CAPSTONE MAGAZINE

Canada's Construction Intelligence

THE CONSTRUCTION ISSUE

ADR PROPERTIES
Custom Built Homes

POLAR ENGINEERING

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Independent coverage of the companies, projects, and people building Canada.

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Editors Note

Welcome to the second edition of Capstone, Canada's Construction Intelligence.

The companies in these pages were not chosen for size alone. Each one tells you something true about how Canada actually gets built, and this edition reaches further to find them: from a hydrovac yard on Tsleil-Waututh land in North Vancouver to a plumbing operation on the Nova Scotia coast.

Read through this issue and the same pattern holds. It has little to do with scale. ADR Properties in Manitoba built one home its first year, then two, then three, and nearly two decades later still wins almost all of its work by referral.

Indigenous Iron Construction earned its place on one of British Columbia's largest pipeline projects through competitive bidding, four years after starting with a single truck.

Polar Engineering in Victoria has built a practice on the heat most facilities throw away, cutting natural gas consumption at some buildings by ninety percent.

Bramac Plumbing grew from one trade into four across three Nova Scotia counties without leaving Yarmouth. bsq Landscape Architects has kept design, construction, and management under one roof in Toronto for eighteen years, long enough that clients return with proposals first discussed a decade ago.

KCC Architecture's founder spent ten years earning the right to practice in Canada, and her newest clients now arrive by knocking on the door of a building she designed. And Horizon Glass has spent forty-five years in Brandon proving that a company can double in size without ever running an advertisement.

None of these stories are flashy. All of them are durable, which is harder to build toward.

Every fact and quotation in this issue has been verified directly with its source before publication. If you find an error, tell us. We will fix it.

Elizabeth Worship

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In This Issue

ADR PROPERTIES
Custom homes across Manitoba since 2007.

INDIGENOUS IRON CONSTRUCTION
100% Indigenous-owned. Built in BC.

POLAR ENGINEERING
Refrigeration and energy recovery.

BRAMAC PLUMBING
Red Seal trades serving southwest Nova Scotia.

BSQ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
40 Years of excellence in aluminum design.

KCC ARCHITECTURE
Tilt-up concrete specialists for BC and Alberta.

HORIZON GLASS
Glazing Manitoba and beyond since 1979.

THE STATS

7 · 4 · 123

COMPANIES FEATURED · PROVINCES REPRESENTED · YEARS IN BUSINESS, COMBINED

"Complacency doesn't help you grow."
— Adamo Rondinella, ADR Properties

Be featured in the next issue

Capstone profiles the companies, projects, and people building Canada. If your company has a story worth telling, we want to hear it.

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The Insights Q3 · 2026

Modular Construction is Canada's Housing Bet. The Sector Isn't Ready.
Sebastien Ameur

The Indigenous Equity Deals Rewriting Canadian Infrastructure
Mehdi El Oudghiri

The Bank of Canada Cut Rates. Construction Didn't Notice.
Sebastien Ameur

"Indigenous joint venture strategy is now capital-project pipeline strategy."

Mehdi El Oudghiri

The Indigenous Equity Deals Rewriting Canadian Infrastructure

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The Bank of Canada Cut Rates. Construction Didn't Notice.

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ADR

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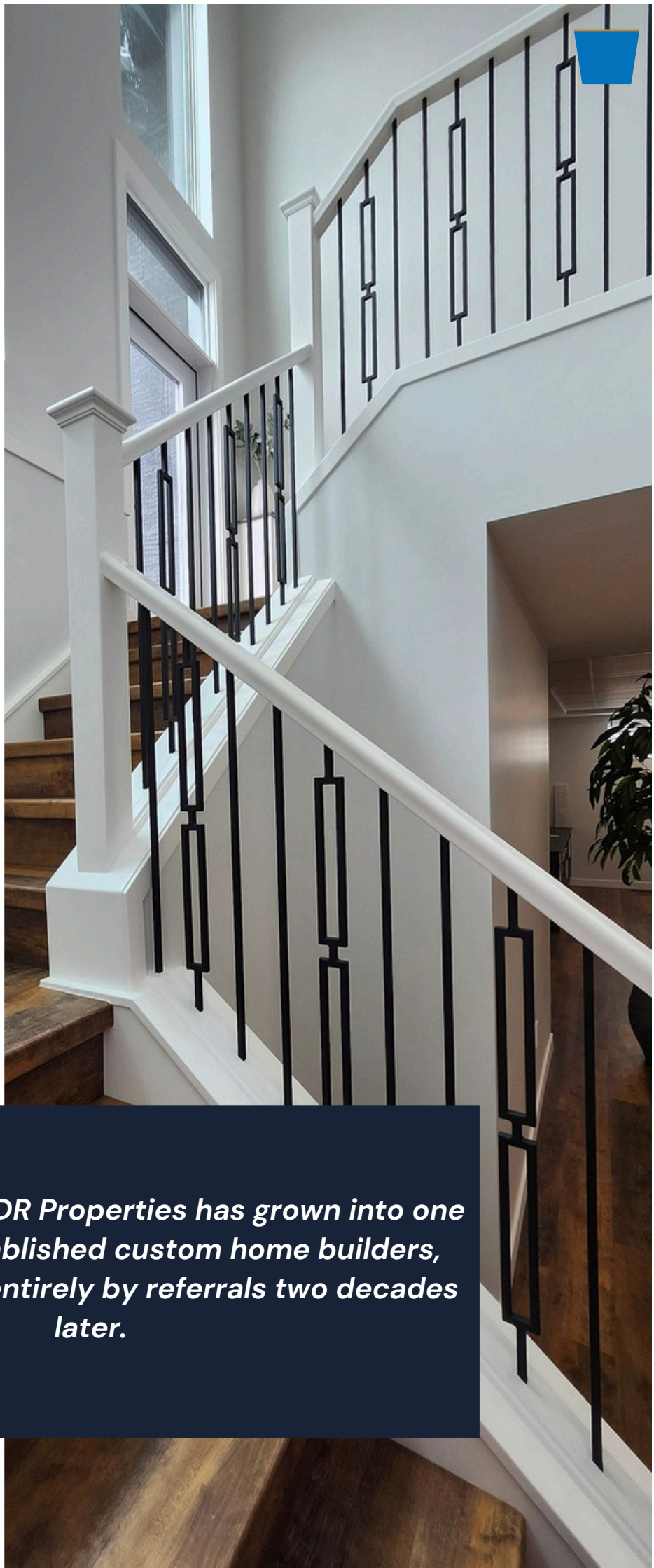
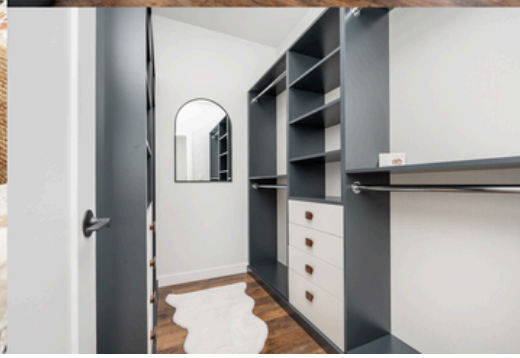
Custom Built Homes



Founded in 2007, ADR Properties has grown into one of Manitoba's established custom home builders, still driven almost entirely by referrals two decades later.



Adamo Rondinella founded ADR Properties in 2007 with a Mechanical Engineering Technology background from Red River College, and his own construction experience. *The company was not built on an existing family business. Rondinella wanted an alternative to office work and started with a couple of residential lots in a rural development, improving the trade through direct trial and error.*

The company grew slowly and deliberately: one home the first year, then two, then three, then five. Rondinella did much of the early construction work himself, including concrete and framing, drawing on the technical background from his engineering studies. Building in a rural market as a new, unproven builder was difficult specifically because the business runs almost entirely on referrals.

ADR
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> *"It's a big word of mouth business. If someone builds with a builder and has a good experience, they'll get their family to build, their friends to build, their cousins to build."*

A TEAM IN PLACE OF A ONE-MAN OPERATION

Rondinella is honest that building custom homes at scale is not sustainable as a solo operation. ADR now runs on a defined internal structure spanning design, administration, and site supervision, with an operations manager responsible for the scheduling across multiple active projects.

The company builds across a wide price range, from custom homes in the $500,000 to $600,000 range, up to multimillion-dollar builds. Rondinella describes the design team's role as keeping clients grounded in their actual budget, rather than letting scope drift upward.

LAND, DEVELOPERS, AND WHERE ADR PROPERTIES BUILDS

ADR's community footprint spans West St. Paul, Gimli, the Interlake region, St. Andrews, and Ile des Chenes, with a few builds along the City of Winnipeg. Much of that geography is shaped by relationships with a small number of trusted land developers. Terracon and Waterside Developments are ADR's primary land partners, and Rondinella says the company follows their market research and site selection closely given the strength of that relationship.

Ile des Chenes, located on the outskirts of Winnipeg, is the newest area where Waterside and Terracon have partnered on development, and ADR is excited to be one of the first builders in this latest development.

> *"People have to be honest: does this meet my budget, can I make this work? Our team works closely with customers, from a point of respect, to keep them in line and be very open about costs."*

RURAL ACREAGE COMMUNITIES

The Creeks of West St. Paul is one of the more established rural communities that ADR builds in. Built on acreage lots that appeal to a specific kind of buyer willing to take on the yard and property maintenance that comes with larger rural parcels. Rondinella describes it as an acquired taste rather than mass-market demand, but one the company enjoys building for given the additional customization those larger lots allow.

Lower Fort Garry Estates is a smaller-scale project ADR developed itself: the company purchased a parcel of land, subdivided it into three separate lot titles, and built homes on each. Rondinella notes that homes on these rural lots are not necessarily more customized than a standard build; the appeal is rural Manitoba living and larger acreage rather than architectural complexity.

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BUILDING ON THE INTERLAKE

ADR has built a steady presence in the Interlake region near Gimli, including building in Siglavik, Miklavik, and Odin's Green, areas that mix cottage properties with year-round residents living on the water. Rondinella describes these as some of his favourite projects to work on.

> *"It's a lot of imagination building this. It's sometimes secondary homes for people, or people downsizing and looking for a different way of life. Away from city living."*

THE MANITOBA HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION

ADR has been a member of the Manitoba Home Builders' Association from 2017 to 2025 and holds a 10-Year Membership Award from the Home Warranty Program of Manitoba. Rondinella describes MHBA as a central influence on the residential building industry in the region, providing a standard that reassures prospective buyers the company operates with sound construction principles and a reliable customer track record.

The New Home Warranty Program plays a similar role from the buyer's side, holding builders accountable to a defined standard so that homeowners know they will be taken care of after possession if issues arise. ADR has also received MHBA New Home Sales Awards in each of the past four years: Gold Achievement Award in 2026, Silver Achievement Award in 2025, Silver Achievement Award in 2023, and Platinum Achievement Award in 2022.

BUILDING SCIENCE AND ENERGY PERFORMANCE

Recent ADR builds include triple-pane windows, spray foam insulation, and higher-performance mechanical systems. Rondinella frames the investment in energy efficiency partly as a response to rising construction costs, and partly as a long-term value proposition for buyers, even if the savings are not always immediately visible.

Spray foam application in particular has improved as a product and a practice over the years the company has been building.

AN OPEN DOOR POLICY ON PROCESS

ADR runs with a comparatively small internal staff relative to its build volume, which Rondinella attributes to strong organization and frequent internal meetings focused on efficiency. The company's stated position is that no existing process, however long it has been in place, should be treated as final.

That posture extends to an open-door policy with staff, where Rondinella says the company actively invites input on whether an established practice could be improved rather than defending it by default.

