

DONALD P. BLAKE JR., INC.



CONTROLLED GROWTH AND CAREFUL QUALITY CONTROL ARE KEY FOR VERMONT BUILDER

by Amy McNeil

BY THE TIME DONALD BLAKE, JR. WAS a senior in a Vermont high school, he knew he wanted to be a builder. After opening his own company, Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc., in 1985, Blake narrowed his focus to high-end residential construction and has crafted a challenging, successful, sustainable career. Blake worked part time on a local construction crew during high school. Once he graduated, he began to work full time for another construction company. There, he worked his way up through the ranks, becoming a job site foreman. "I liked the work, but I didn't like the quality control," Blake recalls.

Above: Vintage post and beam Cape home.

Eventually he was assigned as site supervisor, and Blake was able to oversee many quality projects and improve the site to be cleaner and safer.

Most of the construction projects were high-end homes, but the business expanded to do commercial work. After doing one steel construction job after another, Blake grew tired of the repetitiveness. "We'd have prefab kits and it would be like putting up erector sets," Blake explains. "Everything was of the same nature. I missed the craftsmanship and skilled workmanship of working with wood."



In the late 1970s, one of Blake's bosses left to start his own company and invited Blake to join him. He was interested in returning to wood construction, so he joined the new business. "I worked lots of long hours," says Blake. "I thought if I'm going to work this hard, I should do it for myself."

Blake started Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. in 1985 to specialize in high-end residential construction. He began by doing smaller projects by himself, and then growing large enough to hire a few employees. He and his crew worked as subcontractors for other companies as well as on projects of their own.

As a result of his success, Blake's company expanded so quickly at one point that it employed 15 people. "We tripled growth," Blake explains, "but I discovered that I was making the same money. I focused on getting my company back to a manageable size, and I was deter-

mined not to grow without good management and quality control in place."

Since that time, Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. has grown at a controlled pace to the size of 18 employees, including an administrative assistant to provide internal support. Each year the company is involved in three to four larger and 10 to 12 smaller projects. These include renovations and home construction, which has ranged in size from 2,300 to 12,000 square feet. Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. mostly builds high-end residences but has also done light commercial projects such as restaurants and hospital renovations. "We don't seek out commercial work, but we like being involved with and working on projects for the community," says Blake.

Blake has grown the company with the help of long-term employees, including Travis Cutler, Vice President. Like Blake, Cutler, too, worked his way up through different roles until he became

A MESSAGE FROM THE CUSHMAN DESIGN GROUP, INC.

Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. consistently provides exemplary customer satisfaction due to an excellent standard of craftsmanship, project organization and preliminary cost estimating. These qualities are invaluable to us as we work collaboratively with Donny Blake and our clients. Since the mid-1980s, Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. and The Cushman Design Group, Inc. have been collaborating in Northern Vermont to provide quality homes, both new projects and renovations, for discerning owners.

A MESSAGE FROM NORTHEAST POOLS & SPAS

Congratulations to Donnie and Crew! We are pleased to have collaborated with Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. We have built hundreds of high end shotcrete pools in New England's harsh climate over the past 35 years and builders like Donald Blake trust us to provide the highest quality product to their clients.

Left: The Bridge House interior.

Right: The Bridge House, spanning a brook, is shaped and constructed like a wood truss bridge.



Left: Donald Blake, president. Right: Travis Cutler, vice president.

“WE NEVER BACK AWAY FROM A CHALLENGE.”

Donald Blake, President

Site Supervisor. “I saw something of myself in Travis,” Blake says. “He has a love for building and holds the same values as I do when it comes to how we work with customers.” Cutler became Vice President and a shareholder in the company. As Blake’s partner, he shares in making decisions about the company’s current and upcoming projects as well as plans for future growth.

“We’re both careful to keep a handle on things,” says Blake. “We don’t want to give up quality for extra work. We give every project the time and work that it needs.” To that end, Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. has turned down projects so that it can keep its focus on high-quality work. “I’ve seen companies stretch themselves too thin by taking on work that’s too far,” continues Blake. “I’ve

learned to make it more business than ego. Ego might tell me to do it, but my business sense says no. It’s the good times that get you in trouble, not the bad. That’s when you’re tempted to spend more and stretch out thinner.”

This isn’t to say that Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. shies away from a challenge, though. Take, for instance, Bridge House. The residence was shaped and constructed like a wood truss bridge and spans a brook. “We had to use two cranes at the same time, one at each end,” says Blake, “but it was a lot of fun.” The home also features a roof garden with a deck and picnic area. “We never back away from a challenge,” Blake says.

With every project that the company

DONALD P. BLAKE JR., INC.
AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
Morrisville, VT

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
High-end residential construction
and renovation

PROJECTS SIZE RANGE:
2,300-12,000 square feet

ANNUAL SALES FOR 2007:
\$4.6 million

EMPLOYEES: 18



takes on, people are consistently at the forefront. "Every client is entitled to a job well done," says Blake. Thanks to a reputation for adventurous, premium construction, clients find Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. through the recommendations of past clients. The company also has many repeat customers. In fact, the owners of the first house Donald P. Blake Jr., Inc. built, Vintage Post and Beam Cape, approached the company nearly 20 years later to add on a master wing. "A lot of our clientele become friends," Blake says.

Blake also treats his employees with consideration. "I kept hearing other

builders say, 'If I had it to do over again, I'd spend more time with my family,'" says Blake. He's managed his time so he can spend some of it helping coach his daughter's softball team and volunteering at his children's schools. He also encourages his employees to spend time with their families. If they take time out of their day to coach their children's teams, for example, it is not counted against their vacation time. "We're a tight-knit core of people," says Cutler. ABQ

Left: A contemporary mountain retreat.



A MESSAGE FROM ROCKAWAY DRILLING & BLASTING

Rockaway Drilling & Blasting has had the opportunity to work with Donald Blake Jr., Inc. on several projects. It is a very professional group and their craftsmanship is evident down to the smallest detail. Mac & Erik look forward to working with Donald P. Blake, Jr., Inc. on unique projects in the future.

Our company offers top quality new construction of custom homes and renovations in the Lamoille County, Vermont area since 1985. We strive to work as a team to provide the best and to meet the expectations of each project that we schedule. Enjoy some of our work by visiting our website!
www.stowebuilder.com



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