

MODERN LUXURY

Interiors

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LIVING LEGACY

FBN Construction's Bob Ernst wasn't always in construction—in fact, he was well into his 20s before he learned the ropes.

By Antonia DePace

Before Bob Ernst became the president of FBN Construction (fbnconstruction.com), he wore a number of hats. First, it was as a car cleaner in Germany. Then, it was shuttling people to and from various airports in Europe. When he returned to

the United States, he landed in Cambridge and eventually got a job with his sister at a restaurant doing everything from washing dishes to cooking and serving. Although his original plans had included leaving for Alaska, Ernst ended up staying in the



From top: One old Victorian home in Milton led Ernst to diminish a chimney to create a more family-friendly kitchen area; Bob Ernst.

restaurant industry for two years—and it’s a good thing he did. “I gave my notice and on my last week, I got called in to help in the kitchen because one of the cooks didn’t show up,” he explains. Little did he know that this last week would end up molding his entire future. Later that evening, after recognizing Ernst’s dedication to the company, the owner called him down into his office. He had a project for him—the restaurant was closing for 9 days to replace the sewer line, and he wanted Ernst to figure out what else the restaurant needed done before reopening. “I said, ‘Ralph, I don’t know the first thing about that, and I’ve never picked up a tool in my life. I don’t know anything

about construction.’ He goes, ‘That’s OK. It doesn’t happen for nine months; you can learn in nine months. Figure out what needs to get done, how to get it done and get it done in nine days.’ That’s how I got into construction,” Ernst says. From that point on, it became his life. “I enjoyed the heck out of it. I enjoyed the problem-solving aspect of it and finding a way to get people to work together to accomplish goals,” he adds.

Eventually leaving the restaurant industry to sharpen his knowledge for his newfound passion, Ernst ended up starting his own company in 1986, which merged with another in 1995—creating what we know now as FBN Construction. To date, he’s



From top: A full gut in one waterfront project brought 21st century style to the forefront; a number of walls were removed within the same project in order to create this open-concept kitchen and dining area—both of which look out onto the beautiful waterfront neighborhood.

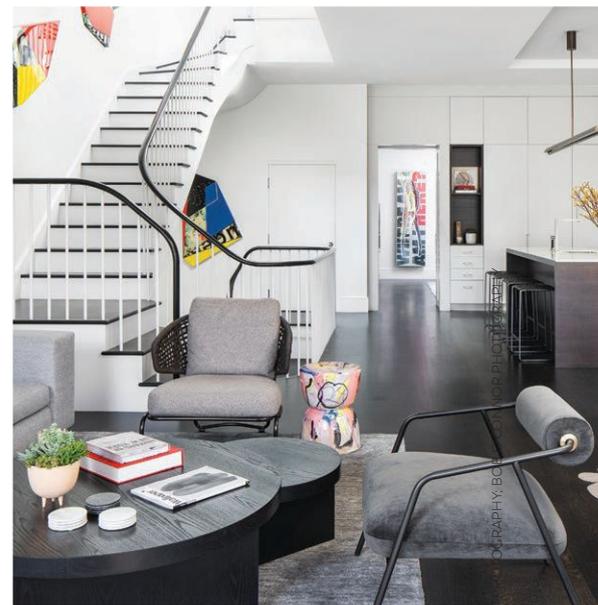
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-BOB ERNST »»



grown the company's revenue from \$750,000 to over \$22 million in the past 20 years. "In actuality, a big part of the success that I've had—even when I wasn't making money—was making a lot of happy clients," he explains, crediting his background in customer service for this point. "That's the way I've approached this business. I'm in the customer service business, just like I was running a restaurant. If I make people happy and I deliver a good product, they're going to want more." Thirty-six years later, Ernst has made a serious name for himself in the industry and has won numerous awards and accolades for his work, including the IFDA Community Service Award and the ASID Award for Industry Partner. He's also made great strides in

emphasizing the importance of creating relationships with interior designers, architects and more—diminishing the church-and-state-like politics he found when first starting. Looking forward, every good story must come to an end, and for Ernst, his chapter with the company is beginning to close as he prepares for retirement. "It's funny—one of the things that I've been known for over the years is I work really hard and I've built a good company, and I've got a good thing. But I also vacation really hard," he says. And by preparing a solid leadership team with key players like Executive Vice President Larissa Cook at the helm, that's exactly what he plans on doing once the time is right, along with spending long mornings golfing under the sun. ■



From left: A functional bathroom was a must in one project, where custom wainscoting, a free-floating tub and a neutral palette make for a serene atmosphere; a contemporary Back Bay townhome features clean kitchen cabinets and an opened stairwell that leads to a brand-new roofdeck.

FROM TOP, PHOTOS BY: JOYELLE WEST

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE EXPERT'S TIMELINE FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO WHERE HE IS NOW

1979

Graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy and decided not to pursue continuing formal education

Late 1979- 1981

Traveled across the country and then to Europe on a shoestring, finding work and learning about the service industry from the bottom up

1983

Was "promoted" from server/cook/maitre d' to manager for a significant and time-sensitive (nine-day) construction project on a large restaurant in Harvard Square despite no previous construction experience, based upon his knowledge of the workings of and commitment to the restaurant

Late 1983

Upon successfully completing that project, Ernst was asked by the same restaurant owners to manage, on their behalf, a large and complex renovation of an abandoned stone church into a 300-plus-seat establishment.

1984

Upon completion of the aforementioned project, he elected to seek out and obtain an entry-level position with a home builder to acquire more knowledge and understanding of the industry.

From top: Located inside an old manufacturing building on the waterfront, two units were combined to create one; inside the iconic Vendome, a moving wall shows a hidden staircase that leads to a loft.



1986-1995

Ran a company that laid the groundwork for his future success with FBN, built upon the ideals of customer service and partnerships with trade and design partners

1995

Joined his former struggling company with another small firm, FBN Construction, and the owner John DeShazo

2000-2005

Earned national designations in remodeling: certified graduate remodeler; certified aging-in-place specialist (inaugural class); and certified green professional from the National Association of Home Builders

2002

After reaching out to build some bridges with design professionals in the greater Boston area, Ernst joined the International Furnishing and Design Association (IFDA) and eventually earned a position on the board.

2004

Joined the board of BRAGB.

2015

Recognized for contributions to the ASID with the President's Award

2020-2022

Managed to maintain a healthy and successful company, ultimately reaching consecutive record years of growth during an unprecedented pandemic

