

Window Of Opportunity

Veteran builder sheds light on how mods are working for him.



A long-held assumption is that builders are averse to changing the way they do business—they're as inflexible as concrete after the two-week cure. But the truth is veteran builders are wise enough to explore alternative systems of constructions, especially if a system can give them an edge in a competitive market.

After more than 20 years in the development and building business, Walt Furrow

FROM HUD CODE TO MOD

Once upon a time, Widewater Village was zoned and approved for manufactured homes meeting the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) code. But a look at the bedroom community's buyers caused the developer, EST LLC, to target a much more upscale buyer.

By going modular, the developer targets a far different profile. Buyers from the

with few customizations.

"My concept is to keep it simple. What I like to do is to build value into the home through the floor plan and load up on usable square footage. It's difficult to be strictly custom in this price range of home, so I give people what they want in the structure," says Furrow.

His homes include two-story designs with four bedrooms, two and a half baths, and living areas up to 2,400 sq.ft. Most designs include great rooms, custom fireplaces and an attached garage.

"We're retailing these for around \$450,000," says Furrow. "We'll do 45 to 50 homes this year. In total, we'll do about 45 modular and 15 site built this year."

ADVICE OFFERED

Furrow says the learning curve for mods isn't necessarily difficult, but it can take a few homes under your belt to understand scheduling, deliveries and the amount of finish work needed to complete a home.

"It's not completely easy by any means. There's still a lot of site work involved. Getting the house ready to sell, the kind of work that's needed, is very similar to remodeling," Furrow says. "So you only have to have two or three guys to do that work. That helps in this labor market."

Walt's Construction is closing on four or five homes each month. "We're doing OK," he says simply. ■

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has an intuitive grasp of the bottom-line realities in home construction. Three years ago he added moduls to his product mix, using Nationwide Custom Homes (Martinsville, VA) as his supplier.

"Moduls are the up-and-coming way to build. It's so hard to find good help these days. That's where moduls can be a big advantage," says Furrow, owner of Walt's Construction. "About 80% of the homes we build are modular. I'm still doing some stick building, mainly in West Virginia, where there's more labor availability."



Walt Furrow

Furrow built a handful of mods before he was invited to participate in a planned community in Stafford County, VA. Called Widewater Village, the project is unique because the entire 435-lot community is dedicated to strictly modular development.

Washington, DC, market demand upscale amenities they've grown to expect—9' ceilings, two-story open foyers, hardwood floors and stairs, crown moldings and other bells and whistles. The homes are also constructed to traditional site-building codes. As a result, they look as if they were site built. But they are completed in a fraction of the time compared to site building. A total of three builders are using moduls in this development, with full build-out expected in the latter half of 2006.

Sticking with his production builder's roots, Furrow says he concentrates on giving the buyer solid value. This translates into quick cycle times on spec homes and offering buyers a lot of volume

