

# Inspiration Report

A Timber Framing Magazine

Summer 2023

## 7 Tips to Choose THE BEST Timber Frame Home Builder

**ARROW**  
TIMBER FRAMING

Old Japanese  
Architecture Book  
Blew My Mind!

pg. 9

Timber Frame  
Community with  
4 Distinct Styles

pg. 5

**UPCOMING  
SEMINAR**

Details inside  
pg. 9

**FREE HAPPINESS ADVICE**

Is childhood happiness all it's  
cracked up to be?

pg. 8



# 7 Tips to Choose **The Best** Timber Frame Home Builder

*Whether you have a design ready or need a one-stop-shop for design and construction, these tips will help you find the right builder. Learn about compatibility, effective communication, assessing competence, and seeking input from a trusted friend. Ensure a smooth and successful home-building journey with these insights.*

**P**eople looking for a Timber Frame home builder by default of their search, telegraph their desire for a high caliber home builder. As they should. The essence of the timber frame mindset is a sharp contrast from slap-dash, short-term thinking. Regarding their search, this discerning group of buyers generally falls into two camps. 1) Those who have completed their design and want a builder to construct their vision. 2) Those at the beginning stages of their home-building process looking for a one-stop shop, ideally, a company with expertise in both design and general contracting. Whether you are in the 1st or 2nd group, this article will give you insight into choosing the best timber frame home builder for you and your project!

After almost 52 years of personal life experience and watching countless people negotiate their building journey, I have come to this conclusion: **"None of us really know what we want."** If we are choosing a career, personal hobby, building a home, or even simply shopping for shoes, this holds true. Why? In a word, education. When beginning our endeavors, we don't

know what we don't know. Therefore, I advise you to stock up on patience, understanding, and self-compassion before you start. You will need all of these to deal with yourself, co-decision makers, and those you choose to hire. Armed with these elusive qualities you are practically guaranteed a pleasant home-building journey. Next, Let's talk about how you can expedite your education (mostly about you and how you roll) so you can quickly discover what you really want in a home builder.

## WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT?

As the visionary, you have imagined what could be with your Timber Frame home. Now you must get it constructed. Many things can go wrong after the baton is handed off and enters the actual building stage. During the building process, nothing will go perfectly. Certain products may be

**Figure 1**

**Smooth baton handoffs are essential for success in both relay races and home building. When they're done well, it means everyone is on the same page, and no momentum is lost.**



cost-prohibitive or unavailable. Mistakes will be made. Delays will happen. Improvised solutions will need to be found. New ideas or suggestions will arise from subcontractors- and quite possibly, your friends and family will have ideas and suggestions as well. Your builder must help you navigate all of these incidentals and changes on your behalf. The last thing you want to see is your builder trip, stumble, and fall on the home stretch!

## 1 HOPE FOR THE BEST, PLAN FOR THE WORST

Without optimism, nothing would ever get started, and life would be the pits! Most people prefer to live, think, and plan with more optimism than pessimism. **But too much optimism can bite us in the rear in two ways:** 1) It can make us careless about who we choose to hire. While I am a strong advocate of maintaining a sense of looseness and relaxation, it is necessary to incorporate a degree of tense pessimism when engaging in planning and decision-making. I'm reminded of a fellow I hired years ago. I doubt that he answered the interview questions perfectly, but because I was wearing rose-colored glasses, I heard what I wanted to hear. I quickly discovered this individual had a temperament and skills meant for another employer! Had I interviewed with a little pessimism, the poor fit would have become glaringly apparent. 2) **It can set us up for heartbreak, pain, and suffering.** I experienced the most extreme case of unrealistic optimism back in 2010. This particular client could hardly hire a contractor which did not result in a dispute. To my knowledge, the only contractors to escape unscathed were hired by the hour to fix framing errors, with the intention

