

# Building Around a Vision

Ravenhill Construction, Inc.

BY LYNN TYLCZAK

Years from now when Peter Kilpatrick reminisces about Ravenhill Construction, Inc., (San Juan Islands, Wash.) he may choose to muse about 2005. It was a very good year: the company's Agosta Home project won the 2005 AIA Honor Award for Architecture and was featured in *Sunset* magazine. Ravenhill's Rainbow Rock Home was featured in *Seattle Homes and Lifestyles* magazine. A third Ravenhill residence, the McNair Home, was featured in the *Seattle Times Sunday Magazine* as well as *Pacific Northwest Magazine*. Not bad for a company that currently builds five or six homes a year (about 75 total building/remodeling projects since the company was founded).

Of course, Kilpatrick could also fondly reminisce about 2004 (homes featured in *Seattle Homes and Lifestyles* magazine and *Residential Architect*), 2003 (homes featured in *Fine Homebuilding* magazine, the book *Coastal Retreats*, multiple magazines, etc.), or, well, any year in the firm's 28-year history. From the very beginning the company's craft homes, which have appeared in over 20 magazines and books, have generated popular, print and professional acclaim.

According to Kilpatrick, president of Ravenhill Construction, all of his custom homes are the same yet different. "In the last 10 years the Northwest has led the nation in terms of progressive residential designs," he says, "but even before that Ravenhill focused on cutting edge architectural details. Our homes don't tend to be all that big, maybe an average of 2,500 square feet, but they always feature lots of interesting angles, different materials, varied surfaces and textures. We're working on a home right now that has all exterior stucco and stone, lots of copper and copper flashing details, cedar, and huge quantities of steel. With creativity you can pull a lot of diverse components together and create an impressive but comfortable home."

Ravenhill homes are always integrated into their lots in a functional yet natural way. "The view lots here in the islands—and that's view, not waterfront property—are very expensive, upwards of \$1 million," says Kilpatrick. "Maintaining the pristine nature and integrity of the land is critical to our clients. We are very careful in our development work. It would be nice if we had a large parking lot for vehicles and supplies, but we never have that luxury. Instead, we have very limited area and we handle it with care. For example, one of the first things we do at a site is define exactly where materials can go, where machines can and can't go—even where people can and can't walk. We flag those places off and

everybody follows the rules. That way, when the home is done it looks like it was just dropped in place."

The firm is known for its low-impact building model. Creativity case in point: on the way to a job (since Ravenhill builds in the San Juan Islands the crew often commutes to work by boat), Kilpatrick and crew found a clear hemlock log floating in the water. They towed it back to home base, hauled it to a local sawmill, kiln dried it and had it custom milled into thousands of square feet of paneling. The entire ceiling paneling for the firm's award-winning Peek Home came from that single log.

Attention to detail is critical to this custom contractor. "Quality tells," says Kilpatrick, who actually started Ravenhill as a cabinetry shop that, with its field stone foundation, timber frame style and hand-split cedar shake roof, presaged the natural materials and style he would use in future projects. "That's especially true when the efficiency of the home is paramount. Space is less important than architectural detail; that is, if you have the right details incorporated in the right way. We have an in-house architect, René Adley [the firm also works with other top local architects]. I've assembled a team of 30 carpenters, most of whom have been with us for over a decade. Two of them work full time in our cabinet shop, where we make our own cabinets, built-ins, furniture, etc. We keep the important tasks, the work that defines the functionality and quality of our homes, in house. That's just the way we do business. We don't design and build around a generic mindset. We build around a vision."

Visions, of course, cost money. "I have a standard line I give anytime somebody asks me what a 'typical' custom home costs," says Kilpatrick, whose homes sell for between \$300 and \$400 a square foot. "I say, it's like going to the grocery store and asking the checkout person what a typical bag of groceries costs. It depends on what you put into it—and what you want to get out of it. What you get from Ravenhill Construction is a well-designed house with the kind of integrated architectural details and that never go out of style. We don't go for trendy materials and colors that will date a house. My favorite house I ever built was the Peek Home [for which Kilpatrick was named 1999 Custom Builder of the Year by *Custom Builder* magazine]. The character of that house is timeless and it looks as good today as the day it was built." Clearly, when Peter Kilpatrick reminisces, he doesn't have to be as picky about his dates as he has been about architectural details. "All of our homes will stand the test of time," says Kilpatrick, "because we build them that way." ■