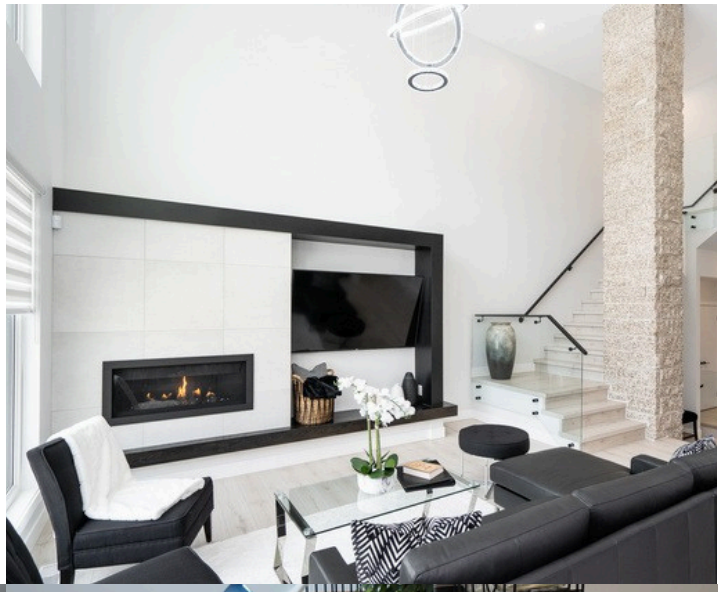
> *"Just because we've kept a certain policy or way of doing things for a certain amount of time doesn't mean it's the best way. Complacency doesn't help you grow."*

WHY CLIENTS COME BACK

Repeat business and referrals are, by Rondinella's account, the primary driver of ADR's growth nearly two decades in. Clients who have built with the company return for second homes, and refer family members, cousins, and friends directly.

> *"Once you establish that relationship, I think that's almost something you keep for life. I hope that we are the go-to for the next generation or the next family member."*

Rondinella attributes that loyalty to the company's consistency with hiring strong trades, being transparent about cost, and delivering a finished product that matches what a client was told to expect from the outset; a standard he says matters especially in a market where prospective buyers frequently hear stories of builds gone wrong.



THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

ADR's growth trajectory going forward is tied directly to residential market demand rather than a fixed expansion target. Rondinella says the company's current team has the capacity to take on additional homes and is open to building in new areas of Manitoba as opportunities develop, without a specific new market identified yet.

The stated priority is improving the process the company already runs rather than growing for its own sake. Rondinella is explicit that any increase in build volume cannot come at the cost of quality; framing continuous improvement as an ongoing discipline, rather than a one-time goal to be reached and set aside.

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INDIGENOUS
IRON
CONSTRUCTION

Founded in 2021 by Tsleil-Waututh Nation member Cody La Rock, Indigenous Iron Construction has grown from a single hydrovac truck into a multi-service contractor working on some of British Columbia's most significant energy infrastructure, and into proof of what Indigenous ownership in heavy construction looks like when it competes and wins on merit.

Cody La Rock did not arrive at ownership through a shortcut. He started in construction as a labourer in habitat restoration and environmental remediation, and spent the following years working his way up through the field into management, eventually serving as general manager of the company that had first hired him. By then he understood every layer of the work, from the shovel to the contract, and he understood something else: the ceiling above him was not going to move.

In 2021, he founded Indigenous Iron Construction. The company is 100 percent Indigenous-owned, and its office sits on səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) land in North Vancouver, a deliberate choice that reflects how closely the company's work is tied to the community it comes from. La Rock is a proud member of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and the company's identity is inseparable from that fact, starting with its name.

A GAP IN THE HYDROVAC SECTOR

The business began with a single observation. Working on a large construction project, La Rock noticed that the hydrovac sector, the non-destructive excavation method that uses high-pressure water and vacuum to safely expose buried utilities, was dominated by large corporations with little understanding of Indigenous culture, Indigenous territory, or Indigenous ways of doing business.

Projects were being executed on First Nations land across the Lower Mainland by companies with no connection to the communities beneath their equipment.
Indigenous Iron was built as the alternative: a transparent, Indigenous-owned contractor that could deliver the same technical scope at the same standard, while bringing genuine cultural understanding to work on traditional territories. From the outset, La Rock set the bar deliberately high.

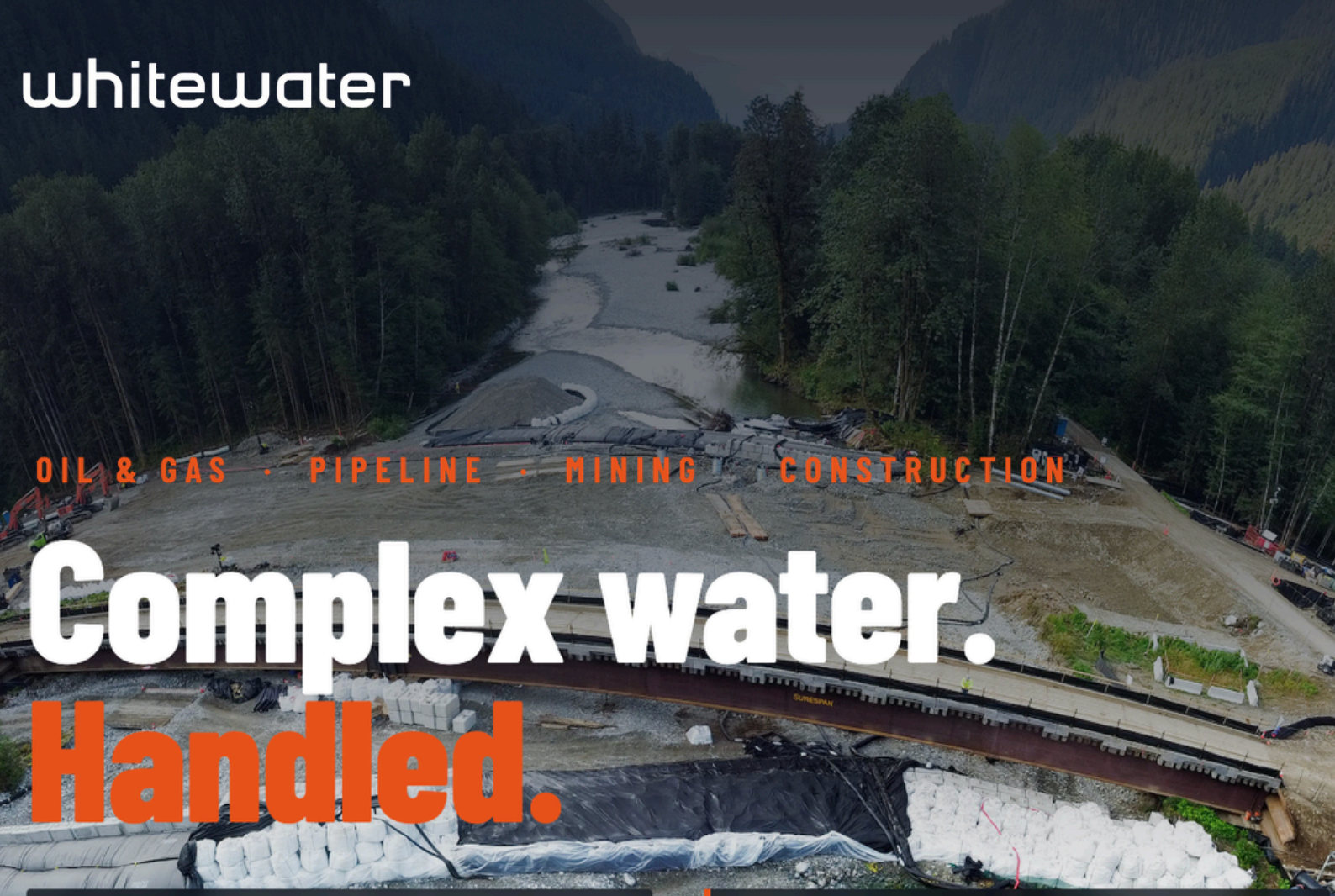
That meant an uncompromising safety program, a modern fleet, and a refusal to be positioned as a token participant. The company would compete for work the same way anyone else did, and it would win it the same way.

THE BREAKTHROUGH: EAGLE MOUNTAIN-WOODFIBRE

Indigenous Iron's defining opportunity came on FortisBC's Eagle Mountain-Woodfibre Gas Pipeline project, the pipeline expansion connecting Coquitlam to the Woodfibre LNG site near Squamish. The company earned its hydrovac contract through competitive bidding, a distinction La Rock considers central to the story: the work was won on capability and price, not awarded as a gesture.

On the project, Indigenous Iron's crews perform daylighting and utility exposure work that is critical to safe pipeline construction, operating alongside FortisBC and the Surerus Murphy Joint Venture. The relationship has grown into what both sides describe as a genuine partnership, one that has given the company a track record on major energy infrastructure that few contractors its age can claim. The company's fleet has also worked on the Trans Mountain pipeline corridor and on projects across the traditional territories of the Kwikwetlem and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

whitewater



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WORKING IN THE INDIAN RIVER VALLEY

Some of the company's most meaningful work has taken place in the Indian River Valley, in the heart of Tsleil-Waututh territory. It is an environment that demands a different posture from a contractor: the valley's ecosystem has seen the return of salmon runs, and with them wolves and grizzly bears, and construction activity there is planned around fisheries windows and wildlife timing rather than in spite of them.

For Indigenous Iron, that is not a constraint imposed from outside. It is the company operating the way it believes all contractors should operate on sensitive land, combining Indigenous ecological knowledge with modern construction practice. La Rock's background in habitat restoration and environmental remediation, the field where his career began, runs directly through how his crews are trained to work.

BEYOND HYDROVAC

Hydrovac remains the core of the business, with a modern truck fleet delivering daylighting, debris removal, pipeline tie-ins, and utility exposure. But the company's scope has widened considerably since 2021. Indigenous Iron now operates across civil construction, marine services, environmental remediation, and spill response, along with a cultural training arm that helps industry partners engage meaningfully with the territories they work on.

The fleet has grown in step, with acquisitions tied to contracts rather than speculation: hydrovac units, a Komatsu PC138 excavator, and street sweepers among them. Each addition has followed the work, a discipline that has kept the company's growth grounded while its capabilities have compounded.

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PARTNERSHIPS BUILT ON DELIVERY

Indigenous Iron's partner network reads like a cross-section of serious industrial players in British Columbia: the Surerus Murphy Joint Venture and FortisBC on the pipeline side, and collaborators including Surespan, White Water Management, Harken Towing, GFL, and Nucor Environmental Solutions across marine, environmental, and civil scopes.

La Rock credits those relationships with elevating every project the company touches, and the respect runs both ways: they are partnerships earned through reliability on difficult industrial work, not through procurement mandates.

MORE THAN AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

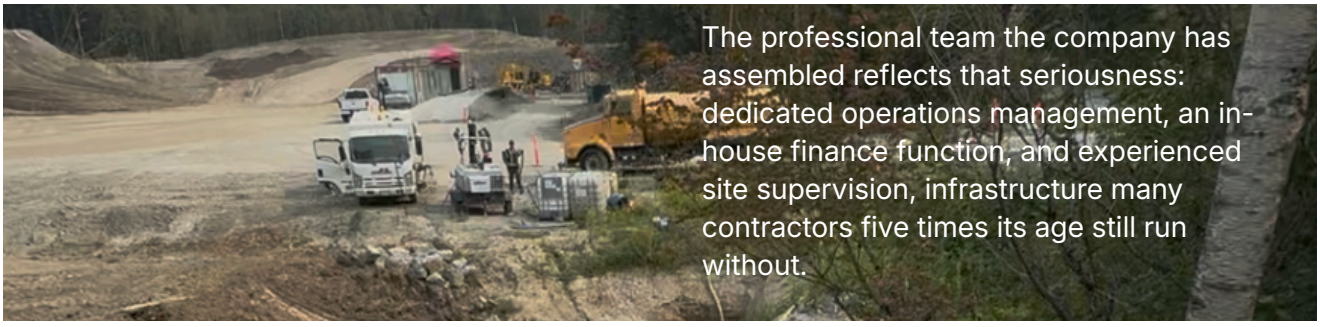
The company's cultural training service occupies a space few contractors even attempt. Industry partners increasingly open meetings with territorial acknowledgments; Indigenous Iron's training exists to make sure the substance behind those words is real. The programs teach partners and workers about protocols, community expectations, and what respectful operation on traditional territory actually requires, converting what is often a compliance formality into working knowledge.

