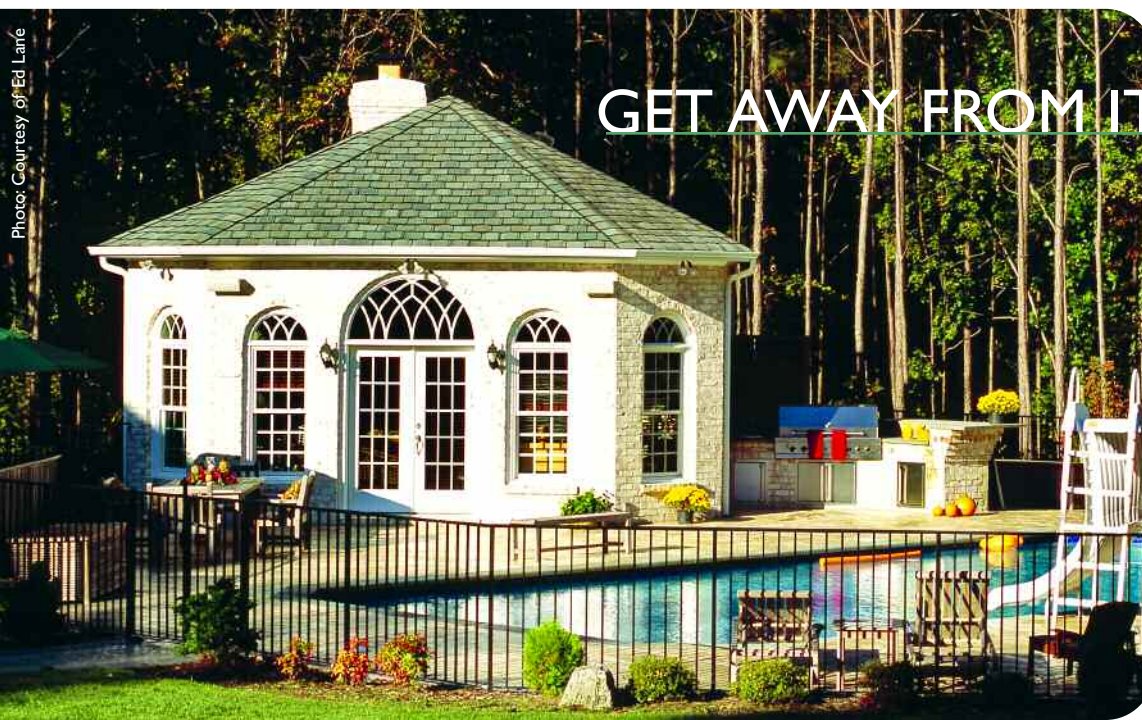




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Courtesy of Alpha Remodeling  
www.alpharemodeling.com



## GET AWAY FROM IT ALL

Would you like a secret get-away for your family, completely removed from the day-to-day pressures of the office and home—no phones, no computers, no unwanted visitors? A secluded place to relax totally and reconnect with your family on the weekends, surrounded by the tranquil beauty of nature.

Yes, but...

(continued on page 2)

- Alpha Among 25 Best Remodeling Companies To Work For
- Letting It Sink In
- Life In a Vacuum
- Partners in Education for Residential Construction

IN THIS ISSUE

## Alpha Among 25 Best Remodeling Companies To Work For

Alpha Remodeling, Ann Arbor, Michigan, has been named to the *Professional Remodeler* magazine's annual list of the **25 Best Remodeling Companies To Work For** in the residential construction industry. Alpha Remodeling ranked 2nd among remodeling companies throughout the U.S. The list appeared in the January 2005 issue of *Professional Remodeler* magazine.

"This acknowledgement is especially rewarding for me because I had nothing to do with the award application process. The employees nominated the company. It was the employees that completed the required surveys and answered the magazine's question, which was used to determine the rankings," says Allan Lutes, Alpha Remodeling's President.

Employees of architects, builders, and remodelers nominated their companies as a premier employer. Nominated companies were asked to provide basic information about their operations, including employee statistics, offerings, benefits, and reasoning on why they provide a good place to work. The Reed Research Group then surveyed a random sample of employees from each company about six key areas: rewards and recognition, professional development, leadership, communication, corporate culture, and personal satisfaction. The staff at Reed Research Group spent months examining what makes these companies a great place to work. All of the provided information factored into the ranking of the companies and those with the highest rankings were named to the list.

