

# What are the reviewers saying about Building Better Homes™ ?

## New tool helps you move to systems design and construction

By Steve Andrews

Have you ever attended a really good seminar on building technology and then asked yourself at the end of the day, "OK, where do I go from here? And how can I start tomorrow?" A new program on DVD called "Building Better Homes" (BBH), featuring nationally acclaimed building science trainer Mark LaLiberte, aims to answer those questions.

LaLiberte's team designed the BBH DVD to assist builders, designers, product specifiers and trade contractors, but in a way that lasts a lot longer than any seminar. It strikes this reviewer that the package would help anyone in the building industry interested in cutting down on callbacks, increasing profits and reducing risk in today's enormously litigious society.... LaLiberte focuses on the successful design and construction method that is typically called "the systems approach."....

LaLiberte's takes are articulate and direct. Lots of Web-based links, called "Learn-Mores," allow viewers to drill down deeper on many topics. And a "print" option helps people like me who need to hear it multiple times.

Most on-line training takes the "feature article" approach to learning. What's different about the "Building Better Homes" package is its broad, inclusive context. With the systems approach, you can't look at building durability without looking at energy efficiency, and you can't look at energy efficiency without

embracing ventilation and combustion safety....

### TEN TOP ITEMS

... The following are a number of notable pieces or specific points on the DVD that jumped off the screen for this reviewer.

**1. Builder interviews.** To make sure you don't have to feel like the Lone Ranger as you tackle this change, BBH includes insightful video clip interviews with representatives of five builders using the systems approach. They describe what the systems approach means to their companies, how they got there, and some key lessons learned....

**2. Basic building science.** BBH lays out eight basic rules of building science - heat flows to cold, moisture moves from warm to cold, moisture moves from more to less, everything gets wet so let it dry, etc. These rules form the building blocks for all subsequent discussion, so it's good that they come across in plain language here.

**3. "Five pairs of glasses."** LaLiberte says you'll need five pairs of "special inspection glasses" - framing, thermal, air leakage, water management and greenglasses - to help you assure that critical details in the building are properly installed....

**4. Where do you begin?** BBH describes two ways to transition into the systems approach to the design and construction of high-performance homes.... Whichever method you select, the transition process involves major organizational change. BBH lays out a logical process for pursuing this complex shift.

**5. Water management issues.** For me, the water management segments provided the information most likely to

help you avoid building failures.... Long segments covering wall and roof systems layout the critical flashing details to look for with your "water management glasses."....

**6. Indoor air quality.** A recent buyer survey by Honeywell plus Builder and Professional Builder magazines indicates buyers are willing to pay several thousand dollars to ensure healthier indoor air quality in new homes today. The BBH introduces you to fresh-air systems and combustion safety product selections obtainable at a reasonable price....

**7. Window and door installation.** News flash: most windows and doors eventually leak. For this viewer, the program's highlight consists of the long video clip showing how to flash windows and then properly integrate them with a drainage plane to prevent water damage. This soup-to-nuts visual is something you could show installers in your construction jobsite trailers just before they start placing windows.

**8. Checklists for remodelers.** Everything in the systems approach can be applied to remodeling, but it's tougher to apply than in new construction. BBH delves into some of the issues unique to remodeling. Two items of particular value were the checklists for use when conducting exterior and interior inventories of the home's status prior to the start of construction.

**9. Ductwork message.** LaLiberte states that "metal tapes and duct tapes should not be used to seal ducts because they don't last the service life of the duct work....

**10. Problems, solutions and selling.** Home building bristles with daily challenges. Always has, always will. While BBH lays out those challenges, it

provides solutions at every turn. Further, LaLiberte makes sure everyone weighs all the benefits, not just the costs, to both builders and buyers. But what good are these benefits if you can't sell them?

In extensive video clips, builders and sales staffs share some of the ways they sell these homes....

### BOTTOM LINE

The DVD seems suitable for company-wide training. The program should help get everyone on the same page, from purchasing to construction through the sales staff. For companies already committed to the systems approach, BBH is a quick way to bring new employees or trade contractors on board....

