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– Sean Sullivan, President
Living Stone Design + Build

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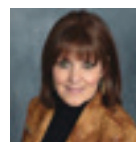
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ON THE COVER

The Sennett Residence in Asheville. Making the most of sweeping Blue Ridge Mountain views, facilitating an indoor-outdoor lifestyle and comfortably housing three generations were the priorities for Sean Sullivan and his team at Living Stone Design + Build. It was the 2019 Asheville Parade of Homes “Best in Show” winner.

Living Space

The Bronder residence brings in the beauty of the outdoors.

When Mark Bronder and his wife Heather came to Living Stone Design + Build, they were looking to build a forever home. "We called it our boots-up house," says Mark. "Meaning, a house we could enjoy and be comfortable living in for the rest of our lives."

It was a tall order for several reasons, not the least of which being that neither Mark nor Heather had ever set foot in North Carolina before they put their lot under contract. "We're actually from Nebraska," Mark notes. "Since we had a retirement home in mind, we wanted to live somewhere that didn't have extreme heat or cold, but still had four seasons, and allowed us to be outside and active. Asheville fit the bill."



All of the careful planning, attention to detail, and thoughtful input that went into the Bronder home paid off in the end. "This house has exceeded our expectations," says Mark. "I don't really have anything that I wish I would have or could have done differently. And that was the main goal we always had for our boots-up house. No regrets."



As soon as the Bronders made a decision about their retirement location, they began looking for the right professionals. "We had some specific lot requirements in mind," says Mark. "I called a number of builders and real estate agents and told them what

I was looking for, and then waited to see who could help us, and what they could offer. Sean Sullivan called me back and said 'I think I have your lot.' So, right from the beginning, I was impressed. Site selection is not something everybody does."

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE



Not only did Sean find them a lot – he found them the perfect lot. "One of the things that we love about this lot is the way it changes with the seasons. In summer we have private, closed-in views. In the winter, we have 360-degree mountain views. Really, it was an ideal spot for a dream home."

When it comes to building homes, Mark is not someone who's easy to impress. As the former president and CEO of a real estate development, property management, and general contracting company, he brought a wealth of industry knowledge and a set of high standards to the project.



"I've been around construction my entire career," he notes. "I'm not used to being the client; I'm used to being the guy driving the ship. I wanted somebody I could trust to do an exceptional job. Our goal was to have a house built in such a way that we could look back and say we had no regrets."

Mark was immediately drawn to Living Stone's design-build process. "I really appreciated that we were able to get a myriad of services

under one roof. When the architects, builders, and designers are all involved together in the process, the design becomes more cohesive and everything flows more smoothly. In our case, the architect drew up the plans, and Laura from ID.ology Interiors & Design helped us enhance and improve upon them with subtle changes that reflected our individual needs and our lifestyle."

The Bronders weren't the only ones who loved the way the design came together; the home was a 2021 American Residential Design Award winner, and an AHBA's 2020 Parade of Homes' Best in Show Award winner.





An elaborately customized room design for the Bronder's extensive train collection.

From the beginning of the build, Mark noted an exceptional level of dedication from Living Stone. "If a house doesn't come out of the ground square, it's doomed for failure from the start," he explains. "Sean's framing contractor literally checked every single truss with a level when it was secured in place permanently. That kind of attention to detail is uncommon these days, and it's pleasing to see that there are still builders out there who place a premium on excellent craftsmanship."

Mark found that commitment to craftsmanship extended to all those who worked on the build. "One of the real assets of working with Living Stone is their trade partners. As an old contractor myself, I can honestly say I didn't have a bad experience with any of them. In terms of quality, they were all top-notch."

Mark describes the home itself as a "modern mountain Craftsman," intended to reflect and embody its pristine natural surroundings. "One of the design intents for the exterior was to have it blend naturally into a forested environment," he says. "I have to say, I never envisioned myself living in a green house, but here we are. And it looks absolutely beautiful. It's almost like part of the landscape."

The home's interior features a contemporary style, made soft and warm by an abundance of well-appointed natural elements. "We wanted to bring the

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE

outdoors in," says Mark. "One of the ways we accomplished that was by allowing for as much natural light as possible. Another was using natural colors and rustic design details like cedar ceiling beams, a reclaimed wood mantel, and native North Carolina stones on the outdoor fireplace."

Mark appreciated the opportunity Living Stone gave him to help shape the design. "I love that we were able to customize different elements and be part of the process. For example, typically an architect will do cross section drawings for ceilings, but we were able to design and build the interior ceiling to my specification onsite. Now we have an incredible six-twelve pitch cathedral ceiling that wasn't part of the original plan."

Mark even included some dream elements in the building plan. "I was able to negotiate two separate man-caves," he says. "They built me a theater on the terrace level of the house, and we simultaneously designed and built a fantastic custom train room."