It reflects the larger position the company has staked out: that Indigenous participation in construction should not be a checkbox on a bid form, and that the companies best placed to lead that shift are Indigenous-owned ones performing at the top of their field.

BUILDING INDIGENOUS CAREERS

A core part of Indigenous Iron's mandate is creating meaningful employment and advancement for Indigenous workers, not entry-level positions that lead nowhere, but genuine career pathways with mentorship behind them. La Rock's own trajectory, from labourer to general manager to founder, is the template, and the company is deliberate about giving its people the same runway he had to fight for.

> *"We're showing that Indigenous leadership isn't just possible. It's essential."*



The professional team the company has assembled reflects that seriousness: dedicated operations management, an in-house finance function, and experienced site supervision, infrastructure many contractors five times its age still run without.

A LEGACY IN THE NAME

The values underneath the company have a lineage. La Rock's father is Claude “Rocky” La Rock, a world-renowned Sts'ailes First Nation artist known for blending contemporary themes with traditional hand-carving techniques, and his artistry taught his son the weight of traditional values, attention to detail, and pride in one's work.

La Rock's mother spent more than two decades designing healthcare programs for Indigenous communities, a career of service that shaped his conviction that business must answer to something larger than itself.

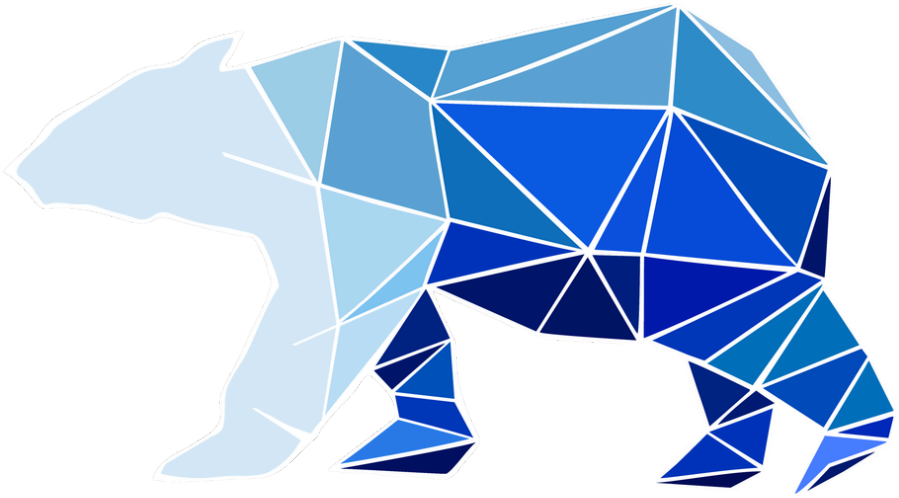
Both threads, craft and service, are visible in how Indigenous Iron presents itself and how it operates: respect for the land, respect for the people on it, and an obligation to the generations that follow.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Indigenous Iron's trajectory points toward larger scopes and greater self-direction: growth into prime contractor roles, expanded marine capability, and continued fleet investment matched to the work in front of it.

The Eagle Mountain-Woodfibre track record has opened doors that were closed to the company in 2021, and the infrastructure pipeline across British Columbia, increasingly structured around genuine Indigenous participation, is moving in the company's direction.

But the measure La Rock returns to is not revenue or fleet count. It is what the company proves is possible. For Indigenous youth watching from communities across the province, Indigenous Iron is a demonstration in real time that ownership, leadership, and excellence in heavy construction are not exceptions to be celebrated once a generation. They are a standard, and it is being raised.



POLAR
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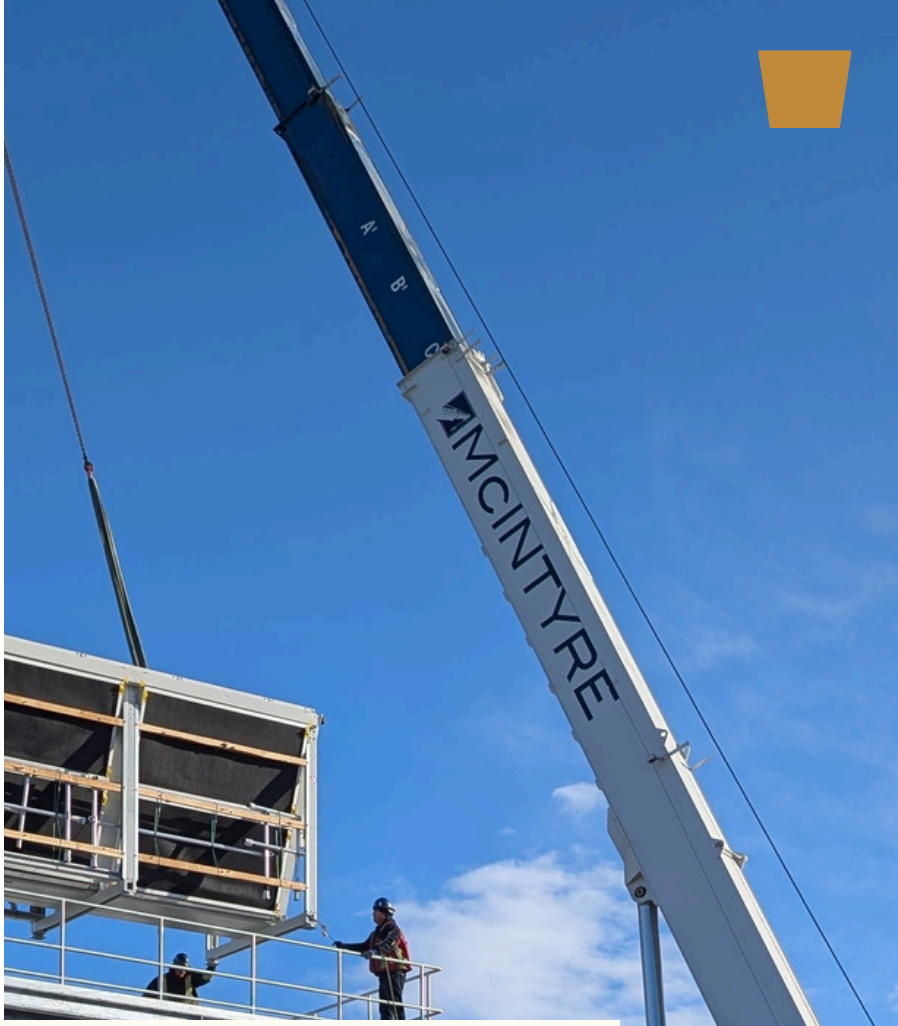

Polar Engineering built a practice on a principle most facilities overlook: every time you cool something, you create heat worth capturing. From ice arenas in British Columbia to the two largest telescopes in the world, the Victoria firm has spent a decade proving how much of that energy has been going out the back wall.

Ian Welle founded Polar Engineering around a problem his clients kept describing to him. They could find engineering firms that handled grant applications, and they could find firms that did detailed refrigeration design. What they could not find was a single firm that did both, and that also understood energy recovery well enough to lead the conversation rather than follow it.*Polar was built to close that gap end to end: securing federal and provincial grant funding, performing the energy studies and carbon and electricity reduction analysis, delivering the detailed engineering, and commissioning the plant at the end. Welle came to it from Accent Refrigeration Systems, where he served as a principal engineer designing premium efficiency refrigeration and energy recovery systems for the ice rink industry, work that took him to projects on four continents.*

ONE DISCIPLINE, MANY BUILDINGS

Polar's client list spans industrial food processing plants, ice arenas, curling clubs, hospitals, breweries, and large district energy developments. Asked what connects sectors that different, Welle's answer is immediate: industrial refrigeration is the entry point to nearly every project the firm takes on.
The engineering logic that follows is a matter of thermodynamics rather than sector. Cooling a fish processing facility, a brewery, or an ice sheet all produce the same byproduct.

The first question Polar asks is how to perform that cooling as efficiently as possible. The second, and the one that defines the firm's practice, is where the resulting heat can go so that a facility is not buying electricity or natural gas to produce warmth it has already generated and thrown away.

TEN TO TWENTY HOMES PER ICE SHEET

Ice arenas and pools are Polar's core work, and they illustrate the scale of what conventional facilities discard. By Welle's rough order of magnitude, a single NHL-sized ice sheet produces enough waste heat to warm ten to twenty homes through a Canadian winter.

Most facilities send that heat straight outside. Welle points to a detail visible from the road at arenas across the country in midwinter: the plume rising from behind the building is heat being rejected to the atmosphere at cost. Polar's approach is to capture that heat instead, run it through a purpose-built heat pump that boosts it to as high as 90 degrees Celsius, and inject it directly into the boiler loops already serving the building. On a facility with two ice sheets and a pool, the firm typically cuts natural gas consumption, and the associated carbon emissions, by 60 to 80 percent.

The results at specific sites bear that out. At the Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre in Victoria, working with Westshore Parks and Recreation, Polar delivered a deep decarbonization program across two projects. An energy recovery dehumidifier servicing the natatorium now supplies over 60 percent of the heat required by the facility's pools, dressing rooms, and lobby, cutting natural gas use by more than 2,300 gigajoules and greenhouse gas emissions by 110 tonnes annually. A second project used a 1.9 million dollar grant to replace a heaved refrigerated floor and install a site-specific heat pump. The facility's overall natural gas consumption fell by 90 percent.

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REFRIGERATION AT ALTITUDE

Among the most technically demanding work in Polar's portfolio are the CO2 refrigeration systems Welle engineered for the two largest telescopes in the world: the Giant Magellan Telescope in Chile and the Thirty Meter Telescope in Hawaii.

The refrigeration components themselves, Welle notes, are not radically different from a conventional system, since the working fluid stays sealed within piping and never opens to atmosphere. The complication is elevation. At the altitudes both observatories occupy, air density and ambient temperature shift substantially, and any calculation involving absorbing heat from or rejecting heat to the surrounding environment has to account for it.

The harder constraint was what the telescopes could not tolerate. A conventional refrigeration system circulates oil throughout its entire length alongside the refrigerant, and it vibrates. Neither is acceptable on a precision optical instrument.

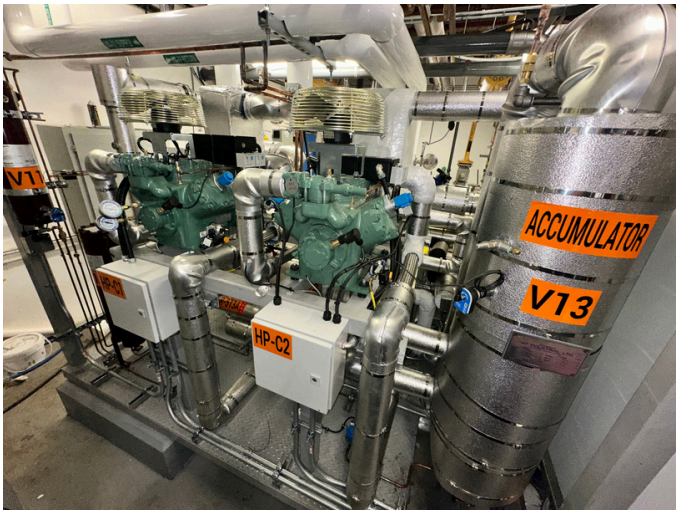
> *"The really cool part of those projects was that we could have no oil on the telescopes, and we could have zero vibration."*

Polar's solution was a split primary and secondary architecture. The secondary loop uses high-pressure liquid pumps to circulate liquid CO2 refrigerant through the facility, eliminating oil from the sensitive portion of the system entirely. For the Giant Magellan Telescope specifically, the firm designed a two-temperature refrigeration system built around exceptionally high pump discharge pressure, requiring a centrifugal pump capable of producing roughly 140 to 150 psi. Welle describes it as a daunting engineering problem that resolved well.

THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN NORTH AMERICA

Welle completed the first R515b heat pump installation in North America, in Oak Bay, Victoria, during his time at Accent Refrigeration. The significance is regulatory as much as technical. Refrigerant phase-outs underway in both Canada and the United States are pushing the entire industry toward refrigerants with low global warming potential, and many of the refrigerants capable of delivering the temperatures these applications require carried high GWP ratings.

