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Working Wonders in White Rock, B.C.

An Interview with Christopher Stiles from Alair Homes

History

In February of 2018, Christopher Stiles started his Alair Homes' office in White Rock/Surrey, B.C. He became associated with Alair Homes through another Alair partner with whom he had worked prior to his own involvement with the company. This partner knew Christopher to have a high professional standard and knew his personable character to be of the quality suitable to work for Alair Homes. Christopher was referred, and after three months of strict vetting, he was awarded an office with Alair .



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Before joining on with Alair , Christopher had acquired an extensive background in many aspects of the construction industry and sub-trades including roofing, siding, finishing, and tiling. Today, Christopher is not only the owner of Alair Homes in White Rock/Surrey but is also the project manager. To Christopher, being heavily involved and overseeing the job site goes a long way towards creating trust with the clients and the trades.

Flawless Project Management

Christopher is an extremely efficient project manager. In 2021 he received a call from clients asking to renovate three bathrooms. Since the clients traveled for work and were away from home much of the time, Christopher asked them if they wanted to consider updating the entire house, in addition to renovating the three bathrooms. The clients agreed and Christopher put together a second feasibility plan, which encompassed the entire 3500 sq. ft. house. The plan entailed changing the finishes, but nothing too involved, such as moving walls. The clients were out of the continent and were concerned the project might not be completed by the time they returned, but Christopher was able to finish the job in just 120 days. With his solid relationships with the trades and an intimate knowledge of the entire construction process, Christopher was able to execute the entire job flawlessly; what could have taken 6-8 months to complete, took only 4 months.



2023 Georgie Nominations

Alair White Rock's work has recently been recognized for its excellence with a Georgie Award nomination in 2023: the project, "Back to the Future," was nominated for Best Master Suite – Up to \$125,000. In addition to this, it won a HAVAN Award for Housing Excellence – Excellence in Products and Technology. The suite on "Back to the Future" project is a perfect example of Alair's quality craftsmanship.



It features a bright bathroom, lit by natural skylights and modern lighting fixtures, which together accentuate the marbled tiling. Dual sinks and faucets, as well as dual shower heads, ensure that peace and tranquility reign for even the most quarrelsome of couples. A large, luxurious bathtub offers relaxation after a long day of enjoying the fresh air at White Rock's famous pier. The bedroom's large walk-in closets meet the spatial needs of even the most sartorial-minded collectors. In short, the suite showcases Alair's ability to harmonize both form and function in the family home.

On top of this, the entire house features solid oak throughout; flooring, railings, vanities, office desks, the entertainment stand and kitchen nook bench (with a hidden compartment for storage) are all oak. As such, these features help to create a united motif from room to room.

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Partnerships

It is difficult to put the spotlight on one particular contractor over another since the trades who work with Christopher are of such high quality and hold high standards. Branda Contracting Inc. was responsible for creating large format tiles for the above-mentioned project. They designed 8 x 4-foot tiles for a walk-in shower with rain shower heads. The imagination and creativity of Allison Evans of Evans Design Corp., as well as her associate Annie, brought the project to life. Custom Design Cabinets provided pure oak at a time when it was very difficult to obtain. ACL Electrical took care of the electrical and The Lighting Warehouse provided all the electrical fixtures. Hippo Plumbing and Heating took care of the plumbing and Emco Ensuite supplied all the plumbing fixtures. Countertops were provided by Burnaby Granite Countertop. Trail Appliances provided the appliances at a time when they were in short supply.



JB Home Staging got the house ready for photos, which were taken by Martin Knowles Photo/Media, and they prepared the house for when the clients returned home. Other notable businesses involved in the project were Inline Glasscraft Ltd., Starline Windows, Dick's Lumber, Al Doors, and Home Art Flooring Ltd.

Alair White Rock's Process

“ We essentially build an entire project on paper and have it signed off on before we enter construction. ”

Christopher does not look for deals when it comes to the trades; he uses the people he knows have the best quality and with whom he has a good working relationship. It is the relationship and the trust which are the most important things to Christopher when he is considering hiring trades for a particular job.

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Alair White Rock's Process Cont'd

"My rule of thumb is if I can't invite them to my house for a family dinner, then I don't use them on my job sites. What separates us from other builders is we enter a very detailed and extensive planning stage. When we first look at a project, we create a feasibility overview. We look at past projects, similar projects, look at our best experiences, make a few phone calls, check for permits or other unforeseen things that may crop up, and then we give them a range. From there, if they are comfortable moving forward, we enter the planning stage. We have all the trades come to the site or look at the plans and get an extremely detailed and secured quote from them. We have them sign a subcontractor agreement, we build a detailed schedule, we have notice of project from compensation, the insurance taken care of, asbestos abatement reports taken care of, anything structural regarding permits taken care of. We essentially build an entire project on paper and have it signed off on before we enter construction," says Christopher.