The Bronders particularly appreciated the help of the ID.ology design firm. "We worked hand in hand with Laura and her team on selections," Mark explains. "We actually sold almost everything we owned when we moved, and had to buy everything new. Laura had a hand in selecting 95 percent of our furniture. And she helped with everything else, from plumbing hardware, to countertops, to paint colors, to lighting, and cabinet pulls. She even chose the artwork on the walls. She was with us every step of the way, guiding us to decisions that supported our vision for our home."

In the end, Mark and Heather couldn't be happier – with the move, with the build, or with the house. "We've lived here for two and a half years now. In some respects, it's like resort living. We feel like we're on vacation 365 days a year. With the pandemic, we haven't had an opportunity to go out much. But frankly, we don't have much desire to go anywhere. We have everything we want and need right here. We're hermits, and we're pretty happy about it." The couple may have even started a trend. "My sister and brother-in-law came to visit," says Mark. "They liked it so much they bought the lot next to us."

WHY BUILDING IN THE MOUNTAINS TAKES SO LONG

MANY PEOPLE DREAM OF BUILDING A HOME IN THE NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS, AND NO WONDER.

The seclusion, the exceptional views, the tranquility, and the direct connection to nature make the area an idyllic place to live. However, prospective homeowners are often surprised to find that building in the mountains is a longer and more complex process than building elsewhere.

Sean Sullivan, owner of Living Stone Design + Build, has built hundreds of homes in and around Asheville, and he knows all too well the delays this specific locale can create, and the reasons why.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

Many of the delays in building mountain homes occur in the planning stages. "There are a lot of municipal rules and regulations to contend with," Sean observes. "In addition to those, the planned communities we build in have rules and review boards we have to comply with."

"Because we build custom homes, there's a complex sequence to the whole process. We have to design the home,

evaluate preconstruction services, and submit plans for approval. We need to get permits for septics, wells, retaining walls, and the site design. It's a lot of legwork. We can't start construction until everything is approved."

SLOPING LAND

The most significant cause for delay on the construction end of any project is a sloped lot. "Building on a slope creates several different challenges," Sean explains. "Parking can be an issue; sometimes there's insufficient room for materials on the lot, so you have to shuffle things around."

A sloped lot means the back of the house might be 20, 30, 40, or sometimes even 60 feet off the ground. When you have guys installing windows and siding at that height, safety is a significant issue. We have to go slowly and ensure that we're taking all of the appropriate precautions."

SOIL SURPRISES

When it comes to mountain building, the very soil itself can cause delays. "Sometimes we'll excavate and find organic matter, like trees for example, have been buried in the lot, whether due to development issues or a natural landslide. Sometimes we'll find rock, an underground spring, or alluvial soils, which are loose soils deposited by moving water. If we find any of these things, we need to excavate and replace them with gravel. There's no way to know if these types of issues are there until we excavate, and correcting them takes thoughtful planning."

The great news is, if you're willing to invest the time, money, and patience, you can have your dream home, no matter which way your lot slopes. "Every lot is buildable," says Sean. "It's just a matter of cost, engineering...and sometimes out-of-the-box thinking!"





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Go Green

*The goal was met for the Park's residence:
Design green. Build green. Live green.*

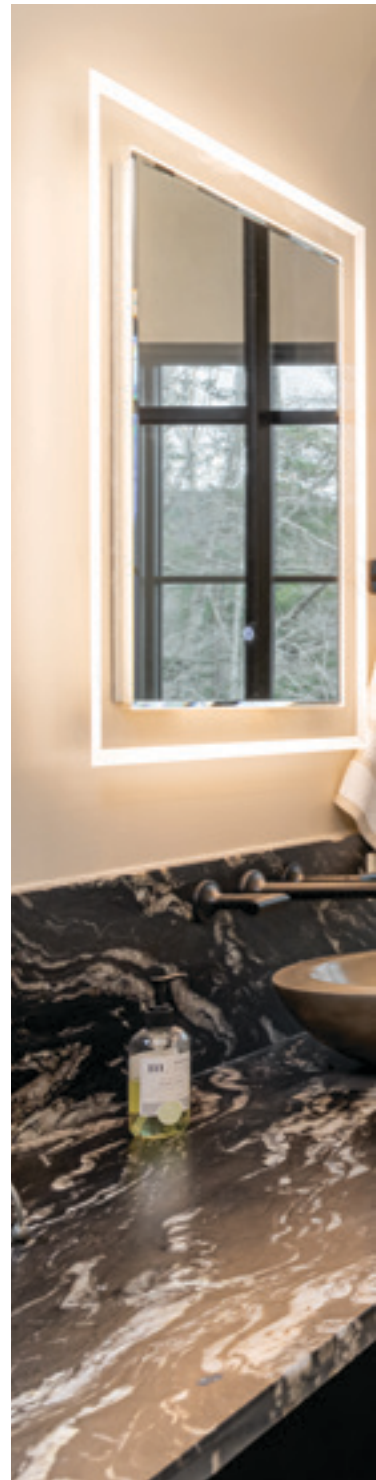
When it came to their forever home, Jack and Cynthia Park had a vision of a grandiose, but welcoming place in a beautiful natural setting. While they weren't quite ready to move in for good, they wanted to strike while the iron was hot. "We wanted this to be our permanent, forever home when we retired," says Cynthia. "I'm still working full time, but we knew if we didn't buy the land now we'd probably never do it."