The design objective was to achieve high condensing temperature potential while using a low GWP refrigerant, a combination that did not previously exist in commercially deployed form. Polar has since installed high-temperature, low-GWP heat pumps across Western Canada. In Prince George, a project replacing end-of-life ammonia plant equipment reduced the facility's ammonia charge by more than 70 percent and included what the City describes as Canada's first custom R515 high-temperature heat pump, designed to recover waste heat from the ice plant.



THE BUILDINGS THAT ALREADY EXIST

Welle's argument for where the industry should focus is pointed. New construction receives the attention and the press releases, but the overwhelming majority of natural gas consumption over the coming decades will occur in buildings that are already standing.

The obstacle to retrofitting them was temperature. Existing institutional buildings typically run centralized hydronic boiler loops circulating water at 60 to 80 degrees Celsius. Until roughly five or six years ago, heat pumps could only reach condensing temperatures of 40 to 50 degrees, too low to integrate with that infrastructure.

High-temperature heat pumps changed the arithmetic. Rather than replacing a building's heating infrastructure, Polar can install a heat pump in parallel with the existing boilers, tapping directly into the loop already in place and shutting off the natural gas consumption behind it. The existing infrastructure stays, and the carbon reduction arrives at a fraction of the capital cost of a full replacement.

Proving that low-GWP refrigerants could deliver those temperatures while integrating with legacy hydronic systems is, in Welle's description, what Polar cut its teeth on over the past five to six years.

THE GRANT CONVERSATION

Polar tracks available grant funding provincially across Alberta and British Columbia, where the firm works almost exclusively, and many clients approach the firm specifically for that capability. The reason is a straightforward tension in public sector capital planning: municipalities want to reduce consumption and be good stewards of their infrastructure, but they are spending taxpayer money and need paybacks that justify the investment.

Most communities Polar works with target a payback period somewhere between five and ten years, while the systems themselves last twenty to twenty-five. Grant funding is what closes the distance between those two numbers, turning a project that saves a community money over its lifetime into one that also clears the near-term financial test. Polar has secured funding at meaningful scale, including a 1.9 million dollar grant for the Juan de Fuca floor replacement and heat pump installation, and over 390,000 dollars in BC Hydro funding on a separate energy recovery project.

WORKING AHEAD OF THE CODE

Refrigeration systems are inherently hazardous if designed incorrectly, and Polar works closely with Technical Safety BC, ABSA in Alberta, and the Ammonia Safety Training Institute. Both regulators treat the firm as a technical resource, which matters because Polar's work regularly outpaces the rules written to govern it.

> *"Polar is often doing the first ones in Canada, if not Western Canada. Sometimes the code doesn't apply to our systems very well."*

Welle compares the situation to the gap between artificial intelligence and the legislation meant to regulate it: the technology adapts faster than the statutes. Polar's practice in those cases is to work from the intent of the code rather than its literal text, sitting down with the regulator to establish what the provision was written to protect against and demonstrating how the proposed system achieves that protection. It is a relationship built deliberately on trust, and Welle is explicit about why it has to be. Protecting the environment and protecting the public are both non-negotiable, and the firm cannot trade one against the other.

THE DEHUMIDIFIER NOBODY NOTICED

Asked which project felt like a genuine turning point, Welle points to a facility in British Columbia where Polar integrated a high-temperature, low-GWP heat pump with a new low-temperature desiccant dehumidifier, a pairing that had rarely if ever been executed in North America. Dehumidifiers are typically among the largest natural gas consumers in a recreation facility. This one was designed with no natural gas hookup at all. Nathaniel Green led the work from Polar's office.

The proof arrived accidentally. After commissioning, during maintenance on the heat pump, staff began receiving calls that the arena dehumidifier was not performing properly. Investigating, they discovered the natural gas backup system on the unit had never been commissioned in the first place.

LISTEN FIRST, ENGINEER SECOND

Polar's stated operating principle is that the firm listens before it engineers, and Welle applies it as a screening mechanism as much as a service philosophy. The firm uses a design deliverable document at the outset of a project, asking clients directly what a good consultant looks like to them and what would constitute a win.

> *"If you're out for beers a year from now after finishing this project, what are the two things you say to your buddy about why you're glad you hired Polar? If you can tell me that on day one, we can deliver on it."*

The corollary is that Welle is comfortable declining work. Where a prospective client's needs do not align with Polar's expertise, he will say so and refer them elsewhere, on the reasoning that both parties end up better served.

HIRING FOR VALUES, TRAINING FOR SKILL

Polar has grown into a team spanning detailed refrigeration design, grant and energy studies, and project engineering. Steffen leads the grant and energy study team and the detailed design work on hydronic system integration, complementing Welle's refrigeration lead. Tyler focuses on energy-efficient refrigeration systems that reduce operating costs and emissions.

The hiring standard is deliberately inverted from what a highly technical field might suggest. Polar hires for alignment with its core values and trains for technical capability, on the reasoning that anyone who has completed an engineering degree can learn a system.

> *"You can teach someone a technical skill. You can't teach them who they are on day one."*

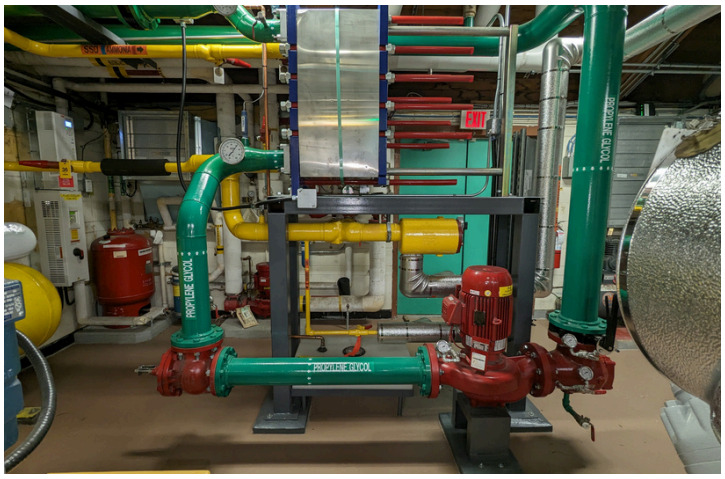
The values themselves are specific: do what you say you will do; listen first and engineer second; operate collaboratively and recognize a good idea as a good idea regardless of who it came from.

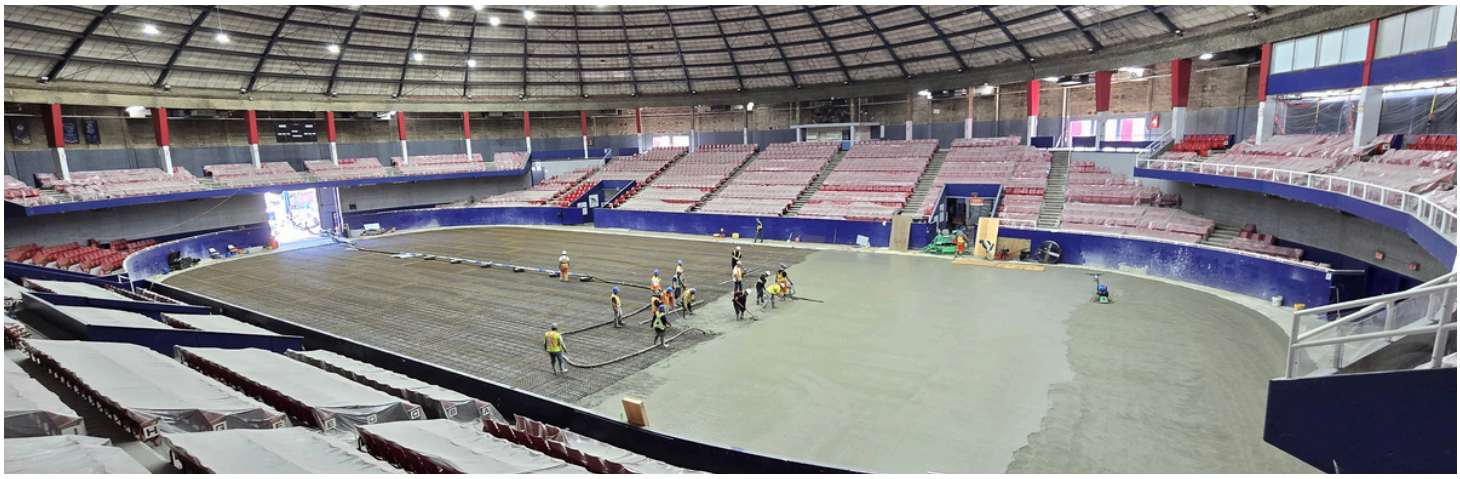
STEAM

Asked where the frontier is now, Welle answers without hesitation. The next generation of refrigerants is moving toward hydrocarbons, propane and isobutane among them, because they are what will make it possible to build heat pumps that exceed 100 degrees Celsius and produce low-pressure steam.

That threshold matters because a great deal of large infrastructure is heated by steam boilers and steam distribution, a category currently beyond the reach of heat pump technology. Polar attends conferences in Europe specifically to track where the industry is heading and how to lead that transition in North America.

ACTION
PLAN
D'ACTION



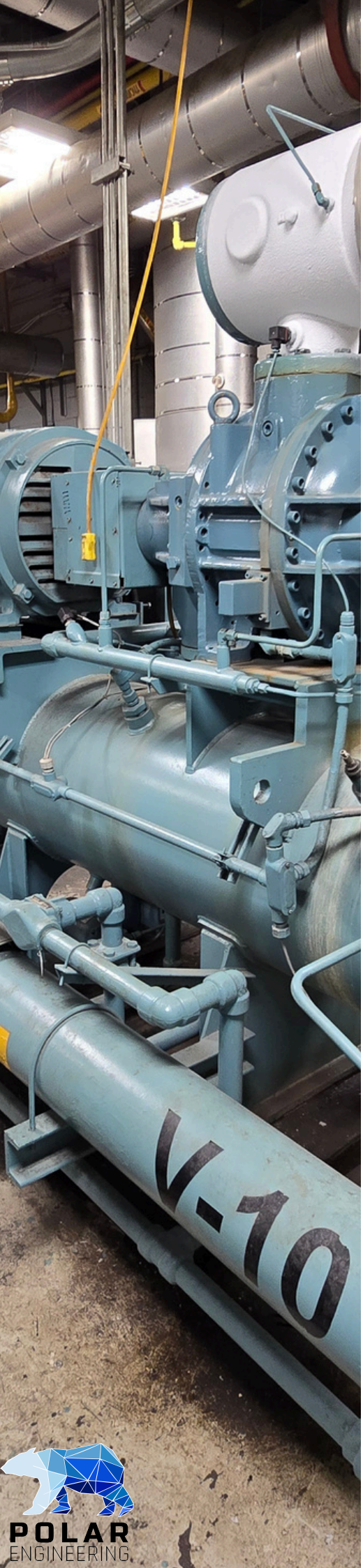


READING WHERE THE MARKET IS HEADED

The engineering challenge comes attached to a safety one. Propane and isobutane are flammable, and the facilities these systems would serve are recreation centres and high-rise buildings occupied by the public. Welle returns to the same balance that governs the firm's regulatory work: the environmental objective and the public safety obligation both have to be met completely, and the industry will need to solve for both simultaneously as it makes the shift.

> *"Steam heat pumps are going to be the next big game changer in our industry. I'm excited to help lead the way for that in Canada and design systems that currently aren't possible to engineer."*

They are not commercially available anywhere today. A small number of test units exist in Europe. That, for Polar, is the point.



POLAR ENGINEERING

Güntner

doucette industries, inc.

BRAMAC
PLUMBING & HEATING LTD

Since founding in Yarmouth in 2013, Bramac Plumbing & Heating has built its reputation across three Nova Scotia counties on service ahead of scale, and its founder is now spinning off a patent-pending well-water storage system as drought becomes a recurring feature of the Southwest Nova summer.