...given the hectic lives we often lead, what about those times when we just can't get to the beach or the mountains?

One busy, young-professional family has found their answer to this dilemma. They decided to build a vacation spot in their own backyard. Now when they can't leave town, they can pack up clothes, books, toys and groceries and move into their pool house—locking the door of their home and leaving their phones and the hustle and bustle behind. It may be for only one day or it may be for an entire weekend or longer, but they spend the night there! They live in the pool house just as if it were a cottage at the beach. Piney woods surround the entire backyard, so there is plenty of privacy. Their home is at the end of a long cul-de-sac, so there is no noise from traffic or neighbors.

The backyard vacation spot includes an elaborate brick pool house with an attached outdoor-kitchen, and a generous pool and patio area. The brick was carefully selected to ensure an exact match with the main house. To keep the kids well entertained while on vacation, there is also a large wooden jungle gym and an 8' x 10' playhouse. Three sizeable terraces—one featuring a hot tub—grace the stamped-concrete pathway meandering from the main house to the pool house.

The pool house great room has all the amenities a family could wish for—a big screen TV, stone fireplace, and practical furnishings designed for comfort and easy-care. There is plenty of space to curl up and take a nap or snooze away the night. Little children's feet on the sofa are not a problem here. There is also an ample kitchen, complete with every modern convenience, and a full bath. An outdoor shower is available in the pool area.

Photo: Courtesy of Ed Lane



*Just smell the tantalizing aromas coming from this outdoor grill! When the kids come running, they can clean up first in the outdoor shower directly behind.*

The outdoor kitchen includes a 53" Viking stainless steel gas grill with several stainless steel access doors for storage. The stainless steel bar sink and faucet were designed to withstand outdoor conditions. Bluestone was used for the countertop because of its good looks, ease of maintenance, and outdoor durability.

So, if you are missing out on vacation fun with the family because your schedule won't always allow it, consider some alternatives for those extra busy times. For at least one family, there's no place like home. □

## Letting it Sink in

Solid surface integral sink



In years gone by, choosing a kitchen sink was not a difficult proposition. You basically had two options: cast iron or stainless steel. Today there are a myriad of choices, which can make planning your new kitchen very exciting and quite overwhelming all at the same time.

Sinks made from composite materials are some of the newest possibilities out there. There are several types of composites, including solid surface, quartz composite, and granite composite.

**SOLID SURFACE** sinks are made from a combination of acrylic resin and natural minerals. The same pattern runs throughout the thickness, so that if you scratch the surface all you need to do is sand it down. Solid surface is non-porous, so it will not support the growth of bacteria. One of the unique advantages of a solid surface sink is that it can be fused with a solid surface countertop to form one seamless piece, called an integral sink. With this arrangement there are no crevices to trap dirt and moisture.

Photo: Courtesy of XXL Innovations Inc. (www.mixa.de)



MIXA

# LIFE IN A VACUUM

Homeowners today are increasingly opting for central vacuum systems. Up until recently, this type of system has been viewed primarily as a wonderful luxury convenience. New studies have shown, however, that it offers numerous other benefits as well.

Basically, a central vacuum system removes all contacted dirt, debris and dust particles from your home and sends it through a network of tubing located in the walls to a receptacle located outside the living area.

The in-wall tubing is easily installed during construction or added to an existing home with no structural modifications needed. You only need to carry around a lightweight hose with a power brush unit and plug it into wall inlet valves placed in strategic locations. You can also include a built-in automatic dustpan that lets you sweep debris into a convenient wall vent.

There are two main types of central vacuum systems.

A filtered system cleans the air taken in by the vacuum with a variety of filters, whether cloth, foam or paper.

A cyclonic system uses centrifugal force and gravity to separate the dirt from the air being taken in by the vacuum. Both types need to have their filters cleaned periodically to maintain the effectiveness of the systems.

