

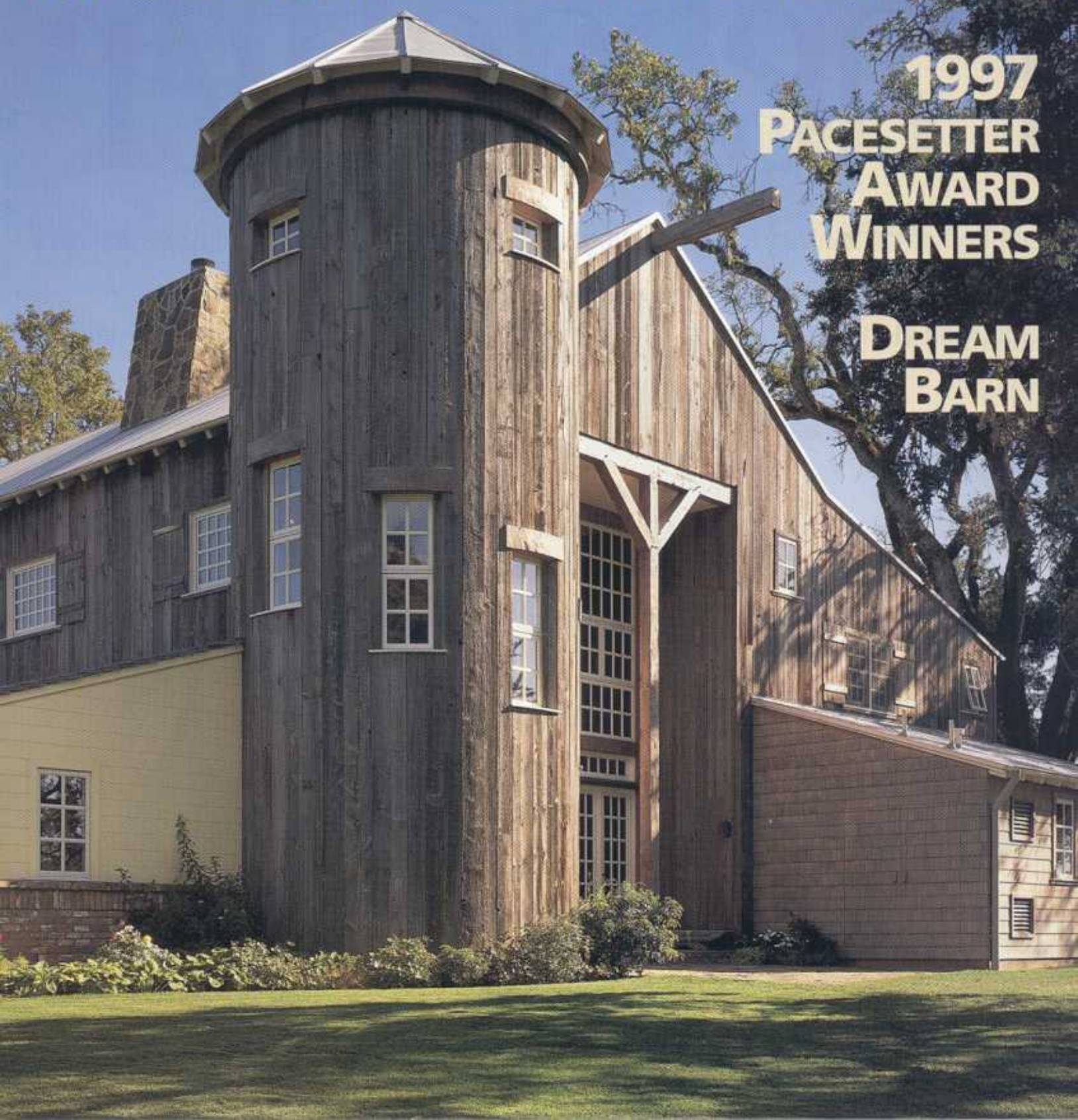
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Custom Home

THE ART AND CRAFT OF CUSTOM HOME BUILDING / A HANLEY-WOOD, INC., PUBLICATION

**1997
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1997 Pacesetter Awards Customer Service

In the custom home business, builders hope to deliver well-constructed, trouble-free houses to their clients—that's good customer service. But when the builder is also the designer, the stakes are even higher. The project's success and the customers' happiness is entirely in the design/builder's hands. ■ "Kevin and I think the process is very similar to a romantic relationship," says Deborah Malone. "There will be ups and downs. If everything seems perfect, then something is wrong, someone is holding back." ■ It's Deborah's job at J.P. Malone to make sure no one is holding back. As the company's designer, she's responsible for the clients' getting exactly the house they want—even when they have no idea themselves. ■ One of her best tools is a 14-page questionnaire that she fills out in a three-hour session with her clients. "It's 'everything you wanted to know about building a house, but were afraid to ask,'" she says. Here, she learns what the clients like and don't like about their current house, and whether they prefer small dinner parties to large cocktail parties. "We design houses from the inside out," she says. "We'll even go measure their furniture so the living room will fit the coffee table."



Deborah and Kevin Malone

■ She tries to make all subsequent client meetings as efficient as possible. "We have agendas and the clients have homework—selecting appliances and so forth," she says. "Our meetings don't take six hours." Nor do the clients make all of their decisions in the office. "For instance, they have a much easier time deciding where the electrical outlets and lighting cans should go if they're at the site when the walls are up," she says. ■ "Our homeowners are our co-designers—they don't just choose colors and appliances," Deborah says. "Maybe that's why only two houses of the 50 we've built have been on the resale market." Now, that's customer service. —S.C.C.

J.P. Malone Construction, Inc.,
Scottsdale, Ariz.
Type of business: design/build
Years in business: 14
Employees: 9
1996 volume: \$4.6 million
1996 starts: 12 custom homes