It strikes me there's a lot of value packed in the BBH product. That's especially true if you buy into the notion that a growing number of builders have embraced: building high-performance homes is the future. If you need a hand when making that leap, give this product a try.

*Steve Andrews consults with builders and code officials for E-Star Colorado and writes on energy issues (sbandrews@att.net). E-Star, at 303-297-7470 (www.e-star.com), is a nonprofit home energy rating system that works with both new and existing homes statewide.*

[Excerpt from the *Home Builder Magazine*, published by the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Denver.]

# What are the reviewers saying about Building Better Homes™ ?

## *New DVD Valuable Tool for Home Professionals*

A new [DVD program], Building Better Homes, is an interactive training program that demonstrates the whole-house systems approach to building and remodeling. Narrated by Mark LaLiberte, a nationally recognized building specialist and trainer, this **engaging and easy to follow program** trains home professionals to build homes that are more durable and energy efficient, as well as safer, healthier, and more affordable to own and maintain. **Builders, architects, remodelers, and sub-contractors can all use this DVD to reduce callbacks, warranty costs, and litigation related to mold and moisture problems in homes.**

The [program] explains the building science principles and physics behind a better-built home. Interviews with several successful home builders who have used these principles in their home construction give the user a hands-on understanding of the scientific principles behind these homes.

The [program also] provides practical advice towards applying the principles described in disc one. Every part of the home building process, including building site, foundation, subfloor system, exterior wall system, roof, mechanical system, plumbing and electrical, finishes and appliances, and remodeling is covered. **Real-life examples are included and are supported with construction details, installation video, printable instructions, and checklists.**

[It also] includes tips and insights for builders and offers advice for transitioning their business and construction practices to the whole-house approach. It includes interviews with successful builders who are already integrating this approach into their businesses. It also provides suggestions on how to market higher-performing homes. Examples of sales literature, checklists, and a video of tips and advice from builders and a realtor using the whole-house systems approach to home building round out disc three.

**The numerous additional resources, including hundreds of Web links, printable checklists, and interesting and educational narration all contribute to the high caliber of this . . . training program, and make it a valuable resource for home building professionals....**

[Excerpt from *Home Energy*, New and Notable.]

## INFORMATION RESOURCES

### Training DVDs

... **The information provided on [this DVD] is the real McCoy. The curriculum is of the same caliber one would expect to encounter at an Affordable Comfort or Energy and Environmental Building Association (EEBA) seminar.** The DVD is being marketed to residential builders who want to train their employees in house-as-a-system principles.

...the material is presented in a solid fashion, with good coverage of such topics as air barriers, crawlspace details, window installation, and the risks of vinyl wallpaper.

...the [DVD] provides valuable **information that other sources neglect.** For example, "Building Better Homes" not only explains the importance of providing a capillary break between a concrete footing and a basement wall, it actually lists four ways to do it: use 4,000 psi or higher concrete for the footing; use a spray-on concrete sealer; install a sheet of polyethylene on top of the footing; or use a "bagged" footing.

### Taking Stands

Rather than merely listing alternative construction methods, "Building Better Homes" makes firm recommendations, including:

- Install waterproofing, not just dampproofing, on foundation walls;
- Use advanced framing techniques (i.e., single top plates and stacked framing);

- Use duct-friendly open-web floor trusses;
- In climates with more than 40 inches of rain per year, install wood or fiber-cement siding over an air space;
- Use only airtight electrical boxes in exterior walls; and
- Omit an interior polyethylene vapor barrier except in severe cold climates.

...**For builders who are committed to providing employee training, the [program is] a bargain. After all, this [DVD program] costs less than sending a single employee to an out-of-state national conference....**

[Excerpt from *Energy Design Update*®.]



## Building Better Homes

For more information, please visit our website at [www.buildingbetterhomes.com](http://www.buildingbetterhomes.com) or purchase the program at The Taunton Press: [www.taunton.com/onlinestore](http://www.taunton.com/onlinestore).