This level of detail is provided not because it is part of a sales pitch but because Alair believes in presenting clients with the complete picture. Christopher believes in educating the client through this process; it is an education, not sales. The client can decide after this if they want to use Christopher.



Building Homes and Building Relationships

"I'm invested in it. I didn't just sign a contract with them; I began a relationship. That's an important distinction. It's not a sales tactic, but it's me being authentic [...] I love working and building relationships with people." At the core of any project is the contractor/client relationship. These relationships last six months, a year, and maybe even longer. To look beyond cost as the only metric for choosing a homebuilder is the key to finding the right match between client and contractor, for cost alone does not reveal the personality of the builder.



Christopher offers some advice to homeowners looking to build or renovate: "Do your due diligence before hiring a contractor. Think about the relationship you are about to enter; what does it look like and how does it make you feel? Understand the importance of planning out your project prior to construction. Detailed planning that outlines the entire schedule and how much it will cost are other factors to consider. Does the company provide that service?"



Building Homes and Building Relationships Cont'd



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Currently, Christopher has been hired to create a huge wet room and a walk-in closet in addition to a master bedroom in a 1940s era Vancouver City apartment. The project requires a mechanical engineer as it involves the expansion of the current space into a section of the lobby. It is a smaller project, but it is exciting because of the involved complications. Christopher maintains the outcome will be impressive as it will increase the original apartment square footage by 200 feet.



For more information on Alair Homes in White Rock, B.C., visit <https://www.alairhomes.ca/white-rock/>

Proceeds from this article were generously donated to B.C. and Alberta Guide Dogs. <https://bcandalbertaguidedogs.com/>



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AN INTERVIEW WITH JAKUB BRANDA

Branda Contracting Inc.

How long has your company been in operation? How did it get started? What led you to found/join the company?

Branda Contracting's roots go back to London, England, where, in 2005, I first started my tiling business. My family had been running a tiling business in the heart of Europe for over three decades, so I grew up learning the trade to the highest European standards. I moved to the UK in 2006, and shortly thereafter, I was successfully operating my own business. I did this for four years.

But at that time, I felt I needed a change in life; I wanted to be close to beautiful nature, so I decided to move to British Columbia in 2010. It took me six years to get my residency, and I could not start a business without first having residency. As such, I worked as a foreman/project manager for another tiling company between 2010-2016. We worked in B.C. and Alberta, and did some major projects, such as the Canada Place Building for the Vancouver Olympics, a new airport in Fort McMurray, the national swimming stadium in Bermuda, multiple aquatic centres, and countless high-end residences on the West Coast.

In 2016, I "restarted" Branda Contracting Inc. on Canadian soil, and quickly established my name. Within no time, I was promoting the highest quality of installations; I was soon backed with five-star customer service as I deliver quality in the required timeline set out by my clients.

Tell us about what your company does in general?

We provide custom tile installations across B.C. We have a large crew that provides the finest installation for difficult, detailed projects, using any tile. We do everything from seal hand-made mosaic to large-format porcelain slabs. We also do a lot of tiling for hot tubs, swimming pools, steam rooms and so on.

Besides residential projects, we have a team of installers working on commercial sites, such as high-rise buildings, public amenities, aquatic centres, and the like.



Branda Contracting Inc.

What is the nature of the work you do for Alair Homes? Did you work with Chris on either of his 2023 Georgie finalist projects – either Home at the Harbour or Back to the Future?

We started working with Alair Homes about three years ago. They had had a bad experience working with some other tile contractors, so they contacted us to come in and fix things. We took over some of their projects that had the highest requirement on detail realization: things that combine multiple different types and layouts within projects and so on.

ALAIR HOMES



We built a strong relationship together, based on the services we provide. Both Alair's and our goal is to always keep raising the bar of quality on our finished products and services; this makes our partnership easy and successful.

We worked together on the Back to the Future project last year, where we did all the tile installations, including prep work. This was all done with the Schluter system for waterproofing and anti-fracture membranes on all the accessories.

The master bathroom was very large, containing a shower and free-standing bathtub. There was detailed work within the shower stall, which had a bench, a pony wall, a shower curb, and such. The large format tile we used turned out very neat and modern-looking.



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Branda Contracting Inc.

Are there any key vendors, suppliers, subcontractors, or partners who help you with your work?

For suppliers, we use the whole shower system from Schluter as their certified installers; their products are always my first choice for their quality, customer service, and extended warranties.

We also use their mortars, which are very easy to work with and provide a strong bond. Grouts were supplied by Daltile - Prism grout from Custom Building Products is also a great product.

All of my installers have been working with me for years and we don't subcontract our projects to other contractors.

Without giving away any vital information, where do you source some of your materials? I know that with stone and tile, the provenance of the materials is often a point of pride.

