

suburban life

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Harth Builders' first custom home clients were the Hustletons, a family of four moving from Fort Washington to Blue Bell. Among other things, the family wanted a larger kitchen and more space for entertaining.

No Place Like Home

LIKE MANY KIDS, GREG HARTH GREW UP BEING FASCINATED WITH LEGOS, AND WOULD OFTEN SPEND HOURS AT A TIME METICULOUSLY PUTTING THE TINY PIECES TOGETHER AS PART OF A LARGER CREATION BORN BY HIS IMAGINATION. Little did he know that his childhood hobby would become his calling in life, and that playing with Legos was actually valuable practice for his future career.

"I went to school at the University of Delaware for civil engineering, and after graduating, I headed out west and ran out of gas in Colorado," he says with a laugh. "I ended up working for a company named Kiewit Construction, where I basically learned how to build stuff—tunnels, roads, and bridges—and how to run a construction company."

After nine years, he came home to Pennsylvania and joined his father Allyn, the founder of Harth Builders. Together they established a thriving business focused mainly on design-build services and whole-home remodeling.

Harth Builders has branched out into the design and construction of custom homes, delivering beautiful residences suited specifically to each client's wants and lifestyle.



David McKibben's path to the industry was somewhat windier than Harth's, but in similar fashion, it involved following his true passion. He entered the corporate world after earning a degree in economics and statistics, but disliked the work, so he went back to college and shifted his focus to architecture. He started his own company in Ohio centered on custom home design. After relocating to Philadelphia almost four years ago, he joined Harth Builders as custom homes design coordinator.

"I absolutely love it," McKibben says of his role. "I got hired to take on their large projects and oversee their custom home design division. I ran my own business in Ohio, basically doing exactly what I do for Harth. This was a perfect fit."

McKibben's hiring came at a crucial point for Harth Builders, which was experiencing great success with renovations, but also receiving growing interest from clients in custom home construction. Harth Builders dove right in with its first custom home in 20 years, and the first ever that its team designed. The project in Montgomery County went so well that it jumpstarted six other custom homes in various stages of development in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties.

"With a custom home, you don't have the ongoing maintenance that you might with an existing house," Harth says. "You can also get the mechanical systems and



plumbing systems to be designed right from the beginning, as opposed to retrofitting the existing ones. But the biggest benefit of doing a custom home is that you can design it how you want from the beginning with all brand-new materials.

"The world is your oyster—you can have anything you want," he continues. "We provide budget, guidance, and availability, and we filter their wants through a lens of whether we can get it, what's practical and affordable, and if it's going to be maintenance free for the duration."

The first custom home clients were the Hustletons, a family of four moving from Fort Washington to Blue Bell. McKibben says the family wanted a larger kitchen, a bigger space for entertaining, land to accommodate a swimming pool, and "a little better location closer to the kids' school."

As he does with all of Harth Builders' custom home clients, McKibben presented the Hustletons with several basic floor plans, each with a different number of bedrooms and bathrooms. When they chose the one they liked, he further customized it to their specific needs.

Remarkably, despite supply-chain issues caused by the pandemic, Harth Builders completed the project in 11 months, even with the added challenge of hitting natural springs at three of the four corners of the house, forcing the foundation to be raised by two feet. McKibben credits the attention to detail in the planning phase and the close bonds he formed with the homeowners for helping everything run smoothly.

"I'm with the client six months to a year before we even start building," he says. "We have meet-

ings every week or every other week, and we have really good relationships and learn a lot about each other. It's fun, and it's also a challenge. We have to read between the lines to find out what the clients really want, and then turn their dreams into a reality."

Adds Harth: "David is an incredibly gifted designer who really bonds with the clients and understands their aesthetics, and comes up with creative solutions that push the edge while being mindful of budget."

The Hustletons' new home features a beautiful cabana—a covered outdoor space with heaters that can be used throughout the year—as well as a breezeway over the garage.

McKibben still keeps in touch with his clients; in fact, he often gets together with them for dinner.

"I stay pretty close friends with most of my clients," he says. "The Hustletons love the house. They brag about it, they're excited to have friends over, and they're happy entertaining."

While McKibben is excited to go through the same process on the other custom homes Harth Builders is currently working on, the company continues to deliver stunning remodeling projects and also recently added a handyman division.

"It's to help service our existing clients with their needs," Harth says. "I don't want to give them a reason to call anyone else. We have two master plumbers and two electricians on staff now, and the small work division can handle all of that little stuff that homeowners don't know where to go for. They've already developed a relationship with us, they know who we are and how we work, and we want to continue to service them." ■



→ **Harth Builders**
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