Honest Stock - Honest Goods - Honest Labor - Honest Wages - Honest Value

The 50’s and 60’s saw a resurgence in pre-cut homes. Companies like Lewis’ Liberty Homes and Aladdin saw their business rekindled as returning GI’s and the baby boom generation wanted homes in the suburbs for themselves.

The pre-cut housing industry faced two major challenges in the post-war decades entering mass developers and manufactured homes: large scale developers and the manufactured home business.

Developers like Abraham Levitt and his sons (William and Alfred) changed the way homes were being built. They studied and adopted the principles of the efficiency movement popular at the turn of the century which was perfected by Henry Ford. They broke down the process of constructing a house into 27 identifiable steps and then taught each crew to perform one step. They then built houses sixty feet apart so the crew just had to move next door to start their next job. This efficiency in labor helped the Levitts to compete with the pre-cut homes on cost.

The manufactured home industry has its origins in the “trailer” homes of the early 20th century. Built primarily for camping, trailers became larger and in greater demand after WWII. In 1976, Congress passed a bill to regulate the industry and in 1980 introduced the term manufactured housing into the lexicon. These factory built houses are constructed and then transported to their site where they are installed on piers and skirted. Today’s manufactured housing industry has added modular homes to their inventory. Modular homes are partially constructed in a factory and then receive final assembly at the site. While pre-cut homes have virtually vanished from the American building scene, modular homes have taken their place and continue today to provide affordable housing for a portion of the American population.

PTN is pleased to announce this year’s IPTW Keynote Speaker, Matt Crawford, author of “Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work.”

Matt attended the University of California at Santa Barbara where he majored in physics. He eventually earned a PhD in political philosophy from the University of Chicago specializing in ancient political thought. He currently serves as a senior fellow at the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. Matt also fabricates parts for custom motorcycles at his shop, Reclaimed Vehicle Fabrication Laboratory, an offshoot of his 2002 motorcycle repair business, Shocko Mo to, which he started in Richmond, VA.

Matt’s book “Shop Class,” won numerous awards when it was released in 2009 including being listed as one of Publisher’s Weekly Ten Best Books of 2009; Vanity Fair’s Top Ten Books of 2009; and the New York Time’s Book Review Notable Book of 2009. In addition, it was the winner of the Borders Original Voices Award for Nonfiction.

“A powerful case for the special value of skilled work that requires the use of one’s hands,” stated the Wall Street Journal.

“(Crawford) is onto something big in Shop Class, something about how the national culture has gotten so disdainful of physical labor that it is losing some basic precepts of how to live a contented (and competent) life,” said Neely Tucker in the Washington Post.

Just three days after publication, “Shop Class” reached number 23 on the New York Times bestseller list. Within five weeks, the book went through five printings.

Currently, Matt is scheduled to speak on Friday afternoon, prior to the annual Pub Crawl.
The 2016 International Preservation Trades Workshop (IPTW) will be held at Clermont Farm in Berryville, VA on September 9-11, 2016. A preconference workshop on masonry will be held prior to the start of the conference. The National Barn Alliance (NBA) will join us this year and hold their annual meeting at the same time, allowing PTN attendees the opportunity to attend NBA presentations and NBA attendees access to IPTW demonstrations. The 2016 IPTW will be held at Clermont Farm, a sprawling agronomic property that has been owned by only four families in its long history. It was acquired by the first owner, Thomas Fairfax, in 1719, as part of a 5,200 acre land grant. In 1819, the McCormick family bought the farm and in 1823 built the slave quarters which was recently restored as part of an HistoricCorps project. In 1980, the farm was donated to the Virginia Department of Historic Resources to be preserved and retained as an agricultural property. The site features a collection of agricultural buildings and the original house. Parking will be available on-site and attendees will have access to the entire property. The site is located approximately 30 minutes east of Winchester, VA. Set-up and demonstrator move-in will occur on Thursday, September 8th with an evening reception for Sponsors, Exhibitors, Volunteers, and Demonstrators. The IPTW will kick-off Friday morning with welcoming remarks, followed by two sessions in the morning, catered lunch, and two sessions in the afternoon. Matt Crawford will deliver the keynote in the Main Tent followed by the annual Pub Crawl in downtown historic Winchester, VA. Saturday will begin with a pair of sessions in the morning, catered lunch, a pair of sessions in the afternoon, and then the annual dinner and auction to be held on-site. The event closes with a pair of sessions on Sunday morning. Each session will consist of up to ten demonstrators who will demonstrate a specific aspect of their craft for approximately 90 minutes. As with past IPTWs, each demonstrator will be scheduled to present twice during the event in case you miss them the first time. Each track will have their demonstrators randomly assigned to allow maximum access.

