

# 'Builder's Apprentice' tells author's enlightening story

**By Brandon Meginley - For the CDT**

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For most graduate school applicants, an acceptance letter from Harvard is cause for celebration. But for Andrew Hoffman, it was a reminder of life's fleeting nature. In 1986, the young chemical engineer rejected the ivory tower and embraced a burgeoning passion: construction work.

In his memoir, "Builder's Apprentice," Hoffman recounts working on custom homes — mansions, really — in the late 1980s. Under the mentorship of Jack Schneider, the titular "builder" to Hoffman's "apprentice," the author transitions from a novice to the main builder on three properties in Fairfield, Conn.



**Weekender:** When you decided to forego graduate school, were you unhappy with your work as a chemical engineer or was it just not enough?

**Hoffman:** I was anxious. I was unhappy. But ... that didn't turn itself into being morose. It turned itself into a real energy around the idea of exploring "What do I really want to do? Where do I really want to go?" It's a question I never really asked myself until after I graduated college, which is unfortunate. I think a lot of people make this mistake. They go to college then they decide what to do with their lives.

**Weekender:** What was it about being a builder that made you happier than sitting behind a desk?

**Hoffman:** The idea of seeing the results of my work every day...to see something physical come about from it. Also, I was young. I loved the outside. I loved working with my hands (and) using my body to do my work. Sitting at a desk just drove me crazy.

**Weekender:** In the epilogue, you mention a difference between being a carpenter and a builder. Can you explain?

**Hoffman:** (As) a carpenter, I wanted to put wood together. I wanted to build a house. A builder really, to me, brought together the people and made the process happen. A builder manages people and understands what is necessary, like a conductor of an orchestra.

The carpenter knows how to put the physical elements of the house together. But to step into the world of the builder is very different. It was more of an identity shift.

**Weekender:** It was a risk what you did. Do you have any advice for recent college graduates?

**Hoffman:** The first thing I try to tell people is this: At a young age, it isn't that big of a risk. It's hard to make a fatal mistake in your career in your early 20s.

Don't get hung up on the idea of what will look good on your resume. That's the worst metric. What you're telling people is that the value of your life is measured by someone else as presented on a piece of paper. That's not only unhealthy; it's flat-out wrong.

Source: <http://www.centredaily.com/2010/07/16/2096938/builders-apprentice-tells-authors.html>