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Forst Construction:
How A Lifeguard And
Community Leader
Became A Successful
East End Builder



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By Ty Wenzel
ty@indyeastend.com

The Forst family has been a pillar of the East End community and a mainstay of the Hamptons builder space for over 40 years. Michael Forst, the firm's current familial owner has a history that evokes a typical local story with a tangible legacy as its ending.

A die-hard lifeguard, surfer and, now, volunteer fireman, he apprenticed for his grandfather, Stanley Silverblank, in literally every aspect of the building trade, from administration to carpenter's assistant, and learned the business from the inside-out.

His gratitude for being able to remain a professional lifeguard yet take the helm at the family business is truly something to behold, as both hold risk and demand loyalty. Today, with his wife, Amy, he runs one of the most successful building companies on the East End.

Michael, the Forst family has built some of the most beautiful homes on the East End for over 40 years. Did you always know you'd be part of your family's building legacy?

I always knew I wanted to be part of my family's building legacy, but looking back at my youth, there were times that I thought of being something else. As an ocean lifeguard starting at 16 years old, I had thought about ways to stay a lifeguard, and for a long time my mother and father would allow me to lifeguard during the summer and then come back to work for the family business during the other 10 months of the year. I have been selling homes for a long time now.

I was very lucky to have such great building and business role models/teachers starting with my grandfather, Stanley Silverblank, to my mother, Helene Silverblank-Forst, and my father, Jack Forst. Why would you not want to follow the footsteps of great leaders of the industry? I am proud to be a third-generation builder. It is in my blood!

As I make decisions for my company now, I always base them first upon the knowledge and insights passed down to me. My grandfather would refer to on the job training as "the road

of hard knocks." I am thankful for all the hard knocks they took in order to pass on to me their knowledge, which has helped me grow my own successful design/build organization with my life and business partner, Amy Forst.

Fifty years ago, your family was building more up-island. Why did it gravitate to the East End?

My family moved out east for the beauty and open space in order to raise a family and build a life in an area that was still somewhat uncharted, so to speak. The wild East End, my dad would call it. My grandfather was a big tract builder up-island, where he was doing large developments, and my father worked for my grandfather. At some point along the line, my parents decided to move out east, where Forst and Silverblank, Inc. was born.

My grandfather and my parents all became partners. They started with the designing and building of one speculative house in North Haven. They sold the house for \$125,000, which was a record sales price at the time. From there, they built another one in Wainscott, which allowed them to be able to show off their product. From there, my family started to build around 10 to 20 custom homes a year, and built a great business which I was welcomed into at a young age.

I was an apprentice with everyone in the organization, from the cleanup guy, to the carpenter's helper, to the secretary/bookkeeper, to the estimator, to finally running multiple jobs a year as the construction supervisor. I was honored when they offered partnership in the family business. Being in the room for all the design meetings, or bank meetings to insure loans for building was so helpful in becoming the businessman I am today. Being able to listen to my family do good business was the best learning lesson of them all.

The Forst family has built over 400 homes in the Hamptons. That is quite a footprint, and must feel amazing.

I am very proud of my family and all of our accomplishments in the building industry. After 400 homes, you are seasoned with knowledge, as well as a lot of great relationships created with the local municipalities, and subcontractors. All of this helps us design and build the best home possible in a very streamlined and organized way due to proven systems.

Every home that is built has its own unique challenges and differences. We continue to fine-tune our techniques based upon experience, so the next generation of homes we build and produce are greener, smarter, and more efficient. Having built this many homes in the area really lets you know all the different environmental and local building issues or codes that are present in each area of our towns and villages. This huge asset in helping to design and build to a realistic budget with the client in order to not have all of those hidden and unexpected extra costs while under construction.

Can you tell us a little about your team?

Amy and I have built a really great team. We hire people that are like-minded with similar values in order to have a harmonious work environment. Good character is most important to me, because that seems to ensure pride in each person's work in order to deliver a very high-end product. This goes for our employees as well as our subcontractors. In order to deliver on time and on budget, you need to be able to trust the whole team and know that they will be there when you need them.

