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PDG Domus homes are green from the word 'go'



(Daily Reporter photo by Lehr Beidelschies)

Nathan Pingel, chief executive officer of PDG Domus, explains how the special ceramic polymer composite used in the construction of Domus homes is mixed in his Livingston Avenue factory.

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Nearly 30 years ago, Nathan Pingel imagined building houses for the masses using materials and technology developed in the automotive industry. Today, Columbus-based PDG Domus Manufacturing LLC is doing just that and helping protect the natural environment along the way.

Upon Pingel's graduation from Columbus College of Art & Design in 1977, he showed his father, an engineer for the U.S. government, plans he'd developed for a "fast-built component house."

His response was encouraging.

"He said, 'I'd take a closer look at it. That looks pretty good,'" Pingel recalls.

Building had always been of interest to Pingel — he worked in construction throughout college — but he wasn't really interested in using traditional materials. The year following his grad-

uation from CCAD, he began research to identify materials and manufacturing processes that could replicate natural materials "with better long term performance and lower costs."

In 1980, he founded Pingel and Associates, a research and development firm that began examining manufacturing machinery and processes to handle large-scale composite structures.

Thirteen years later, he created Pingel Design Group (PDG), which adopted the Bauhaus ideology of melding techniques and materials associated with mass production and design aesthetics.

"With most everything I do, I put teams together," he said, explaining that PDG brought together craftspeople from a variety of disciplines — a method he believes improves product quality and helps "create balance" — to accomplish his goal of mass home production.

In 1996, Pingel founded PDG Domus to focus solely on housing research and product design. Three years later, the company's first home was constructed at 1081 Michigan Ave. in Columbus. It received a five-star energy award, for energy efficiency, from the state of Ohio in 2000.

His creations look fairly traditional at first sight, but upon closer inspection, the houses Pingel and his team build are in a league of their own.

While the homes' exteriors appear to be made of wood, stone or brick, they actually are made of a molded ceramic polymer composite (also used in the auto and marine industries) that not only is rot-resistant, but has a very high insulation rating. In addition to looking good and saving energy, they are virtually maintenance free, not needing paint on the walls, shutters or porches.

PDG Domus houses also have a seamless, slate-like roof (again made of the ceramic polymer composite), high-energy E-glass windows, and are completely wired for phone, cable and Internet connections.

They arrive onsite for assembly already outfitted with the buyers' choice of kitchen and bath fixtures, cabinets, appliances, countertops, lighting and floor coverings.

PDG Domus houses, which range from \$110,000 to \$200,000 depending upon size and design, meet requirements for withstanding Category 5 hurricanes, they meet the state of California's earthquake standards, and their roofs can hold at least 380 pounds of snow per square foot.

PDG Domus homes involve more than 474 man hours at the company's plant on Livingston Avenue and only two and a half days of work on-site for assembly, Pingel said. In 150 years, each entire house can be completely recycled using technologies available today.

In the future, Pingel said he would like to sell homes outside Ohio, build plants throughout the Buckeye State, and then expand production to other parts of the country.

Over the years, Robert Hoffman and Daniel Rosen — PDG's chief financial officer and vice president of operations, government and building relations, respectively — as well as the Ohio Board of Building Standards, which continuously "pointed out ways to fight through the bureaucracy," have been especially critical to PDG Domus' success, he said.

The 54-year-old's advice for those looking to succeed in business is fairly simple and consists of 13 tenets he calls "Nate's Laws."

Among his laws: "Have great relationships with your partners; know your vision and what you want; respond to criticism and write things down."

Most importantly, he said, "Do something you love, that you're passionate about. If you can do something socially decent and make money doing it, you've got the best of both worlds."