If you have never attended an IPTW, attendees typically either attend an entire demonstration from start-to-finish or roam from tent-to-tent observing all the demonstrators during any given session. Demonstrations at IPTW are very personal and informal with a lot of questions and even some one-on-one time with the demonstrator. This makes for a unique learning experience unmatched by other conference formats.

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(continued on page 9)
The President’s Page

It seem 2016 is just flying by. We’re less than two months from the IPTW in Berryville. Registration has gone live on the website, so head over and register. There are many good things shaping up for this IPTW, so mark your calendars. I hope to see you all there. There are changes in store for the organization and I’d like to hear your opinions about these things. PTN should be guided by our membership, and that only happens when people use their voices. So, come, meet with your Board, let us know your concerns and let’s take PTN into the next twenty years together.

We are still looking for demonstrators and sponsors for the IPTW, so feel free to reach out to me or Kassman if you’re interested in doing either. As we have several other trades organizations sponsoring, or attending, I’m planning on having a roundtable discussion to figure out how PTN can work with these other groups to mutually strengthen our relationships and positions. All members will be welcome, so look for it on the schedule when it gets posted. Also, an event like IPTW does not happen without the hard work of many, so we are looking for volunteers to help out. If you’d like to do so, please email me.

The scholarship committee will be deciding on the five recipients of the Misia Leonard scholarships next week, and we will be happy to help these students attend the IPTW. They will be featured in the next newsletter, and probably on our Facebook page.

Several Board seats are becoming vacant at the IPTW and we are looking for new Board members. Both Dave Mertz and Sam Newton have served two terms and are setting off. Both have been invaluable assets to the organization and will be missed. PTN is a volunteer run organization, so remember that many hands make lighter work. We are also looking for people to be involved in our committees. If you have any interest in either the Board, or a committee, please reach out to any member of the current Board.

Since the beginning of the year we’ve been working on getting our finances more transparent and making our Board more accessible. We’ve been updating our website and switching our emails/file sharing to a Google platform, which has been helping. We are going through years of files to try to streamline some of our historical information. We are also looking to invest in new promotional materials, so keep an eye out for those. It may seem like there are a bunch of exciting things in the works, and there are! Many of them will be revealed and discussed in Virginia, so I hope to see you all there.

Until next time,
Ian Stewart, President

PTN Welcomes these new members since our last newsletter!

Bruce Blanchard, Waltham, MA
Peter Bank, Duluth, MN
Janet Booth, Brooklyn, CT
Colleen Chapin, Waltham, MA
Michael Cuba, Stockton, NJ
Virginia Gerrish, Warrenton, VA
Benjamin Hoaziv, Waltham, MA
Rolf Hagberg, Duluth, MN
Danee Peckler, Fredricksburg, VA
Sherry Rogers-Frost, Fairfield, PA
Larry Seaboyer, Hull, MA

“Bring a Friend to PTN”

At the publication of this issue, PTN was holding steady with around 220 members currently listed in our membership database. Since membership is the heart of any “Network,” we are encouraging all members who will be attending the 20th Anniversary IPTW in Berryville in September, to “Bring a Friend to PTN.” All attendees at the IPTW will receive a one-year free membership in PTN and will be able to take advantage of all the benefits that PTN provides including access to the “Members Only” portion of the website and a subscription to PTN News. The goal of this initiative is to increase our membership to 250 members, a level that the organization hasn’t seen in some time.

