

“We do what we say we’re going to do, when we say we’re going to do it.”

SEAN SUPPLE, OWNER

MHB
MODERN HOME BUILDER
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Working in Silicon Valley, Supple Homes has many opportunities to build high-luxury projects for its clients.

Staying Ahead

Setting expectations early helps Supple Home satisfy its discerning Silicon Valley clients. **BY TIM O’CONNOR**

PROFILE

SUPPLE HOMES

www.supplehomesinc.com / Revenue: \$7 million / HQ: Menlo Park, Calif. / Employees: 7 / Specialty: Luxury homes

Sean Supple didn’t start out as a homebuilder. His first career out of college was as an attorney, but he decided after a year-and-a-half he didn’t like it. Supple then tried real estate brokering, but it didn’t grab him either so instead he became a laborer on home construction projects.

Finally, he found something he liked. Supple advanced quickly in construction and within a few years was managing projects. After four years of working for another company, he decided it was time to get a contractor’s license and strike out on his own.

In 2005, he founded Supple Homes as a one-man business and his first project was a small bathroom remodel. Thirteen years later, the company has grown to seven employees building about six custom homes annually – five of which are ground-up construction.

COMPACT MARKET

The company works as a custom homebuilder exclusively in three communities off the southern point of San Francisco Bay and near

Stanford University: Atherton, Menlo Park and Palo Alto, Calif. The towns are among the most expensive in the entire nation, giving Supple Homes plenty of opportunity to build high-luxury projects for its clients.

The cities are also located along the same four-mile stretch, which gives Supple and his team more time to spend on job sites and less time fighting the region's notoriously heavy traffic. "It's much easier for us to manage when they are all within a couple miles of each other," he says.

The tightness of its market area enables Supple Homes to complete about six projects annually, each of which can take from 10 months to a year-and-a-half to finish. Construction costs typically hover between \$1 million and \$3 million for a job, but Supple says many of the homes would be valued between \$3.5 million to \$8 million if they were put on the market.

Working with that kind of budget takes serious care and comes with elevated scrutiny. Clients trust Supple Homes with their projects because the company has a strong reputation for quality and works hard to set reasonable and honest expectations from the start. "We do what we say we're going to do, when we say we're going to do it," Supple says.



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Supple Homes' clients are keen for it to employ green building techniques and construct highly efficient houses.

On every project, Supple Homes strives to establish clear communication and eliminate unknowns to avoid surprises for the clients. Supple says it helps that he lives in Menlo Park himself and feels more beholden to his clients, who will also become his neighbors. "We have an added incentive to make sure things go well because I'm going to see you at the local Starbucks, or our kids go to school together," he explains. If a project goes poorly, the negative word of mouth would spread quickly. "I want the project to end well and have goodwill and good referrals," he adds.

GREEN BUILDING

Working in Silicon Valley brings with it certain expectations. The area is home to tech giants such as Facebook and Google, whose employees have heightened technological and environmental savvy. Supple hasn't seen an overwhelming demand for advanced smart home features yet, but clients are keen on green building and high-efficiency houses. Palo Alto even mandates that homes are prepped for solar panels and electric vehicle chargers.

Those requirements are becoming only more involved: California has set a goal that all new residential buildings statewide will be zero net energy by 2020. The continuously changing standards are likely to trip up the builders and subcontractors that can't keep up,



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which is why Supple Homes works to stay ahead by understanding and documenting green building trends such as gray water systems, which recycle laundry and shower water for landscaping use.

“Our commitment to staying on top of these technologies and the education [differentiates us],” Supple says. “I think the more well-established companies that are staying on top of it will have an advantage going forward.” ■

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