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JOHN CONTE, CO-OWNER



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## Keeping Control

Fairfield House and Garden succeeds with in-house employees and by maintaining control of project time frames. **BY MARK LAWTON**

### PROFILE

FAIRFIELD HOUSE & GARDEN

fairfieldhouseandgarden.com / Headquarters: Bedford, N.Y. / Employees: 20 / Specialty: Custom homes and landscapes

Fairfield House & Garden was founded in the late 1930s as a contracting service, engaged in tree landscaping, masonry and home improvement work. The founder's son John R. Conte got involved in the business in the 1980s and increased the amount of home improvement work including house additions and landscape construction.

Conte co-owns the firm with his wife Kimberly, who serves as president. Their sons joined the firm in the early 2000s. Their son John III is director of operations while son David handles landscape maintenance and management. Conte spends most of his time on designing. Since the sons joined, Fairfield has taken on bigger and more complex home construction projects.

“I think what works for us is the full mix,” Conte says. “There are very few firms with in-house staff and management capable of doing from site to interior development. We are staffed with 20-some employees who do physical work in addition to managing the projects.”

Those include carpenters, masons and site employees that run heavy machinery and handle rough framing.



The company mostly works in Fairfield and Westchester counties of New York. It builds custom homes costing \$2 million to \$6 million.

“It is not a juggling act of subs,” he says. “It gives us control over our projects’ time frames. A sub might make promises to multiple jobs. We decide where our men go every day. The full-service, turnkey sort of operation is where we shine. I think a lot of builders are management firms that coordinate lots of subcontractors.”

Conte likes the diversity of small home improvements, full builds, often collaborating with other contractors. “I like the constant challenge,” Conte says. “Having a variety of skills has certainly been a key to our success. Flexibility is part of both our survival strategy and growth strategy.”

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### MOVE TO CONTEMPORARY

Over the years Conte has seen a move toward more contemporary architecture and interiors. “Classic elements with a modern flair,” Conte says. “That’s often done with materials. There have been incredible advances in smart homes, technology and lighting. A clean, simple look is trending now. Simple uncluttered styles in the rooms and furnishings.”

Among the recent projects Conte is proud of is a small 1920s farmhouse of about 6,000 square feet. “The homeowner had a love of the original structure,” Conte says. “Even though we changed almost everything, the soul of the original structure remains.”

Fairfield gutted the house down to the studs. “We took so much of the structure apart, at one point we had to have temporary bracing on the walls,” Conte recalls.

This even included lowering the basement floor by demolishing it and digging it out by hand.

The plumbing fixtures were sourced from England along with antique clay tiles and reclaimed antique flooring. “It was put to-

gether not to look like a new house,” Conte says. The project was done in pieces over almost three years and cost somewhere north of \$3 million.

Conte is also proud of the work the firm has done on his own home, which they refer to as the Langhorne Lodge. They purchased the house 10 years ago, doubled the size, renovated the kitchen, built an outdoor fireplace and pavilion, added landscape features and increased the size of the now three-car garage that doubles as a party room. “We are happy to entertain there and live there,” Conte says. ■

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