Many homeowners these days are deciding that a central vacuum system significantly improves their quality of life and is definitely worth the extra cost. □



## Advantages of central versus portable vacuums

**Cleaner air** Portable vacuums exhaust dirt back into the room. Central vacuum systems move the dirt to a receptacle in a remote location, such as a garage. In a study conducted at the University of California at Davis School of Medicine, it was determined that the air quality and allergy relief was improved by over 50% with the use of a central vacuum system.

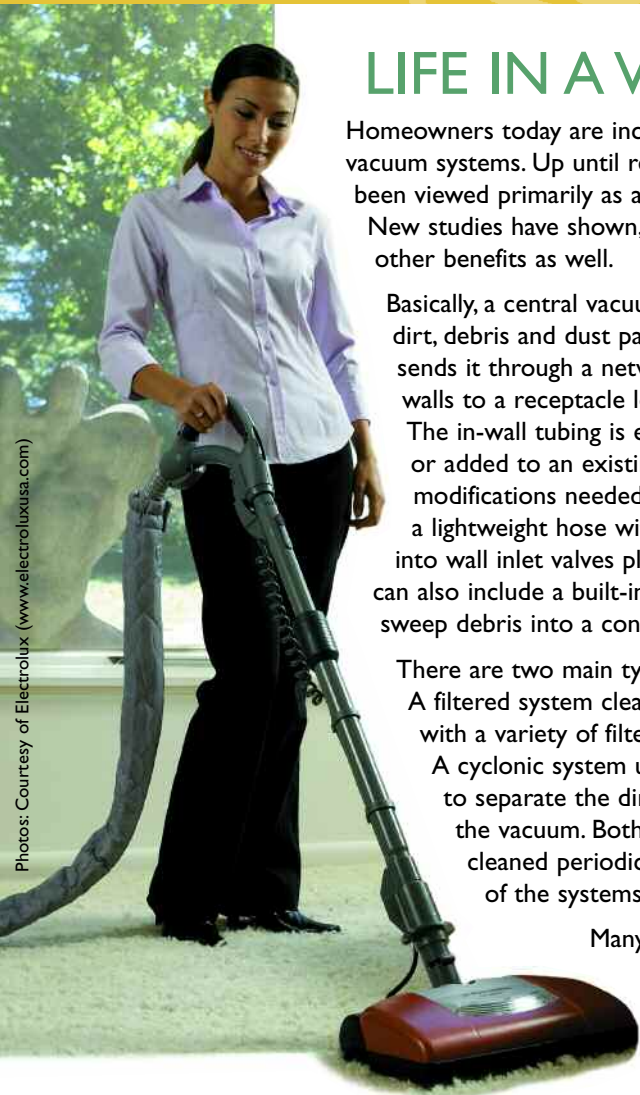
**Alleviation of back strain** Central vacuum systems eliminate the need to carry or pull heavy portable vacuums up and down stairs, and around the house.

**More power** Central vacuums have 3-5 times more power than portable vacuums. Because the power unit of a central vacuum system is stationary, it can house a more powerful motor.

**Reduced noise** Central vacuum systems operate more quietly, partly because the power unit is in a remote location, and is therefore insulated from the rest of the house.



Photos: Courtesy of Electrolux (www.electroluxusa.com)



Quartz composite sink



Photo: Courtesy of Moen (www.moen.com)

The **MIXA** sink is a solid surface sink that has a precision cut stainless steel bottom. With this combination, you have the beautiful color selections and easy-care of a solid surface integral sink, along with the durability of a stainless steel base—the best of both worlds.

**QUARTZ COMPOSITE** sinks are typically made from 70% quartz and 30% resin. These sinks are lustrous in appearance, resembling porcelain, and are resistant to scratching,

denting, and staining. They have a heat tolerance of up to 446°F. The color goes all the way through the material, which is also non-porous and very hard wearing.

**GRANITE COMPOSITE** sinks are formed from the most durable sink material on the market today, which is 80% granite, 20% acrylic resin. This material offers extreme stain, chip and scratch resistance and is non-porous. It has a heat rating of up to 535°F, so that a pan can go from stove to sink without marring the surface. These sinks will hinder thermal conductivity to keep dishwater warm longer. The color runs throughout the material, which is available in matte finishes only. □

Granite composite sink



Photo: Courtesy of Moen (www.moen.com)

## Partners in Education for Residential Construction

As the huge crane gently placed the modular home onto the foundation, it marked the culmination of over five years of work towards a program that will continue to have a significant impact on the lives of many people in Washtenaw County. This home is the first of many that will be constructed in an exciting effort to train the next generation of leaders in the construction industry, and is the result of an exciting partnership between Washtenaw Community College, the Home Builders Association of Washtenaw County, and Alpha Remodeling.

