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Constantine Builders Inc.**



builder profile



Joe Constantine of **Constantine** Builders Inc.

Amsterdam builder aims to give customers the same security he had growing up.

Joe Constantine builds the way he lives, and lives the way he builds – solid, sound and at a deliberate pace. He doesn't use a computer much or advertise his business at all. His motto, "Life is good," belies the simplicity of his life, and at the end of the day, he dreams about doing what he loves: making his customers happy and retiring to the Adirondacks.

Joe Constantine Jr. of Amsterdam wants people to feel safe and secure in their homes, free from worries about air quality or cracking foundations. He wants them to feel as secure as he did growing up in the home his father built on Tremont Street 50 years ago.

"When I grew up, I remember seeing the work my father did on our house. It was a simple home, because we were not rich by monetary standards. But it was quality, and I remember being happy living there. We never worried about a leaky roof or anything like that. I want that for all my customers – to feel good about living in their home," he said.

Joe spent a good amount of time on job sites with his dad, who was a heating and cooling contractor. In his teens, he started cutting in duct work and doing some carpentry work, which he loved. It wasn't long before he gained a reputation among more experienced carpenters for his precision and attention to detail.

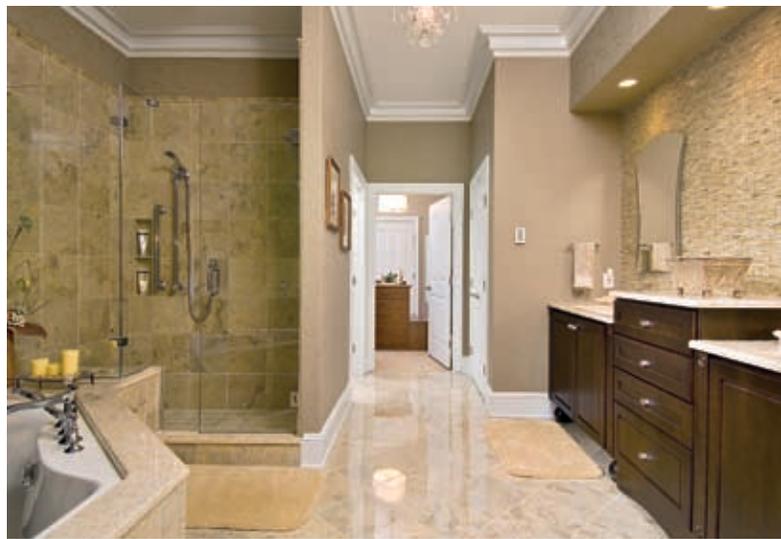
Do It Yourself, Smart Guy

"They used to call me the carpenter's carpenter because I did all the finish detail work they didn't want to do. One of the fellas complained because I asked lots of questions and wanted to find out why people did things one way when I had a better way. He finally said, 'You got so many ideas, Constantine, why don't you just go out and do it for yourself?' I thought that sounded like a good idea," he said.

At first, Constantine's mother encouraged him to get some business training before starting a business. He earned a degree in construction technology from Fulton Montgomery Community College before setting out to do things his way. He met his wife Jules in 1979. "I had been doing my own thing for a couple years, but after we met, Jules really made the business run. She's brilliant with computers and is definitely the brains of the outfit," he said.

Since 1981, Constantine has been providing a unique kind of workmanship in custom homes, additions and remodeling in Upstate NY. It is the personal touch that is important to them, as Joe works on virtually all of the company's projects as a full-time, hands-on craftsman. And it truly is a family business – his brother Anthony is lead carpenter.

They build custom, one-of-a-kind homes that Joe designs based on customer input. With an on-site woodworking shop, Constantine



makes trim, cabinetry and custom wood products. There isn't a phase of the process with which he doesn't get involved. "I like every part of what I'm doing. When I'm framing, I love to frame, and then I love crazy crown molding. I like the elaborate details, and I find there isn't a part that I don't enjoy," he said, adding that the stress of building someone's dream and being responsible for their largest investment weighs heavily on him.

