

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THEIR CLIENTS



Q&A with Matt Fisher on his custom home building company, SHELTER ASSOCIATES, and their latest build.

Matt, before we ask how you came to be the owner and operator of a long time and very reputable custom home building company in our area, tell us a bit about your background prior to moving to Coeur d' Alene more than 10 years ago, and how you came to build your first custom home.

I was living in the resort town of Big Sky, MT and roommate of mine was a carpenter for a custom home builder. There was a Sewer Moratorium that was just lifted and lot prices and home building were taking off. My roommate convinced me to buy a lot to avoid getting priced out of the market and ensure our "place" in Big Sky. After both of us secured lots, with some help and cre-

ativity, he further convinced me to build my own home. Through my job varied history, I had experience with many different trades and was willing to give it a try. We both took time off and built my first home from foundation to finish and through that process, we decided that we could do this for a living and started Big Sky Homebuilders. He still owns and operates it today.

After moving to CDA you worked on the residential side of a very reputable local building company in Ginno construction and further developed expertise in custom home building. As the owner of Shelter Associates you described your company as a boutique custom home builder, and very much a design/build firm, coordi-

nating with local architects. Tell us a bit about the kind of work you do and what you appreciate most about the service or experience you can bring to clientele who work with you.

I build custom homes that are on the higher end of the price scale and typically designed by an architect. I enjoy putting together and being part of the "team" and the design process. A client will usually come to me with a concept for a home and raw land. I will suggest to them some architects or draftsmen to interview and select to draw/design their home. As a "Team", we then work together to get the clients ideas onto paper in the most cost effective and efficient design.



From that process I continue to be involved and make myself accessible to the client, as the owner of the company, throughout the building and completion of their home. Giving the clients direct access to myself as the owner, is something I feel is very important to the clients and one of the things I want to provide no matter how large of a company I become.

Your most recent project photographed here in these pages has quite a story. For the reader taking in these pictures, tell us how this project came to be and give us a sense of what you built for this client.

This has been a builders dream client with an incredible project! The project started with designing a small guest home. Their intent was to move into it while their main home was designed and built. We completed the guest home in 2016 and shortly after moving in, the owners quickly decided that the 1000sf structure was all they needed, minus some storage space! They switched from designing a main home, to designing a building with storage space, garage space, guest quarters, a man cave, and a tack room. A big wish list! Our architect, Shelli Mittmann, did an incredible job and was able to get all of their desired spaces into the building. The pictures you see are the finish product.





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I remember you mentioning that your client and their neighbor did some collaborative trading of sorts to allow you to use some unique timbers in the build...

My clients neighbor owns and operates a sawmill that provides rough sawn timbers for many of our local builders. He has collected many unique timbers over the years, some of them being float logs that were used for the log booms when timber was ran down the Coeur d'Alene river and into Lake CDA. The owner saw these and fell in love with the idea of using them for his project. He allowed the neighbor to harvest good timber off of his property in exchange for the reclaimed logs and the milling required to transform them into usable timbers. Many of the holes where the chains tied the logs together are visible in the timber elements.

Tell us about the hearth, and some of the other unique design/build elements that sets these structures apart.

The hearth stone was found in a quarry in Clark Fork, ID. The mason and myself walked the quarry for about an hour trying to select the "perfect" piece. The one we selected weighed about 6500 lbs and was half buried in a snow bank when we started looking at it. It was a process to dig it out, clean it off, and flip it over, but when it landed, we knew it was the one! We had the massive boulder cut with a wire saw in order to create a perfectly flat surface on the bottom for it to sit perfectly on the polished concrete floors.



For the concrete floor in the man cave, we used an exposed aggregate mix design and used grinding company to polish it to a 3000 grit finish. In the tack room, we used a green mountain marble and "seeded" (scattered random pieces of stone onto the surface of the still wet concrete) the floor to add a splash of color. That floor was also polished to the same level of finish.

The man cave, apartment, and tack room all have air conditioning and for added comfort we put radiant floor heating in all of the concrete floors.

The owners wife does a lot of canning so we also incorporated a root cellar

into the design. The entire north wall of the building is a concrete retaining wall about 10 feet tall. On the back side of this wall, we built a concrete vault about 8' x 9' that is completely buried in the hillside. We lined it with shelves so she can store her goods.

You mentioned one of things you appreciate most about what you do is the opportunity to work so closely with your clients. Say more about that, and more broadly, what do you find most gratifying in your work?

I do! I find the client interaction very enjoyable and rewarding. It's also a challenge! Getting to know each client and their desires for the project is



unique to each job. Learning how to best interact with each client is also different with each job. Presenting new ideas, change orders, handling problems that arise on the job, and invoicing are just a few of the many facets on every job and they are all handled differently by each owner. I feel like I really get to know each client by the end of the job and feel like I'm forming life long relationships. I want them to feel like they can call me 2, 5, even 10 years later and ask questions about their home. Or, talk about building another one!

How do you spend time outside of work?

When I'm not working I'm usually with my two boys, Logan and Levi. They are 8 and 6 and just a blast to be with. They keep me feeling young. Logan started baseball this year and will continue to play flag football. He also plays hockey and snow skis. Levi has been playing soccer, hockey and skiing as well. The hockey comes from me. It's a pretty huge passion of mine, one I've had for about 37

years! I started when I was about 6 in Minnesota and continued to North Dakota where I played on a high school varsity team. Since then its been various men's league team's, but always playing. In the summer, we

stay busy with whatever we can outside, camping, swimming, biking, whatever we can do! I also have a fur baby, Stella. She is a rambunctious 2 year old Bernese Mountain Dog who goes everywhere with me. She loves riding in the back seat and drooling down the side of my truck!



To learn more about Shelter Associates, visit: shelterassociates.com