Alliance Insights is a twice-monthly email featuring “quick hits” about innovation from inside and outside of the housing industry. Along with an infographic (“Pulse”) and a mini-blog (“Rant”), it is intended to provoke thought and spur action.

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PULSE
Welcome to Surbia

John Burns’ latest take on urban and suburban housing trends has aging Sharers (the firm’s moniker for those born in the 1980s) moving to Surbia (code for urban-like suburbia) in droves through 2025.

Why It Matters: Simply, you gotta know where to go before the other guy, and folks moving through their 30’s during the next decade will be driving demand and setting the terms of minimal commutes, mature trees, and high-quality, health-conscious shopping in areas once left for dead.

> View the Graphic

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY
Not Your Father's SIPs

A small Florida start-up’s proprietary concrete structural insulated wall panels are designed to combat construction labor woes, quality issues, energy waste and housing affordability.

Why It Matters: Part of a systematic approach to better-built housing, PG Homes’ panelized wall system represents a new breed of lightweight yet resilient and resource-efficient would-be solutions to housing’s myriad challenges. A model home is under construction.

Photo courtesy PG Homes
OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Scary Smart

The brainacs at Carnegie Mellon University are developing a plug-in sensor that can monitor multiple inputs within a room – including sound and vibrations – to deliver the next level of home intelligence.

*Why It Matters:* The "synthetic sensor" is designed to leapfrog the lack of a standard smart home device platform, hacking risks, and singular device sensors to immediately create a smart space ... without a web connection. Deeper data *and* privacy? Yes, please.

*Photo courtesy Carnegie Mellon University*

> Further Reading

RANT

Apple Orchards

I’ve long been an advocate of alternatives to stick-framing. My first published article in a 1988 issue of *Builder* featured a new-fangled, Lego-block system called insulated concrete forms that was on the cusp of taking over the U.S. market. Or so I thought.

Subsequent tomes about component framing, SIPs, precast concrete, panelization, and modular followed with the same promise (or at least premise) that new-home construction was about to jettison 2x4s in favor of something better.

Eventually, my naiveté gave way to a harsh reality: while the problems suffered from stick-framing were real and apparent, the vast majority of builders – in boom times and bad – had no intention of hanging up their hammers. Innovation was a pneumatic framing nailer.

It’s not entirely their fault. A bevy of real and artificial barriers stand in the way of mainstream acceptance of off-site alternatives and the business models that enable them. It’s almost impossible to envision anything new emerging from the primordial soup of the status quo.

In fact, I’m convinced change won’t come from within. Instead, it'll be a company from outside the industry with deep pockets and a vision that sees and seizes the opportunity to deliver affordable, well-built, resource-efficient and truly connected homes on their own terms instead of trying to wedge their way into housing’s current culture. Think Google or Amazon or Apple or Tesla, where Innovation is spelled with a capital I.
sites. They’ll work directly with modular manufacturers and advanced panelizers to design and deliver homes that delight and serve their owners. They’ll develop master plans named “Amazon Acres” and “Google Gardens” in key metros and deliver them at a fraction of the cost and time it traditionally takes.

Consumers will be drawn like bees to pollen by brand loyalty and kept fat and happy by a customer-first, “ship-and-remember” approach that continually primes them for their next purchase. As with their iPhones, they’ll wait on the edge of their porch swings for the next release and line up to buy it.

Can’t happen? This time, I wouldn’t be so sure.

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