The Parks' idea for their home was specific and unique. "We love the Old English author Anthony Trollope," says Cynthia. "A character in one of his novels lives in Gatherum Castle – this incredible place where an assortment of interesting people come together. We wanted our home to be special in that regard – to be a place designed around an invitation to come gather. We knew we weren't getting a castle, so we named ours Gatherum Cottage."

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE

The Parks have four grown children and six grown grandchildren, and everything about the home was designed for the family to come together in one space. But not just *any* space. "When we talk about gathering, we mean it in its finest sense – as though special guests are set to arrive every day," Cynthia explains.

"When you know company is coming, you provide them with a beautiful environment, plenty of space, and very thoughtful seating area for conversation. There should be no place where a guest has to move their hand too far to have something to eat or drink. Every bed should be comfortable. Every time guests show up, they should say to themselves, 'she did this for *us*.'"





There were some obstacles on the path to the Parks' dream home. "We were working with a very small lot, and we have a very large family. In addition, the homeowner's association had a strict set of guidelines. The challenge was on the designer and the architect to make it all work. They came up with a design that met the exhaustive HOA criteria and created lots and lots of room in a small amount of space."

Another obstacle was long-distance planning. "When we started looking at retiring, western North Carolina was a natural choice," recounts Cynthia. "I grew up going to Montreat as a kid, so that area has always been special to me. Of course, we didn't live in North Carolina during the build, so we were doing everything from a great distance. We needed a one-stop shop to ensure that everything would get done in a cohesive and timely way."





The Parks chose Living Stone Design + Build, and found an easy camaraderie with the owner, Sean, and his wife, Laura, owner of design firm ID.ology Interiors & Design, and principal designer on the project. “We all became friends,” says Cynthia. “I wish they lived next door to me. They’re just so real. We spent a lot of time with them, talking and sharing meals. They would ask us for stories about the kids, about our life, what brought us joy. They took the time to really get to know us.”

Cynthia loved Laura’s team approach to the home’s interior design. “We met once a month with her team and they took care of all of the design details. We’d have a fixtures meeting, and we’d go over every type of fixture. Then we’d have a lighting meeting, and go over every lighting option. I got to see it all and ensure it looked cohesive. That was really important to me. I told them I didn’t want chapter books; I wanted a poem. They understood, and made sure everything flowed together seamlessly. I also told them I never wanted them to show me more than two options for any design element, and they never did.”

The Parks also had a great rapport with building supervisor Mike Bates. “He was so confident, and so accommodating. Nothing seemed off-limits. No matter what idea we called with, he’d say ‘Oh, that’s no problem, we can do it.’ Of course, he’d explain the cost associated with the idea, so we could make good decisions about where to invest our money and attention.”

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE

The Parks deeply appreciated Living Stone's creative and thoughtful approach to helping them get what they wanted, within their budget. "Laura and Sean have their own story. They know what it feels like for this to be the biggest thing anybody does. We've struggled and clawed and scraped for forty years for this opportunity. I really wanted to invest wisely. We had a mutual appreciation for value. And the value always shows."

"Laura would say things like, 'tell me what you like about the Wolf Sub-Zero. Is it the name, or the way it looks, or its capacity, or its style? When you say something is non-negotiable, I need to know which features you're referring to so we can figure out the best option for you.'

"Throughout the building process, they'd tell us, 'if you don't have strong feelings about this brand, or this material, we can get this same look for \$40,000 less. We can save that money and spend the big bucks somewhere else! I knew I couldn't have all my little darlings, and when the time for editing inevitably came, they made it as painless as possible."

The home is a contemporary mountain cottage, with a facade designed to blend into the natural setting. "I didn't want a boring, run-of-the-mill color for the exterior," Cynthia notes. "I wanted something bold – something interesting. We went with an iron ore gray. It's gorgeous. There are copper accents and copper gas lanterns on the front porch, but otherwise it disappears into the mountains, and it's amazing."



