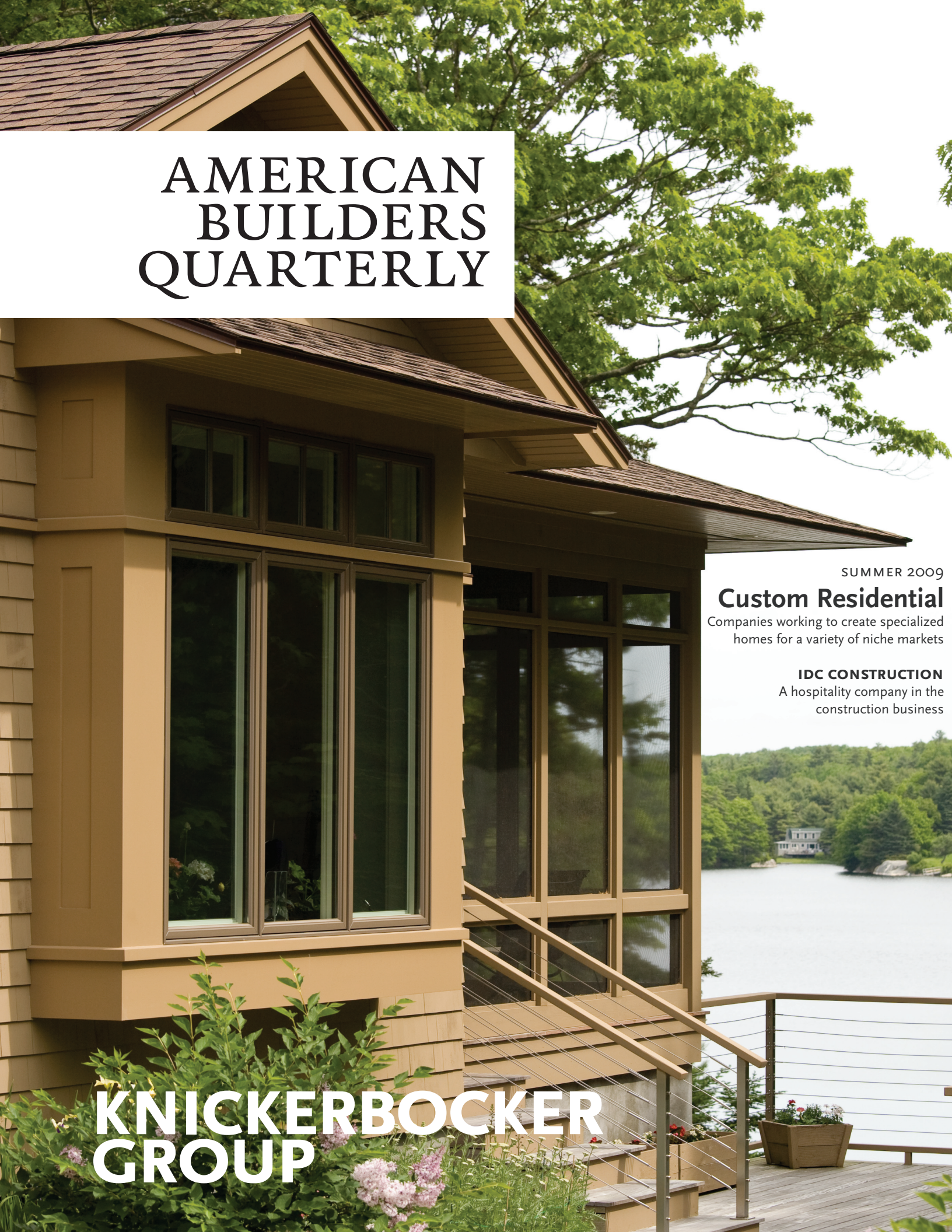


AMERICAN BUILDERS QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2009

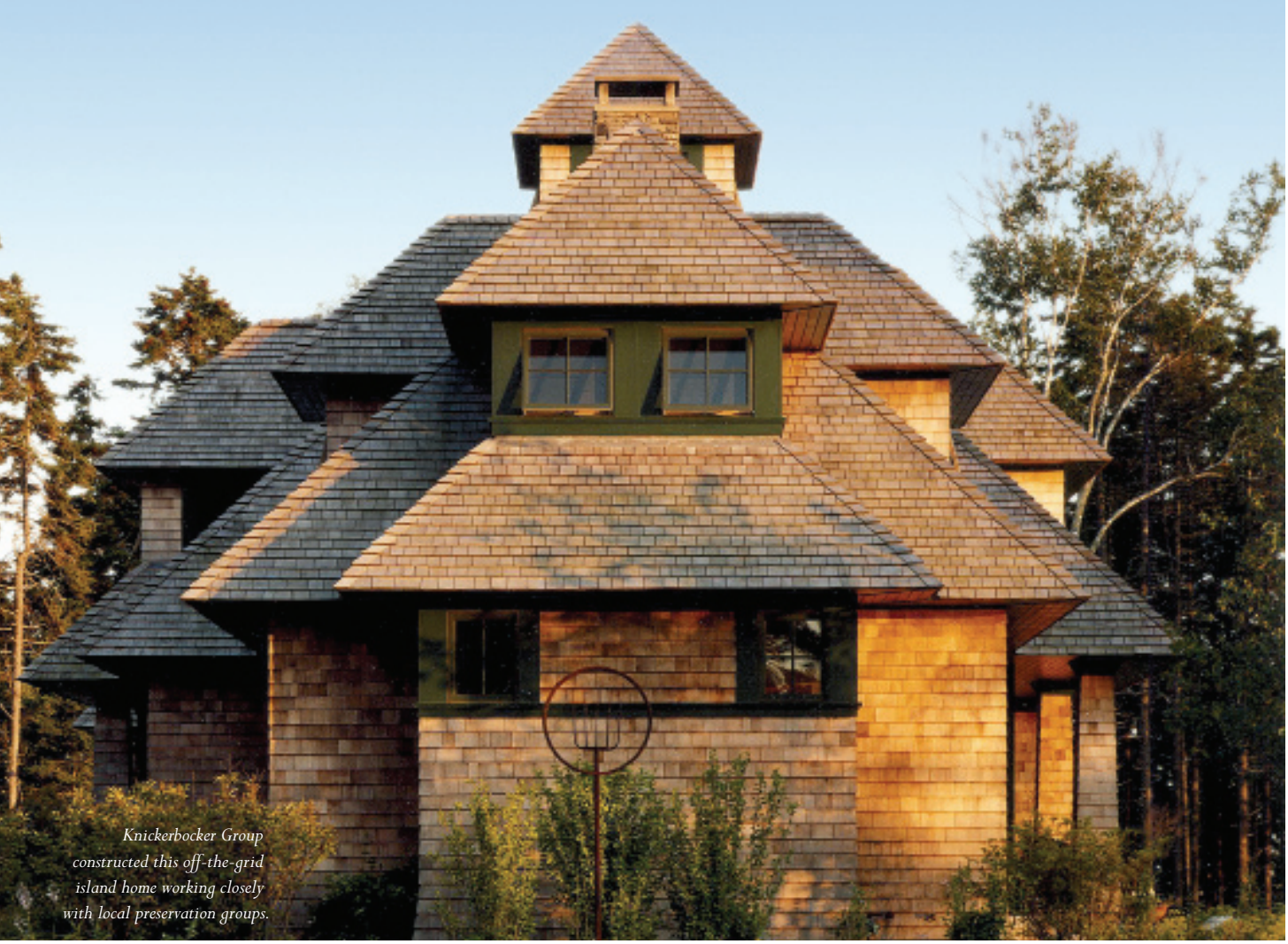
Custom Residential

Companies working to create specialized homes for a variety of niche markets

IDC CONSTRUCTION

A hospitality company in the construction business

KNICKERBOCKER GROUP



Knickerbocker Group constructed this off-the-grid island home working closely with local preservation groups.

