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## Madsen Inspired to Start Sky Builders

Sky Builders, LLC | Houston, Texas



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**By Kathy Bowen Stolz**

Isn't it always a woman who changes a man's plans? For Henrik Madsen, it was Laura.

You see, in 1988 Henrik was a young Danish carpenter in the United States for a year on a trainee visa. He wanted to take a break after completing his formal training in construction management, business and an apprenticeship

in carpentry. He was planning on taking over his father's construction company in Denmark because his father retired. He was working at Danish Inspirations furniture store in Houston when he met Laura. This Dane was inspired to stay in Houston, soon starting his business with hand tools shipped from Denmark and a pick-up truck.



And so began Sky Builders, LLC, a custom remodeling company in Houston.

Madsen found his niche in the Memorial Villages and West University neighborhoods of Houston where he completes about 50-60 projects each year with his employee team of two carpenters and three painters plus subcontractors -- plumbers, framers, electricians -- as needed. He also does projects in Clear Lake, where he lives.

“It took about 5-6 years to get to meet people, but 30 years later, the company is not too big, just right,” he continued. The size of his business fits him perfectly, he said, because if it grows, he would have to hire more employees and

wouldn’t be able to control the operation as efficiently. “With more guys, it becomes a different business.”

About 75 percent of his business comes from referrals from a realtor friend in those neighborhoods, while others come from architects who prefer him or from the “friend-of-a-friend” referrals or now from the children of early clients. His company’s reputation is such that people will wait for months for him to be available, he said.

“You have to know how to work in a nice home. My crew knows how to be in a house. You’ve got to put up plastic protection and drop cloths. Vacuum. Clean up. Be careful. Be clean. I put a lot of emphasis on this. Dirt in corners is



where a lot of complaints can start.”

Sky Builders will do projects as small as a powder room because of the potential of return business. It’s not unusual for a small project to lead to a major project, he said. After Sky Builders has done that first project, “many of my customers become repeat customers.” “You have to work hard, even six days a week, and you have to be honest.”

As custom remodelers, “we do everything because we’re well-rounded in construction. There’s a wide spread of things we do,” he explained. “We can do a small job and can do a big one, too. Sometimes we need a big job to offset small ones to keep the crew busy.”

Although Sky Builders will tackle big projects, such as house tear-downs and rebuilds, it doesn’t build speculative homes. “We did a tear-down in 2018-19. The clients wanted a custom house that is easy to maintain in the Danish-modern style with good quality materials and good insulation to keep air conditioning costs down to \$50-60 in summer. It was about 2,500 sq. ft.”

He encourages clients to come visit their projects and to ask questions, stating that he doesn’t have anything to hide. “They want to know they can trust the contractor. If the

client is happy, then I’m happy.”

Half of Sky Builders’ clients are people who want to upgrade their homes’ appearances. “People now want black and white color schemes with white floors. They want us to tear out the travertine tile [that used to be popular]. They want bigger closets and back-lit mirrors.”

Sky Builders’ clients fall into the “mature” clientele of people he’s worked with off-and-on during the years he’s been in Houston who are now in their 70s and 80s or are people in their 30s and 40s who are professionals.

For many companies, the COVID-19 pandemic hurt their business. “I’ve never been as busy as I was in 2020. We kept on going during the pandemic. I met with clients over Zoom [visual software]. We worked outside much of the time, and we had masks on. I had only one client who decided to wait [until the pandemic was over],” Henrik noted.

As the business owner, Madsen meets with potential clients among his duties. “I tell them, ‘I’m not selling anything. I’m here to listen.’” He also takes measurements and creates proposals with the help of his wife, who left her job working in a Big Five accounting firm to become



his assistant. She gets prices for tile, fixtures, finishes and lighting to complete the proposals. “We put together a very detailed bid. It’s not a lump sum. The more details I put in it, the more people can see what we’re doing. We’re upfront on costs and profit. If there’s a change order, we show them the cost difference.”

Madsen continues to look for ways to improve the experience for his clients. He now offers 3D renderings to help clients visualize their final product in addition to his proposal.

He continued, “If something goes wrong, I know that I’ll have to take the heat straight on. Like a client told me years ago, ‘Just put your big boy pants on and fix it.’”

Although it’s been 20 years since Henrik pounded nails, he still finds construction very satisfying. “You can stand back and see what you did. It’s very rewarding. While a lot of people don’t show big emotions, most of our clients are really happy. It’s like TV, it truly is. You knocked walls down, but they couldn’t see how it would turn out. Then they say, ‘Oh, my god, this is really great!’”

And if you’re wondering about the Laura that inspired Henrik Madsen to stay in Houston, well, Henrik sees her every day. You see, she’s the wife who assists him in the business!



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