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July/Aug. 2022

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DECK SPECIALIST

Ideas & Strategies for Outdoor Living Professionals

FEATURE STORIES

14 Women Who Are Driving the Industry Forward

We sat down with some of the leading women in the industry to see what they love most about their careers.

18 Specialists of the Year

The industry's top builders are honored in our second annual Deck Specialist of the Year Awards.

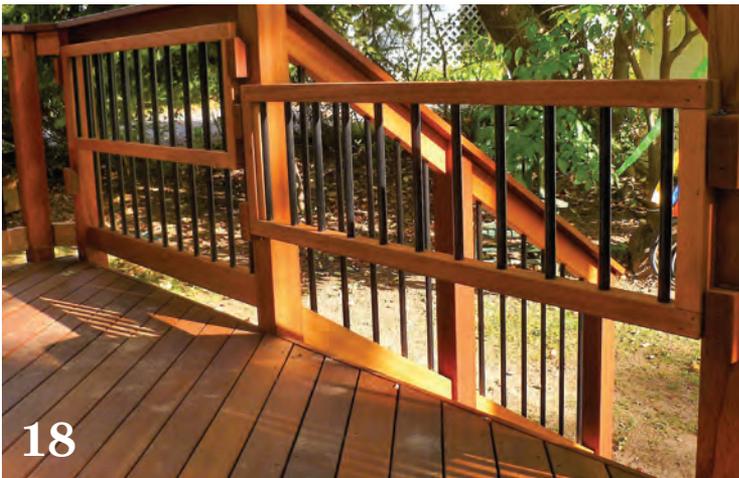


LEADING LADIES:

Lainie Sleppin, MoistureShield Mid-Atlantic regional sales director, is just one of many leading women who work hard every day to move the industry ahead.



ON THE COVER: This hideaway, built by Mosaic Outdoor Living, one of our Deck Specialists of the Year award winners (page 24) features a composite deck, a wood-burning fireplace, several custom operable-glass walls, a skylight and an outdoor kitchen. (Photo by Mosaic Outdoor Living)



HIDDEN BEAUTY: Archadeck, one of this year's Deck Specialists of the Year award winners, uses FastenMaster hardware for a clean look.

ALSO INSIDE

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DECK SPECIALIST

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The night Jack had to go

A few days ago, as my son and I sat at a stoplight on our way home, he asked me, “Mom, do you remember that night at Jack in the Box?”

How could I forget?

It was 9:22 pm on a clear, warm Thursday night and my teenage son and daughter were hungry.

For any parent of a teenager, hunger is a constant, gnawing, demanding, non-entertaining house guest. Tonight I wasn't in the mood—so off to Jack in the Box we went.

Normally, I would go myself and come right back. But, for whatever reason, this night I insisted they both go with me. Forced family bonding time. Isn't that sweet?

We pulled into the nearest Jack in the Box down the street. There were four cars. Not bad for this time of the night in my neighborhood.

We waited

“Let's go to the other Jack in the Box,” I suggested, after 10 minutes of not moving.

The second Jack in the Box is farther away. It was my son's favorite when he was younger and liked to skateboard at the city's “break-an-ankle-on-your-dime” skatepark next door.

When we arrived, there were only three cars.

We moved quickly at first. Ten minutes later, we were at the order kiosk.

And that's where we stayed—for 25 minutes.

People behind us were honking their horns—*like we could do anything.*

Finally, we ordered, and after another 20 minutes of waiting, we pulled up to the pick up window. Relieved. Miffed. Hungry x 100.

Would you believe the staff's excuse for the delay? “We had to change out our wireless microphones batteries,” the woman said. *All the mics at once? That took you 25 minutes?*

To add insult to injury, there were two people filling orders that we could see. One of the workers took back a customer's order from inside the restaurant and put it up on the to-go orders counter. The second attendant grabbed

the same bag, looked into it, and tried to hand it to me.

“That was someone else's order,” I said, practically yelling at this point.

I'm not usually that impatient, especially when I know we are living in unparalleled times when it comes to staff shortages, but when I saw her do that, it was hard to bite my tongue.

At that moment I could see how a poorly trained staff can harshly affect a business.

Every company faces delays and employee mistakes, but how those are addressed with the customer is the difference between creating a loyal customer versus an unhappy one. This is even more important in an industry that relies on referrals.

If the staff had understood my frustration and approached it with a willingness to make the bad situation better, that would've left me with a much more favorable impression.

Instead, that night cost Jack a customer—a customer that won't come back easily.

And if it was that easy to lose me as a customer—one bad experience—then how easy it must be for other companies to lose customers if they aren't concerned with properly training their staff and preventing unnecessary delays.

For my kids and I, we laugh about that night regularly. It has become a family meme of sorts. It was the night that Jack had to go.



Sara Graves is the managing editor of Deck Specialist. Reach her at sgraves@526mediagroup.com



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Barrette Sold to CRH

European conglomerate CRH, parent company of Oldcastle and MoistureShield, has agreed to buy Barrette Outdoor Living for \$1.9 billion.

Ohio-based Barrette, a provider of residential fencing and railing solutions, has 14 locations across North America and is sold through retailers, home centers and lumberyards. Last year, Barrette reported profit before tax of \$79 million and gross assets of \$1.2 billion.

This follows CRH's sale earlier this year of Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope unit to KPS Capital Partners.

The deal is expected to close in the second half of 2022.

Deckorators Acquires Cedar Poly

UFP Industries, Grand Rapids, MI., announced that its subsidiary, Deckorators, Inc., has acquired Cedar Poly, LLC., a plastics recycler, for \$17 million. The purchase price includes incentive payments of up to \$1.5 million over three years if Cedar Poly meets certain performance goals.

Cedar Poly, Tipton, IA., is a full-service recycler of high- and low-density polyethylene (HDPE and LDPE) flakes and pellets used in various products, including composite decking. The company also operates its own transportation fleet. Cedar Poly had 2021 sales of approximately \$17.3 million and will operate in UFP's



DECKORATORS decking is constructed using recycled polymers, similar to those produced by Cedar Poly.

Deckorators business unit. The company's management team, including vice presidents Scott and Jeremy Rogers, will continue in its management roles.

"Cedar Poly allows us to vertically integrate our sourcing of recycled polymers and increase our use of post-industrial waste materials in our industry-leading products without compromising quality," said Landon Tarvin, VP of Deckorators. "Growing our Deckorators product line using more sustainable raw materials is a key objective and enhances the overall value to our customers and our shareholders."

UFP plans to invest in additional capabilities at Cedar Poly's operations to serve both Deckorators' and Cedar Poly's customers.

"Joining the UFP family of companies will give us more resources to accelerate our growth," said Scott Rogers, VP of Cedar Poly. "We'll also have the ability to work hand-in-hand with the Deckorators team to innovate and improve the best composite decking in the industry. Our team is thrilled about this new chapter in our business and ready to capitalize on all the opportunities this creates for our customers and employees."

Wolf Home Products Partners with Key-Link Fence & Railing in NE

Wolf Home Products has partnered with Key-Link Fencing & Railing, a Pennsylvania-based aluminum rail and fence systems manufacturer, to distribute Key-Link's products to the Northeast corridor.

Wolf Home Products will offer Key-Link's full line of aluminum and cable railings, including the American, Chesapeake, and Outlook Series, as well as ADA handrails, caps and stair lighting.

"We aim to bring the highest standards of excellence to everything we do, and partnering with Key-Link helps us continue bringing that brand vision to life," said Mark Simmers, senior VP of sales for Wolf Home Products. "The premium standard met by Key-Link's product offering aligns effortlessly with our long-lasting, extensive portfolio of high-quality building products."

"We are excited to partner with Wolf Home Products to supply their network of dealers with our premium aluminum railing," said Reuben Lapp, chief executive officer of Key-Link Fencing & Railing. "This partnership brings our team members' commitment to quality and innovation to more dealers and installers."

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Fiberon Breaks Ground on Eco-friendly Plant in Tennessee

Fiberon, a manufacturer of wood-alternative decking, railing, cladding, and fencing products distributed around the world, broke ground May 10 on its new manufacturing facility in Columbia, TN. The facility will make Fiberon polyethylene decking product lines and composite cladding.

The plant is expected to be at least 500,000 sq. ft. on a 130-acre plot of land, with the first phase of operation completed by mid-2024, and the facility at full capacity by 2028. An estimated 140 full-time employees will be at the facility when it begins operations.

“We’re excited to join the Columbia community,” said Fenton Challgren, president of Fortune Brands’ Outdoors Business Unit. “With our



FIBERON EXPECTS to create more than 300 jobs in the next five years at its forthcoming plant in Columbia, TN.

new, state-of-the-art facility, Fiberon will create more than 300 jobs including manufacturing and office positions. Plus, giving back is one of our core values and we look forward to supporting Columbia and the surrounding areas.”

The plant will be converting baled plastic waste into pellets for use at the Fiberon plant. Last year, Fiberon plants used a total of 100+ million pounds of recycled plastic, and even more post-industrial wood. Fiberon expects that when the new plant is at full capacity, it will be diverting even more wood and plastic from landfills than the company’s current two plants combined.

Furthermore, Fiberon is making a \$15,000 donation to the Youth Education Fund, a non-profit based in Maury County, TN., that provides funding for organizations focused on offering leadership, mentorship, and educational resources to the youth in their community.



Lumber+ Expands to Texas

Lumber Plus has added a new 72,000-sq. ft. showroom and warehouse in Houston, TX, and is putting the finishing touches on a new branch in Mississauga (Toronto), Canada.

Reportedly offering building contractors and other hardwood decking enthusiasts “the largest hardwood inventory in North America,” Lumber Plus also operates out of its original location in Miami, FL.

Outdoor Living Supply Acquires California-based The Rock Garden

Outdoor Living Supply, Rochester, MN., has acquired The Rock Garden, a distributor of natural stone, and hand-hewn stone furniture. The acquisition extends the OLS platform into California and strengthens its regional presence in the Lake Tahoe market.

“I am proud to welcome the dedicated team at The Rock Garden to the OLS family of companies. This exciting new partnership expands our OLS footprint into California,” said Brian Price, CEO of OLS. “With its proximity to our Parker Hardscape Supply location, The Rock Garden is an exceptional fit. The combined strength and resources of these two locations will allow us to form the region’s market-leading platform, delivering best-in-class customer service to the Lake Tahoe and High Sierra markets.”

Brian Marsh, president of Marsh Ventures, Inc., added, “OLS shares our commitment to providing an exceptional customer experience, along with providing growth opportunities for our employees, customers, and suppliers alike. We are thrilled to have The Rock Garden join the OLS family of companies and look forward to watching the next chapter of growth unfold.”

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COZY OUTDOOR DECK, constructed by Jessica Hagan's company, All Decked Out, was built under an open gable roof next to an outdoor fireplace and custom outdoor kitchen. (Photo by LiVon Photography)

Women who are driving the industry forward

By Sara Graves

The construction industry is growing in popularity among women, with 76% of women surveyed stating the construction industry is changing for the better and 80% saying they love their jobs, according to the recent 2022 Levelset Women in Construction report, released.