Cynthia also had a very specific aesthetic in mind for the interior. "I wanted a rich-looking house – not ostentatious, but rich, as though generations of good taste had designed it. This would not be the kind of place where you put your feet on the furniture."

The result? A lush, well-appointed space with clean lines, warm natural accents, soft fabrics, and a serene gray and blue color

palette, highlighted with pops of red and orange. The entire home is a deft balance of modern style, plush comfort, and brilliant artistry. The whole design is accented with carefully chosen artwork – a priority for the Parks. "Except for the Atelier items, every single piece of furniture came from a garage sale," reveals Cynthia. "We took the money we saved and invested it in artwork, most of it by well-known artists from across the southeast."



INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE



Practically speaking, the home is designed to accommodate lots of people comfortably. The ground level is a self-contained living space with its own laundry room, mudroom, and kitchen; two beds; two baths, and a deck with a view of the mountains.

The upstairs level is a beautiful, welcoming space with floor-to ceiling windows that offer incredible views and an abundance of natural light. There's a living area with plenty of seating around the fireplace, a spacious kitchen with ample cabinetry, an office with a Murphy bed to accommodate extra guests, a mountain-view dining room, and a fabulous deck with rocking chairs – each with its own drink table beside it.

Sean introduced the Parks to “right size living,” a concept the couple fully embraced. “It meant that we didn’t need to build as big as we could afford. We needed to build as comfortably as we could afford. It was about focusing on what we needed from the space, and making the most of every design decision.”



INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE

"The upstairs is the "gatherum level," explains Cynthia. "Really, it's the family level, as this house is their house, too. This is the spot where we can all gather around and talk and spend time together. The kids and grandkids can come enjoy it whenever they want, and eventually we plan to pass it down to them."

There are even built-in accommodations for the family's furry members. "I told my husband, we either have a zero-dog house or we do this right. I asked Living Stone to build a mid-sized dog crate into the wall so that it didn't stick out, and to make me something that could contain the dog food so it's not spilling into the hall. That way, everything has a place."

Also on the upper level: an indulgent master bedroom and bath. "The master bath is separated from the bedroom by floor-to-ceiling glass sliding doors with black iron accents. Inside, there's a stand-alone soaker tub with two shower heads."

The bathroom is certainly luxurious. But the Parks' favorite part of the master bedroom space is the bedroom seating nook. "We both have worked so hard; Jack is a lawyer and I'm an Episcopal priest. This little spot says 'the day ends here.' It's just big enough for the two of us to sit on the cushion with our shoes off, unwind, and talk."





The home's design is loved by the family, and has attracted notice from outsiders, as well. "I started my three-month sabbatical there. A couple of times, I came back from running an errand to find people looking in the windows. When they saw me, they'd apologize and say, 'This house is so incredible, we thought it was a model of a concept house! We didn't realize anyone lived here.' Sean really deserves the credit for that."

The Parks truly love their home, and truly enjoyed their building experience with Living Stone. "They did a beautiful job, for sure," says Cynthia. "But beyond that, they were constantly mindful of how hard we had worked to build our dream house, and they treated us with so much respect, and were so flexible with their options and smart with their ideas. It could not have been a better collaboration."

THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GREEN BUILDING

GREEN BUILDING IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO HOMEOWNERS WHO VALUE THEIR PERSONAL HEALTH AND ALSO WANT TO SUPPORT A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.



Living Stone Design + Build has always had a deep commitment to environmentally-conscious building, and the average Living Stone home usually obtains high-level silver or gold green building certifications. But what does this mean, exactly?

CERTIFICATION TYPES

Living Stone owner Sean Sullivan notes that there is no one definitive set of standards for green building. "There are a number of different certification programs, with a number of different checklists. The certification levels of any given home will depend on which program is used."

THE NC GREEN BUILT PROGRAM

Living Stone uses the NC Green Built program to evaluate each of their new builds. "We like the fact that it's a regional

program, so it addresses local mountain issues that might not exist elsewhere in the country," says Sean.

The Green Built system evaluates homes based on a number of different criteria, including:

- BUILDING SITE
- WATER
- COMFORT SYSTEMS (meaning air and heating systems)
- BUILDING ENVELOPE (meaning the barrier that separates the interior of the home from the environment, including the walls, doors, roof, and windows)
- APPLIANCES, LIGHTING AND RENEWABLES
- INDOOR AIR QUALITY
- MATERIALS
- BONUS (this includes anything the builder has done to go above and beyond typical green building processes)

GREEN BUILT QUALIFICATIONS

Minimal prerequisites must be met to qualify for Green Built certification, including compliance with federal, state, and local standards; a specific Energy Star rating; and the installation of specific items, such as energy-efficient doors, windows, appliances, weatherstripping, and carbon monoxide detectors. Once the minimum criteria is met, certification levels are determined by a points system.

