

DESIGN/BUILD

Construction comeback?

The design/build sector finally shows signs of growth. *By BETH GERACI*

After years of decline, the construction business finally is showing signs of a turnaround, reports *Engineering News-Record* magazine in its latest Construction Industry Confidence Index.

The second-quarter report released in June showed that a record 69 percent of more than 300 respondents felt optimistic about the state of the market, indicating it has stabilized.

Landscape design/build professionals are seeing the positive results firsthand.

"It's definitely turning around, no question about it," says John Mariani, design director at Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. "People are doing some pretty major projects. In fact, in the last few weeks I sold one of the biggest projects I've ever sold."

Lambert's Director of Garden Development Jud Griggs also is encouraged.

Because Texas emerged from the recession last year, Dallas-based Lambert's had a "remarkable" 2012, Griggs says. "Our revenues were about a million and a half dollars more in design/build last year than the previous year."

Lenny DiTomaso, owner of Landscape Perceptions in Oakland, N.J., is noticing growth there, too. "People realize the market is so up and down that when it's up and they have the money, they're going to spend it," he says.



A recent Lambert's project.

TRENDS

The caveat, Griggs says, is "people are taking much longer to make decisions now. It's more of 'Let's look at this option and let's explore these materials and we're going to think about it.'"

DiTomaso sees the same scrutiny. "Usually people cut me loose and allow me to do my thing, but this year customers are watching every single thing that's being done," he says.

Things also are trending toward more water features, patios and swimming pools, sources say. Lambert's completed 15 pools in the last year; Mariani already has installed three of them in 2013. All of that growth is creating a pretty positive picture.

"It's a ways a way," Mariani says, "but I do believe it will be better than before the crash. I'm pretty positive about that."

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