



Boomtown

The surprising **hotbeds** of design, construction, remodeling, and more

BY SEAN GROOM

The Great Recession wreaked havoc on the housing industry, putting an untold number of builders, remodelers, and designers out of business. But not all areas of the country endured the same hardships, and not all are experiencing the same kind of recovery. At its 2006 peak, the housing market was supporting 2.27 million housing starts a year. These days, that number hovers at about 1 million, despite extremely low interest rates. That may not say much for an overall recovery, but across the country there are a multitude of markets that are rebounding in their own way—markets where designers, builders, and homeowners have found their niches in this recovery. Here's where they're making it work.

Sean Groom is a contributing editor.



HOME BUYER'S ADVANTAGE: DETROIT

That's right—Detroit: city of nightly arson, block after block of empty lots, bankruptcy declarations by both government and automakers, and a median asking price of \$16,000 for a home. Detroit isn't for everybody, but its downtown is redeveloping, with huge investments in start-up companies and infrastructure by the likes of billionaire Dan Gilbert, owner of Quicken Loans and the Cleveland Cavaliers. For those with an appetite for remodeling, for rethinking development and urban space, and for building new communities, Detroit is a petri dish they'll want to jump into. The houses that the Detroit Land Bank (buildingdetroit.org) auctions off—usually for \$1000—aren't properties for a quick flip, but if you've got more energy and building know-how than budget and are willing to bet on Detroit's future, here's a chance to get in on the ground floor.



MODERN-HOME MECCA: ALEXANDRIA

There is no shortage of communities vying for this honor, particularly in California, where developers such as Joseph Eichler built thousands of modern homes for the middle class (see pp. 36-41). With the surging popularity of midcentury-modern design, other contenders in this category—such as Denver and Austin, Texas—share much of the press with California. That helped steer our choice to the East Coast and a remarkable collection of intact modern developments in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Hollin Hills is a 450-home development just south of Alexandria, Va., built in the 1950s and 1960s as an experiment in modern housing. Charles Goodman (architect of the original National Airport) planned the neighborhood, designed the houses, and weighed in on the landscape architecture as an antidote to the rows of colonial revivals sprouting up in the postwar years. Goodman designed three other developments on the Maryland side of Washington that are also on the National Register of Historic Places.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE HEAVEN: PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Portland has a reputation as a progressive city in a progressive region, and homeowners have put their money where their mouths are. Oregon has 22 certified Passive Houses, and Washington has 17—about 30% of the projects certified to date by the Passive House Institute US. In addition to the national green-building programs, the region's builders and homeowners can participate in the regional Earth Advantage program, which enrolled 566 homes last year.

PRESERVATIONIST HOT SPOT: PULLMAN NEIGHBORHOOD, CHICAGO

In the southeast section of Chicago in 1880, George Pullman built a factory for his rail cars and a model industrial town for his workers. When a proposal for an industrial park in the 1960s threatened the thousand buildings in this early, planned, mixed-use neighborhood, homeowners banded together, gaining local and national landmark protection for the properties. In February 2015, a portion of the neighborhood was designated a national monument.

NEXUS OF NET ZERO: CALIFORNIA






If you're interested in building net-zero houses, California is the place to be. According to the state's energy code, often referred to as Title 24, every house built must be net zero as of 2020. The energy codes have tightened every few years in preparation for the change, and builders, especially large production builders, have started adopting net-zero strategies early.



WHERE HOME SELLERS CASH IN: DENVER

Even if you bought your Denver dream home in 2006 at the peak of the bubble, you'll still come out ahead. On average, Denver's home prices are higher today than at any other point in history. A strong job market and a steady influx of transplants has economists predicting that demand will continue to exceed supply, pushing future prices even higher.

THE LAND OF THE GREATS

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|  Thomas Jefferson
(BY BIRTHPLACE) (Shadwell, Va.) |  Frank Lloyd Wright
(Richland Center, Wis.) |  James Cutler
(Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) |  Julia Morgan
(San Francisco) |  Charles and Henry Greene
(Cincinnati) |
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RETIREE'S RETREAT: COLUMBUS AND SUBURBS

Everybody is looking for something different in retirement, but we made affordability our primary criterion, along with an ample offering of cultural opportunities and good medical care. Columbus, Ohio, is a full-fledged city; with 822,000 residents, it's only a whisker behind San Francisco in population. Ohio State University is the sporting hub of the region, there are two professional sports teams (hockey and soccer), and the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts oversees six magnificent venues with a heavy schedule of music, dance, and theater. The cost of living is 10% below the national average, and the median sales price for a home is \$124,550 within the city limits—not a bad deal for the golden years.



REMODELER'S PLAYGROUND: WASHINGTON, D.C.

In terms of the value of remodeling projects undertaken in each city annually, it's nearly a toss-up between Boston and Washington, D.C., but we'll go with Washington here. You'll spend about the same amount of time waiting in traffic in each city, but Washington's milder winters play in that city's favor. And the regular turnover of politicians, staffers, consultants, and lobbyists ensures that there's always work and makes the remodeling market here recession proof.



BEST BET FOR BUILDERS: TEXAS

Take your pick: Dallas, Houston, Austin. Housing starts last year in Austin were up nearly 14% over the prior year. In the Dallas area, where three suburbs make the nation's top-ten list for largest percentage of households earning more than \$100,000, median home prices rose \$13,000 during 2014. Low unemployment and popularity with the baby-boomer generation makes these markets good bets if the local economy can weather falling oil prices.



BUILD FREE: NO STATEWIDE BUILDING CODES (not comprehensive)

- | | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Alabama | Colorado | Mississippi |
| Alaska | Hawaii | Missouri |
| Arizona | Kansas | Nebraska |

RESOURCES: WHO IS USING WHAT?



Jose Fuste Raga/Corbis (Houston), Jose Fusta Raga/Corbis (Denver). Drawing: Toby Welles, WowHouse.