Bramac Plumbing & Heating has spent thirteen years building a reputation across Yarmouth, Digby, and Shelburne Counties on service ahead of scale, growing from a single Red Seal plumber into a full trades operation covering plumbing, electrical, gasfitting, and propane. That growth followed a formula the company has stuck to since its founding: filling a service gap larger competitors had abandoned. Its newest venture follows a different logic, turning a homegrown response to drought conditions into a standalone company built to outgrow the shop that invented it.

A SECOND TRADE COMPANY, BUILT FROM THE FIRST ONE'S COLLAPSE

Bramac was founded in Yarmouth in 2013 by Curt Goudey, who had spent decades in the trades before starting the company. Goudey says the business he was previously part owner of, Germane Mechanical Electrical, closed after three different trade unions organized its electrical, plumbing, and ventilation divisions in successive years, leaving three unions inside one company pulling in different directions. He says Germane's had operated for roughly sixty years before it shut down.

The closure did not happen all at once. As Germane's wound down, Goudey was asked by a community college to cover a three-week teaching gap in its plumbing program. He says those three weeks became nine and a half years, during which he split his time between teaching in Shelburne during the day and running Bramac's early jobs on evenings and weekends. Tim Atkinson, who had worked with Goudey in Germane's plumbing division, joined Bramac at the outset and stayed. Atkinson is now the company's vice president.

Goudey moved into the office full time after the college's pipe trades program in Shelburne was discontinued, a shift he places at around 2019, shortly before the pandemic. The company has since grown beyond plumbing into electrical work, gasfitting, propane, and hot tub sales.

BUILT THE BUSINESS AROUND THE CALL NOBODY ELSE WOULD ANSWER

Bramac serves residential, commercial, and institutional clients across Yarmouth, Digby, and Shelburne Counties. Goudey says the company's service-first model was a direct reaction to what he saw at Germane's, where a roughly 120-person operation kept only one plumber assigned to service work while commercial jobs took priority. That imbalance became the reasoning behind Bramac's 24/7 on-call commitment from day one.

Within its first two years, a competing company closed and Bramac bought its customer list. Its main local rival, Graves, was started around the same time by former Germane's owners who moved into commercial electrical work. By building around service instead, Goudey says Bramac became the largest service plumbing outfit in Yarmouth and its surrounding communities, a claim based on his own read of the regional market rather than independent data. He places larger operations in Bridgewater, Halifax, and Kentville, where competitors lean toward commercial and institutional new construction rather than service calls.

THE CLARK'S HARBOUR JOB THAT PROVED THE MODEL

Bramac's largest project to date, according to Goudey, was an addition to a lobster processing plant in Clark's Harbour, roughly forty-five minutes from Yarmouth, valued in the range of $1.1 to $1.3 million. The company had been doing service work for the client beforehand, and the plumbing contract for the addition followed from that relationship rather than a competitive bid. The company has also completed commercial work farther afield, including three Tim Hortons locations in Newfoundland around 2015 or 2016.

Most of Bramac's commercial work, Goudey says, runs on a shorter cycle than large institutional builds: restaurants, small gas stations, and similar fit-out jobs that wrap in five to six months rather than large multi-year contracts. The most technically demanding work now sits on the service side, where oil furnaces and boilers are increasingly being replaced with propane systems built around computerized circulating pumps and control panels, a shift from the largely analog systems Goudey trained on decades earlier.

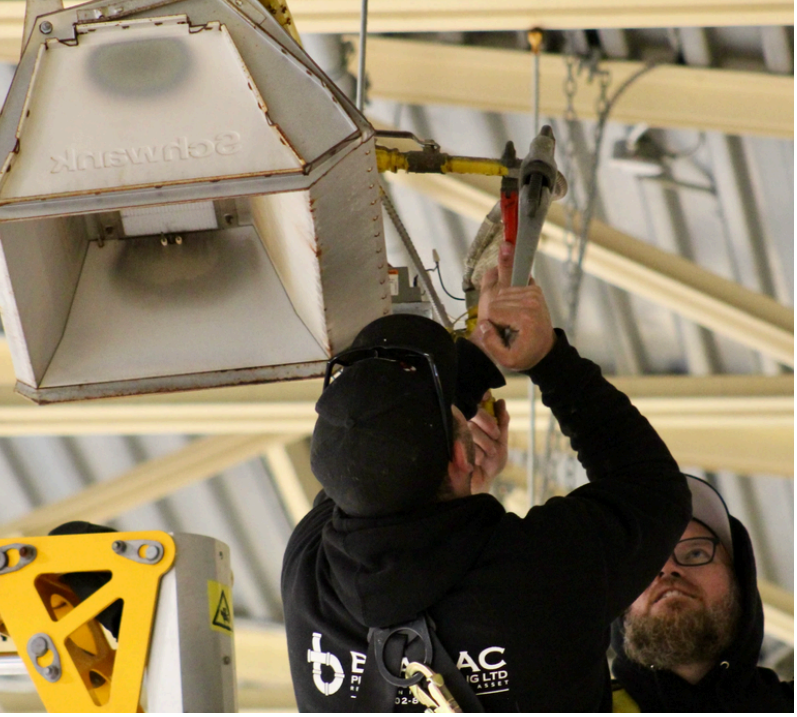
CARRYING APPRENTICES THROUGH TO RED SEAL

Bramac's licensed technicians are Red Seal certified across plumbing, electrical, and gasfitting. Goudey says the company is not formally affiliated with trade associations, but works closely with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency on hiring, tracking apprentices' logbooks and pushing them toward technical training on schedule rather than leaving it to individual initiative.

> "With more knowledge you can tackle more issues, bounce them off each other and you're learning every day."

Goudey describes the relationship between veteran and newer staff as running in both directions: apprentices bring current, technology-driven knowledge that he says he is still absorbing after more than three decades in the trade, while longtime staff bring field experience apprentices are still building toward their own Red Seal designations.

BRAMAC
PLUMBING & HEATING LTD



BUSINESS OF THE YEAR, AND A WEEKEND OF FREE WATER

Bramac received a Business of the Year award in 2017, according to Goudey; the awarding body and exact date could not be independently confirmed and are worth checking before publication. Beyond formal recognition, Goudey points to the company's water-bottling side business, filling three- and five-gallon jugs at its Starrs Road shop, as a source of goodwill in the community that is separate from its plumbing trade entirely.

During recent drought years, Bramac has hosted free water giveaway weekends, drawing residents who fill containers directly at the shop. Goudey says many of these customers do not realize the business also does plumbing work, and that the visibility from the water program has helped the company grow, though that impact is his own assessment rather than a measured figure.

FROM ANALOG BOILERS TO SYSTEMS YOU RUN FROM A PHONE

Bramac's team includes a Level I thermographer, a certification Goudey says his daughter completed roughly three years ago before the company's growing

hot tub business shifted her focus. Mackenzie Goudey now leads propane sales and marketing for Bramac. The company also offers in-house financing through Financeit, though Goudey says that program has been used almost exclusively for hot tub purchases rather than plumbing or heating installations to date.

WHY BRAMAC PAYS MORE FOR A GOULDS PUMP

Bramac's plumbing division centers its pump business around Goulds Pumps, a relationship Goudey traces back nearly forty years to his time at Germane's. The company's own materials describe Goulds as a brand with more than 170 years in residential pumping solutions. Goudey says the higher upfront cost, roughly $1,000 for a Goulds jet pump against about $400 for a comparable retail unit, is offset by fewer callbacks, easier field installation, and stronger manufacturer support when something goes wrong.

HIRING FOR PERSONALITY, KEEPING PEOPLE FOR YEARS

Bramac's team runs to roughly eighteen people, according to Goudey, spread across plumbing, electrical, propane, and office roles, with some staff splitting time between estimating and fieldwork. Asked what he looks for in new hires, Goudey was direct about priorities.

> "Personality first. Actually can't teach that. You can teach the trade to pretty much anybody if they're interested."

Goudey says that approach has produced strong retention: across the company's history, he counts only two employees who have left, one of whom preferred commercial work to Bramac's service-oriented model. He credits the retention record to a culture built around treating customers, in his words, no differently than the crew would treat their own parents.

EFFICIENCY CONVERSATIONS DEPEND ON WHO'S CALLING

Energy efficiency is not a fixed pitch Bramac applies uniformly, Goudey says. Clients who arrive already familiar with heating options tend to ask more detailed, efficiency-focused questions, while others simply want a working system restored with as little disruption as possible. Rather than leading every call with a sustainability message, Bramac's team adjusts to what each customer is already asking for.

WHAT SETS BRAMAC APART IN A SMALL MARKET

Beyond round-the-clock service, Goudey points to a set of company values developed through a Housecall Pro training course, now printed on every quotation and intended eventually for display at the shop. He describes after-hours calls being monitored voluntarily by senior staff, including Atkinson, even when no one is required to do so.

> *"They don't mind paying a little more knowing that when they call, someone's going to be there."*

That line, Goudey says, sums up how he built the business in a market too small to compete on price alone: not by being the cheapest option in Yarmouth, Digby, or Shelburne, but by being the one that reliably shows up.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Bramac began installing rainwater harvesting systems in 2021, collecting rooftop runoff into above-ground tanks that can also be topped up by licensed water haulers during dry periods. Goudey trained with CleanFlow, a company he describes as based in British Columbia, and says Bramac is currently the only outfit doing this work at scale in Nova Scotia, taking on jobs as far away as Cape Breton, an eight-hour drive from Yarmouth. The company has installed around a dozen systems to date, with several more scheduled in the weeks following this interview.

> **"We're the only ones in the province at this point doing it, we've got time to get good."**

Bramac's newer invention addresses a different part of the same problem. FlowLock is a patent-pending liner installed inside an existing dug well to create a protected water reservoir, while the well continues collecting groundwater exactly as it did before. The same pump or foot valve simply relocates from the open well into the liner.

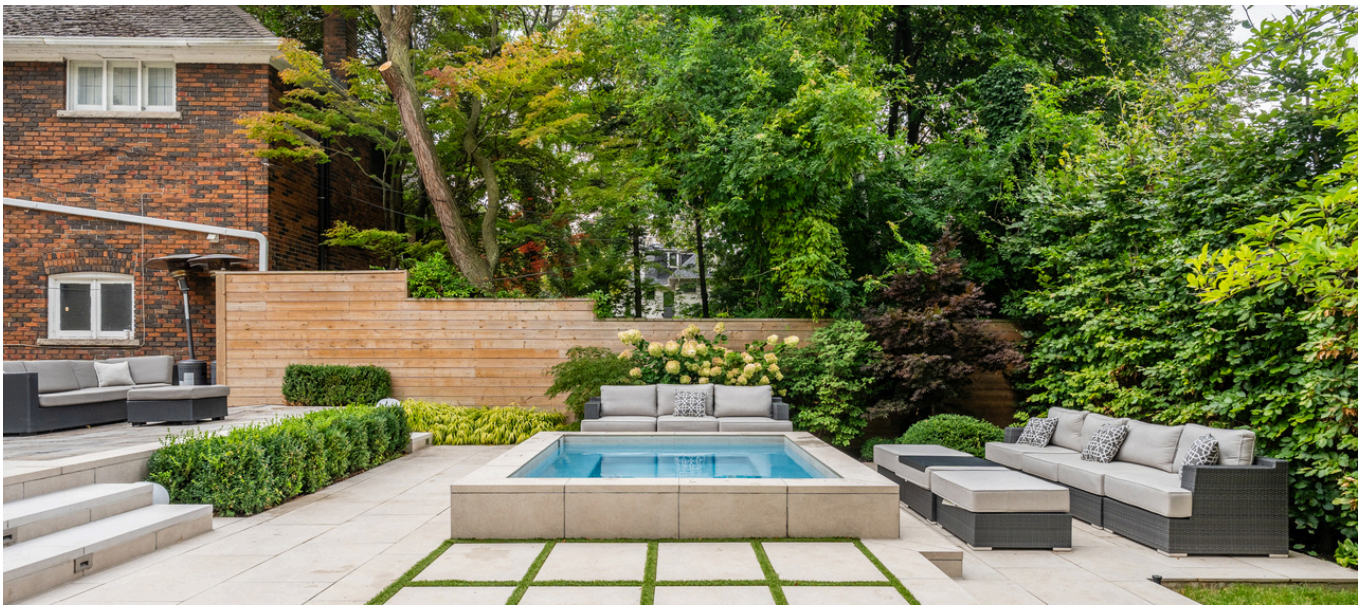
> *"Every bit of water that you buy from that truck will be retained by the liner. It won't go back into the aquifer."*

Where homeowners refilling a dry well directly, or storing water in open totes through the summer, routinely lose water back into the ground or to freezing over winter, Goudey says FlowLock's sealed reservoir holds every gallon added to it year-round. The system is still in its early stages: Bramac's own materials describe it as patent-pending with one installed unit currently in operation, and introductory pricing that depends on securing a minimum number of committed customers.