We are not resting on our laurels either. The Membership Committee is looking for new ways in which to encourage new members to sign-up, bring back old members who have been unable to attend IPTWs and make sure that we provide enough value for the membership that current members want to keep on renewing. Any suggestions would be welcome.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

2016

July 13–16 : ABANA 2016 Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
June 17 : APT Masonry Cleaning Workshop, 2nd Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL.
June 21–23 : A Century of Design in the Parks: Preserving the Built Environment in National and State Parks, Santa Fe, NM.
July 12–14 : Field Documentation for Project Planning, NCPTT and PTN, Clermont Farm, Berryville, VA.
August 7–Sept. 2 : 2016 Pacific Northwest Preservation Field School, Mount Ranier National Park, Longmire, WA.
Sept. 9–11 : 2016 IPTW: 20 Years Under Our Belt, Clermont Farms, Berryville, VA.
Oct. 30–Nov. 2 : APT Annual Conference, San Antonio, TX.
Nov. 15–18 : National Preservation Conference, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Houston, TX.

2017

Belmont Students Tackle Three Summer Projects

The students in the Building Preservation/Restoration program at Belmont College will be working on three different buildings this summer according to instructor Cathie Senter.

Our first project will be to clean and restore the mullions located on the soffit of the Blue Church building. Contractors, currently working on stabilizing the building, have removed about three dozen of the architectural element and have had them shipped to the College for the students to restore.

The Blue Church is an 1837 Greek Revival building and one of the dozen of the architectural element and have had them shipped worldwide. They average about 30,000 visitors a year. Along with the re-roofing, students will be doing some minor wood repairs and replicating and installing some missing trim.

The second project will be on “Edemar,” also known as the Stifel Fine Arts Center, a division of Oglebay Institute, built between 1910 and 1914. The students will be working on prepping the steel framing of the porte cochere for restoration by removing rust from the beams and priming them to buy time for the organization to fund raise for future work. The students will also be restoring the wide wood railing along the front porch.

The final project will involve the re-roofing of two, small free-standing trolley stop shelters with cedar shingles at the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum in Washington, PA. The Museum opened in 1954 with three trolleys and today boasts a collection of near- ly 50 cars, with 150 active volunteers and over 600 members worldwide. They average about 30,000 visitors a year. Along with the re-roofing, students will be doing some minor wood repairs and replicating and installing some missing trim.

What other organizations do you dedicate time to?

I am currently a trustee of the Historic Charleston Foundation. I chair the committee for the Alien-Rhett House which is one of the house museums of Historic Charleston Foundation. I am also a member of the Preservation Society of Charleston, South Carolina Historical Society, APT, as well as PTN. Historic Charleston Foundation and the Preservation Society of Charleston are the two organizations that work tirelessly to protect the architecture of Charleston as well as the historic culture and urban environment. It is this mission that attracts me to these two groups. The battle to save historic structures and their details is never-ending here. APT is my source for information and research on new preservation techniques and dissertations on unique projects being done by craftsmen around North America. I give talks to undergrads and graduate students in the two preservation programs in Charleston on traditional tools and crafts.

What do you like about working in the trades?

What attracts me to the trades now is the same as what attracted me many years ago. It is an opportunity to create with one’s hands a building and associated detailing that will stand the test of time. I find it to be a continuing challenge to solve the problems of preservation, and to create on a level that comes close to the skilled mechanics that proceeded us. And at the end of the day I can always stand back and say I created that product and get a lot of pride.

Tell us a little about your family?

I met my wife, Scottie, in Charleston and was married here. I have two daughters, Eliza and Eleanor, who have grown up with the crafts. One is now a fashion designer in New York, and the other is an interior designer in Charleston. Scottie had worked alongside of me running the office end of the business as well as going on endless house tours and tolerating my obsession with collecting antique tools. Tool collector and dealer Bud Steere once told me that behind every great tool collection was a very patient wife.

We Need Your Auction Items!

Each year PTN raises money for the Misha Leonard Scholarship Fund by holding a silent and live auction at the annual IPTW dinner. In order to make it a success, we need your donations! Past items included, but are not limited to, old tools, trades related t-shirts and clothing, books related to architecture and the trades, and unique items produced by PTN members and guests like stained glass panels, stone carvings, etc. Architectural artifacts are also in demand, but make sure they are transportable. Exhibitors and Sponsors will often include some of their products for bid. There are also a handful of “gag” items that make the evening fun and a fair amount of location specific items like maple syrup from New England, a bottle of bourbon from Kentucky or a box of cut nails from Massachusetts. Most items can be checked in at the registration desk when you arrive for the IPTW or in the morning on the second day.

