



2015 JESSE H. NEAL  
AWARD WINNER



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## Soft Sell

The last scene of the final episode of *Mad Men*, AMC's hit TV series, finds advertising mastermind Donald Draper seated in a lotus position, chanting at a meditation retreat on the California coast. While the others in the group are looking within, Don is dreaming up one of the most famous and successful TV commercials of all time, the 1970s "Hilltop" Coca-Cola ad, in which a huge chorus of flower children croons about teaching the world to sing in perfect harmony.

It's a clever bit of storytelling, but not because we've caught our antihero in the act of not meditating. Don's Esalen epiphany captures a moment in the history of commerce: when advertising becomes fully aware of its own astonishing ability to leverage youthful idealism to sell a soft drink.

The Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who rejected working in the family lighthouse business in order to become a writer, is credited with saying that "Everyone lives by selling something." But in modern times, being brand-aware is being smart because a crucial aspect of good quality is the reliable products you choose for constructing your homes. Sound products help you keep the promise you make to buyers, and they help you maintain your hard-earned reputation.

Each month we devote several pages to delivering the latest in new products. But this month we center almost the entire issue around them. How do we know they're worth the trouble? You told us. The 100 products featured here were selected by you, the readers, as those you're most interested in using.

But there's more to this issue. We've partnered with the NAHB's Home Innovation Research Labs to bring you the latest results of its brand-use survey, which HIRL has been doing annually since 1994. Now compiled for the first time into an extensive report, the study asks builders in 32 regions of the U.S. about the brands of flooring, kitchen appliances, HVAC systems, interior paints, decking, and other products they're currently using. The methodology was developed in the 1970s by PhDs with strong grounding in both statistics and the housing industry. "I have the first research ever published, with coffee stains all over it," says Ed Hudson, director of market research at HIRL.

So, on the pages that follow, no hard sell, just top picks from professional builders. After all, what more trusted endorsement is there than a recommendation from a peer?

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