Goudey has structured FlowLock as a company separate from Bramac. Bramac will handle installation, while FlowLock will handle sales, a split he expects will let the invention grow on its own rather than as a side offering of an established plumbing shop. Where Bramac's growth over the past thirteen years has followed the demands of Southwest Nova's service market, Goudey is now betting that FlowLock's growth will follow the province's drought line outward from Yarmouth.

bsq
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

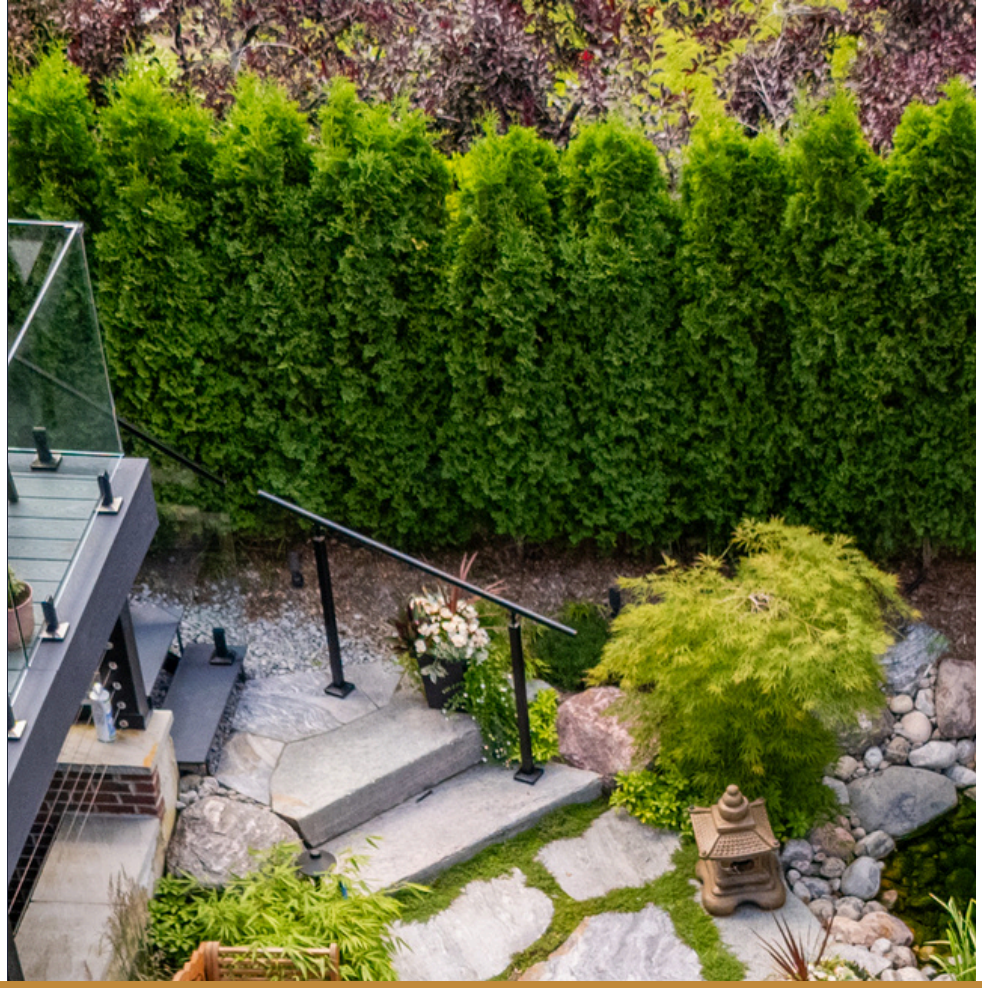
Founded by classmates Robert Boltman and Alex Bartlett in 2008, bsq Landscape Architects has represented Canada at international garden competitions in Japan and Singapore, and now applies the same design-first discipline.



bsq Landscape Architects has spent nearly two decades building backyards, condominium landscapes, and commercial sites across the Greater Toronto Area, work that has twice taken founders Robert Boltman and Alex Bartlett to represent Canada at international garden competitions in Japan and Singapore. The firm has stayed deliberately small, five people on a good year, and deliberately design-first: no proposal goes out, the founders say, without a drawing behind it.

Boltman and Bartlett met as classmates at Ryerson University, now Toronto Metropolitan University. Both worked at established firms first, a traditional development-focused planning practice he found unfulfilling as a senior project manager. The two reconnected when Boltman emailed his old classmates and Bartlett was the only one to respond, after finding the message sitting in his junk folder.

bsq launched in 2008. Within two years, the firm was competing at the inaugural Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki, Japan, an early validation Boltman says told the founders they were doing something right.



"We went through ups and downs, having our own crew, not having our own crew, and here we are, eighteen years later. Seems like yesterday, but that's how life goes."

DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT.

bsq's model differs by sector. On residential work, the firm handles design and project management directly and positions its long-standing network of subcontractors, plumbers, electricians, stonemasons, and carpenters, as effectively its own crew, even though those trades are not bsq employees. On commercial work, Boltman says the firm's role is almost always project management rather than hands-on construction. Most projects arrive as inbound inquiries through the company website; because the firm is small, Boltman says it can size up a project's scope quickly and write a proposal to match.

A GOLD MEDAL, TWICE REMOVED

bsq has competed and medaled at the Gardening World Cup in Nagasaki and the Singapore Garden Festival across multiple years, including a gold medal win at the Singapore Garden Festival in 2012. Preparing for those competitions, Boltman says, mirrors a client commission almost exactly: design drawings, approvals, materials lists, and final construction, in this case roughly two and a half weeks of on-site building before each show opened. The difference, he says, is the client.

Boltman makes a point about the competitions themselves: without a client to answer to, changes happen the moment the firm decides to make them. bsq's last competition appearance was at a Canada Blooms show in 2016; the founders have not returned to Nagasaki or Singapore since roughly 2014 or 2015, partly, Boltman says, because family life got busier for both partners. He hasn't ruled out competing again.

DIGGING EIGHTEEN FEET FOR A HOT TUB

bsq's largest active project sits in Scarborough: a swim spa set beneath a steel-framed deck, which required excavating about 18 feet down to pour concrete footings before the spa could be craned into place. A steel structure and deck were then built above it, alongside a separate sports court on the same property. Boltman describes it as one of the largest residential landscape builds the firm has undertaken. Construction began the previous September, with completion targeted for November, a build cycle of just over a year.

THE TRADE NETWORK BEHIND THE DESIGN

bsq works with a consistent group of trades rather than rotating suppliers project to project, a choice Boltman ties directly to communication, both in coordinating on site and in how those trades interact with bsq's clients. The firm is also firm about sequencing: Boltman says he declines to provide a quote to prospective clients who haven't yet committed to a design.

> "Would you build your house without a drawing? You're spending a quarter million dollars or more. I don't suggest you proceed in this way."

Boltman says that conversation, explaining why design, permitting, and trade pricing have to happen before a number gets attached to a project, is a recurring part of the job. Some clients take years to come around to it; he mentions prospects who returned to bsq a decade after an initial proposal, once they were ready to commit to the process.

AWARDS WITHOUT THE EGO

Beyond its international competition results, bsq holds multiple Canada Blooms medals and OALA design honours dating back to the firm's founding year. Asked which award or project meant the most, Boltman didn't point to a specific one.

> "I don't think the award really matters, in my opinion."

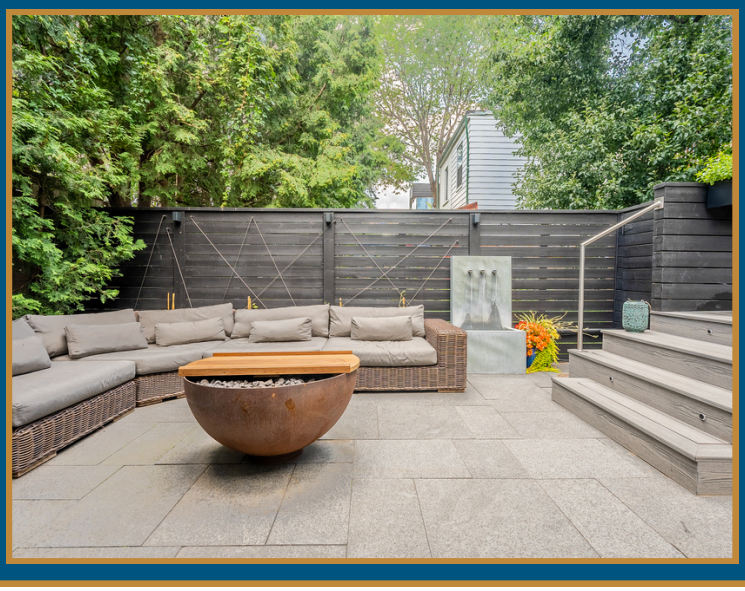
He points instead to the experience of representing Canada internationally as a young firm, describing the Singapore and Japan trips as a career highlight independent of how any single project placed.

TWO PARTNERS, A LOT OF HUMOR

bsq has stayed intentionally small: Boltman describes a typical team of five, himself and Bartlett plus three full-time staff, a size the firm has held to by choice rather than necessity.

> "We think keeping people is really important, so we'd rather keep it small."

Boltman says the partnership itself runs on humour as much as process after nearly two decades of working together. He puts the firm's potential growth ceiling around six or seven people, which he says would likely require restructuring how the practice runs today.



TEACHING AI TO UNDERSTAND A LANDSCAPE

bsq has experimented with AI-generated 3D rendering tools, with mixed results. Boltman says the software struggles with the kind of nuanced, spatial instruction a designer gives intuitively.

"I wish I could take my finger or a stylus pen, circle something and say, make this blue."

Where AI has worked reliably, he says, is narrower edits: moving a shed, adding a seating area, swapping a railing for glass, tasks that take five to fifteen minutes with the right prompting. The firm has also used AI tools for cleaning up technical writing and is evaluating AI-assisted surveying software as a possible alternative to manual measuring on site.

WHAT COMES NEXT

bsq's near-term growth has leaned into two areas: condominium landscape renovations, driven in part by a real estate market where more people are staying put and reinvesting in their existing homes, and custom garages and carports, a niche the firm now markets as its own service line after fielding repeated inquiries.

Boltman says the firm remains selective about which commercial work it takes on, and continues to rely primarily on word of mouth and its website for new residential clients. He describes the practice's approach to growth as a habit of finding a niche, doing it well, and letting that work lead to the next one.

HORIZONGLASS
RESIDENTIAL + COMMERCIAL

Now equally owned by estimator Doug Arnold and general manager Matthew Andrushak, Horizon Glass has spent over four decades building a glazing and window business out of Brandon, Manitoba, and its fastest growth today is coming out of a newer Winnipeg office.

Building on Trust: How Horizon Glass Leverages 45 Years of Heritage for Regional Expansion

For over four decades, Horizon Glass Ltd. has served as a trusted residential and commercial glazing specialist out of Brandon, Manitoba. Today, the company is accelerating into its next era through a unified leadership structure and rapid expansion across the province and beyond.

STREAMLINED LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

Horizon Glass has been a fixture of the Manitoba glazing industry since 1979, building its reputation on commercial storefronts, curtain wall, and residential window and door work across the province.

Following a recent buyout, the company entered a new chapter under a simplified ownership structure: Douglas Arnold and Matthew Andrushak now stand as equal 50/50 partners.
The division of responsibilities between the two is deliberate. Arnold manages operations and estimating from the core Brandon fabrication hub, where the company's manufacturing and administrative foundation remains anchored.