With so many women loving their jobs, we sat down with some of the leading females in our industry to find out what excites them about their careers, what advice can they offer to women who may be interested in working in this industry, some of the challenges they face, and the special strengths they bring to their jobs.

What excites you in your career?

"I love that I have been able to balance my family life much more so with this role over the last 10+ years versus in previous jobs—that was not an option I had to clock in and clock out and had very little flexibility—but now that has changed," says Jessica Hagan, business manager, All Decked Out, Cincinnati, OH. "My husband starting this company was the best blessing I could have ever dreamed of!"

Hagan adds that her ability to use her creativity, flair for organization and communication, and opportunity to learn new things keeps her "fresh and excited for the future."



“No two builders are the same. Their personalities, their business style and strategies are all unique. We are simply people doing business with people and I think we both appreciate what both parties bring to the table.”

— Lainie Sleppin, MoistureShield Mid-Atlantic regional sales director



“My favorite type of project is one that incorporates a patio, with a deck that is covered with a roof.”

— Jessica Hagan, business manager, All Decked Out

Amy Breen, owner, Legacy Decks, Greenville, S.C., says it’s problem solving and personal growth that excites her. “I feel like that is all we do year after year—look for ways to get better at what we build and how we run our business and the people in it.”

Catherine Lippincott, director of global expansion, Premier Outdoor Living, Palmyra, N.J., says nothing is more rewarding than creating something from scratch. “Not only are we able to do that every single day, but we have the unique opportunity to share our projects with others on the Internet, so hopefully we are helping to inspire the next generation of builders!”

Lainie Sleppin, MoistureShield Mid-Atlantic regional sales director, is inspired by the progression of products offered as solutions to low maintenance decking.

“I love the opportunity of brand building,” she says. “Coming from a place of being passionate and with a high level of integrity, it excites me to sell deck builders and dealers a blend of innovative and eco-friendly products that can meet the advancement of consumer awareness.”

Tara Holstein, owner, Solid Ground, Wentzville, MO., is motivated by three things: development, project and operations management.

“I have always enjoyed developing organizations and people. I have fulfillment when others achieve,” she says.

What are your unique strengths?

“Before getting into the deck building world, I had a corporate job in commercial real estate and before that in marketing,” Lippincott says. “I have always had a passion for building as a hobby, but now that I had the opportunity to make it my career, I felt I brought a unique set of skills with me. From contracts to organization, I brought skills I have learned in the business world to help our deck building business run as smoothly as possible.”

As a company owner, Holstein also draws from her prior corporate experience. “I have 15 plus years’ experience as a finance and operations executive,” she says. “I have worked in various industries, such as hospitality, higher education, and healthcare in human services, and I have worked in both for-profit and nonprofit sectors.”

For Breen, her unique strength lies in processes and systems. “I’m what we call the visionary in our business,” she says. “I can see where we are going and all the little steps it

What advice would you offer women who want to work in this industry?

“There is no reason why a woman cannot excel in the building industry as long as they have the right attitude and excitement for knowledge. Don’t let the curmudgeons in the industry get to you, just use it as an incentive to prove them wrong!”

— Catherine Lippincott, director of global expansion, Premier Outdoor Living, Palmyra, N.J.

“Construction is no different than any other industry out there; there’s a product, a service, marketing, finance, HR, IT, legal, sales, project management, and more. It’s not just about swinging a hammer. There’s a place for your skill sets and ambitions.”

— Amy Breen, owner, Legacy Decks, Greenville, S.C.

“Make certain to surround yourself with other successful women, no matter the industry. Do not be afraid to put yourself out there—opportunity is everywhere. Never stop learning, always be coachable.”

— Tara Holstein, owner, Solid Ground, Wentzville, MO.

“Be your beautiful, authentic self! I used to hold myself back in certain ways in fear that contractors would think I was a weak woman. I know from personal experience and from other women around me, that sometimes it’s not men that hold us back, but ourselves.”

— April Edwards, marketing strategist & creative director, Deck Builder Marketers, Carlsbad, CA.



“ I have always had a passion for building as a hobby, but now that I had the opportunity to make it my career. I brought skills I have learned in the business world to help our deck building business run as smoothly as possible.”

— Tara Holstein, owner, Solid Ground

will take to get there.”

It is providing balance to those around her that has proven to be a strength for Edwards. “I make sure my team is inspired to work hard and make an impact,” she says. “It’s often overlooked, but having a team that loves the work they do is important to help our deck builder clients grow and reach their business goals.”

Have you encountered any barriers as a woman in this industry?

“I started in my twenties in the decking business which is over 20 years ago,” Sleppin says. “Composite decking was fairly new to the market and coming from a place of being fairly young and not so experienced, I definitely was challenged with barriers. I jumped in with both feet, dug footings, carried 2x materials and held my

own in the field. Thereafter, I was able to talk the talk and relate to deck builder struggles when it came to building decks. This experience certainly gave me credibility in the market which overshadowed the fact that I am a woman.”

Having her own business versus being an employee has its perks, according to Breen. “There’s definitely been many times I’m the only female in the room, but my knowledge leads before my gender so I’m usually treated the same as the men,” she adds.

Holstein says since hers is a “wife and husband-owned company,” she is often “viewed as a behind-the-scenes person,” when in fact she’s “out in front of the company representing Solid Ground by networking, meeting with clients, vendors, and other organizations.” Her goal, she says, “is to build this company, not just make certain it operates.” 



THE ALL-SEASONS DECK built by Legacy Decks in Greer, S.C., features AZEK Vintage Coastline decking, picture frame and fascia, TREX posts and balusters, and a fire pit. (Photo by Stanton Photography)



“ I’m what we call the visionary in our business. I can see where we are going and all the little steps it will take to get there.”

— Amy Breen, Legacy Decks



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Deck Specialist for the second year has partnered with the leading manufacturers in outdoor living to honor top builders that specialize in their brands, based on sales growth or artistic excellence. In this special issue, the winners discuss their businesses, passions, and what they look forward to seeing in the future.

Armadillo Specialist of the Year

California Custom Decks

Owner: Mark Lingo

Location: St. Louis, MO.

Year Founded: 1990

Website: caldecks.com

Instagram: @californiacustomdecks

Facebook: Caldecks

Specialty: Design and build outdoor family rooms and entertaining spaces

Q. How did Caldecks get started?

The company was started in 1990 with a goal of filling the need for a local solution provider who could design and build outdoor spaces where people could spend time with their families and friends. That idea quickly evolved as early spaces were simple and utilized for just the basics where families may grill, sit outside, or give themselves access



to their backyard.

Early decks were built with wood, with California Custom Decks providing the innovative butcher-block style of deck.

Over time, we've seen product offerings explode with interesting and lifestyle-oriented concepts dominating people's desires. Spaces are more unique and providing multi-faceted spaces for entertaining, leisure, and food preparation.

Q. How did you begin using Armadillo?

We were immediately struck by the appearance of the Campfire color of decking in the Lifestyle collection when we first saw it, and we immediately put it in our showroom for customers to see for themselves. It was very positively received, and we've been seeing Campfire and the other Lifestyle colors being selected by customers for years.

Q. What are your regular Armadillo products?

Campfire from the Lifestyle collection is certainly a customer favorite, but we also find other colors utilized regularly, as well. Walnut is a popular secondary color often used for picture-framing and trim. The Foothills and Smoke colors gain our interest as the taupe and gray color families have been more intriguing to customers, and we have utilized Sunset, Bronco, and White Sand on occasion, too.

We also have customers utilizing the 2x4 profile regularly for drink rails and stick built railings. That is a fun and unique option that has helped us many times in providing solutions.

Q. How has the pandemic affected your business?

The pandemic certainly provided some unique circumstances for our company to grow as consumers' changing habits created more demand for outdoor spaces. We've been as busy as ever in designing and building projects, and each project has become increasingly dense with details and involvement as customization to make extensions of the home is at the forefront of adjusted lifestyles.

Q. What's next for Caldecks?

We have a packed schedule of great projects to construct this year, and we are expecting there to be plenty of new customer interest where we can plan new projects to add to our future plans. We're very fortunate to have the opportunities we do, and as a continually growing company adjusting to new interests, we're looking forward to changing with consumer trends and providing innovative solutions that we can be just as proud of as those for whom we build them.



Mike Bruggenjohann, Greg Schaefer, and David Mullins

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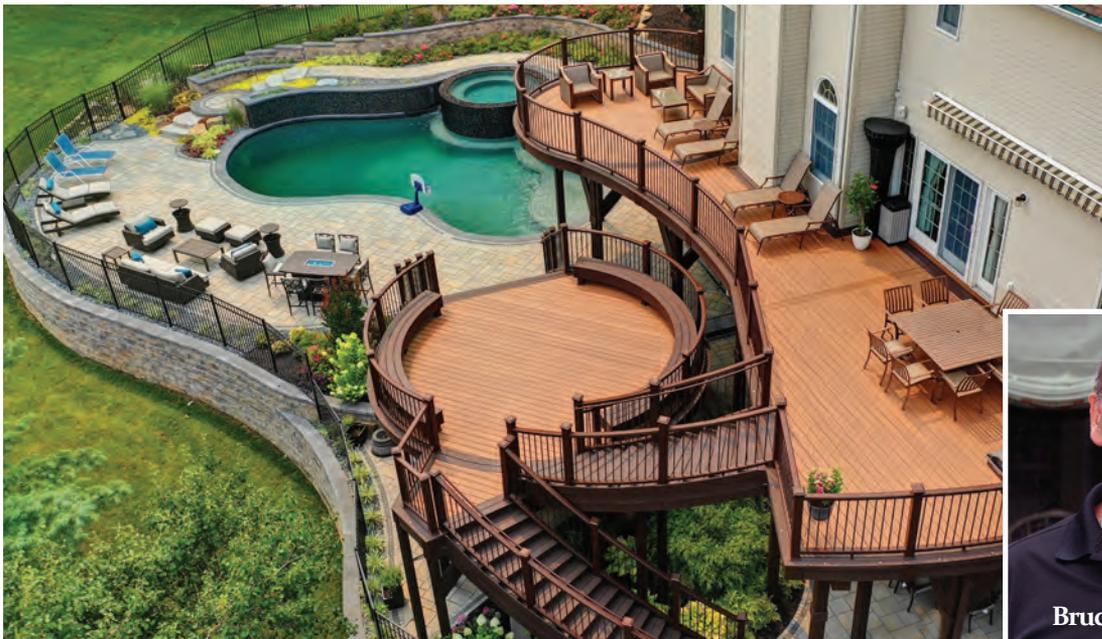
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CAMO Specialist of the Year

NJ Decks and Railings

Owner: Bruce Verblaauw

Location: Mahwah, N.J.

Year Founded: 1970

Website: njdecksandrailings.com

Instagram: @c_verblaauwandsonslc

Facebook: NJ Decks and Railings

Specialty: Custom decks

Q. How did you get started in construction?

I started helping my dad at an early age and enjoyed building houses, additions and decks.