The beginning level in the Green Built program is certified, followed by bronze, silver, and then gold certified. The highest level is platinum certified.

LIVING STONE GREEN BUILT RATINGS

Living Stone's personal building standards are stringent enough to consistently earn high certification levels, at no additional cost to homeowners. "Our average home usually gets high-level silver or gold," says Sean. "In addition, many certification standards are already an integrated part of our building practices, so the cost is already baked into any given estimate."

Living Stone also builds platinum-certified houses. "The only way to get a platinum rating is with the use of renewables, like solar panels and geothermal HVAC. By going this route, you can achieve a Net Zero home; a home that produces as much energy as it consumes. Building Net Zero is the way of the future, and it's so satisfying seeing our clients embracing it now.



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For one patient homeowner, bringing the perfect home from vision to fruition was a long time in the making. "For 25 years, I dreamed of having a house in the mountains," she says. "I spent three years looking in mountain areas. I liked Asheville's vibrancy, but I didn't want to be in town. I wanted to be out in nature."

After choosing the ideal location, she selected Living Stone Design + Build to design, and build, the home of her dreams, with a very specific look and feel in mind. "The architect and I discussed the design. He had a couple of floor plans in mind, and one of them really spoke to me. I liked that it was contemporary and had very distinct architectural lines. It was a really great starting point for the overall design."

As an integrative health coach, cultivating a sense of wholeness, wellness, and tranquility within her home was very important to the homeowner. "I wanted the inside to feel inviting and comfortable, but also very restful and peaceful," she notes. "I really feel that we achieved that. When I walk in the door I can breathe and settle in, as though I'm going to the spa. I immediately feel more grounded. The high ceilings and large windows create an airiness and an openness, and a feeling as though I'm in nature."



*Winner of the 2021 American Residential
Design Award for Custom Home.*





To fully embody nature, the homeowner wanted to incorporate the five elements into her home's design. "For earth, we used wood from the property and wood tones, which add a natural warmth," she explains. "For air, we installed sliding glass doors that open all the way to the porch. For water, we incorporated a beautiful water feature. As for fire, there's a fireplace in the bedroom and in the great room. For the fifth element, meaning the ethers/spiritual energy, we added crystals into the foundation, and crystals throughout the house."

A focus on spirituality also drove the design in other ways. "I wanted a dedicated space for meditation that was not accessible from inside the house and could only be entered from the outside, so it could be a separate, sacred environment. I'm thrilled with the way it turned out. It's very tranquil to be in there, and the color that Laura and I picked to create the mood could not be better. It's incredible to look up into this beautiful space that reflects the natural world, and feel a part of something that's so much bigger than I am."

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE



The homeowner wanted to be able to share this experience, so the home was designed to accommodate a number of guests for extended visits. "I wanted this to be a place where friends could come to relax and spend time in nature. But I also had business considerations. One of my goals was to be able to host occasional mini-retreats for clients, so we could do intensive work on personal development and wellness in this serene and beautiful setting."

"The downstairs was designed to allow several people to stay for days at a time. I have space for visitors in the bunk room and the guest room. I have a nice-sized rec room and an exercise room, so guests are able to gather to relax, meditate, or do yoga. The outdoor gathering spaces are fantastic; the primary deck upstairs is really large and has great furniture, so a lot of people can fit there comfortably. Down below, there's a beautiful patio with pavers and a fire pit. It makes a great gathering space, especially in cooler months."

The home addressed practical concerns of the homeowner as well. It features a universal aging-in-place design, allowing her to live comfortably for many years to come. It's also designed to be energy efficient, and to promote optimum indoor air quality.



When it came to the home's aesthetics, the homeowner took a bold leap of faith. "I decided that instead of watching the whole thing come together piece by piece, I wanted the excitement of a grand reveal. I gave Laura from ID.ology a big picture plan, and I put a lot of faith in her and in Living Stone to put it together. And they totally pulled it off! It was so much fun to do it that way."

The homeowner was especially delighted with Laura's teams smart, intuitive design choices. "I wanted a marriage between contemporary design and nature, and I feel like they really helped capture that. They also found a way to highlight the home's fantastic architecture."

"They used lighting to offset unique architectural details, whether it was natural lighting from lots of windows above the fireplace and in the kitchen; transitional lighting between hallways and entryways that made each room its own unique space; or a lighting system to highlight the beauty of the exterior. They did things I never in a million years would have thought of, and I'm extremely happy that they were there to be the guide!"

"I never could have pulled off decorating from scratch," she continues. "I brought one piece of furniture from my old house. They handled the rest. There are definite advantages to hiring a design-build company. They approached the design together from both sides, and worked to coordinate the architecture, the build, and the interior design. Ultimately, that was a really good thing."