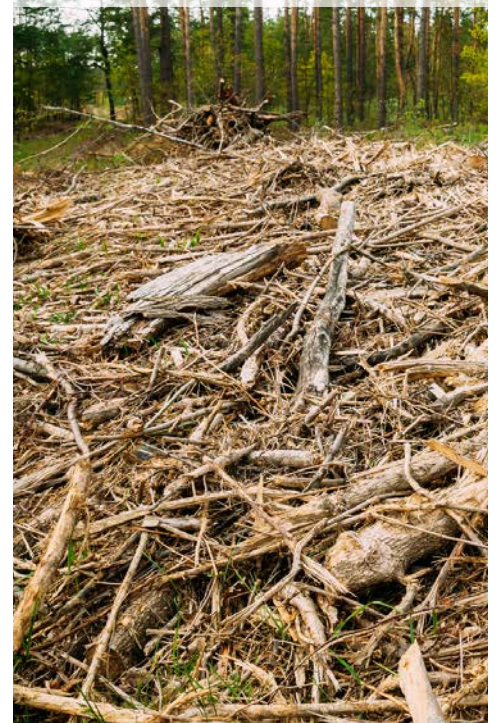
to recoup fix-it costs in court. What caused this toxic home-building cocktail? **A crappy childhood? Little brother syndrome? Bad medication?** STOP! Let's not go there. Finding the root cause is *waaay* beyond where I'm willing to go, but he said something one day that revealed his hopeless perfectionism: "I don't understand why people can't simply make a plan and execute it! I love it when a plan is thought out and gets done with absolutely no changes!" And it was apparent he valued no changes more than a better outcome or final product. Now, I really like thorough planning, but please shoot me if I ever reach that level of rigidity! **TAKE-AWAY:** With a dose of pessimism, you can right-size your expectations and get very inquisitive with questions to determine a good fit.

## 2 COMMUNICATE WHAT GOOD & BAD LOOK LIKE

Quite a few years ago, a developer I know hired a logger to clear his property. In time, the logger called him up, saying, "We are pretty much all wrapped up!" **But once this fellow saw what the logger he hired considered done, he found another logger to come and finish the job to his level of expectation.** One might ask: "Why not make the first logger complete the job and avoid the extra costs? That is a fair question. But this fellow was really wise. He could have asked the first logger to complete the job, but their ideas of done were so far apart, he would have likely had to spend a lot of energy coercing his logger to finish- and ultimately have to settle for a lower level of completion than he envisioned. In my opinion, it was an extremely good move to admit his mistake to himself, cut his losses and hire smarter with lessons learned. This

**Figure 2**

**Does this look done to you?**  
Most will answer no - some will say yes. Context is key.



alone is a valuable **TAKE-AWAY** for you, but let's make it even more valuable. What could the developer have done to make a smart logging hire the first time? And more importantly, what can you do to hire the best builders for you and your project the first time? In our example, simply showing a few pictures of done and not done may have done the trick. While pictures do a lot of heavy communication lifting, I have my doubts about closing the communication gap with the logger by simply showing him a few pictures. Even pictures are open to interpretation when applied to real-life situations and the many decisions which culminate to produce a finished project. It may have been helpful also to show or communicate a picture of not-done, working to describe things from two directions. You may often see the lightbulb moment of comprehension as you complete your description of what bad looks like!



# 3

## DOUBLE DOWN WITH GOOD/BAD COMMUNICATION

If you can conduct an actual tour with your builder, do so. One builder I know was given a tour of his client's existing home so he could get an idea of their expectations. But it was after they had begun construction and the contract was signed. During the tour, his stress levels went through the roof! The level of finish he witnessed was substantially higher than he had understood or budgeted for. I'm not sure how the disconnect happened. *I can't imagine hiring a builder for a multi-million-dollar home without touring past projects done by the builder.* Perhaps a tour was done, but the buyers were focused more on timbers and space design rather than quality details and the overall cost of selected building materials. Had the builder asked the clients to point things out that they liked as they went from room to room, he may have broadened the communication focus and avoided the awkward situation. As with tip number two, also touring a bad example is worth considering.



**Fig 3**

Tour past builder's work to truly know what you can expect in your new home.

# 4

## AVOID A TOXIC MATCHUP

Stories abound in the business world featuring a talented superstar hire that has to be fired because they are a toxic fit for the company culture. I remember having one such employee years ago.

**Fig 4**

You don't actually have to camp with your builder to know if the fit is good - but would you want to?