Q. How did you begin using CAMO products?

We saw the EdgeClip demonstrated at DeckExpo a few years ago and really liked how easy it was to install. We also helped beta test CAMO's EdgeX clips for steel framing.

Q. Where do your deck and railing design ideas come from?

We listen to our customer's thoughts and wishes and try to come up with new and exciting designs. Also, attending the NADRA National+ Deck Competition and Awards each year helps us to see what other deck builders across the country are doing, which gives us inspiration for new designs.

Q. Tell us about your team.

We feel that we have the best team of professionals in our area, from the design team to our foreman, our lead carpenters and all of our apprentices

and laborers. Everyone is very detail oriented and work toward building above code with our clients in mind. We take great pride in customer satisfaction.

Q. How has business changed in the past few years?

Our workload has increased significantly all while finding it hard to hire on additional help. We have had to take a deep look at ourselves and figure out how to become more efficient at what we do.

Q. Anything new that's proving especially popular with customers?

More and more customers are looking to build a real outdoor living area rather than just a deck. We are including more roofs, pergolas and outdoor kitchens in our designs than ever before.

Q. What's ahead for NJ Decks and Railings?

We hope to continue growing as a team and keep up our great customer relations.

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Tim Simkins, Justin Wylie, Brandon Young

Deckorators Specialist of the Year

All Pro Decks & Patios

Owner: Justin Wylie

Location: San Antonio, TX.

Year Founded: 2019

Website: apdecks.com

Facebook.com: All Pro Decks

Specialty: Deckorators

Q. Take us to the beginning of the company.

I started in the industry about 20 years ago as a helper. As the years went by, I got more experience, and I was able to move up to a builder. After that, I did sales for a few other companies in the industry.

Once I learned and worked all aspects of the industry, I decided it was time to make a change. I wanted the challenge of building my own business. Also, I wanted to see if I could improve the deck and outdoor business here in San Antonio, TX.

Q. Any projects for which Deckorators was particularly beneficial?

Deckorators products are beneficial on every project. We live in south Texas. The climate is extremely hot and humid. The Deckorators decking is by far more effective than any other product on the market. Deckorators boards don't have as much thermal expansion, so the finished product looks great year-round.

Q. Where do you get your ideas from?

I listen to the client's wants and needs first and foremost, then I will give them my thoughts and

ideas. I have been in the industry so long; I have seen so many different patio designs. I also keep myself educated on new designs and trends in the market. I like to give the customer their wants and needs, while also giving them my spin on it.

Q. Tell us about your team.

My team is the most important part of my company. Period. We wouldn't operate without them. I try my best to make sure they are well taken care of. I do everything I can to show my appreciation for their hard work. A happy and well-taken care of team will also show through to the customer. That's our goal. I take being their boss seriously.

Q. What's next for All Pro Decks & Patios?

We hope to continue to hit our goals, double our production annually, while still being the customer service-driven company that people know us as.

We are also happy to announce we are working on opening a full-scale lumberyard. It is a great addition to our company. We have grown leaps and bounds from when we started. We are excited to see where the All Pro team and company will go.



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Filming Mosaic's Hit TV Show *MegaDecks*

Envision Specialist of the Year

Mosaic Outdoor Living

Owner: David C. Schwank and Klint Reiber

Location: Englewood, CO.

Year Founded: 1985

Website: coloradodecks.com

Instagram: @mosaicoutdoorliving

Specialty: Envision decking

Q. Tell me how Mosaic got started.

In 1985, we opened Colorado Custom Decks with a desire to creatively transform the ordinary square deck into an artistic, usable space. We quickly became the leading innovator in outdoor living and began to incorporate roofs, glass wind walls, ambient lighting, built in grills, spas and other custom features into our decks. In 2008, we fused Colorado Custom Decks with the new company name Mosaic Outdoor Living to encompass everything we do.

Q. Do you ever work directly with Envision?

We work directly with several people who work for Envision; Shara Gamble, Rick Gebhart and Jim Murphy always do a great job for us!

Q. How did Envision Outdoor become one of your primary vendors?

Envision became our main choice for decking immediately after it was introduced to our market. It was a very easy choice as the product was absolutely beautiful, durable and has a great warranty.

Q. What are some of your favorite products?

We are partial to the color variations and profile of the Envision Distinction and Ridge Premium decking products.

Q. Where do your “creative spins” come from?

My creativity comes from being raised with an artist for a mother. She taught me to look at the world with a different paradigm. Combining artistry with construction makes me who I am today!

Q. How has business been for Mosaic?

Business has been truly amazing! Many of our clients have decided to spend more time at home during the two-year pandemic and are therefore investing in their homes. This, coupled with incredible referrals and repeat business from previous clients has kept us going strong.

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Evolution Specialist of the Year

Precision Construction

Owner: Scott Kelly

Location: Greater Denver, CO., area

Year Founded: 2005, rebranded to Precision Construction in late 2015

Website: buildingyourspace.com

Instagram: @precisionconstructioncolorado

Facebook.com: Precision Construction Co

Specialty: Evolution steel deck framing

Q. How did Precision Construction get its start?

Even as a kid, I was into building and assembling things. Throughout high school and college, I would do tenant finish work over summer break. Eventually in 2005, I decided to turn my hobby into a full-time job. I take pride in my work and love what I do.

Q. What percentage of your jobs do you use steel on?

Precision Construction uses steel framing on 100% of our jobs. We've been building exclusively with Evolution from Fortress Building Products for over five years.

Q. When did you start using steel deck framing, and why did you choose Evolution?

I built my first standard galvanized steel frame deck just over six years ago and was hooked. A steel frame deck will stand strong for decades. When Fortress Building Products introduced the Evolution steel framing system, clients got to reap all the benefits of the material without the "shini-

ness" of galvanized steel. Evolution uses a premium powder coating to deliver a matte, sleek look and provide better protection. Now most clients prefer to leave their deck structure exposed as the black steel frame profiles look great and typically match the railing. Plus, not having to install fascia helps keep the cost of the project down for the client.

Q. Have you ever worked directly with the Fortress team?

I had the opportunity to visit Texas and talk with Fortress Building Products about the Evolution system while it was still in the development phase. The team did a great job taking input from myself and others before bringing it to market. To see how much traction and momentum Evolution has gained in such a short period of time is very exciting for me. I hope to have helped contribute to that success.

Q. Where does the inspiration for your projects come from?

Precision Construction is built around the client experience and delivering outstanding results that exceed client expectations. As a builder, I believe it

is my responsibility to look out for the best interests of my clients, which is why we use steel framing. Strong and stable, it is the best substructure available.

When it comes to sourcing inspiration, I love when clients present me with unique challenges that other builders were either hesitant to take on or walked away from entirely. We are constantly striving to redefine what is possible when it comes to deck building, so it is very satisfying to see the look on a client's face when you say to them, "Yeah, we can do that—no problem."

Our workload has increased significantly all while finding it hard to hire on additional help. We have had to take a deep look at ourselves and figure out how to become more efficient at what we do.

Q. What's next for Precision Construction?

Moving forward, Precision Construction will continue to work with Fortress Building Products and other like-minded companies to inspire and deliver innovative solutions.

I plan to shift more time and energy into helping other builders make the transition to steel framing. Growing #SteelNation is important to me and critical to the advancement of the building industry.



Scott Kelly and his son Axton

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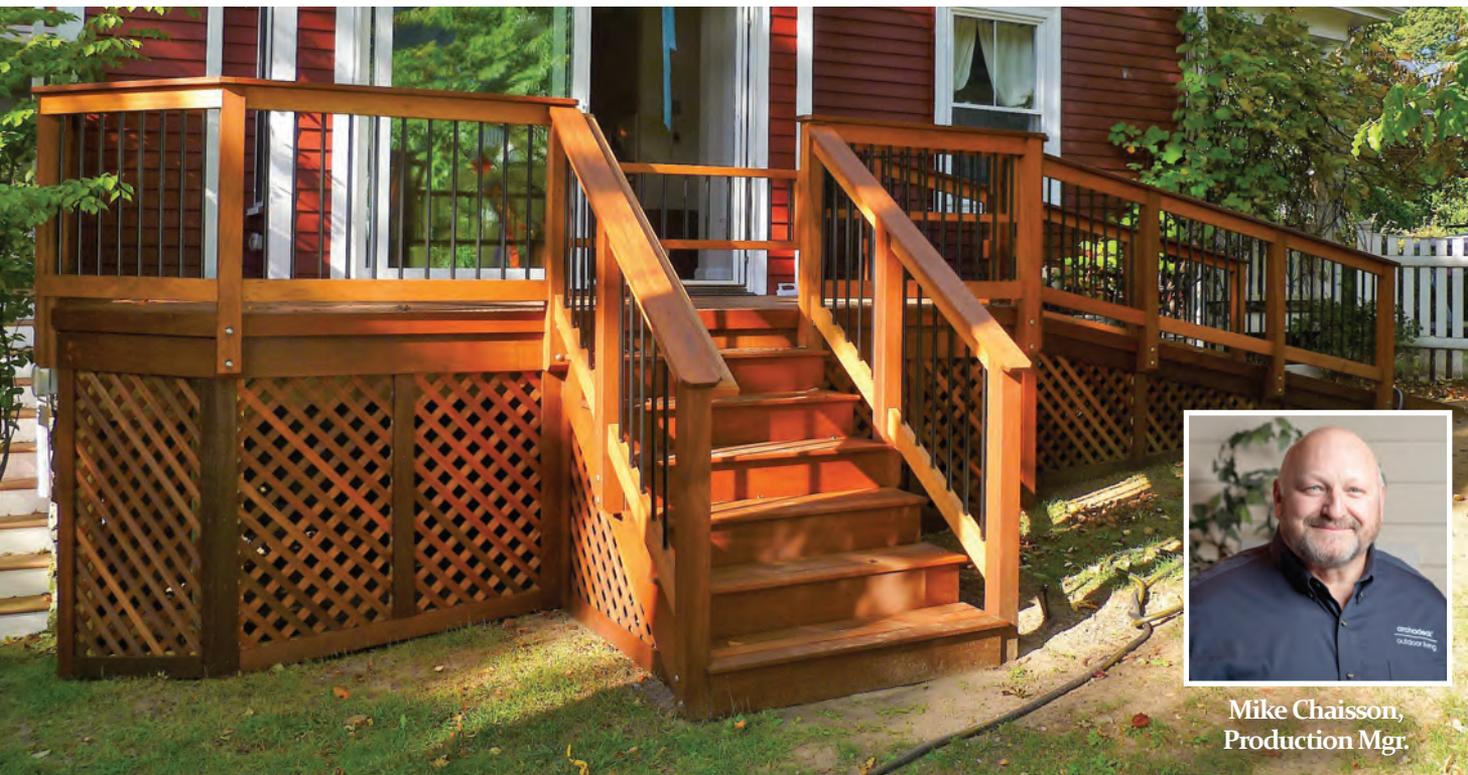
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Mike Chaisson,
Production Mgr.

FastenMaster Specialist of the Year

Archadeck of Suburban Boston

Owner: James Finlay

Location: Burlington, MA.