The homeowner also liked the ease with which she could manage the project's bottom line. "They use an online system for communication and budgeting, which was really helpful," she notes. "I was able to access the budget, and I could see what the potential fluctuations would be if I decided to splurge on this or splurge on that, and how my decisions would impact the end result. In the end there weren't a lot of surprises, which I appreciated."

INSPIRATION IN ARCHITECTURE

The project wasn't all smooth sailing. "This was my first time building a new home, and it was a huge undertaking on so many levels. I didn't know what to expect. Construction is already a challenging process, and then given the circumstance of Covid, a lot of things had to be accepted and adapted to, and patience was required from everyone. But I'm glad I did it, I'm glad I'm in. I love my house. It's beautiful."

She isn't the only one. "I've had people stop by the house to admire it, and ask how different aspects of it were accomplished. They tell me, 'We love what you did here, it's incredible.' One builder even described the house as a placeholder in the neighborhood. It definitely stands out, not just because of its architectural elements, but because of the materials used. The facade is a pretty spectacular mixture of metal, stone, and wood and tile. And the metal roof line creates a shape that resembles butterfly wings."

"It's a really incredible thing to turn the corner on my way home and see my house lit up. I can't believe it's my house. It's a dream come true."



UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGING COSTS OF LUMBER

ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF BUILDING A HOME, ITS PRICE, CAN FLUCTUATE GREATLY AS MOST OF US HAVE SEEN RECENTLY.

As the owner of Living Stone Design + Build, Sean Sullivan keeps a very close eye on lumber prices, and understands the forces that drive costs.

DEMAND AND PRODUCTION

"Lumber is traded on a commodities exchange in the stock market," notes Sean. "Anything that's a commodity is going to have a fluctuating price."

Lumber prices skyrocketed in mid-2021, sending shock waves throughout the construction industry. The steep hike was not just a matter of low supply, but of higher-than-anticipated demand coupled with low production.

The sawmills that process the lumber slowed production in anticipation that Covid would cause a construction slowdown.

In addition, Covid regulations and safety concerns led to shutdowns and short-staffing. However, construction demand unexpectedly increased during Covid, leading to a serious processing backlog. This backlog sent lumber prices soaring.

Lumber prices have recently declined completely, however those savings are not yet realized as they haven't made it fully through the supply chain. Labor shortages and sustained demand are keeping the market value high, at least for now.

MULTI-STEP PROCESSING

There are multiple steps lumber goes through before it gets to the end user, and all of them can affect pricing. "The process starts with the tree farm," says Sean. "The trees get cut down and the lumber goes to the mill. Then it goes to a wholesaler, then

from the wholesaler to the retailer. Then it's delivered to the job site. Things can get gummed up at any stage in the process, causing price increases."

REGULATIONS

Some issues with lumber prices have to do with U.S. regulations and restrictions. "A lot of American wooded forests and lands are heavily restricted from deforesting or logging," observes Sean. "It's an added challenge to have to buy lumber from Canada and Europe. Fluctuating tariffs and shipping prices can affect the overall cost."

INDIVIDUAL BUILDERS

Since lumber is such a large component of a home, it pays to find a builder who understands the market and is transparent about cost. "I am constantly going to economic forums and attending market analysis seminars, and I get monthly market reports," says Sean.

"If I sense the cost of lumber may go up, we'll buy it and store it to hedge against inflation or shortage. Building a home is a huge investment, and we want our clients to get the best possible value for the money they spend."



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WOOL
Natural comfort



Living Well

Atelier Maison is Asheville's elevated furniture destination offering healthy, design-forward furniture in Asheville's new Design District.



Asheville homeowners, interior designers, and builders looking for beautiful, sustainable, non-toxic furniture have a wonderful resource available in Atelier Maison & Co.

The spacious, one-of-a-kind furniture showroom was established by Sean Sullivan and his wife Laura as a way to meet an industry need. Sean is the owner of Living Stone Design + Build, and Laura is the owner of ID.ology Interiors & Design. They've been doing custom home building since 1995 and interior design since 2005, and together they've crafted exceptional homes throughout the Asheville area.



WOOL

JUTE & HEMP

FSC CERTIFIED WOOD

LOW VOC WOOD STAINS

ORGANIC COTTON

NATURAL LATEX



Their years of building experience eventually led them to a troubling find. "We were focusing on sustainable materials and natural products," explains Laura. "Through our research, we realized just how toxic and dangerous a lot of the furniture on the market was. Essentially, homeowners were being poisoned."

"New homes are getting tighter and tighter for energy efficiency reasons," says Sean. "This means good things for the environment,

but it also means people are more likely to breathe in the toxins being off-gassed into the house."

