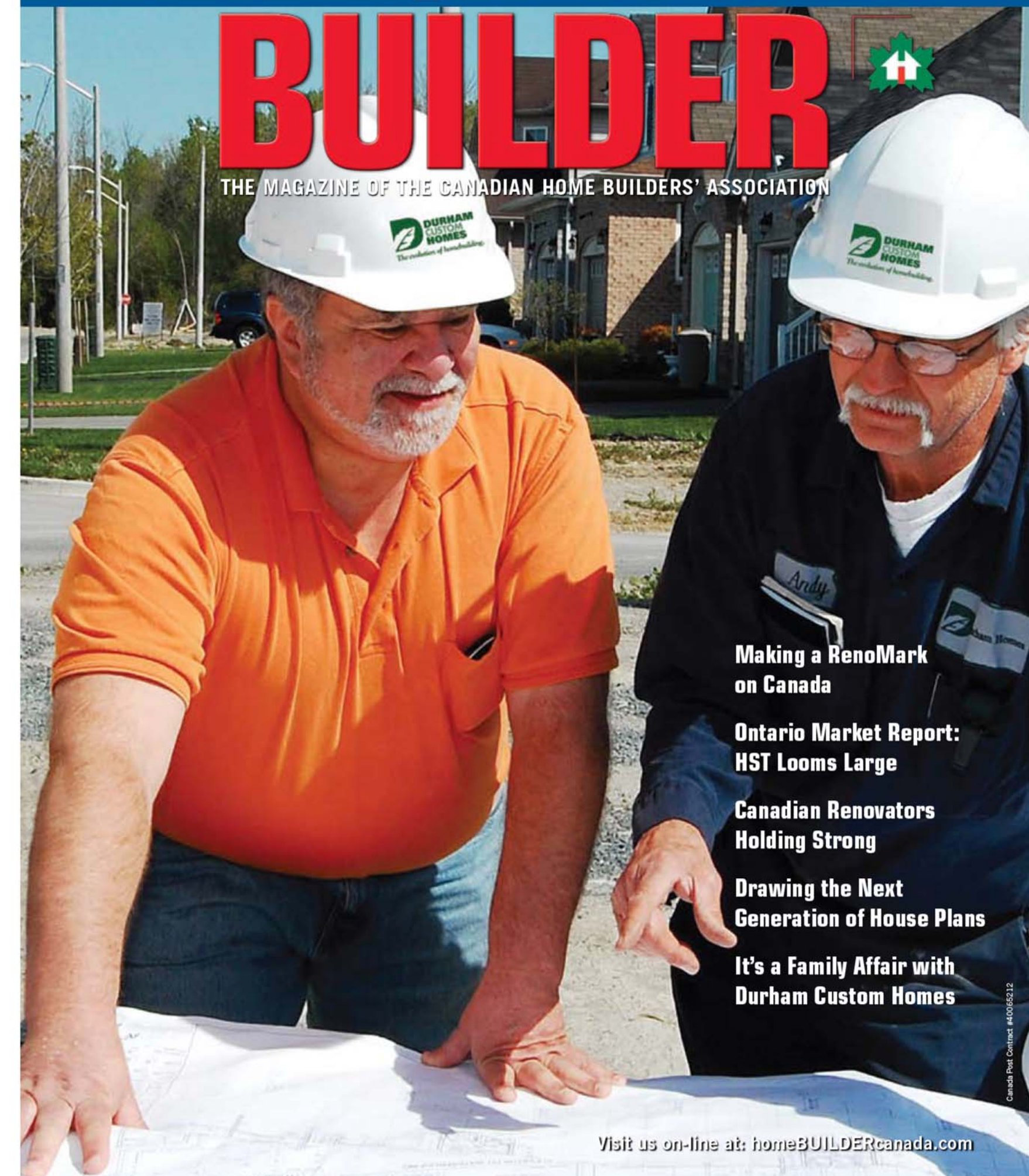


BUILDER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE CANADIAN HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION



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It's a Family Affair with Durham Custom Homes

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BUILDER PROFILE



Jeff Goldman discusses customization of a home with a prospective purchaser.

JOHN NEIL

It Must Be in the Genes

BY CHARLIE BLORE

Ten years ago, **JEFF GOLDMAN** wanted to reinvigorate **Durham Custom Homes**. The company has long had a solid reputation throughout Ontario's Golden Horseshoe. It's a reputation that wasn't won overnight, and one that the third-generation builder has only served to strengthen in his decade at the helm.

