

one and a half million
 PEOPLE LIVE IN
 MANHATTAN. **LEE**
J. STAHL MAKES IT
 FEEL LIKE A *small town.*

IT'S JUST ON A MAGNIFICENTLY DIFFERENT SCALE THAN THE TOWNIE METAPHOR IMPLIES. STAHL RUNS A BOUTIQUE DESIGN-BUILD FIRM THAT SPECIALIZES IN ULTRA HIGH-END RESIDENTIAL MAKEOVERS, AND FITTINGLY, HE CALLS IT **THE RENOVATED HOME.**

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN THE EARLY 1990S, THE FIRM HAS COMPLETED MORE THAN 800 PROJECTS. NINETY-EIGHT PERCENT OF ITS BUSINESS IS BASED SOLELY ON REFERRALS. *NEW AMERICAN LUXURY* SAT DOWN WITH STAHL TO HEAR WHY HIS TEAM IS THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS. —AS TOLD TO SETH PUTNAM

NEW YORK. This is where cool breeds. People want to live here, the young and the old. I'm standing in a park on the East River, and all I see are kids. We're within 10 blocks of 30 of the best private schools in the country, and people are willing to make huge sacrifices to send their kids to these schools. If people didn't want to raise their kids here, my business would be totally different.

LUXURY IS MY NICHE. Our work really shines when we have the budget to back it up. It's hard to demonstrate your abilities when the budget for a kitchen renovation is \$30,000. In the luxury market, you get the chance to hit the highest-quality product.

RELATIONSHIPS MAKE MY WORLD GO 'ROUND. When we tie our professional cart to someone's horse, we're not looking for another horse. The pros we work with are loyal, smart craftsmen. Here are two examples: J&G Marble is arguably the best I've ever worked with. If they ever go out of out business, I'd consider going out of business myself. The guys at Celtic Carpentry understand that they get every job we do. It's not difficult to find cheap subcontractors; it's the reliability that's irreplaceable.

**FAMILY MAN**

"My daughter's signature is her curly hair, purple glasses and big smile," says Stahl, pictured here with his daughter. "My signature is designing and building great homes on time and on budget."

Photo: Richard Cordano, richardcordano.com



CELTIC CARPENTRY, INC.

Celtic Carpentry, Inc is a New York based company. We specialize in custom carpentry, cabinetry and milled molding; we also frame and drywall interior walls and ceilings.

We only use local suppliers.

All of our craftsmen have been with us at least 7 years and work well together.

The owner has 20+ years experience in the field and is always on-site to ensure the quality of work exceeds your expectations.

Our company motto is:
Done right the first time!

Celtic Carpentry, Inc. is fully insured.

Please call us for a free estimate at **914-434-4302**.

www.celticcarpentryinc.com

OUR MARKETING STRATEGY IS SIMPLE: do the best job. We've messed with Facebook, Twitter, and some local luxury media. But that's all nothing compared our clients' recommendations. We've shown them that quality work doesn't have to come with insane prices and that a well-managed project isn't an anomaly.

THE RENOVATED HOME BRAND IS BASED ON THREE THINGS. Family: we're family owned, and our work revolves around building for families. Follow-up: our workmanship carries a lifetime warranty. Last: under-promise, over-deliver.

WE JUST FINISHED A 7,000-SQUARE-FOOT PENTHOUSE on the Upper East side with 4,000 square feet of terrace space. We also just completed the gut-renovation of a 90-year-old estate; the interesting part of that is that we did 6,800 square feet in 15 weeks. In order to get that project, I blurted out that I'd pay the client \$100,000 if they gave us the contract and we didn't finish on time. We finished a day early.

THE RECESSION WAS A GUT PUNCH. But our guts were strong, and we rode it out. We'd been through this before in the '90s, and it was a movie we didn't want to see again. It really stuck with me as a person, even through good times. There can be a Ferrari in everyone's driveway, but it takes next to nothing to turn it all around. Surviving isn't about strength; it's about smarts. New Yorkers are resilient and tough. That's what got us through: hard work and being smart.

NOT OWING PEOPLE MONEY IS A GREAT WAY TO GET THROUGH SLUMPS. In 25 years, we haven't had debt. You have to have capital, you have to work hard, and you have to have good clients. And it has to be the whole package.

2003 TO 2008, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS BANANAS. The city went through an incredible growth spurt. You just have to hang on to the roller coaster for dear life—there was that much work available. We were turning down million-dollar projects.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, it's our relentless commitment to doing the job better than anyone else. We're always on budget, and we have a 99 percent on-time completion rate over the last 15 years. That's what people will say about us: "He listens to us, and he does what we want without excuses." I'm comfortable hanging my hat on that. ●

THE RENOVATED HOME TIMELINE OF MILESTONES

1985

► Lee J. Stahl graduates from a top-25 business school and goes to work for his stepfather in the family cabinet business in Brooklyn.

1985-1989

► Stahl does it all. Sure, he learns how to design, build, and deliver cabinets, but he also learns something else: payroll, expenses, hiring—all the ins and outs of day-to-day business.

1989

► Stahl's stepfather dies in a tragic boating accident.

1992

► Stahl builds a showroom in Manhattan and catapults his business from "cabinetmaker" to full-service firm.

1997

► The Renovated Home moves into its current headquarters on Third Avenue in Manhattan.

2011

► Stahl makes a bet with a client: The Renovated Home can complete an extensive renovation of a 7,000-square-foot apartment on Park Avenue over the course of one summer, or Stahl will pay a \$100,000 penalty. He gets the contract—and, more importantly, gets the job done.