

Yen for Housing Part 2

By George Porter

In the last article I was about to go to Japan and train some set-up people on multi-section homes. That has happened and it was an experience that I will not soon forget. It has been said that you don't know what you have until you have to do without it for a while.

One of the largest assets we have in the U.S. is that almost everyone can do many things. An accountant can probably change the spark plugs in his car, an auto mechanic can shingle his roof, and nearly everyone can replace a washer in the faucet. We paint our homes, hang wall paper, repair lawnmowers and just about anything else in our lives that needs doing. Not in Japan.

The average installer in this country can repair the truck, drive the truck, back the home into places you can just barely walk to, pour concrete footings, block and level the home, skirt it, shingle it, spackle the drywall, paint it, lay the carpet, repair the vinyl floor, hook up the gas, adjust the pilots and burners, re-hang doors, replace glass in windows, connect ductwork, install air conditioners, hook up water and sewer, and most of the time wire the home. In Japan you would need 20 tradesmen to do the same thing. Each person has a job and he does it to perfection, that's great!, it has made them the world power that they are today, but they don't have handymen! They don't have hardware stores, lumber yards, etc. because there is no demand. When you buy something over there it lasts until you decide to replace it or throw it away, you don't generally plan on fixing it ever. Cars of course have maintenance and it is always done by a service tech. at a service facility, not your driveway.

An installer who knows what he is doing and speaks fluent Japanese would soon be worth his weight in gold over there. They have the skills necessary to do the work but they are not found in one person like here. This person could literally take the place of 20 Japanese tradesmen and could do in two days what it would probably take them two weeks to do because of the coordinating and waiting for one guy to finish so the next fellow could start his job.

Please do not get the impression that it will remain this way long, these people are very capable and they will adjust. The thing is they don't have this level of skill right now and the homes are on the boat. It's going to be a little slow at first but the demand for housing is so great and this price is so good that they can't fail.

The average Japanese Home is about 1000 sq. ft. and costs \$300,000.00 US. These are just as big and will cost about \$85,000 not including land. When you get away from the cities a building site is about the same as for a lot in the US, \$20G - \$50G. What would you say their chances of success were?

By the way, sushi is not bad if it's cooked right.