Year Founded: 1993

Website: archadeck.com/ne-mass

Instagram: @archadeck

Facebook.com: Archadeck

Specialty: Decking Hardware

Q. Share the origin story of Archadeck.

Back in the last century (1993), I was looking to start a company that focused on innovative, high quality products. I found Archadeck, an established deck building franchise system founded by an architect and a carpenter. Its combination of professional design services and solid construction standards (documented in nearly 200 pages of CAD drawings) appealed to me. I also liked the narrow focus—offering only decks, porches (and later, sunrooms)—which allowed me to be a true expert.

Q. How did FastenMaster become one of your primary vendors?

It was at a JLC convention in Providence, R.I., I was impressed with the LedgerLOK, which is a faster and stronger way to attach a ledger to a house. There's no pre-drilling involved and it's stronger in combination than lag screws. We

started using it on our decks right away to replace the lag screws that you have to predrill. The LedgerLOK zips right in. It was hard to believe that it would go right into pressure treated wood, but it does because they engineered the screw very carefully—it is very effective. And then I was also blown away by the power of HeadLOK and TimberLOK to straighten old, warped framing members.

I first noticed it when I was building a display porch in our showroom and one of the boards was bent and flared out at the end so I couldn't cover it with outside trim, and I tried a HeadLOK and I was shocked that it pulled that warped member nice and flat—it returned about 3/4"—from badly warped and unusable to nice and straight and flat.

Q. Where do your design ideas come from?

I have two design consultants on staff who have degrees in architecture, they meet with the client,

spend some time to understand what the client wants, and they design solutions. They get their ideas from the homeowners. Their dreams—what do they want to do on the deck? You get good ideas from the homeowner’s functional needs and desires—what they want their deck for, what they are going to use it for.

One good idea came from a client in Wayland, MA. I asked him what they want, and he said, “We are going to dance on our deck.” So, I designed a deck that had a 12’ octagon to dance on, plus a little area to grill on.

Q. How has your business changed since the pandemic started?

We have twice as many leads and our business has grown by approximately 85% in volume over two years. One thing, many homeowners during the pandemic were laid off in their houses, or working from their homes for the first time. Being in the house more, they looked in the backyard and started daydreaming, thinking—“If we had a deck or a porch, we could invite a few guests over and socialize—we could really use our backyard better.”

I think our growth is a result of 30 years of paying attention to our project building—detailed, very strong projects that people like—because we pay attention to our customers. Two-thirds of our business comes from referrals because we built a reputation for quality construction. Last year, we built 86 projects.

What’s ahead for Archadeck?

We have to chip away at our five and a half month backlog, but it’s dependent on getting enough crews. We are pretty selective about who we hire to build. Finding good and keeping good crews can be difficult because a lot of them wash out. We check on their work every day—and if they are not building quality and they can’t cor-



rect it, they are gone. Getting qualified carpenters is a problem throughout the industry.

We are going to continue to look for the best products to utilize. We are focused more on the quality of the fastener and the material, rather than the cost. We’re not going to be “spendthrift to be foolish.”

I’m looking to grow carefully, it’s more important that we build quality projects than we build a lot more of them because of the personal satisfaction. Part of our compensation is the customer appreciation. I’d rather have really happy customers than a lot of mediocre, barely satisfied customers. I’m more interested in client satisfaction than making lots of money.

Here’s a good example, we started doing this about eight years ago: About a year after we finish a deck, we come back, ask permission from the homeowner and we do a deck tune up at no cost. We have a one-year warranty on everything and a five-year warranty on the structure, so we do this before the warranty expires. What we are addressing here is that pressure treated wood shrinks a lot in the first six to nine months and then it’s stable. Some of the joints and connections that we make initially become loose a year later so we go back and tighten them. It doesn’t take any time at all. And when our customer walks on their deck or down the stairs, it will still be solid. It won’t be bouncy and loose. The rail will be solid and secure. That’s what we want.

Also, about three years ago, we started emailing every client of an active project daily with a status report of their project. It’s usually a lot easier to fix a problem during the construction than coming back later on. We catch issues up front when it’s easier to fix. We also learned it’s a good vehicle for us to remind the homeowner of progress payments.





Paul Summers Jr. (left) and Paul Sr. (right)

MoistureShield Specialist of the Year

Decks By Design

Owner: Paul Summers, Sr.

Location: Buffalo, N.Y.

Year Founded: 1998

Website: buffalodeckdesign.com

Specialty: MoistureShield Composite decking

Q. How did Decks by Design get started?

I started Decks by Design in 1998 building wood decks only and in 2006, started to install composite decking but really did not like the products I was using so I went back to just wood. It turns out it was a good call as the composite materials we used failed and these companies went out of business.

Q. When did you first start using MoistureShield?

In January of 2014, after meeting with Kevin Coppola from Len-Co Lumber (Buffalo, N.Y.), I was considering displaying composite decking at the Buffalo Home and Garden Show for the first time since 2008. Kevin suggested several brands, but highly recommended MoistureShield composite

decking. We featured a few different products on our display, including MoistureShield Vantage and installed several Vantage decks. In 2015, we went back to every composite deck we built in 2014, spoke to each customer and inspected the deck to see how it held up to the tough Buffalo weather. It became very clear to us that MoistureShield was the product we needed to bring our company into the age of composite decking.

Fast forward to last year, 2021, and virtually all of our decks were MoistureShield, with one exception, because the homeowner wanted to match a small covered deck with an extension. In 2022, we expect that we will install 100% MoistureShield composite decks.

Q. Why do you prefer MoistureShield?

MoistureShield composite decking is the only product all deck companies should use to keep their margins up and call-backs down. I am so passionate about this product; sales are easy and I know that my customers are getting the highest level of installation and the highest quality of decking that outperforms all other decking in the industry.

Q. Tell us more about your company.

Paul Jr. runs the installation side, and is also very passionate about the product. He has requested that I not sell anything other than MoistureShield. Paul Jr. and his installation crews have installed other brands and have nothing but complaints about them. He has mastered the installation of MoistureShield composite decking and loves the fact that we never have to return to perform any repairs. The only time he has had to send an employee back to a customer's house is damage caused from falling trees, wind-blown items or to build an extension to a deck we already installed.

The entire team at Decks by Design loves what we do, and MoistureShield composite decking makes our job easier.



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MOSO Specialist of the Year

Craftsman Construction

Owner: Jerry Jackness

Location: Edinburg, VA.

Year Founded: 1987

Website: craftsmanbuilds.com

Specialty: MOSO Bamboo

Q. How did Craftsman get its start?

Craftsman Construction started 45 years ago as a custom cabinet shop. As we grew, we expanded into other areas. First, we added home remodeling to our portfolio. After several years of remodeling, we branched out into custom home building. This is where we are now building medium size to estate size custom home.

Our company focuses on luxury residential projects of all sizes and significant remodels. We are based out of the Northern Virginia area, but have done projects up and down the East Coast.

Q. How has your business changed as you've sought to grow amid the pandemic?

Business has changed due to the price increases in materials and labor. This has shut out the mid-ground market as they are now priced out. The only market left to move forward with is the high-end custom homes.

Q. How did the company first come to use MOSO bamboo products?

We first saw MOSO at a trade show, and we were very impressed with it. What drove me to the MOSO decking was that it was made from bamboo, not plastic. Synthetic decking is hot to the touch, and expands and contracts too much. Also,

it scratches easily. The MOSO product is a natural product and does not expand and contract as much as the synthetics. It is easy to repair as you can sand it and re-oil it. It is made from a renewable resource which everybody loves.

We have used this decking on other projects to the client's delight.

Q. Tell us more about a project in which Craftsman used MOSO bamboo decking.

We first used MOSO bamboo on a timber frame house we were building in the mountains of Virginia. This house has a spectacular view, and the clients wanted a high-end deck.

The deck in question was part of a timber frame construction project. Lots of natural wood and stone, we wanted something that fit in to this natural environment. The client was very much interested in using natural materials. This deck was a two-story deck that is over 2,500 sq. ft. and included a hot tub and firepit.

Q. What's next for Craftsman Construction?

Craftsman Construction will keep to its roots and only build quality, energy efficient homes of distinction. We pride ourselves on our workmanship, so we only build one home at a time giving our clients the best product possible.



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Wayne Paulsboe

ProWood Specialist of the Year

Backyard Builders Deck & Pergola LLC

Owner: Wayne Paulsboe

Location: Grayslake, IL.

Year Founded: 2018

Website: mybackyardbuilder.com

Instagram: @backyard_builders_llc

Facebook.com: Backyard Builders Deck and Pergola

Specialty: Composite decks and luxury outdoor living spaces

Q. Tell us about your construction beginnings.

I really started at a young age working for my father sometimes in the summer helping him build a few decks here and there.

I first got started in outdoor living working for a custom in-ground pool company, I oversaw all the daily construction operations which included building decks, pergolas, outdoor kitchens, patios and everything that had to do with the pool construction itself. I found myself gravitating more towards decks and pergolas and really loving the framing aspect of it and creating the “bones” of a project.

I remember first getting on Instagram and started following other deck builders and becoming inspired and trying to get customers to let me try some out of the ordinary things. The end results were amazing and I found out quickly I can make a living doing something I really enjoyed and doing

things a little different.

I started my own business and specialized in composite decks. I’m not going to lie, it was insanely tough competing with some other great local deck builders, but I felt I could bring more than just a rectangle deck to a homeowner and create an extension of the house outdoors, a life outside four walls.

Q. How did you first start using ProWood in your projects?

When I first started, I purchased my framing lumber from a big box store. Sorting it myself, loading it, transporting it to the job site and unloading it. It got tiring. I found out there was a local lumberyard extremely close to me and I went there, spoke with the owner and he told me he only carries ProWood pressure treated lumber and he and his

team would take care of all the things I was doing and that they have everything else I needed. It's a one-stop shop. At first I thought wood was wood until I built my first deck using ProWood. It was by far more superior to what I was used to and I was hooked.

Q. Any projects for which the use of ProWood products was useful?

I exclusively use ProWood for all framing for my decks and any outdoor applications. I have next to no call backs from the framing splitting, cracking or for wood doing what it wants after it dries out a bit. It's also nice to see that ProWood does third-party testing. That lets me know they go the extra mile to make sure that their products are all within a standard.

Q. How has business changed over the past few years?

Everything has changed for everybody. It's been a crazy two years for absolutely everyone. I would say that outdoor living is becoming more of a popular vision to everyone since more people are starting to work from home. People want to move out of their little home office or even their kitchen table and get some sunshine and fresh air and all they have to do is step right out the back door.



Q. Where do your design ideas come from?

Definitely from a number of great deck builders on the Instagram world. Jason (Russell) with Dr. Decks, Sean (Collinsgru) with Premier Outdoor Living, the guys with Cascade Fence and Deck, and Brendan Casey with Casey Fence and Deck. I would have to say those are my top four inspirations. I want to combine all four styles into something spectacular.

