

## EXCALIBUR CUSTOM HOMES: SPECIALISTS IN HIGH END CONSTRUCTION SINCE 2005



Nanaimo's Excalibur Custom Homes is the creative force behind some spectacular single family homes

#### Nanaimo Builder Wins Coveted BBB Torch Award

**N**ANAIMO – To Gary Richardson the owner of Excalibur Custom Homes Ltd., being nominated for the Better Business Bureau's (BBB) prestigious Torch Award is as great an honour as winning. To him it's proof that he and his team have been doing the job right. But he does admit that winning is a pretty good feeling too.

"While we have been nominated

for a Torch Award before this is the first time that we've won, it's the sort of honour you get by having people nominate you, people who think enough of you to go to that much trouble which is a really good feeling," he said.

Presented at a gala celebration held November 3 at the Union Club in Victoria, Excalibur Custom Homes won in the 'Contractors – General' category, one of 13 separate awards presented that night. Organized each year by the Better Business Bureau of Vancouver Island, the Torch Awards have been created to encourage and support ethical business practices among

its membership.

The Torch Award is the highest honour the BBB can present to a business or nonprofit organization and being a recipient means the winner not only believes in the high standards promoted by the BBB, but also consistently acts on them and continuously integrates them into daily practices – a philosophy that has been at the heart of Excalibur Custom Homes' successful business model since it opened a dozen years ago.

"To win a Torch Award is beyond having great construction ability. It's about serving the customer right at every stage, the same people who in turn nominated us for this honor. People made unsolicited nominations that allowed us to win this award and I want to make it clear that they know I'm grateful and appreciative," Richardson explained.

"The Chief of the Cranberry Volunteer Fire Department, Ron Guelette, along with Deputy Fire Chief Garry Hein were just two of the people who wrote in. I also want to thank Jolynn Green from Community Futures for nominating us as well and I really want to thank Allan and Donna Farris from Departure Bay Service – their letter was actually read out at the presentation which was very special and touching."

While Excalibur Custom Homes



The crew at Excalibur Custom Homes have experience working on both commercial and residential projects

has operated as a corporate entity only since 2005 (being incorporated in 2009), Richardson himself has been actively involved in residential construction and general carpentry since he was 16 in his native Port Alberni. His first construction experience involved

working for a friend of his father, mixing concrete, helping to build decks, building railings and a variety of other tasks – basic skills that laid the foundation for a multi-faceted construction career

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on receiving a Torch Award**



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Excalibur Custom Homes has built some of the finest single family homes in the Central Island region



Wooden trusses are common in Excalibur homes, reflective of the company's love of natural materials

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that now spans decades.

Later going to college he originally found work as a marine mechanic, but the satisfaction of building things with his own hands, of seeing a project transform from a concept to reality encouraged him to return to his construction industry roots.

Over the years he honed his craft, trying his hand at a number of different aspects of the field in order to learn the construction industry inside and out. After stints in framing, concrete work, siding, plumbing, electrical, masonry and installing hardwood floors, he decided to use his hard won knowledge and experience by assisting others with the process of creating new spaces for their homes and businesses. The end result was the launching of the now award-winning Excalibur Custom Homes.

"While our focus remains high quality single family homes (as much as 75 per cent of the company's current workload) in reality we do and have done a little bit of everything. We work where we're needed and where it makes sense for us," he explained.

Working primarily across the Central Vancouver Island region, from the Comox Valley to the Cowichan Valley (with the occasional project in his home town of Port Alberni), Excalibur Custom

Homes has been involved in a number of different commercial, retail and multi-family construction endeavours since it was first founded.

These larger scale projects are in addition to its expanding portfolio of extraordinary custom homes. Over the years the firm has built everything from restaurants for both Wendy's and the White Spot chains, to taking over and successfully finishing a 45-unit apartment complex in downtown Nanaimo.

"We built the offices for Community Futures here in Nanaimo, and we were very happy to be involved in building the new Cranberry Volunteer Fire Hall, which turned into a terrific project.

That's why both the Fire Department and Jolynn Green of Community Futures nominated us for the award," he said.

The Cranberry Volunteer Fire Hall was a major project for Excalibur and a huge source of pride for the company. The \$1 million plus job essentially involved a complete rebuild of the aging structure, adding to both its functionality for the firefighters and to its importance to the local community as a whole.

