

Western North Carolina Edition

Builder/Architect

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Living Stone
Construction

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By Jessica Klarp

Custom-home building can mean endless compromise. For many, decisions become a question between style and substance. The answer for customers of award-winning Black Mountain-based Living Stone Construction is a resounding, satisfying “both.” Since 1995, the company has been on a mission to build beautiful, highly functional homes that surpass expectations: Craftsman-style custom homes in some of the region’s finest developments and seamless renovations of established homes for select clients. In the process, they have built a reputation for excellence and innovation that attracts clients near and far.

On the Cover: Exterior and bridge of Green’s residence at The Settings of Black Mountain. Architect Amy Conner-Murphy, ACM Design. Shown, from left, are Mike Bates, Supervisor; Jason Harris, Supervisor; Frank Turchi, Vice-President; Sean Sullivan, President; and Sam Arrowood, Supervisor.

Company President Sean Sullivan leads a thoroughly modern team of responsible, evolved men who embrace what they do and are committed to creating the best possible home for their clients. Each project improves communication, perfects streamlined systems, implements new technologies, discovers hard-to-find products and participates in the greening of the building universe.

But all that is business. What clients care about is a beautiful home that works and that is built with as little stress as possible. Living Stone Construction understands that. Making client concerns a priority has helped the company become so successful. The long list of awards the company has prove it, and the long list of clients reinforce that Living Stone Construction is satisfying their mission to “take clients’ dreams beyond their expectations.” But really, one look at a Living Stone Construction home is all the evidence you need to see that these men know what they are doing: that style and substance win the hearts of clients and build a legacy for the family — and for the company.

Flaherty residence at Mountain Air. Architect: Maury Hurt, Hurt Architecture & Planning



Take, for instance, the award-winning Green residence in the newly created Black Mountain community, The Settings. The home recently won the Outstanding Achievement award from the North Carolina Home Builders Association for homes over \$1 million and under 5,000 square feet. This stunning home is the eighth structure built by Living Stone Construction in this precipitous gated development. From the front, the home is a traditional, modestly sized Craftsman-style house. But once inside, substance and style vie for attention. The Greens, like all other Living Stone Construction clients, got a “green” home, which means Gold-certified Healthy Built and Energy Star rated. By now, most home buyers are aware of the advantages of this standard and demand sustainability in the construction of their home and energy efficiency for the life of the product.

“Energy Star is our base standard,” said Sullivan. “This gives clients a discount on their power for the life of the home. Many of our clients choose to upgrade to Healthy Built, which includes recycling throughout the project, making best use of certain supplies and using



Flaherty residence interior

healthy and sustainable products with low VOCs. The homeowners that choose this route do so because they, like us, want to be good stewards of the environment. After all, the environment is one of the main reasons they have moved to the mountains and they want to protect it.”

This four-bedroom, four-bath, two-level house has a wine cellar



and a dog shower. It offers the homeowner 5,300 covered square feet, with 400 screened for sleeping and twilight cocktails, and 3,500 heated square feet, which include an unfinished bonus room that serves as a workshop. There are details throughout the home that tie one feature into the next, from the bamboo flooring in the dining room to the zen-like drip chain off the master suite to the lizard lights illuminating the footbridge spanning the creek. The house is woven with structured wiring, boasts heated bathroom floors and an automatic toilet. All four of the fireplaces are direct vent to improve air quality and maximize heat output.

The beautifully landscaped back yard has terraces filled with native plants that cascade down to a natural creek that cuts through the property. The company salvaged felled trees from the site and built a beautiful bridge with twisted rhododendron rails over the creek. The bridge and most of the backyard has camouflaged solar lighting that takes the shape of lizards, birds, frogs and ferns. Across the lot from the bridge is a fire pit surrounded by stone seating. Because the lot and the development are so heavily wooded, the pit burns easy-to-control gas, not wood.

Details are what make the home an award winner, but in the eyes of the client it was the process that gained the most kudos. Living Stone Construction is committed to making the highly charged process of home building as stress free as possible. “For most custom-home clients, after the home is complete, their lack of satisfaction stems not from the builder, but how stressful the process was,” Sullivan noted.

This is a man who knows what he is talking about. He has made

it his business to learn as much as possible about every aspect of home building, to share that knowledge with his staff of nine and to be involved in the rapid development of the mountains. In addition to being President of the Asheville Home Builders Association for 2008, he serves as State Director for the NCHBA, is on the board of the Mountain Council for Accountable Development and has recently become an Accredited Builder. Not one to toot his own horn, Sullivan’s pride in this accomplishment shone as he pointed out that of the 60,000 licensed builders in the state, less than 500 are accredited. “The education was priceless, and it’s a nice distinction to have over the competition,” he said.

The company completes about 10 homes a year and has seven to 10 projects going at once. Sullivan works with the same group of trusted supervisors and carpenters that he has for years. Turnover is very low. He attributes part of the company’s success to the low supervisor-to-project ratio and the skill and integrity of his staff. “We have a great support group,” he said. “Everyone is empowered to make decisions and to communicate with clients.” The pride the supervisors take in their projects is evident, as they point to nuances that might escape the casual observer, like the reproduction antique switch plates or the perfect stain job on inset ceiling light cans, the structured wiring box and the recycled glass subway tiles. “Our intent is to construct homes that appear to have been built at the turn of the century and to fill it with modern conveniences.”

“We are constantly trying to improve our processes. We have always focused on quality, value and timeliness. And of course, maintaining our high standard of integrity is key to everyone who

Rich details of the Craftsman Cottage in the Village of Cheshire





Sullivan residence at The Settings of Black Mountain. Architect: Maury Hurt, Hurt Architecture & Planning

Sullivan residence interior





Craftsman Cottage exterior details at twilight. Architect: Daryl Rantis, Daryl S. Rantis Architects

Craftsman Cottage interior



PHOTOS BY JEFF MILLER

works here. But we have found that for someone building here who lives out of state — given the size of the investment they are making — communication is essential for a good relationship.”

To facilitate communication and reduce stress, the company maintains a state-of-the-art owner’s portal on its website. The portal gives clients access to images that are regularly updated, a list of preferred vendors and subcontractors working on the project, a calendar of events and a timeline for decisions large and small. From those lists they can make appointments to choose finishes. “We have tried to give the client all the information they need when they need it through the owner’s portal. The No. 1 stressful objection that clients have is that they don’t know what to pick out, and when.”

Respectful communications within the ranks is also a hallmark of the Living Stone Construction style. “We feed off each other,” Sullivan said. “Every project is a little different, a little bit better. When a client chooses us they will get better supervision, quality and communication than they might somewhere else. It means we can work together with the client to educate them, to keep them on track, to take away the anxiety of the decision-making process and give them an opportunity to fulfill their dream.” If the dream includes a handsome home packed with detail, personality and features that will create a legacy of comfort, then Living Stone Construction is the company to choose for style and substance.

Contact Living Stone Construction at (828) 669-4343 or on the Web at www.livingstoneconstruction.com. ■