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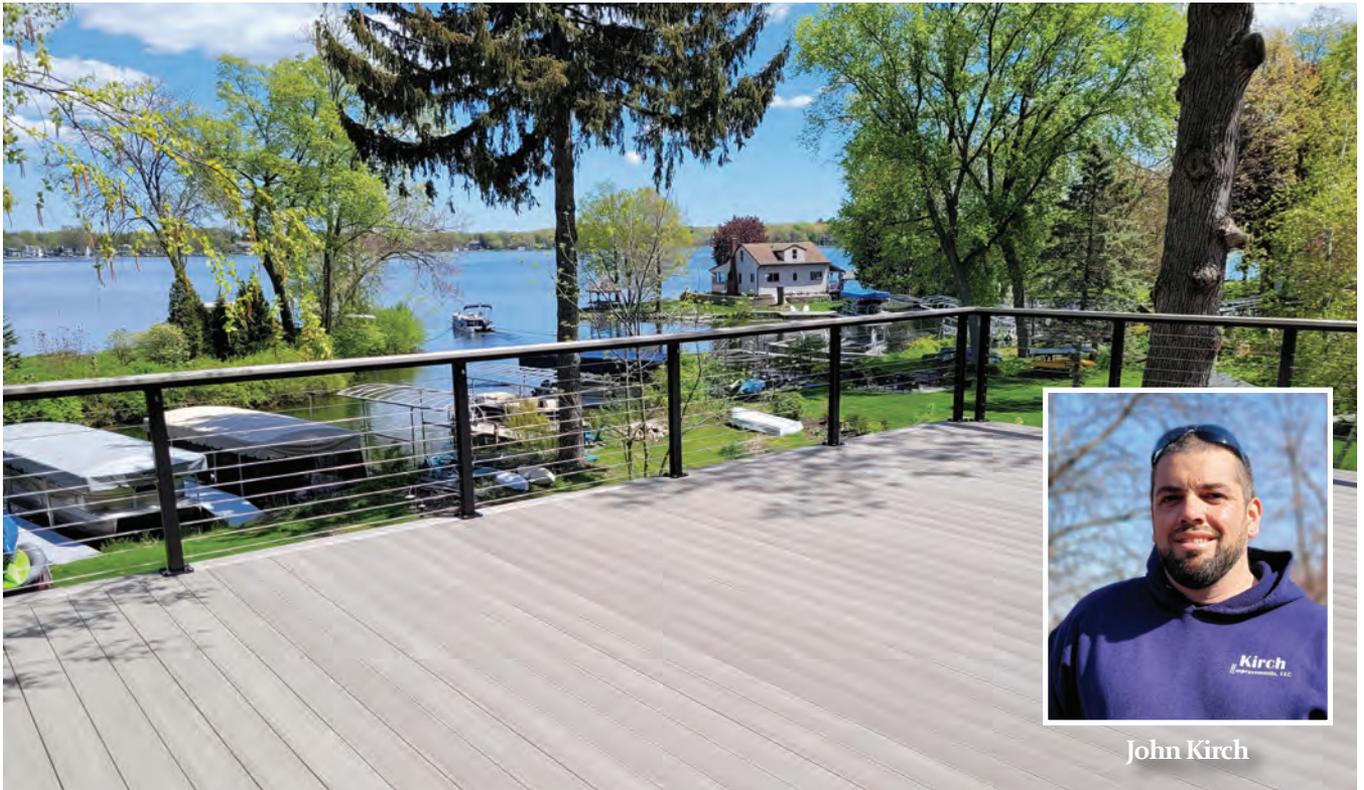
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John Kirch

RailFX Specialist of the Year

Kirch Improvements LLC

Owner: John Kirch

Location: Brookfield, WI.

Year Founded: 2011

Website: kirchimprovementsllc.com

Instagram: @kirchimprovements

Facebook.com: Kirch Improvements

Specialty: Decks and pergolas



Q. Tell us how you got started in construction.

Upon graduating high school, I started working in a warehouse for a larger home improvement company. After a about a year of doing that, I had the opportunity to become an apprentice to a crew building sunrooms and decks. I was completely intrigued by the process. I liked being able to take a stack of lumber and create something that I could walk on by the end of the day. I was hooked!

Q. How has business changed since the pandemic started?

It's almost easier to say, "What hasn't changed?!" The pandemic has brought so many challenges to everyone, not limited to the building industry. Material shortages have drastically increased lead times; costs have increased exponentially. We continue to focus on quality and customer

service. We value customer satisfaction and are a referral-based business. We take things one day at a time and strive to deliver a deck that surpasses our customer's expectations.

Q. How did you first start using RailFX products in your projects?

We were first introduced to RailFX by a customer that specifically requested it. After completing that first installation, we haven't looked back. It's become an extremely popular option with both our customer's and us. Our crew often comments how the rails have a clean look, allowing the decking and the scenery to really stand out.

Q. Any projects for which the use of RailFX products was particularly beneficial?

So many projects, but definitely when the customer wants an unobstructed view. Most common are waterfront properties and those with a wooded backyard, where wildlife is often present. The RailFX cable rails are also prevalent for homes looking for a modern or Mid-century modern aesthetic.

Q. Where do your design ideas come from?

We are inspired by a multitude of things. A deck should complement the style of the home. We look

at how it will blend into the yard and enhance the existing space.

Another consideration is functionality. How will the customer use the space? Our customers often have design idea boards from Pinterest or Instagram that we are able to build off. The biggest compliment we can receive is when a homeowner shows us their design idea board and it features past projects we've completed.

Q. What's ahead for Kirch?

We look forward to continuing to grow with the industry and expanding our knowledge base. Twenty years ago, a deck was thought of in a simpler manner—now, the possibilities are endless. More people are spending time at home and entertaining in their outdoor spaces. Customers want it to be a place to relax and retreat with their family and friends. It's more than "just a deck," it's a space where memories are made.

We are passionate about decks and bringing our customers ideas to fruition. We look forward to continuing on this journey and staying relevant with the market and products.



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Regal ideas Specialist of the Year

Dr. Decks LLC

Owner: Jason Russell

Location: Tacoma, WA.

Year Founded: 1991

Website: drdecks.com

Facebook: Dr.Decks L.L.C.

Instagram: @drdecks

Specialty: Regal ideas railing

Q. How did Dr. Decks get its start?

I started my business when I was 21 years old—32 years ago. It’s all I know.

Q. How did you first discover Regal ideas?

I discovered Regal ideas at the International Builders Show in Florida seven years ago.

Q. What interested you most about working with Regal ideas?

The people at Regal ideas are the initial reason I was attracted to the brand and then I saw their Crystal Rail product and was hooked.

Q. What Regal ideas products are among your regulars?

My go-to Regal ideas products are Crystal Rail and Regal picket and glass systems with their LED light kit installed in the top.

Q. Tell us about your team.

I usually run a small team of two carpenters plus myself, but recently injuries and COVID-19 have made it difficult to keep a solid team together.

I hope to develop a three-man crew soon that can work efficiently together while I manage the business and make appearances to various locations around the country.

Q. Any upcoming projects that you are excited about?

I have several projects sold that will take us well into 2023. I’m excited to share them with my followers on Instagram and YouTube. Nothing really crazy designed yet, but I’m itching to do something absolutely bitchin’.

Q. Many builders look up to you in the industry. What would you tell them?

Hard work and the willingness to push through your failures is what will make you a success. Never give up and keep grinding.

Q. What’s next for Dr. Decks?

I plan on continuing to develop my social media channels and pivot my business into a hybrid construction-media company where I will share my digital content to the world while still building to the

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Exovations' CEO and directors (l-r): Roone Unger, Candice Skinner, Brandi McNamara, Chris Craft, and Terry Brooks.
 (Photo by Tawnji Hurlbut)

Westbury Specialist of the Year

Exovations

Owner: Roone Unger, Founder/CEO

Location: Cumming, GA.

Year Founded: 1996

Website: exovations.com

Instagram: @exovations

Facebook.com: Exovations

Specialty: Exovations

Q. Take us to the beginning of Exovations.

In 1996, the business focused on serving builders in the Atlanta area with new construction siding and windows, intermittently working with residential homeowners for remodel needs. Year after year, the business grew toward remodeling for homeowners. In 2008, due to economic misfortunes with the collapse, Exovations exited the new construction market, downsized, and became solely focused on providing the best service and processes to homeowners. Twenty six years in the making, we still strive to provide the best people, products, and process to every customer.”

Q. When did you discover Westbury?

Our first project sold was in April 2016. We were

really drawn to the sleek appearance combined with the durable powder-coated finish. We thought it would be a great fit for us with the beauty and long term benefits that we have always offered. We were in search of a product similar to the look but not at the cost of wrought iron.

Once we used Westbury and found the ease of application, we knew we had found the product that we had been looking for.

Q. How do you decide how railings should be used in an outdoor space?

We do not use any high pressure sales tactics with any of our products; we simply educate each customer with all the information and examples so that each homeowner has all of the options to make

the best decision for their home and their family. Westbury railing almost sells itself for a customer looking to bring the outdoors in. The railing offers a sleek metallic look and without the expense of wrought iron. Many customers like that the railing provides a clean and clear view into their backyard or landscape, especially those that love outdoor living.

Q. Tell me about your company's 3D renderings and how does that give you an edge?

This was an exciting addition to Exovations after listening to customer's needs and learning that it would be very helpful to see the project before ever signing a contract or doing the work... we call this an Exovision.

We have an amazing, talented in-house architect that meets with our clients looking to makeover their home's exterior, also known as an "Exterior Facelift." We have a design center where all the creativity begins. We present the customer with ideas, detailed, renderings at no charge so they can envision their transformation before any changes are made to their home.

Q. How has the pandemic affected your business?

The pandemic has affected our business in both

negative and positive ways. Initially, we were fearful of our future at the start of the pandemic in 2020 based off the information reported at that time. We prepared for the worst. Thankfully, we were wrong. We had a record year in sales volume in 2020. We attribute this to many homeowners being home and deciding to not travel and wanting to remodel their homes. The downfall has been material shortages experienced across the nation on products. This has delayed our production significantly.

Q. What's next for Exovations?

We have an exceptional management team in place that is determined and committed to helping our business grow, despite any challenges that we may face. Our plan is to continue to be a different type of contractor in this industry. We strive to earn a homeowner's trust and business the right way—with integrity, transparency, and clear communication to make the home improvement process as stress free for the customer as possible.

Internally, we are implementing new technologies to help our team be more efficient and create an ease of communication within our team and with our customers. The new technology will also help us complete a long-term goal of becoming paperless.



An Exovations' covered porch completes the view when enjoying the view from the garden.



YellaWood Specialist of the Year

Strongwood by Townsend

Owner: Steve Shea

Location: Dothan, AL.

Year Founded: 2012

Website: townsendbuildingsupply.com

Instagram: @strongwoodbytownsend

Facebook.com: Strongwood Outdoor

Specialty: Great Southern's YellaWood

Q. Take us to the beginning of Strongwood by Townsend.

In 2012, I started building decks as a hobby and to make some extra money. I was an instructor on Fort Rucker, AL., teaching survival. I started off building decks for family and friends. The first one was for a friend and I only charged them \$500 for labor. Townsend supplied the materials. I then continued building decks and fences based on referrals from prior customers.