Andrushak relocated to spearhead the company's new Winnipeg office, an expansion that has quickly proven itself. Armed with four office staff and five installation crews, the Winnipeg branch has become Horizon Glass's primary engine for growth, driving a projected 12 percent increase in revenue this year.

The two-city structure allows the company to serve its long-standing rural and western Manitoba client base from Brandon while competing directly for commercial work in the province's largest market.

REPUTATION-DRIVEN PARTNERSHIPS

Horizon Glass has more than doubled in size over the past decade, expanding its reach well beyond Manitoba into eastern Saskatchewan, Nunavut, and eastern Ontario.

That growth has come without a formal marketing program. The company eschews advertising in favour of word-of-mouth recommendations and long-standing relationships with general contractors, many of whom have returned to Horizon Glass project after project for years.

That reputation is reinforced through active industry involvement. Arnold serves as a director on the board of the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba, and the company holds active memberships in both the Manitoba Home Builders' Association and the Canadian Home Builders' Association.

Across all of it runs a consistent culture built on fair pricing, dependability, and mutual trust, the same principles that have carried the company through 45 years in a competitive trade.

BALANCING TRADITION WITH MODERN EFFICIENCY

Coordinating complex glazing projects across multiple regions and two offices requires flexibility, and Horizon Glass has been deliberate about which parts of its process to modernize and which to protect. Trade-specific plan takeoffs still rely on specialized human expertise, a discipline the company considers too consequential to automate.

Around that core, however, Horizon Glass actively integrates modern tools. AI meeting summaries keep cross-office teams in Brandon and Winnipeg aligned, and automated progress-payment software streamlines billing across active projects. By pairing traditional craftsmanship with evolving technology, Horizon Glass continues to deliver high-quality commercial storefronts and residential solutions across Manitoba and beyond, with its next 45 years built on the same foundation as its first: trust, earned one project at a time.

> *"Tech has definitely changed as it always does. It's continuing to evolve. Automation and less human input."*

Fowler
NISSAN
NISSAN

QUALITY EXPRESSED

Horizon Glass has roughly doubled in size over the past five to ten years, growth Arnold attributes mainly to commercial work. The company does little formal advertising, relying instead on word of mouth built over decades in Brandon: neighbours, past clients, and referrals from people who already know the name. Its residential division has stayed a steady, if smaller, part of the business alongside that commercial growth.

> *"We've built that relationship and trust in the community of being here for as long as we have, that we do quality work at a fair price."*

FOLLOWING THE GROWTH TO WINNIPEG

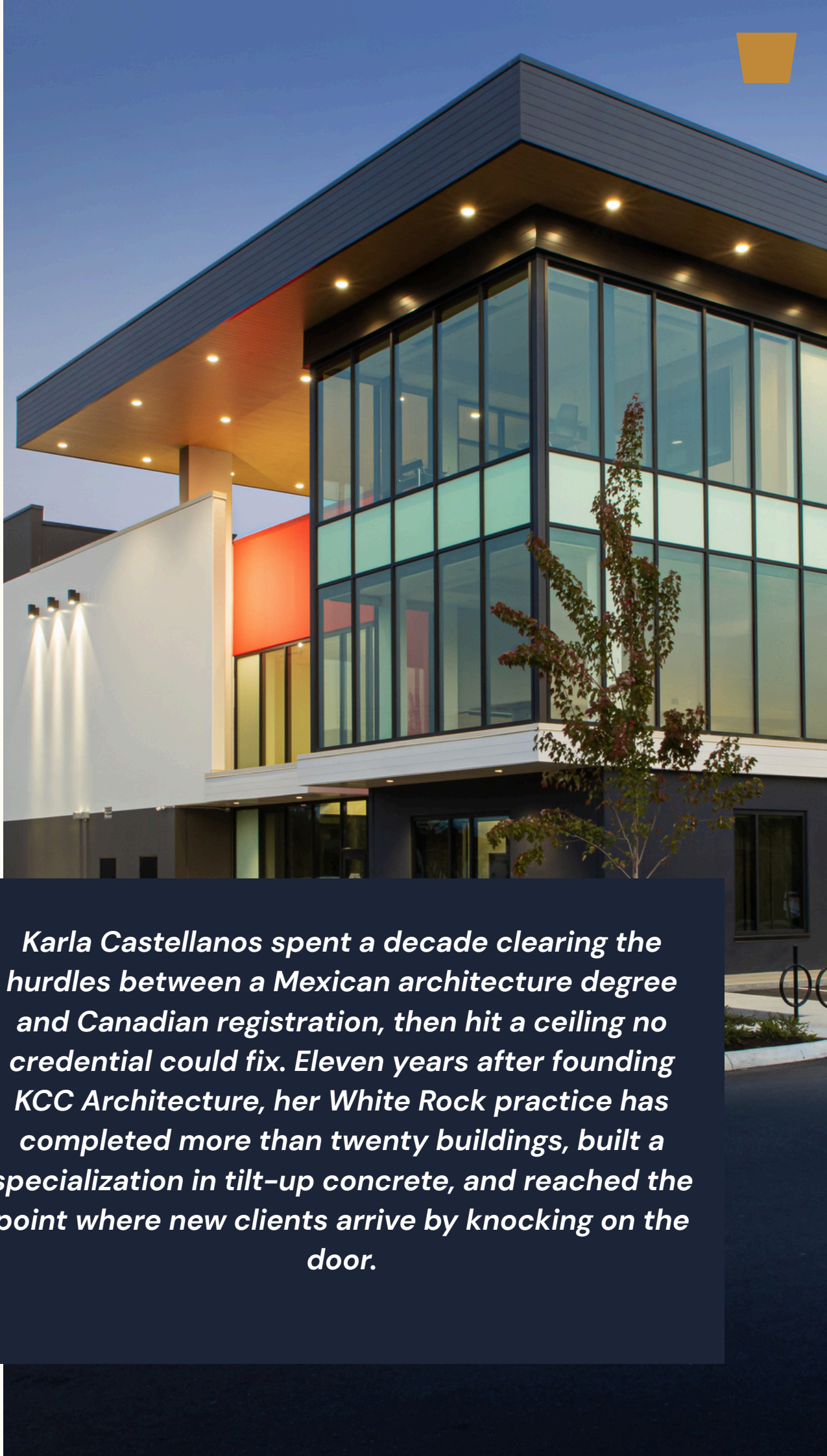
Arnold expects roughly twelve percent growth this year over last, with Winnipeg and its surrounding area remaining the company's clearest path forward as it becomes better known in a larger market. The company's reach occasionally extends further: Arnold mentions a recently booked project in Nunavut and some service work in eastern Ontario, both routed through the Winnipeg office.

> *"Winnipeg is definitely our immediate trajectory. We're looking at probably about 12% growth even this year over last year."*

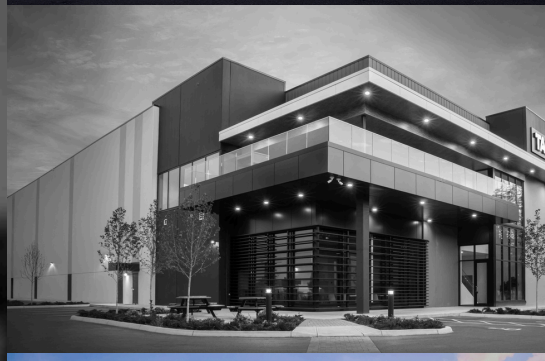
DIVING

KCC

KCC ARCHITECTURE



Karla Castellanos spent a decade clearing the hurdles between a Mexican architecture degree and Canadian registration, then hit a ceiling no credential could fix. Eleven years after founding KCC Architecture, her White Rock practice has completed more than twenty buildings, built a specialization in tilt-up concrete, and reached the point where new clients arrive by knocking on the door.



Karla Castellanos immigrated to Vancouver from Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2002. *It took her the better part of a decade to earn her registration with the Architectural Institute of British Columbia, granted in 2011, a path that ran through residency, citizenship, and the accumulation of Canadian professional experience. What she found on the other side of that milestone was a different kind of barrier. Established firms gave her drawings to produce, teams to manage, and clients to meet, but the opportunity to design an entire building, to express the art of the form, was never offered.*

She founded KCC Architecture in 2015 expecting a modest practice. "Quite frankly, I thought at the beginning it's going to be me for a couple of years," she says, a chance to pursue the buildings she wanted to work on. The response exceeded the plan. Eleven years in, KCC has completed more than twenty buildings, earning an Award of Merit at a Vancouver Island commercial building awards program in 2022 with a second project shortlisted, and remains a deliberately boutique firm with a strict internal process governing how drawings are produced, information is managed, and design intent is carried into construction.

Castellanos frames the decision to go out on her own in terms that have little to do with technical readiness. "It's not so much about how you deliver the information, but whether or not you have a voice to deliver," she says. "Not so much how you say it, but do you have something to say."

THE YEARS IN ESTABLISHED PRACTICE

Before founding KCC, Castellanos worked across several established practices in the Vancouver market, firms with distinctly different approaches to the profession and different goals. She describes taking the best of each and integrating it into her own formula. But the lesson she draws from those years is about disposition rather than technique: starting a practice, in her telling, is less about how much an architect knows than about how much risk they are willing to take, and how sure they are of their own voice as a designer.

CHOOSING CLIENTS, QUALIFYING CONTRACTORS

KCC's projects typically run three to five years from first meeting to completion, and Castellanos treats that duration as the defining fact of how the firm takes on work. The relationship with the client, built on trust, transparency, and honesty, governs which projects the firm accepts. In the early years of the practice, that was the whole filter. It no longer is.

As the firm matured, Castellanos developed a qualification process for the contractors she works with, born of experience watching design intent evaporate during construction. A building executed by a contractor with no interest in understanding its architectural components can be completed on time and on budget and still emerge, in her words, as "completely another expression of what I was originally intending."

The firm now identifies a project's key architectural expressions early and budgets for them specifically, so that quality is planned rather than hoped for. "It's the first day a client comes in trying to get a project done, and the last day, how you shake their hand," she says. "Walking away from somebody that is happy or is unhappy."

THE TILT-UP SPECIALIZATION

For roughly eight years, tilt-up concrete construction has been a defining focus of the practice, and for Castellanos the attachment predates the firm. Her relationship with concrete goes back to Mexico, where she came to regard it as a beautiful, versatile, and durable material, as structure and as expression at once. Tilt-up gives her a way to keep exploring it.

The method's natural territory is the industrial building, and KCC has built a client base among contractors and private owners developing facilities that combine warehouse and processing space with office headquarters, and sometimes a retail component within the same development. Castellanos finds the combination genuinely interesting rather than merely commercial, and she is direct that the method's potential remains largely untapped.

“We haven't even begun to explore how we can use it,” she says. The firm is currently designing a community centre in tilt-up, an application well outside the method's industrial comfort zone, and a member of the Tilt-Up Concrete Association, KCC is registered with both the AIBC and the Alberta Association of Architects.

AN EXPANDING PORTFOLIO

As client trust has compounded, the work has grown more ambitious. KCC currently has three office building projects in development at six and seven storeys, one in concrete and one in steel, each demanding a different structural and design expression. Castellanos describes her clients as having become more sophisticated over the firm's lifetime, and the portfolio has followed.

Operating across British Columbia and Alberta has proven less complicated than the dual registration might suggest. All design and correspondence runs from the firm's base office in White Rock, with satellite personnel in Alberta performing field reviews.

Calgary, as Castellanos points out, is a flight of little more than an hour. The practice of the profession differs somewhat between provinces, and the contractors differ too, but the firm's performance and values carry through unchanged.

SIGNAGE

KCC INTERIOR DESIGN

The firm's newest expansion is KCC Interior Design, launching this year, and its motivation is architectural rather than commercial. On a recent completed project whose building design landed with significant impact, the client engaged a separate interior designer, and Castellanos watched the building's concept and language stop at the front door. The new division exists so that does not happen again.

“My aspiration is to be able to design a building outside in,” she says, carrying the concept, intent, and language of the exterior through every interior space. She regards it as taking the firm's design capability to its next level.

