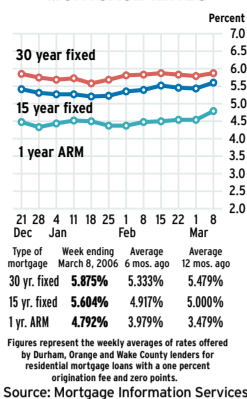




See the KB Home ad on the back of today's section.

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SMART MOVES

## Avoid mistakes in first home

By ELLEN JAMES MARTIN  
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Your sense of excitement is palpable as you begin the search for your first home. But real estate specialists caution against making a hasty decision when buying your first property. To those who've lived in a cramped rental unit, almost any house can seem tantalizingly large.

"Chances are, the houses you see will look a lot bigger than any apartment," says Virginia Madden, president-elect of the National Association of Exclusive Buyer Agents (www.naeba.org).

But good size doesn't necessarily mean a good buy, Madden says, encouraging newcomers to the real estate market to shop around before making a decision.

"It's not necessarily wrong to buy the first house you visit. But before you do, you should look at all the other properties in the neighborhood that might meet your needs — whether that's three or 33," she says.

Here are several pointers for first-time purchasers:

■ Shy away from the choice of an unusual property. The problem with what Mark Nash, author of "1001 Tips for Buying and Selling a Home," calls "the odd-man-out home" is that one day it could be hard to sell.

"We live in a society where housing is increasingly homogenized. Most people feel safer about their investment if the place they buy looks like all their neighbors' homes," he says.

■ Develop a list of priorities to better evaluate your housing choices. Ten years of experience has taught Madden that purchasers who write down their priorities are less likely to err when selecting a home. She recommends that home buyers carry a priority list to help ensure that they make the right trade-offs when choosing a place to buy.

■ Try to pick a home with your future lifestyle in mind. Sometimes buyers look upon their purchase as a short-term proposition. They expect to keep the home for just a few years before selling. But if you anticipate remaining in a home for five to 10 years, longer-range thinking is essential.

■ Avoid purchasing the largest house in the neighborhood. Madden explains that a "king of the hill" house is unlikely to increase in value as quickly as average-sized homes in the same area. That's because the median home will set the standard for the area.

■ Make your home inspector's report part of your home-selection process.

Madden says buyers who encounter major problems with a property — such as trouble with the foundation or unsafe

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Steve Brouillard is nearly finished with the house he is building by hand at 612 Mason Road in north Durham County.

PHOTOS BY DEREK ANDERSON FOR THE DURHAM NEWS

# Nail by nail

A Rougemont craftsman builds energy-efficient houses by hand, one at a time

By EDDY LANDRETH  
CORRESPONDENT

Steven Brouillard walked out the door at the University of Rhode Island in 1971 with a degree in philosophy and English and immediately traded it in for a hammer and a box of nails.

Now a master carpenter, he's been building ever since. He moved to North Carolina in 1974, constructed his first custom home in 1977 and started a business that is still going strong.

Brouillard is a little different than the average contractor. He builds his homes one at a time, and he will do custom woodwork as well, anything from duplicating antique stair railings to crafting handmade beds. In business since 1977, Brouillard, 56, learned house-building from a guy he worked for in college who built houses one at a time.

"I'm probably totally alien to anyone's concept of a builder or contractor," Brouillard said.

Alien is a slight exaggeration, but uncommon is not.

"I wouldn't call it unique, but I'd call it rare," said Nick Tennyson, the executive vice president of the Home Builders Association of Durham, Orange and Chatham Counties. "He's not the only one doing that, but it's not very common."

"The reason why most contractors have many



Builder Steve Brouillard runs his hand over the cedar shingles that have been individually trimmed to fit the exterior of a home.

jobs going is it helps to retain a pool of subcontractors," Tennyson said. "If you are only building one house, there is a great gap between when you need bricklayers, for example, or carpenters. One of the things that has builders building



At the Brouillard site in North Durham county, nails are pounded by hand to ensure quality.

multiple houses is they can rotate crews between job sites."

Brouillard says that has not been a problem for him. He's been around so long that he has established long-term relationships.

"Most of my subs I know and have used for a number of years so they know what to expect with me," Brouillard said.

### Passion leavens business

Of course, building homes is big business. Money is always a factor, and the greater the production, the larger the income. That's why Henry Ford invented the assembly line for building automobiles.

"With some professions, a person can only make as much money in 24 hours in a day as they

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FEATURE PROPERTY

## Elegant home, more than 27 acres in Rougemont



8401 N.C. Hwy 157, Rougemont  
3 bedrooms, 4 full baths, 2 half baths  
\$675,000  
27.20 acres

**First floor:** Grand entry with Palladian and transom windows around front door; beautiful chandelier; hardwood floors throughout first floor; fireplace in spacious family room with French doors to the screened-in porch; three bedrooms downstairs.

**Kitchen/dining:** Gourmet kitchen has center island with gas cooktop and built-in shelves, stainless-steel appliances, tile backsplash and granite countertops; separate dining room with bay window.

**Master suite:** First-floor master; luxurious master bath has oversized separate shower.

**Second floor:** Full bath; bonus/theater room; two very large storage areas with many possibilities.

**Exterior:** The screened porch and patio overlook the beautiful 27 wooded acres; three-car garage.

**Contact:** Sherry Clayton, Keller Williams Preferred Realty, 336-598-1293 or 919-281-3272; www.SherryClayton.com.

FEATURE PROPERTY

## Four bedrooms, basement in Hillsborough home



3700 Ode Turner Road, Hillsborough  
4 bedrooms, 2.5 baths  
\$299,000  
4.12 acres

**First floor:** Hardwoods throughout; kitchen — with large island and built-in desk — open to greatroom; French doors to the peaceful backyard; spacious dining room; very large mud-room/laundry room, includes a half bath and is just off the kitchen; master suite and second bedroom.

