

# master builder

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# INSIDE/OUT

Inside the out-of-the-box philosophy of  
Prestige Residential Construction

BY CAMERON POGUE





Oh, the places we'll go. Throw a dart at a map of the greater Puget Sound region and you'll likely snag a bit of topography encompassing a Master Builders Association (MBA) member-built home. It happens with an association as influential and widespread as the MBA of King and Snohomish counties. Today the dart has pierced a cozy little neighborhood on the Seattle side of Lake Washington.

Bullseye.

The home, dubbed Bookhouse (you'll soon find out why), was built — or I should say rebuilt — by Prestige Residential Construction, with design done by DeForest Architects, and it is absolutely breathtaking. The entire narrative of this home is understated elegance; no gaudiness, no look-at-me features or unwieldy excess.

Here, lakeside charms blow in with the onshore winds, light and refreshing with a strong hint of history. This spot of land and its brick Tudor house in

different forms has been around for a while — 87 years, I learn. I wonder what the original owners would think of the estate as it stands now. From what little I see so far, I think they'd approve.

The renovation, continues Jeff Santerre, founder and principal of Prestige, was done so as to keep the home's original soul intact, creating a seamless juxtaposition between old and new. Preserving Seattle's rich architectural past is key and Prestige is leading the charge to keep our city looking as emerald as ever. Within the mix includes a few personalized "Oh would you look at that" features both big and small. It's important that there's a "word wall" (a big feature) just past the deemphasized front entrance inside the home, where the owners were able to stencil in words and phrases close to their heart. Some are book passages; others look to be more personal, family names and the like. Out by the front sidewalk, the entry gate has a horizontal slit cut in about a foot off the ground that acts as a lookout for the dogs that roam the grounds (small feature).

## One Book, Two Books, Three Books, More...

About the name Bookhouse — inside I find many floor-to-ceiling shelves containing works like *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, a book on the history of Asia and many other titles I don't pretend to know anything about. It's safe to say the homeowners love to read. Touring Bookhouse is like opening an unknown book, with each page, or each corner of the home, offering something new and exciting to experience. This place allows you to dream, and so I do.

Like the most vivid dreams, a signature Prestige project contains significant parts you just can't shake — bold

well-crafted details like a wall made of retractable steel windows, an exposed brick exterior and minimal interior trim. Some of these features you notice right away, some are pointed out and then become instantly recognizable, but all help to define the home in their own way.

The home is perfect for the people it was built for; of that Jeff and the talented team at Prestige make certain. Before any project begins, a thorough discussion takes place, involving what is wanted, what is expected and what is best for the property, the home and the homeowners. Neighbors are thrown into the mix, too, because Prestige wants to “play nice in the neighborhood,” as Jeff puts it. He and his team are careful not to infringe on “zip code violations,” or anything

that wouldn't fly within a particular neighborhood plus their unrelenting commitment to keeping their sites clean and tidy or as Jeff says “protect and respect”. After all, they “build communities, not (individual) projects.” It's important to note that these preliminary conversations are called negotiations and that they form the foundation for building an estimate.

The best part of a build or renovation project, of course, comes at the end when Jeff can “toss the keys” to the owners. Before the team leaves, high-fives are exchanged and many thanks are given. Sounds like a good gig. What makes the gig groove is a focus on excellent communication, superior craftsmanship and high-quality execution, the core values of Prestige.

## Hop on Top

The phrase “some folks just have it all” is thrown around in and out of context, and it could easily be said about Prestige today. Mostly it conveys some sort of supernatural luck, which diminishes the hard work behind the achievement. Jeff and his company weren't always blessed with everything. He and his crew worked hard over 35 years to get where they are. And it didn't happen overnight. In movies, when the young yet-to-be-famous person is shown not being famous, the wait is short. A few frames about how hard it was to get to the top, and suddenly they're there.

Reality says differently.

There are days, weeks, months, years where nothing happens. Success isn't a few scenes in a two-hour biopic; it's sometimes a decade or more in the making. This isn't fun or exciting, and it's not something people would likely pay to see, but it's reality. And 99.99% of the time there's no way around it.

Prestige wasn't one of the .01%. Jeff Santerre worked hard, and smart, to get to where he is today. He grew his small 20-person crew slowly and deliberately, ensuring that each candidate first learns how to do things “the Prestige way” before becoming an official team member. Maybe this cohesive philosophy has something to do with his past as tenor sax player in an R&B band, I suggest. He doesn't seem to think so.





You get the feeling, however, that most clients-turned-family would welcome any member of Prestige into their home. Don't believe me? Take it from a real-life client, who, in the cadence of casual conversation, warmly stated, "I would do anything for Jeff!"

To a general contractor, that's like winning an Oscar.

Somewhere not far away, the Prestige team is at work building or remodeling another dream

home for someone. The first time this someone experiences the transformative environment that has been created for them, it will be amazing. When they realize this transformation is theirs, it will be defining. After that, who knows? The steel-made windows, personalized wall art and other unique intricacies that make the home home will take its owners wherever they please.

Doesn't that excite you? It should. 🏡

When he traded his band gigs for the ones mentioned above in the residential homebuilding industry arena, he admittedly carried with him a fair amount of naivety. Helped in part by a strong sense of getting things done right and a natural ability to connect with people on a personal level, he eventually found success playing a new tune.

Of course, a steady backbeat in the form of the MBA helped keep the groove going strong. In the 90s, Jeff found mentorship and friendship as part of the Remodelers Council and proudly acknowledges his winning entries in the Remodeling Excellence (REX) Awards over the years. He continues his partnership with the Association today, frequently participating in volunteer efforts like Rampathon® and Painting a Better Tomorrow™. In fact, his wife Teresa worked on the very first Rampathon in 1993. Not to put him on the spot, but Jeff seems like the ideal mentor for someone up and coming in the industry; someone who is where he once was.

## You're Only Boss Once

For all his accomplishments — Prestige just celebrated 35 years in business — Jeff isn't ready to give it all up tomorrow. He's energetic, obviously loves his clients and his job, and is very good at taking care of both. When asked about retirement, he brushes off the question. It's obviously not something he has put a lot of thought in. For now, Jeff and crew are happy to continue the journey begun 35 years ago — a journey, Jeff says, that is shared by "great clients" and what sounds like a lot of great moments.

When done right, like Bookhouse, a project becomes a "piece of art that's priceless," says Alex Steele, director of marketing and business development at Prestige. She has the "Prestige way" down. Doing things right also means avoiding projects that are treated simply as "transactions." There's no build and bail; these homes are as much a home for Prestige as they are for the owners, only the team doesn't get to live there.

