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URBAN INTENSIFICATION AND THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN CITIES

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Renovation/repair specialist assesses achievement through lasting relationships and jobs well done

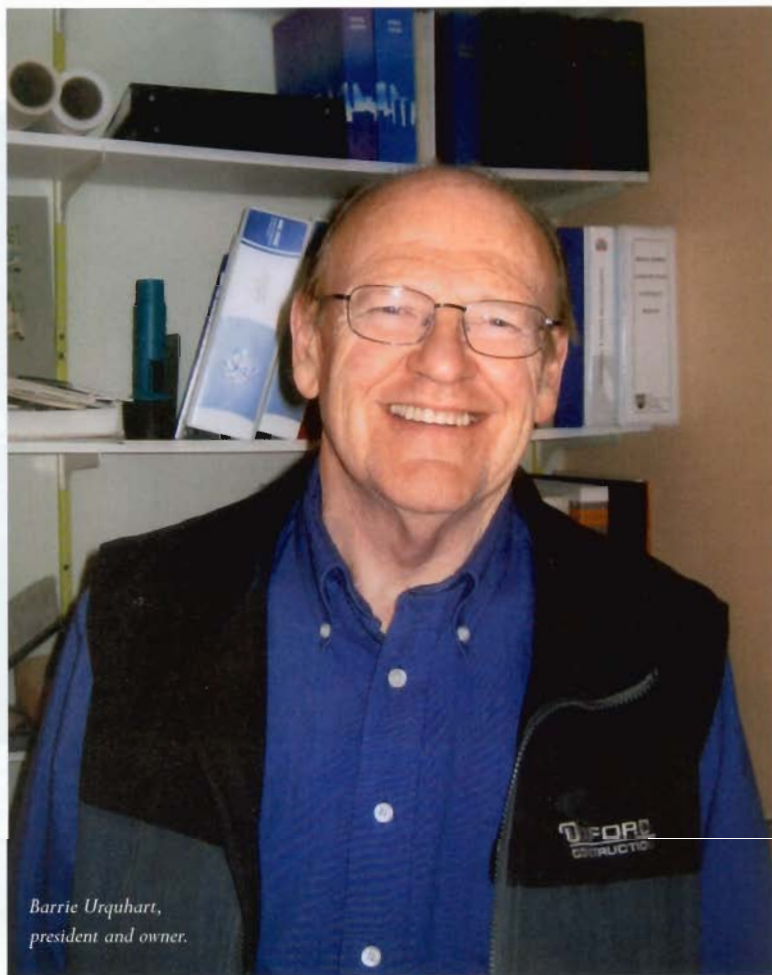
BY JAMES ASKEW

UNLIKE MANY PROFESSIONS, WHERE the measure of success is defined often by a single-minded objective such as money or recognition, one of the beauties of the building trades is that its rewards are abundant and varied. Amidst the daily grind and taxing work, beyond the concerns of cost overruns and profit margins, there remains in the craft of construction myriad daily satisfactions—satisfactions that for many builders supersede the measure of success through profits.

For some, it is the satisfaction of a perfectly mitered corner joint or a smoothly finished wall. For others, it is the work with the clients and the delivery of the finished product that will, one hopes, stand for a hundred years or more. And, of course, for others there is the drive toward expansion and growth and a push toward greater profits, but for many builders, like Barrie Urquhart, the owner of Oxford Construction in Vancouver, profits and growth are far from the *only* measure of success.

At 67, Urquhart has run Oxford Construction for 23 years, taking on work that ranges in size from \$200 to \$2 million, and he says that in the end, he just never saw the need to grow bigger.

"I am just not that aggressive," Urquhart says, "and I am not trying to get a great-



Barrie Urquhart,
president and owner.

big name for myself. I love my work. I love the relationships that we build with people and the satisfaction of seeing a job completed."

Having spent the early part of his adult life in a government office job, working as architectural technologist and project manager, Urquhart says that one of the pleasures of his work is the ability to get out in the field.

"Sometimes I tend to be a little too hands-on," he admits. "I carry a bunch of tools in my truck; I jump in and help the guys, sometimes when I shouldn't. And other times I like to work in the shop, making pieces and parts for the jobs.

"After spending 18 years in an office," he continues, "I like to get out of the office. I visit my clients and visit my jobs, whereas some managers are happy to remain in the office. I don't want that and never did want it."

Though Urquhart admits that his hands-on approach may have hindered Oxford's growth, it has in no way hindered its success. Working with a small crew of four builders and committed subcontractors, and with his wife, Vivian, acting as part-time secretary and treasurer, Urquhart has been able to build long-standing relationships with both his clients and his subcontractors, some of which have lasted decades.

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
VANCOUVER, BC

AREAS OF SPECIALTY:
RENOVATIONS AND
REPAIRS

AVERAGE ANNUAL
REVENUES:
\$1.5-2.5 MILLION

EMPLOYEES:
6

“After spending 18 years in an office, I like to get out of the office. I visit my clients and visit my jobs, whereas some managers are happy to remain in the office.” *Barrie Urquhart, President & Owner*

“One of our major clients over the years has been the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Vancouver,” Urquhart says. “I have worked in that building for 18 years. We get called in on jobs there from \$200 to \$300, to the one we have now, which is over \$2 million.”

In addition to Oxford’s work with the CBC, the company also gets a considerable amount of repeat business through eight or nine downtown Vancouver office buildings as well as residential and institutional clients. In addition, Urquhart says, the company also takes on more unique and challenging projects.

One such project was the installation of the People Amongst People Welcome Gates at the entrance to the Totem Park in Vancouver’s Stanley Park. Conceived and crafted by a local Musqueam artist, Susan Point, the gates are the first representation of work from the local Coast Salish First Nation people of Vancouver and are part of one of the most-visited tourist attractions in the city.

“They are absolutely beautiful,” Urquhart says. “They’ll be there for years, and we can say that we installed them. I am very proud of those.” *CBQ*



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