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WORKING WITH CLIENTS TO MEET LEED CERTIFICATION GOALS

HUGH LOFTING TIMBER FRAMING



TIMBER FRAMER ADOPTS GREEN APPROACH AND EXPANDS MARKET FOCUS

by Daniel Casciato

Above: Working with oak that was felled locally, Hugh Lofting Timber Framing crafted this new barn for a client who uses it to house livestock and as a living classroom to teach children about farming.

HUGH LOFTING FOUNDED HUGH LOFTING Timber Framing over 30 years ago and has developed an outstanding reputation for crafting custom timber frame homes and structures throughout the United States. However, about five years ago Lofting contemplated retirement. "This is a younger man's business, with a lot of heavy, hard, dirty work," explains Lofting. "That, coupled with increased competition, was making it more difficult to make ends meet."

Yet, rather than retire, Lofting worked

with the company's LEED AP, Amy Cornelius, to develop a business plan that would help the company adapt to the changing needs of the marketplace. "We tried to insulate the company from demand fluctuations by expanding into the commercial market as well," Cornelius says. "We were focused on residential up until that point." The company branched out into three markets: barns, residential, and commercial. The strategy worked well. Today, half of the Kennett Square, PA-based timber framing company's \$2 million in

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revenues comes from the commercial marketplace.

“Timber framing has become very competitive,” says Lofting. “It’s tough because you have large, established companies with the money behind them to do the marketing. Then you have mid-sized companies like us, and then you have young and upcoming companies trying to break into the market. We get hit from both ends. That’s why we broadened our marketplace. We are now one of a handful of timber framers working in the commercial market that has experience working with and raising large glued-laminated and heavy timber projects.”

As a result of such business planning, the company reconfigured its administrative and marketing efforts to be more flexible. Moreover, the company has successfully responded to the sustainable movement. According to Cornelius, the sustainable movement has spurred a surge of interest from clients and their architects, as well as designers, to incorporate green elements and techniques into their timber frame projects.

Since its inception, Hugh Lofting Timber Framing has been committed to creating long lasting, energy-efficient homes and structures. Recently, it has focused on creating a culture of sustainability that permeates everything it does from purchasing paper to specifying and designing projects for clients. “In 2005, we timber framed the Philadelphia Zoo’s Big Cat Falls Exhibit,” says Lofting. “Although not designed to LEED standards, the project incorporated many sustainable elements. The project

inspired us to learn as much as we could. Since the zoo project the company has made a concerted effort to stay in front of the wave. Now we have a number of green projects under our belt.”

Cornelius notes that they have learned two important lessons as a result. “First, don’t wait for the market to come to you. Be aware of lifestyle trends in unrelated industries to identify future opportunities. And second, never put your business plan on the shelf—use it

HUGH LOFTING TIMBER FRAMING AT A GLANCE

LOCATION: Kennett Square, PA

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
Timber framing, residential, and commercial construction

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALES: \$2 million

SALES GROWTH IN 2007: 10%

EMPLOYEES: 8



Above: Living room of a timber frame home using sustainable wood.



“We have adopted the LEED model to make our operations and purchasing more sustainable.”

Amy Cornelius, LEED AP

as a daily reference guide to see where you are headed.”

Companies interested in sustainable practices can also receive assistance from the USGBC. Cornelius adds that in its LEED programs, the USGBC has developed a structured approach to design that it uses as a guide in helping clients think through green or sustainable issues affecting their projects. “We have adopted the LEED model to make our operations and purchasing more sustainable,” shares Cornelius, adding that the company now uses FSC-certified woods, structural insulated panels (SIPs), reclaimed, recycled, and local materials. The key to sustainability, Cornelius says, is “looking at timber framing as a holistic process that begins with a good, solid,

complete design, and carries through the selection of wood, to finishing the project.”

One of the company’s more exciting projects is the recently-introduced Eco Collection of Sustainable Homes. Designed in collaboration with local architects, these homes are built with open living areas and private away spaces, combining timber framing with SIPs construction to create drama, contain costs, and optimize comfort. Lofting adds that the collection incorporates many sustainable techniques, and is designed to meet the USGBC’s LEED for Homes criteria.

The company also encourages its clients to minimize their impact on the

Left: Located in Cape May, NJ, this boathouse features forest-reclaimed Douglas fir/Larch. Right: Dining room of a timber frame home using sustainable wood.

environment by using earth-friendly materials, limiting site disturbance, incorporating innovative storm water techniques, and carefully positioning the home on the property for natural ventilation and solar efficiency.

While the company currently plans to focus on building more LEED-H homes, in the long term, it wants to find a way to build timber frame projects that are more affordable. "I think right now the economy is worrying a lot of people," says Lofting. "The challenge for us is to make timber frame projects more affordable, without compromising structural integrity or beauty." GBQ