Old World Craftsman in the Tech Age

Constantine spends 10 to 12 hours a day on the job, painstakingly working to make every detail just right for his customers – and for himself. He once had a subcontractor on a job bemoan, "That Constantine. He's always gotta do everything right." Joe still considers that to be high praise.

"I love creating something of interest. Roof lines, crazy angles, arch windows, stone work, details in kitchen – that's the mark I'm going to leave on the home," said Constantine. He admires the work of home builders in the last century who added details specific to their crafts. "Back then, every home had details. Today, we are losing the craftsmanship. I guess I'm not the best businessman, because I'll go ahead and put things in like cornice returns or arches that take time and cost money, but I won't pass it along. I love to hear from the home owner that the house is way more than they expected," he said.

Green Before Green Was Cool

Constantine learned about energy efficiency and air quality from his father in the late 1970s and is continuing to keep ahead of the curve. He said he has always worked to make his homes as energy efficient as possible, and as healthy as possible, using only high-quality building materials that are as natural and non-toxic as possible. "I learned that making the home as well insulated and tight as possible would save the homeowners money," he added.

Though they never advertise, Constantine Builders has a sound reputation as a builder with character and style. Referrals and word of mouth have kept the company going strong for these 27 years.

"People write me letters telling me how much they like the quality of the construction in their homes, how low their heating bills are and how the air quality in their homes is like night and day from their other houses. We don't have that 'new house' smell," said Constantine, referring to the absence of VOC emissions from paint, carpeting and toxic building materials.

No Man Is an Island

His biggest challenge over the years has been finding subs and carpenters that understand Constantine's mission and philosophy. "Our business mentality is that it is all about the homeowner. And in

the beginning, some people just didn't get it. For example, 20 years ago I had a disagreement with a sub, and after talking to him and hearing his side, I figured out that he thought people built houses so that he could have a job. He had it upside down," said Constantine. Still today, he believes that he's cultivated a set of craftsmen who "get" his style of building. "No man is an island, and I need good quality subs. I've found them. I constantly hear my customers give praises about my subcontractors. They get it because they care."

Also overheard on the job site these days are the long-established subs giving new guys the lowdown, saying "You're on a Joe job here. You gotta do things a certain way." That means no cutting corners, no inferior materials and no overwhelming workload.

"Life Is Good" Before the T-shirts

His favorite expression for the past 20 years has been "Life Is Good." The people around him have heard it so much that they think he coined the phrase that can now be found on coffee mugs and ball caps around the country. "But I believe it. I'm a Christian, and I believe there is so much more to life than just this. I have hope for the future. Life can be hard, and it is a struggle at times, but it is good," he said.

For the past 15 years, Constantine has been a member of the Capital Region Builder and Remodelers Association and the NAHB. The connections he has made have been helpful in his career and his life. "Learning from people like Peter Schrader of Schrader and Company has been invaluable. He's been a good mentor and a close friend to me, and I wouldn't have met him without the association," said Constantine. Pete is such a good friend that he even lent Joe his son, Silas, as a part-time carpenter. (Silas is also a part-time Marine.)

His father, Joe Sr., is still active at 83 years old, helping friends and neighbors with their home repair needs. The old house on Tremont is also holding up just fine. "It's just like I would want one of my houses to hold up. It doesn't need any work. There are no cracks, no leaks. It's an amazing thing to see, and I long for my customers to experience that with their Constantine-built homes. That way they can enjoy the true reason you have a house. Every Sunday, my Mom cooks pasta for 22 family members. That's why I build: to make a house a home for family to live in."

That said, people might be surprised to learn that Constantine himself dreams about retiring. "People think I'll work until I die, but I want to spend quality time with my wife, I want a home in the Adirondacks that I build myself, and I want to sit by the fire and not be sore all the time. Jules and I have a plan. It won't happen for another dozen years or so, but we have a plan," he said.

He added, "My biggest hope is that when customers come away from working with us, they say they never thought it was all about me. I hope they know that it is really all about them." ◉



Joseph M. Constantine, Jr.

Constantine Builders

- ◇ Custom Home Design & Building
- ◇ Additions
- ◇ Upscale Remodeling
- ◇ Custom Cabinetry
- ◇ Millwork

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