**Master suite:** 19x13 bedroom; large walk-in closet plus a linen closet; bath has two sinks, tub/shower.

**Second floor:** Gabled bedrooms at both ends of the hall/living area; one bedroom has a sleeping room within the larger bedroom, open on one side with a large pass-through to the living space; the larger living space in this room can hold a sofa, chairs, television and still has space for a desk; spacious bathroom.

**Extras:** Lot is filled with hardwood trees and a large treehouse in back; paved driveway and double garage; full basement with garage area, storage area and a 12.7x22 foot room that could be finished for extra space.

**Contact:** Julian Culton, Fonville Morisey Realty, 740-3333.

## BUILD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

can bill," Tennyson said. "It's certainly reasonable that a contractor can supervise multiple projects. If he or she chooses to do that, they can leverage their time by having several projects ongoing."

While in business to earn an income, Brouillard said he's been able to balance it with his passion for overseeing a project from start to finish. His own crew does the framing of the house and the majority of the overall work.

He learned years ago to draw the plans as well.

"The quality of the building is top-notch," said Brenda McCall of Efland, who is living in a home Brouillard built for her 14 years ago. "Steve took some drawings of what I wanted and what I liked, and he drew the plans for us."

Phil and Ellen Baer of Rougemont already had their blueprints drawn when they discovered Brouillard about nine years ago. Later, when they wanted to put on an addition, they had Brouillard draw the plans.

Perhaps what really separates Brouillard from many others is he pours his heart and soul into every project.

"To me, everything is personal," Brouillard said. "For a lot of guys, ... they just get in and get out. To me, it's totally personal. It's about me doing the best I can every day to build a beautiful home. There is no production mentality to it."

Brouillard lives in Rougemont, but builds homes all around the western portion of the Triangle. He also does historical restorations.

"Some of these things," he said of the older homes, "the wood is just so beautiful. You can't even find stuff like that anymore. It is nice working on them and saving them. Some of them have lasted 150 years, and you can give them another 150."

What really excites Brouillard, however, is building energy-efficient homes. Passive solar homes are becoming more popular with the rising costs of energy. Brouillard has been building solar homes since the 1970s. He receives a newsletter from the Department of Energy each month and works diligently to stay on top of the latest energy-saving tips in construction.

Both McCall and the Baers have passive solar homes that were planned to take advantage of environment, from the positioning of the house to the place-



The deck frame at the Brouillard site has been crafted to fit around several large rock formations.

PHOTOS BY DEREK ANDERSON FOR THE DURHAM NEWS



A custom-built home by Steve Brouillard Construction in Orange County.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ment of the windows.

"He put a concrete-stamped floor in the kitchen and in the dining room," McCall said recently on a windy day when the temperature did not get warmer than 50 degrees outside. "It looks like flagstones. It warms the house. This time of year when there are no leaves on the trees, it will warm the house pretty well during the day. There is a lot of light coming in from the south side of the house. I haven't had the heat on all day, and it's 72 degrees in here.

"The way the house is situated on the lot, we have a lot of tree cover in the summer so it prevents it from getting too hot," McCall said. "In the summer, I don't run the air conditioning very much.

... Unless it's a really, really hot day, the trees will shelter the house from having the direct sun come in the windows. He built it with the angle so that the summer sun would not shine in the windows and the winter sun would."

Energy efficiency was tops on the list of desires for the Baers, which is why they sought an architect who specialized in solar homes before they met Brouillard. When they found him, it proved to be a perfect match.

"At the time my wife was working for the Advanced Energy Corp.," Baer said. "They have done lots and lots of work in energy efficiency design and construction. We wanted somebody who would take the time and effort to learn



Painter David Spencer works in a home being constructed in North Durham County by Seteve Brouillard's crew of craftsmen and designed by architect Barry Swanson, AIA.

the techniques that group has developed. Steve was willing to do that."

The Baer's 2,400-square-foot home was built in 1998. It's all electric, but with the energy-saving construction, their power bills have averaged around \$100 a month until the recent surge in the price of electricity, Baer said.

"We're totally happy with the energy efficiency and the comfort factor of the house," Baer said.

### Patience pays off

In spite of all this praise, even Brouillard will admit his kind of construction is not for every client. Many builders can erect a home in nearly half the time Brouillard does. Hiring Brouillard requires patience and an understanding from the start it will not be a rush job. The Baer's home took around one year to build. While he concedes he got antsy in the last month or so, Baer said ultimately it was worth the wait.

"You can tell when you walk around in this house," Baer said. "Nothing moves. Nothing bounces. It just has a solid feeling of quality construction to it.

"We had some people come in to do our window treatments, and they commented that they had just never seen such perfectly true and square windows."

Quality is the word Brouillard consistently preaches. He refuses to use nail guns because he says they will not produce the same standard that a hammer does.

"The real trick to framing, which is what separates us more than anything, is you're always trying to move the wood in a particular alignment," Brouillard said. "When you shoot it with a nail gun, it's more like sewing."

Brouillard's way may not be for every contractor, and some clients may grow impatient with the process. But many people living in Brouillard-built homes swear by him and his style of doing business.

"He's a meticulous builder, and he has a crew of people who have been with him for a long time," Baer said. "You get to know them very well. ... It's very different to have master carpenters on site all the time. The total experience is you get an incredibly well-built house."