

TRADER REAL ESTATE

INSIDE:
TRADER
BUSINESS, C5

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One of the high-end houses that Hobbs Inc. has built

Family builds from ground up

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Most family-run businesses are lucky to survive five years, let alone 50. Even fewer of them grow and prosper, not to mention enjoying and taking pride in what they do along the way.

That's what makes Hobbs Inc., a high-end construction company, stand out. Celebrating its 50th anniversary, Hobbs Inc. is now managed by the third generation of the family, Scott Hobbs and his brother Ian.

The business was founded by their grandfather Ted, who started out paving driveways and then moved into construction of all kinds. When Michael, Ted's son, took the reins, he began to change the company's focus to high-end residential construction, Scott Hobbs said.

The company's main office is in New Canaan, Conn., and it has a branch in Bedford Village. That office, which they did some renovations on for the Bedford Historical Society, opened in 1998 and is managed by Ian.

The company has continued to grow and expand in terms of projects and staff under all three generations, Scott Hobbs said. In his father's time, there would be about three or four major projects going on at a time.

When Scott took over, he said, the company was up to about 10 major projects. Now they are working on about 18 major and several smaller-scale projects.

Hobbs Inc. has three divisions: Main Projects, which includes new construction and significant renovations; Distinguished Editions and Renovations, which was created three years ago to handle smaller-scale projects; and Personal Estate Management, for ongoing maintenance of houses. The Personal Estate Management division allows the company "to look at a house from a holistic point of view," Scott Hobbs said.

House keeping

While the other two divisions are fairly straightforward in their missions, the Personal Estate Management area is only limited in its offerings by what a client needs and wants. Owning a high-end custom house can be a job in itself in making sure it stays in pristine condition. Some clients love being in charge of their house, Scott Hobbs said, adding that the management division becomes a resource for them. Then there are the clients who prefer to bring in professionals to help run their house so they can enjoy it.

For example, many of Hobbs' clients use their house as a country retreat so they might need to

find a caretaker to oversee the property while they are not there. Or, if they already have a caretaker, Hobbs can help design a plan for the optimal upkeep of the property. The company also can make recommendations about skilled help. Scott Hobbs said he's even arranged rides from the airport for clients.

On another practical note, Hobbs said the company likes to arrange semi-annual inspections of its projects to catch things that might need fixing sooner, before it becomes a major problem. "We make sure everything's functioning as it should," he said. This means they will go around and check all the windows, faucets, doors, drawers and systems.

He likened the service to having a painter come out each year to do small touch-ups and maintenance. If you put off the job for, say, 10 years, it usually will be more expensive and a major undertaking when it is done.

It pays for itself, Hobbs said, adding, "the house will stay in much better shape ... and cost less in the long run."

What homeowners want

With the majority of projects centered in the Westchester and Fairfield County, Conn., area,

Please see HOBBS, C3

Family builds business from the ground up

HOBBS, from A1

Hobbs said there are some similarities among what customers desire in their dream home. To be a truly high-end house, it must have at least five bedrooms and several full and half baths; a kitchen/family room area; nice lighting and layout; curb appeal; at least three garage spaces; and be different from a McMansion, he said. Theaters and multimedia set-ups are also popular and run the spectrum from a room with a large-screen television, accompanying sound system and some casual seating to a more cinematic experience with a

rear-projection screen and movie-theater seating.

Master bathrooms continue to be important to homeowners and have become more elaborate.

"It really is a retreat," Hobbs said, adding they are seeing clients use different types of stone and tiles.

Master showers can have multiple shower heads, raindomes, steam units, aromatherapy misters and even body sprays — multiple shower heads mounted in the shower walls to shoot streams of water up and down the body.

The garage isn't just for cars any-

more, according to Hobbs. People are turning it into a utility space with extra high ceilings and garage doors that go straight up so it can double as a gym space for the kids on inclement days.

In addition, clients also are requesting his and hers home offices and sometimes even a separate office for the person running the house. Multipurpose rooms are also catching on, and can be used for anything from arts and crafts projects for all members of the family to a potting area to a wrapping station.

Clients are also going green,

Hobbs said. They are concerned with an energy-efficient and environmentally sensitive building process, as well as high-efficiency heating and cooling systems.

One area where Hobbs is seeing a resurgence is modern design. "The market taste is moving that way," he said. Some reasons are that building technology is catching up to the design elements especially in the quality of glass and roofing products and structural materials. It's more feasible to build a glass house now that a homeowner knows he or she won't lose all their energy

through the windows.

What all the requests have in common, no matter the scale, Hobbs said, is that clients are looking for quality in their house. "The expectations of owners have gone up in the past 10 years," he said. And his company is more than happy to meet the challenges.

In all the years Hobbs Inc. has been doing business, Hobbs said, they are most proud that they have never been involved in a lawsuit with a client. They try to establish a bond with clients and provide them with a great product, he added.

One architecture firm Hobbs works with regularly is Shope Reno Wharton in Greenwich, Conn. Arthur Hanlon, one of four partners in the firm, estimated that they have collaborated on more than 25 houses since 1981.

One of the reasons he enjoys working with Hobbs is how the company handles the home-building process, which he called collaborative. "These guys are terrific communicators," he said. During projects, they meet weekly to monitor the progress.

He also commented on Hobbs' level of execution. "It's important to move projects quickly without sacrificing quality. People are happy and that's the bottom line," Hanlon said.