Atlanta since 1994. Over time the company has identified what it calls “the Touchstone difference.” The key portion of its brand platform relates to a strong customer focus.

“Our brand promise is the high quality of the product we deliver at all levels, as well as meeting our buyers’ expectations in terms of communications,” says Bryan Cohen, company president. “We have excellent communities, both in terms of location and the amenities inside each community. On top of

that, our homes have great style.”

The company tagline – Designed for Living, Built

for Life – speaks directly to what TouchStone Homes strives to provide. “The promise is that our homes are not only attractive but are usable and functional in the long run,” says Cohen.

Another major focus for TouchStone is its design studio. “We enable people to customize their homes so that they not only have the home of their dreams, but a dream home that looks different from everyone else’s dream home,” Cohen adds.

To strengthen its core benefits of quality and community, TouchStone has created a new Q&A department that separates it from the traditional warranty function and gives it equal standing within the corporate structure.

“We have always been a real estate-driven home company,” says Cohen. “We don’t try to find a piece of land that fits a house that we already build. We

try to find excellent land, and if we don’t have existing product for it already, we develop that product.”

## The promise of natural gas

Both builders regard natural gas as integral to fulfilling their brand promises to customers. Dina Gundersen says that, for Monte Hewett, natural gas is important to the company’s focus on ecology and efficiency. “One aspect of our brand promise is that we are one of four premier EarthCraft builders in Atlanta. Every one of our homes is EarthCraft certified. In our view, natural-gas appliances are cleaner, more efficient and better for the environment. That certainly goes along with our commitment.”

For TouchStone, gas fulfills its goal of meeting the buyer’s expectations for functionality and efficiency. “Clearly gas is the most efficient heat source, both in quickness to warm-up space and from a comfort standpoint,” says Cohen. “We believe that it provides benefits that people prefer and delivers on our lifestyle promise to our customers.”

The importance of branding extends to other channels within the homebuilding industry, not just builders. W. A. Birdsall & Company, a major distributor of plumbing, heating and air conditioning equipment in New Jersey, believes it is important to differentiate itself from other providers in its market. The company’s tagline – “Yeah, we got it” – sums up an attitude toward service that permeates the company at every level.

“The No. 1 thing we do is try really hard to do it right,” says Mike Murphy, vice president of Birdsall. “That means we get the order picked correctly and accurately and have the material on hand, ready for these guys to do their job. We see ourselves as a subcontractor to these independent contractors, and we want to let them know that we are doing it right.”

Even though W. A. Birdsall has been in business for almost a century, Murphy feels there is still a basic need to communicate the company’s brand promise and to make certain that promise is honored. “We can’t say it unless we believe it. Our belief is you don’t get a second chance.” 🏠

**Monte Hewett Homes.**  
Building Homes For Life.  
[mhhomes.com](http://mhhomes.com)





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