**I was waiting for a chance to cut ties with this person and kept taking his guff because we were so busy.**

Then things got even busier! But then came the straw that broke the camel's back. It was a relatively small infraction, but that was it! I let him know we were switching gears that afternoon. I thanked him for his help and wished him well. And my fears about getting all that work done? There was probably some short-term pain, but I can't remember it now. I can only remember the relief. The work got done. I think it has something to do with the saying: "Nature abhors a vacuum." I've seen it too often, in too many different situations, not to believe it. But the **TAKE-AWAY** here is compatibility. In the first section of our book, *'The Art of Hybrid Timber Framing'*, we give Owners a method to measure compatibility. It, too, is pilfered from the business world. It involves discovering your **Core Values**. They are not basic permission-to-play values such as industriousness, integrity, and trust. Permission-to-play are required values, and just get your builder to first base. **Nor are your Core Values aspirational- what you wish you were like.** Gaining skills and improving are very important, but they are not **Core Values**. A quick method to get started discovering your **Core Values** is to ask yourself the following questions: 1) "What kind of behaviors leave me angry?" And conversely, 2) "What kind of behaviors give me a great big smile?" Another question to evaluate compatibility is to answer this question honestly: *"Would I be glad to go camping or take a road trip with this individual?"* In general, the business world advocates for a cultural fit to win the long game. And you will be playing a long

game with your chosen builder. Be honest with yourself when you perform your compatibility evaluations.

# 5

## "BUT NICE ONLY GOES SO FAR!"

**"Billy Bones is a nice guy, but it only goes so far!"** I overheard this statement on a job site from a roofing contractor who was responding to a suggestion to use Billy Bones, a concrete contractor, for the foundation of his home. I had to chuckle to myself at how he expressed this simple truth. This roofer went on to express concerns about Billy Bones' quality of work. **TAKE-AWAY:** *This observation about competence, ability, and expertise takes absolutely nothing away from the prior message about toxic matchups. It just narrows your hiring choices. Trust me, you want and need both compatibility and competence.*



**Fig 5**

Fit is important when choosing builders, but so is *know-how*.

# 6

## SOLID YES'S FOR THREE EXPERTISE QUESTIONS

Another hiring tip from our book (also heisted from the business world) involves getting a solid YES for the following three questions: **1) "Do they understand what you want?"** As we've already covered, the best intentions cannot compensate for not understanding what you want. **2) "Are they thrilled to do your project?"** My fifth-grade teacher had an "Attitude is Everything" banner hanging on the wall. While this is an oversimplification, it measures how much a person believes in the value they are providing with their

service. Because of short-term necessity, I've taken some jobs where I was not absolutely thrilled. There was still satisfaction helping clients, but it was just not the sated feeling that comes with a truly good fit. **3) "Do they have the ability to perform?"** *Question:* How much Timber Framing experience should your general contractor have? While it is much better if your builder has experience with post and beam construction, compatibility is more important. Provided your builder clears your competence bar with all the other aspects of home building. *Why? Because the expertise and details involved in using Timber Framing is not rocket science.* If your builder is both competent and conscientious, it is better than an experienced builder with a poor fit. Missing skills and knowledge can be learned. Just don't hire cheap subcontractors where your builder may lack knowledge and expertise.



**Fig 6**  
Three simple questions can help clarify if your home builder search is done.

## 7 COVERTLY OR OVERTLY HAVE A FRIEND HELP

Once you narrow down your choices, consider getting a friend who knows you well to interview potential builders. This can be done on the sly by simply having your friend in tow visiting the builder's office or job site. Or you can ask your builder to talk openly with your friend regarding a good fit. Why is it a good idea to consider this tactic? Because a friend who knows you will not be encumbered with emotion or too much detail regarding your hiring concerns. And they may know your tendencies and blind spots. After hearing their opinion,

you may end up going against their advice- you are still the visionary and the final call is still yours. But, you've been given the opportunity to evaluate your decision from another angle you may not have considered if left to your stoney lonesome!



With all these tips, remember that your job communicating means finding out what is going on in the head of your chosen builder. You are the visionary investing your hard-earned money, so you have to find this out. Don't make the hiring mistakes I've made interviewing potential hires. Do the hard work of really listening. Dig in with clarifying questions. Avoid glossing things over, listening with preconceived expectations, and mentally "checking boxes" after hearing a few keywords. It will be especially hard if you really like the candidate. Take it from me. I've learned the hard way!