We are a fully-staffed organization in the office and in the field. In order to have this hand-held experience from the beginning to the end, you need the right people in the right places. My office staff helps with all of the selections for the home, which is one way that helps allow us to keep a project on schedule. Controlling the whole puzzle allows us to deliver on time. In the field, we have project managers for each job to ensure that the project is built properly each step of the way.

We also have a service department that handles all of our maintenance and warranty work to ensure the homes are operating as intended. Treating each house as if it was our own helps to design, build, and maintain each home with the quality and care they each deserve.

Do you work with specific architects through a bidding process or do you design the home in-house?

We have a few architects that we work with, but each one is part of our team as we design the house together. The team is created on day one. Design/build really allows for a much more streamlined approach to building, where the builder is hired in the beginning to help the clients design their dream to code based upon their location, while meeting their budget. This allows me to be able to help specify the right products and proper assemblies.

A lot of the time in the bidding process, the plans are not really complete and the proposals are not accurate, which then leads to large overruns in the budget during construction, which only leads to unhappy clients. I am in the service business and my job is to make the client happy. I think design/build allows me to deliver that consistently, and to create and keep these great relationships that we have built.

In regards to acquisitions, is it usually referrals or the bidding process that you follow?

Almost all of our business today is repeat or referral. My goal with each home is to create a strong relationship with each client by building trust. Once there is mutual trust, the building process becomes less stressful and more fun, as our letters of testimonial show. The construction process can be fun with the right team and team leader. Here at Forst Construction, Inc., I am the team leader and when you set the tone for your business to be service minded with the best interest of the client, it will pay off down the road with great new friendships as well as new opportunities for new projects with existing clients and their friends, soon to be my friends.

You've built incredibly classic homes right through to contemporary styles. Do you have a preference?

Each style lets you grow as a better builder because the details are so very different. Modern would appear to be easier to build, but it is actually harder to build these very modern homes. I love traditional because it feels so warm and cozy, but what I prefer is a more transitional style home that is traditional and modern all mixed into one. For some reason, it just works and you get the best of both worlds. Warm and cozy with the modern touches and open spaces with lots of light.

What projects are you currently working on?

Currently we are building a 10,000-square-foot modern farmhouse in Sagaponack for a repeat client that we built a home for 12 years ago. It has taken about 18 months to get to the point in order to design the house and get through the permit process, which we handle also. Construction has started and we are in full motion, and I am very excited about this project. It is nice to build for the same family again, as we already know and trust each other, which makes the process so much more enjoyable and fun for all.

The property is on two acres and had an existing house on the property that we tore down, but not before we took the time to rip out the kitchen and other parts of the house in order to recycle the components by donating them to Habitat for Humanity. Once we completed the donation, we then allowed the Bridgehampton and the East Hampton fire departments to come in and train on the house. The house was used in multiple scenarios for search and rescue, roof ventilation, as well as hard-interior attacks on simulated fires with smoke machines.

I knock down a lot of homes, but we try to do it in a more thoughtful way that gives back to the community by making our first responders better through realistic training, and we also help with affordable housing on the island with our donations to Habitat for Humanity. I am always so thankful to the clients that allow this to be part of the process, and I hope more follow suit.

Besides the actual build, do you offer other services, like interior design, landscaping, or maintenance?

We are a full-service design/build firm that handles interior and exterior design for the whole house, including the pool, hardscape, and landscape. Depending on the scope of the job, we will bring in team members from outside companies to help with the process. We help the client select and design the whole house through our streamlined process.

We also have a division that takes care of maintaining all the homes we build so that our clients' biggest investment is cared for properly, and they have the peace of mind that we are only a phone call away for any of their maintenance and or home improvements. Within our maintenance packages, I do a yearly home inspection in order to stay ahead of anything that an untrained eye might not see.

Do you ever spec build?



Yes, we do build speculative homes. We are in between right now as we look for the right piece of land. The Forst family has always done speculative building as part of our overall business. Building speculatively allows us to grow as builders and as developers, which makes us better prepared to design and build for others. It also allows me to express myself through the build, which is very rewarding. With speculative building, you are able to share your work of art to others, and that process of showing and marketing the home can be a very fun experience that Amy and I enjoy.