TECHNOLOGY WITH INTENT

KCC runs its practice on Vectorworks and Apple hardware, and in recent years has directed significant resources toward full photorealistic rendering and building walkthroughs. The capability serves clients, municipalities, and approval processes alike, but Castellanos holds it to an unusual standard: her renderings are meant to match the finished building, not flatter it.

“A rendering is representing how the building is actually going to look,” she says, and she takes visible pride in placing her renderings beside completion photographs and finding them identical. On artificial intelligence, her position is measured. The firm uses AI for writing, fee proposals, certain rendering tools, and marketing portfolios, useful improvements at the margins, in her description. For drafting and design itself, she has not found it ready. “Technology has to be used with intelligence and intent,” she says. “It has to serve the purpose.”

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DESIGN

Castellanos holds a LEED AP designation, but no KCC building has pursued formal certification; her clients have shown little appetite for the documentation the process demands. Her conviction sits elsewhere, in sustainability embedded in the design itself, an approach she absorbed in Mexico, where environmental design was never taught as a separate discipline from architecture.

In practice, that means every KCC building is designed around where the sun rises and sets, where the strongest winds run, and how air moves through the structure naturally, rather than compensating with larger mechanical systems. She connects the discipline directly to a changing climate and the need for buildings durable enough to meet it. “We have underestimated this for many years,” she says, “and in some ways we're paying the consequences.”

ON SITE WITH THE TRADES

Castellanos's architecture education in Mexico did not separate design from construction. Her training included the practical work of building, millwork, concrete, electrical fundamentals, and it left her with a durable admiration for the trades and a working understanding of what contractors and subcontractors actually face on site.

That understanding shapes how KCC conducts its field reviews. Castellanos describes the firm's best projects as the ones where site visits become collaborative design sessions, two or three people gathered around a corner detail, developing it into something better than she would have drawn alone. “We are outsiders of construction,” she acknowledges; the synergy depends on how welcoming a contractor is to architects. But where it takes hold, the results are the buildings she is proudest of. “Everyone's hands are on the vision,” she says. “We all work truly together to accomplish something which is majestic.”

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Castellanos intends to grow KCC, in team and in the ambition of its projects, but she resists the industry's habit of defining a firm by its specialization. Her framing returns the profession to first principles. “An architect is not somebody that is specialized in one single sector,” she says. “An architect is somebody that can take a problem and solve the problem.”

Higher-density redevelopment, a first community centre, new building types: each arrives at the firm as a problem to be solved with the same team of consultants and the same disciplines.

The most telling signal of where the firm stands may be how its newest clients arrive. Word of mouth carried KCC for a decade. In the past few years, something else has started happening: people encounter a completed KCC building, ask who the architect was, and knock on the door in White Rock. “They come because they saw one of my projects and they loved it,” Castellanos says. “That for me is the ultimate accomplishment.” For a practice built on the conviction that quality manifests in the building and returns to its maker, it is difficult to imagine a more fitting proof.

KCC ARCHITECTURE

Capstone Magazine

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THE CONSTRUCTION ISSUE

Modular Construction is Canada's Housing Bet. The Sector Isn't Ready.

Build Canada Homes committed $1.8 billion to modular-only procurement this month. Canadian modular capacity sits at 15,000 units a year. The federal target implies 60,000. The gap is not marginal.

BY SEBASTIEN AMEUR

Build Canada Homes announced its first four modular-only procurement rounds in July 2026, committing $1.8 billion to factory-built housing developments across BC, Alberta, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. The federal messaging has been consistent since spring: modular is the primary bet for hitting the 2030 housing target.

The manufacturers are not ready.

Canadian modular capacity, measured across the roughly 40 active production facilities from BC to New Brunswick, sits at approximately 15,000 units per year. The federal target implies demand for 60,000-plus modular units annually by 2028. The gap is not marginal.

Building manufacturing capacity in this sector is not analogous to building housing. A modular factory takes 18 to 30 months to bring online. Its output requires a stable, high-volume order book to justify the fixed capital, which means a manufacturer will not build until commitments are secured, which means commitments cannot be secured until the manufacturer has capacity to deliver against them. The chicken-and-egg has been documented in the sector for a decade. Federal purchasing power is the tool designed to break it, but the timing question is whether federal orders arrive with the certainty required to underwrite plant construction.

The other constraint is trade coordination. Modular reduces on-site labour hours but shifts the workforce into factories that operate on manufacturing schedules and require different training pipelines than site-built residential work. The training system for that workforce does not exist at scale. Ontario's trades pipeline in particular is still oriented around traditional site-built residential and commercial work, not the assembly-line requirements of modular production.

For contractors, the practical takeaway is that modular partnership positions are being written now. Firms that establish factory partnerships in 2026-2027 will have privileged access to the federal procurement stream over the next decade. Those that treat modular as a peripheral capability will be locked out.

The developers making the earliest moves are the ones building modular into their standard product line, not the ones treating it as a specialty offering. Repeatable design, factory relationships, and financing structures compatible with 6-to-9-month construction cycles are becoming the new baseline.

The Indigenous Equity Deals Rewriting Canadian Infrastructure

Cedar Leaf Capital closed a billion-dollar Indigenous-led infrastructure fund in June. Federal and provincial procurement are following. Contractors without established Indigenous joint venture partners are being locked out of shortlists.

BY MEHDI EL OUDGHIRI

Cedar Leaf Capital closed its first billion-dollar Indigenous-led infrastructure fund in June 2026, backing a mix of transmission, port expansion, and district heating projects across four provinces. Six of the seven First Nations partners hold equity stakes above 20 per cent.

That structure is now the template. Canadian infrastructure deals worth over $500 million increasingly include Indigenous equity participation as a baseline design element, not an afterthought. The Coastal GasLink financing modification in 2024 that added a 10 per cent First Nations equity slice was the inflection point. Every major fund in this cycle has treated that structure as the reference case.

For the construction industry, the operational impact is real. Projects with meaningful Indigenous equity move faster through regulatory review, face fewer challenge cases at the Federal Court, and have measurably lower delay costs during construction. What was once a compliance line item is now a scheduling advantage.

The contracting side is adapting more slowly. General contractors on Indigenous-partner projects are being asked to structure subcontractor packages that meet minimum Indigenous procurement thresholds, often 15 to 25 per cent by value. Contractors without established Indigenous joint venture relationships have found themselves excluded from bid shortlists on projects worth billions.

The shift is one-way. Federal infrastructure funding under the Investing in Canada plan now explicitly favours projects with Indigenous equity participation. Provincial procurement is following. Alberta's most recent major transmission tender required Indigenous economic participation as a scored evaluation criterion, not a bonus point.

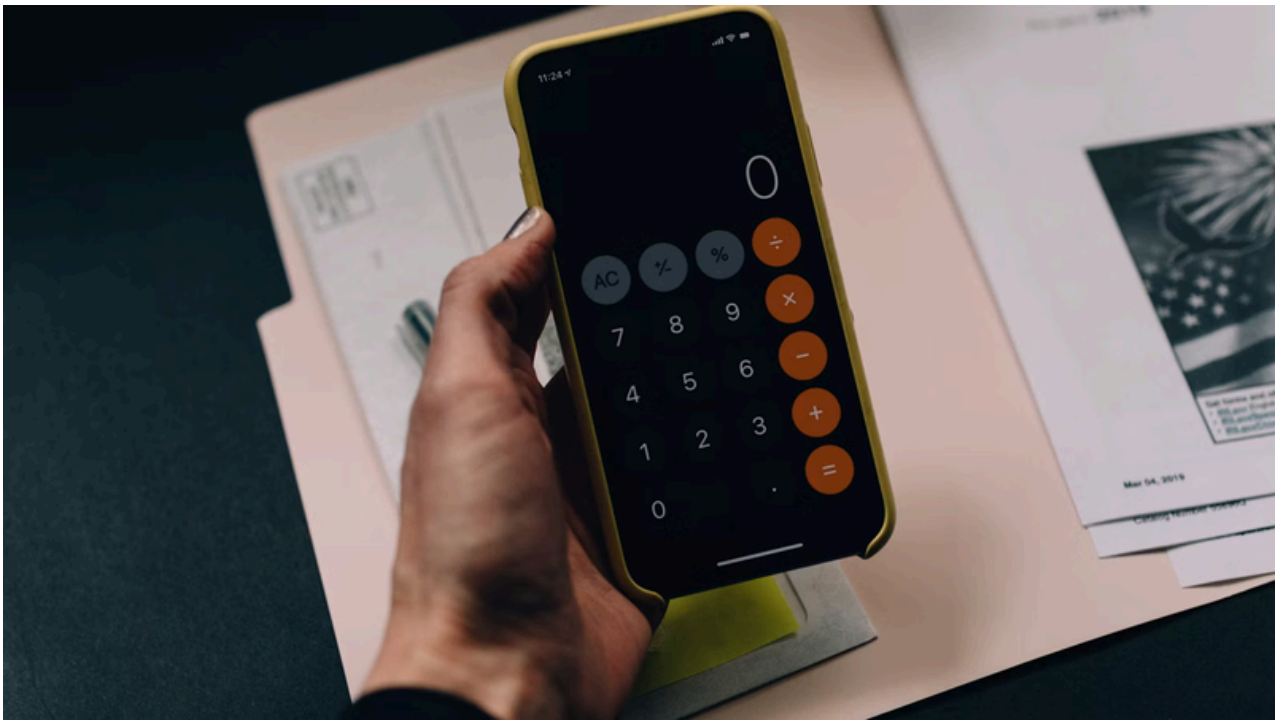
The practical implication for construction firms is that Indigenous joint venture strategy is now capital-project pipeline strategy. Firms that treated Indigenous procurement as an HR or ESG issue are discovering that it is a pipeline issue. Those without partners are late.

C

The Bank of Canada Cut Rates. Construction Didn't Notice.

Development lending in Canada is priced off a spread over prime. Since 2024, banks have widened those spreads on construction paper faster than the Bank of Canada has cut. The pass-through most developers expect isn't landing.

BY SEBASTIEN AMEUR



The Bank of Canada delivered its third rate cut of 2026 in early July, bringing the policy rate to 3.25 per cent. Construction financing didn't move.

That disconnect reveals something structural about how the sector actually funds work. Development lending in Canada is priced off a spread over prime, but the risk premiums lenders apply to construction projects have widened over the same period the policy rate has fallen. Banks are still marking construction paper as higher-risk after two years of overrun-heavy delivery, and the incremental cost savings from lower policy rates are being absorbed into wider spreads, not passed through to developers.

The numbers make it worse. Residential construction starts in Ontario declined 12 per cent year-over-year in Q2 2026, according to CMHC. Non-residential permits grew but at a decelerating rate. Contractors describe a market where financing exists but is priced as though rates never moved.

For the industry, the story is not that monetary policy has failed. It is that monetary policy transmits through banking spreads that respond slowly to sector risk perception. When lenders are still repricing residential exposure from the 2024-2025 defaults cycle, a 25 basis point cut at the Bank of Canada does not reach the pro forma.

The practical implication for developers is that pro forma sensitivities to policy rate movements are increasingly disconnected from bank underwriting outputs. Project financing needs to be modelled against actual spreads offered, not against expected pass-through from policy rate changes. That gap could persist for another two to three quarters, depending on how quickly lenders retire loss reserves built up over the last cycle.

About Capstone

Capstone was founded on a simple premise: the Canadian construction industry builds everything, and almost nobody covers it with the seriousness it deserves.

We are an independent publication focused exclusively on the business of construction in Canada. Every issue profiles the firms, project leaders and industry figures whose work shapes the built environment from coast to coast. Our editorial is not commissioned by the companies we cover and is not contingent on advertising relationships. We report on the industry as it is, not as it presents itself.

Our readers are the people making decisions in Canadian construction. Project managers, general contractors, developers, engineers, executives and the supplier networks that keep major projects moving. They read Capstone because the coverage is specific, grounded and written for people who already know the industry.

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EDITORIAL IS NEVER COMMISSIONED BY THE COMPANIES WE COVER.

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Capstone profiles the companies, projects, and people building Canada. If your company has a story worth telling, we want to hear it.

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