These toxins came largely from mass-produced furniture, made with materials that allow for fast, easy, and cheap manufacturing. Everything from glues, to finishes, to foam, to fabric treatments can harbor dangerous chemicals that release into the air over time.



INNOVATION IN HOME FURNISHINGS



"It was such a big concern that we couldn't keep it to ourselves," says Sean. "We wanted to educate builders, designers, realtors and homeowners and give them accessibility to low or non-toxic products. So, we opened Atelier Maison."

The 20,000-square-foot showroom is open to the public and to the trade, and features furniture from over 80 different brands and vendors. In addition to the indoor showroom, a large outdoor showroom sports a deck in Asheville's new Design District.

Health is not the only consideration: Atelier Maison is also focused on superior quality. "We carry heirloom pieces that stand the test of time," says Sean. "Quality and health actually go hand in hand. When you handcraft furniture using naturally durable, premium materials, you don't need toxic glues, finishes and treatments to hold it all together."

"We want to get people away from the disposable mindset – the disposable lifestyle," says Laura. "A lot of people say, 'I'll buy a cheap sofa and in a couple of years we'll throw it out and get another one.' Well, that's bad for the environment, and, as it turns out, it's bad for their health as well."

People appreciate the concept of a healthier home; demand has increased, even in light of the pandemic. "Our clients are spending a lot of time at home. They're wanting to give their home a facelift and make it a comfortable place to live, work, and play. They want something that's beautiful, something that will last, and something that will make their home a healthy place to be, and that's what we offer.

"Our hope is to reach as many people as we can to increase awareness of the importance of a healthy indoor environment. A friend once expressed to us that in this day and age, 'health is the new wealth,' and it's so true. We are passionate about the marriage of beauty and health. Our clients work so hard to be able to build or up-fit a home. We want to ensure that what goes into it increases their health as well as their enjoyment."



FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE COST OF AN ASHEVILLE-AREA HOME

THERE ARE NO TWO WAYS AROUND IT – BUILDING IN THE ASHEVILLE AREA IS PRICIER THAN BUILDING ELSEWHERE. BUT WHY?

According to Molly Sullivan-Reeves, the Sales Manager for Living Stone Design + Build, several different factors determine the cost of building homes in the North Carolina mountains, and some of them are a little surprising.

DEMAND

The pure mountain air, the pristine views, the serenity – it's no wonder that demand for Asheville-area mountain homes is high. Pair that demand with the limited supply of lots available in difficult mountain terrain, and you have a recipe for higher-priced homes.

Even within the available lots there's a range of build prices. "Proximity to Asheville, mountain views, usability of the lot, and even the slope of the lot will affect the overall price of building," says Molly. "The more desirable the lot, the higher the price."

SLOPE

In the world of mountain homebuilding, slope is a big deal. "Every lot has a slope," says Molly. "It's really just a question of degree. We sometimes jokingly say a lot is 'mountain flat,' meaning it seems level but it can actually have some decent slope. Everyone wants a 'gentle slope,' because the steeper the slope, the more money has to be spent on things like safety precautions, grading, and retaining walls."

LOT ENGINEERING

The slope is only one issue. Mountain lots are prone to issues like erosion; loose, porous soil; poor drainage; and

underground surprises like active springs and rock. "All of these problems can be solved with engineering," says Molly. "But the solutions can become costly, quickly."

MARKET

Asheville's specific housing market also contributes to the cost of building. "After the housing bubble burst in '08, we lost a lot of our trade partners. And currently there's a labor shortage. It's difficult to find subcontractors who are specifically skilled

at mountain building. Sean will only use people he's trained himself. A shortage of qualified trade partners means delays and higher-priced labor, which translates into higher costs."

In spite of everything, prospective homeowners remain undeterred. "To many people, the extra cost is worth every penny. And I can't say I blame them."

For many people coming from different parts of the country, and paying \$1,000 or more per square foot, it's still a good value to build in Asheville."



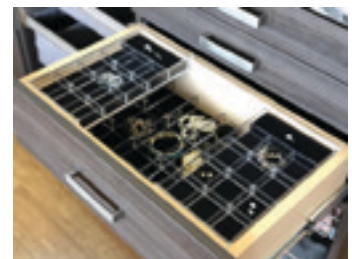
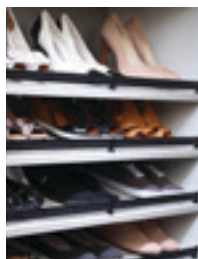


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Building

The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the building industry in a myriad of ways, and created a number of challenges. But what does the future hold for homebuilding?