For those who cannot make it this year, please send any items included, but are not limited to, old tools, trades related t-shirts and clothing, books related to architecture and the trades, and unique items produced by PTN members and guests like stained glass panels, stone carvings, etc. Architectural artifacts are also in demand, but make sure they are transportable. Exhibitors and Sponsors will often include some of their products for bid. There are also a handful of “gag” items that make the evening fun and a fair amount of location specific items like maple syrup from New England, a bottle of bourbon from Kentucky or a box of cut nails from Massachusetts. Most items can be checked in at the registration desk when you arrive for the IPTW or in the morning on the second day.

For those who cannot make it this year, please send any items you would like to donate to Dave Mertz, Building Preservation Department, Belmont College, 68094 Hammond Road, St. Clairsville, OH 43950. Be sure to put a note inside or write IPTW on the box. Also, please estimate the approximate value of the items you are donating and the suggested starting bid price. Please check with your accountant regarding deducting your donation on your income taxes.

My background also is very helpful when uncovering the layers of history in a building and translating how it was constructed and in what era was the building built and altered.

What do you like least about working in the trades?

Perhaps the most frustrating part of the business is the administration of the company and the education of clients to understand the importance of preserving the early building they own. As Charleston has become a very costly city, it has attracted wealthy clientele that like the ambiance of the preserved cityscape, but do not necessarily appreciate the details and purity of the early structures.

And in your spare time…?

In our spare time, we work on the preservation of an 1842 Greek Revival house in Charleston, as well as an 1830 house in Berkeley County, north of the city. My personal projects are especially rewarding since I get to do plenty of hands-on work on them. And when time permits, we travel in order to – what else? – study architecture.

The Saturday evening will kick off with an open bar and the unvailing of the silent auction items, so get there early and bid often. A catered dinner will be followed by the presentation of the annual Askins Award, the top award given to those involved in the Preservation Trades. The award is named for Jim S. Askins, founder of the National Park Service Historic Preservation Training Center in Frederick, MD. The evening festivities will then get lively as the annual “Live Auction” takes place. The auctioning off of approximately 30 items selected from the auction donations have included in the past parts of Landmark Buildings like the White House or Lincoln Cathedral, hard to find historic tools, and specialty items brought by conference attendees from all across the country. We encourage all to drink, be merry, and bid often! Proceeds from the auction will go directly to the Misha Leonard Scholarship fund that is used to subsidize IPTW attendance for students and apprentices.

The cost to attend the 20th Anniversary IPTW is the same as last year. On-line registration is now open! Be sure to take advantage of early-bird registration rates. We appreciate all who can pre-register as this allows us to accurately predict the number of meals, t-shirts, conference notebooks, etc. that we will need. We are expecting a large turnout for this 20th anniver- sary celebration so please come and join us!
I grew up in the Hudson Valley on a farm with several historic buildings. My father was always working on one of them when he wasn’t busy with farm work. I still remember his workshop in the basement which included a fully stocked Stanley tool cabinet; so, hand tools have been part of my life since an early age. On the farm, beside the farm chores, there was an abundance of construction work. I was always fascinated to watch the carpenters at work and to try my hand at carpentry.

At 15, I bought my first antique car and joined in with my brothers in the car restoration hobby. At one time I owned a 1933 Stanley tool cabinet; so, hand tools have been part of my life since an early age. On the farm, beside the farm chores, there was an abundance of construction work. I was always fascinated to watch the carpenters at work and to try my hand at carpentry.

In my last years of high school, I began to work off the farm with a builder who knew our family. This was my first opportunity to work alongside professional craftsmen. I trained under that were major influences on me. Buster Jenny, along with Carl and Ben, all worked for my first boss. They were old school craftsmen who only gave up tricks of the trade when they felt someone was worthy. This was the beginning of my professional carpentry skills. And along the journey I was blessed to be able to work with plasters, masons, millwright fabricators, blacksmiths and many others who passed along their hard earned knowledge.