"Garry Hein, in his nomination letter to the Better Business Bureau, said that we didn't just rebuild the fire hall, we rebuilt the whole

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Excalibur is especially proud of the work it did rebuilding the fire hall for the Cranberry Volunteer Fire Department

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community. So the whole community in the South Wellington area is pretty happy with the hall as it is now essentially a community focal point, a community hall – all while being a pretty fun job to do,” Richardson said.

“The volunteer firefighters work very hard and it was a real privilege to be working with those guys. We’re very happy with how well it all turned out.”

Despite working on the

occasional commercial, retail or multi-family project the bulk of Excalibur Custom Homes’ efforts are residential renovation assignments and the construction of high end single family homes. “It’s fair to say that upwards to 75 per cent of our work involves single family homes. In the last year there has been a bit of variety, between things like Community Futures and the Fire Hall, but certainly most of what we do involves residential properties,” explained Richardson’s wife and business partner Nelda Richardson.

“I think one key part of the success of the business has to be our willingness to diversify, to be able to go from a commercial job to a residential job without missing a beat. It’s all about quality and taking the care to do the job right, and that’s the same regardless of the client – whether for a business or a homeowner.”

Having grown up in the construction sector, having extensive hands’ on experience in virtually every aspect of the trades allows Richardson to transition seamlessly from one assignment to the next, another of Excalibur’s forte’s. “I’m lucky as I don’t have to leave my trades to switch to a commercial job. The same trades follow me over there that I use with a residential job,” he explained.

Excalibur Custom Homes, like many builders has a small but focused team of construction experts, typically about seven, that are involved in all of its projects. In addition to its in-house staff the firm works with a core of trusted sub trades, specialists in their individual vocations that play key roles in all of its assignments. By working with the same tradespersons and sub contractors over long periods a bond of trust is developed that is seemingly unique to the construction industry.



Quality designs and materials are used throughout an Excalibur home, both inside and outside the home

Richardson knows what his sub trades are capable of, and his contractors understand what is expected of them in terms of skills, professionalism and deportment in return. That level of understanding allows him to take on projects without worrying about the results – all parties involved know that quality, customer care and clear communication is at the heart of any Excalibur project.

“The trades are incredibly important. We’re still using the same ones we always have. I know they’re there for me, sometimes on short notice, not due to a lack of planning but because something unforeseen has shown up,” he said.

One part of the Excalibur team of contractors is the firm’s default designer Nanaimo’s Grebco Design Group, the creative vision behind many of Excalibur Custom Home’s outstanding projects.

“They are very knowledgeable about structural matters, having worked I believe with a number of truss manufacturers in the past so they really know how things work, which is a huge help to us,” Richardson said.

“The nice thing, right from the beginning, is that it’s very cost effective to not have to make any changes on the job site. That’s one of the real values of having a well planned project. We take great pride in providing planning that works from start to finish. If we had to make changes on-site because of bad planning that would increase the costs, and impact the building schedule but with Grebco’s planning we simply don’t have to deal with any of those costly mistakes.”

By planning out every detail of

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a project beforehand costs can be kept down, and building time-tables can be more easily met. "I've had finishers tell me they like working for us as we don't have to ask them to do things twice, or change our minds halfway through a project. By having a plan and sticking to it, it makes life easier for everyone, from the customer right down to me," he joked.

Another important Excalibur supplier is Atlas Truss, one of the custom builder's key suppliers of roof trusses and other quality building materials. Having worked with Excalibur Custom Homes for many years Atlas has become a major contributor to the company's projects, a partnership the company doesn't take lightly.

"Excalibur is one of our long-time, most loyal customers. We certainly have become one of Gary's go-to suppliers, a relationship that is very important to us," explained Gurmit Dhaliwal, Atlas Truss's General Manager.

"Gary is a very important customer and we certainly appreciate all of the loyalty and support he has shown us over the years – in many ways our relationship with Excalibur goes beyond being a mere supplier to one that is more like a partnership. In all of our business

One hallmark of an Excalibur home is the use of such natural materials as stone and wooden timbers

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The gymnasium at the Cranberry fire hall has become an extremely popular place in the local community



An Excalibur home is a complete home, with quality craftsmanship found both inside and out

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Open and bright floor plans are another common feature found in an Excalibur custom built home

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dealings Gary and everyone at Excalibur is professional, respectful and just generally a great bunch of guys. We're proud to be part of their success and look forward to continuing to work with them in the years ahead."