KNICKERBOCKER GROUP

Residential design/construction family of companies cites relationships, technology as keys to success

BY JERRI FARRIS

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
BOOTHBAY, ME

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
FULL DESIGN &RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

2008 BUDGET:
$10 MILLION

The corporate philosophy of Knickerbocker Group states that architecture is as much about communication as it is about construction. Perhaps that is why the company encompasses so many parts of the process: the staff and management teams of Boothbay Home Builders, Knickerbocker Woodworking, Knickerbocker Design, and Knickerbocker Home Services have a great deal to say about building fine homes.

Located in Boothbay, Maine, the group started with Boothbay Home Builders in 1978 and expanded into a multifaceted group with a reputation for constructing distinctive custom homes throughout mid-coast Maine. Although the majority of the work is done collectively, each unit operates independently. For example, Boothbay Home Builders works with other architects and designers and Knickerbocker Design works with other builders.

One of the company's primary focuses these days is on green building, but with a twist. Marcus Golding, one of Boothbay's construction managers, says that green is an interesting buzzword but not one that always appeals strongly to his company's clients. "We talk about performance issues," he says. "We tell our clients that we're building the best building we can, and that resonates more with them."

Attention to performance issues is critical in Maine's unforgiving climate, which is one of the wetter climates in the country. "The majority of the homes we build are literally sitting on the coast,

on the water," Golding says. "We're dealing with a lot of elements that need to be controlled and managed—particularly, water."

Knickerbocker Group has a strong commitment to building homes that provide lasting beauty and performance. That commitment has driven its architects, designers, and builders to adopt best practices that, Golding says, fall under the rubric of green building. "We have a passion for pushing forward new technologies, good technologies," he says. "We're willing to try things that meet our ultimate objectives, which are to build a tight building that manages the water, the temperatures, and the humidity swings."

Golding sees a hierarchy of need when it comes to managing the elements of a project. That hierarchy is:

- water management;
- thermal envelope;
- airflow.

Following the traditional style of the area, most of the homes that the group designs and builds—which range from $500 thousand to $10 million—are shingle style. One of the innovations being used is a product called Home Slicker, a synthetic woven mesh that is installed behind the shingles. The mesh, which creates a drainage plain and a backvent, captures water driven by the wind and provides airflow behind the shingles, which allows them to dry out.

Another new product, the Advantech Zip system, focuses on the building's thermal envelope but contributes to the success of a project in other ways too. "The product provides a weather-tight house at the sheathing stage," Golding says. "Subcontractors are able to start roughing in mechanicals and electrical, and windows can be installed immediately—things that are typically not done until an actual roof is on the

> "We talk about performance issues. We tell our clients that we're building the best building we can, and that resonates more with them."
>
> *Marcus Golding, Construction Manager, Boothbay Home Builders*

For this summer cottage on the Maine coast, a screen porch sited off the south corner minimizes solar gain in the adjacent living areas.

The designers review the massing model for a new home on the coast of Maine.

building. It's leveraging technology not only to improve the performance of the building but to shorten our construction schedules."

Another innovation addresses the management of airflow. "Instead of using wood blocks in rafter bays," Golding explains, "crews cut blocks from XPS foam and install those blocks with expanding foam. We seal all the way around those blocks with expanding foam so that there is no airflow through that rafter bay. Now that block has a thermal value of about R-14."

Although business has not yet been dramatically affected by the economic downturn, work is in motion to broaden the group's base. "We've been developing four designs of green houses that are economical," says Rick Nelson, an architect with Knickerbocker Design. Nelson and Danielle Betts, staff civil engineer for Knickerbocker Design, are deeply involved in the process. "We're actually using our houses as testing grounds," Nelson says. "We're trying advanced framing techniques, different ways of insulating and air sealing, and different types of heating systems—basically, the things we haven't had a chance to try on our large projects."

Golding believes that the key to success lies not only in technology but in relationships. "We place a very strong value on the relationships we build with our clients, our subcontractors, and the community," he says. "We're in a position now where we have a lot of work and we're able to employ some of the other smaller builders in the area. We've reached out and brought them into projects. We need to nurture our community as much as we need to nurture our own business." ABQ

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