We work closely with some of the major suppliers in B.C., such as Daltile, Ames Tile, Stone Tile, Julian Tile, and others. The variety of porcelain, ceramic, and natural materials we install is endless; some of materials are coming from Italy & Spain, the US, Mexico, and even Asia.



ALAIR HOMES



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Branda Contracting Inc.

Walk us through the process you go through when a builder calls you. How do you go from the consultation to the design, through to the delivery and installation?

If a client, like Alair Homes, calls us, we start with the documents available for the project, such as drawings and tile specifications. This gives us a better idea what to prepare for before going to the site meeting. Then, we would generally meet with Alair Homes and the designer, and eventually the client. We meet on the site and go over the tile selection to make sure the selected types of tiles are going to work for such an installation. We would measure up the space and confirm the layouts, details around the niche, bench, or such. Once tiles and layouts are confirmed, I would calculate the tile quantity we need and order the tile. Once the tile arrives, we deliver them to the site and as soon as the work area is ready, I get my team onto the site to set up with our equipment, such as a wet saw, systems for large format slabs, and whatever else we need.

We would then start with the surface preparation, including self-leveling, wall leveling, anti-fracture membranes, and waterproofing systems. Finally, we mark the surface for the approved layout and start with installations.



ALAIR HOMES





ALAIR HOMES



Do you have any exciting new projects on the horizon, or any others that you might have just wrapped up?

We do have multiple ongoing and upcoming projects that are very interesting. One ongoing project is at Chancellor Blvd in Vancouver. It is a high-end residence over three levels. We are dealing with a number of transitions / combinations of quartz and tile: accent tiles that are framed in with stone / quartz, combining various marble mosaics with large format tiles. There is also a large steam room, which is almost commercial size; every wall has a different tile finish; it has a comfy bench along the entire wall and very interesting tile details around the accent patterns.

Next month, we are starting another high-end residence at Blenheim St, Vancouver. The entire main floor will be done with 2' x 4' marble tiles. The 17-foot-tall fireplace will be done with porcelain slabs, and there are a number of bathrooms that are each unique in their choice of tile.

Besides this, we have a couple of commercial projects starting in July, such as swimming pool renovations and the like.

We have built our reputation on quality of work and customer service; that goes a long way in this industry. As such, we are not forced to do pretty much any marketing as we have clients calling us every week, based on the recommendations from happy clients that we have had a chance to work with over the years.



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AN INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN FAIZI

From Hippo Plumbing and Heating



How long has your company been in operation? How did it get started? What led you to found/join the company?

Hippo Plumbing and Heating was established in 2019. It all started after I my wedding, when I thought I had to step up and try to go out on my own. Since that day, I never looked back.

Tell us about what your company does in general?

We specialize in commercial and residential plumbing and heating. My background is in new construction. I have been doing new construction (plumbing and heating) for about six years with British Properties.



Alair Homes



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Hippo Plumbing and Plumbing

What is the nature of the work you do for Alair Homes?

I recently worked with Chris Stiles from Alair on a house on 29th Avenue, Surrey.

Alair Homes



Are there any keys vendors, suppliers, subcontractors, or partners who help you with your work?

Our favourite vendor is Emco Corp. – especially their location in Port Coquitlam (David is manager there).

Walk us through the process you go through when a builder calls you. How do you go from the consultation to the design, through to the delivery and installation, whether that is for plumbing, heating, or gas?

In most cases, our builders or renovators have a design in place when they call us. But besides design, I like to tell my clients to make sure your kitchen or bathrooms are comfortable for them to use. Design is great, but functionality is the most important thing.

Do you have any exciting new projects on the horizon, or any others that you might have just wrapped up?

One beautiful project we did recently was in north Vancouver – our client just won a HAVAN Award for this project. At the moment, we are also working on a project in an apartment where we are adding a whole new four-piece bathroom; this is not a very easy job to do.

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Inline Glasscraft Ltd.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JASON WITWICKI

Director of Inline Glasscraft Ltd



Introduction

In 30 to 60 seconds could you please state your name, your company's name, your job title and tell us what your company does and what you do there?

My name is Jason Witwicki. I am the Director of Inline Glasscraft Ltd. We've been in business for 18 years. We are a supplier and installer of high-end glass for the residential and commercial market. My role is day-to-day management, measuring and co-ordination of projects.



INLINE GLASSCRAFT



Inline Glasscraft Ltd.

How long has your company been in operation? How did it get started? What led you to found/join the company?

I come from a Glazing family. My Dad, Dennis, was a Glazier for his entire career, and all three of his sons followed in his footsteps. I received my Red Seal ticket for Glazing at BCIT in 1996 and had been working for a company doing high-rise work for a number of years. There wasn't much opportunity for growth in that company, so I chose to move on.