For two years I did this while working on the base. Then in October 2014, I left the secure base job behind to run Strongwood full time. It was just my wife Anita and me with a Jeep Wrangler and an open trailer. I never had to look for work, it was always there. We eventually worked our way into a couple of Dodge Rams and enough tools for three crews, building more than just decks and gazebos,

a great reputation. The whole time I stayed faithful with my supplier of Townsend Building Supply.

In 2019, I was approached by Turner and Michael Townsend, and was told they were “looking to start an installed sales department.” I joined the Townsend Team on March 25, 2019. We changed the name from Strongwood Custom Outdoor Living to Strongwood by Townsend.

We still have the same great customer service, same five-star quality work with just a larger team to complete the mission.

Q. What did you learn in your Naval career that you use in your business today?

While in the military, I was a senior enlisted and was a leader to upwards of 240+ Sailors and Marines. I am a father of six and I feel that making you a good father makes you a better leader and vice

versa. I was a military instructor for over 10 of my 21 years, teaching survival to SEALs, Marines, and pilots as well as boarding teams in the Persian Gulf.

All of this gave me the knowledge and faith to do whatever is thrown my way to succeed. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Philippians 4:13. That's where Strongwood comes from.

Q. What is your secret to success that enabled you to grow by 200% in the past two years?

- Better organized accounting system
- Trust of those running the company
- Great reputation throughout South Alabama.

Townsend has been around for 77 years and has history.

Q. How did YellaWood become one of your primary vendors?

I was called by Great Southern Wood Preserving and asked to participate in a new program called YellaSource. Since then, we have built a very close bond and through the YellaSource Project we continue to build awesome projects. We have developed a cohesive machine getting products from the manufacturing plant to the backyard project in a minimal amount of time with "Five Star" results.



Q. How has the pandemic affected your business?

Due to our stability, we were able to weather the storm. We had in-house employees and a great reputation. We were able to maneuver away from stagnant business. The need for our business was always there.

Q. What's ahead for your company?

We are planning to expand our consumer market in three states and work on residential outdoor living installs on the Gulf Coast.



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TAKING THE RIGHT steps now in your business can protect your bottom line both in the good times and in the bad, when you might need to weather the storm of a market downturn.

Prepare your business for the new normal

In October of 2020, several months into the COVID era, I had a conversation with a buyer for a large building supply company that has multiple locations. I had concerns with what was happening in the industry and was just wishing for things to get back to normal.

I asked him if he thought that pricing and availability issues would begin to correct over the winter and if we would begin to see things returning closer to normal in the spring of 2021. His answer was that it would not and that it would continue to get worse. He stated that prices would continue to increase and availability would become more of a problem.

I then asked when and what it would take for us to get back to normal. His answer: “It’s not likely to get back to the pre-COVID prices but a new norm will eventually be established. When I’m not sure. If it was to get back down to pre-Covid prices, you probably wouldn’t like what it takes to get us there.”

At the time, I didn’t fully realize the impact that COVID would have. As I researched it further, I realized there was a perfect storm in place as several other factors were in play.

I learned that there are only four major providers that produce 80% of resins in the U.S. with 20% being imported. These are located in Louisiana and Texas. Louisiana was hit with hurricanes and floods. Texas was hit with winter

storms causing power outages. Much of the plant equipment had to be disassembled and cleaned as mixes clogged the lines, taking the facility offline for weeks. This impacted production for resin and engineered lumber facilities.

There were also several lumber mill and engineered lumber plant disruptions due to fires and other incidents, increased extended unemployment benefits that kept labor at bay, transportation issues, and increased fuel cost. Likely there was some market manipulation as well. These combinations wreaked havoc on the industry.

I mention all of the above as a recap of what contributed to the cost and availability aspects of material. What wasn’t impacted in a negative way was the demand for building and remodeling projects. Interest rates stayed low and most contractors enjoyed a surplus building period. Price increases for the most part were processed, digested, and accepted with homeowners and homebuyers.

Based on the previous factors, many believed that at some point in 2022 we would ease back into rhythm, things would settle down, and we would begin to find the new norm in pricing and availability. Most believed that sawn lumber and engineered lumber prices would settle back down, but at a higher base price than pre-COVID rates. Some believed that resin products, such as decking products and PVC, would not drop and would

stay higher due to other factors.

But we've continued to have new ingredients added into the recipe. This includes unfortunate worldwide events along with a continuation of certain politics. This mix has not only extended the problem but made it worse. Ridiculously high fuel costs hurt our personal budgets as well as product transportation. Inflation has increased dramatically. Interest rates have spiked, affecting homebuyers negatively.

I write this piece at a time when some economists are predicting a possible slowdown at some point in the next two years. Yet, consumer confidence in the economy can be a big factor in a market shift. Just the talk of a downturn unnerves many. It brings back to mind what my friend told me that night: "If it was to get back down to pre-COVID prices, you probably won't like what it takes to get us there."

The objective of this piece is to stress the importance of maintaining the fundamentals that allow businesses to stay strong during good times and survive during tougher times. I'm not an economist so I don't pretend to be able to predict the future. If a downturn occurs, hopefully it will be short lived. Most savvy operators will adjust, plan, and ride this out.

Unfortunately, when times are good—as they've been for the past two years—some become complacent and are less efficient because jobs, cash flow, and profit have been easy to come by. Weaknesses in a company's processes and operations show up when times are tough. For example: Some that count on referrals only, may struggle more than others who have websites and balance with marketing that generates more lead opportunities as demand shrinks and customers become more selective. It's the contractors that separate themselves and stand out that get the most opportunities. Those that have not been charging a premium through good times may not have the resources or reserves to function through a tough period.

Tightening up budgets and operating as lean and efficiently as possible should be a basic practice all the time, but now for sure is a time to adopt that mindset, if you haven't already. Where slippage of a few margin points in the past might have been tolerable, every point matters when net margins constrict. Preparing for a storm would be wise, regardless if it's a short thunderstorm or a Category 5 hurricane.

Evaluate your means of operating and identify systems that might help you streamline aspects that better help time management and deliveries. Look for ways to trim cost without compromising quality and service. If you do invest back into your company, make sure it's in areas that have immediate impacts.

Part of being a business owner is adjusting to what the world delivers to you and keeping an eye on the horizon, not just what's in front of you, so you're always prepared.

So my revised "wish" is not for pre-COVID prices to return. My hopes now are for the inflation factors to drop and for an even rhythm for the industry to return, where availabilities, pricing, and interest rates are all within an acceptable range. I'm sure I'm not alone in these wishes.

Bobby Parks is a nationally known contractor who has delivered over \$40 million of outdoor living projects. He is founder and former owner of Peachtree Decks & Porches LLC and current president of BP Consulting & Design LLC.



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BRENDAN CASEY



LOVE OF FAMILY is the main reason why many builders get up each morning, including: [1] Brendan Casey with his wife Dianna, both of Casey Fence & Deck; [2] Levi Tippets of TC Decks of the Salt Lake City area, shown with his family; [3] Mike Mitchell of Monee, IL.-based Mitchell Construction, with his family, and [4] Andy Henley of Uniontown, OH.-based Hen-House Decks with his family. It's also why Henley [5] sponsors his son's baseball team. (Photos by Casey, Tippets, Mitchell, Henley)

Who do you work for?

Deck specialist, occasional deck builder, wood butcher, “Bob in his Beater”—we have gotten into this business for a multitude of personal reasons, but in it all there is one resounding and unanimous purpose: to provide a better life and legacy for ourselves and our families.

For many of us, our goal is to make the world a little easier, safer, and more comfortable than it was for us.

We wake up between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. every morning to get our day started. We have crews to get working, sales calls to make, invoices to check, orders to verify and send to suppliers, quotes to provide, business associates to meet, luncheons, dinners, seminars, expos, work travel, plant tours, and much more.

We are putting in 80- to 90-hour workweeks in the busy season only to joke about how easy normal people have it with a 40-hour workweek. We justify this to ourselves by declaring that we are doing all of this for our family (the people we actually see less than we do our clients and employees).

The people at the lumberyard know our schedules better than our families do.

Up until 11 p.m. or midnight crunching in “one more” bid in fear of not getting it submitted on time, or with the hopes of landing “one more” really good project. The rest of the house is in bed asleep where we should be. But, we tell ourselves we are doing it for them.

The following morning, we start the cycle all over again. We’re gone before anyone but the family dog is out of bed, but we tell ourselves we are doing it for them.

We justify that 90-hour workweek every time we land another big project. We tell ourselves the juice was worth the squeeze; the payoff was worth the extra time. We hit that next milestone in the goals that we as business owners set for our companies. But did we remember to build in a few milestones for our families? We occasionally cut a day short and reward a crew with a lunch or dinner for their great effort, but do we remember to do the same for our families? We brutalize and

cripple our bodies and souls to become the best deck builder in our communities, but are we doing it at the risk of being the worst husband, father, or spouse without even realizing it? A few of us come out unscathed—most of us don't.

As Mike Mitchell of Mitchell Construction in the Chicago, IL., area said to me, "I write family time into my schedule book like they are appointments so I don't miss out on events and activities with my wife and daughters. The point is we have to find creative ways to balance the work/ family life dynamic in order for all this effort to be worthwhile."

When asked, "Who do you work for?" Mike's first response was showing me a picture of his family. Then he said, "This is who I work for." Mike went on to say, "I love what I'm doing. What keeps me going early in the morning before everyone wakes up and hours after they go to sleep is knowing that we are not only building quality products, but creating lasting memories for both our clients and our families."

Andy Henley of Hen-House Decks in Uniontown, OH., had this to say: "Being a business owner, it never shuts off. I work Monday through Sunday making sure the business operates correctly. I sponsor my son's baseball team so he can see our name on the back of his jersey. It's a proud moment for me, the little guy, and our family. It's also an opportunity for people to see that as Deck Specialists we are also family men. We're not just out here trying to get rich, but working for our families, supporting our communities and providing our family, with the best opportunities we can."

We pride ourselves on building our businesses, empires, or legacies to be the best that they can possibly be. On our own we want to be able to sit back and say, "look what I created"—and rightfully so. Unfortunately, there is a major fallacy in that thought process.

It has been said that "behind every great man, there's a great woman." I am here to happily attest that in my case that is 100% true. By no means would I have a business, much less a successful one, if it weren't for my wife. Dianna has been the catalyst behind every good decision we have made since the day we started the business—including the decision to start the business. I just wish I listened more often and many times, sooner. It was her insistence that provoked me into hanging up my deck building tools and focus more on developing a deck building business.

So many hammer swingers with sawdust in their veins can't get out of the way of their own egos and see the forest for the trees, allowing themselves the opportunity to become twice as successful. Without our families and their influence, would we be as motivated, or would we just go through the motions? So, who do you work for?

Be mindful of the standard you are setting and go be GREAT today.

With 35+ years experience in construction, Brendan Casey, with his wife Dianna, launched Casey Fence & Deck, Frederick, MD., fulfilling a growing need in the outdoor living market for an innovative, creative custom builder.