You see, the Goldman family has a long history with the Oshawa region. Durham Custom Homes was founded in 1950 by Jeff's father and grandfather — they were later joined by his father's younger brother. At the time, they were buying 50-foot lots at \$500 a pop, and building storey-and-a-half homes on them, complete with roughed-in second floors, which they would then sell for \$8,000.

It was a successful, family-run, community-minded business then, and it remains those things today.

"When I joined the business, my uncle arranged for a kind of get-to-know-you open house with our trades and suppliers," Goldman recalls. "Many of them were from family-run businesses themselves. And when I asked them how long their companies had been associated with us, almost to a person I would get the same response, which would be 'well it wasn't me, it was my father or my grandfather who dealt with your father or grandfather.' That kind of long standing association with trades and suppliers, I think speaks to a strong business relationship."

For his part, Jeff may have been born into the business, but it wasn't a role he immediately embraced. He earned himself a Masters degree in social work, rather than enter the company at a young age. From there he would go on to work in the Health Care industry until 1999. Only then did he decide to join the family business.

"[My father and uncle] had really done their thing, and by the time I joined they were kind of in a mode where they didn't have quite the same kind of energy to devote to the business that they had when they were younger," says Goldman. "So aside from learning the business, part of what I wanted to do was reinvigorate it."

Where's the Ramp?

One of the keys to any company's success is finding its niche in the market. For Goldman, that niche was found through a balance of flexibility and a commitment to quality.

"Some builders say 'Oh yeah, we'll do whatever you want.' But they'll never move a wall; that would change everything. We've always been open to the possibility of making modifications."

This willingness to make significant adjustments to floor plans, along with an attractive lineup of bungalow models, inadvertently made them a popular choice for home buyers with mobility issues. The most remarkable design feature of the accessible homes that Durham Custom Homes product is that from the outside looking in, you'd never know they were designed for residents with mobility issues. It's a conscious effort that was made to reflect the wishes of their customers.

All of the sudden, the company found itself putting in more and more roll-in coun-

ters, elevators, grab bars and so on.

The company came to discover a portion of the market that it felt was being inadequately serviced. Goldman found that the cost of retrofitting a home with accessible features was often prohibitive. It was a market new home builders were in a unique position to service, yet it was being largely ignored. Considering his company's willingness to accommodate on design and its experience in the field, Goldman saw an opportunity.

"Part of this comes back to my own orientation in terms of business and community responsibility. I think that we have a responsibility: if we can do it, we have the expertise and it's economically viable, then why not?"

They aren't just building accessible homes, mind you; they're building sustainable ones too. The company has been at the forefront of the green movement in Canadian residential construction for decades. They were a participant in the R-2000 project and are proud to say that, over the last three years, all their new homes have been built to be Energy Star compliant. In addition, Durham was the first Canadian production builder to enroll a GreenHouse Certified home.

"We've had purchasers come to us, because a heat recovery ventilator is not a sexy item," notes Goldman. "And they'll say 'Well we haven't built the house yet, and I'm not really interested in those things you have on the furnace there. Can I trade the value of those for an upgrade on the kitchen cabinetry?' And our answer is, with respect, no. We will not do it. Why? Because it's going to create more problems as time goes by and it's not the right way to build a house."

Industry Recognizes Team's Achievements

The building community has certainly recognized the work Durham Custom Homes has been doing. In January, the company was awarded three prizes by the EnerQuality Corporation: GreenHouse Builder of the Year, Energy Star for New Homes Builder of the Year, and Leader of the Year, which was presented to general manager, **VICTOR FUME**.

Then in April, the company was honoured by the Durham Region Home Builders' Association as its Tier 1 Builder of the Year — this after winning the 2007 Award for Technical Innovation from that same local HBA.

The recognition speaks to the company's hard work, along with that of their suppliers

and trades. Goldman underlines the latter's contribution as being attributable to a concerted effort to push each other.

"We've said to all these associates, this is where we're going — whether it is on the accessibility issue, green building practices or energy efficiency. Don't just join us, but help lead us in it. You tell us what's cutting edge and what makes sense. You tell us what's going on in your field. You should be leading us, not the other way around. It becomes a true team effort."

Ten years ago, Goldman wanted to reinvigorate Durham Custom Homes. He put the company on a clear path, challenged everyone involved to get on board and not just coast on the company name, but build on it. Given the results they've already achieved, would be hard to argue they haven't done just that. Not a bad start for the third-generation of Durham Custom Homes. ■