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## **37 RIBA members exhibit at successful 2011 Home Show**

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Some long-awaited spring weather and signs of economic optimism were the backdrop as thousands of visitors converged on the Rhode Island Convention Center for the Rhode Island Builders Association's annual Home Show.

Among the 37 RIBA members who exhibited at the event, which ran from Thursday, March 31st through Sunday, April 3rd, most agreed that visitors seemed cautious but willing to buy, and that many were talking about new construction or remodeling.

Many exhibitors who spoke with The Rhode Island Builder Report noted far more optimism among visitors from southeastern Massachusetts than among those from Rhode Island.

"It's clear that the ones from Massachusetts are living in a better economy," commented Alex Mitchell of Meridian Custom Homes Inc. Mitchell said that, overall, there seemed to be some enthusiasm for new construction among this year's show visitors than among last year's.

Suppliers noted even more activity.

"We've been going strong for the whole show!" said Jeanine Lantini of Lighting & Design by J&K Electric on Sunday, the show's final day. "There's a lot of interest, and we're hearing people talk more about building."

Jeff Francis of Swenson Granite Works stated that visitor response on their end had been "great" throughout the show.

"We've seen a lot of interest in some of our newer products, especially among visitors from southeastern Massachusetts," Francis said. "Many are saying they plan to forego a vacation this year in order to spend more money on their houses."

Tanya Donahue of R.I. Kitchen & Bath, which enjoyed "a record year" in 2010, said she saw steady traffic throughout the show.

"We talked with a number of people who plan to build. That pent-up demand is certainly out there," Donahue said.

The folks from The Washington Trust Co. reported that people were approaching them about refinancing and financing for remodeling projects, with a few inquiries about construction loans.

In general, show visitors were positive about the show's scheduling (late March-early April as opposed to early March) and were very enthusiastic about the new fine arts section, which featured painters and sculptors from around the area. A portion of the proceeds from that section went to RIBA's Builders Helping Heroes charity.

"I really love the show format. The art section was a big surprise, and I'm finding a number of things that I need for the house. I definitely have some projects in mind," stated Amanda from Brooklyn, Conn.

Complimenting the Home Show's newer features were traditions such as RIBA Member Night on March 31st, the show's opening day. Members were among the first to turn out and enjoy the

exhibits, demonstrations, seminars and other attractions.

The three Rejuvenation Nights were as popular as ever at the 2011 Home Show. Visitors enjoyed beer, wine, cheese and chocolate tastings, and complimentary chair massages.

Seminars included appearances by author and "Coupon Queen" Kathy Spencer, well known from Good Morning America, Inside Edition and the Food Network, who presented a program on saving big money with coupons. Also featured throughout the show was the Designer Dog House Competition, with entries built by area career and technical high school students. Visitors were able to vote on their favorite entry, with many prizes awarded.

Experts, including RIBA members Felix Carlone of F.A. Carlone & Sons ("How to Choose a Contractor"), and Prudence Stoddard of R.I. Kitchen & Bath Inc. ("Kitchen and Bath Design Trends for 2011") presented seminars throughout the show. Various cooking demonstrations and tastings with chefs from Newport Restaurant Week drew crowds each day, and there were plenty of events for the children, including Kaleidoscope Theater and balloon-animal artist Lon Cerel.

Capping the show on Sunday were the drawings for the grand prizes: the appliances from Newport Restaurant Week's Demonstration Kitchen (the winner: John Windecker of Greenville) and a seven-night Cruise to Bermuda on the Norwegian Dawn from The Vacation Center (the winner: Jerry Sarza of North Providence).

Over a dozen works of fine art, donated by artisans in the Fine Arts Showcase, were awarded as well.

The 2012 Home Show will be held March 29 - April 1. Visit [www.ribahomeshow.com](http://www.ribahomeshow.com), or contact Yoffe Exposition Services at (800) 963-3395.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket and is the editor of the monthly RIBA newsletter, The Rhode Island Builder Report.