

Compliments of Sherrie Natko

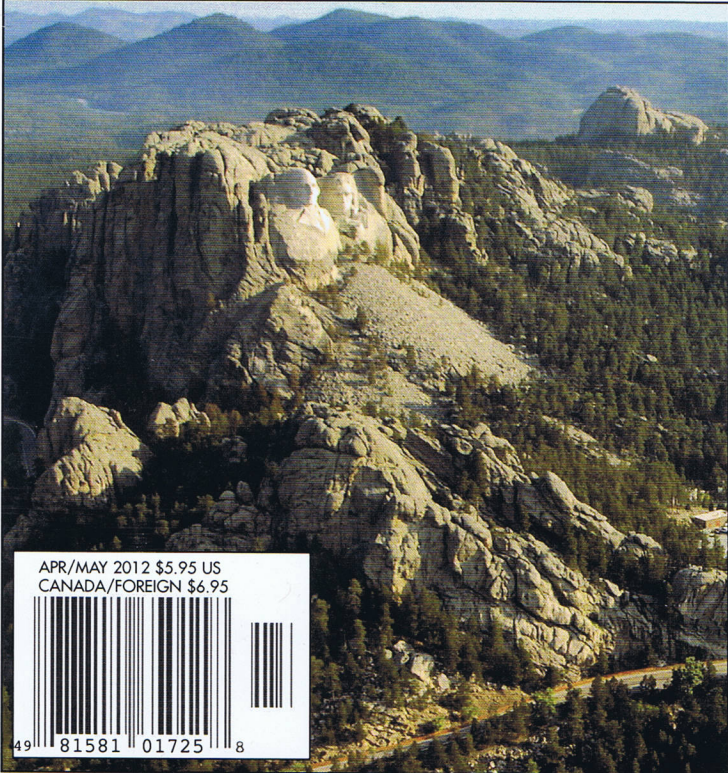
AMERICAN LIFESTYLE

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How to Hatch a Home

THE BIRTH OF A DESIGN BUILD FIRM

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Hatch Works is a design build company specializing in unique homes and structures: anywhere from classical Victorian to ultra-modern.





MY WIFE AND I ARE BUILDERS. While we could craft an argument that we've been nocturnal builders for quite some time, it only recently became official. In September of 2009, our design build firm, Hatch Works, officially opened for business.

MEANDERING PATHS

I've always loved meeting people or reading stories about someone who, from a very early age, knew precisely who and what they wanted to become as an adult. In some ways, I'm envious of the well defined career arc. I've always suspected that these people must also sleep very well each night knowing that they are on their destined path.

I have a degree in Zoology. I love insects. I toyed with getting a Ph.D. and joining the world of academia. Instead, I drifted back toward another college path of mine, chemical engineering, and worked as an environmental regulator and consultant for almost ten years with a three-year stint developing utility scale wind farms thrown in for good measure. And now, I build homes. All very logical to no one.

Ashley, my wife, has a history degree and a master's in industrial design. She's also had more careers than I: documentary film production, architectural draftsman, advertising assistant, product designer, and currently works in digital design, as she moonlights for Hatch Works.

BLOODLINES

So how on earth did we start a design build firm? In short, it's in our blood. My grandfather was a builder. My father is a builder. And I played with lots of LEGO's as a child. My wife's mother is an interior decorator. My wife made custom-made furniture for her Barbies as a child.

So while we were pursuing all of our varied careers mentioned above, we were also secretly training ourselves to be builders by doing the things we had learned from our parents as children. I bought my first house in 2002. As I was working for the state of Texas at the time, all I could afford was a condemned house located in a questionable neighborhood (that I love). I learned by reading, doing, and the occasional call to my parents for advice. After the first house, I met my wife, then came another house, a 2,000-square-foot workshop, marriage, another project, and now a business.

DEVELOPMENT OF FIRM

We had become the definition of weekend warriors. But after seven years of warring, we decided we need some peace. Either slow it down, or quit the job and become a full-time builder. It was 2009. The economy had just suffered its worst drop since the Depression. So yes, the perfect time to quit one's job (I didn't actually end up leaving until August of 2010) and enter the sector of the economy suffering the most. In truth, why not? It's better to start at the bottom of a market cycle than at the top. We could start slowly, and we would be poised to take advantage when the housing market begins to grow again. It also helped that we live in Texas, where the impacts of the downfall were not nearly as severe as most other states.

FIRST CLIENT

Our first client really was ourselves. The project was a complete remodel of a 700-square-foot Craftsman style bungalow built in the 1930s that was in worse shape than the first condemned house that I purchased. It was

The living space then ties into the kitchen, which was built around an old architectural desk and French doors leading to the backyard deck. The kitchen is very large, relative to the size of the house. We found that when we threw parties, everyone centers in or around the kitchen.





definitely a learning experience for us on how to work together, how to make small spaces feel bigger than they are, and just how important it is to have plenty of storage space (“more closets!” was our mantra). This project is featured later in more depth under Overview of Project.

FIRST REAL CLIENTS

Our first real clients came to us in 2010 when we were in the middle of building our own house. They had driven by the house and really liked it. When we told them it wasn't for sale, they said we should build them one then. Although, we had started the company the year before, we were still both working full-time jobs as consultants in our respective fields. Our consulting background, where we



We also minimized our **lawn space** in favor of a large succulent/xeriscape garden bed which is terraced and frames the **backyard deck**.

feet of low-cost hangout space to our house. Also, everyone in Austin loves to be outside anyway. We also minimized our lawn space in favor of a large succulent/xeriscape garden bed which is terraced and frames the backyard deck.

FAVORITE PART OF PROJECT

I dared to paint an orange stripe on our house, and my wife gave her approval. I know she was extra pleased that I also woke her up early on a Saturday morning and told her we had to pick a color for the stripe on the outside of the house immediately. I think we settled on a color called Hawaiian Sunshine.

MOST DIFFICULT OBSTACLE

Final Certificate of Occupancy. Our inspector kept failing us for the most trivial little things. We had four final inspections, each time with a different list of tiny little things he wanted done. We passed on the fourth and final time only because he was out sick that day. Instead, his supervisor performed the inspection, and he said the house looked fantastic!

WOULD WE DO IT AGAIN?

After our experiences with the bungalow remodel—trying to figure out the previous builders' intent, amending their mistakes,

and re-leveling well, everything—Ashley and I joked that it would have been easier, faster, and less expensive to build the house from scratch and just put the old siding on it. That's when we realized the potential for building new homes, utilizing salvaged materials and era-relevant fixtures to make them feel old. While we love an old home down to its spiderwebs, my wife does not love the closet space or lack thereof, nor I the mysterious electrical work.

NEW OLD HOMES

While home building is an old craft, we're avid fans of integrating new technology into



our design plans. In our current house, we have a “server room” with a central computer to contain and wirelessly distribute music, content, and media to other devices’ speakers, TVs, and the movie projector. Technology is changing how we interact with our homes. Five different control panels will become a thing of the past as we will soon be able to control our lights, thermostat, and sprinkler system all from an iPad app. Imagine all that, and a dedicated shoe closet in a Victorian home—best of both worlds.

For a builder, new home construction has fewer variables than a remodel. This

enables me to project costs more accurately, and work on time and on budget. For a new company like ours, we like the containment of these variables. Our clients like it too. We still have our share of surprises; there are just fewer of them.

While recently building a Victorian house with two-story front porches and arched gables, a random passerby asked if I had moved an old house onto the lot. For me, that’s a successful design.

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