After moving around to a couple of different companies, I wound up working for a rapidly growing company that did a totally different type of glass work. I actually felt really challenged and learned a lot from some really great co-workers. After several years I just felt that owning and running my own business was something I would like to do. With the support of, and a push from, my wife, Jodi, we founded our own business in 2005.

For the first few years it was just the two of us, with the help of my Dad and Brother. Over the years, we've added office staff and installers as required, and we've settled in with a really good core of people, who are really committed to the business and their own craft. Dennis retired and my brother, Clay, moved to the interior (of British Columbia) a few years ago. Now Viktor, Linda, Ryan, and Ron are our solid group. A few of them have even become partners in the business. They are all committed to providing attentive, personal service with exceptional quality in their day-to-day work. We really wouldn't be where we are without them.

Tell us about what your company does in general?

Inline Glasscraft specializes in architectural glass in the residential and commercial sectors. We mainly focus on Frameless Showers, Glass Guardrail, Back-painted Glass for Backsplash and Feature Walls, Glass Doors & Office Partition. We really focus on good communication with our clients and quality of work on our projects.



Inline Glasscraft Ltd.

What is the nature of the work you do for Alair Homes? Did you work with Chris on either of his 2023 Georgie finalist projects – either Home at the Harbour or Back to the Future?

We do quite a bit of work for Chris at Alair Homes. We typically do his showers and mirrors, but we have also done some guardrail for him in the past. He is a very meticulous guy and really puts the customer first. We were a part of his Back to the Future project. It consisted of a large shower in the primary ensuite, with custom hardware and a sliding shower door in a secondary ensuite.



Are there any keys vendors, suppliers, subcontractors, or partners who help you with your work?

We have a few companies that have really helped us along the way. Garibaldi Glass and Oldcastle Glass are our two tempered glass suppliers that we use all the time. They are always willing to help us out with custom or odd requests, as well as our day-to-day orders. MX Glass is where we get all our mirrors and annealed glass products. They do really great work with custom sizes and shapes for mirrors and tabletops. Metallica Manufacturing always provides great service and exceptional work when it comes to custom metal fabrication. They supply us with all our custom welded handrails and guardrail top cap. They do really top-notch work. A good solid core of suppliers and subs really makes it easier to focus on what we need to give our customers the best service and product that we can.

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Inline Glasscraft Ltd.

You have a large portfolio of work under your belt. What are some of your favourite jobs you've done? Were there any pieces you created that really stood out? What are some of the most difficult installations you've had to do?

We've done so many fun and rewarding projects over the years. Everything from full interior / exterior house packages, multi unit projects, and right down to jobs as small as a single mirror. I really enjoy working with our customers and I love making people happy. Workwise, I find challenging, intricate projects my favourite type of work: things that look and work equally amazing.

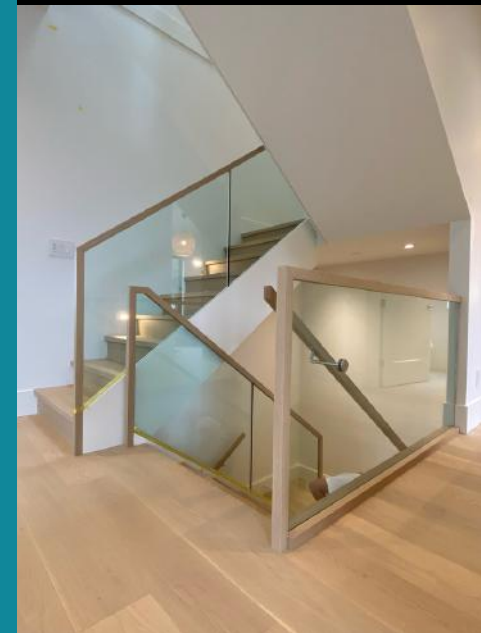
Last year we completed a full house project for a client in Vancouver that included a full-framed office enclosure in their home, as well as three floors of elevator enclosure, with the same frame and glass. It was very intricate work and totally custom. It truly turned out amazing and the clients could not have been happier. That was probably one of my favourite projects.

I really enjoy the unusual projects: things that not everyone can do. If it's too complicated for the average glass company, that's what I like best.

Do you have any exciting new projects on the horizon, or any others that you might have just wrapped up?

We take everything day-by-day and are looking forward to working with all the great contractors and designers that have been supporting us for years. It really is a pleasure to work with our customers and see their visions come to reality.

We have a couple of interesting projects coming this year. We have a fairly large back painted glass project at the YVR Customs Hall. It consists of a large feature wall with a custom colour back painted glass. Another project we are excited about is a whole house package in Pemberton. It's a private residence which includes glass railings, showers, mirrors, and custom tinted sauna glass.



For more information on Inline Glasscraft, visit <https://inlineglasscraft.com/>

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