

Can A Woman Build Your House? She Can And She Does

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Real Estate I think old houses, and the people who love them, are fascinating.

Nikki Bach of Gloucester, Massachusetts heads up Bach Builders, a full service general contracting firm she founded in 2009. The company has three dedicated work crews and revenues of \$3 million a year.

“Not a lot of women do what I do, and I’m not sure that a lot of them want to. But, for me, it’s perfect. I have always loved wearing jeans and crawling around in basements,” she smiles.

“As our reputation has grown, we have become busier and busier. Right now, we are booked through until next fall. I can’t take on all the work that is coming my way.”

Traditionally male-dominated careers have, in recent years, become less homogeneous as women entered them in increasing numbers. Women choose medicine, law, architecture and elected office, all fields populated almost exclusively by men only a few years ago. But a few lines of work remain quite male: auto mechanics is one. Construction is another. Although you might come across the occasional female electrician, mason or carpenter, the building trades remain a redoubt of masculine dominance. Only 3% of workers in the building trades are female.

But that, too, is changing, as Bach demonstrates.

“Women have an advantage as builders,” she says. “They tend to be more conversant with the issues of what makes for a well-functioning house. Also, among clients, women are often the ones who make the decisions, so the communication is easier right from the beginning.”

Sarah Lawson agrees. As the owner and president of S+H Construction in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she heads up a firm of about 60 people. Founded in 1978, the company specializes in remodeling and additions.

“Being a woman in a male-dominated business is an advantage for me,” Lawson says. “I get attention and people remember me.”

She thinks that the days when a strong body was necessary to do the work are over.

“We have better technology, and people’s bodies are not punished as much. Pure brute strength is not important; skill and judgment are.”

She says the industry has also evolved beyond the days of belligerence and salty language.

“No one likes to work under adversarial conditions, and in today’s work world there is no tolerance for macho bullying. What matters is whether you do your job well.

She sees increasing numbers of women entering the building trades.

“In the past, you heard about women project managers: they were like Bigfoot sightings. Now, there really are more of them, and women are much more interested.

“It’s a wonderful profession,” she adds. “It’s a lot of fun. There are lots of technical challenges and, at the end, you have something beautiful.”

Bach describes the same joy.

“Building is a demanding process, full of endless moving parts. But, when we are done, you will love your home. That’s a wonderful thing to be part of.”