Sean Sullivan, owner of Living Stone Design + Build has been building homes steadily throughout the pandemic, giving him special insight when it comes to building post-pandemic.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Since the pandemic, a healthy living and working environment has shifted to the forefront of many people's priorities. Sean has seen an uptick in concern about indoor air quality among his clients. "They want homes that breathe, homes with filtration systems, homes with minimal toxins in the air. Think about it this way, do you eat organic...?"

MULTIGENERATIONAL LIVING

For a variety of reasons, multigenerational living was trending even before the pandemic began. "That trend has been amplified over the past year," Sean says. "We see even more adult children moving back in with parents and older parents moving in with their grown children. Everyone wants to be together and take care of each other."



Depending on a family's specific needs, a multigenerational home could mean an accessory dwelling unit that's separate from the main house, a separate floor with full kitchen elements, or a garage apartment.

"Many times, it involves creating an aging-in-place design for older generations, with options for in-home health or some type of assisted living so they can stay in the

house as long as possible," says Sean.

WORK-FROM-HOME BALANCE

The number of people working from home increased dramatically during the pandemic. For many professionals, the change has opened up a whole new set of possibilities.

"After staying home and zooming, people realized they had options," says Sean. "They didn't have to go sit in an office somewhere to do their jobs."

This new-found flexibility has led to a surprising trend. "People are moving up their timelines for their dream homes," says Sean. "There's no need to put off their goals until they retire or change careers. As more professionals settle into permanent work-from-home positions, I think the number of people who will relocate and build in their dream location will only increase."

ENDURING CHALLENGES

Some challenges that came along with the pandemic may just outlive it. "Product availability issues will persist for a while," notes Sean. "Commodities like lumber have come back down a little in price, but inflation is here and here to stay, and it's



Sean and Laura Sullivan going over blueprints at the Atelier Maison & Co. job site.

raising the prices of homes and goods in general across the board."

Labor shortages, too, have caused extended problems. "The building industry in Asheville is always busy, and there's a higher demand for labor on our limited trades."

Put together, these problems are causing delays, added costs, and added headaches, with no surefire solution on the horizon.

A GOOD TIME TO BUILD?

In the face of these very real challenges, people may wonder if now is a good time to build a home. "The answer to

that is yes," says Sean. "Costs are stabilizing now, according NAHB leading economists, but prices historically rise over time. In the future building will almost certainly cost more."

There are practical steps you can take to mitigate today's building issues. "To keep costs low, look for a design-build firm, as they have an integrated, budget-focused approach. Use a right-size building plan that makes the most practical usage of every square foot. If you plan well, budget well, and exercise some patience and understanding, there's no real reason to wait to build your dream home."





THE TOPSY-TURVY EFFECTS OF COVID ON HOMEBUILDING

SINCE EARLY 2020, THE PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED NEARLY EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE, OFTEN IN UNFORESEEN AND UNEXPECTED WAYS. THE HOMEBUILDING INDUSTRY HAS BEEN NO EXCEPTION.

Rapidly escalating lumber prices may have been the most dramatic occurrence, but it was hardly the only one. Everything from housing demand to furniture selection to plumbing parts has been affected in some way by the novel coronavirus.

SLOWDOWNS AND SHUTDOWNS

First, there was the production slowdown. Manufacturers across the board scaled back in anticipation of a construction, homebuying, and purchasing downturn. Then there were the shutdowns. "Covid essentially stopped the economy," says Sean Sullivan, owner of Living Stone Design + Build.

"Governors shut down what they considered non-essential businesses, and a lot of affiliated manufacturers had to close up shop. Plumbing parts production

was interrupted multiple times in 2020 and 2021. But the building industry was considered essential. So it kept going."

THE BIG FREEZE

An unrelated weather event in early 2021 exacerbated the Covid dilemma. "The Texas freeze was a devastating blow to many companies, including major paint sources and companies that work with petroleum-based products and plastics. So there was a major slowdown on those, too."

PLOT TWIST

Curiously, the downturn never materialized. People kept buying products, and kept building houses. Demand never waned – in fact, in some aspects, it increased. "People were spending a lot of time at home, and they were finding out

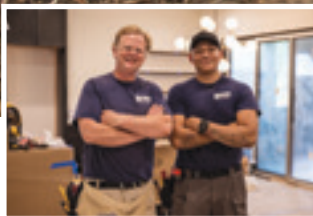
their homes were not nearly as comfortable or as functional as they imagined. They bought new homes, or had homes built."

Of course, new houses require new furniture, new appliances, and new accessories. A tall order when lumber, metals, plastics, textiles, and appliances are in short supply.

FORGING AHEAD

When it comes to building, production shortages have led to price increases, delays, and long lead times. None of which has done much to deter prospective homeowners. "A few clients have decided to wait until prices come down and supply catches up with demand," notes Sean. "But most haven't. So, we're all in it together, being patient, taking things as they come, and waiting to see what's next."

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