

Don Ferrier The 'Godfather of Green'



by Jennifer McDermitt

It's hard not to talk about Don Ferrier, president of Ferrier Custom Homes, without making references to Francis Ford Coppola's "Godfather" movies. First of all, his name is "Don." Second of all, Ferrier is the third generation of the Ferrier family to work in the construction business, whose ancestors emigrated from Scotland (not Italy) to find success in the

U.S. Finally, Ferrier was one of the first in the state, and the nation, to build green, which is why he is often referred to as the "Godfather of Green."

But what separates this Don from the Don in the Coppola movies is his outstanding business ethics, commitment to mission work and the fact that's he never sent a customer — no matter how difficult — to "sleep with the fishes." In fact, Ferrier's devotion to his customers is the main reason for his success.

"I take a lot of pride in delivering a product to my customers that is extremely healthy, high performing and energy-efficient," said Ferrier. "I could have given up on 'green' many years ago before people started recognizing its value, but I stayed true because I believed in the product."

Coming to America

Don Ferrier's grandfather, Alexander Ferrier, a general contractor/stonemason, emigrated to this county from Scotland in 1881 with his brother, David Ferrier, to assist with construction of the Texas State Capitol. Later, Alexander and David formed a partnership with Albert Wirz, (Ferrier Brothers and Wirz) and they erected many historic stone courthouses, schools,

churches, hotels, banks, houses and bridges in Texas and Mexico. Three of Alexander's sons, Otho, Otto and Mack, continued the Ferrier contracting business and constructed hundreds of bridges and culverts throughout Texas as Ferrier Brothers Bridge Company.

Ferrier started working for his father quite young, which piqued his interest in the industry. "I worked summers for my father because I had to, but after college, I returned to the industry because I wanted to," said Ferrier. "For me, there came a time when I realized it was something I knew I was meant to do."

Following in his grandfather's, father's, and uncles' footsteps, Don Ferrier carried on the construction heritage when he established Ferrier Builders Inc. in 1984. In 2004, Ferrier Builders continued the remodeling and commercial end of the business and began building custom homes as Ferrier Custom Homes.

Green Before Green Was Cool

Ferrier's interest in green building was sparked after the first oil embargo, when the company was asked to serve as a contractor on some earth sheltered homes.

"I was fascinated by these homes, because they were unlike anything I had ever seen before," he said. "The oil embargo was a wake-up call for many people, and they started to rethink how homes should be constructed."

Soon after starting his own business, Ferrier was introduced to Structured Insulated Panels (SIPs) — another milestone in his path to green building. "We decided this was a good direction for us, and although many people felt it was a fad, we were confident that SIPs, with their phenomenal air-tightness and insulation, were a great option for customers."

After years of building energy-efficient homes, Ferrier still didn't put a label on what he was doing. It wasn't until attending Dr. Holly Latty-Mann's self-awareness conference at Duke University in 1999 that Ferrier became, well, self aware. "We were sitting around a table talking about what we do, and one guy said to me, 'So, you are a green builder?' I said, 'Hmm, I guess I am!'" said Ferrier.

"The Don" Is Recognized

This year, Ferrier Builders received the GOLD Energy Value Housing Award Hot Climate, Custom Category by the National Association of Home Builders for building



Photo by Travis Laminack Photography

the most energy-efficient, custom home in a hot climate.

The Energy Value Housing Award (EVHA) is the nation's preeminent energy efficient award honoring builders who voluntarily incorporate energy efficiency into all aspects of new home construction.

According to the EVHA judges, "Ferrier demonstrates a good understanding of what it takes to build appropriately in a hot climate and does an exceptional job getting the word out to the public about the benefits of energy-efficient home building." The homeowner's manual for this custom home was noted as "one of the most professional" that one EVHA judge had ever seen. The judges noted, "Ferrier Custom Homes has truly systematized the whole idea of green building."

To date, Ferrier has won five gold and one silver EVHAs. In addition, Ferrier Custom Homes was recognized by the HBA of Greater Dallas as the builder of the "Best Green Built Home" in the DFW area at their 2007 Vesta Award Ceremony and was awarded the "Green Builder Advocate of the Year" at the National Green Building Conference in 2007.

Staying True

Ferrier demonstrates a strong commitment to many areas of the industry, including his mission work and association involvement. Ferrier travels to other countries to aid in the construction of facilities for local residents. He is also a member of the Greater Fort Worth BA and the HBA of Greater Dallas and says that his memberships in the associations has been key to his success.

"Education is very important to me, which is why I joined the association," said Ferrier. "Once I joined, however, I realized there was so much more I could gain."

Ferrier has remained committed to green building in good times and bad, and it's paid off. Last year, Ferrier experienced its second-best year to date — despite the sluggish economy. "My mom, who has always been supportive, suggested at one point that I work at the post office," joked Ferrier. "But I never gave up on my dreams, and I never considered building a standard, low energy efficient home, no matter how tough things got." Thankfully, his mother's offer was one the godfather could refuse. ■



Photo by Björn Wellander