Once your homes are complete, do you work with a specific real estate agent?

I am very lucky to have my partner, Amy Forst. Amy is a local agent with Town & Country. Having Amy as part of the team is very helpful as we search for properties together, or sell properties together. The best part is that I think this helps us be a more full-service design/build firm, as we are able to help the client search for the right piece of land that will fit their budget and suit them properly with the vision they have. By allowing Amy and myself to help you find the property only helps the process, with the team starting to work earlier in the process.

So, having another generation of a local agent built in, as well as being connected to a great local brokerage house like Town & Country real estate, has allowed us to grow, as well as assist our clients with the whole process of real estate development. Not only have we been finding land and knock-downs to build for the client, but we are also marketing their existing houses that they have been living in. Who better than the builder to sell your home?

In what ways are you evolving as a Hamptons builder?

As a local builder that lives here year-round, I think evolving to me will be

trying to get back to my roots a bit and help with the affordable housing issue that our town is facing. I am hopeful for some more opportunities for public/private partnerships as a way to help create some more affordable housing that is sustainably built, as well as getting more involved with Habitat for Humanity projects out east as we wait for Habitat to get started locally again.

Developing, designing, and building affordable housing is what my grandfather did. Some years he was producing up to a 100 at a time, all up-island 50 years ago, along with my father's help.

How has green building been incorporated into your homes?

My theory is that everyone can do something to be more environmentally sustainable. Every home I build incorporates good building practices in order to deliver the most efficient and sustainable home possible based upon the client's budget. By building green locally, I am helping globally. I have been incorporating green building techniques in all my homes since Forst construction was started, and will continue to be a passionate leader in this field. We were one of the first certified green homes with a gold rating through NAHB green homes program in New York state, and once we got that under our belt, we took all those building practices and techniques and made it our normal practice.

How far we go has more to do with the client and the budget. Some things do not cost any more money to introduce into your design build, and others are very expensive and maybe not practical for each client or location. A lot of green building starts with buying the right lot and designing the house to sit properly based upon your exposures. Experience helps when it comes to green building, as not all techniques that you see on the internet or DIY programs are proper for our area and climate.

Are you incorporating any trends that you've seen in any of the homes you're currently building?

We try to be a trendsetter, and sustainable building practices should be everyone's trend, as we try to get a head of this global issue of global warming and poisoning our planet. Everyone can do something, and something is what I hope everyone does do when it comes to making better and greener building choices.

What do you do on your downtime?

I am not sure I would call it downtime, but my downtime is split with my family and my volunteerism. I try to be involved as much as possible with my two children, Aidan and Sarah, and all their activities. I am a volunteer firefighter with the EDFD Hook and Ladder Company 1, as well as a volunteer rescue swimmer with the East Hampton Volunteer Ocean Rescue squad. I spend most of my time training to stay in shape for emergencies, as well as training on how to mitigate risk, which is what a lifeguard's job starts with prior to the rescue.

It really crosses over nicely with the building business, which has high risk to manage every day. I am a better builder for sure because of it. I would recommend to most that giving yourself to the fire service or other emergency organization, especially at a young age, can really help grow you into a strong leader, as you get to be mentored by other great leaders that help motivate others to do their best. I feel lucky that I was able to serve and learn under some great chiefs in both EHFD and EHVOR, which has helped me become a better boss/manager I think, and hope that others will take on this rewarding challenge of being part of our local emergency service teams.

I am also a director of the Hampton Lifeguard Association and give a lot of my time to trying to help waterproof the South Fork and beyond, mostly by being part of the junior lifeguard programs. I am thankful that I figured out how to be both a lifeguard and builder at the same time, my lifetime goal. A lifeguard for life! Oh yeah, and somewhere in between this all, I am still trying to catch a few waves as I continue to surf to live.

To reach Forst or inquire about his services, call 631-329-3739 or visit www.forstconstruction.com. Read the unabridged interview at www.indyeast-end.com.