

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MARKETING



By Jonathan Orpin

For most of our 25 years as a timber frame company, New Energy Works has been blessed with a talented marketing staff. The job of sharing just who we are can be challenging, and these folks help us express this with fine graphics, a strong presence on the Internet, and even a hip logo. It's all good stuff.

But at a recent home show, a timber frame company owner was telling me that he had fired most of his staff, and was pretty happy just having all his timber framing sourced, cut, and raised by subcontractors. "After all," he reasoned, "it's really just about the marketing."

His words stunned me.

By expressing structure as craft and combining that with extraordinary energy efficiency and a caring business environment, timber framing has rocketed to the forefront of residential construction. This couldn't have happened without sawdust in our blood and dirt under our fingernails.

When a New Energy Works frame goes up, it does so by the same joiners who worked on it in the shop, with the support of their coworkers who have helped design and engineer it, and often in conjunction with other coworkers who will enclose it, even be responsible for the home's completion.

There are questions you can ask your timber framer to gain a thorough understanding of the timber framing process. Although there are no completely right or wrong answers, a picture will evolve that will help you find a timber frame company for your needs. And yes, we hope you ask these of us, as well.

- Do you do your own timber framing (e.g. engineering, cutting, finishing, raising)? If not, why not?
- Do you use the most modern and safe equipment, as well as employ fine handwork, when needed?
- Do you offer dry and stable timbers (both reclaimed and properly dried) so the joinery stays tight?
- What are your sanding and finishing options?
- Do your own crews raise the frame, no matter where it is?
- What about specialty enclosure options and installation?
- How long have your key people been with you? Are they involved in the timber frame community, including the guild and business council, continually learning as well as serving?

Our homes represent an extraordinary effort among a complex and experienced team to deliver an expression of our life's work. Our clients often come to know us as individuals, and appreciate the effort we've made on their behalf. While there may not be perfectly correct answers to all your questions, one thing is absolute: **Timber framing is not about the marketing.**



Jonathan Orpin is a familiar voice in the industry. He's an international presenter on the craft and sustainability of heavy timber construction, a charter member of the Timber Frame Business Council, serving on its board as well as that of the Timber Framers guild, and the founder of two companies: New Energy Works, a 25 year old timber frame firm specializing in greater sustainability in craft-intensive homes, and Pioneer Millworks, a reclaimed wood flooring company. He can be found most days at the company's West Coast show home & studio — a LEED H Platinum candidate in Portland called The Vermont Street Project.
newenergyworks.com