As a Vancouver Island native Richardson has respect for the environment and the beauty of the Island – an appreciation that is reflected in many of Excalibur's projects. A use of stone, natural woods, a conscious use of the landscape and the site itself if possible and other considerations go into any Excalibur job. In addition the company does far more than

new builds, as renovation assignments (which can be as complex as new construction in some cases) are frequently tackled, including specialty items such as gateways and other features that require that unique Excalibur touch.

"We've done quite a few custom gates and entranceways in the past year as well. That's something that's a little different but it's also a custom job that allows for creativity and individuality," Nelda explained.

"It provides the opportunity to design, to receive input from the property owner and in the end to give them something that helps to set their home apart from all the other homes. That's become a fairly interesting little niche that's come along."

For Richardson providing the customer with bonus features like ponds, entranceways and other unique features are part of the complete service his company provides its customers. "They can get the full package. To build on that concept we're actually looking at becoming an appliance dealer as well. We've been asked to go to Vancouver to check out some European appliances that we might want to include in our homes," he explained.

"These are fantastic, state of the art systems. If we like what we see we might be able to equip our custom homes with a complete appliance package as well. We're going to go over there and check



A new and interesting niche market for Excalibur Custom Homes is the creation of customized property gateways

it out. We're going to do the first package in our home and if we like it that could become a standard feature."

While he doesn't market himself as a Green Builder (a term he thinks is often over used and not fully understood) energy efficiency and environmental sensitivity have been core parts of the Excalibur Custom Homes business model from the very beginning. He was pioneer in the use of spray foam insulation, which is an approach that adds both improved thermal efficiency and increased structural support to any project – commercial or residential. The Cranberry Fire Hall is a good example of this approach, with the foam having added dramatically to the structural integrity of the building.

"Everyone is talking about the new BC Energy Step Code for home construction but we're already building well above that right now. The required entry point is Level One, and we're currently building our projects at about Level Three," he said.

"It's all about our using quality products in the build, hot water on demand, spray foam, triple pane windows and all of the other things that we're already doing. That's what makes us an energy efficient builder, not just calling ourselves one. I've always said it, why wouldn't I build an energy efficient home? It's what we do all of the time."

Thanks to the beauty of

Vancouver Island, and the skyrocketing prices of land in the province's major centres, Richardson anticipates the Central Vancouver Island region will experience significant growth in the future. He also anticipates that this expanding population base will require quality housing in which to live, offering new opportunities for Excalibur.

"The local market has been phenomenal and I expect it to get even busier. A lot of people are saying that Nanaimo and area could become the next Kelowna, so we're expecting to keep busy," he said.

While central Island land costs are relatively value priced when compared to the Lower Mainland, the nature of the land that is available requires a builder with knowledge of the area, such as Excalibur. "There's not a lot of easily buildable land left, so when you're dealing with a complicated property you need to have an experienced, knowledgeable builder who can give consideration to all of the challenges that come from dealing with the slopes, drainage issues and other factors," Nelda explained.

Looking toward the future Excalibur Custom Homes anticipates a busy spring, with four custom projects already on the books for 2018, projects which could take up much of the company's energies next year. "It may not be everything we do, but you want to give the customers your full attention

so those jobs will certainly take up much of the year," she said.

For Gary, Excalibur has kept busy not by just doing great work, but by putting the customer first in all things. "I like to put myself in my customer's shoes. I always treat my customers the way I would want to be treated. I think that's a big part of why we've done as well as we have. We're lucky in that we don't have a huge overhead, we don't have a big office or a large staff to take care of so we're able to pass a lot of that onto our clients," he said.

Substance over show, being able to deliver on all promises, whether the project is a small renovation assignment or a full scale commercial project has kept Excalibur Custom Homes at the forefront of the local construction industry for a dozen years. It's a business model the company has no intention of changing in the future.

"It's not about seeing how much we can make. It's always been about doing it right, standing behind everything we do and being upfront about everything from the get go," he said.

"It's not about putting on a big show, or having a big office downtown. It's about being able to deliver what the customer wants in the best way possible. That's why we're having repeat and referral business. I never want to be the one-hit wonder – I want to be here for the long haul."

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