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Unique Defines
New Style Construction's Beginnings

New Style Construction | Houston, Texas



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By Kathy Bowen Stolz

“Unique” defines New Style Construction and its owner and general manager, Peter Shi.

Unique is the best way to describe Shi’s path to becoming a builder in 2008. Few others in the building industry have bachelor’s and master’s degrees in chemical engineering. (Shi’s degrees are from the University of California-Irvine.) Few others start their building careers overseeing



a large custom home when the contracted builder disappears. And few others have designed and patented a construction process using prefabricated metal framing to be able to construct extraordinarily large and affordable luxury homes.

But Peter Shi is a man who likes challenges and seizes opportunity when he sees it. He also understands the customer’s perspective.

Shi was working as a

consultant for a Chinese company selling LED lighting when his father bought a piece of land and hired a builder to construct a custom home in Houston in 2008. When the foundation was half done, the builder ran off with others’ money, Shi said. He learned that the foundation company, the framer, the roofer, the carpenter and the plumber were all under contract for the elder Shi’s home.

Peter decided to step in and oversee the completion of his parents’ home by transferring the knowledge from his engineering background and the experience from building three pesticide chemical plants for his father’s business in China to homebuilding. “I learned a lot building that first house, but it was not that hard” because of his background, he noted.

Other builders told him his work was ‘way too different, but during that build, Shi said two other potential buyers asked him to build their custom homes because they were so impressed with the unfinished house. Because Texas does not require licensing for a homeowner to build his own house, Shi did not have a company or a contractor’s license at the time. Ready for a change in careers anyway, he bought New Style Construction, an inactive company registered in 1999, and launched his new career in 2009 after selling his LED lighting company to his partner.

From the start his customers couldn’t believe that he

didn't have years of building experience. "I think the fundamental concept of being an engineer can transfer to being a builder. Most of the small builders don't have the engineering background that I do. It takes me about one-fourth of the time to figure out what's going on when it comes to plumbing, electrical and foundation work. My customers know I have competency."

Shi said he continues to get his customers through referrals "because I understand customers 100 percent. After all, I started as a customer, not a builder. I can make the buyer feel like they're building the house themselves. I allow them to input their ideas in a very easy, efficient way. That's one reason why clients like me."

But he finds communicating with customers can also be challenging because they may not understand why making changes in their plans invariably will lead to delays because of the domino effect of rescheduling all of the trades.

Peter goes to the job site once or twice a day, typically meeting his clients at their homes' construction sites.

Because the company specializes in large custom homes, New Style Construction builds just four or five houses each year, primarily in the Memorial, Bellaire, Pearland and Medical Center areas of Houston. These luxury homes typically take a year to build. His clients are often employed in the medical or energy fields with incomes that allow them to afford a luxury home.

New Style Construction regularly builds homes between 5,000 and 8,000 sq. ft. in the price range of \$125 to \$250 per sq. ft. However, the largest was 16,000 sq. ft. and cost \$2.15 million, plus the land. That home included a second floor swimming pool, 35-foot ceilings and three kitchens.

Fortunately Peter enjoys the challenge of the unusual. One customer requested a heated pool, an unusual request in Houston's hot and humid climate where ice may be added to cool down an outdoor pool's temperature. He said he contacted several swimming pool contractors, but none had experience installing a heated pool. "I had to work with a lot of different people to make that pool happen. But having to go above and beyond the regular builder challenges is what motivates me the most."

Designing custom sound systems for these luxury homes is one of New Style Construction specialties. Shi even employs a sound system specialist on his staff of five. (The others in addition to Shi are a sales manager, a project manager and an exterior wall specialist.) He explained that homes with high ceilings and multiple





floors and surfaces demand particular attention to the sound.

Shi, who is a native of Beijing, China, said he often builds for other Chinese immigrants in the Houston market. “I’m probably the only Chinese builder in town, and there are a lot of Chinese in this market.”

He explained that many of his projects have large square footage because the homes may be set up for two or three generations to share the space, with a separate wing for each family unit. He said keeping the extended family under one roof is typical of the Chinese culture.

It’s not unusual for customers to return to New Style Construction for a second time when their lives change, according to Shi. They may be downsizing when their children are leaving home or they may be expanding because their parents are moving in.

Although 90 percent of New Style’s projects are custom homes, Shi said the company occasionally constructs a commercial building; typically they are medium-size projects of less than 10,000 sq. ft. requested by one of his homebuilding clients. Right now he is building a 20,000 sq. ft. dental clinic for one of his clients. He said New Style may do more commercial projects and land development if his base of Chinese-American clients demand it.

Although the Shi family seldom returns to China, Peter and his wife do participate in a social group of Beijing natives who gather regularly to reminisce about their native land. “If I go back to China, I stay for a week; that’s it. My mom and dad are here, and I have no brothers and sisters.

We’ve lived in the States for 21 years. My two children were born here. My home is here. This is home now.”

And that’s not a unique concept for anyone to “understand.



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