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I have always had a fascination with the early trades. And as a builder in the preservation field, I am always exposed to the results of highly skilled craftsmen who primarily worked by hand. I have collected early hand tools for over 40 years. I occasionally get to use them in my business, and I make sure to know the purpose and procedures of all the tools in the collection. The collection goes from 13th century to 19th century and currently includes over 10,000 pieces.

I have been preserving and restoring historic homes in Charleston for 37 years and before that, I did preservation work in the Hudson Valley. I have made it my business to know the skills of all the trades involved in my projects. This makes the communication with the craftsmen easy, and when necessary, I get to pick up the tools and work on the project. In recent years, this has become more critical as my older craftsmen retire and there aren’t the skilled people to replace them. There is a constant training process in this business.

Why did you join PTN? I joined PTN because it is one of the few groups (maybe the only one) that promotes and documents the hand trades in this country. I have always had a fascination with the early trades. And as a builder in the preservation field, I am always exposed to the results of highly skilled craftsmen who primarily worked by hand. I have collected early hand tools for over 40 years. I occasionally get to use them in my business, and I make sure to know the purpose and procedures of all the tools in the collection. The collection goes from 13th century to 19th century and currently includes over 10,000 pieces.

Who has had the greatest influence on you as a tradesperson? There are a number of individuals who have influenced me. The first was a carpenter named Al Hogel who did work for my father. He was a fully trained carpenter who made carpentry look easy. I still remember the smell of white pine and linseed oil on his job sites. There were several carpenters who I trained under that were major influences on me. Buster Jenny, along with Carl and Ben, all worked for my first boss. They were old school craftsmen who only gave up tricks of the trade when they felt someone was worthy. This was the beginning of my professional carpentry skills. And along the journey I was blessed to be able to work with plasters, masons, millwright fabricators, blacksmiths and many others who passed along their hard earned knowledge.

What are you currently doing? Currently, I am the president of Woodglen Builders, a preservation firm in Charleston, South Carolina. I have been preserving and restoring historic homes in Charleston for 37 years and before that, I did preservation work in the Hudson Valley. I have made it my business to know the skills of all the trades involved in my projects. This makes the communication with the craftsmen easy, and when necessary, I get to pick up the tools and work on the project. In recent years, this has become more critical as my older craftsmen retire and there aren’t the skilled people to replace them. There is a constant training process in this business.

Learning curve as I worked to uncover the early processes used to create these great structures. Back in the 70’s there were far fewer resources for researching early crafts. I was offered a project in Charleston in the late 70’s and fell in love with the city, met my wife, and realized that the huge stock of historic homes would keep me busy for many years to come.

Joe Jenkins

The Slate Roof Bible, new Edition!

For most of us PTN ‘Elder Statesmen,’ Joe Jenkins is a known quantity. Joe was an active participant in the IPTWs of the first decade and was an early Akins Award recipient. He hasn’t attended the meetings as regularly in recent years, but not out of lack of interest; he has become a bit of a world traveler, researching traditional roofing methods and materials on the European continent and beyond. He founded the Slate Roofing Contractors Association and represents this group at many international meetings.

I have carried the first two editions of his ‘Slate Bible’ for years. The first edition was completed in 1997, more as an effort to ‘get everything about slate roofing down in writing’ (partly for his two sons), in case he fell off a roof and died! The second edition, published in 2003, was greatly expanded and featured many color illustrations. I have sold dozens of copies of this edition, and it is still in high demand to this day.

I spoke with Joe at great length about the new edition, its scope and focus, and we are both planning on making the new edition available at this year’s IPTW. I will bring several cases of the third edition for Joe to sign and personalize. We hope to see you this autumn at our 20th anniversary celebration!

[Slate]. Jenkins, Joseph C. The Slate Roof Bible, Everything You Need To Know About The World’s Finest Roof. White River Junction, VT: Joseph Jenkins, Inc., 2016. Third Edition. Quarto pp. iv, 374, indexed. Hundreds of illustrations, including color photographs, b/w construction details, and tables. Decorated Boards w/ Dust Jacket. New with New DJ. This is a 21 chapter, indexed and referenced book which includes detailed step-by-step repair instructions plus sources for slate roofing tools, equipment, materials and new and used slate. There is new information on international slates from Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Practical and informative, it is the bible of the industry. (17731) $50.00

