

WAG

JOAN LUNDEN

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and her beloved homes*

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celebrating DESIGN



MAKING a house a home

BY GEORGETTE GOUVEIA
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY CORNERSTONE CONTRACTING

In building a home, George Pusser says, it's very easy to get to 95 or 98 percent of accomplishment.

What he and his Cos Cob-based Cornerstone Contracting strive for is that 100-percent mark.

That's because their clients "want us to feel their house is the most important." To that end, he has set up a group of senior managers to guide the company's projects – everything from new construction to renovations to "repeats" that might lead to a 20-year relationship. And even though he's president of the 24-year-old firm, he makes regular visits to the sites, juggling those with office work.

The result is an award-winning (Palladio, HOBI) business that has done hundreds of projects – on homes ranging from \$1 million to \$35 million, from a few thousand square feet to more than 30,000 – for the captains and kings of Westchester, Fairfield, Putnam and Dutchess counties as well as New York City. Cornerstone has also done a little commercial work in Greenwich and the Big Apple. Its clients in-

clude Hollywood actors, sports figures, politicians and plenty of Wall Streeters. Pusser cannot, of course, name names – adding "although I probably wouldn't even if I could."

A key to the company's success is undoubtedly its self-containment.

"We're a relatively small business," he says of Cornerstone's 50 to 60 employees, who include seven family members. "But for the kind of high-end work we do, we carry our own forces, unlike other companies who use subcontractors."

That enables Cornerstone to keep a tight control on quality and deadlines. It's something Pusser learned growing up in the business in rural Alabama. By 20, he could build a house. By 22, he had started a business similar to Cornerstone in Dallas.



When an opportunity came to move to the Northeast, he took it. He's been here for more than 30 years.

In that time, he's seen a lot of changes. When he was a child, the adage that "children should be seen and not heard" applied. The children might



Winner of the 2009 Palladio Award.

have an early dinner in the set-off kitchen before mom and dad entertained in the living and dining rooms.

Now, Pusser says, everyone's included. The trend among younger homeowners with families continues to be contemporary houses with big kitchens

that flow into family rooms with the dining rooms nearby. "The living room, not so much," he says.

The palette is soft – "blues and grays. For a long time, people considered these colors cold. Now they're seen as clean, crisp." Closets are important. "We've built master closets that are bigger than the

dining room." And the décor is minimalist. "Younger people want to spend time with their families," not maintaining knickknacks. Traditional homes – with their layout of living room, dining room, home office – are seen as requiring more upkeep.

But minimalist homes do not always mean min-



Winner of the 2014 Habi Award.

lowest costs.

"People think they cost less, but that's not necessarily true, because of the building materials," Pusser says.

Another big trend in home building – green technology, including recycled materials and harnessing the earth's natural resources as power. Cornerstone has even built a swimming pool with a cover that comes up from the bottom that the homeowners can walk on, adding to their outdoor space.

Pusser, still a country boy, loves the outdoors. His Greenwich home has a large wooded area that backs up to a Boy Scout camp. His Vero Beach, Fla., home – which he's had for the same number of years, 15 – is a contemporary affair that his wife, interior designer Elizabeth Pusser, continually renovates.

But making and remaking his own homes is not for him.

"I don't like the process," he says. "The thing that bothers me is the amount of people and all the detail."

He'd much rather concentrate on his clients' homes. For which they are all no doubt grateful. **W**

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