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Master Craft *by Ed Kiersb*

THREE GENERATIONS OF HOMEBUILDING IN SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT

A simple handshake used to be enough for third generation home-builder Scott Hobbs to do business. Rarely pressured by overly demanding clients or confronted with dishonest contractors, he'd seal deals with a traditional, good faith handclasp.

Now, the construction business has changed. The building of expensive homes, according to Hobbs, the 37-year-old president of Hobbs, Inc., "has attracted many unscrupulous and inexperienced people into home building," who instead of honoring cost estimates and other promises "have created an environment where lawsuits are all too common.

"For decades someone's word was sufficient, but now people are all too quick to sue," says Hobbs, standing next to a 10,000-square-foot New Canaan farmhouse. "If you don't spend time on the contracts, you're opening yourself up to disaster. We tell everyone what will be happening, what the cost will be, when things will be happening, and I'm proud to say that approach has given us an impeccable record."

Avoiding messy legal battles is only one hallmark of the "Hobbs Way," a principle that's distinguished this 50-year-old company since Hobbs' grandfather, Theodore, built his first house in New Canaan. At the heart of the company's growing reputation in Fairfield County is his fixation with quality—building homes that "work" for people.

"We pay attention to the flash, the woodworking finishes, tiling and painting, but we also make sure the house is absolutely structurally solid," says Hobbs, who was never pressured to join the family business and only worked for his father during summers while attending Duke University. "We want our homes to have longevity, so take the heating, ventilation and AC, for example.

We'll make sure we have separate drain



Generation Next | Scott Hobbs, who took over the family business from his father, says attention to detail is one attribute that helps set his homebuilding firm, Hobbs Inc., apart. See Resources.

valves for all these systems, so they can be easily serviced. This greater attention to detail gives home owners much higher levels of comfort."

After leaving the Army's armor corps in 1992 to work alongside his father, Hobbs recalls, "I never felt I had to prove myself or to escape his shadow. The only pressure I felt was to maintain the Hobbs' reputation."

Earning an MBA from Columbia in 1996-97, he, along with his brother Ian, broadened the firm's "business model," setting up different divisions to cater specifically to "distinguished" homes,

additions, renovations and personal estate management.

His father, who retired in 1998 and now does public service work in New Canaan, enthusiastically supported his sons during the restructuring. "My dad always counseled us to do good work and to have high expectations for the company," says Hobbs, who's now trying to bolster the firm's industry muscle.

"Our size [a 75 member staff] gives us an advantage managing all the regulations and [coastal environment] laws," he adds. "While the construction business is getting a lot harder, it's a fun challenge."

Luxury homeowners have become much more demanding. From insisting on master bedroom "comfort centers" to more decorative master showers, Hobbs says, "people's expectations have risen dramatically."

The firm's arsenal, which allows him to do much more precise work, includes such innovative tools as laser measuring devices, digital surveying equipment and improved mitre cutting saws that all reduce hour jobs to mere minutes. As he explains, "more precise measurements help me save a lot of

money since reworking things in a house can be very expensive."

Hobbs still faces the challenge of attracting skilled laborers to Fairfield County, but that's not his main concern. His plan for the future rests on the passion for the business that first inspired his grandfather and father.

"Construction has always been in my family's blood. It's what excited us," he says, "and that's the same feeling our skilled workers and I have. When you build something great, these craftsmen will come."