I occasionally get to use them in my business, and I make sure to know the purpose and procedures of all the tools in the collection. The collection goes from 13th century to 19th century and currently includes over 10,000 pieces.
The Rise and Fall of Pre-Cut Housing in the United States

Through all of the 18th and most of the 19th century, all homes were custom built. Designs were produced by the owner, architect, or contractor (mason or carpenter) and buildings were built on-site using materials that initially were produced locally. Houses were typically simple in design and rectilinear in nature. The owners relied heavily on the artistic tradespeople to be able to articulate their thoughts into complex moldings and design details that were added to the simple plans. While most homes were simple and lacked significant ornamentation, the homes of the wealthy began to separate themselves from their poorer cousins in an attempt to mimic the English country homes from the Old World.

As the 19th century advanced, the introduction of the railroads allowed for company specialization and marketing in larger, regional areas. Wood was produced where old growth forests could be easily harvested, bricks were manufactured near high quality clay seams and stone was quarried from large, easily accessible seams of building stone. Companies began to specialize in architectural ornament. If you wanted an iron gate in the first half of the century, you went to a blacksmith and had one custom designed. Now in the 2nd half of the century, you could still have one custom designed, but you could also purchase stock designs from a plethora of metalworking firms. By the end of the century, enterprising companies like Sears and Roebuck, and Montgomery Ward, bought goods in bulk and sold them via a network of stores and catalogues.

With the advent of Rural Free Delivery in the last quarter of the 19th century, publishers began to print books of house plans, often drawn by architects who were under contract or who would supply designs for a fee. These “Plan Books” would often contain an order blank in the back which would allow the reader the opportunity to modify and purchase home plans from the company. In 1906, Aladdin Homes was founded in Bay City, MI by Otto and William Sovereign. Aladdin was built on the premise that all lumber would be pre-cut so that the contractor simply had to follow the plans and assemble it. Pre-cutting lumber reduced waste and significantly reduced construction time as building a house became more like building a plastic car model. At first, Aladdin contracted out their supply line to local lumber companies, but eventually purchased and operated their own mills. Sears, Roebuck and Company followed suit in 1908 by offering packaged homes and entered the true pre-cut market in 1915 with their “Honor Built” line. Lewis Manufacturing was hired to fabricate and ship Aladdin’s homes but a dispute in ownership rights led to Lewis losing the Aladdin contract. Since they owned the mills, they decided to get into the packaged housing business themselves by launching Lewis Homes in 1913, becoming Aladdin’s largest competitor. After a 1925 fire, Lewis Manufacturing renamed their pre-cut home business Liberty Homes.

In 1907 Gordon-Van Tine was created as a subsidiary of U.N. Roberts Company, a large lumber mill in Davenport, IA, as their primary building products division. They entered the packaged housing market in 1912 and launched their own line of pre-cut homes in 1916. Montgomery Wards, attempting to keep pace with Sears, launched their own line of pre-cut homes in 1909 and contracted with Gordon-Van Tine to manufacture and ship the components. Other companies like Pacific Ready Cut Homes (1918), Sterling Homes (1915) and Bennett Homes (1919) are just a few examples of the many companies who got into the ready cut housing market.

Because pre-cut homes took less time to construct and had less waste, they were cheaper to build than their custom home counterparts. These factors allowed the home ownership market to reach deeper into the blossoming middle class. It was also stated that because these companies were purchasing lumber on a large scale and milling it themselves, they could offer the material at a much cheaper cost than the local lumberyard. Home companies also began offering mortgages to gain a competitive edge in the market and to continue to reach new customers from the rental class.

The 1920’s and early 30’s were the heyday of the pre-cut housing boom. Unfortunately, the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression that followed caused many of the mortgages that were be held by the pre-cut companies to be foreclosed on. The demand for new homes also fell as the primary target market for pre-cut homes, the middle class, was hit hardest by the economic conditions of the decade. World War II added to the problem as many of the materials used for housing were now rationed. With millions of soldiers fighting the war, the U.S. housing market slumped even more. This bottoming out of the market would last about a decade. When Gil’s returned, armed with a guaranteed mortgage from the Veterans Administration, a new housing boom would take the country by storm. By that time, many of the companies, like Montgomery Ward, had gone out of the pre-cut home business.