

BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION

MIDWEST

BUILDING A STRONGER REGION

THE WET THREAT

A well-insulated building envelope stops mold in its tracks. Page 10

Turner Construction
turns up the volume
in Kansas. Page 88



CUSTOM FIT

Orren Pickell Designers & Builders
meets homeowners' unique needs
with turnkey solutions. Page 40



Trusted Builder

+ Orren Pickell Designers & Builders shows how transparency in the business can ease the pressures of a tough economy. *By Brooke Infusino*

"The future should always be bright for building because nothing else can move forward without it."

> Orren Pickell, CEO

Orren Pickell Designers & Builders

www.pickellbuilders.com

Headquarters: Lake Bluff, Ill.

Services: Custom homebuilding

> **Few custom homebuilders are able** to tout the fact they've been around for 35 years, and even fewer can say they specialize in design/build construction. Orren Pickell, founder and CEO of Orren Pickell Designers & Builders (OPDB), can claim both.

"We have not only tried to build and grow the company, we have built it underneath us as we have grown," Pickell adds. "This business is about to be passed on to the second generation of ownership and we are proud of that. My daughter, Lisa Pickell, will be taking over operations."

The metamorphosis of the Lake Bluff, Ill.-based company from a hands-on builder into a design/builder took place until 1993. From that time on, the design side of the business has been equally as important as the quality construction it delivers. OPDB targets single-family custom homebuilding and remodeling projects in Illinois, southern Wisconsin and southwest Michigan.

At one time, OPDB had as many as 13 architects on staff. "We were one of the first to market design/build, and we felt that back in the early 1990s this was the direction construction was going in," Pickell explains. "Not only was the risk less, but it is more cost-effective. We were becoming much more highly diversified and we brought in high-end clients and that's what differentiated us."

Assertive Business Plan

Although economic times have changed significantly over the past four years, >>



Lake Bluff, Ill.-based Orren Pickell Designers & Builders delivers high-quality single-family custom homes and remodels in Illinois, southern Wisconsin and southwest Michigan.

>> Pickell doesn't necessarily view the recession in the negative light that many do. "We could see the change coming back in 2007," he says. "Really, every company can find a little fat to trim, and when the time came to renew our lease, we went into a smaller building and became a smaller company. Over the last several years, we have been profitable as a much smaller company."

Starting in 2009, home remodeling projects and second and third new homes kept OPDB busy.

"Fortunately, in the last one to two months, we have seen houses selling again," Pickell says. "The fear is starting to wane, and people are gaining back their confidence in the banking system. The

future should always be bright for building because nothing else can move forward without it."

In addition to downsizing, part of what makes Pickell successful at what he and his team do is providing a total, turnkey solution for its clients in the building process.

"Our customers want quality in how they are treated, in the design, and how things are handled in the field," he says. "Our client wants to be treated differently and get great value when they build. Value is not just cost; it's in service, timeliness, quality of the design and construction, and longevity of the product. That's what I've been going after since I started in 1975."



Clear-Cut Process

Transparency has been a crucial part of OPDB's success. To achieve this, Pickell's team closely manages the time and budget, and shows its clients how they manage each. In 2009, OPDB implemented a system to create personalized websites for each project. The client, subcontractor and OPDB can log onto the secure website to submit change orders and payments and track the schedule and view progress photos.

"We have opened our books to provide a transparent process for our clients," Pickell notes. "We can open up everything from the bid documents and show them every category and show them what type of margin we are making. It has made a lot of anxieties go away for about 30 percent of my clientele."

Today, OPDB employs six designers, four superintendents, and a purchasing and estimating department to the building efforts. With its superior construction and expert services, Pickell has all the in-house resources to efficiently handle every phase of the project on time and on budget. "Part of doing a good job is understanding who we report to here—which is the client," Pickell asserts.

When it comes to the design/build process at OPDB, the architect is the captain of the team through the development of the construction contract, Pickell explains. Once the client has accepted a home's proposal, the architect becomes the co-captain to the project's superintendent. ☺



OPDB's team includes six designers, four superintendents, and a purchasing and estimating department to take each project through completion.