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Craftsman CMCD732
Brushless RP Hammer Drill
craftsman.com

Retail Price:
\$119 (tool alone)
\$179 (with batteries)
\$249 (combo kit)

Craftsman Brushless 20V Hammer Drill and Impact Driver

This may come as a surprise but there was a time before the big-box store, a time when the Internet was accessed via a screeching modem and AOL discs.

It was also a time when the options for purchasing tools looked very different than today. Professional builders had their local, independent lumberyard. Here they would sell a small number of high-quality, pro-grade, trade-specific tools. Many of these products would eventually go on to become the “boutique” tools of today.

For me, Piedmont Lumber in Pittsburg, CA., and Coliseum Redwood in Oakland, CA., were the yards where I made many purchases.

Sears, Roebuck & Co.-The Origin of “Craftsman”

The story of Sears and the Craftsman brand’s successful history is an oddly unlikely one.

Originally founded as the R. W. Sears Watch Co. by Richard W. Sears, he then partnered with watch repairman Alvah C. Roebuck, and the business was renamed Sears, Roebuck and Co. With an initial focus on only catalog sales, they developed their market of farmers and ranchers. This enabled their rapid growth and then expansion, opening the first



retail store in 1925. By 1933, the company had 400 stores across the country. After deciding they needed a brand to build their hardware products around, they purchased the rights to the Craftsman name from the Marion-Craftsman Tool Company for \$500 and Craftsman Tools was born.

Throughout the years, very few brands have been able to maintain a reputation so synonymous with quality, integrity and American pride. Incredibly, they never manufactured any of their own tools; instead they contracted with many of the finest tool makers of the time. Always with a focus on quality, the tools were never marketed to the “professional” user, instead choosing to focus more on what we today consider the “prosumer.”

However, nothing lasts forever and Sears was no different. With changes in the retail marketplace and consumer buying habits, the one-time behemoth eventually ceased operations. Yet, the Craftsman brand, which was still considered viable, was resurrected. Craftsman was retooled and relaunched. To date, they are improving existing products as well as introducing new tool lines, power tools and storage solutions, while maintaining the principles and values that have always underwritten the Craftsman tools name. Two of these recently relaunched tools are the Craftsman V20 Lithium Ion, 1/2” Brushless Hammer Drill (CMCD732) and the Craftsman V20 Lithium Ion, 1/4” Brushless Impact Driver (CMCF813).

The Craftsman V20 Brushless RP 1/2” Hammer Drill (CMCD732)

One of the first things I noticed was the overall heft and feel of each tool in my hand. The rubber molded over-grip and ergonomics make for a comfortable and secure hold on both tools during use.

After charging the 20V, 2Ah lithium ion battery, I verified the fully charged battery status via the battery fuel gauge, convenient to use in direct sunlight, with easily the brightest LED segments of any battery I have used to date. Also worth noting, the 2Ah lithium ion battery charged quickly, achieving a fully charged condition in under 55 minutes.

The Hammer Drill has a good-quality, metal, one-handed ratcheting keyless chuck with an automatic spindle lock.

Areas that I would like to see

improved are the use of a metal Mode Selection Collar and a metal Speed Selector actuator, allowing for easier operation of the two-speed gearbox.

The LED work light and variable speed trigger both performed as expected, with the trigger engaging smooth, progressive tool speed changes. The no-load RPM is 0 to 600 in low range and 0 to 1900 in high range. The no-load BPM is 0 to 32,200.

The tool alone weighs in at 2.5 lbs. sans battery. The 20V 2.0Ah Lithium Ion Battery (CMCB202) weighs 13.2 oz. so the tool ready to work weighs in at 3.7 lbs., which is comfortably lightweight for a 1/2” cordless hammer drill. Craftsman claims that the V20 platform achieves 20% more run time.

During the course of testing, it was noted that the brushless tools were faster to spin up and seemed to run longer than their brushed motor brethren. I had read somewhere that brushless motors are 60% more efficient and while I concede they are more efficient, for me to believe they are that much more efficient, I would need some proof.

Next, I popped it open to take a look at the interior assembly work. Examining the overall interior build quality and ingress protection, I also checked the neatness of the wiring, gauge used and the quality of the solder connections (shiny) at the battery and motor connections, which are both

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Craftsman CMCF813
V20 Brushless RP Cordless
1/4" Impact Driver
craftsman.com

high-current draw. I also identified the steps taken to achieve ingress protection and to what level, confirming that it is consistent with the stated IP rating. Ideally, the electronic components are completely potted in a specialty epoxy resin, known as a conformal coating. This ensures the sensitive electronics are waterproof, dust proof and protected. The Craftsman Tools use a urethane sealant as a conformal coating which is equally protective.

The Craftsman V20 Brushless RP Cordless 1/4" Impact Driver (CMCF813)

Nimble and comfortable in hand, with good ergonomics and rubber overmold grip, well-balanced and lightweight with the 2.0 Ah battery, the Craftsman V20 Brushless Cordless RP 1/4" Impact Driver is a pleasure to use. A middle-of-the-road power output is adequate for everything that would be expected of this tool. A pleasant side effect of the moderated power output is that the tool is not exceedingly loud or obnoxious during use.

Craftsman surely has the prosumer identified as their target market. Feeling suspiciously DeWalt-like during use, this is no surprise really given that both DeWalt and Craftsman are brandmates under the parentage of Stanley Black & Decker (SBC). What is surprising is why Craftsman has three nearly identical impact drivers in the lineup, positioned to directly compete with each other. Those models are the CMCF810, the CMCF813

and the CMCF820 impact drivers.

The 810 and 813 are virtually the same tool with slightly different badging. The tool specs are identical, with the 20V 2.0 Ah battery fully charged and attached, both tools produced 2,800 rpm via brushless motors and output 1,500 in.-lbs. of max torque during use. Both the 810 and 813 (the subject of this review) tools were developed in the U.S., yet built in an ISO 9001-rated Chinese factory.

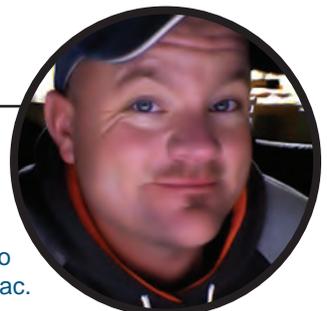
The CMCF820 Impact Driver is a step above, and considered the top of the line tool in the Impact Driver line. The features and specs are what set the CMCF820 driver apart. The 820 has a 2,900 rpm brushless motor, with an output of 1,700 lbs. of torque. The trigger-actuated triple LED lights encircling the chuck provide an enormous amount of light with very little shadow—a feature that I am thankful for nearly every time I use the tool. The three-speed adjustment switch, located above the battery, is a lesser used feature that the 820 incorporates and enables the user to modulate the speed and torque for driving various fasteners used in specialty applications.

The last real difference between the tools is very important to some consumers. While all three tools enjoy the same 36-month warranty, only the top-of-the-line CMCF820 is Made in the U.S.A. Given that the price points are virtually the same, with the 820 only costing an extra \$20, it is easily the best value purchase of the three competitors. The additional feature set, better performance and power, as well as being American made, add value worth far more than a few gallons of fuel.

Summary and Final Thoughts

Looking at the whole picture and taking into consideration the design, performance, and pricing, the relaunched Craftsman brands seem to fit best in the prosumer market. Within this market, however, it's an excellent value when you look at the performance and price against the entire 18V/20V landscape. The CMCD732 is available for \$119 bare tool, for \$179 with two 2.0 Ah batteries or in a combo kit with the CMCF813 Impact Driver for \$249. As good performing solid "prosumer" grade tools, the 1/2" Drill/Hammer Drill and the 1/4" impact driver represent a solid value and a sound pro-sumer or DIY purchase.

Marv Johnson is the principal of Deck Envy LLC, Gig Harbor, WA. Send comments and suggestions for product reviews to emjaybuilding@mac.



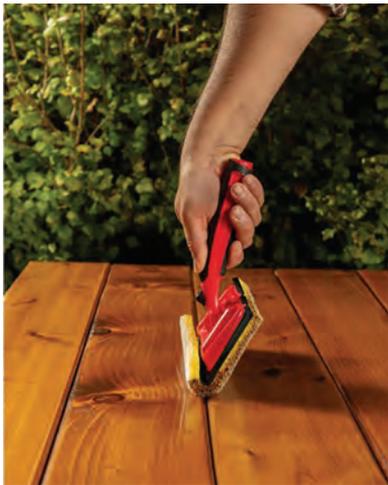
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Shur-Line's new 9" **Deck Pad with Detail Edge** is faster than a roller, smoother than a brush.

A detail-curved edge is perfect for in between deck and fence boards and small areas. Its tear-resistant foam pad helps prevent ripping due to screws, nails or rough wood. Refill pads fit most handles.

The tool can be used with all paints, stains, polyurethane and other hardwood floor or deck coatings without linting.

[shurline.com]



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MOSO North America's new 6" **unfinished fence boards** are tongue-and-groove, square edge, and available in 6' lengths.

It boasts a Class A fire rating and a 25-year warranty against rot and decay and is WUI listed in California.

[moso-bamboo.com]



Milwaukee Tool's new M18 Fuel Utility **Fencing Stapler** and 9-gauge galvanized staples allow for increased productivity, easier stapling, and all-day run-time on one battery.

Designed so fence installers can staple up to six times faster compared to installing with a hammer, the tool simplifies the two-handed hammer stapling operation into a one-handed battery-powered task with increased maneuverability and less strain from repetitive hammering.

[milwaukeetool.com]



Trex Seal Ledger Tape is an 11"-wide aluminum-lined **butyl tape** for use on the ledger board of a deck, combining the best performance features of metal and tape flashing in one easy-to-use product.

Reinforced with an aluminum liner, the tape covers the entire surface of the ledger board and creates a seamless seal over any gaps between the ledger and deck substructure for optimal protection against moisture penetration.

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[trexseal.com]



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Microjig's new **FitFinder 1/2 Gauge** allows users to find the exact center of stock with no measuring and no math. It draws on basic geometry and simple mechanics to automatically indicate the center point of pieces up to 3" thick.

It can be used at the shop when setting fences, transferring cutting depths, and creating joints.

The FitFinder uses a pair of legs that move together. When woodworkers set the P2 leg on top of the material, the P3 leg automatically moves to indicate the exact center of the stock. This measurement can be locked and used to set up machines or mark parts as needed.

It can also help center router bits, center stock on the lathe and more. It works for square, rectangular or round stock.

[microjig.com]



Spyder's new **impact-rated driver bits** featuring Mach-Blue Tough Tip technology are designed to last significantly longer and resist breakage better than typical impact-rated driver bits.

The new bits are third-party tested to ASME standards and shown to last up to 70 times longer than standard impact-rated driver bits.

Mach-Blue plating strengthens the drive surface and provides extreme corrosion protection. IMPACTIVE alloy tool steel and optimized torsion zones actively flex to dissipate peak impact forces. Each tip is precision machined for superior strength and fit, resisting cam-out, twisting and breakage.