Increasing the tension before your hiring decisions is generally very beneficial. But can the fear factor get too high? YES. Some people with a naturally high worry factor should probably not read this article. Other happy-go-lucky types could benefit by rewriting this article by hand, so it all

“ IN GENERAL, THE BUSINESS WORLD ADVOCATES FOR A CULTURAL FIT TO WIN THE LONG GAME.. AND YOU WILL BE PLAYING A LONG GAME WITH YOUR CHOSEN BUILDER. ”

really sinks in! If you find yourself waking up three mornings in a row with this decision on your mind, your fear factor may need to be reduced. You still need to stay loose and have fun through most of the process. But for most people, the tips shared in this article will yield both emotional and monetary dividends for their home-building journey. Then after your decision is made, don your rose-colored glasses whenever things do not go exactly as planned. *Because once you've done due diligence to your level of satisfaction, worry is counterproductive. It's going to be OK.* Mistakes will be made, but you will find solutions for things that come up. As we've discussed in previous articles, reconfirming your WHY will bring you back into loose, fun territory. You got this. Find your way to enjoy both apprehension and success! It is your journey.

On behalf of the ATF Team,

BERT SARKKINEN



**Fig 7**  
Stay loose, have fun, and enjoy the home building journey!



# A Timber Frame Community

The economist Milton Friedman once said something to the effect of: ***“Your freedom to swing your fist depends on the proximity of my chin.”*** His statement captures both the essence and issues of being a member of society or community. If your neighbor exercises his freedom to raise hogs, you might resist and raise some objections, right? The opposite is true. Because influence is a two-way street, a bad neighbor is more than just a nuisance. **To our primitive brain, bad influence actually threatens our survival and our way of life!** But the opposite virtue involving good neighbors is a pleasure to see. In this gated community, we were able to help foster a pleasant timber frame vibe. Between us and the builder, there was a concerted effort to make each timber package unique to avoid repetition and still capture the owner's style. You can get the complete details by visiting our YouTube channel:

[www.youtube.com/@timberframedesign](https://www.youtube.com/@timberframedesign)

Any way you slice it, this neighborhood turned out to be a nice place to live! I realized that the owner's and builder's decisions regarding timber framing are just a small piece of the overall decision pie to construct this community. But wrong or right, I believe the decision to use timber framing functions more like a linchpin than a cog- the decision to upgrade with timber framing positively impacts a multitude of subsequent decisions!

Tall Craftsman

Warm





# Classic



# Elegant Farmhouse



# Modern Coastal





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# GETTING TO KNOW

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## Mikayla

I really appreciate Mikayla. She is not the sort of gal concerned about breaking a nail. And as an apprentice artisan crafting timbers on the shop floor, she fits right in with the team. I happened to be around when she stopped by for an application. Because of her obvious determination and can-do-attitude, I couldn't resist teasing her a bit: "Our applicants must pass a deadlift minimum test. Are you OK with that?" I asked her. There was no hesitation- she gave a serious nod of understanding. She did not realize I was joking! She does sports and outdoor activities, so she was familiar with deadlifting. I suppose she was also accustomed to proving herself because a lot of women are not interested in doing heavier hands-on work. But whether female or male, we (ATF) believe, "If the shoe fits, wear it!" It is difficult to force a good fit over the long haul. With Mikayla, nobody has to attempt pushing a rope and forcing her to do a job she has neither interest or ability to do!

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### **WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE PEOPLE TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR PAST?**

I'm Washington-born and Montana- raised. I'm from a small town on the eastern side of Montana, Sidney! I grew up playing sports and fishing the Yellowstone River.

### **WHERE IS A PLACE YOU WOULD LIKE TO VISIT?**

I want to visit my family back in Montana, travel to New York to watch a New York Yankees game and go to Vegas to watch a Raiders game at the new stadium.

### **HOW DO YOU LIKE TO SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?**

In my spare time, I play soccer and softball. I also volunteer as a basketball, soccer, and T-ball coach, helping the youth. I love fishing and doing anything outdoors!

### **WHAT WOULD HAVE TO HAPPEN IN THE NEXT 3 YEARS TO MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE MOVING FORWARD?**

To feel like I'm moving forward in the next 3 years, I would like to pay off my car and save money to become more financially stable. I want to also improve my skills a little bit every day to be more successful in my work life.



