

An Owner Builder Does It Full Time

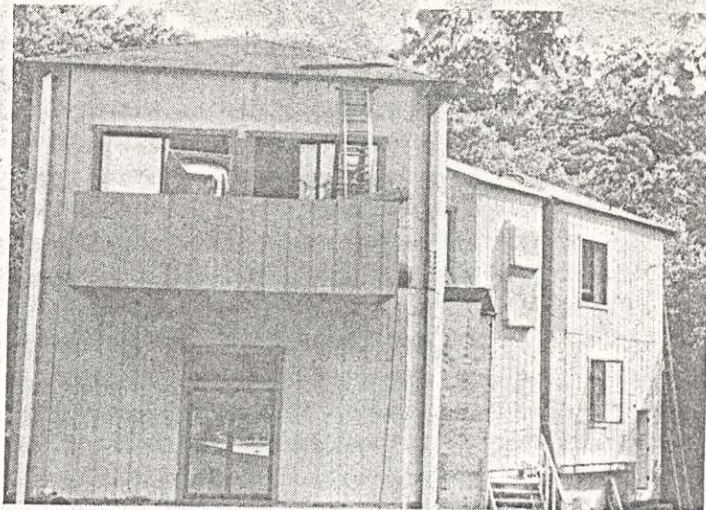
by Chuck Kim

The home of David Cook is unique. Unique not only in the design and construction techniques he has used, but also in the resourceful and creative manner in which he has welded design and materials. Instead of designing a house and then buying the materials, David's method allows materials to influence design. What's the pay-off? Incredible savings on materials for one thing; and a more creative use of materials than you'll find in a hundred standard homes for another.

Take the frame of the home. It's steel. It must have cost a fortune, you say; everyone knows that structural steel is expensive and used only in commercial buildings. "Not necessarily," says David. He purchased a complete steel building at a sealed bid auction and took the drawings to an architect, who came up with a pleasing design that incorporated the steel posts and beams. The net result: a custom design, a reasonable cost, and a frame that is strong and highly earthquake resistant.

Consider his wood flooring. Hardwood flooring runs between a \$1.50 and \$2.50 per square foot; but David located some solid maple flooring from the old Rincon Annex Post Office in San Francisco for less than half the cost of new flooring. He not only saved money, but also obtained quality and materials that are unobtainable today.

His home is filled with such examples of smart buying and creative use of materials. In the best tradition of owner builders, he saves money by seeing value where others don't. David finds materials (most of them new) that are considered surplus, and



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purchases them at auction. He has been so successful at this and other money-saving techniques that he is putting together a book for owner-builders that outlines his ideas and methodology. He has certainly made a believer out of me!

David credits OBC classes and the Summer Building Camp with giving him the confidence to proceed with such a major project. "Attending the OBC Summer Program gave me the confidence and experience to tackle some jobs that I would not have attempted otherwise. I highly recommend the Owner Builder Summer Program to anyone contemplating building their own home."

Like all owner builders, David and his family have made some sacrifices in order to build. His wife runs their business, for instance, freeing him to be on site. He has done virtually all the work himself with one helper and an occasional craftsman. But the joy of owner building is also readily visible around his home. Visiting his project reminded me that the satisfaction and joy of building, as well as the chance to own a home, outweigh the short-term sacrifices and annoyances of owner building.

David is presently completing the interior finish work, and expects to move into his completed home in June.