During the past seven years, Allan Lutes, President of Alpha Remodeling has served as chairman of the Workforce Development Committee for the Home Builders Association. The purpose of this committee is to promote education and opportunities within the construction industry. "Allan recognized at once the organization's ongoing need for a better trained pool of individuals from which to select potential employees," says Les Pierce, lead professor in Washtenaw Community College's construction technology program.

A partnership between the Home Builders Association and Washtenaw Community College was established to develop a residential carpentry certificate program. "The College had gone through several cycles of decommissioning and recommissioning the construction program over the past 10 years. We were about two years behind the "curve" of the upswing in construction activity," says Pierce. The Workforce Development Committee guided Washtenaw Community College in developing a curriculum for a Residential Construction Apprenticeship Program. "He (Allan) put the committee to work at once in rewriting the residential construction curriculum. We crawled over the existing syllabi, line by line, and developed a program of courses that would help prepare young men and women for entry level jobs in residential construction," says Pierce. This initiative jump-started a new and growing program at the college.

After a few semesters of running the residential construction program, the students obtained practical experience by building "mock ups" of houses and garages and other projects to learn the carpentry

skills. However, the "mock up" projects were demolished and thrown away, which Lutes felt was wasteful. "I felt there should be an opportunity for these students to gain real experience and have a product that has some real value at the end of the term. There was an added benefit that the product could potentially be sold to recoup some of the cost of the building materials," says Lutes. These thoughts were shared with the college and contact was made with a couple of modular home manufacturers. Visits to the modular home plants convinced WCC leaders and the Workforce Development Committee that a modified version of what was observed in the plants could provide a framework for the college's new initiative in residential construction.

Out of that interaction was born the idea to create a modular home that could be built by the students and would become a finished home for someone at the end of the process. In the long run, the hope was that these units could be potentially used to help the community—as low-income housing or for other charitable uses.

For the next year and half, Lutes worked with Washtenaw Community College and researched the program, selected and created designs that would be appropriate for the market. At the same time the college made a major commitment to the program by creating a new 26,000 square foot facility, the Henry Landau Center for Residential Construction, dedicated to skilled training for the construction industry.

Construction of the first home began in November 2003 and was completed in late summer of 2004. On September 19, 2004, the modular units were transported to a site in Milan where a foundation had been prepared. Within 6 hours, the units were craned onto a foundation, the roof was constructed, and the home was weather tight. Alpha Remodeling completed the home by installing all of the heating and cooling equipment, connecting the house to water and septic systems, completing electrical work, adding dormers, finishing the second floor of the house, and constructing a garage. The 2470 square foot modular home features a complete kitchen, dining area, living room, foyer, first floor laundry, master suite, plus



*A huge crane lifts the modular home built by students at Washtenaw Community College and sets it on the home's foundation in Milan, MI.*



an additional bedroom and full bath. The second floor includes two added bedrooms, a loft, and a full bathroom. In December, the completed home was occupied by a new homeowner.

With the lessons learned from the first house, the future process will be significantly more streamlined. The program's faculty learned some construction economies and efficiencies that helped to provide better training, while continuing to lower the cost of construction and reduce the timeline with each successive house.

"One of the unexpected benefits of the program is the level of pride that the students take in their work, knowing that their efforts will result in a home that someone will be living in," says Lutes. Numerous students worked many more class hours than required to contribute to the first house. The college anticipates building three to four homes each year. "We expect to complete our fourth house the first of May of this year," says Pierce. It is anticipated that the next two homes will go to a community charity that focuses on affordable housing.

The Residential Construction Certificate program at Washtenaw Community College is proving to be highly successful as the program continues to train students for this industry. Due to the demand for and popularity of the program, two additional class sessions have been added. Advanced carpentry, cabinet building, and formal instruction in other construction trade areas are planned by WCC for future classes. "None of this would have happened as quickly or smoothly without Allan's hands-on involvement and support," says Pierce. □