[spyderproducts.com]

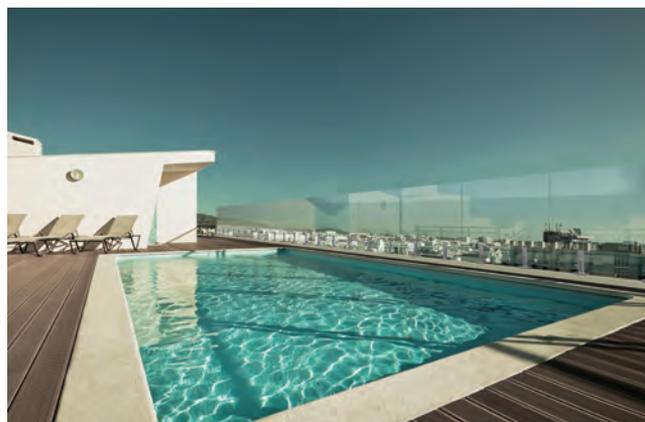


Feeney's next generation of its DesignRail **LED Rail Lighting Kit** simplifies installation and delivers added versatility, while also offering a longer product warranty.

Developed to install easily into DesignRail top or bottom rails without special tools, the kit now accommodates a single, continuous 55-ft. run and is field trimmable for optimal flexibility, with 4" cut lines for convenient reference.

The durable 24V wet location strip lights attach to the railing surface using integrated double-sided foam (VHB) tape for carefree installation. Waterproof crimp fittings provide protection from the elements, while plug and play connectors facilitate quick linking of lights and components.

[feeneyinc.com]



Trex Commercial's new Ocula **glass windscreen system** offers optimal versatility with its post-free, clamp-supported design.

The system is designed to divert wind while elevating architectural aesthetics. It comes in three standard heights: guardrail (43"), pool surround (48"), and balcony divider (60"), plus custom heights and multiple top cap and handrail options.

The stainless steel clamps can be paired with view-optimizing clear glass for a barely-there look, or frosted or fritted glass for more privacy.

[trexcommercial.com]

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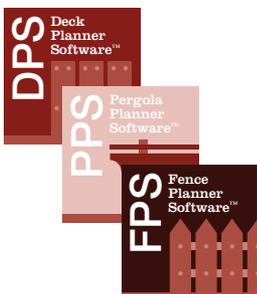
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Download free design software at go.strongtie.com/outdoorliving. Or call (800) 999-5099 to learn more.





Atlantis Rail Systems has launched a new **aluminum top rail** for its popular Spectrum cable railing system. Previously, the Spectrum System included the cable, fittings and posts, and customers supplied their own hardwood top rail.

The new Spectrum Top Rail System has a rectangular top rail and small assortment of adaptive fittings to handle most layouts. The system consists of square, 1-1/2"x1-1/2" stainless steel powder-coated posts that can be fascia- or surface-mounted and an extruded aluminum 1-5/8"x3-1/2" top rail. The top rail is offered in standard lengths of 4', 6' and 8'. Aluminum top rail and fittings are powder-coated in the standard and special Spectrum colors.

[atlantisrail.com]



Trex Co. is expanding its premium Transcend decking line with the introduction of Trex Transcend Lineage, boasting refined aesthetics, trend-forward colors, and enhanced performance features.

The **new boards** feature an elevated aesthetic with subtle, elegant graining for an unmatched natural appearance. Available in two new color options (Rainier, an airy mountain grey, and Biscayne, a light coastal brown), they are engineered with heat-mitigating technology in the shell to reflect the sun and keep boards cooler than other composite decking offerings of a similar color.

Boards come in 1x6 square and grooved profiles—square-edge in 16' and 20' lengths, grooved in 12', 16' and 20' lengths.

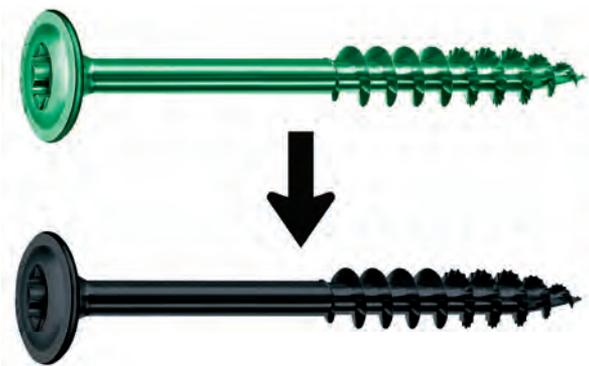
[trex.com]



DeWalt's new Elite Series **accessories line** features a full portfolio of circular saw blades, hole saws, reciprocating saw blades, diamond masonry cutting blades, abrasives and masonry drilling accessories designed to deliver groundbreaking industry performance, exceptional strength, and long life for professional users.

The full portfolio includes longer-life circular saw blades, metal-cutting wheels, demolition and metal-cutting carbide reciprocating saw blades, metal-cutting carbide-tipped hole saws, multi-material hole saws, SDS Max and SDS Plus 4C masonry drill bits, flap discs, and diamond blades.

[dewalt.com]



Spax Powerlags **engineered fasteners** are getting a colorful new look this season.

The fasteners will transition from green to a black top coat, based on customers' preference for black to provide an attractive appearance and to match with other products.

This High Corrosion Resistance coating adds a double barrier. First plated with a zinc base coat, then finished with a durable top coat, the structural wood screws are engineered, tested and inspected to hold up to the harshest conditions.

[spax.us]



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Barrette Breaks Ground in Florida

Barrette Outdoor Living broke ground at a 175,000 sq. ft. PVC manufacturing plant located along Brooksville Tampa Bay Regional Airport Rail Park, just north of Tampa Bay, FL.

Expected to be completed by early 2023, the new plant will bring upwards of 170 new jobs and will complement the company's existing 300,000 sq. ft. aluminum manufacturing and warehouse facilities located nearby.

The Brooksville plant is designed to handle PVC compounding, in addition to vinyl extrusion, fabrication and product assembly. The plant will also feature a PVC recycling center—part of Barrette Outdoor Living's GreenWays Recycling Program. The program works with customers to collect



BARRETTE breaks ground on its Brooksville, FL., recycling plant that will bring nearly 170 new jobs to the region.

recyclable PVC materials that are then processed and used as substrate in the firm's vinyl products. Once operational, the Brooksville recycling center is forecast to process and reuse up to 40 million lbs. of vinyl/PVC scrap material annually.

To further align with the company's sustainability initiatives, the plant has direct access to a CSX rail line. The direct-to-plant rail delivery eliminates the need for additional transportation methods, helping to reduce the company's carbon footprint.

"Being able to say our vinyl products are made in the USA using recycled material and eco-friendly manufacturing processes are great sources of pride for our company," said Jean desAutels, CEO of Barrette.

In addition, energy efficient lighting and machinery will be installed throughout the plant, including a closed-loop process water system and centralized water-cooled chiller system. The possibility of installing a rooftop solar array is also being explored for 2024.

"This expansion allows us to better service our customers—not only in terms of capacity, but also in terms of proximity," said desAutels.

Trex Signs Up Materials Supplier

Trex Co. has reached an agreement with recycling company Arkansas Poly & Printing (AP&P), Van Buren, AR., to supply Trex with more than 1.2 million pounds a year of scrap plastic to feed the manufacturer's Little Rock, AR., plant when it begins production in January 2024.

The agreement will increase sustainability efforts for both manufacturers in the state and reinforce Trex's commitment to supporting Arkansas-based suppliers.

AP&P co-owner Sarah Diebold noted the Trex partnership will increase employment at the 70,000-sq.-ft. Van Buren plant and enhance sustainability efforts.

"When we bought the company, we wanted to make sustainability a focus," she said. "Instead of putting our scrap in a landfill, we wanted to partner with somebody who could convert it to something else. All of our scrap from our production runs...will ultimately go from Van Buren to Little Rock and Trex will use it to make outdoor products. This really made an excellent fit for us."

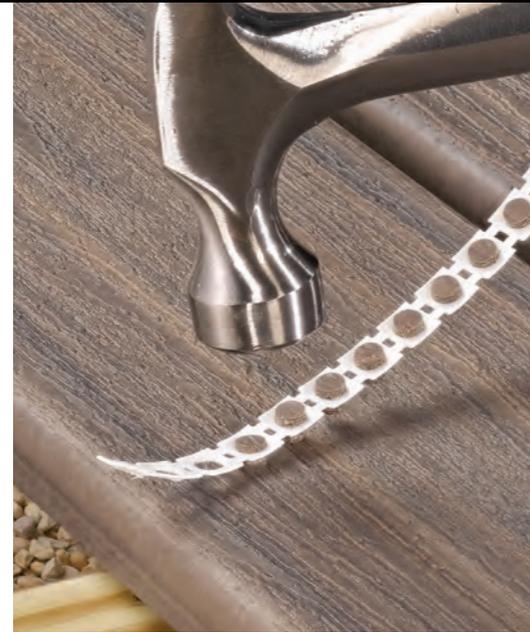
Trex, which has manufacturing operations in Virginia and Nevada, is scheduled to create more than 500 new jobs at the facility it is building on a 289-acre site at the Port of Little Rock.

"When we move to Little Rock we'll have a supply that's basically right there," said Stephanie Hicks, materials sourcing manager for Trex. "It's going to be a huge asset to have suppliers coming out of the Midwest and in Arkansas to be able to supply our plant."

A byproduct of AP&P's production process is the creation of scrap plastic, which today is bundled and shipped to a Trex plant in Virginia. Once the Little Rock plant opens, sustainability efforts will receive a boost by further reducing the carbon footprint required to send the scrap plastic to the East Coast.

"Commercial partners like Arkansas Poly are essential to Trex's sourcing efforts," Zach Lauer, supply chain VP for Trex, said in a news release announcing the partnership. "We are excited to join forces with a company that shares our vision of driving recycling for plastic films and pleased to be establishing meaningful connections with our new neighbors in Arkansas."

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Home and Garden Expo of Oklahoma

When: July 22-24

Where: The Exchange Center at Expo Square, Tulsa, OK.

What: The three-day show features outdoor living, home companies, and much more.

More info: coxradiotulsa.com

Northeast Georgia Home and Garden Show - Young Harris

When: July 23-24

Where: Towns County Recreation and Conference Center, Young Harris, GA.

What: Home improvement, landscaping, and pool products and services will be on display.

More info: expomanagementinc.com/north-east-georgia

Montgomery County Home & Outdoor Living Show

When: Aug. 20-21

Where: The Lone Star Convention & Expo Center, Conroe, TX.

What: The show features over 100 exhibitors in the

home improvement and outdoor living space. All active duty military personnel, veterans, fire, police and first responders receive free admission.

More info: www.texwoodshows.com/live-shows/montgomery-show

Greater Cincinnati House & Outdoor Living Show

When: Aug. 20-22

Where: Sharonville Convention Center, Cincinnati, OH.

What: Knowledgeable builders gather for a three-day expo featuring the latest in exterior products that are trending in outdoor living spaces.

More info: www.homeshowcenter.com

Central Florida Home Expo

When: Aug. 27-28

Where: Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL.

What: The event provides a place for builders to meet with homeowners interested in home improvement.

More info: orlandohomeexpo.com



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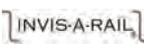
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