# Happiness is...

When I'm around little children, I often find myself slightly envious. They don't have a problem in their world that can't be fixed by a piece of gum or a sugary treat. Wouldn't that be nice if the same tactic to shift our disappointed focus worked in adulthood? i.e., "Sally is no longer interested in being your girlfriend? What a bugger! Here- have a piece of gum. Do you want a red one or a green one?" Presto! Problem solved!

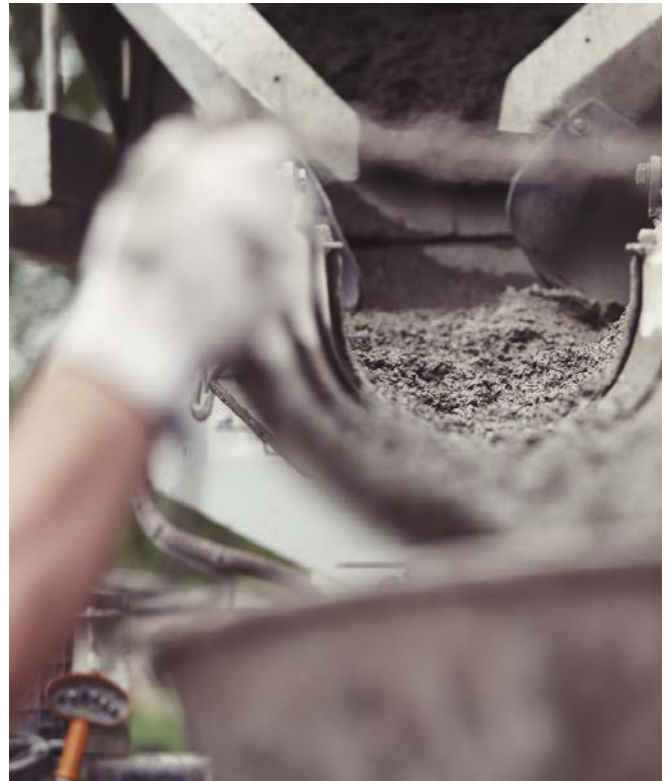


But if I had to accept the turbulent roller coaster of emotions children experience daily along with the ability to easily fix to life's disappointments... Well, I don't think I could handle it! As a 51-year-old, I still get some kick-butt, high-flying days. But I've learned that this feeling is temporary and will change. The same message applies to crappy days full of disappointments. Understanding the transitory nature of our focus and feelings allows us to wait out hardships patiently. And it can help us enjoy good times without clinging desperately to the moment, fearing the loss of these happy feelings.

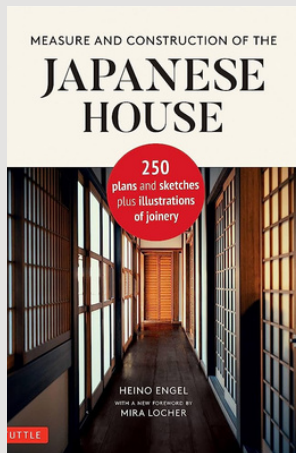
# Knowing Feelings Are Temporary

# Memory Lane

Nothing beats the feeling of positively surprising your boss. I remember being tasked to form concrete to fit a kidney shape jacuzzi one morning. My boss told me to get started, and he would be along later. I could tell he expected me to spin my wheels, thinking, unable to accomplish much until he was able to get to the job site. However, I hit upon a simple forming method to deal with the multiple curves and had things about halfway done by the time he came to the job a few hours later. We were both happy. I got the nod of approval, and he did not have to jump into work and problem-solving but simply say, "Looks good! Carry on!"



# GOOD READS



## THE MEASURE AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE JAPANESE HOUSE By Heino Engel



Written by a German scholar in the mid 1900's this book is a difficult but illuminating read. In a way, the content is more about how Japanese lifestyle, thinking and culture evolved and manifested itself in residential architecture. For example, space and square footage is conceptualized and designed around 3'x6' floor mats. An average bedroom is defined as a six mat room. A living room might be an 8 or 10 mat room. (Yes, small is a fitting adjective to describe Japanese architecture.)

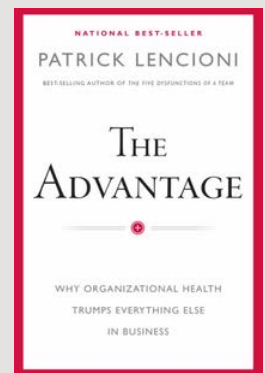
The thick woven floor mats (tatami) were a portable, personal item designed to sleep one person or sit two people in times before the 18th century. By the 1900's the floor mat served as modular wall-to-wall carpeting. Sizes became standardized. And the carpenter, who was also the architect, designed post locations and floor plans working with these floor mat units. The beautiful beam joinery of the roof, was always covered by a hanging ceiling and walls were built without insulation using light sliding panels. For me, these are a mind-blower! From compact use of space, precise timber joinery methods, and building philosophy, this book will give you insight you've never had before. Granted, some insights will make you snort in disbelief but others will spark creative ruminating in your brain!



## THE ADVANTAGE

By Patrick Lencioni

When in doubt, communicate with a story. Patrick's previous books have inspired me to use stories in my communication as much as possible. Initially, I was disappointed when I started to read this book. Patrick had deviated from his usual story before teaching points format! But I became mollified once I realized this book brought the lessons of his previous books into a compact guide to achieve organizational health. He challenges his readers to answer six simple questions and then relentlessly communicate and reinforce the answers within the organization. He also repeats the need for humility, so anyone in a leadership position with even a glimmering of their own inadequacies will thoroughly enjoy and benefit from this book.



# FREE Timber Frame Seminar

## INTERIOR DESIGN AND STRUCTURAL TIPS TO CHOOSE THE BEST TIMBER FRAME WOOD

- Why do some wood types crack more than others? Is it safe?
- Do my timbers need to match my cabinet colors?
- What type of wood accepts my stain color is the best?
- Which wood is the most expensive?
- Should I use kiln-dried timbers?
- What wood texture is best for my style?

The questions above and more will be explored in depth with the intent to help you balance structural performance, interior design aesthetics, and investment costs. And you need to find that trifecta in order to choose the best wood for your timber frame home. To assist you even further, we have invited Monica, with Linked Design Group in Longview, Wa, as a guest speaker to help us dig deeper into how timbers will help create the home you want. Not only with how wood and stain colors will affect your interior design but how timbers can be used to emphasize tones, borders, and space. I look forward to an enjoyable, benefit-rich evening with you. Snacks and beverages will be available before, during, and after the seminar. If you can't attend in person, you can partake in the seminar virtually, which begins at 6:30 after the shop tour. See you then!

## WHEN

Sept 14, 2023 @ 6pm

## WHERE

Arrow Timber  
Kalama Shop

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CALL (833) 212-0202



# THE ARROW TIMBER PHILOSOPHY

**People want** things which reflect their personality.

**People want** an enjoyable process with a mutual exchange.

**People want** teamwork, transparency, and creative solutions.

I experience this over and over in the course of a year, not only when clients view albums or 3-D models in my office, but especially so immediately after the completion of their timber structure. **Appreciative head nods and slow smiles have almost become a trademark!** I fell in love with the timber framing craft in 2002 and I still feel just as privileged and enthused. Many, many, personalized structures have been created since then. In fact, my **passion, artistry, and repertoire of creative solutions** have all grown dramatically... I sometimes wonder if it is simply something to do with rising to challenges and building upon success. You probably agree that exposed beams provide geometric beauty and resonate deep within our psyche... The style brings to mind **durability, longevity, safety, laughter, smiles, and home to many warm feelings.**



## THE QUESTION

What is the best way for you to acquire your personalized timber living?

Not too much, not too little. Not too high, not too low. Just the right mix of timber presence and style... How to find that sweet spot which you can enjoy for years and pass on to your heirs. It's really about enriching the lives of those around you and sharing your unique personality and viewpoints with them. **How do you intend to achieve this? How will you determine a good fit with service providers?**

Seek out and choose, therefore, things that will evoke head nods and slow smiles. Things which resonate with your personality. Things that do not grow old or boring with the passage of time. You will not regret it.

*To your goals, momentum, and happiness*

Bert Sarkkinen, Owner



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